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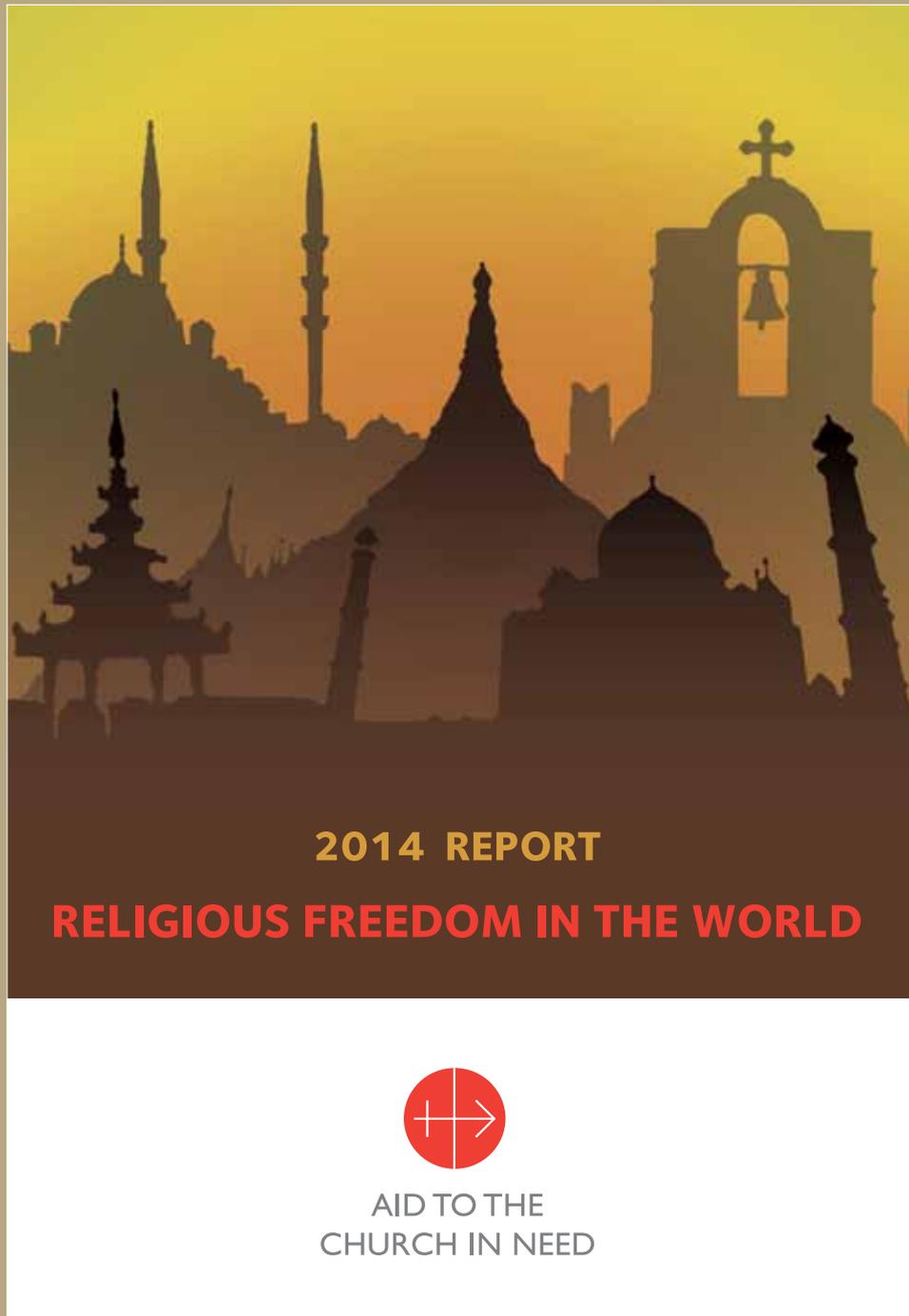
# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

IN THE WORLD - 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**IN THE WORLD - 2014**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Cover: Church Destroyed in Sadad, Syria

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# FOREWORD BY DR PAUL JACOB BHATTI,

Former Federal Minister of National Harmony and Minorities Affairs, Pakistan

The cause of religious freedom is one that has changed my family's lives and mine forever.

It was a rainy morning on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2011, when my brother Shahbaz Clement Bhatti, then Federal Minister for Minorities in Pakistan, was killed in broad daylight. His determination to stop all kinds of injustices and to protect the oppressed and marginalised communities cost him his life.

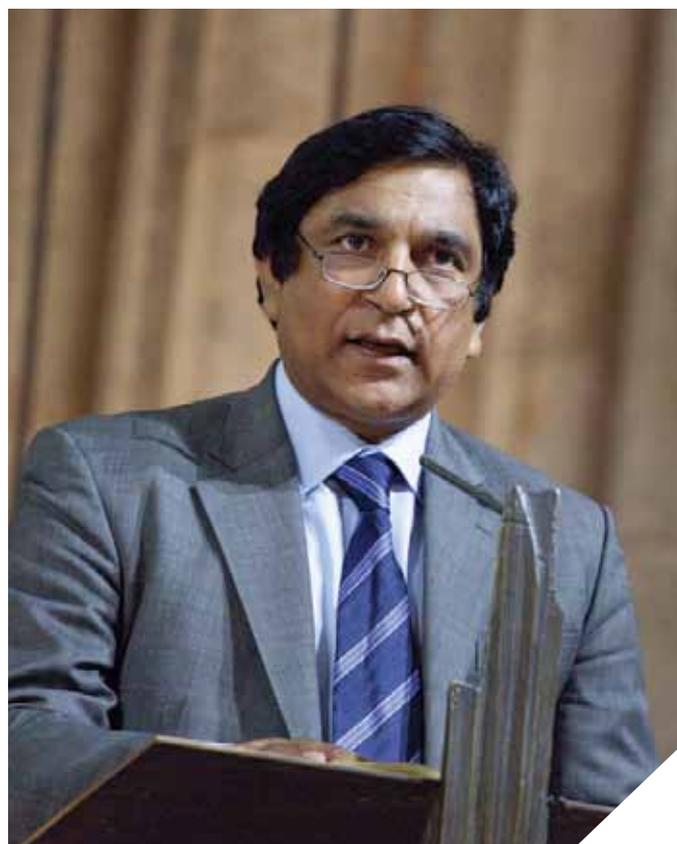
When Shahbaz was killed, I had a choice to either continue the life I had in Italy, or pick up the baton left by my brother and continue the task he had set himself. My conscience left me in no doubt; I believe I was directed by God to continue his vision and mission, protecting those whose basic human rights are too often violated because of discrimination, extremism and religious hatred. Consequently, I took up the role of Federal Minister of National Harmony and Minority Affairs in the Pakistan Government, as well as the Chairmanship of All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA). This was established by my late brother with the aim of ensuring that all religious minorities have a voice on one platform. Simultaneously, I established the Shahbaz Bhatti Memorial Trust, so that the legacy of my late brother would continue to promote religious freedom, human equality and social justice.

I never thought that I would come to work in Pakistan after setting up my medical practice in Italy. I would have been compromising personal and professional freedoms that I enjoyed. That being said, one month before Shahbaz's death, we had a very significant discussion and he asked me to come and work in Pakistan. I thought he was joking at the time and replied: "You are calling me from paradise to hell." He immediately replied: "The way to paradise lies in Pakistan." His strong, unwavering conviction and discussion with me always was that non-involvement is not an option; we are obligated being one human family to struggle for those who are too weak to speak and defend themselves.

I am so grateful to Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) involvement for undertaking this important task of assessing situations of religious freedom around the world. Nobody should have to suffer physical violence and psychological intimidation for declaring what they hold dear and adhere to. Religious freedom is a right

and a responsibility that involves everybody; all of us are entitled to express our beliefs, respecting the faith of each other.

Religious freedom is by its nature a right for all, equally shared, and that is why I commend ACN's *International Religious Freedom in the World Report* for looking at and assessing the situation over a broad cross-section of faith groups in countries throughout the world. In so doing, this report challenges people to think afresh about this fundamental right, which is central to a free, fair and flourishing society. It is the most critical need of the moment in a divided world where, in some parts there is a religious revival and in others, a trend towards religious indifference and atheism. In an increasingly polarised world, a growing consensus about the nature of and respect for religious freedom could prove crucial in our struggle against fanaticism and a culture of violence, be it by the State, extremists or by terrorist groups.



# At-a-Glance findings

(Period under review: October 2012 to June 2014)

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1. Of the 196 countries in the world, 81 countries – or 41 percent – are identified as places where religious freedom is impaired (classified as “high” or “medium”) or is in decline.
2. A total of 35 countries – or 18 percent – are classified as having some religious freedom issues that are “of concern,” but with no deterioration in their status.
3. The remaining 80 countries – or 41 percent – indicate no concerns regarding religious freedom. The report found no regular or systemic religious freedom violations in these nations.
4. Where there has been a change concerning religious freedom, that change has almost always been for the worse. In the 196 countries analyzed, change for the better is noted in only six countries. Deteriorating conditions are recorded in 55 countries (or 28 percent).
5. Even in the six countries where some improvements have been noted, four – Iran, United Arab Emirates, Cuba and Qatar – remain classified as places of “high” or “medium” persecution. Zimbabwe and Taiwan are classified “of concern” and “low” respectively.
6. In total, 20 countries are designated as “high” with regard to lack of religious freedom.
  - a. Of these, 14 experience religious persecution linked to extremist Islam. These are: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Maldives, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.
  - b. In the remaining six countries, religious persecution is linked to authoritarian regimes. These are: Burma (Myanmar), China, Eritrea, North Korea, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.



Based on these findings, the Report concludes:

7. In the period under review, global religious freedom entered a period of serious decline.
8. The impression given by global media headlines of a rising tide of persecution aimed at marginalised religious communities is supported by this research.
9. Muslim countries predominate in the list of states with the most serious religious freedom violations.
10. Religious freedom is in decline in Western countries that are predominantly or historically Christian. Two principal factors explain this. First, there is disagreement over the role to be played by religion in the ‘public square.’ Second, openness to religious freedom is under threat from increasing societal concern about extremism.
11. Christians remain the most persecuted religious minority, due partly to their wide geographic spread and high relative numbers. However, Muslims are also experiencing a serious degree of persecution and discrimination, both at the hands of other Muslims and from authoritarian governments.
12. Jews in Western Europe are subject to violence and other abuse that is generally low-level. However, such problems have grown, prompting increased emigration to Israel.
13. Some positive signs of religious co-operation have been identified, but these are often the result of local initiatives rather than progress at a national level.
14. The persecution of long-established religious minorities, and the rise of mono-confessional states, is resulting in exceptionally high population displacements that contribute to the worldwide refugee crisis.
15. The countries of Western Europe, which until recent decades were overwhelmingly Christian and racially homogenous, are becoming more like the multi-confessional and diverse societies of the Middle East. This is generating tensions, both political and social.
16. The rise of “religious illiteracy” among both Western political leaders and the international media is hampering productive dialogue and effective policy-making.
17. We conclude that, to reverse the disturbing trends identified in this Report, responsibility for combatting violence and persecution rests, first and foremost, within religious communities themselves. The necessity for all religious leaders to loudly proclaim their opposition to religiously-inspired violence, and to re-affirm their support for religious tolerance, is becoming ever more urgent.



# MAIN FINDINGS

Acts of violence, committed in the name of religion, continue to dominate the international news media. The inescapable impression is that religiously-inspired terror is not only widespread but is on the increase. This report sadly confirms this assessment to be correct.

In almost every country where we have recorded a change in the status and condition of religious minorities, that change has been for the worse. Sometimes the deterioration is caused by legal or constitutional discrimination; in others it is related to sectarian hostility, often linked to racial or tribal tensions. In some cases it involves one religious group oppressing – or even trying to eliminate – another. In others, an authoritarian state is trying to restrict the activities of a particular faith group. In Western countries, religious tension is rising, provoked by the recent phenomena of ‘aggressive atheism’, liberal secularism and the rapid influx of economic migrants and refugees with a faith and culture markedly different from the host country.

In the 196 countries covered by this report – effectively every country of the world – we have noted change in 61 countries. In only six countries have we recorded an improvement in the position of religious minorities. In the remainder – 55 countries – we have seen a change for the worse. This means that in almost 30 percent of the countries analyzed, covering the period October 2012 to June 2014, the position of religious faith communities had either “significantly deteriorated” or “deteriorated.”

We have also identified 26 countries where restrictions on religious freedom are already “high” or “medium,” but where no change has been noted in the past two years. If we add these 26 countries to the 55 countries that have experienced a deterioration, we find that in 81 of the world’s 196 countries – slightly over 40 percent – religious freedom is either impaired or is in decline.

The number of countries which are categorized as having “high” or “medium” religious freedom violations – regardless of whether they have improved, deteriorated or stayed the same during the period under review – comes to 56, or just below 30 percent of the total.



## CASE STUDY

# NORTH KOREA

## Missionary sentenced to hard labour for life

May 2014: South Korean missionary Kim Jung-Wook, aged 50, was sentenced to hard labor for life by the North Korean authorities for allegedly spying and trying to set up underground churches in the totalitarian state. Kim was arrested six months previously in October 2013 after crossing into North Korea from China. Kim appeared in February at a North Korean press conference, where he appealed to the North Korean authorities to show him mercy. Kim also said that he had received assistance from South Korea's intelligence agency and apologized for committing "anti-state" crimes. However, past detainees have later recanted their statements after appearing at staged news conferences.

South Korea has denied having any spy links to Kim. According to a friend of Kim's in Seoul, Kim had been based mainly in Dandong, China, since 2007. Kim helped North Korean defectors get to South Korea via Thailand, Laos and other countries in the region. However, more recently, Kim had turned more to providing food and shelter to North Koreans who had received permission to go to China to look for jobs, but who were often unsuccessful, leaving them with no income or other means of subsistence.

Sources: AP/The Guardian, May 31, 2014;  
NY Daily News, Feb. 27, 2014.

## CASE STUDY

# IRAN

## Permission granted for Sunni mosques in Tehran

November 2013: In a breakthrough in Shia-Sunni relations in the Middle East, Iran's new President, Hassan Rouhani, has given the green light for Sunni mosques to be built in the capital city of Tehran.

Before this announcement, Rouhani's special adviser on ethnic and religious minorities, Ali Younesi, had met with Sunni leaders to discuss the rights of the Sunni minority. They agreed to work towards removing barriers preventing Sunnis from achieving full equality under the law in the predominantly Shi'a Muslim country. The meeting followed a number of incidents in which security forces in Tehran prevented Sunnis from gathering and praying in designated sites to commemorate holy days.

During the early morning hours of Oct. 16, 2013, dozens of uniformed and plain-clothes security agents surrounded Sadeghiyeh Mosque in north-west Tehran, one of the largest and most important Sunni prayer sites in Tehran province, and prevented Sunni worshippers from entering the building to mark Eid-e Ghorban, the Feast of Sacrifice. Sunni activists also reported that security forces prevented worshippers from entering another prayer site, in Saadatabad, in northern Tehran. Sunni faithful in other parts of the capital apparently entered prayer sites freely and worshipped without hindrance.

After the 1979 revolution, Iran prevented Sunnis from building mosques in Tehran. In the past 10 years, the Iranian Reform Association has been working to provide Sunnis with a system of *namazkhanehs*, or provisional prayer sites, to pray on Fridays and Eid days. However, the restrictions on *namazkhanehs* in recent years have forced some worshippers to perform their Eid prayers at undesignated sites, including people's homes or other private spaces.

Sources: World Bulletin, Nov. 9, 2013 ([www.worldbulletin.net](http://www.worldbulletin.net)); Human Rights Watch, Nov. 9, 2013 ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org)).





Where positive outcomes have been achieved, they have often come as a result of local initiatives rather than through progress at a national level.

Although the international news media naturally focus on headline reports of violence and cruelty linked to religious extremism, there is little subsequent analysis of what the implications and consequences of these actions might be. The media also largely fail to report the religious roots of these conflicts, which might at least provide a context for a better understanding. The audience is left with the sense that the events recorded are random acts of cruelty committed by deranged gunmen. It is hoped this report will rectify some of these failings.

Communities of religious believers are, according to this secular media interpretation, increasingly a problem to be managed, and even marginalized, rather than bearers of a tradition to be encouraged and supported. The view is gaining ground in the West that religion, rather than bringing out the best in humanity, engenders its worst aspects.

Linked to religiously-inspired violence is a decline in religious tolerance, religious pluralism and the right to religious self-determination. Although the right to freedom of religion is enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is almost everywhere under threat. Though hard to quantify, the trend away from religious pluralism, especially in the developing world, is clearly documented in this report.

Throughout parts of the Middle and Far East, the phenomenon of the mono-confessional state is emerging. Where once various Christian and Muslim groups managed to live together for centuries, there is now a growing tendency for the dominant religious group to insist, often through the imposition of *Shari'a* law or devices such as a “blasphemy law,” on universal conformity of religious practice.

The emergence of the Islamic State (formerly the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is the most obvious example of this. In July 2014, the jihadists drove out all faith communities including non-Sunni Muslims from Mosul, the city in northern Iraq which they had seized the previous month. The Christians were forced to choose between converting to Islam or leaving. They were given a deadline and the Islamic State declared that if they failed to comply “there is nothing for them but the sword.” Since early August, for the first time in 1,600 years, there have been no Sunday liturgies.

Extremism and persecution of this nature emerge as a significant factor in a growing phenomenon of mass migration. Minority faith communities in the Middle East had been in decline for

many years, but in the period under review a pre-existing humanitarian crisis suddenly and dramatically worsened. For example Christians in Syria declined from 1.75 million in early 2011 to perhaps barely 1.2 million in the summer of 2014 – a decline of over 30 percent in three years. In Iraq the decline is even steeper. Clearly religion was not the only factor driving people out of their home country – economic factors and general security were prevailing concerns – but nonetheless religious hatred increasingly became a more obvious driving force for the growing refugee phenomenon. The rise in migration related to religious persecution can therefore be linked to the UNHCR announcement in June 2014 that the worldwide number of displaced people and refugees had topped 50 million for the first time in the post-World War II era. The creation of theocratic or mono-confessional states is having a profound impact not only on those countries where it is being put into practice but also in Western democracies.

Displaced members of religious groups are seeking refuge in the West, thereby creating a range of social and economic challenges. Ironically, as religious pluralism in areas such as the Middle East goes into decline, Western democracies, historically mainly Christian and themselves largely mono-confessional, are having to learn to live with religious pluralism, often for the first time.

The rise of social media has meant that fundamentalism and religious hatred is felt far beyond geographical boundaries. Extremism, popularised through Facebook, Twitter, chat rooms and other social media, is such that religious hatred preached in a distant country is quickly of local concern. The most obvious manifestation of this is the recruitment of people from the West to engage in conflicts in the Middle East. The Western media increasingly highlights concerns about the growing threat to the West of ‘Generation Jihad’ coming home. Sporadic attacks from radicalized individuals against particular faith communities in the West – often with social media playing an important part – confirm that this threat indeed already exists.

In general however, the degree of religious oppression in Western democracies remains low. That said, as this report records, there are genuinely worrying tendencies.

Chief among these developments is that, while increasingly mainstream Western opinion rightly regards discrimination on the grounds of race, gender and sexuality as unacceptable, there is at the same time a declining consensus on the rights of conscience of religious believers.



## CASE STUDY

# NIGERIA

### Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram kidnaps over 200 schoolgirls

April 2014: As many as 276 female students were seized by members of the Boko Haram terrorist group from a secondary school in Chibok, Borno State, in north-east Nigeria, on the night of April 14/15. Most of the kidnapped girls were from Christian families but others were Muslim. According to reports, early on in the abduction, 53 girls managed to escape. At the time of this writing, Nigerian police report that the militants are still holding 223 girls.

On May 12, 2014 a video showing around 130 of the girls dressed in full-length *hijabs* and being forced to recite verses of the Qur'an was released by the terrorist group. Wearing trademark military fatigues, Boko Haram leader Abubaker Shekau confirmed that his prisoners had been forced to convert to Islam.

Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Jos, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria,

described his anguish over the plight of the schoolgirls. The prelate said: "I am very worried... they are just innocent girls and every human being feels bad about this. Life is sacred." Asked why he thought the terrorist group had carried out the kidnappings, Archbishop Kaigama replied: "They wanted to hurt the heart of Nigeria."

The leader of Nigeria's Catholics went on to stress that, having tried all other means, prayer is currently the best solution to the threat of Boko Haram. He said: "We tried dialogue and it didn't work; the government used force and it didn't work... At this stage, what we need to do is to pray – only God can move the heart of these people."

Sources: Aid to the Church in Need UK, May 13, 2014; BBC News Online, May 9 and 12; Daily Mail Online, May 12, 2014.

## CASE STUDY

# BURMA (MYANMAR)

### Government proposes limiting births to contain Rohingya Muslims

May 2013: Authorities in western Burma's Rakhine state introduced a local family planning regulation setting a two-child limit on families from the Rohingya Muslim minority group in a bid to restrict "rapid population growth" and "to contain sectarian violence." Rohingya families, unlike other minorities in the country, do not have the rights to full citizenship in Burma and are seen by many as illegal immigrants.

The regulation comes on the back of proposals made by a central government commission set up in 2012 to investigate anti-Rohingya violence in the western state of Rakhine. The panel, created by President Thein Sein, has 27 members from different backgrounds. A statement by the commission said that it is unlikely that the displaced Rohingya Muslims would be returning home any time soon, arguing that the widespread segregation of Buddhists and Muslims is a temporary fix that must be enforced for now.

The report drafted by the pro-government commission focuses on the "concerns" voiced by majority Buddhists in Rakhine State regarding the growth of the Muslim population.

Human rights activists and organizations have serious doubts and misgivings about the proposal, with US-based Human Rights Watch saying that the authorities are engaged in virtual "ethnic cleansing" in the area. Aung San Suu Kyi, the prominent Burmese opposition leader, has said that, if confirmed, the imposed limit of two children is "a flagrant violation of human rights."

Since June 2012 and May 2013, the area has been the scene of violent clashes between Burmese Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims (who number about 800,000 throughout Burma), which has left at least 200 people dead and a further 140,000 displaced.

Sources: [www.AsiaNews.it](http://www.AsiaNews.it), May 1, 24, and 28, 2013.





Especially with regard to subjects such as faith taught in schools, same-sex marriage and euthanasia, there is a growing conflict between traditional religious views and the “progressive” liberal consensus. While mainstream opinion concedes that believers should, as a minimum, be free to practice their faith in private, there is less and less agreement on how far that faith should be permitted to manifest itself in the wider society.

This leads to an increasingly apparent tendency for the rights of some groups to trump the rights of other groups. In practice this “hierarchy of rights” means that where the rights of homosexual or gender equality campaigners conflict with the rights of conscience of religious believers, the former groups usually take precedence. In the UK, for example, Catholic adoption agencies that refuse to place children with same-sex couples have either been forced to change their rules or close. Other examples of this tendency across Western Europe are legion.

It is hoped that this report can prompt greater reflection on the core precepts of religious freedom, especially how far faith groups should be permitted to legally dissent from prevailing norms.

This report also highlights the need for the West to develop a fuller and more sophisticated understanding of religious motivation. The religious illiteracy of Western policy-makers is creating a formidable barrier of understanding between the West and other parts of the world. The Western interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan are two cases where this lack of sympathy, or religious understanding, is all too apparent.

It is beyond the scope of this report to account for the growth of this intolerance and religious violence. Historians in the future will no doubt discern the reasons. We can only recount some of today’s more evident explanations.

One common theory relates to the frustration that has grown out of the failure of the Islamic world to develop as rapidly as the West in recent centuries. This has led some Muslims to fight for the restoration of a “Golden Age” of the Caliphate when Islam was seen as emerging triumphant.

Another consideration is that globalization and multiculturalism, far from engendering greater tolerance, have led religious and ethnic groups to feel under threat and thus withdraw into an intolerant bunker mentality.

A third is that Western democracy – once so admired and emulated – is no longer automatically seen as the preferred role model for developing countries. So the argument goes, if Western liberalism leads to abortion, contraception,

## CASE STUDY

# BELGIUM

### Four people killed in shooting at Jewish museum

May 2014: Four people were killed in a shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels by a man who had spent over a year in Syria and had links with radical Islamists. On May 24, 2014, a gunman armed with a Kalashnikov rifle opened fire at the museum, killing three people at the scene and critically wounding a fourth person, who was taken to hospital and died almost two weeks later, on June 6. The three who died at the scene included two Israelis (Emanuel and Miriam Riva, a middle-aged couple on holiday from Tel Aviv) and a French woman. The fourth was Alexandre Strens, a young Belgian man who worked at the museum. He was born in Morocco to a Jewish mother and Algerian Berber father.

The attack lasted less than 90 seconds, after which the shooter fled the scene on foot. His image was partially captured by security cameras before he disappeared into central Brussels. Joëlle Milquet, the Interior Minister, was on the scene as police cordoned off the

area and was quoted as saying “It is likely this is an anti-Semitic attack.”

On May 30, Mehdi Nemmouche, a 29-year-old French national, was arrested in Marseilles in connection with the shooting. Joel Rubinfeld, head of the Belgian League against Anti-semitism, said the arrest was a relief but that Mehdi Nemmouche’s Syrian jihadist profile was a source of deep anxiety. “It is crucial that countries that have citizens who have gone to Syria take all necessary measures to make sure this does not happen again,” he said. Roger Cukierman, president of the Council of Jewish Organisations in France, said “... it seems that the worst fears of western governments are being realized. The European jihadists in Syria are a time bomb waiting to go off.”

Sources: The Independent, May 24 and June 1, 2014; Wikipedia (‘Jewish Museum of Belgium shooting’), referenced June 27, 2014.

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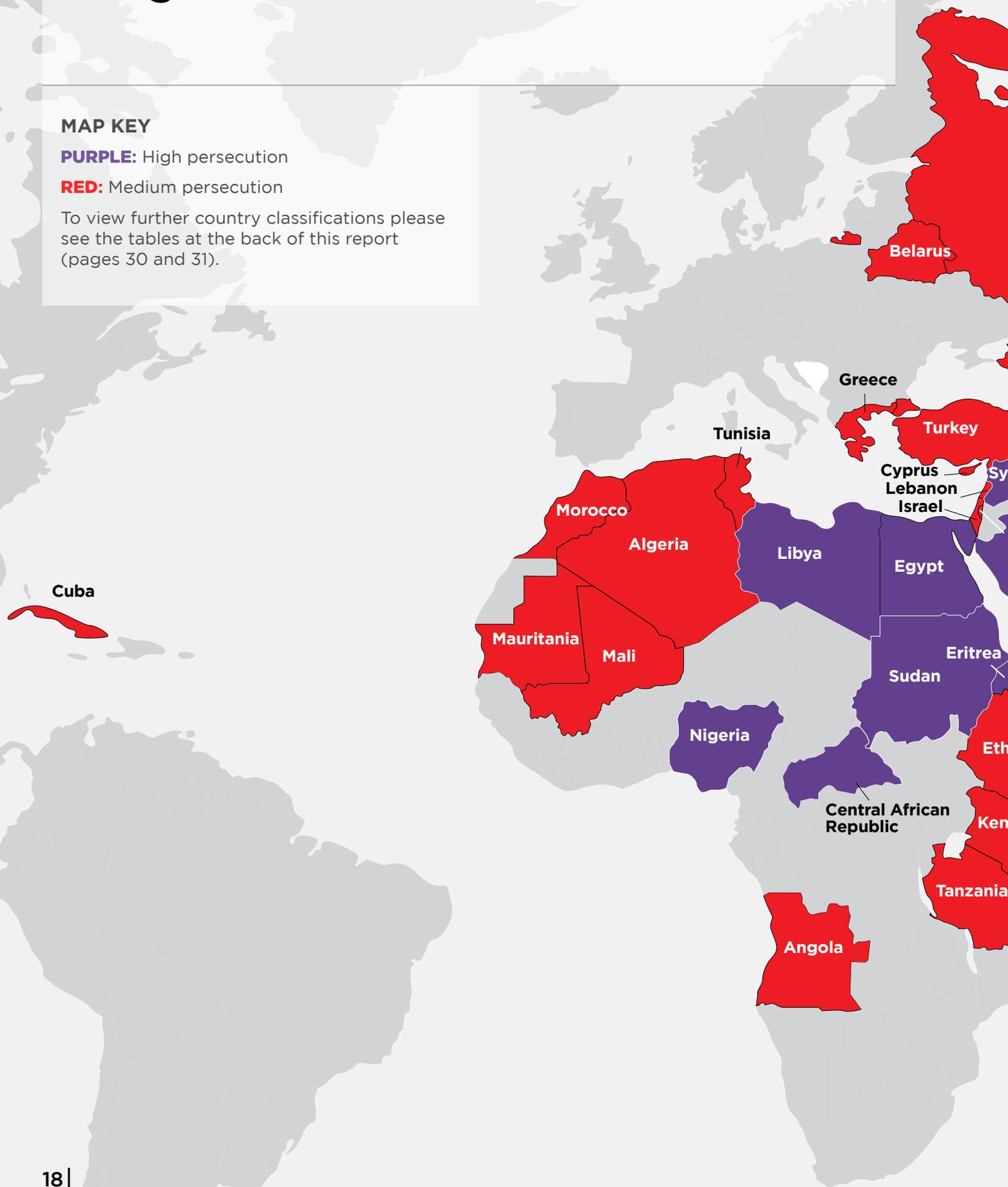
# Countries of High and Medium Religious Persecution

## MAP KEY

**PURPLE:** High persecution

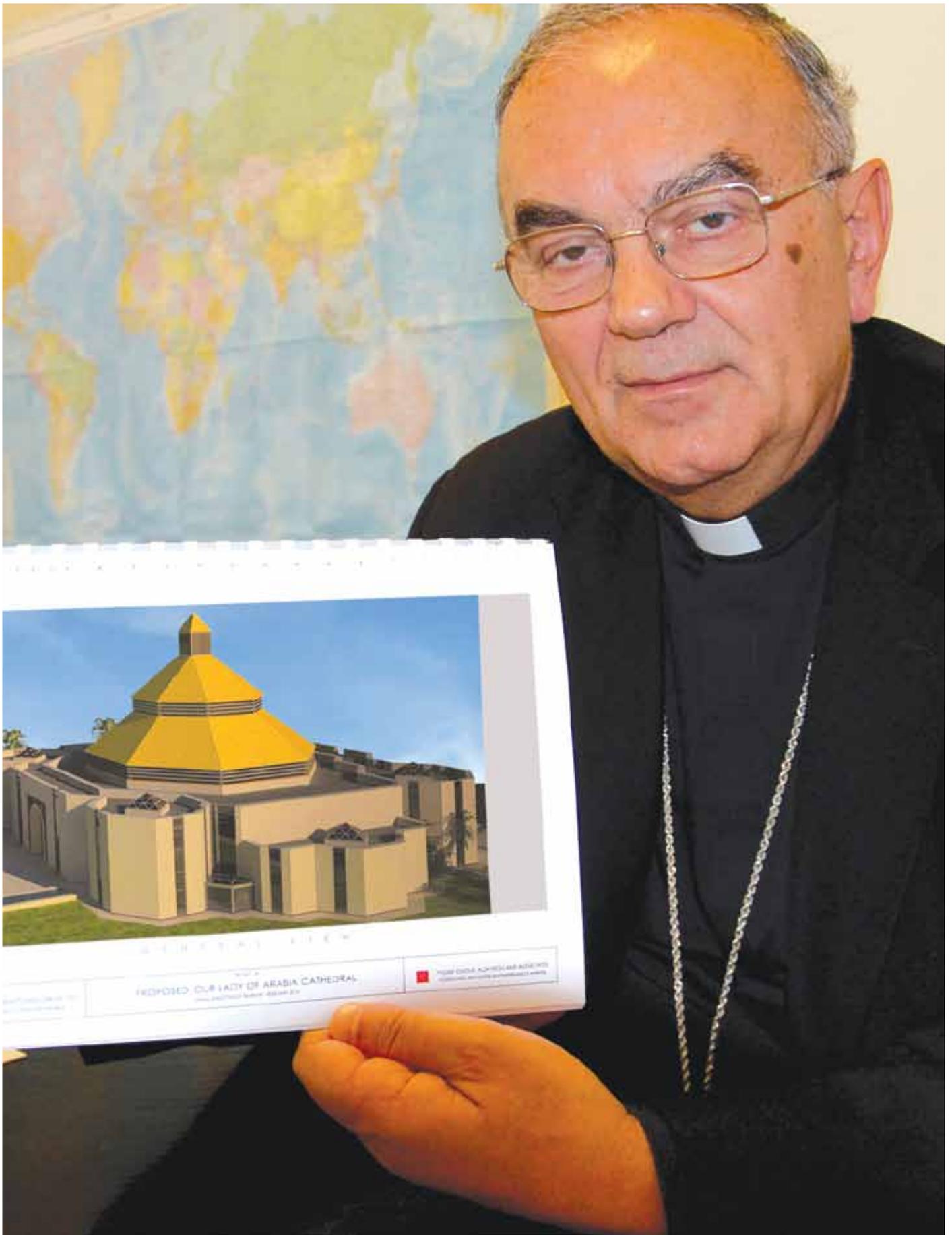
**RED:** Medium persecution

To view further country classifications please see the tables at the back of this report (pages 30 and 31).





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immodesty, family breakdown, gay marriage and huge national and personal debt, then traditionally-minded religious groups want no part of it.

With justification, the media focus mainly on Islamic terrorism. But, as this report shows, this is not the whole story. Of the 20 countries we have identified as having a “high” problem regarding freedom of religion, six of them – Azerbaijan, Burma (Myanmar), China, Eritrea, North Korea and Uzbekistan – are ruled by authoritarian regimes where Muslims are prominent among the victims of religious persecution.

The report reinforces earlier research establishing that Christians are by far the most persecuted faith group. Christians’ susceptibility to oppression is directly related to the fact that they are historically widely dispersed, often in cultures very different from their own. Many of the countries where Christians have been established for generations

or even millennia have now become subject to extremism. In almost every one of the 20 most “high” countries we have identified, Muslim minority groups also face terrible and systematic persecution. It should be noted, however, that in most cases this comes at the hands of other Muslims. The rising tension between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims is a constant theme of this report.

Jewish communities have also suffered increased threats and violence, notably in some parts of Western Europe, prompting record levels of migration to Israel.

Noting a decline in religious freedom affecting Jewish, Christian and other communities, former British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks stated in the British Parliament in July 2014 that a “new tribalism” was leading to “the use of religion as the robe of sanctity to disguise and legitimate the naked pursuit of power,” adding: “God himself weeps at the evils being committed in his name.”

## CASE STUDY

# BAHRAIN

## Cathedral construction signals light in the darkness

March 2014: The island of Bahrain lies just 16 miles (25km) off the coast of Saudi Arabia, which is governed by one of the world’s most repressive regimes. The proposed construction of a 2,500-seat Catholic cathedral in Bahrain is seen by many Christians and others as having huge potential for the emergence of a more tolerant attitude to minority faith communities across the Arab-speaking world.

In March 2014, Bishop Camillo Ballin, who heads the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, confirmed that King Isa Al Khalifah of Bahrain had given land to the Catholic Church to construct a cathedral. Dedicated to Our Lady of Arabia, the cathedral will serve an estimated 2.5 million Catholics (350,000 of whom are in Bahrain). The great majority of them are foreign guest workers from India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries, who are now resident in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The new structure will be a focal point for the territory’s 10 parishes.

The practice of Christianity in the Arab Peninsula is severely restricted, particularly in Saudi Arabia, and is mostly limited to the grounds of foreign embassies and private homes. Priests are generally not allowed to appear in public dressed in clerical garb and Muslims are strictly forbidden from converting to Christianity. While Christian women in Saudi are permitted to marry Muslim men, Christian men are banned from marrying Muslim women. The building of the new cathedral in Bahrain signals a breakthrough in church-state relations and is also testimony to what Bishop Ballin describes as “the constantly increasing number of Catholics in the region.”

The cathedral is estimated to cost £17.5 million (US\$30million) to construct and is scheduled to be completed by 2016.

Sources: National Catholic Register, March 20, 2014 ([www.ncregister.com](http://www.ncregister.com)); Aid to the Church in Need USA, March 19, 2014.



## CASE STUDY

# PAKISTAN

### 22 Shi'a Muslim pilgrims killed in bomb attack

January 2014: At least 22 Shi'a pilgrims, including women and children, were killed in a bomb attack on their bus in western Pakistan. The bomb exploded near the bus, which was returning to victims' home city of Quetta in Balochistan, after a trip to sacred sites in neighboring Iran. Fifty-one passengers were on board at the time of the blast.

At least 20 people were wounded, according to Shafqat Anwar Shahwani, assistant police commissioner for Mastung district. Shahwani said bomb disposal officers suspect the bomb was planted on the roadside and detonated remotely, but he did not rule out the possibility of a suicide attack. He added that the driver of the bus told authorities that he did not see any car hitting his vehicle, but felt a sudden blast

followed by the cries of women and children.

Sectarian attacks are on the rise in Pakistan, where minority Shi'a Muslims make up about 20 percent of the country's population of 175 million. Hundreds of Shi'as were killed in sectarian violence in Pakistan in 2013, including many teachers, doctors and children.

Groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, who have previously admitted carrying out similar attacks against Pakistan's Shi'a minority, say they are fighting for a Sunni theocracy and that Shi'as should leave the country or be killed.

Sources: Al Jazeera America, Jan. 21, 2014; BBC News Online, Jan. 21, 2014.





**Pope Francis meets Meriam Ibrahim and her child Maya at the Vatican's Santa Marta residence on July 24, 2014. Credit: ANSA/Osservatore Romano**

## CASE STUDY

# SUDAN

### Meriam Ibrahim escapes death penalty for 'apostasy'

May – June 2014: In Sudan, Meriam Ibrahim, eight months pregnant with her second child, was sentenced to death by hanging on May 15, 2014 for allegedly committing apostasy from Islam. Meriam was born to a Muslim father and Ethiopian Orthodox mother, however Meriam's father left her mother when Meriam was just a young child, and Meriam was subsequently brought up in the Christian faith, eventually marrying Daniel Wani, a Christian. Meriam maintained that she has always been a Christian.

Despite her claims, the prosecution stated that she should have followed the faith of her absent father, and demanded, with the support of the judge, that Meriam abandon her Christian faith, and adopt, instead, her father's faith, Islam. She was given three days to do so, but refused, arguing that she had been a Christian all her life, and could not rescind or alter her faith at the request of a court.

The sentence imposed on Meriam was soon brought to worldwide attention, with

governments, individuals and the media united in their outrage. This reaction was only heightened when it was revealed that Meriam had subsequently given birth to her child in prison, with her legs shackled to the floor.

The pressure on the Sudanese authorities continued and on June 24, 2014 Meriam Ibrahim was released on the order of a Sudanese appeal court. The following day, as she and her family were to board a plane to the United States, they were arrested and taken from the airport to Khartoum for questioning over allegations that she had forged travel documents. Meriam Ibrahim was freed again the subsequent day and took refuge in the United States embassy in Khartoum with her family. About a month later, on July 24, Meriam flew to Rome and met with Pope Francis in the Vatican. Meriam and her husband, Daniel then flew to the United States, where they now hope to raise their family.

Sources: AP/The Guardian, May31, 2014; NY Daily News, Feb. 27, 2014.

Whatever the possible reasons for the decline of religious pluralism and tolerance – whether motivated by hatred of another religion or hatred of any religion – the damage to the human condition at its deepest level is apparent.

Pope Francis said in a speech on June 20, 2014: “Reason recognizes that religious freedom is a fundamental right of man, reflecting his highest dignity.”

Even an avowedly secular body, such as the European Union, acknowledges the fundamental importance of the freedom of religious belief. In a set of guidelines it adopted in June 2013 it said: “As a universal human right, freedom of religion or belief safeguards respect for diversity. Its free exercise directly contributes to democracy, development, rule of law, peace and stability.”

This report, which sets out to describe the conditions faced by every religious minority in every country of the world, is published by Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic charity which, as a Pontifical Foundation, comes directly under the responsibility of the Holy See.

It is reasonable to ask whether it is possible for a Christian charity to describe objectively the sufferings of all religious believers, sometimes at the hands of other Christians. Readers can, of course, judge the success or failure of this report for themselves. But our response is that such a report on all religious minorities from a Christian charity is not only possible but necessary. Religious organizations have a duty to object vociferously when any faith community is being unfairly attacked. As underlined in Vatican documents, notably *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), religious freedom guarantees self-expression to all faith groups on condition that each respects the inalienable rights of others.

To broaden the spectrum of analysis of our individual country reports, Aid to the Church in Need has commissioned experts in religious freedom to spot emerging trends in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, North America, Western Europe, Russia and central Asia, and Latin America.

The reports from these experts are published in full electronically and can be accessed at: [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)

In summary, some of their findings are reported here:

The analysis of the state of religious freedom in Africa is made by former missionary **José Carlos Rodríguez Soto**. He is generally optimistic about the future of religious freedom in Africa, claiming that the problems “should not overshadow the

reality that in most African countries their citizens enjoy the right to religious freedom, which is exercised against the background of a favorable culture of tolerance and mutual respect among different religious denominations.”

He also highlights the growth of inter-denominational groups for dialogue and social action in Cameroon, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, Uganda, Zambia, South Africa and Kenya, among others, as a hopeful trend.

**Rodríguez Soto** also reports that the most worrying trend in Africa in the past two years has been the growth of Islamic fundamentalism spearheaded by groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (in north-west Africa), Boko Haram (in Nigeria and surrounding areas) and Al Shabaab (with its stronghold in Somalia). He says the military response to these terror groups has so far been ineffective and insists that other policies, including religious dialogue, should be pursued.

Concerning the Islamic world, **Father Paul Stenhouse**, editor of the monthly Catholic journal *Annals Australasia* and a frequent visitor to the Middle East, appeals for the West to exercise patience and restraint in the region, while developing a more sophisticated understanding of the diversity of belief concerning human rights within Islam.

He cites instances in which attempts at liberal reform in countries with little or no experience of democracy have led to widespread violence and upheaval, making the point that “Rome was not built in a day.” He gives a “special mention” to Iran. He writes: “By its constitution, Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews enjoy freedom of religion. Desecration and destruction of churches or synagogues – a feature of Islamist extremism in many Sunni states – is notably absent from Shi’a communities and societies.”

In Asia, **Father Bernardo Cervellera**, editor of *Asia News*, claims that, over the past two years, “Asia continues to be the continent where religious freedom is violated the most.” He writes: “Except for countries like Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines (apart from some episodes in Mindanao) and Cambodia, all other countries report varying degrees of violations of the religious freedom of Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities, not to mention groups deemed ‘heretical’ by local majorities like Ahmadis and Sufis.”

He makes special mention of North Korea, where “professing any faith other than that of the ruling demi-gods from the Kim dynasty is banned” and China, about which he writes: “China...is the

country where controls over religion are the most methodical and virtually complete, as evidenced by the violent campaign against unofficial Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist and Muslim communities.”

The two specialists writing about North America – **Eric Rassbach** and **Adèle Keim** – from the Becket Fund have focused on the June 2014 decision of the United States Supreme Court *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Inc.* This involved a federal regulation that requires many employers to pay for health insurance packages that includes mandatory contraceptive coverage. The Supreme Court held in a 5-4 vote that the Green family, owners of Hobby Lobby, could exclude abortifacient contraceptives without government penalty. Another dispute concerning how far believers may put their faith into practice involves an executive order issued by President Obama (July 2014) prohibiting federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identification. Despite the request of many

religious organizations, the order included no exception for religious practice, putting a question mark over some services provided by churches to the poor and the homeless.

Similar questions of conscience are highlighted in their analysis concerning Canada. The authors describe the case of Trinity Western University, an evangelical Protestant college, which limits its faculty members to those who share its faith. Opponents claim it should be barred from opening a law faculty as its belief in the traditional definition of marriage prevents it from offering legal education. “The outcome of this dispute will affect all religious institutions that demonstrate a preference for co-religionists,” they write.

Regarding Western Europe, **Dr. John Newton** – an author on religious freedom who works for Aid to the Church in Need in the UK and Vienna-based **Dr. Martin Kugler** of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe – paint a worrying picture of the gradual marginalization of those trying to maintain

## CASE STUDY

# CHINA (TIBET)

## Buddhist monk dies in detention

December 2013: Chinese police are suspected of beating to death a Tibetan Buddhist monk,

Jamyang Geshe Ngawang, while he was being held in prison. Jamyang, aged 45, and two of his friends were arrested by public security officials in November 2013 while on holiday in Lhasa, the provincial capital of Tibet. Since then, all traces of him were lost until Dec. 17, when the police handed over his body to his family. Ngawang Tharpa, a Tibetan living in India but who maintains contact with his country of origin, told Radio Free Asia: “He was beaten to death. When the police handed over his body, they warned the family members to say nothing of the incident. Otherwise, they would be killed.” There is no news to date of the two companions arrested along with Jamyang.

Jamyang Geshe Ngawang was highly respected by the local community and was popular among the local faithful. He taught for many years in an Indian monastery before

returning in 2007 to Tibet, where he accepted the post of lecturer at the monastery of Tarmoe Nagchu, Diru County.

According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, “it is clear that the monk was beaten to death while being held in a secret prison. He was a big man and in good health when he left his monastery to visit Lhasa.”

In 2008 Jamyang was arrested in Tibet and sentenced to two years in prison on charges of “maintaining contacts with foreign countries.” However, he was released early for good behavior. According to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, 87 prisoners were tortured and died either in detention or shortly after their release between 1987 and early 2005.

Sources: [www.AsiaNews.it](http://www.AsiaNews.it), Dec. 20, 2013; Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, Jan. 27, 2014 ([www.tchrd.org](http://www.tchrd.org)).



Courtesy: Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy.



## CASE STUDY

# CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

## Christians and Muslims brought together for peace

January 2014: Kobine Layama, a Muslim Imam and chairman of the Islamic community in the Central Africa Republic, together with Dieudonné Nzapalainga, the Catholic Archbishop of the capital of Bangui, and Nicolas Guerekoyame, a Protestant Minister, have established an inter-denominational peace group. During the time when half the country was occupied by the Séléka rebels, the three men conducted peace missions, mediating between the parties in the country's interior in order to prevent the clashes from becoming open warfare. When the Séléka rebels occupied Bangui, and seized power there, Imam Layama found himself in a difficult personal situation: many Central African Muslims saw this as a sign that the time had come for them to take power, and in many places Séléka rebels and Muslims openly collaborated. Kobine Layama is a pious Muslim who is convinced that Muslims and Christians should live in peace and mutual respect. He became an awkward figure for the Séléka rebels because he preached: "What you are

doing - stealing, killing, raping women and terrorizing people - is contrary to what God commands us to do in the Qur'an." As violence raged through Bangui in early December 2013 and caused 500 deaths in three days, Kobine sought shelter with his friend, Archbishop Nzapalainga. He knew that his life was under threat from the extremists on both sides. Since then, he has indefatigably called for calm and reconciliation.

According to these three religious leaders, the nature of the Central African conflict is not religious, but social and political. Violence and revenge is being fomented by those who want to see an outbreak of hostilities between Christians and Muslims; time and again this puts the country's citizens in dangerous situations. At great risk to themselves, the Imam, the Archbishop and the Minister are three courageous voices tirelessly calling for peace.

Sources: Aid to the Church in Need, February 2014

traditional moral values. Though religious believers have full freedom to practice their faith in private, the authors identify “a hardline imposition of relativistic positions” which is inhibiting reasonable accommodation of religious beliefs.

Worse still, this clash of values is growing to the extent that religious believers fear they may be forced by the state to conform to societal norms to which they conscientiously object.

The authors also highlight the rising occurrence of violence against Jews and Muslims across Western Europe, which, though deeply concerning, remains for the time being largely the exception. They draw particular attention to Jewish emigration from France where, in the first three months of 2014, some 400 French Jews left for Israel, a four-fold increase compared to the same period in 2013 and 2012.

**Peter Humeniuk**, a specialist on Russia and Central Asia, is a member of Aid to the Church in Need’s international project team. He invites readers to view religious liberty in Russia through the lens of its recent tumultuous past. He says that, while traditional religious groups are treated in general with respect, the experience – from the mid-1990s onwards – of well-funded religious sects flooding into the country has colored the degree of religious liberty that is now permissible. Although these sects were largely unsuccessful, the authorities sometimes find it difficult to draw the line between legitimate and illegitimate religious activity.

He says Russia is striving to develop its own, home-grown, form of Islam, though the line between “an exotic religious community and an active terrorist cell can be a very thin one.” He also says the large groups of service workers in Moscow and St Petersburg, mainly Muslim migrants from Central Asia, represent a “potential for ethnic and religious unrest”.

Turning to the countries of Central Asia, he writes that many fear that the withdrawal of Western military forces from Afghanistan may lead to the spread of radical Islam within the region. “This is a frightening prospect for the authoritarian regimes in which Islam is State-controlled.” The leaders of these Central Asian states, he says, have seen the results of the “Arab Spring” and while these bloody revolutions do not necessarily justify the restrictions imposed on religious communities, they go some way towards explaining them.

Author **Dr. Austen Ivereigh** says that while Latin America is home to half the world’s Catholics, a much greater diversity of religious belief and practice exists than is popularly imagined. In

Brazil more than 20 percent of the population is Evangelical Christian, while in some Central American states this number rises to one-third. Argentina has significant communities of both Jews and Muslims and in the English-speaking Caribbean Islands Protestant Churches dominate. There are also, in Cuba and Brazil for example, significant numbers practicing Spiritism or Santería.

He explains that the barriers to full religious freedom, where they exist, are usually the result of officially secularist and atheist regimes and generally apply equally to all religious groups. The challenge for the future, he says, is for the lifting of the remaining sanctions, both legal and unofficial, on religious bodies and for greater acceptance by the region’s governments of religious voices in national life.

As several of the case studies in this Executive Summary highlight, there are signs of hope as well as reasons for grave concern. We feature examples of religious leaders holding out the hand of friendship to one another. We report that even in the Arabian Gulf, home of some states that are most hostile to religious pluralism, a Muslim ruler has donated land for a Christian cathedral. In Africa we show how Christian leaders and a Muslim Imam are working together to reduce violence. Though we report on the ominous growth of religious intolerance in parts of Western Europe, there is clearly a contrary tendency as religious and community leaders are joining together to warmly welcome refugees.

The clear lesson from this research is that the urgent call to reverse the violence and oppression directed towards religious minorities must come, first and foremost, from within religious communities themselves. Though this report highlights the many legal and constitutional impediments to religious liberty imposed by governments, the precondition for improvement is harmony and mutual respect between religious groups.

The necessity for all religious leaders to use their pulpits and the media to loudly proclaim their opposition to religiously-inspired violence, and to re-affirm their support for religious tolerance, is becoming – in the present climate – ever more urgent.

Peter Sefton-Williams

Chairman, Editorial Committee, ACN Worldwide Religious Freedom Report

# OVERALL STATE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Country	Overall state of persecution or discrimination facing faith groups	Change in Situation
Iraq	HIGH	Sig. Deteriorated
Libya	HIGH	Sig. Deteriorated
Nigeria	HIGH	Sig. Deteriorated
Pakistan	HIGH	Sig. Deteriorated
Sudan	HIGH	Sig. Deteriorated
Syria	HIGH	Sig. Deteriorated
Azerbaijan	HIGH	Deteriorated
Burma (Myanmar)	HIGH	Deteriorated
Central African Republic	HIGH	Deteriorated
China	HIGH	Deteriorated
Egypt	HIGH	Deteriorated
Uzbekistan	HIGH	Deteriorated
Afghanistan	HIGH	No change
Eritrea	HIGH	No change
Maldives	HIGH	No change
North Korea	HIGH	No change
Saudi Arabia	HIGH	No change
Somalia	HIGH	No change
Yemen	HIGH	No change
Iran	HIGH	Improved
Mali	MEDIUM	Sig. Deteriorated
Angola	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Bangladesh	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Belarus	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Brunei	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Ethiopia	MEDIUM	Deteriorated

Greece	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Indonesia	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Kazakhstan	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Kenya	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Kuwait	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Kyrgyzstan	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Lebanon	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Malaysia	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Morocco	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Tanzania	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Tunisia	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Turkmenistan	MEDIUM	Deteriorated
Bahrain	MEDIUM	No change
Algeria	MEDIUM	No change
Comoros	MEDIUM	No change
Cyprus	MEDIUM	No change
India	MEDIUM	No change
Israel	MEDIUM	No change
Laos	MEDIUM	No change
Mauritania	MEDIUM	No change
Nepal	MEDIUM	No change
Palestinian Territories	MEDIUM	No change
Russian Federation	MEDIUM	No change
Sri Lanka	MEDIUM	No change
Tajikistan	MEDIUM	No change
Turkey	MEDIUM	No change
Vietnam	MEDIUM	No change
Cuba	MEDIUM	Improved
Qatar	MEDIUM	Improved
United Arab Emirates	MEDIUM	Improved

Djibouti	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Hungary	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Bolivia	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Canada	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Denmark	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Ecuador	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
France	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Georgia	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Germany	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Netherlands	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Peru	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Sweden	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Ukraine	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
United Kingdom	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Uruguay	OF CONCERN	Deteriorated
Armenia	OF CONCERN	No change
Bhutan	OF CONCERN	No change
Bulgaria	OF CONCERN	No change
Chad	OF CONCERN	No change
Colombia	OF CONCERN	No change
Democratic Republic of Congo	OF CONCERN	No change
Equatorial Guinea	OF CONCERN	No change
Ivory Coast	OF CONCERN	No change
Jordan	OF CONCERN	No change
Kosovo	OF CONCERN	No change
Macedonia	OF CONCERN	No change
Madagascar	OF CONCERN	No change
Mauritius	OF CONCERN	No change
Mexico	OF CONCERN	No change
Moldova	OF CONCERN	No change
Mongolia	OF CONCERN	No change
New Zealand	OF CONCERN	No change
Nicaragua	OF CONCERN	No change
Niger	OF CONCERN	No change
Norway	OF CONCERN	No change
Oman	OF CONCERN	No change
Palau	OF CONCERN	No change
Papua New Guinea	OF CONCERN	No change

Philippines	OF CONCERN	No change
Romania	OF CONCERN	No change
Rwanda	OF CONCERN	No change
Serbia	OF CONCERN	No change
Singapore	OF CONCERN	No change
Slovakia	OF CONCERN	No change
South Africa	OF CONCERN	No change
Thailand	OF CONCERN	No change
Tuvalu	OF CONCERN	No change
Uganda	OF CONCERN	No change
Venezuela	OF CONCERN	No change
Zimbabwe	OF CONCERN	Improved
Australia	LOW	Deteriorated
Albania	LOW	Deteriorated
Argentina	LOW	Deteriorated
Belgium	LOW	Deteriorated
Cameroon	LOW	Deteriorated
Ireland	LOW	Deteriorated
Italy	LOW	Deteriorated
Luxembourg	LOW	Deteriorated
Poland	LOW	Deteriorated
United States of America	LOW	Deteriorated
Taiwan	LOW	Improved

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

**The period under review:** October 2012 to June 2014 (inclusive).

A total of 79 additional countries were classified as “low” with no change in their status. To view these countries please see the spreadsheet at [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org).

In assessing the scale of oppression of religious groups, ACN has considered many factors. The categorisations shown here are based on the likelihood of religiously-inspired violence and/or intolerance in a given country from any source. ACN acknowledges that the qualitative nature of the categorisation means that there is necessarily a subjective element in such an analysis.

To read an individual country report please visit [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org) and click on the relevant continent.

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[www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)



*Aid to the Church in Need* is an international Catholic charity under the guidance of the Holy Father, providing assistance to the suffering and persecuted Church in more than 140 countries.

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