

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN PRESENTS

PERSECUTOR *OF THE YEAR* AWARDS

20
22

THE ANNUAL LIST OF
THE WORLD'S TOP
PERSECUTORS

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ENDORSEMENTS FOR INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN'S **PERSECUTOR** *OF THE YEAR* **AWARDS**

"I love International Christian Concern's ongoing commitment to point the light at the darkness that is persecution. Christians are suffering greatly, and reports like this are critical to sounding the alarm around the world." —*Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom (2018-2021)*

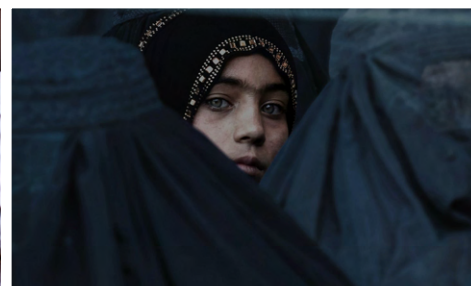
"Our nation was founded on the fundamental truth that every individual is made uniquely by our one true creator. Unfortunately, there are many places across the world where people cannot exercise their beliefs. We must openly condemn these bad actors and call out the places where persecution exists. Thank you to ICC for your tremendous work defending and preserving our Christian faith all over the world."

—*U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL)*

"As one of the greatest abusers of religious freedom in the world today, International Christian Concern's report rightfully shines a light on the abuses committed by President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party. The persecution and silencing of Chinese Christians and other religious minorities calls for more than a simple slap on the wrist. ChinaAid is grateful to have a partner in ICC in pushing back against the regime in China by working towards the recommendations highlighted." —*Rev. Dr. Bob Fu, President and Founder of China Aid Association*

"I have known Jeff King for many years. His passion to help the persecuted is admirable. What makes International Christian Concern unique is that their support of the persecuted is comprehensive and multifaceted. In addition to advocacy and bringing awareness, ICC provides resources and financial support to the persecuted families—giving them a strong message that 'You are not alone.'"

—*Hormoz Shariat, President and Founder, Iran Alive Ministries*



“International Christian Concern does vital work, alongside other excellent organisations, to awaken the moral conscience of the free world to the desperate plight of Christians facing persecution in many countries. Its ‘Persecutor of the Year Awards’ provides a valuable tool for spotlighting the worst places of persecution and informing legislators, policymakers, the media, the church and the general public. I recommend reading this important report.” —**Benedict Rogers, Senior Analyst, East Asia, CSW**

“ICC goes to great lengths to communicate modern-day, real-life stories of religiously motivated persecution. With facts in hand, they are motivated to advocate for those whose voices go unheard, particularly Christians, who are the largest religious group persecuted globally. ICC then works to empower persecuted Christians in their environments of oppression but then also challenges ICC supporters to meaningful, godly action. The beauty and value of ICC’s ‘Persecutor of the Year Award’ is not only the helpful presentation of where the trouble lies globally but in their call for action and response. In other words, ICC doesn’t simply present the problem; they offer ways people can make a tangible difference for those suffering under religious repression.”

—**Floyd A Brobbel, Chairman, Religious Liberty Partnership**

“As an international mission serving the persecuted church world-wide, we value our partnership with ICC. They and their local partners do not only faithfully serve those that have suffered for Christ, but they also provide valid information about the local circumstances and thus help a wider public to gain insight into current events in the countries of concern. This important work helps bringing justice and care to the persecuted. We are thankful and privileged to partner with ICC in their work and ministry.” —**Manfred Müller, CEO, HMK-Germany**

“The work of International Christian Concern is vital, since it is one of the few voices that speaks out loudly against the intolerance and persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters. The expert monitoring work and their results show us clearly that Christianity is – as it was all throughout its history – still the most persecuted religion. It is of the utmost importance that this work should be continued!”

—**Tristan Azbej, State Secretary, Aid of Persecuted Christians**





IN THE PREVIOUS CENTURY, MORE
CHRISTIANS WERE MURDERED FOR
THEIR FAITH **THAN IN ANY CENTURY**
IN RECORDED HISTORY.



Afghan refugees ponder their fate after the Taliban takeover.

LETTER FROM THE **PRESIDENT**

Tonight, in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, Christian communities will anxiously be on watch to see if their village will be the next to be attacked by radical Muslim Fulani militias. Like locusts, the militants swarm over the land and devour everything in their path while the government and military give lip service that they care.

Tomorrow, in India, a pastor will be beaten on the street if they simply share their faith. The police will wait for the mob attack to end before arresting the pastor for disturbing the peace.

And in Afghanistan, the Taliban will continue the hunt for the country's Christians since most are apostates from Islam and should be put to death.

Elsewhere, Christians are routinely denied jobs, beaten, imprisoned, tortured, and even murdered due to their God-given right to worship their Creator as they see fit.

The voices of my persecuted brothers and sisters, living and passing, haunt me. The images of their suffering are burned into my psyche - a young Christian girl beaten to death by a mob of Islamic classmates or the burnt ashes of homes and lives in a farming community, and so many more.

Despite the widespread human rights tragedies they represent, their stories are rarely told by mainstream media. And those in global power take a pass on the issue as more pressing geopolitical issues take precedence.

This comprehensive, 150-page report is an attempt to bring their plight into the light. To identify the forces arrayed against them organized under the categories of individual, entity, and state; and to give journalists, human rights workers, and concerned government leaders a helpful tool to understand

our complicated landscape.

I often say that International Christian Concern (ICC) is the special forces of the Christian world. We operate at the front lines of the most dangerous places on Earth for Christians. Our skilled and dedicated staff – about 50 strong worldwide – work in Washington, D.C. but also in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia where they interview survivors, bring healing to the wounded, and keep government officials informed.

It is only because of their expertise, connections, due diligence, and comprehensive analysis that ICC can produce this comprehensive document. I am incredibly grateful for their dedication and arduous work to serve and save those who are targeted for their choice of who and how to worship.

Thank you for caring for those we care for. Facts and findings and 'dubious' awards are one thing. But what do you do with the information we are passing on to you?

I would urge you to join us.

Tell others about what is happening. Stand up with us for the oppressed until justice flows down like water, and the persecuted find the freedom to worship who they wish and in the manner they choose.

May God bless you.



A stylized handwritten signature in black ink.

JEFF KING

President, International Christian Concern

SUMMARY

A REPORT TO SHINE LIGHT IN DARKNESS

ICC's Persecutor of the Year Awards is a summation of insights and analysis compiled from countless victim interviews, 50 international ICC staff, and their massive network of contacts.

The persecuted endure suffering in the darkness to live out the faith they have chosen. ICC works to shed light on their experiences, and to hold those who persecute accountable for their heinous actions.

ICC's team of Washington, D.C.-based analysts spend thousands of hours annually reporting on and analyzing reports from our overseas staff and sources. Every day, they research and post

persecution news on our website, *Persecution.org*. Throughout the year, they also develop in-depth reports on countries with the worst religious freedom records. Those reports are foundational to the building of this report and can be found in the last few pages of this document.

No matter your position or playing field, we hope you use this report and information to support the cause of religious freedom.

Join us in our cause to bring awareness of the plight of persecuted Christians. More importantly, join us in our fight to advance religious freedom for followers of all faiths.



A DISTINCTION OF DISDAIN

Persecution is only confined to the creativity and limits of the human mind, consisting of the most brutal crimes against humanity. International Christian Concern (ICC) analyzed data and reviewed global trends of Christian persecution over the past year and selected the worst oppressors in three categories: country, entity, and individual.

Sixteen persecutors made this year's findings in the pages that follow, but three earned the dubious distinction of (dis)honor in the 2022 ICC Persecutor of the Year Awards.



COUNTRY AWARD

AFGHANISTAN

The chaotic withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from Afghanistan in August 2021 plunged the country into disarray and put a death sentence on Christians. Since the Taliban became the ruling party of the country, beatings, kidnappings, torture, and murder of Christians and minority groups have increased dramatically. Within the Taliban's hardline fundamentalist version of Islam, Afghan Christians—many of whom are former Muslims—are branded as apostates deserving of death. By the end of 2021, the Taliban employed harsh tactics to expose the country's Christians and implement their Islamic justice. This brought persecution in Afghanistan to its highest levels since the Taliban's first government in 1996.



ENTITY AWARD

FULANI MILITANTS

Nigeria is arguably one of the most dangerous places on the planet for Christians because of the abundance of violent extremists, including groups of Fulani militants. This faction of a broader nomadic group, through its exposure to Islamic fundamentalist ideologies, has terrorized Nigeria's Christian communities. Radicalized and armed Islamist Fulani militias have killed tens of thousands of Christians and left countless homeless in a 20-year genocide. The Nigerian government claims to be countering this extremism but is mostly lip service as the conflict grows out of control. Many point to government inaction as one of the reasons for increasing Fulani militant violence against Nigeria's Christian population in the Middle Belt.



INDIVIDUAL AWARD

ALI KHAMENEI

As Grand Ayatollah of Iran, Ali Khamenei controls every aspect of Iranian life and uses harsh tactics to restrict Christians. Khamenei, who serves as the country's Supreme Leader (an honorary title for his clerical role in Shia Islam), allows the torture and execution of many Iranian Christians. Those found attempting to share their faith or worship in a house church are often arrested and sent to the notorious Evin Prison, known for its brutality and torture of prisoners. The Grand Ayatollah at the helm of Iran directs persecution by controlling every aspect of Iranian life and dealing grave consequences to those who do not conform to his strict conservative ideologies.

Left: Destruction in Syria's Dier Ez Zior in the aftermath of ISIS, February 2020.

PERSECUTION PRIMER

TYPES OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



ARRESTS
IMPRISONMENT/
TORTURE



ASSASSINATION
MARTYRDOM



ATTACKS ON LIFE
& PROPERTY



RESTRICTIONS
ON CHURCHES &
BIBLES



FORCED
CONVERSIONS



CRIMES AGAINST
WOMEN

INDIRECT



EDUCATION
DISCRIMINATION



JOB
DISCRIMINATION



DENIAL OF
RIGHTS



LEGAL
RESTRICTIONS



SOURCES OF PERSECUTION



EVIL

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."
Ephesians 6:12



RADICAL ISLAM

Fundamentalist Islam is intolerant toward other faiths, and Christians suffer greatly in radical Muslim countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Indonesia.



MARXISM

In communist countries like Cuba, China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea, Christians are targeted because of their allegiance to Christ instead of the Marxist regimes.



DISCRIMINATION

Christian persecution occurs because of social and cultural discrimination. Human beings in general are afraid and intolerant of that which is different.



UNDERSTAND ICC

OUR MISSION

Since 1995, International Christian Concern (ICC) has served the global persecuted church through a three-pronged approach of advocacy, assistance, and awareness. ICC exists to bandage the wounds of persecuted Christians and to build the church in the toughest parts of the world.

A HOLISTIC ATTACK ON PERSECUTION



WE ADVOCATE

by working with government leaders and challenging persecuting countries.



WE ASSIST

by building and bandaging the persecuted church.



WE AWAKEN

by bringing persecution awareness to the sacred and secular world.

WHAT SETS ICC APART?



SPECIAL FORCES

We are fast, nimble, and get in where others can't and execute difficult missions on the ground.



LONG-TERM CARE

We don't parachute in. We work with victims for the long-term when needed but don't create dependency.



TRACK RECORD

We have a 5-Star Charity Navigator Rating with 26 years in ministry. We have a long history of growth.

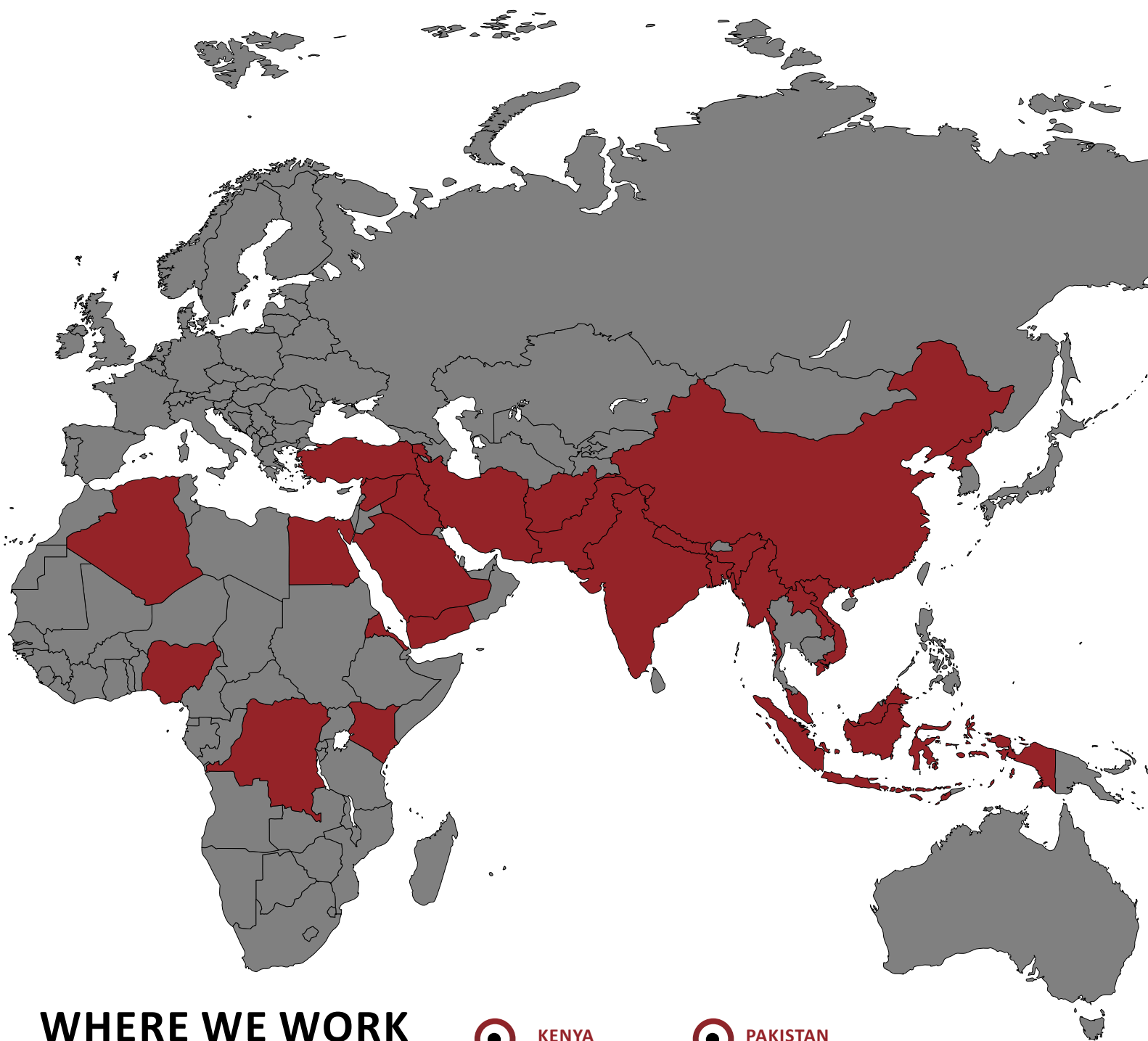


MINISTRY FIRST

We focus on ministry over fundraising, serving the Lord and the persecuted first. We believe funds follow Godly work.

OUR STAFF

ICC has about 50 worldwide staff—half in Washington, D.C., and half spread throughout the world. Regional managers (Africa, Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) and project coordinators oversee indigenous staff to assist victims and report attacks. Expert analysts work closely with government officials and advocate for victims on Capitol Hill and beyond. ICC strives daily to make the world aware of the suffering of persecuted believers.



WHERE WE WORK

 AFGHANISTAN	 EGYPT	 KENYA	 PAKISTAN
 ALGERIA	 ERITREA	 LAOS	 SAUDI ARABIA
 ARMENIA	 INDIA	 MALAYSIA	 SYRIA
 BANGLADESH	 INDONESIA	 MYANMAR	 TURKEY
 CHINA	 IRAN	 NEPAL	 UGANDA
 DRC	 IRAQ	 NIGERIA	 VIETNAM
		 NORTH KOREA	 YEMEN

 ICC STAFF & PROJECTS

WASHINGTON, D.C.
(ICC HEADQUARTERS)



COUNTRIES





AFGHANISTAN

A CHRISTIAN DEATH SENTENCE

TALIBAN: THE EMBODIMENT OF PERSECUTION

Afghanistan's violence against Christians has only worsened since the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and the Taliban is attempting to eradicate Christianity across the country.

SUMMARY

- The weeks and months after Kabul fell to the Taliban were the most frightening times Christians have faced in recent years.
- Under the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islam, Christians are considered apostates and a community of criminals who deserve the death sentence.
- The Taliban's harsh tactics include going door to door to identify Christians and making threatening phone calls to known Christians.
- The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban has brought persecution to its highest level in decades.
- The international community needs to do more to hold the Taliban accountable.

OVERVIEW

Afghanistan's turbulent history is highlighted by its struggle with various world powers and the evolution of Islamic extremism that has unfolded since Russia's invasion and occupation from 1979 to 1989. The Taliban hold a prominent place in Afghanistan's contemporary history and have heavily influenced government, society, culture, and religion. The group continued to demonstrate its persistent aggression during the rapid takeover of the country last August, following the withdrawal of U.S. forces. Since 1996, Afghanistan and the Taliban have been inextricably bound together, paving the way for the Taliban's repressive rule, which includes the goal of eradicating Christianity from the country.

The Taliban are one of the worst oppressors of Christians, with a long track record of brutal crimes against the community. In a theocratic dictatorship, religious minorities are not free to practice their faith traditions. The Taliban's adherence to strict Islamic law compels them to punish and even kill those who do not follow their radical interpretations of Islam. Worse, Christian converts to Islam are deemed apostates and a community of criminals deserving of death. Since the takeover, Christian persecution has only grown. The international community must do more to intervene and hold the Taliban accountable.



QUICK FACTS

POPULATION:

38 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

99.7% Muslim

<0.3% Other

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

12,000 - 15,000 (estimated)

LANGUAGES

Afghan

Persian

Dari

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

For 1997-2021 events, reference the 2021 POY Timeline of Events.

2021

AUGUST 2021

Kabul, Afghanistan's capitol, falls to the Taliban. A twin suicide bombing at the airport further hinders evacuations. Christians flee to neighboring countries.

SEPTEMBER 2021

The Taliban reportedly used whips and sticks against women protesting the new restrictions of rights.

OCTOBER 2021

A U.S. delegation meets with the Taliban in Qatar. Meanwhile, ISIS takes advantage of the chaos and bombs a Shia Mosque.

NOVEMBER 2021

Human Rights Watch releases a report documenting credible information on more than 100 targeted killings by the Taliban.

DECEMBER 2021

The U.S. authorizes some limited aid transactions into Afghanistan.

2022

JANUARY 2022

Restrictions imposed on women include prohibiting long-distance travel, forbidding appearances on TV shows and movies, abolition of the Women's Affairs Ministry, cutting off secondary education, a workforce ban, and dress code enforcement and societal segregation.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

The chaotic withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from Afghanistan in August of 2021 plunged the country into disarray with increased food scarcity, the eradication of various human rights, restrictions on press freedom, and other new limitations. Under the emerging Taliban rule, Christians are facing the harshest conditions seen in decades. Most, if not all, Afghan Christians are converts from Islam or Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). The Taliban's hostility toward Christianity includes extreme violence as a means of integrating their radical interpretation of Islam through all levels of government and civil society. Despite some optimism about a reformed Taliban, there has been an internal collapse of fundamental human rights, particularly women's rights. Meanwhile, what little hope existed for religious freedom reform evaporated within days of the takeover. Religious minorities, especially Christians, live in fear for their lives, knowing that the oppressive regime which historically targeted them has returned to power. Since the Taliban takeover, beatings, kidnappings, torture, and murders of minority groups have increased dramatically.

Because the Taliban's style of governance targets vulnerable communities, Christians regularly face societal and employment discrimination, as well as harassment. The lack of opportunities and resources places an extreme burden on families, who have no recourse. The group's takeover has interrupted foreign aid within the country, bringing Afghanistan closer to economic disaster. Food insecurity is rampant, further increasing the vulnerability of religious minorities whose options are already limited. Families have resorted to desperate measures, including selling their underage daughters into marriage to older men in exchange for food.

Meanwhile, the Taliban are cracking down on Afghans who are trying to leave the country. Through door-to-door security sweeps they call "clearing operations," Taliban militants search for Afghans who had U.S. relations as well as those who are living contrary to their interpretation of Islamic law, including Christians. It is reported that the incoming Taliban government gained access to recordings and documents that identified Christians, who were then found and detained. Before being killed, Taliban members tortured them in hopes that they would reveal their Christian contacts. Christian religious leaders have reported an alarming trend where they receive threatening calls saying, "We're coming for you."

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



HARASSMENT AND
INTIMIDATION
TACTICS



DETAINMENT,
TORTURE, AND
EXECUTION



DISCRIMINATION



RESTRICTION OF
MOVEMENT

HARASSMENT AND INTIMIDATION

TACTICS: Christians receive threatening phone calls and worry that spying neighbors may report them to the Taliban.

DETAINMENT, TORTURE, AND

EXECUTION: Christians identified by the Taliban are often detained and subjected to various types of torture intended to compel them to reveal Christian networks. As apostates, they are deserving of death.

DISCRIMINATION: Food and medical supplies are limited throughout the country, but Christians are unable to access these resources for fear of being identified.

RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENT: As the Taliban has cracked down on Christians and other minorities, these individuals are not free to move about day to day without threat of harm.



MORE THAN 75,000 AFGHAN REFUGEES

HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN WELCOMED TO
THE U.S. SINCE THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER.



INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN



DETAINED AND TORTURED

A nine-member family was preparing to go to Pakistan when their breadwinner, Niaz, was arrested by the Taliban and detained for three months. He reported that during the first month of captivity, his captors physically assaulted him. During the second month, those assaults continued, but then included sexual abuse. In the third month, the torture stopped, reportedly because the Taliban wanted to sell Niaz back to the family without any visible evidence of torture. After returning home, he was afraid to leave and confined himself to his house. Since then, however, he has become more active in helping other Afghan Christians, including recently baptizing two new Christians.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

TALIBAN TAKE OVER AFGHANISTAN



A Glenn Beck Interview on Afghanistan

Leading up to the fall of Kabul earlier this year, ICC was closely fixed on Afghanistan. Knowing that the Taliban was gaining strength, ICC worked months in advance to rescue some of Afghanistan's most vulnerable Christian families.

In response to our efforts to support Afghanistan's Christians, Glenn Beck

invited ICC's president, Jeff King, to spread the word on his show. He has generously provided support to Christians in need by providing them with emergency rescue and raising awareness on their behalf.

To watch the interview, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit: <https://bit.ly/3KKjDX2>

Inside Afghanistan

ICC President, Jeff King, interviewed Luke, one of ICC's long-time partners who lives in Afghanistan. To watch both parts of the interview, please scan the following QR codes with your mobile device.



PART 1



PART 2

Policy Briefing: The Case for Afghan Christians to Receive P-2 Visas

Afghanistan is in the midst of what the UN has called the worst humanitarian crisis in history. Even as more than 30 million Afghans face acute or emergency-level food insecurity, the Taliban is going door to door enforcing its fundamentalist interpretation of Sharia law. The UN recently reported that 95% of Afghan households are failing to get enough to eat. Before the Taliban took over, 40% of Afghanistan's GDP came from foreign aid.

An unwelcome minority in the country, Afghan Christians are at particular risk in the context of a crumbling Afghanistan. They have long faced social challenges and now must deal with a government run by a terrorist organization.

Even as Afghan Christians face an onslaught of persecution, the U.S. and others in the international community are turning a blind eye to their struggle.

Sadly, the world has afforded Afghan Christians very few escape routes and though private organizations have rushed in to help escaping Afghan Christians, their efforts are limited by current U.S. legislation. The policies discussed in the report are intended to help the Biden Administration and Congress address the Afghan refugee crisis in a way that pays appropriate attention to those experiencing religious persecution. To read the full report: <https://bit.ly/3vIBBoT>

Escaping the Taliban

ICC successfully helped a Christian escape the Taliban. This is his testimony.

Since the Afghan government was overthrown by the Taliban, we face increased danger and chaos. The oppression and terror of the Taliban left everyone in shock.

"My best [Christian] friend was forced to leave the country. I kept following up with believers till the Taliban arrested me.

"I was imprisoned for three months in a Taliban security prison. I was repeatedly tortured and insulted. They spat on my face and called me an apostate. I was deprived of all human rights.

"My mother came from a remote village to beg for my release. My parents sold their house to ransom me from the Taliban.

"I've been released with no reassurance that I will not get arrested again. I seek refuge only in our Lord Jesus Christ. When I see what the Taliban are doing to people, I'm just so glad that Jesus is my Lord.

"I pray for my family, for other believers who are in danger like me, and for all the believers in the world! I hope that one day all the people of my country will become believers and will be saved from ignorance, tyranny and darkness. I want to help, especially the people of Afghanistan, find the way and the light of Jesus Christ. Amen!"

**Due to security, no photos can be provided from victims inside the country*



ICC AT WORK



BUILDING A MINISTRY

ICC is working with Afghan refugees to build a ministry to receive other Muslim Background Believers fleeing Afghanistan. We have contact with at least 40 Christians in the area, all needing tailored aid to remain in the Middle East. The situation is complicated, as officials are not kind to Christians and receiving refugee status is a delicate process. If there is a legal misstep, the refugees may be sent back to Afghanistan and face certain death. ICC has been sending food aid, resettlement funds, and Christian literature and developing livelihood projects for the refugees to support themselves.

FAMILIES RESCUED

Before the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, ICC worked to extract the top Christian leaders. Thousands of people fled to the Pakistan border after the Taliban took control of Kabul. After the attack, we rescued another 43 leaders. The nightmare is not over for these Christians as they must adapt to a new life in another country with hardly any possessions or resources. Pakistan is no friend to Christianity, so these families suffer not only as refugees, but as infidels. ICC worked with local churches to receive these families and provide them with food, clothing, and other resources needed for survival.



EVACUATIONS

Fear and uncertainty surround the future of Afghanistan under Taliban rule and many minorities, including Christians, fear the Taliban's strict interpretation of Sharia law will be imposed, resulting in increased persecution. In many cases, known Christians must flee Afghanistan or risk being killed. Some Christian families were in too dire a situation to evacuate safely before the Taliban restricted movement. ICC worked with partners to extract these families and move them to Pakistan.

PROVIDING BASIC NECESSITIES

The Taliban are hunting former government staff as well as Christians. ICC works with in-country Christians who would be put to death if discovered. While these men and their families attempt to avoid capture, ICC provides food and rent.





ESTIMATED 8,000-10,000 CHRISTIANS
CHRISTIANS LIVING IN AFGHANISTAN

ICC RECOMMENDS

- Sanctioning top Taliban leadership and other known persecutors using Global Magnitsky laws.
- The creation of a multinational commission to monitor human rights in Afghanistan and publicly condemn human rights abuses.
- That international governments not recognize the Taliban government as legitimate.
- That the United States award a special P2 visa status for Afghan religious minorities.

TAKE ACTION

CONTRIBUTE

Support by contributing to ICC's MBB fund. Visit www.persecution.org/mbb to donate today.

PRAY

Pray for those Afghans who have escaped the Taliban, that they may find healing, and for their family members who remain inside.

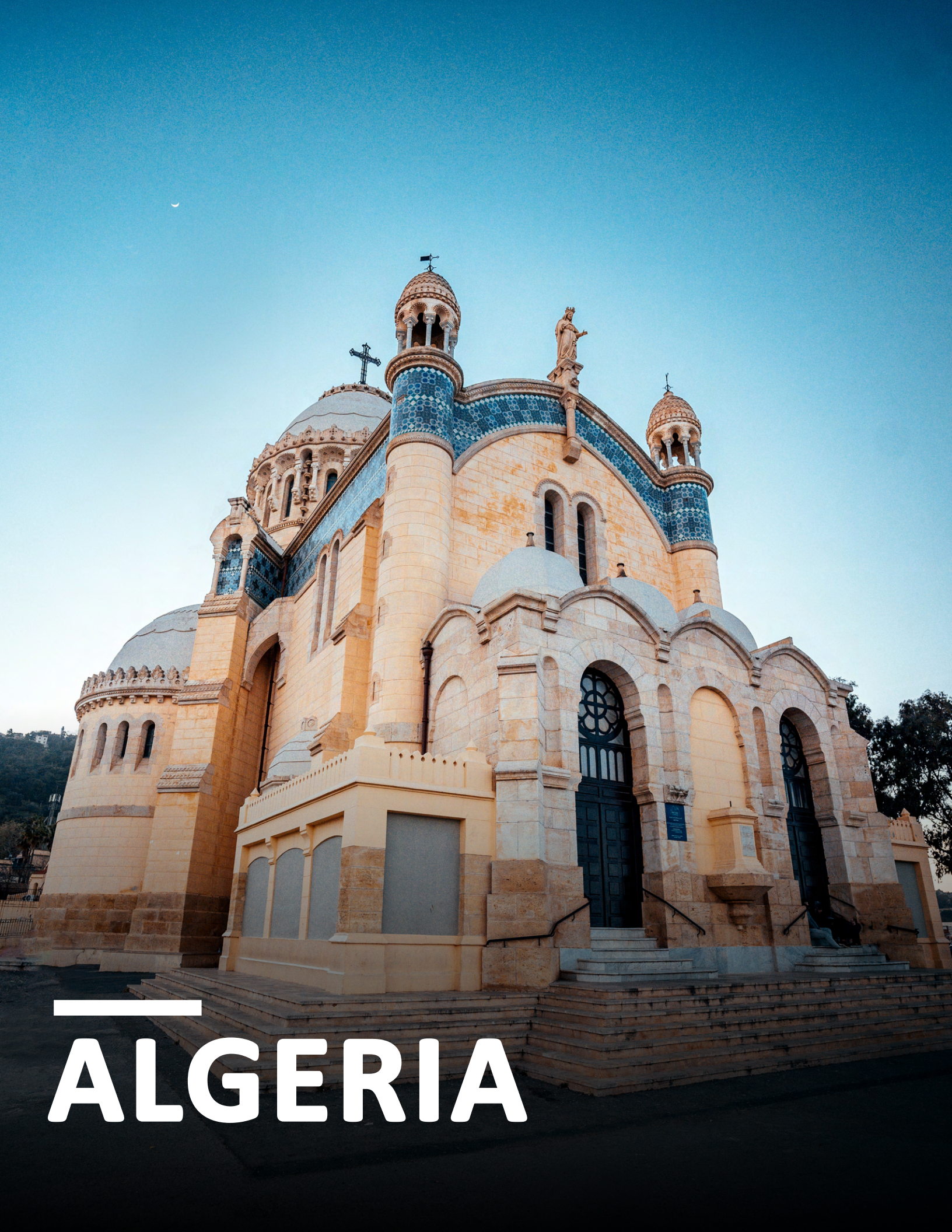
ADVOCATE

Find your congressional representative and share ICC's recommendations with them by visiting www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member, or by scanning the QR code below with your mobile device.



Contact the White House by visiting www.whitehouse.gov/get-involved/write-or-call/ or by scanning the QR code below with your mobile device.





ALGERIA

LOCKING CHURCH DOORS, ARRESTING CHRISTIANS

CHRISTIANS VIEWED AS A THREAT TO NATION'S ISLAMIC IDENTITY

Despite the hope of a new administration, Algeria continues to persecute Christians.

SUMMARY

- Algeria has closed dozens of Protestant churches affiliated with the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), leaving hundreds with nowhere to worship.
- The government elected a new president in 2019 after Constitutional reform, which has brought little change for religious freedom.
- Algeria has a blasphemy law in its penal code, allowing authorities to arrest non-Muslims for proselytization and doing anything to “shake the faith of a Muslim.”
- Several leaders in the EPA have faced or are currently facing various charges of proselytization from authorities.
- Several churches closed for COVID-19 remain closed, despite other places of worship having reopened.

OVERVIEW

After gaining its independence from France in 1962, Algeria officially became a constitutional republic with guarantees of religious freedom, while maintaining an identity as an Islamic country. In practice, the Algerian government remains far from this ideal and severely persecutes non-Christians. Specifically, Protestant Christianity has grown immensely in the country, which Algeria views as a threat to its Islamic identity.

As a result, Algerian leaders have cracked down on the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), which is a government-approved organization of Evangelical churches. Algerian authorities have closed dozens of EPA churches across the country, citing a variety of administrative reasons while refusing to offer any remedies to the situation. Some were closed for COVID-19, though were not allowed to reopen even after mosques and other non-EPA historical churches were reopening; some were closed for not having the proper permits, which the government refused to grant when requested by the EPA. When EPA pastors and parishioners attempt to live their faith and worship outside of their sealed churches, many have been arrested under Algeria's blasphemy law, criminalizing proselytization and “shaking the faith of a Muslim.” In short, the Algerian government sees the EPA and religious freedom as a threat to its Islamic identity and has reverted to persecution to protect it.



QUICK FACTS

POPULATION:

44.2 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

99% Muslim (mostly Sunni)

1% Other (including Christian)

YEAR GAINED INDEPENDENCE:

1962

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2018

Algerian authorities order the closure of Al-Azagher church in Bejaia province, sealing it just months later, becoming one of the first EPA churches forced to close by the government.

2019

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigns and is replaced by President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, promising to bring reform.

2020

Algerian authorities use COVID-19 as a justification to close more EPA churches, which remain closed even after mosques and historical churches begin to reopen.

2021

As mosques reopen, EPA churches closed for the pandemic remain closed. Several Christian converts including Foudhil Bahloul and Rachid Seighir are arrested for proselytization activities.

2022

Algerian authorities seal even more EPA churches, closing the majority of Protestant churches in the country.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Although the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019 provided an unparalleled opportunity for Algeria to improve its human rights and religious freedom record, the nation has only succeeded in doubling down on repressing its vulnerable Christian minority. COVID-19 posed new challenges. Every church was closed, but when Algeria made the decision to reopen society, mosques and the historic churches were authorized to resume their activities.

Protestant churches asked the government for clarity about their status but for weeks received only silence. Some have since reopened, although they never received a response from the authorities. However, the churches which were sealed pre-dating COVID remain closed.

As the country has emerged from COVID, there has been an increase of activity relating to criminal charges pressed against individual Christians, namely protestants, arrested on blasphemy charges when they worship outside of their church, which they cannot access due to the closures. Now more than ever is the time for the international community to pressure Algeria to reverse course and protect the rights of its Christian minority.

The Algerian church is the second-largest Christian community in Northern Africa, and it faces a type of government-sponsored persecution that is unique. Like most countries in this part of the world, Algeria is officially Islamic. Indeed, the President's oath of office requires him to "glorify the Islamic religion." Still, Algeria's Constitution contains provisions which guarantee religious freedom, although these protections have frequently been ignored in the creation of subsequent legislation and in government practice.

Christianity has existed in Algeria for centuries and is mostly tolerated by the broader society. However, the government views Christianity as a danger to the Algerian Islamic identity and is making every attempt to regulate the church into non-existence.

Estimates of the Christian population range from 20,000 to 200,000. Protestants make up the fastest-growing Christian population in Algeria. The Evangelical Protestant Association (EPA), a government-approved organization of churches, consists of 45 churches spread across the country's many ethnic and tribal identities. The largest single church consisted of approximately 1,000 members before it was shut down by authorities in late 2019. Since the early 2000s, the protestant community in Algeria has faced three waves of government-sponsored persecution. In each, the authorities target places of worship, shutting them down and refusing to recognize their legitimacy.

Completely ignoring requests for information from local Christians are by now well-established trends within Algeria, but these trends are newer within the broader historical context of the country's religious freedom.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



ARRESTS AND
IMPRISONMENT



CHURCH CLOSURE



CONFISCATION
OF BIBLES

ARREST: Algerian authorities have arrested several Christians under their harsh blasphemy laws for discussing their faith outside of churches, many of which remain closed.

IMPRISONMENT: After arresting pastors, Algeria regularly detains them or keeps them under house arrest to inhibit their ability to preach.

CHURCH CLOSURE: Algerian officials have sealed dozens of EPA-affiliated churches using a wide range of justifications and fails to respond to EPA leaders when requesting proper permits.

CONFISCATION OF BIBLES: Algerian police have raided the houses of EPA leaders and taken Bibles from their homes to prevent the spread of Christianity.



Partially burned Bible.



BLASPHEMY LAW VICTIM

Mohammed Derrab is an elder at the Tafat church in Tizi Ouzou, an EPA-affiliated church that has been sealed by the Algerian government since 2019. Unable to enter his own church, Brother Derrab delivered a sermon outside of Tafat on January 27, 2022 and gave one of the listeners a Bible. The next day, Algerian authorities arrested Brother Derrab and charged him under Algeria's blasphemy and proselytization laws. Authorities also raided his house afterward and confiscated all of his Bibles. A judge has sentenced Brother Derrab to 18 months in prison and he currently is waiting for his appeal.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Algerian Church Notified of Immediate Closure

The 17th church affiliated with the EPA, the umbrella for the Algerian Protestant Church, was informed of its closure earlier this month. The church of Aouchiche was notified on April 6 that a March 21 administrative order issued by the governor ceased all worship and closure of the building.

More than 300 active congregants attended the church. Since November 2017, 17 churches have been closed by the Algerian government along with 12 Christians convicted of faith-related charges according to Middle East Concern



Sealed church door. Photo Credit: World Watch Monitor

ICC Cohosts Congressional Briefing on Algeria

International Christian Concern (ICC) joined several other human rights organizations to host a virtual briefing on the deteriorating state of religious freedom in Algeria. Speakers highlighted the ongoing arrests of Christians who are forced to worship outside of church buildings due to government closures of many of the Protestant churches throughout the country.

Algerian Authorities Arrest Another Christian as Churches Remain Closed

Algerian authorities arrested another Christian man after preaching outside of a church and distributing Bibles. The man, Mohammed Derrab, remains in detention for anti-conversion charges brought against him.

Algerian Christian Sentences Upheld and 3 Churches Sealed

Pastor Rachid and Nouh Hamimi's appeal sentences were upheld by regional courts on September 26. The two Algerian Christians were fined approximately \$1,500 USD and given a one-year suspended prison sentence.

“Now more than ever is the time for the international community to pressure Algeria to reverse course and protect the rights of its Christian minority.”

- ICC Briefing



Algerian Christian Sentenced and Fined for “Shaking the Muslim Faith”

July 21, 2021

An Algerian Christian was accused of accepting unauthorized donations to spread Christianity and was sentenced to six months in prison and fined 100,000 dinars (\$740 USD). Ahmed Beghal* of Ain-Defla Province says he also faces charges of distributing Bibles, printing Christian literature, and “shaking the faith of a Muslim,” all of which he denies.

He was forced to sign a police report without being allowed to read it, despite the fact that his charges were outlined and based on it. Beghal’s lawyer did not appear for the June 30 hearing or the July 9 sentencing.

Beghal and his wife became Christians in 2013. Beghal, his wife, and their two young children faced years of threats and insults because they left Islam. Both extended families began to follow them. After years of pressure from her family, his wife eventually recounted her faith and accused him in 2017 of attacking Islam and destroying a box that had Quranic verse inscribed. His home was raided and his movements were monitored but he was never jailed.

Now, Beghal is separated from his wife and children as she took them from him. He was detained on April 17, 2021, and questioned for some time saying to him

“There are many rumors and accusations circulating about you. You are very active, it seems.” After interrogation, they followed him back home and raided his home, taking Christian books and personal items.

Beghal has eight days to appeal his sentence and intends to do so. His charges come under Algeria’s 2006 law which regulates non-Muslim worship, also known as the Law 03/06. Sentencing for crimes “which aim to undermine the faith of a Muslim” can range from two to five years in prison and 500,000 to 1 million Algerian dinars in fines.

*Name changed for security.

ICC AT WORK

INFORMING POLICY MAKERS

In 2022, ICC hosted a member of the EPA in Washington, D.C. to meet with government stakeholders highlighting the situation for Christians in Algeria, which continues to worsen by the day. As EPA churches remain closed, Algerian authorities continue to arrest more EPA members when trying to worship outside of the churches. ICC worked to bring this ongoing and worsening persecution to the attention of the Department of State and Congressional partners. Additionally, ICC helped to inform the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom of the plight of Protestant Christians in Algeria, so that they can better report on persecution around the world. ICC plans to roll out new advocacy initiatives this year to assist Algeria's Christian community and help finally alleviate their worsening suffering by engaging U.S. stakeholders in Congress and working to create real punishments for Algerian leaders as persecution continues to increase in the north African country.



ADVOCATING FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In 2021, ICC worked closely with a small cohort of human rights organizations to help the persecuted religious minorities of Algeria. In coordination with the EPA, ICC helped draft a letter from Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) to Secretary of State Antony Blinken highlighting the underreported issue of rising persecution in Algeria. The letter, which was signed by a bipartisan group of Senators, outlined some important cases of Christians being arrested by authorities and helped to paint the broader picture of Algeria's attack on religious freedom throughout the country. By informing the Department of State about this issue, ICC advocated for Algeria to be designated as a Special Watch List country on the Department of State's list of religious freedom violators around the world, a designation that Secretary Blinken signed off on in November. This designation now puts more pressure on Algerian leaders, who rely on their alliance with the United States.



ICC RECOMMENDS

- U.S. Department of State should make aid to Algeria contingent upon religious freedom benchmarks.
- The Algerian government should respond to requests from the EPA for permits to reopen churches.
- U.S. government officials should call on the repeal of Algeria's blasphemy and proselytization laws.
- U.S. Department of State should continue to include Algeria on its Special Watch List for violations of religious freedom until the Algerian government makes real progress toward religious freedom.
- The international community should call on Algeria to live up to its own constitution to guarantee religious freedom for all minority religious communities.



CHINA

RELIGION ON THEIR TERMS

A DEATH GRIP ON EVERYONE OUTSIDE THE CCP

Christians and other religious groups are subject to China's religious mandates, and those who fail to comply risk being deemed a threat to the state.

SUMMARY

- Christians and other religious minorities who practice their faith outside state-sanctioned religious organizations risk being deemed a threat to national security.
- All religious activities must be sanctioned by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), which was absorbed into the United Front Work Department (the government's central propaganda organization).
- China's "Rule by Law" governance operates a complex system of persecution through regulation, surveillance and subjugation.
- The legal framework for crimes against the state are kept intentionally vague in China, expanding applicability.
- Chinese Christians have relied on the use of creative lingo to avoid governmental interference. During the pandemic, house churches have gathered virtually, though some have still been raided.

OVERVIEW

Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China has undergone rapid changes as it continues to compete on the world stage. While China's relationship with Christians and other religious groups has always been rife with controversy and concern, the modern technocracy in China has unleashed persecution to a level never seen before.

Persecution in China goes beyond the thousands of crosses and churches that have been torn down, as the Chinese Communist Party seeks to expand its authority over the practice of religion and shape it into a tool of state power. In the years shortly after the 1949 revolution, the central government created the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), which manages the practice of religion in China through five religious-organizations. The two Christian organizations, the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), referred to as Lianghui, are heavily managed by the government and are regularly provided with the state's approved doctrine and guidance. Christians practicing outside of these organizations, whether in house churches or "unofficial" dioceses, face heavy scrutiny from the government. Their operations are often targeted as unauthorized religious gatherings, fraud, illegal business operations, or worse, subversion of state power.



QUICK FACTS

POPULATION:

1.4 billion

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

51.8% Unaffiliated

21.9% Chinese Folk Region

18.3% Buddhist

5.2% Christian

2% Muslim

<0.9% Other

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

91% Han Chinese

9.98% Various Ethnic
Minority Groups

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2012

NOVEMBER 15

Xi Jinping is elected General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.

2013

MARCH 2013

Zhejiang government launches three-year "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" campaign targeting Christian churches and crosses.

2014

MAY 2014

China launches the "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism," beginning the securitization of Xinjiang Muslims.

2018

DECEMBER 9

The Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC), a Chengdu-based house church, was raided. More than 100 Christians were taken away. This was the largest crackdown against a house church in recent years.

2020

JUNE 30

Hong Kong National Security Law is passed, expanding CCP influence.

2021

OCTOBER 31

First formal meeting between Chinese State Administration for Religious Affairs and Hong Kong clergy.

DECEMBER 19

Pro-Beijing candidates sweep Hong Kong's "Patriots Only" election, providing unfettered influence in the once-autonomous province.

2022

JANUARY 19

U.S. declares Chinese treatment of Uyghur Muslims "genocide."

FEBRUARY 19

China issues the Measures on the Management of Religious Clergy.

MARCH 1

Ban on unauthorized online religious activity comes into effect.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

CENSORSHIP AND SUBVERSION: Beyond China's widespread internet censorship, China attempted to ban unauthorized online religious activity. Unable to eradicate religion, the CCP uses sanctioned religious movements in support of state power through Sinicization. The CCP seeks to invoke social compliance and patriotism by incorporating the teachings of CCP's successes, socialist values, and communist worldviews like Xi Jinping Thought into the practices of the church. Children under 18 are forbidden from attending any religious education in China, undermining parents' ability to raise up the next generation of Christians. Multiple Christian homeschools have been raided and shut down during the pandemic.

IMPRISONMENT, TORTURE, AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE: Christians are detained or arrested on fabricated charges. Vaguely-defined laws and regulations around religious practice are enforced, making their compliance nearly impossible.

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION: Individual's livelihoods have been threatened for church involvement—instances have occurred where the CCP has had one's job threatened, and others have lost access to financial lending. This sort of discrimination is expected to grow as China's social credit score moves beyond pilot programs.

SURVEILLANCE: Churches are fitted with CCTV cameras and have been asked to foster patriotism, national unity, and love of party [CCP] and country through flag raising ceremonies or "Red Song" competition.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

China continues to emerge as a global power and has expanded its suppression of Christians and religious minorities to levels not seen since the Cultural Revolution. The country has taken new steps to sideline any movement which may shake the regime's legitimacy.

The official number of Christians in China is unconfirmed; however, estimates are between 70 million and 100 million, many of whom make up China's unregistered house churches. This number could possibly outnumber the 95-million-member ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Like Political activism, the CCP had perceived Christianity and religion as a threat to civil stability and to their legitimacy, and thus to national security.

In response to the CCP's civic paranoia, Chinese President Xi Jinping has relied heavily on the practices of regulation and 'Sinicization,' an intentional attempt to make Christianity and religion more in line with the principles of socialism and Chinese culture. Through the revision of Christian doctrine and the regulation of religious practice, the CCP believes they can shape religion into a tool of national security, promoting national unity, love of country, and of the party. Resulting in the increased securitization of religious beliefs.

The government enforces strict religious guidelines for clergy and religious leaders with obligations to promote national unity, love of country, love of the CCP, and to root out dissidents. State-sanctioned religious organizations, managed by the United Front Work Department, oversee all religious practices in China. Those operating outside the state's apparatus or who challenge its instructions are liable to face punishment by Chinese authorities. Under this new lens, the Chinese government increased its crackdown on unsanctioned churches and pastors, and many are regularly harassed or arrested and charged with embellished crimes, including "subversion of state power." Others have disappeared entirely.

China's anti-religious influence now extends beyond the mainland. Following the establishment of the National Security Law in June 2020, the once-autonomous city of Hong Kong, which boasts 1.2 million Christians, is now significantly influenced by Beijing. Concern has grown for Christians and clergy as loyalty to the party is expected among the city's religious institutions. In October 2021, the Chinese Liaison Office organized the first formal meeting between the Chinese religious organization, SARA, and the clergy of Hong Kong, indicating a new understanding of religious affairs between the two parties, and adding credence to the reports of the increased influence from Beijing.

18

THE MINIMUM AGE TO ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES IN CHINA



LOCKED UP

Pastor Wang Yi is a vocal critic of the Chinese government's control over religion, making him a priority target for government repression. In December 2018, he was arrested in a raid on ERCC. In December 2019, Pastor Wang was found guilty on embellished charges of "incitement to subvert state power" and "operating an illegal business." Both are familiar charges for those running unregistered house churches and practicing outside of the sanctioned rules for religious groups in China.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

China's Creativity Abounds in Slapping Trumped-Up Charges on Christians

With the escalated crackdown on churches, church leaders, Christian businesses, and Christian schools, it is no secret that Beijing is a foe to Chinese Christians, especially those who belong to the house churches.

The Chinese government uses the excuse of "pandemic prevention" to ban Christians from gathering, while other public places, tourist attractions, and restaurants are allowed to open. Earlier this year, authorities in Hebei province even went so far as to call Christians and missionaries "spreaders," in the hope to incite hostilities against Christians and churches.

Once the pandemic started to ease in China (or so they claim), the authorities resumed their surveillance of house churches. Whether these Christians meet at a hotel room, a rented office space, someone's home, or at the beach, raids have become their new normal. They are always told that they are "gathering illegally" and should attend a state-sanctioned church instead.

Beijing continues to take down the leaders of house churches, Christian schools, and businesses. In order to justify the arrests of these Christians, the Chinese government comes up with creative fabricated crimes to put them behind bars.



Five Chinese Christians Sentenced

On January 7, 2022, Fenyang City Court in Shanxi province sentenced five Christians from a house church in Taiyan to more than six months in prison. The five were arrested and detained for attending a 2020 Christian conference in Malaysia.

Beijing has been wary of foreign influence since President Xi Jinping came to power. Religions that are seen as foreign, such as Islam and Christianity, are treated with more scrutiny and tightened control.

ERCC Member Taken

A member from the Chengdu-based Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) was taken away by the police when he returned to his rented apartment with his landlord. Jia Xuewei, a member of ERCC house church, has been monitored and repeatedly harassed by the local authorities in Chengdu.

One ERCC member says Xuewei is not afraid to confront the authorities on ERCC's persecution so he is seen as a threat by the local authorities.

Unauthorized Online Religious Activities Banned

The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in China announced new measures to curb all forms of religious activities online. China's state-owned newspaper Global Times shared some of the details of the new rules, such as, "Any Chinese organization or individual that operates online religious information services should submit application to provincial religious affairs departments."

Persecuted Church Faces Threats to Return to China

The Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, often referred to as the “Mayflower Church” for its resemblance to those seeking religious freedom on the Mayflower voyage to the U.S., has been taking refuge on South Korea’s Jeju Island since 2019. Under the leadership of Pastor Pan, the unregistered church had faced harassment from Chinese government officials and local police, as operating a church outside the Chinese state-sanctioned organizations is against Chinese law. Seeking a better life for themselves and their children, a contingent of the congregation voted to leave China. However, after two years in South Korea, their Korean host has grown sour toward them.

Pastor Pan has led his congregation in

filing for refugee status, though they have nearly exhausted all their attempts to gain asylum; their initial applications and following appeals have all been rejected. With the defeat of their last appeal, they are residing in the country illegally and fearing a possible removal back to China, where they are sure they will be prosecuted. In February, they submitted an administrative appeal, which will push their case forward, as they believe their luck may have changed under the new South Korea administration elected in March 2022.

Allegedly, the outgoing Moon government is unwilling to appear critical of Chinese persecution; to accept the refugees from China would be seen as a direct slight

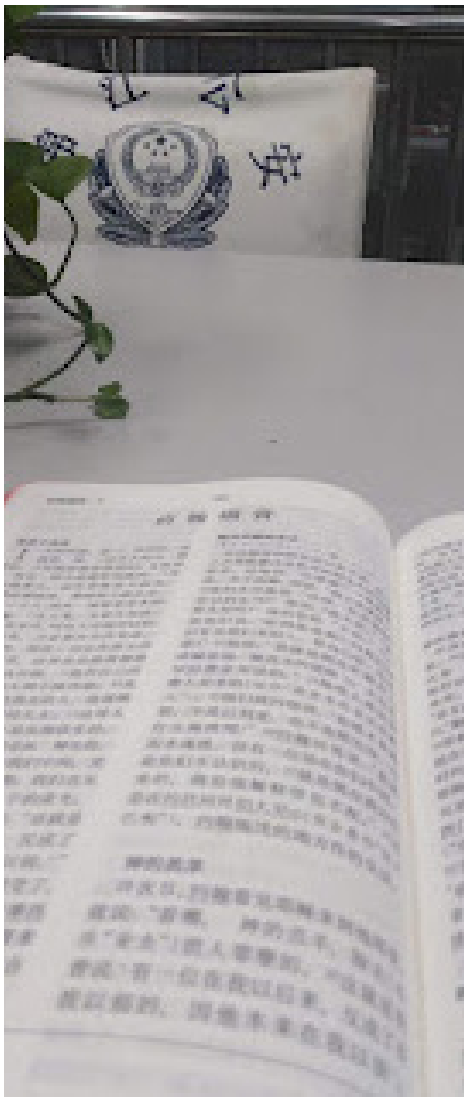
against the regional superpower. The congregation must also demonstrate a significant threat and when dealing with a nation like China, the threatening party has tight control over the information. Given that the global community tuned in for the Beijing Olympics, we can assume that the world has not fully come to terms with the scale of persecution in China.

Should Pastor Pan and his congregation be returned, and they are not punished for their alleged crimes, the CCP will likely keep a close eye on them. While the status of the Mayflower Church in Korea remains undecided, these Christians are not out of options, as other Christian groups around the world have heard their cry for help.



Jeju Mayflower Church.

ICC AT WORK



LEGAL ASSISTANCE TO HOUSE CHURCH CHRISTIANS

ICC partners with a Christian organization to provide legal assistance for a house church Christian who was arrested for selling audio Bible players. The charge against the victim carries more than five years' imprisonment. While unlikely to be accepted by the courts, their lawyers have filed an appeal.



TRAINING FOR HOUSE CHURCH LEADERS

ICC trains more than 600 house church leaders, equipping them with skills to navigate the tightening space in China. Speakers share about mercy ministry and how the churches can better serve their local communities, reaching the lost while witnessing to the authorities.



PROVIDING TREATMENT FOR SUFFERING HEALTH

ICC provides financial assistance to dozens of Chinese Christians who suffered from religious persecution decades ago and are still experiencing health issues associated with their treatment.



Left: A Chinese church where its cross was removed from atop and moved to the wall in an attempt to hide the church from passerbys.



ESTIMATED **2,000-3,000** CROSSES TORN DOWN

IN ZHEJIANG PROVINCE SINCE 2013.

ICC RECOMMENDS

- The U.S. must continue designating China as a Country of Particular Concern for violating religious freedom.
- The U.S. must penalize China economically, following the example of the Xinjiang Forced Labor Prevention Act passed in December 2021.
- Congress must pass legislation requiring companies to disclose the steps being taken to eliminate forced labor and/or trafficking in their operations.
- The U.S. must encourage the repatriation of American businesses from China, and prevent the PRC's profiteering from American corporations while conducting rampant persecution.
- The U.S. must monitor Chinese human rights conditions, make the findings public, and respond through Global Magnitsky Sanctions.
- The U.S. must investigate the Chinese government's influence in the U.S. which is whitewashing China's atrocities and subversion of religious groups.

TAKE ACTION

SEND LETTERS

Send letters to the Chinese Embassy demanding the release of religious prisoners, and inform your representative or member of parliament that the respect for human rights must be a condition of our relationship with China.

SHARE THEIR STORIES



Share Stories of Chinese persecution and make the plight of Chinese Christians known.

SOUND PURCHASES

Where possible, reduce the amount of goods you buy that are "Made in China" to ensure the products are not made from the forced labor of victims of persecution. You can do this by shopping locally or looking for "Made in America" labels.



— EGYPT

AN ANCIENT CHURCH SURVIVES

CHRISTIANS ENDURE 1,400+ YEARS OF PERSECUTION

Despite a revolution and Egyptian officials' public promises, Egypt's government continues to directly and indirectly persecute Christians.

SUMMARY

- Egypt seeks to increasingly regulate Coptic Christian life.
- An arbitrary bureaucracy makes it nearly impossible to build or renovate churches.
- Imprisoned Christians are subject to abuse and torture for criticizing the government.
- Persecutors rarely face criminal prosecution, even for extremely violent acts.
- The Egyptian government is quick to make public promises on human rights and protecting its Christian minority with little, if any, meaningful follow through.

OVERVIEW

Christianity has been an ever-present aspect of Egyptian society for the last 2,000 years, since the days of the first apostles. This deep historical connection has led many in Egypt, including everyday Muslims, to see the Coptic Church as quintessentially Egyptian. The church has survived the fall of Rome, the Crusades, the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, Napoleon, two world wars, and ISIS' activity and influence.

Despite all this, the Coptic Church and the Egyptian government (which has taken many forms) have rarely had an ideal relationship. More often than not, Egypt's many sultans, viceroys, and presidents have been a persistent obstacle to the church.

Comparatively, cultural intolerance of Christians is less extreme and organized in Egypt than in other Middle Eastern countries (due mainly to Christianity's historical presence there). Radicals do persecute Egyptian Christians, both individuals and communities, and there are certain cultural norms relegating Copts to second-class status in their own country. But in contrast to other countries in the Islamic world, hardline groups like ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood, and far-right religious political parties do not enjoy the same level of cultural influence in Egypt. The Egyptian church's biggest challenge is the government, which either works to control the church's influence or ignores them altogether.



QUICK FACTS

POPULATION:

106.1 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

90% Muslim (mostly Sunni)

10% Christian (90% Coptic)

YEAR GAINED INDEPENDENCE:

1922

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1400s

15th CENTURY

The Ottoman Empire conquers Egypt, introducing many of the legal norms still used for government oversight of Christians.

1934

1934

The “El-Ezaby Conditions” are first issued, used as a way to regulate church buildings.

2011

JANUARY 2011

The Egyptian people overthrow dictator Hosni Mubarak in a revolution where Christians and Muslims support each other.

2014

JANUARY 2014

Egypt passes a new constitution which includes articles claiming to secure the rights of Egyptian Christians and the Coptic Church.

2016

AUGUST 2016

Egypt passes a law intended to streamline the church construction process.

2017

APRIL 2017

Two coordinated suicide bombings attack Coptic churches on Palm Sunday, triggering a government-mandated state of emergency that would last for four years and suppress Christian voices.

2021

OCTOBER 2021

The state of emergency is lifted, but only after Parliament passes three totalitarian laws granting broad powers to the executive branch and the military.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Egyptian Christians primarily face two challenges. First, governmental control over the Coptic community. Second, when the church needs intervention to protect its rights, government officials often remain silent.

The approval process for construction or renovation of church buildings reveals the government’s control and its silence. The government makes this process laborious and has riddled it with endless red tape. Many Christian communities wish to abide by the law and seek official approval to build or renovate their churches, but permit requests are frequently met with silence, causing a years-long backload of applications. As a result, many congregations have nowhere to meet or hold services legally, stirring potential backlash from local radicals and government officials. In 2016, a law to streamline the approval process was passed, but little has changed and Christians who have protested the situation have been arrested.

In addition, individuals are also targeted for persecution. When the years-old state of emergency finally ended in late 2021, Parliament passed laws granting the government the same draconian powers it held during the emergency. Christians arrested under these laws can be tried in military courts with no right of appeal. As of March 2022, a legislative committee approved a bill’s introduction to Parliament that would ban anyone from “talking about religious matters on visual, audio, or electronic media” without a government-issued license.

Another dangerous aspect of government inaction is in not punishing local extremists. Churches, especially in rural areas, are always under the threat of extremists who wish to incite trouble between Christians and their Muslims neighbors. When churches or individual Christians are assaulted and the government chooses to get involved, officials pressure the victims to accept arbitration to settle the dispute, thus waiving all legal claims against their attackers. By failing to criminally prosecute persecutors, the government only emboldens extremists with this lack of meaningful consequences.

Egypt is a party to many of the most important human rights treaties and has frequently made public overtures of its dedication to human rights. The Egyptian government has a pattern of acting positively toward its Coptic community when faced with international pressure from the West, or when a violent attack stirs a public outcry (like Palm Sunday 2017). It seems that only consistent international pressure, tied directly to trade and economic sanctions, will motivate the regime to rectify the situation they’ve created. Such strategies have produced some results in the past, so active diplomacy in this arena may bring about moderate change.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



ARRESTS
IMPRISONMENT/
TORTURE



RESTRICTIONS
ON CHURCHES &
BIBLES



ATTACKS ON LIFE
& PROPERTY



LEGAL
RESTRICTIONS

ARRESTS: The government arrests and falsely accuses human rights advocates and Coptic critics.

IMPRISONMENT: Egypt has a consistent pattern of holding Christian prisoners without due process.

HARASSMENT AND ATTACKS: Local radicals violently harass Christians and vandalize church structures.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS: The government indefinitely withholds legal authorizations for churches.



**6,000 CHURCHES LACK LEGAL
RECOGNITION**

1,027 CHURCHES ARE GIVEN PERMITS

ACCORDING TO HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH



LOCKED UP

Rami Kamel is a Coptic human rights advocate who's highlighted the plight of Egypt's Christian community. In 2019, he was arrested for "broadcasting false information" (sharing videos of mobs targeting local churches) and "receiving foreign funding" (he worked with the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues). One day before heading to Geneva where he was set to testify at the United Nations concerning Egypt, Rami was arrested with no warrant, no official paperwork required to imprison him, and was interrogated with torture. He spent two years in pre-trial detention before finally being released in January 2022.



IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



Coptic Priest Fatally Stabbed on Street

An Egyptian Coptic Orthodox priest of Alexandria was stabbed several times in the neck and died en route to the hospital on April 7. Arsanious Wadid, age 56, served at the Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Paul in Moharm Bek district.

Egyptian authorities arrested the 60-year-old assailant shortly after

the incident. The man's identity and motives are currently unclear, pending police investigation. Coptic Christians comprise approximately 10% of Egypt's population, which is primarily Muslim. The nation's Muslim population is currently celebrating Ramadan while the Christian minority is in the Lenten season preparing for Easter.

Church Restoration Law Falls Short

In 2016, Egypt passed the Law on Building and Restoration of Churches seeking to allow for official channels for its two namesake goals, legalization of existing churches, and preventing churches from closing. In practice, the law has yielded little improvement with seemingly no new churches built through official, legal channels and only 35% of applied churches receiving permits.

No official count of permits given for the building of new churches exists, according to the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). Seemingly, no new churches received the permits through the legal channels created by the 2016 law. Rather, public authorities provided verbal permission for churches to be built. Churches being built in newly-created cities do not fall under the parameters of the law in question.

Churches in Egypt continue to face closures as a result of radical public outcry or a lack of necessary paperwork, despite inaction by the committee. Created as a channel to decrease discrimination against Christian buildings, the law has thus far fallen short of its mandate, delaying the process and reverting back to old ways.



Not Forsaken

ICC supports an Egyptian mother after domestic and societal persecution.

Hanan was kicked out of her home in Egypt by an abusive husband, leaving the Christian mother of six without social status and sidelined as a religious minority and single woman. She unsuccessfully tried to get a divorce because of his abuse and infidelity, but had little support.

For Hanan, raising children in a Christian household and seeking justice is a difficult feat when up against a Muslim man in a legal system and country that favors Islam.

To relieve Hanan's economic burden as a single mother with many children, ICC provided a small grocery store business that she can run out of her home. For the first time, Hanan can breathe a sigh of relief. She is no longer bound to her abuser and has money to spare that she earns herself.

Hanan said, "I'm very happy because of this project. Now, I always have money in my pocket. Before the project, I was not able to."

Now, Hanan is serving a need in her community. "[There are not many] grocery shops here, so many people who live beside me are my clients. They always buy stuff like cleaning products, macaroni, and rice," she said. Hanan, free for the first time in her adult life, can dream of her future.

She hopes to expand her business and continue loving her children and teaching them about God.

ICC AT WORK

EDUCATION

In a culture that gives Christians a third-class education and constantly reinforces the message that they are inferior, ICC offers Christian children a hope for a better life. Hope House provides Christian students with supplemental classes like literature, social studies, mathematics, discipleship, and Bible classes.



CHILD SPONSORSHIP

The child sponsorship program provides educational incentives, medical attention, nutritional support, and additional gifts and activities for Christian children, during school and when it's out of session.

JOB TRAINING

ICC is actively building up the Christian community, giving Christians the tools and capital needed to thrive in an otherwise hostile country. Vocational classes are available to help parents support their families.



SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Small business loans are available to students' parents, giving them the chance to start their own businesses. These loans enable Christian families to sustain themselves and restore a sense of dignity as parents are able to provide for their families.



DID YOU KNOW?

EGYPT RECEIVES AN AVERAGE OF \$1.38 BILLION IN FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE U.S. EACH YEAR.

ICC RECOMMENDS

- Egypt must cease holding Christians in pre-trial detainment as means of silencing them without having to formally prosecute them.
- The government must make rapid progress on approving church building and renovation permits or provide specific reasons why the requests are being denied.
- Local officials must phase out customary reconciliation in lieu of unbiased criminal prosecution for persecutors.
- Christians must be removed from military court jurisdiction when the military is not involved, and their cases transferred to civilian courts.
- Egypt must stop regulating the religious speech of priests and pastors.

TAKE ACTION

SUPPORT HOPE HOUSE

Support ICC's Hope House projects and follow its growth.

ADVOCATE

Urge your local congressional representative to hold Egypt accountable to the human rights commitments it has made to the U.S. Find your congressional representative and share ICC's recommendations with them by visiting www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member, or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.





NIGERIA

THE DEADLIEST PLACE IN THE WORLD FOR CHRISTIANS

50,000+ CHRISTIANS SLAUGHTERED, MILLIONS MORE DISPLACED AS THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOTHING

Twenty years of unanswered attacks against Christians have led many to believe that Nigeria's security services are aiding and abetting the Fulani militants.

SUMMARY

- More Christians were killed in Nigeria last year than in any other country.
- Muslim terror groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani militants have waged a 20-year genocide against Christians in the Middle Belt.
- The adoption of Sharia criminal law in 12 northern states has contributed to the ongoing persecution of Christians in the region.
- The Nigerian Government and much of the international community continue to deny religious motivation behind ongoing violence, despite the clear targeting of Christians and churches.
- Twenty years of unanswered attacks against Christians has led many to believe that Nigeria's security services are aiding and abetting the Fulani militants.

OVERVIEW

Nigeria is the largest killing grounds of Christians today. In 12 northern states, the adoption of criminal Sharia law has established Islam as the favored religion, leading to a massive outflow of Christians. In the Middle Belt, Muslim extremist groups, like Boko Haram and Fulani militants, carry out large-scale, coordinated, and unending attacks against Christian communities.

They inflict unspeakable brutality on men, women, children, older adults, and even the unborn. The federal government continues to spin the narrative that the attacks are all about land and are beyond their control—that they are doing the best they can with limited resources. In reality, the 20-year genocide with no meaningful response from the Muslim-controlled security services has led most Christians in Nigeria to believe the government is aiding and abetting the attackers.



QUICK FACTS

POPULATION:

212 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

45% Muslim

45% Christian

10% Indigenous Religions

MAJOR SOURCES OF PERSECUTION:

Terrorist Groups

Sharia States in northern Nigeria

Conservative Islamic Communities

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2021

DECEMBER 18

45 Christian farmers are murdered by Fulani militants in Nasarawa state.

2022

JANUARY 6

ISWAP attacks Christian community, burns down a church and multiple homes.

JANUARY 11

Fulani militants enter Ancha village screaming "Allahu Akbar" ("Allah is the greatest") and kill 18 Christians.

JANUARY 20

Boko Haram terrorists abduct 17 girls, kill many Christians, and burn down two churches in single attack.

JANUARY 22

Fulani militants target Christians in Dong village. Killing four Christians and wounding two others.

FEBRUARY 8

Fulani militants kill and burn down 45+ homes in Zamandabo village.

MARCH 8

A church security guard is killed during the kidnapping of a Catholic Priest.

MARCH 17

Fulani militants kidnap 46 Christians and their children.

MARCH 19

100+ herdsmen and Islamist terrorists kill 32 civilians in Kagoro town. More than 100 houses are burned.

MARCH 24

Fulani herdsmen kill nearly 50 Christians and abduct a Catholic priest in attacks on Kaduna.

APRIL 11

Fulani militants kill 14 Christians, including women and children, in Nigeria's Benue state.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Last year, Nigeria was ICC's worst offender in our 2021 Persecutor of the Year report. Shockingly, just one day after the report's release, the U.S. Department of State took Nigeria off its list of troublesome countries, essentially giving its religious freedom practices a stamp of approval. Human rights groups reacted with strong condemnation and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a government body, called the move "appalling."

Whether the U.S. acknowledges the plight of Nigerian Christians or not, the fact remains the same: Nigeria has become a burial ground for believers of the Christian faith. Men, women, and children are brutally kidnapped, tortured, and killed every day. The Nigerian government's lack of response toward Christian hate-crimes has only fueled the conflict.

SHARIA LAW: Observers must understand the evolution of Sharia law in Nigeria within the broader context of Nigeria's ongoing religious tensions and its establishment as a constitutionally secular state. Sharia, as applied today in Nigeria, violates the principles of secularism and endangers non-Muslim religious communities in the northern and Middle Belt regions of the country. Despite repeatedly claiming to be a secular nation, 12 northern states in Nigeria have adopted Islamic Sharia criminal law, meaning that Christians do not participate as equal members of society. Given its inherently religious nature, Sharia is problematic when applied to non-Muslims—particularly when they are charged under criminal Sharia law. For example, testimony from non-Muslims is considered unreliable within Sharia courts, and a woman's testimony is worth only half that of a man. As a result, fair adjudication of cases involving non-Muslims is nearly impossible, especially where women are concerned.

MUSLIM EXTREMIST GROUPS: Boko Haram, its offshoot, Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), and Fulani militants are the leading perpetrators of violence throughout the country. Boko Haram and ISWAP have killed tens of thousands of Christians and displaced millions in an attempt to discard western influence and impose strict Islamic Sharia law. While the Nigerian military repeatedly insists that the group has been defeated, the horrific attacks continue.

The Fulani are a migrant herder people group who span much of sub-Saharan Africa. They are about 90% Muslim and, though most Fulani are peaceful people, Fulani *militants* have become radicalized by Islamic extremist groups. They have wreaked severe havoc and destruction among Christian farmers throughout Nigeria's Middle Belt, the area where the Muslim North meets the Christian South.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



KIDNAPPINGS



MURDERS

KIDNAPPINGS: The Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram, whose name loosely means “Western education is forbidden,” established the pattern of kidnapping school children in Nigeria for ransom in 2014 when the group abducted 276 girls (mostly Christian) from a school in Chibok. 2021 saw several large-scale kidnappings as armed groups realized its effectiveness in raising cash through the extortion of parents or state governments for ransom money.

ISWAP often tries to radicalize those whom they have taken captive. If they are unable to, they may use them as slaves, suicide bombers, or ransom them back to family and friends. Often, those who are taken do not ever return to their homes or families.

State governments in the north prohibit the construction of church buildings, often using fear tactics to halt their land purchases. According to a church leader in northern Nigeria who spoke with ICC, “If you want to build a church, they will not give you a permit, because the government will [fire] anyone who proposes/signs a document to build a church. A Muslim will not approve a document to build a church.” Such pressure enforces a structure that systematically deprives Christians of their right to hold public religious services.

MURDERS: Fulani Militants, Boko Haram, and ISWAP usually use AK47’s or machetes to kill their victims. Often bodies are found burned beyond recognition, having been burned to death, or set on fire after being murdered.



MARTYRED

Reverend Shuaibu Yohanna was assaulted in September 2021 in a northern Nigerian village. A man in the village had recently left Islam, and not long after leaving the faith, killed a woman. While the murderer was not a practicing Christian, extreme Muslims assumed that Christianity was to blame, and began targeting believers of Christ. Reverend Yohanna fled the area for safety, but returned when he felt the need to protect the students at the Christian school he had founded. While on his way to evacuate the school, a mob of Islamic extremists attacked Yohanna and macheted him to death.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

UNREST FOR NIGERIA'S CHRISTIANS

The Secret War Against Christians

Over the years, you've heard us speak at length about the genocide unfolding against Christians in Nigeria. We've seen more than 100,000 Christians murdered, yet the silence from the government is deafening.

The Nigerian government is largely run by Muslims who are either unmotivated to intervene or sometimes complicit in the violence. The false narrative of the violence being rooted in a complicated regional dispute often pushes the international community toward inaction. Scan the QR code to learn more.



Three Christians Murdered

Suspected terrorists killed three Christians in the Chibok area of northeastern Nigeria on Feb. 25, 2022. The perpetrators are likely members of Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). The attack occurred in the village of Kautikari, a predominantly Christian area.

U.S. Turns Its Back

In a canned statement, a Biden administration official wrote recently that, while the U.S. cares deeply about religious freedom in Nigeria, conditions there do not warrant Nigeria being designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom violations. Several congressional offices pushed back in a letter.

Boko Haram Persists

Boko Haram has maintained an insurgency in Northern Nigeria for close to thirteen years. The terrorist group seeks to implement strict Islamic law in the region and oppose any who disagree with their interpretations of Islam. Due to their violent acts, at least 2.4 million Nigerians have been displaced.

Boko Haram Kills, Abducts, and Burns Churches.

Boko Haram terrorists abducted 17 girls in the Chibok area of Borno state on Jan. 20, 2022. The ISIS affiliated group made a statement claiming responsibility for the attack, adding that they killed "many Christians," set fire to two churches, and burned down two homes.

An Infant of Hope

God had plans to bring baby Ruth, who was left for dead, into the richness of His blessing.

By Kate Piselli and ICC Field Staff

The rain was relentless. For more than 24 hours, the sky opened up and the riverbanks filled to the brim. Maiyanga village, a small community located in central Nigeria, was trapped.

“Anyone who attempted to cross [the river] would [be] taken away,” a source, preferring anonymity, told ICC.

Around 2:00 a.m., the village felt relief— but only temporarily. Miles beyond the borders of the village, a group of Fulani militants had their gaze set upon the isolated community.

When the Fulani attacked at 4:00 a.m., there was no way out.

Run for Cover

“We ran and hid ourselves by the riverside,” the source continued. “But the ground was wet enough to leave our footprints behind, and we could be easily tracked.”

One set of muddy footprints led the gunmen to Hannatu Yakaby, who was hiding by the river, holding her three-month-old daughter, Ruth.

When the militants found her, Hannatu began negotiating with them.

“Because she could not reveal the whereabouts of men as they

demand, they decided to kill her. But she pleaded with them to spare her daughter, Ruth.”

The men agreed to let Ruth live in that moment, but they assured Hannatu that Ruth would eventually die of hunger.

“They reached out and picked up Ruth from her mother, and threw her away to the side. After that, they shot her mother without delay, leaving Ruth at the mercy of God in the cold weather.”

Just as Moses was abandoned as a baby, God had a plan in store for Ruth.

Unexpected Blessings

Five of Ruth’s family members were killed that day, along with 65 others in a series of brutal Fulani militia attacks that destroyed nine villages in the area.

In late 2021, ICC presented a gift to Ruth, which included essential supplies so her caretakers could sustain her. The gifting meeting was filled with prayer and appreciation to God, as her caretakers led more than 100 displaced persons in a prayer for baby Ruth.

“We will not forget this kind of love, from another country, to baby Ruth,” said her caretakers.



ICC AT WORK

NIGERIA FARMS

For the past three years, ICC has brought a wellspring of hope to families in Nigeria that have endured great suffering at the hands of jihadist violence. Through ICC's Nigeria Farms initiative, farmers who had their farms destroyed at the hands of Fulani militants have a second chance to reclaim their livelihoods.



RELOCATION

ICC has worked to relocate individuals targeted by Boko Haram and other jihadist groups. Once targeted, these groups will stop at nothing to find and kill individuals they see as a threat to Islam. ICC staffers relocate these victims and their families to a safe environment and provide sustainable aid to secure a successful future.

SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP

ICC sponsors hundreds of students who have been orphaned or forced to flee their homes due to attacks by extremist groups.



AQUACULTURE

Benue state is home to at least 1 million IDPs who have fled jihadist violence. Many of the women in these camps have resorted to begging and prostitution to feed themselves and their children. To help them, ICC has started a new initiative: aquaculture, or "fish farming." The program and subsequent training aim to help these vulnerable women generate income and care for themselves and their children.



NIGERIA ACCOUNTED FOR NEARLY 80% OF CHRISTIAN DEATHS WORLDWIDE

IN 2021, ACCORDING TO OPEN DOORS

ICC RECOMMENDS

- The Nigerian government should take steps to ensure an effective law enforcement presence and consistent criminal prosecution in areas where Christian communities are frequently targeted.
- The U.S. should condition continued foreign assistance on the Nigerian government, making substantial improvement in the area of religious freedom, including rescinding the Sharia courts' jurisdiction over criminal matters and ending Kaduna State's practice of putting Christian communities under punitive house arrest.
- The U.S. should return Nigeria to the Countries of Particular Concern list, along with all the sanctions that normally come with that designation.

TAKE ACTION

ADVOCATE

Call your representative in Congress and urge them to raise the issue of Nigeria's CPC status with the Department of State. Nigeria richly deserves to be included on the CPC list, and pressure from Congress can help this to happen.

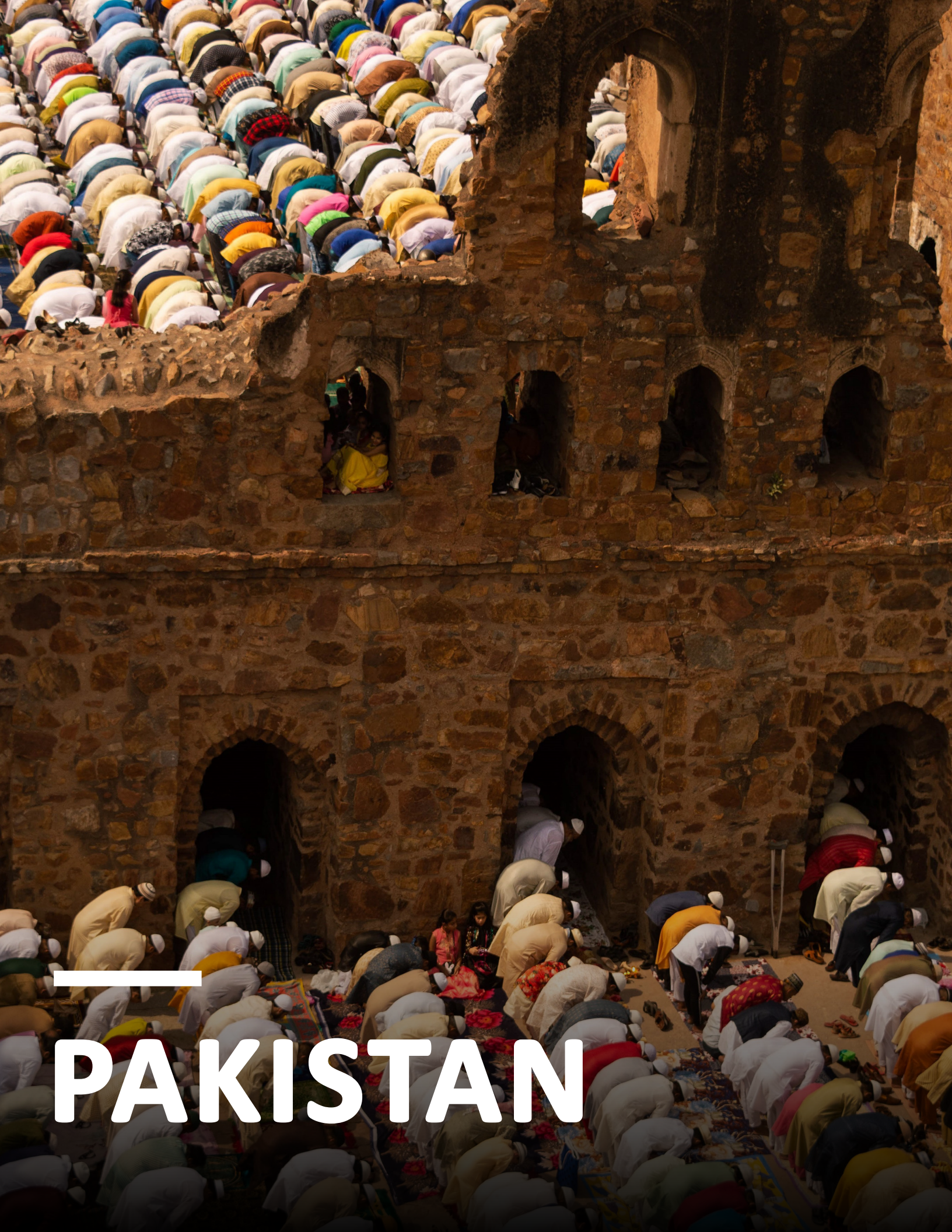
Find your congressional representative and share ICC's recommendations with them by visiting www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member, or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.



ADVOCATE

Read *No Protest Allowed* to learn about one form of direct government persecution in Nigeria and the extreme wealth that some of these persecutors have. Scan the QR code with your mobile device to read the report.





PAKISTAN

HOTBED OF PERSECUTION

CONCERN GROWS FOR PAKISTAN'S CHRISTIANS

Pakistan's constitutional endorsement of Islam and blasphemy laws make it easier for Christians to be imprisoned or killed.

SUMMARY

- The U.S. labeled Pakistan as a “Considered as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC)” and has failed to adequately address its religious freedom issues.
- Pakistani state endorsement of Islamic fundamentalism is contributing to the growth of extremism.
- Islamic Fundamentalism continues to grow and receive state sponsorship.
- Pakistan has deepened a trend of unstable government, further allowing extremism to flourish.
- Authorities use blasphemy laws to legitimize persecution and force conversions across society to suppress Christians and other religious minorities.

OVERVIEW

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) labeled Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) again in 2022. Pakistan's integration of Islamic fundamentalism into official government policies creates a hostile environment for religious freedom. Newly created agencies are tasked with monitoring media and education for violations of Islamic law. Pakistan is suffering an economic crisis, and accusations of mismanagement has led to a change of leadership within the position of Prime Minister. Societally embedded religious discrimination combined with economic hardship and political instability foreshadows a challenging future for Pakistan's religious minorities, including Christians.

QUICK FACTS

POPULATION:

238,181,034

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

96.5% Muslim

3.5% Other (Christian and Hindu)

MAJOR SOURCES OF PERSECUTION:

Radical Islam

Government Oppression

Religious Nationalism

Religious Extremism

Cultural Threat

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1990

1991

Sharia law formally incorporated into Pakistan's legal code leading to a spike of persecution incidents.

2000

2001

Pakistan postures itself toward the west by joining the U.S. in its fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

2002

Election results strengthen role of Islamist parties within the political system.

2004

Two pastors killed and a church compound bombed. Police protection is absent from these and other cases.

2010

2009

A mob murders eight Christians, leading to mass protests from the Christian community about the state of persecution.

2013

Two suicide bombers kill scores of congregants at the All-Saints Church in Peshawar.

2018

A ruling by Islamabad's High Court states that citizens must declare their religion when applying for ID documents, voting, or applying for government positions.

2020

2022

Gunmen assassinate a pastoral leader at All-Saints Church; vote of non-confidence thrusts Pakistan into political instability.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Pakistan's systematic suppression of religious freedom earned its designation by the U.S. government in November 2021 as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said at that time that Pakistan's designation was "for having engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom."

Just months after this designation, Pakistan was thrust into political instability following a vote of no-confidence which ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan. No prime minister has ever completed their term of service, and historically, periods of political transition increase religious minorities vulnerability. Meanwhile institutions such as the National Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, created to ensure education and media adhere to Islamic values, are given increased opportunity to function in ways that suppress human rights.

While blasphemy laws have existed in Pakistan since the mid-1800s, there has been a steady trend toward increasing their formal usage within society. These laws carry harsh sentences, including life in prison and the death penalty. The laws overwhelmingly penalize religious minorities for any actions deemed offensive to Islam. The inherent religious freedom issues contained within these laws are magnified by their subjective nature. Any Christian may face blasphemy accusations based on community perceptions rather than any actual crime.

Women who belong to a religious minority group are often more severely targeted for persecution. Within the Christian context, forced marriages are a common practice which legally compels women and girls to convert to Islam. Often, these victims are kidnapped before the marriage. Despite laws declaring a minimum age for marriage, law enforcement is not reliable, and therefore perpetrators often walk away with impunity.

While these are the two predominant forms of persecution faced by Pakistan's Christian community, broader trends within the community exist which actively discourage Christians from identifying and practicing their faith publicly. For example, a Christian clergyman was assassinated in January 2022 while traveling home from church. Targeting a clergyman, whose dress is often distinctly Christian, discourages other believers from openly identifying their faith among society. That case also serves as an example of the authorities not conducting a serious and effective investigation into persecution cases.

The U.S. decision to designate Pakistan as a CPC was a positive step toward acknowledging the extreme persecution that Christians face in Pakistan. The country's current political instability is expected to increase the vulnerability of Christians, requiring further detailed human rights monitoring and more detailed focus on from those groups regarding the status of minorities.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



FORCED
CONVERSION/
MARRIAGE



ATTACKS ON
PLACES OF
WORSHIP



FALSE BLASPHEMY
ACCUSATIONS



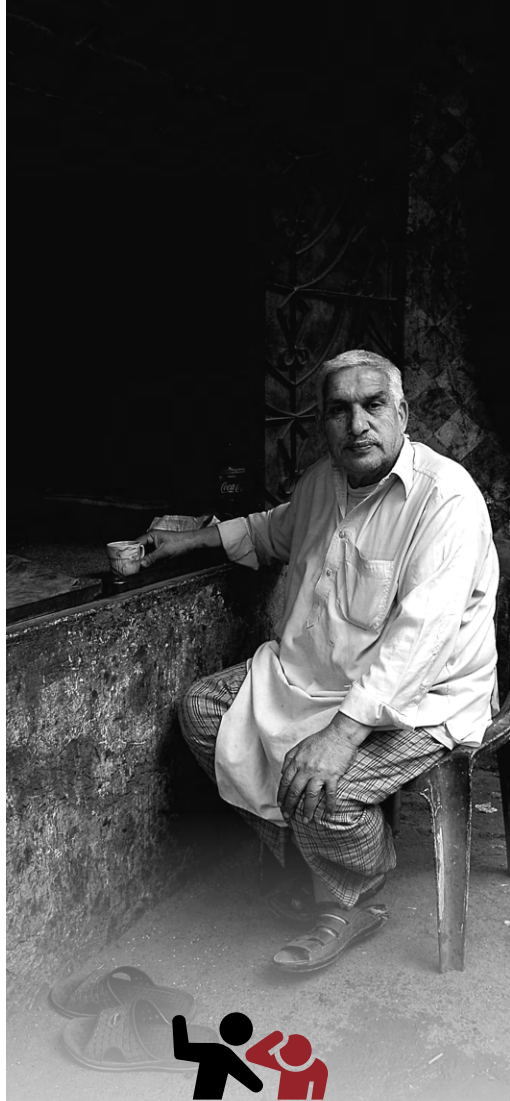
DISCRIMINATION

FORCED CONVERSION AND MARRIAGE: Women and girls are kidnapped from their families, married to an assailant, and held in sexual captivity. The perpetrators justify this through forged marriage and conversion documents. Investigations into these crimes are often nonexistent and a lack of justice encourages further victimization.

ATTACKS ON PLACES OF WORSHIP: Christian places of worship are often targeted by extremists for deadly terrorist attacks. Many Pakistani Christians fear the possibility of further attacks, particularly when celebrating major Christian holidays.

FALSE BLASPHEMY ACCUSATIONS: According to a 2020 report by the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), a human rights organization in Pakistan, at least 200 people were accused of committing blasphemy. Blasphemy accusations often have their roots in personal, professional, or business disputes. These types of comments can spark mob lynchings, vigilante murders, and mass protests.

DISCRIMINATION: Pakistani Christians face extreme levels of discrimination due to their religious identity. They are often regarded as second-class citizens, working the filthiest jobs with no hope of advancement. This discrimination is frequently seen in the number of Christians involved in Pakistan's sanitation workforce.



TARGETED

Qudrah and her family are Christians living in Pakistan. Her father worked for a Muslim business owner that was openly critical of the family's faith in Christ. He approached the family one day saying that the father owed him a significant amount of money. While the father had borrowed money for food, it was nowhere near the amount he quoted the family. The Muslim businessman is holding the father hostage until the family pays. Qudrah's father was the only earning member of the family, so they needed to start a small business to provide for themselves and potentially make enough to pay the father's ransom.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Child Abduction Protests

Less than one month into 2022, at least four Christian girls have been abducted this year in Pakistan. The chairman of Voice of Justice called the law enforcement agencies incompetent for being unwilling or unable to convict the kidnapers and rapists. A protest was organized on January 17 at the Karachi Press Club to appeal for change. Ilyas Samuel, the spokesman for Voice of Justice, has petitioned the government to no effect.

"There is gender-based violence and child abuse in the country. We see an increase in it as there is a lack of action on the part of government institutions."



Christian Youth Killed in Pakistan

A Christian man was stabbed to death in Lahore, Pakistan in February. A mob of radical Muslims attacked the 25-year-old Christian during a dispute about the construction of a wall in the neighborhood factory area police limits. The victim's brother was injured the day before as the local Christian and Muslim communities had clashed over the same issue.

Survey Reveals Corruption

The Center for Social Justice (CSJ) recently carried out a survey on the social, political, and religious situation of non-Muslim groups in Pakistani society. The report was sent to Agenzia Fides and highlights four areas of concern that Christians face in Pakistan. "The fundamental rights of religious minorities in Pakistan are of great concern, as can be seen in the field of blasphemy, in religious conversions, in the implementation of labor regulations, in the educational sector."

PM Endorses Islamization

The Pakistan government appointed the National Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority earlier this month to supervise both the education system and the media to ensure that the institutions are adhering to Islamic values. Additionally, the Prime Minister of Pakistan hopes to use the Authority to raise global awareness of Islamophobia, saying that steps need to be taken and the practice is "a journey of transformation toward morality and ethics."

Increase in Forced Conversions

A Pakistan NGO called on the government to provide legal and administrative guarantees to protect religious minorities, specifically women. Voice for Justice drew attention to the injustices plaguing Pakistani women such as forced conversions, child marriage, and general abuse. The government has outlawed marriage for those under the age of 18, and the Federal Court of Sharia accepts that setting a minimum age for marriage does not go against Islam.



In the Blink of an Eye

A quarrel between brothers leads to one of them being sentenced to death.

In 2011, Fidvi was accused of posting blasphemous articles and pictures of the Prophet Muhammad on a website that was copyrighted in his brother's name. According to Fidvi, this is a false accusation motivated by a quarrel between his brother and some of his Muslim friends in 2010.

Fearing for his life, Fidvi fled Pakistan with his wife, Azrah, to Singapore and Thailand.

However, when they returned to Pakistan in 2014, he was arrested and charged with committing blasphemy. In 2018, Fidvi was sentenced to death for committing blasphemy. Their case has been appealed to the Lahore High Court, but has yet to be heard. Azrah visits her husband in prison monthly.

During these visits, she provides him with various necessities such as medication, food, and pocket money. Without these items, Azrah fears for the health of her husband. ICC has been supporting Fidvi and Azrah since January 2021 by providing a year's worth of monthly prison visits and renewed the support for the entire year of 2022.

On a monthly basis, this support will allow Azrah to visit her husband and provide him with the necessities he needs to survive.

ICC AT WORK



SOLIDARITY GIFTS TO BLASPHEMY PRISONERS

Pakistan is one of three countries where blasphemy is punishable by death. These laws are widely abused to settle personal scores and incite religious hatred. Due to widespread religious intolerance and bias, members of Pakistan's religious minority communities are disproportionately accused and punished under the country's blasphemy laws. ICC is aware of dozens of Christians who have been accused of blasphemy and stands in solidarity with them. Food, clothing, and other essentials have been provided to the families of the accused to soften the financial struggles that come with a father or husband being incarcerated.



AID FOR A DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIM

Anadia, a Christian woman, married a Muslim man with the promise that they would follow Christ. Years after their marriage, her husband fell deeper into his Muslim faith. He insisted their children be raised Muslim, but when she refused he became angry and abusive. He beat her and the children when he discovered they were Christians. Anadia fled with her children but needed the means to provide for her family. ICC gave the funds for her to start a small business that she uses to support her family away from her abusive Muslim husband.



FROM JOB DISCRIMINATION TO BUSINESS OWNER

Rayan is a well-educated and hardworking Christian man. Due to his excellent performance in engineering, he was put in charge of a project with 10 Muslim men working under him. The Muslim men refused to work with a Christian and consistently demeaned him. They attempted to convert him to Islam, but when he refused, they abused him more. The discrimination and hatred he felt led to his resignation. ICC recognized Rayan's dedication and provided funds for him to start his own business. He now works for himself so he may not be discriminated against by Muslim colleagues.



ICC RECOMMENDS

- The U.S. government continues pressuring the Pakistani authorities in all bilateral interactions to prioritize human rights within their domestic legislative processes.
- The U.S. government needs to pressure the judicial authorities of Pakistan to conduct timely investigations involving the appropriate due process which upholds the rights of Christian victims and holds perpetrators accountable.
- Regular international monitoring through various human rights institutions of how religious freedom violations in Pakistan impact Christians and specifically Christian women.
- The U.S. government should impose targeted sanctions through the Global Magnitsky legal framework to encourage behavior change in those individuals known for attacking religious freedom.
- Make U.S. economic and military aid to Pakistan conditional on religious freedom improvement. This should be a tiered process for Pakistan by which it gains further access to military aid once domestic milestones regarding religious freedom improvement are met.

TAKE ACTION

STAY INFORMED



Read ICC's latest Blasphemy Report by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.

CONTRIBUTE

Help us break generations of persecution through the power of education, small business grants, and vocational training through Generation transformation.



SPREAD THE NEWS

Stay up-to-date on the latest and breaking persecution news from Pakistan by following our website, www.persecution.org. Follow us on social media—Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—to share the news with your followers.



A man looks at the devastation caused by Fulani militants in Nigeria's Middle Belt village of Te'egbe on November 26, 2021.

ENTITIES





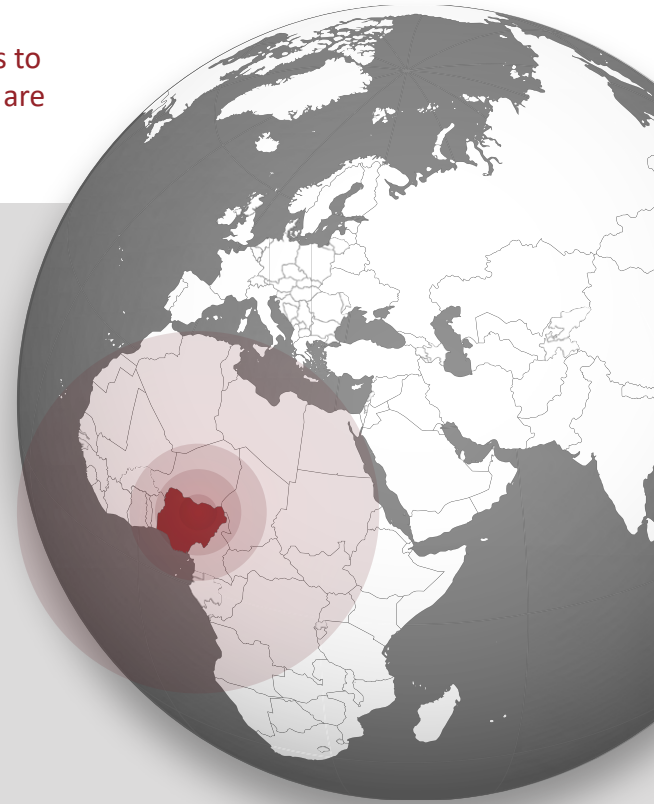
FULANI MILITANTS

CARNAGE, BLOODBATH, AND EVIL

For 20 years, Fulani jihadists have openly and unabatedly murdered tens of thousands of Christians in Nigeria. While the world continues to deny religious motive, Christians in the country have no doubt: they are experiencing genocide, a one-sided war against Christianity.

SUMMARY

- The Fulani are an ethnic group who mostly live at peace with their neighbors. The Fulani Militia are members of the Fulani who have become radicalized by extreme Islam.
- The militants are ruthless and uncompromising. They kill Christian families, steal what they can, and burn everything else down.
- Fulani militants have killed tens of thousands of Christians and left more than three million homeless over the past 20 years.
- The Nigerian government continues to spin the narrative that they are doing the best they can, but that the conflict is beyond their control.
- In reality, the government is either incompetent or aiding and abetting the attackers.



OVERVIEW

For decades, Fulani militants have attacked Christian farming villages in Nigeria's Middle Belt region—where the Muslim north meets the Christian south—killing and displacing Christians.

The numbers are staggering. Depending on the source, an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 Christians have been killed by Fulani militants over the past 20 years, while more than three million have been displaced.

Many say that this is a conflict over land, as the arid zones in Nigeria have been increasingly moving southward. But to leave the narrative at that is simply irresponsible. While farmer-herder conflicts over land have existed throughout centuries, a more sinister element has emerged within the last few decades—fueled by a jihadist agenda.

This is what the Nigerian government refuses to acknowledge, and what Christians in Nigeria have spent years trying to communicate to the international community.

Left: Woman whose husband was killed by Fulani militants on April 28, 2022.

QUICK FACTS

YEAR GROUP FORMED

Unknown

CURRENT LEADER

No Known Leader

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Radical Islam

PREDOMINATE REGION

Middle Belt of Nigeria

2022

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

JANUARY 1

Five Christians killed by Fulani militants while walking home after New Year's Eve prayer in Miango.

JANUARY 11

Fulani militants kill 18 Christians and burn more than 100 homes in Plateau state.

FEBRUARY 4

Eleven Christians killed by suspected Fulani militia in Kaduna State; more than 40 homes burned.

FEBRUARY 27

Fulani herdsmen attack a Baptist church and kidnap 10 people, including the pastor.

MARCH 10

In Iye village, herdsmen kill eight Christians, and on the same day in Udeyen village, six more killed.

MARCH 17

Fulani herdsmen kidnap 46 Christians and an unknown number of children.

MARCH 19

More than 100 Fulani militant herdsmen and Islamist terrorists kill 32 civilians in Kagoro town in Kaura County. More than 100 houses burn down.

MARCH 24

Fulani herdsmen kill an estimated 50 Christians and abduct a Catholic priest.

APRIL 2

Fulani militants launch a night attack in Plateau State. 10 people killed and 19 injured.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

FULANI VS. FULANI MILITANTS: The Fulani, who are majority Muslim, are the world's largest nomadic ethnic group. While most Fulani live at peace with their neighbors, militant Fulani, having been radicalized by extreme Islam, have emerged from their people group with Jihadist intent.

For centuries, Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers in Nigeria lived in relative harmony. The two groups formed mutually beneficial agreements where cattle could graze on fallow farmland and in return, crops were fertilized by cattle dung. If "clashes" between farmers and herders would arise, they were usually mediated by local chiefs and community council members. Rarely would a disagreement become violent.

Today, desertification in the Sahel has brought larger numbers of Fulani into Nigeria in search for greener pastures. Many of these Fulani hold radical Islamic views, having been influenced in their proximity to the Middle East, the epicenter of the global jihadist movement. While other factors are at play, such as economic prosperity and the desire for land grabbing, the measures taken to fulfill such desires is fueled by the extremist notion that they are superior to those they consider infidels—anyone who does not follow their extremist agenda. This gives Fulani militants the excuse to rid the country of anyone they see as a threat to their ideals. As militant Fulani move southward, they spread their extremist ideology which deems any non-Muslim an enemy of Islam. During this intended process of Islamification, Fulani who choose to remain at peace with Christians or stick to a more moderate view of Islam are regarded as "impure" Muslims, also deserving of death.

TARGETING CHRISTIANS: The Nigerian government and much of the international community often characterize attacks in Nigeria as "Farmer-Herder Clashes" and deny any religious motivation. This is like the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which was initially attributed to "farmer-herder clashes" with no ethnic undertone. As seen in the Rwandan genocide, denial of evidence proving the targeting of a people group will end in devastation for said people group. Fulani militants strategically target Christian communities, key Christian leaders, and Christian houses of worship. In the first 100 days of 2022, ICC documented that Fulani militants specifically targeted Christian communities in 31 staged attacks, resulting in the death of 205 Christians and the kidnapping of 60 Christians. Sadly, these numbers are likely a significant undercount due to the lack of reporting of Christian persecution in the country. In comparison, ICC documented that 0 Fulani herdsmen were killed by Christian farmers in these first 100 days.

Clearly the Nigerian media's claim of tit-for-tat "clashing" is objectively ludicrous. Fulani militants are becoming increasingly daring in their conquests due to lack of retribution, and violence against Christians will only continue to escalate if this false narrative continues.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



TORTURE, RAPE
AND KIDNAPPING



ASSASSINATION
MARTYRDOM



ATTACKS ON
LIVELIHOOD



EDUCATION
DISCRIMINATION

TORTURE, RAPE, AND KIDNAPPING:

Fulani militants are known to enter Christian communities, cut off limbs and other body parts of their victims, rape women and girls, and abduct others.

MURDER: Fulani militants use AK-47's or machetes to kill their victims. Often bodies are found burned beyond recognition, having been burned to death, or set on fire after being murdered.

ATTACKS ON LIVELIHOOD AND

PROPERTY: During their rampages, Fulani militants set fire to entire villages, burning down homes and vehicles and destroying farmlands.

EDUCATION: The mass movement of Christians due to Fulani attacks has indirectly affected the upcoming generation. Millions of children who have grown up in IDP camps have been forced into extreme poverty and are unable to afford school.



ORPHANED

14-year-old Francis was orphaned on Aug. 2, 2021, when Fulani militants attacked his village and killed 11 people, including his mother. The militants shot Francis several times, leaving him to die. Since his father died while his mother was pregnant with him, Francis bravely underwent three surgeries without the support of a family. He survived that day and was adopted by an ICC representative in-country.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

A BURIAL GROUND FOR CHRISTIANS

Violence in Nigeria

Militants from Fulani communities have been killing Christians in southern Kaduna. These attackers not only kill villagers but also burn villagers' houses and destroy their farm crops.

"They normally come at night or ambush our people when going to farm," said Habila Sambo, a local from the Adan community in Kagoro who survived a gunshot wound in a recent attack. Sambo was still in pain when ICC visited him at the hospital where he is currently receiving treatment. He said it would be difficult for him to farm again with his injuries but that he would like to go back and stay at his original home. "I know [militant] Fulani are killing us because of our faith in Jesus, but we will continue to forgive them for Christ's sake," he said.



Army Watched as Militants Burned Christian Houses

"The militants came at night, we ran, we saw the Fulani militants burning our houses that we just rebuilt." The village community leader told ICC that a unit of the Nigerian army was present during the attack but refused to stop the militants from burning the houses, claiming that they had not been given a command to do so from their superiors.

Militants Killed Mourners

Armed gunmen attacked Kpachudu village in Nigeria on March 28, killing at least five people, burning down homes, and destroying crops. The attack comes just days after more than 30 Christians were killed by Fulani militants in Nigeria's southern Kaduna State. In addition, militants abducted at least 46 Christians on March 17.

Footage from Attack

At least 20 people were killed and many homes were reduced to rubble. This brutal footage shows a glimpse of the tragedy that unfolded that night. Scan the QR code with your mobile device to watch.



Militants Unleash Terror

Fulani militants killed 28-year-old Stephen Monday and injured his wife, Ejoma, while the couple was walking to their farmland on Jan. 10. A Christian leader in Ancha told ICC that citizens are expecting more attacks through the night, as gunshots continue to be heard in the distance.

Homeless and Living on the Edge of Death

Displaced and facing death from Fulani extremists, Christians living with targets on their backs share their horrific realities with ICC's Regional Manager.

By: Kate Piselli

The Benue River runs directly through Makurdi, slicing through the state and cultivating the richest soils in all of Nigeria. Basketfuls of colorful crops line the city streets, supplemented by hanging rows of raw meat and the fishermen's catch of the day. While driving past the marketplaces and marveling at the natural resources available, I easily understood why locals fondly refer to Benue as "the breadbasket of Nigeria." Inconceivable, though, is what you will find just a few miles down the road.

In a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), only a 10-minute drive from the center of town, are hundreds of people forced into lives of obscurity. Women who once reaped bountiful harvests now trade sex for a meal to bring home to their families. Children who otherwise would have been able to attend school now wander idly with their bellies swollen from malnourishment or so emaciated that their skeletons show through their skin. In a state so blessed to be called Nigeria's breadbasket, there are more than 1 million IDPs struggling to survive each day.

These are the same people who were living lives of peace and comfort just years prior. Lives taken from them in an instant when Fulani militants stormed their communities, killed their family members, and burned down their homes all in the name of their god.

I spoke with Mary, a woman seemingly in her 20s, whose English revealed years of education.

"I've been here for five years now," she told me, her eyes fixed on the red dirt beneath us. "One day, we were asleep at our homes and we heard shooting, but we didn't know the problem that started it. There were more than 50 of them, carrying guns and cut glass." She paused, then continued, still looking at the ground.

"They killed my brother and his wife that day," she said, as she looked out and motioned toward the sea of tents. "Now we are living here. We don't have a clinic, or healthcare, or anything to eat. My prayer is for you to help us to go back to our home."

As Mary spoke, a crowd gathered, and when she finished, others took their turn to tell their stories, each more devastating than the last. When it was time to leave, we joined together in prayer, and said our goodbyes. While we left full of good intentions, hoping to effectively relay their message back home, deep down we wondered if anything would really make a difference.

Our van started to exit the camp and I turned around to see the crowd waving goodbye. Just then, I noticed a woman emerge from the group. Is she running after us? We continued driving, and she began to slow down, eventually turning back to the crowd in exhaustion.

They motioned her forward, as if telling her not to give up. Once again, she

continued to run. Yes, she's running after us. We asked the driver to stop, and we got out and began running to meet her. When we did, she reached behind her back and handed me a child who I hadn't previously seen, tied around her in a swaddling scarf.

He was skin and bones. Never had I held something so delicate. With one wrong move, I felt that he would break in my arms. He clung to me, not making a noise. He couldn't have been more than 10 pounds. Later I would find out he was almost four years old.

Thankfully, this child was brought to a hospital that day and nourished back to health. But for millions of IDPs across Nigeria, this story rarely has a happy ending. Having been driven from their ancestral farmlands due to Fulani militant attacks, they have become refugees in their own country.

A four-year-old child starving to death in Nigeria's breadbasket. I wondered how many more there could be.



ICC AT WORK

TE'EGBE ROOF REPAIR

Radical Fulani militants descended on Te'egbe village on Nov. 26 in the assault that lasted about three hours. Witnesses said the attackers wore black and shouted, 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is the greatest). The militants killed 10 villagers and set more than 100 homes on fire, displacing roughly 700 people. ICC helped rebuild the homes of some of the most affected community members, including three widows of the attack.



SCHOOL SPONSORSHIPS

ICC pays school fees for 100+ children who were orphaned or deeply affected by Fulani militant attacks



TRAUMA COUNSELING

In March 2022, ICC embarked on a six-month-long trauma training program for individuals affected by Fulani militant attacks. In the trainings, survivors are separated into three groups: men, women, and youth. Highly trained trauma professionals in Nigeria have created healing workshops specifically catered to these groups. Hear a testimony from one of the first workshop attendees:

"I am Aka Zee (name changed). I am a victim and survivor of the Fulani attack on my village, where our house and farmland were all destroyed. I lost my father during the attack and some of our neighbors. I narrowly escaped. Before coming for this trauma healing seminar, I hated the Fulanis and wished them dead. But I learned how to forgive my enemies and if I don't forgive, I may be destroying myself with anger, bitterness, and hatred. I feel I can now try to forgive those who killed my father. My father was the one paying my school fee and now that he is dead, I have to drop out of school to care for my family as I am the eldest. It is still painful, but I was able to share and write a lament to God, after which I felt light as if a heavy stone was lifted from my chest. Please, pray for me as I sometimes experience headaches and lack of sleep at night."



A Fulani herdsman grazes his cattle right next to an ICC farm in Nigeria.

DID YOU KNOW?

IN THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF 2022, ICC DOCUMENTED 31 VILLAGE ATTACKS, 205 CHRISTIANS KILLED, AND 60 CHRISTIANS KIDNAPPED BY FULANI MILITANTS.

ICC RECOMMENDS

- That the U.S. recognize the problem of militancy within the Fulani community and take steps to combat it, including dedicating funds to countering extremism.
- That the U.S. and others publicly acknowledge the religious component of Fulani militancy in Nigeria.
- That Nigeria be added back to the Countries of Particular Concern list for allowing religious persecution to blossom within its borders, including in the form of Fulani militancy.

TAKE ACTION

Call your representative in Congress and express your concern that the United States largely ignores the religious motivations of Fulani militants, to the detriment of Christians in Nigeria.

Find your congressional representative and share ICC's recommendations with them by visiting www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member, or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.





ALLIED DEMOCRATIC FORCES

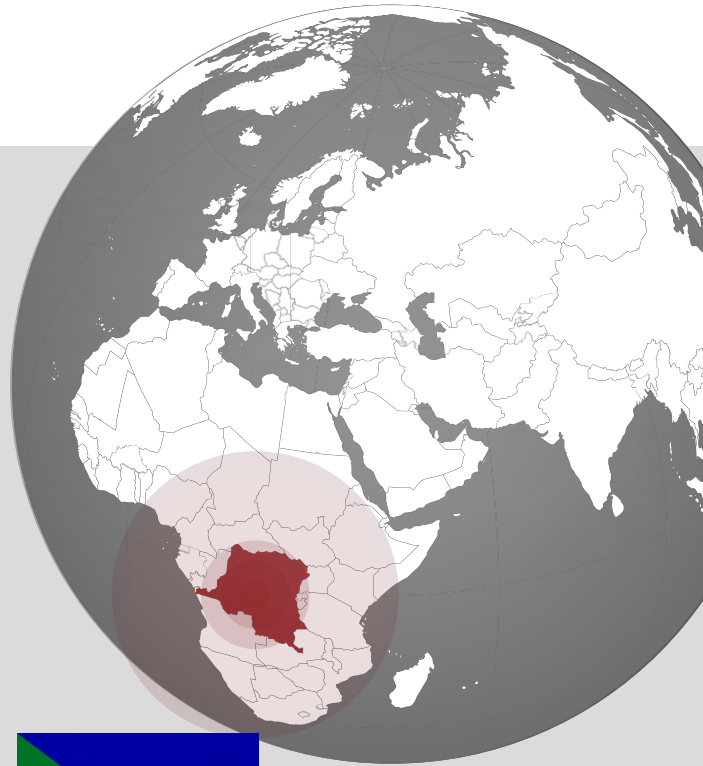
WHEN WILL IT END?

ISLAMIC STATE-AFFILIATED GROUP TERRORIZES CHRISTIANS

After decades of violent extremism, the ADF terror group formally affiliated itself with Islamic State in 2019. It must be stopped.

SUMMARY

- Founded in 1995 to topple the Ugandan Museveni government, the ADF now conducts terror operations in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- The ADF's 2019 affiliation with Islamic State has returned its extremist religious motivations to the foreground.
- Financial gain is a major motivator for the ADF, which operates in a very poor area of the continent and often recruits from destitute populations.
- The ADF is largely financed by the illegal exploitation of natural resources.
- Years of local and international attempts to uproot the ADF have seen short-term success, but the group has repeatedly regenerated in the face of withering losses.



OVERVIEW

Allied, democratic—what's not to like? At first glance the ADF may sound like a commendable organization, but the reality is that ADF cares nothing for democracy or freedom. In fact, it is an Islamist extremist group that has long caused mass devastation and destruction in Christian-majority eastern DRC, where it routinely conducts mass murder, extortion, and destruction of property. Many claim the group is only Islamic in name, but they have strengthened their ties with the Islamic State in recent years and increasingly use language indicative of extremist Islamic Ideology.

The connection to Islamic State immediately raises a red flag for religious freedom. Islamic State wants to create a worldwide Islamic caliphate, and for years has persecuted Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The U.S. Department of State, in its most recent report on international religious freedom in DRC, notes that ADF continues to attack churches and pastors among others in their areas of operation.

QUICK FACTS

YEAR GROUP FORMED

1995

CURRENT LEADER

Musa Baluku

IDEOLOGY

Islamist extremism

PREDOMINATE REGION

Uganda and Eastern DRC

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1995

1995

ADF formed in eastern DRC to overthrow the Ugandan government.

1997-2012

ADF is beaten back to remote parts of DRC but develops deep economic roots.

2013

ADF resumes its violent attacks with a campaign against the Congolese military.

2015

2015

ADF leader Jamil Mukulu flees to Tanzania but is arrested and extradited to Uganda.

2019

Under the new leadership of Musa Baluku, ADF forges official ties with Islamic State.

2020

2021

The United States designates ADF as a terror group.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

In 2020, just a year after ADF officially became an Islamic State affiliate, ADF leader Musa Baluku shared in a propaganda video that ADF had been dissolved and fully incorporated into the Islamic State conglomerate. ADF's self-declared new name is the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).

Many analysts believe that the relationship between ADF and Islamic State is looser than Baluku's words would suggest. Observers, however, see signs within ADF camps of increased religiosity including celebrations of Eid al-Adha, the use of Sharia law, and an Islamic banking system which fighters are compelled to use. Regardless of the strength of their relationship, one thing is clear: Islamic State's influence on ADF marks a shift for the worse for the region's Christians.

When ADF was founded, it espoused extremist Islamist ideology. Over the years that rhetoric faded as it focused on regrouping from losses sustained in the late 1990s and early 2000s. ADF conducted few violent attacks from 2001 to 2012. When it resumed its violence in 2013 there was less of a religious component to the language they used than when they conducted attacks in the 1990s.

ADF's allegiance to Islamic State changed all that, however, and today ADF is again primarily marked by Islamist extremism—bad news for Christians from DRC to Uganda to Mozambique under ADF's sphere of influence. ISCAP is already targeting Christians more often than ADF was before and is spreading east toward Mozambique.

While the international community recognizes the extreme danger posed by ADF, it does not seem to fully appreciate the religious component of the ADF movement. In searching for long-term solutions to the terror group, it is important that the world address not just the economic roots of the insurgency but the ideological ones as well. Whether through targeted information campaigns on the ground or specific efforts to protect religious communities in ADF territory, it is vital that the world first recognize the persecution happening and then address it accordingly. Only then can a viable solution be reached.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



ASSASSINATION
MARTYRDOM



ATTACKS ON LIFE
& PROPERTY

ASSASSINATIONS AND MARTYRDOM:

ADF has killed dozens of individuals in Christian areas, including pastors.

ATTACKS ON LIFE AND PROPERTY:

ADF's modus operandi is to attack and destroy communities it has chosen to victimize. The ADF is known to burn down churches in communities it visits.

INDIRECT



DENIAL OF
RIGHTS

DENIAL OF RIGHTS: ADF is notorious for kidnaping children to serve as child soldiers or suicide bombers. This practice has drawn international condemnation.



**~ 1,000 FIGHTERS
UNDER THE ADF FLAG**

ACCORDING TO UN ESTIMATES



GIRL ESCAPES TORTUROUS CAPTIVITY

"The rebels appeared abruptly and pulled us away into the thick forest. They were conversing in Swahili and Arabic saying that they would kill us for refusing to become Muslim. They separated me from my parents and for three days, they sexually abused me in turns. They were eight in number."

A few days after captivity, Kahindo was able to escape when the ADF entered a battle with the police.

"The Lord strengthened my weak body and enabled me to trek back...I found my mother and my three siblings hiding. We did not know the whereabouts of our father and until now we do not know whether he is alive or dead."

Today, Kahindo has completed her secondary education and hopes to pursue a nine-year medical course, so she can care for victims of violence in her country.

"I desire to study medicine so that I can help young girls and women who get sexually assaulted by the rebels," she told ICC.

With the help of donors, ICC is covering living and tuition expenses for Kahindo's medical school.



IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

FOUR KILLED BY ADF TERRORISTS

Four travelers were killed Feb. 24, 2022 while driving in eastern DRC after their vehicle was barricaded by Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) terrorists. Among the four civilians killed was Sylvia Kombi, a staff member of the Anglican Church of Congo, hailed for her service in providing trauma counseling to the terror-stricken region.

“She was coming from our diocese in Kasindi where she had gone to give counseling to Christian refugees living in Lubhiriha,” said local source Canon Muhasa. “We received reports that the rebels had stopped their vehicle in Karuruma, which is a village in Virunga Park, and they killed four of the travelers, while two escaped with serious wounds. They also set vehicles on fire.”



ADF Kills 20 Civilians

Twenty people were killed in an attack suspected to have been perpetrated by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group on Feb. 27.

The attack took place in Kikura village on the eastern side of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The ADF struck around 9 p.m. with militants wielding machetes and burning houses in the village. According to a report from David Moaze, a lawyer affiliated with the DRC rights group ADDHO, two women and one nine-year-old girl were among those killed by rebels.

Children Rescued

According to police, more than 80 children were rescued the week of Nov. 23 from various terrorist recruitment centers around Uganda.

Police spokesman Fred Enanga informed the public in a press conference that last week, the joint Anti-Terrorism Task force and the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence rescued 50 children.

An additional 22 children were rescued during a raid at a terrorist recruitment home in Kasengeje-Wakiso district. Police also rescued an additional group of 15 children who escaped the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group.

Kenya's Most Wanted Terrorist Arrested

Rashid Mohamed Salim, one of Kenya's most wanted terrorists, was cornered and captured by local youths on Jan. 29 in a village in the DRC. Salim was handed over to the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and arrested.

Salim was put on the Kenyan Anti-Terror Police radar in November 2021 with the government offering a \$100,000 reward for him and four others on terrorism charges.

Terror in the Congo

Christian survivors describe their encounter with ADF terrorists

“In the morning, we found my husband’s lifeless body.”

Masika Savitha lost her husband, Reverend Bernard Kalume, in October 2021 when the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) laid siege to her village.

“We were almost crossing over to another village when the Muslim (extremists) reached us,” she recounted. “We did not suspect that they were coming after us. They killed my husband and slightly cut my daughter’s hand. In the morning, we found my husband’s lifeless body, but my daughter was alive though lost in the bushes.”

Masika and her children left Kainama village after burying her husband, and walked 20 miles to Beni, a city of refuge for thousands fleeing rebel violence.

In November, ICC visited with some of these survivors, who selflessly shared their stories to reveal the truth of what is happening in the Congo.

“We were thriving through farming back in Oicha but the conflict has reduced us to be beggars.”

Kambale, a Christian refugee from Oicha, told ICC that he fled to Beni when his village was attacked in June of 2021.

“Our village was attacked at night, houses torched and farms vandalized,” he said. “We have been staying here without a

stable source of income since we depend on casual jobs to buy food. We live in a small rented house without beds and other furniture. We sleep on mats that we fold and keep aside during the day. We were thriving through farming back in Oicha but the conflict has reduced us to be beggars.”

The ADF started in the 1990s as a force opposing the alleged mistreatment of Muslims by the Ugandan government. They later expanded their operation to DR Congo where they have now grown and spread in the provinces of Ituri and North-Kivu.

About 40 miles south of Beni, in a city called Butembo, masses of refugees have also gathered, leading to overcrowding and a rise in communicable diseases.

Muyisa Edson, displaced from Virunga, told ICC how he has been coordinating housing and schooling for Christians that find themselves in the city, without direction.

“Others become Muslims in order to avoid being killed.”

“The greatest need for any displaced people is food and shelter,” said Edson. “The Lord has blessed our country with great farming lands and enough rainfall, but due to the killing of Christians in the villages that lead to displacement, we continue to languish in poverty and homelessness.

“We are so many in this town and more

people are coming in to seek protection from the Muslim rebels. Our family members have been killed and others kidnapped. They are now serving the rebels without any hope of being rescued. Others become Muslims in order to avoid being killed. There are no jobs here. There are not enough houses, schools, water, and electricity for everyone...We also have fresh air in the villages and we do not get sick frequently like in town and the refugee camps.”

Uganda deployed soldiers to the DRC last year, after ADF rebels released a series of attacks in Uganda’s capital of Kampala. While the mission has reported various successes, many question whether a military intervention is the answer to the complex socio-economic crisis at hand.

In Kasindi, a region that borders Uganda in the west, Reverend Paul Kavuzungwire has been helping refugees find some bearing after leaving everything behind due to war.

“When these families come to Kasindi, they come hungry and without any money to buy food. Others come with babies that need food at least three times a day. We try our level best to find places where they can stay and how to get food. Christians welcome some of them in their homes while the others rent small rooms to keep their belongings as they wake up every day to go and look for casual jobs. The need is overwhelming and we are not able to provide a lasting solution to the situation.”

ICC AT WORK

ENSURING THE ESSENTIALS

As a result of unrest, a group of Bible school students were displaced for six months due to ADF attacks. Though they have found safety, they struggle for food and other basic necessities. ICC provided food staples and other essentials to their camp.

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Nineteen-year-old Kahindo Kambuthye was abruptly abducted by Allied Democratic Forces in October 2021. The terrorists said that they would kill her if she didn't convert to Islam, and for three days they sexually abused her. Her mother escaped and a day later, planned a rescue mission with police. ICC was able to cover living and tuition expenses for Kahindo's first year of medical school. We will continue to monitor her progress.

AIDING A WIDOW AND HER FAMILY

In July 2021, ADF rebels attacked Jorline's village in Eastern DRC. While she and her eight children ran into the bushes to escape, Jorline watched as her husband was murdered by the jihadists.

The large family fled to Uganda for safety, where ICC provided them with a new home, food, and medical care.

"We do not have words to express how we feel right now," Jorline said in response to the assistance. "It is like a dream to us. We left Beni with nothing, but we have seen the goodness of God over the months. Our hearts have been comforted by your generosity that no one has ever extended to us. We thank you for loving us unconditionally."



THE GIFT OF MOBILITY

In October 2020, ADF killed eight Christians during a nighttime assault in Eastern DRC. A bullet struck Mayasa Dorotia in her back, leaving her paralyzed. Through the generous support of our donors, representatives in the Congo purchased a wheelchair for her, and gifted it to her along with other essential items.

LIFE STOLEN

Denize narrated her story to ICC:

"Our village was attacked at night by the ADF rebels and before we could escape to the nearby bushes, three of us were killed. I lost my elder brother and my cousin."

ICC delivered food, clothing, rent, and cash assistance.

"Our prayer is that there shall be peace and that one day we shall return home and do the things that we used to do in the village farms. We are very happy to receive food aid and funds from you today. We do not know you and we can only say that the Lord sent you to us the same way He sent a Raven to feed His prophet."

A WHEELCHAIR FOR SAMSON

Samson, a paralytic, was forced to desert his shoe-making business when he and his family fled an ADF attack that killed 36 Christians.

After relocating, Samson dragged his body to town each day and used the few tools he had to try to earn an income. To help, ICC supplied Samson with a wheelchair, food supplies, and the tools to re-start his business.

"I used to get scorched during sunny days or muddy when it rained but now, I will not be burned or dirtied because I have a new tricycle that can move me around," Samson told ICC. "I will use the shop, new machines, and the materials to make my business a center where all shoe needs are met. I am truly thankful to you."



2,155 **KILLED** BY ADF IN EASTERN DRC

SINCE JUNE 2017

ICC RECOMMENDS

- That the U.S. continue to sanction ADF leaders and pursue other means of international accountability for their actions.
- That ADF be designated an Entity of Particular Concern along with the main Islamic State entity, Islamic State West Africa Province, and Islamic State Greater Sahara.
- That regional security forces be held to a high standard of conduct and trained to combat ADF in a way that minimizes civilian casualties.
- That places of worship and vulnerable Christian communities be given special consideration as they fight to survive in the face of ruthless terrorist opposition.
- That efforts to counter ADF be taken with consideration of ADF's role within the larger conflict in the region rather than in isolation.

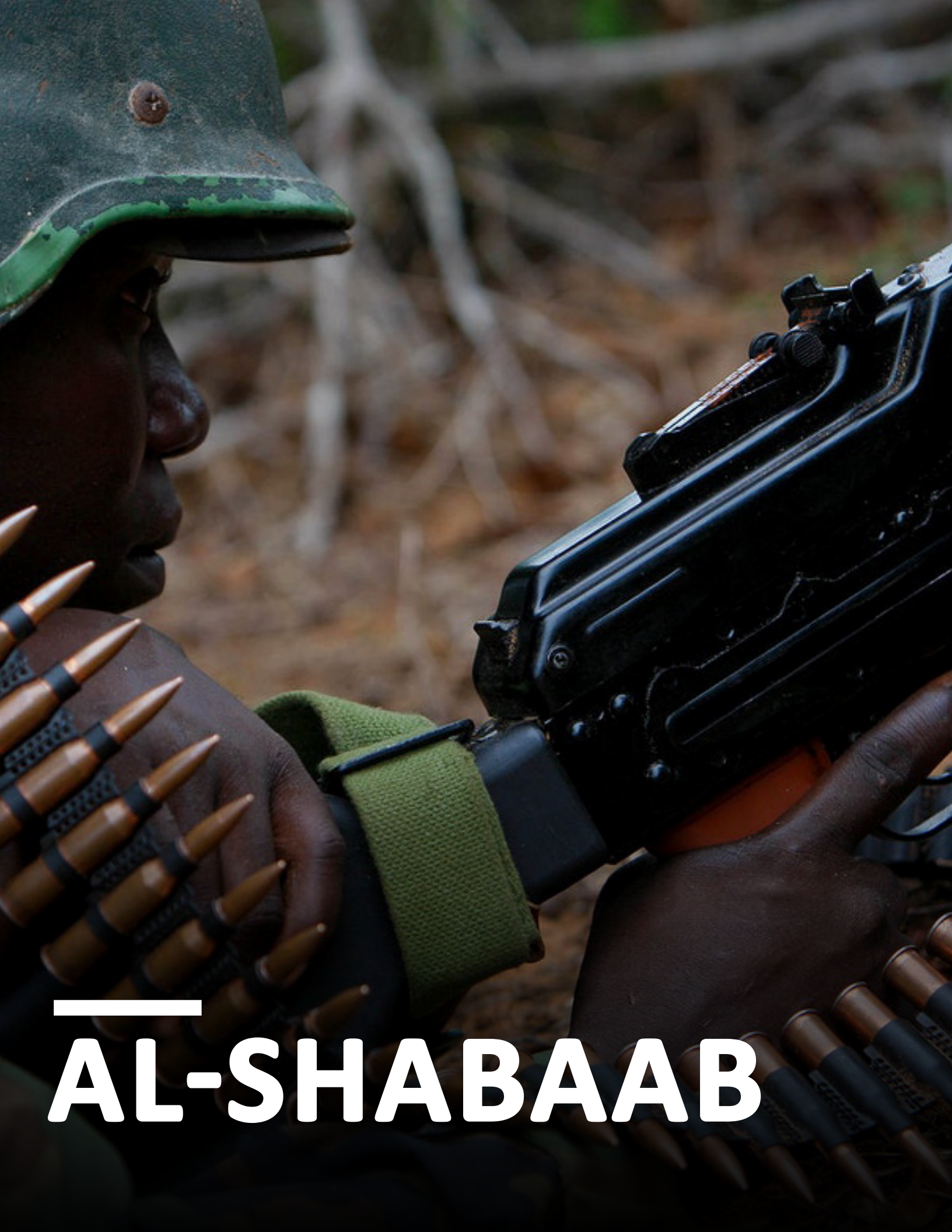
TAKE ACTION

ADVOCATE

Push members of Congress to urge the U.S. Department of State to designate ADF as an Entity of Particular concern for their violations of religious freedom.

Find your congressional representative and share ICC's recommendations with them by visiting www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member, or by scanning the QR code with your mobile device.





AL-SHABAB

CREATING AN ISLAMIC STATE

RUTHLESS ATTACKS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Al-Shabaab, directly translated as “the Youth,” is an al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist militant organization whose primary aim is to create an Islamic state in Somalia.

SUMMARY

- Al-Shabaab ranks among the four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2021.
- Al-Shabaab has ensured that Somalia has remained a region of terror for Christians.
- Militants enforce a strict ban on behavior deemed un-Islamic and have implemented punishments under Sharia law to include floggings, amputations, and public executions.
- Al-Shabaab fighters actively attack Somalia’s surrounding nations such as Kenya and Ethiopia, where fighters can easily slip across porous borders and retreat to Somali soil.
- The group also targets churches, police stations, shopping centers, communication masts, and Christian aid workers outside of Somalia.



OVERVIEW

Al-Shabaab, an affiliate of al-Qaida, has been fighting to overthrow Somalia’s central government for 16 years. Despite an international coalition of forces that, up until recently, was fighting to secure Somalia against al-Shabaab, the terrorist group became one of the largest and most active in the world and has maintained control of much of Somalia’s southern and southcentral regions. In 2008, the group underwent a series of changes, transforming itself from a local movement into an al-Qaida affiliated terrorist group committed to a global jihadist ideology. Regional conquest expanded from defeating Somalia’s allied forces to aligning themselves with al-Qaida in the war against the west.

Following a change in leadership in 2008, al-Shabaab began to adopt common al-Qaida strategies such as suicide attacks and explosives to accomplish its goals, in addition to their usual guerilla-styled tactics. Today, al-Shabaab is led by Ahmed Umar, who took power after former leader Abdi Godane was killed in a U.S. drone strike. The group is estimated to be made up of between 6,000 and 7,000 fighters experienced with asymmetrical warfare and small unit tactics. Al-Shabaab holds terrorist training camps, which, combined with their link to al-Qaida and ideological affinity for a global jihad, has created concerns for transnational terrorism.

QUICK FACTS

YEAR GROUP FORMED
2006

CURRENT LEADER
Ahmed Umar

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
Islam (al-Qaida)

PREDOMINATE REGION
Southern Somalia and
Northeastern Kenya

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2021

NOVEMBER 25

Eight people were killed and 17 injured in Somalia's capital after a car bombing claimed by al-Shabaab. Four staff and 13 schoolchildren were also wounded.

2022

JANUARY 3

Al-Shabaab terrorists attacked Widho Village. Six Christian men were killed, four of them tied, shot, and burnt. The other two were butchered. Four houses and two shops were also torched.

JANUARY 26

Al-Shabaab terrorists ambushed a convoy of vehicles near Kenya's Somali border and began shooting. Six people were injured in the attack and three were able to escape due to security measures in place.

JANUARY 31

Al-Shabaab kills 13 people in Northeastern Kenya after a bus drove over an improvised explosive device planted by militants.

FEBRUARY 2

Four people killed in Kenya after driving over IED placed by al-Shabaab militants.

MARCH 23

An al-Shabaab suicide bomber attacked polling station in central Somalia, killing at least 48 people and injuring over 100.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Al-Shabaab ranks among the four terrorist groups responsible for the most deaths in 2021. Since 2006, the group has ceaselessly attacked the Somali government and pursued Islamist statehood aspirations, boasting the status of being al-Qaida's largest, most operationally effective affiliated group. Christians and other minority religions have been ostracized and heavily persecuted by al-Shabaab.

The reduction in counterterrorism efforts and the withdrawal of peacekeeping forces in Somalia has led to a rise in terror activity over the past year. In January 2021, the U.S. officially withdrew an estimated 700 military personnel from Somalia, including military trainers. In May 2022, the Biden administration approved 450 U.S. troops to return to Somalia to combat terrorism in the country. African Union peacekeeping forces also withdrew from Somalia after successfully reclaiming control of Mogadishu and other territories held by al-Shabaab. U.S. drone strikes against al-Shabaab militants have declined under the Biden administration, with only five drone strikes conducted in 2021, compared to just under 60 in 2019. Consequently, al-Shabaab has grown and gained momentum in terms of its ability to operate through larger swathes of the country. As is evidenced by the bloody attacks against Somalia's capital of Mogadishu at the hands of al-Shabaab in late November 2021 and March 2022, al-Shabaab's hopes of an Islamic theocracy are still alive and its subsequent attempts to overthrow the Somali government are only growing more violent.

In addition to its theocratic ambitions, al-Shabaab has ensured that Somalia has remained a region of terror for Christians, as it is a closed country where Islamic extremists circulate freely, and the church operates in secret. Christians make up only 0.33% of the population and conversion means certain death or other forms of extreme violence or torture. Somali Christians keep their faith concealed as al-Shabaab desires to eradicate all believers from the country. Al-Shabaab enforces a strict ban on behavior deemed un-Islamic and has implemented punishments under Sharia law to include floggings, amputation of limbs, and public executions. They are also notorious for blocking international aid from reaching millions of suffering citizens.

Al-Shabaab fighters actively attack Somalia's surrounding nations such as Kenya and Ethiopia, where militants can easily slip across borders before retreating to the safety of Somali soil. Attacks on Kenya have occurred for nearly a decade because the Kenyan military has supported the central government in Somalia. These attacks most often involve the killing of Christians in small villages or who are riding on buses. These ongoing attacks have led to the deaths of more than 100 Kenyan Christians over the past five years. The group also targets churches, police stations, shopping centers, communication masts, and Christian aid workers.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



TARGETING NON-MUSLIMS



SUICIDE BOMBERS

INDIRECT



SHARIA LAW CONTROL

TARGETING NON-MUSLIMS: In many of their attacks, insurgents separate Christians from Muslims, before executing the Christians and sparing the Muslims. They do this by forcing people to show their national IDs, which state their religion, or by looking at an individual's name, which often reveals what faith that person follows. If neither of these methods work, militants force suspected Christians to say the Shahada, an Islamic statement of faith. When the targets cannot say it or refuse, they are executed.

SUICIDE BOMBERS: Al-Shabaab uses suicide bombings to target high-value individuals, institutions, and spaces antithetical to their mission, including the Somali government, United Nations, and African Union. Most of the group's suicide bombing occurs in southern Somalia, primarily the country's capital of Mogadishu.

CONTROL THROUGH SHARIA LAW: Areas under al-Shabaab control are subject to the group's extreme Islamic ideology, including a strict implementation of Sharia criminal law. Sharia criminal law mandates various harsh punishments that stand in contravention of human rights law, including floggings for alcohol consumption, the amputation of limbs for thieves, and death for apostates. Al-Shabaab advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. Examples include women being forced to wear full body garments, and the prohibition of anything considered "western," including the shaving of men's beards, and various forms of music, movies, and art.



INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN



MARTYRED

Emmanuel, who is five years old, watched as his father was killed by nine al-Shabaab militants on Jan. 2, 2022. Three months later, he told International Christian Concern (ICC) about the events that left him and his three older siblings without a father and made his mother a widow.

"They broke down the door and dragged us to the shop. They tied up some other men who were there lying down. They told me to go away. I went away but came back to see my father and saw them tying him up. I asked them not to kill him, but they killed him with a machete. They also killed the other men."

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

A NIGHT OF TERROR

Survivors Recall Attack

The al-Shabaab terrorist group staged an attack on Widho Village, Lamu West, Kenya. The onslaught lasted over six hours, leaving a trail of deaths and destroyed property. Six Christian men were killed during the night of terror, four of them tied, shot, and burnt. The other two were butchered. Four houses and two shops were also torched.

Peter Kinyua Muriuki, his wife Regina Wanjira, and his son, Francis, missed being caught and killed by a whisker. But they lost their retail shop, food kiosk, and house which were all set on fire by the terrorists.

“On the night of the attack, I heard gunshots in the neighborhood and someone shouting that thieves were in the area. I rushed out to see what was happening only to come face to face with three gunmen approaching my premise. I immediately knew that they were on an evil mission and Widho was under attack. I turned back swiftly and jumped over my fence without informing my wife and son of the men that I had met. They would have caught me and my family if I went back to wake them up.”



Kenyan Community Attacked for Seventh Time this Month

Six gunmen suspected to be al-Shabaab terrorists ambushed a convoy of vehicles near Kenya's Somali border, and began shooting. Six people were injured in the attack and three were able to escape due to security measures in place.



13 Killed in Bus Bombing

Thirteen passengers were killed and others were severely injured on Jan. 31 in northeastern Kenya after their public service vehicle ran over an improvised explosive device. According to a survivor, the attackers, suspected to be al-Shabaab militants, fired gunshots at the vehicle just before it drove over the bomb.

8 Killed by al-Shabaab

At least eight people were killed and 17 injured in Mogadishu on Nov. 25 in a car bombing claimed by the al-Shabaab terrorist group, officials and witnesses said. The terror group intended to strike a United Nations security convoy passing near a school in Mogadishu. As a result, at least 13 schoolchildren and 4 staff were wounded.

A Miraculous Survival

Christian girl orphaned by suicide bomb

Residents of the serene village of Kamloma in western Kenya were thrown into a panic on Wednesday, Dec. 7, when a loud explosion emerged from the home of Petro, Mary, and Nancy Onyango.

Alarm soon turned into horror as neighbors realized the origin of the blast. Charles Obala, Petro's brother, narrated the events that followed.

"We heard a loud explosion coming from my brother's homestead. Suddenly, Nancy appeared with blood all over her body. We took her inside the house and rushed to check what had happened. I was the first to arrive and found my brother and his wife already dead and another body lying a distance from them."

The other body, Charles soon realized, was that of John Odhiambo.

Locally known as 'Pope,' Odhiambo was alleged to have returned from Somalia where he claimed to be working for a construction company. Petro and Mary were his neighbors, and they knew each other well.

Nancy Onyango, the only child of Petro and Mary, recalled the events of that night.

"We had taken supper and sat outside our

house to get fresh air before going to bed.

John Odhiambo walked into our homestead and sat opposite us.

I was sitting between my father and mother, but I was closer to my mother. He sat about three meters from us and what I can remember is that he verbally greeted us and laughed...

Then the bomb went off."

Odhiambo had detonated an IED, intending to kill himself along with the entire Onyango family.

"It happened so quickly that I did not notice that my father and mother had died," said Nancy. "I regained consciousness at the hospital. That's all that I know."

While Nancy survived the explosion, she sustained various injuries, including the loss of three of her right-hand fingers.

"I was shocked to find out that I had lost three of my fingers. I also had deep cuts on my chest and back, and my ear was chopped a little. I stayed in the hospital for two weeks. I did not celebrate Christmas with my parents. I also missed meeting with my young friends at church. This was very painful. Why did John kill my parents?"

Charles, Nancy's uncle, speculated about the reason for the attack.

"Petro was a great evangelist in this village. They always had friendly discussions on religion whenever John resurfaced from where we do not know. He used to challenge John on why he converted to Islam after being raised as a Christian. Sometimes he would be disgruntled by the conversations, but he never showed any intention of hurting anyone. He never threatened anyone in our family."

The police declared the suicide-bomb a terror attack, similar to the al-Shabaab style attacks more commonly seen in Eastern Kenya. Sadly, the assault exemplifies a growing trend of extremism in Kenya's west.

For 13-year-old Nancy, this extremism took the life of her parents, and sought her life as well. Her survival is truly miraculous.

As believers in Christ, we can be confident that God can take what the enemy meant for evil and use it for good. Nancy's life has been spared for a reason. God has a great purpose for her future, and as her family in Christ we are blessed to walk alongside her and bear witness to the sovereignty of our Lord.

ICC AT WORK



EMERGENCY FOOD AID

ICC gave emergency food aid to Christians displaced by an al-Shabaab terrorist attack in January 2022. The militants ambushed the quiet village, killing six people and setting four houses and two shops on fire. Due to fear, villagers fled the place of the attack and others camped at the Redeemed Gospel Church where security officers guarded them.

MOTORBIKE PROJECT

Peter's home, and the motorcycle he used as a taxi to support his family, were destroyed by al-Shabaab terrorists on Jan. 11, 2022. Luckily, Simon and his family of five had fled when they were notified that the attackers were burning neighboring houses. ICC replaced Peter's motorbike, as well as two of his daughters' bicycles that they use to travel to school each morning. In addition, Peter's family was given emergency food supplies and additional cash assistance.





4,000+ PEOPLE KILLED

BY AL-SHABAAB IN THE LAST DECADE

3,000+ PEOPLE KILLED

BY AL-SHABAAB SINCE 2015

ICC RECOMMENDS

- The U.S. should dedicate resources to improving infrastructure in Somalia and helping the government learn how to deliver basic services to its citizens. Much of al-Shabaab's recruiting appeal lies in the failure of the Somali government to deliver these necessities to their people in the first place.
- The U.S. should work to enact reforms within the Somali government. The people are disenchanted with the government and, in some ways, see al-Shabaab as a viable alternative to the Somali government. Where this view is accurate the government needs to grow and reform.
- As a condition of its continued help in the country—amounting to hundreds of millions every year—the United States should insist on laws protecting the right of religious minorities to live and worship freely.
- The United States should support other countries in the region as they deal with al-Shabaab, which works to export its violent ideology outside of Somalia.

TAKE ACTION

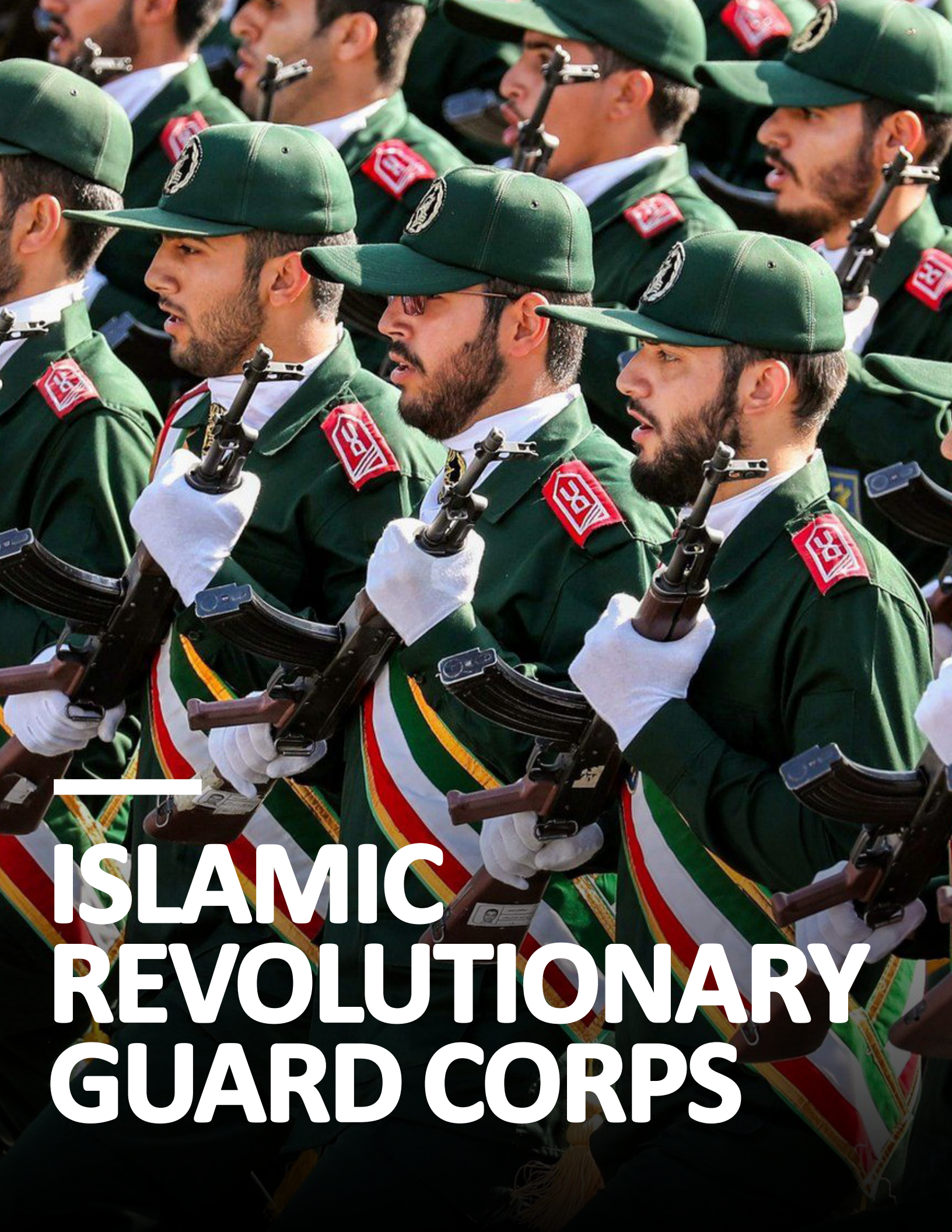
STAY INFORMED

Follow ICC on social media to receive the latest updates on persecution incidents in Somalia.

ADVOCATE

Inform your Representative and Senators about persecution in Somalia. As U.S. troops return to the country, it is important that the U.S. recognize the religious element of the struggle against al-Shabaab and protect Christian communities accordingly.





ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS

ELITE TERROR

THE IRANIAN SWORD POINTED AT MIDDLE EASTERN CHRISTIANS

The Revolutionary Guard is one of the most elite military forces in the Middle East and targets Christians inside and outside of Iran's borders.

SUMMARY

- IRGC is an elite military group controlled by the Supreme Leader of Iran to exert Iranian influence and protect the Ayatollah's regime.
- Formed during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the IRGC's initial aim was to protect the revolution, which overthrew the U.S.-backed leader of Iran.
- IRGC provides ample support to terrorist groups throughout the Middle East that persecute Christians.
- Inside Iran, the Revolutionary Guard cracks down on Christians who it perceives pose a threat to the Islamic identity of Iran.
- The United States recognizes the IRGC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and has imposed sanctions on the powerful military group.



OVERVIEW

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, also known as the IRGC or simply the Revolutionary Guard, was formed immediately after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that established the theocracy that exists in the country today. The Revolutionary Guard, as their name suggests, was initially formed as an armed protector of the revolution, and consolidate the power of the new Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Today, the IRGC serves alongside the Iranian armed forces under the direction of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei both inside and outside of Iran. The Revolutionary Guard has several different branches, including ground, air, naval, and cyber forces to do the Ayatollah's bidding. Within Iran, IRGC heavily persecutes Christians, specifically Christian converts from Islam, by raiding house churches and arresting members for threatening national security. Outside of Iran's borders, IRGC exports this persecution across the Middle East through its elite Quds Force, which currently arms and funds several militia groups that choke out Christianity in the region. Groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq receive support from the Revolutionary Guard to attack and harass Christians in its effort to drive them out of the land.

QUICK FACTS

YEAR GROUP FORMED

1979

CURRENT LEADER

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Islam

PREDOMINATE REGION

Middle East

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1979

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini establishes the IRGC as the guardians of the Iranian revolution.

1980

1980

IRGC grows and becomes a dangerously well-equipped force throughout the Iran-Iraq War.

1983

IRGC assists Hezbollah members in an attack against U.S. troops in Beirut.

2000

2003

U.S. invades Iraq fighting against Shia extremist militants funded by the IRGC.

2014

As ISIS grows in Iraq, IRGC begins funding militias to fight against the Sunni group. These militias now exert tremendous control over Iraqi society and are a primary persecutor of Iraq's Christian community.

2015

2019

U.S. President Donald Trump designates the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) for promoting Islamic terrorism.

2020

2020

U.S. forces kill IRGC Quds force commander Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad.

2021

American negotiators reopen talks with Iranian representatives on nuclear deal as IRGC continues operations persecuting Christians inside and outside of Iran.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Both inside and outside of Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps remains one of the largest threats to Christians in the Middle East. Considered by some as the most elite military group in the region, IRGC serves as a constant destabilizing force against religious freedom. Within the country, the Revolutionary Guard works alongside the Intelligence Ministry to identify converts from Islam to Christianity. IRGC forces are also sometimes called in to crack down on worship in house churches, a common practice among converts who often are unable to worship in any official churches in their language of choice. This can land them in Iran's notorious Evin Prison, where they face brutal torture, lack of adequate medical resources, and harsh living conditions.

Unfortunately, the persecution by Revolutionary Guard forces does not stop at Iran's borders. IRGC commonly backs militant groups throughout the Middle East with well-documented records of violent persecution against the historic Christian communities of the region. The IRGC aids Hezbollah in Lebanon, a terrorist group widely considered as one of the greatest threats to religious freedom in the country. Additionally, the IRGC supports the Popular Mobilization Forces of Iraq, a group of Shia militias first formed to fight ISIS that now persecute Christians in the areas they now control, earning them a mention in ICC's 2021 Persecutors of the Year Awards Report.

Because of the growing influence of the Revolutionary Guard's persecution against Middle Eastern Christians, President Trump designated the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization in 2019, levying more sanctions against the group aimed to take away its ability to commit human rights violations. Shortly after the designation, in January 2020, the United States orchestrated a drone strike in Iraq against Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds force, a major blow to the leadership of the group.

However, more recently, the U.S. and Iran have been renegotiating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a treaty aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program signed by President Obama from which President Trump withdrew American support during his presidency. As a result, there are calls within the U.S. government to not pressure the Iranian government as harshly on their human rights abuses, including calls for the U.S. to lift its Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation of the Revolutionary Guard. With the IRGC's ongoing position as one of the most well-equipped persecuting military forces in the Middle East, the U.S. must continue fighting the harmful influence of the Iranian group.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



RAIDS ON HOUSE
CHURCHES

RAIDS ON HOUSE CHURCHES: IRGC works in conjunction with the Intelligence Ministry of Iran to identify Christian converts and crack down on the use of house churches.



EXPORTING
PERSECUTION

EXPORTING PERSECUTION: IRGC aids PMF militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, two groups that regularly persecute and attack Christians in their respective countries.

INDIRECT



MONITORING
CHRISTIANS

MONITORING CHRISTIANS: IRGC works with Iranian government agencies to identify Christian converts and monitor their activities to curb the spread of Christianity.



In 2020, U.S. forces killed Qassem Soleimani, pictured here, for his human rights abuses as the head of the IRGC's elite Quds force.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



Iran-Backed Factions in Iraq Deteriorate Security Situation

In the crisis-torn country of Iraq, a recent interview with the leader of Asaib Ahl al Haq, an Iraqi-based radical group in support of Iran, suggested the group's role in the deteriorating security situation. Qais al Khazali told BBC Persian that the resistance group is established and willing to continue its efforts so long as there is U.S. involvement.

The group's leader also commented on Iraq's appointed Parliament speaker saying, "We decide based on our internal interest...we continue rejecting the results of this election...and Iranian parliament speaker's message won't change it...This is a clear evidence of our independence in our decisions."

A few days later, a home of Parliament speaker, Mohammed al-Halbusi, was targeted by at least three rockets reportedly originating from Iran-linked

armed factions. Though he was not in the area at the time, Halbusi has been threatened repeatedly by Iranian-linked groups, including Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah.

Iranian groups have recently posted many fliers and paintings of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander Qasem Soleimani and PMU commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Iraq, the deaths of whom incited promises of revenge by Iran-linked factions.

The foreign influence and interference by Iran in Iraq pose continued risk for Christians and other minorities who have bravely stayed throughout the last years of conflict or are seeking to return to their homes.

Iranian Survey Identifies Harassment for Religious Minorities

Harassment of religious minorities most commonly stems from Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Intelligence Ministry, but also notably originates with clerics and religious officials, according to a recent survey done by IranWire. Christians, who made up about 6% of the survey population, are routinely harassed by the country's intelligence ministry and officers.

The primary modes of discrimination outlined in responses included denial of job opportunities, denial or difficulty with permits for their businesses, and denial of a right to education. Outside of these, Christian converts and other religious minorities are subjected to arbitrary arrests and monitoring. Around 80% of the survey respondents said that the discrimination against them because of their faith continues unabated.

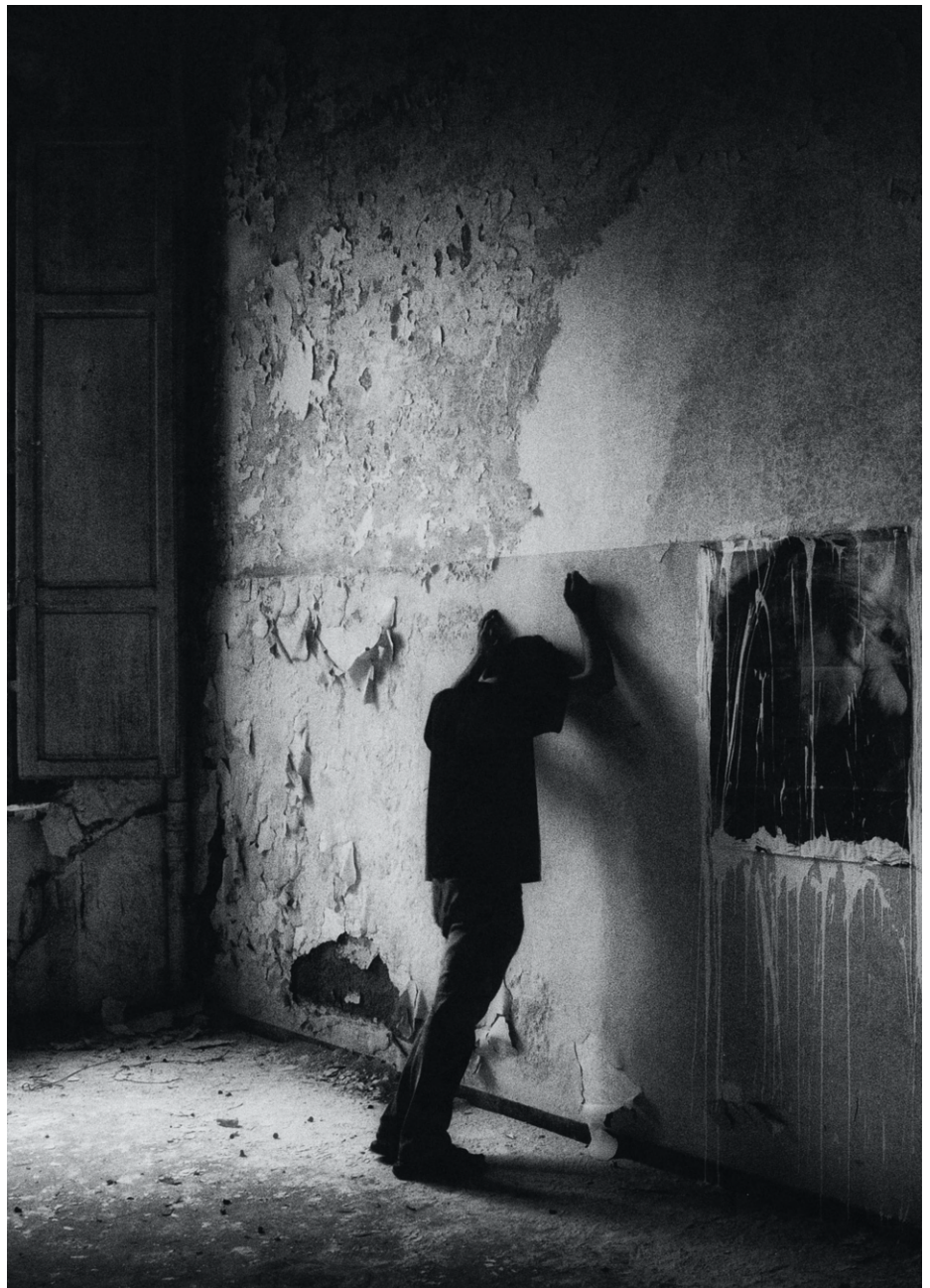
For Christians in particular, once the intelligence ministry identifies them as a convert, they are routinely monitored and questioned. Many Iranians forcibly fled their homes because of the continued harassment and fear of retribution that may fall upon their families or churches for persistently sharing and acting out their faith.

Iranian Christian Converts Interrogated and Imprisoned

Several Iranian Christian converts face persecution at the hands of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence. Fariba Dalir, age 51, began her two-year prison sentence at Evin Prison on April 16. Rahmat Rostamipour, age 49, remains imprisoned after being interrogated and arrested at his home on April 18. Rostamipour's wife Azar was originally to be arrested as well but was summed later due to a panic attack their teenage daughter suffered during the raid.

Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) agents arrested Dalir alongside five other converts in July 2021, including her fiancé Soroush. Guards held her in solitary confinement for 38 days and later released her on Nov. 18, 2021 after posting bail of about \$22,000 USD. Soroush and another convert were released in October after submitting bail of \$11,000 USD. Fariba was sentenced to five years in prison, later reduced to two years, as the judge had assumed she had a criminal record. Fariba and Soroush were married in November. Now Fariba begins her sentencing for "acting against national security by establishing and leading an Evangelical Christian church."

Rahmat's home in Anzali was raided by a dozen plainclothesmen in the early morning. IRGC agents confiscated Bibles, phones, ID cards, books, and the children's school tablets. Authorities intended to arrest his wife as well but allowed her to stay due to their daughter's trauma. Azar was summoned on April 19 for hours of interrogation, during which she was informally accused of "propaganda against the regime through involvement in house-church activities."



ICC AT WORK

AIDING AN EXODUS

During the past 40 years, the IRGC has devoted much of its resources to ensuring the country's Islamic identity. The harshness with which they have enforced this has led many to reject Islam and to seek out opportunities to have normal life experiences. At no time of the year is this more obvious than during Nowruz, the Persian New Year. As a result, International Christian Concern (ICC) sponsored several ministries to conduct outreach during this season, helping to reach the hundreds of thousands of Iranians traveling out of the country around this time. By traveling to places like Turkey, outside of the destructive reach of the IRGC, these Iranians can explore Christianity uniquely in ways prohibited inside Iran. This one project resulted in hundreds of Iranians deciding to become Christians, a decision that the repression of the IRGC would have prevented them from making.



THREATENED BY FAMILY

Omar is a college student living in the Levant, a region west of Iran, who grew up in a conservative Shia Muslim family. As a book seller, Omar connected with a local church that had organized a book tent during protests in Bagdad in 2019, when he decided to convert to Christianity. Though initially accepted by his immediate family, one of Omar's extended family members served as a leader in Hezbollah, a terrorist group largely funded by the IRGC. As a result of the conversion, this leader persecuted Omar by threatening to kill him and allowed him to be beaten when distributing Bibles. After Omar was forced to flee to protect himself, ICC staff connected with him to assist in covering his living expenses. Because of ICC's support, Omar can live in a safe home and continue to express his faith as he wishes.



ICC RECOMMENDS

- The U.S. Department of State should keep the Revolutionary Guard on its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.
- U.S. officials should emphasize the importance of religious freedom on all meetings with Iranian negotiations in nuclear deal talks.
- The U.S. Department of State should continue to identify sanctioning opportunities for curbing the influence of the IRGC.

TAKE ACTION

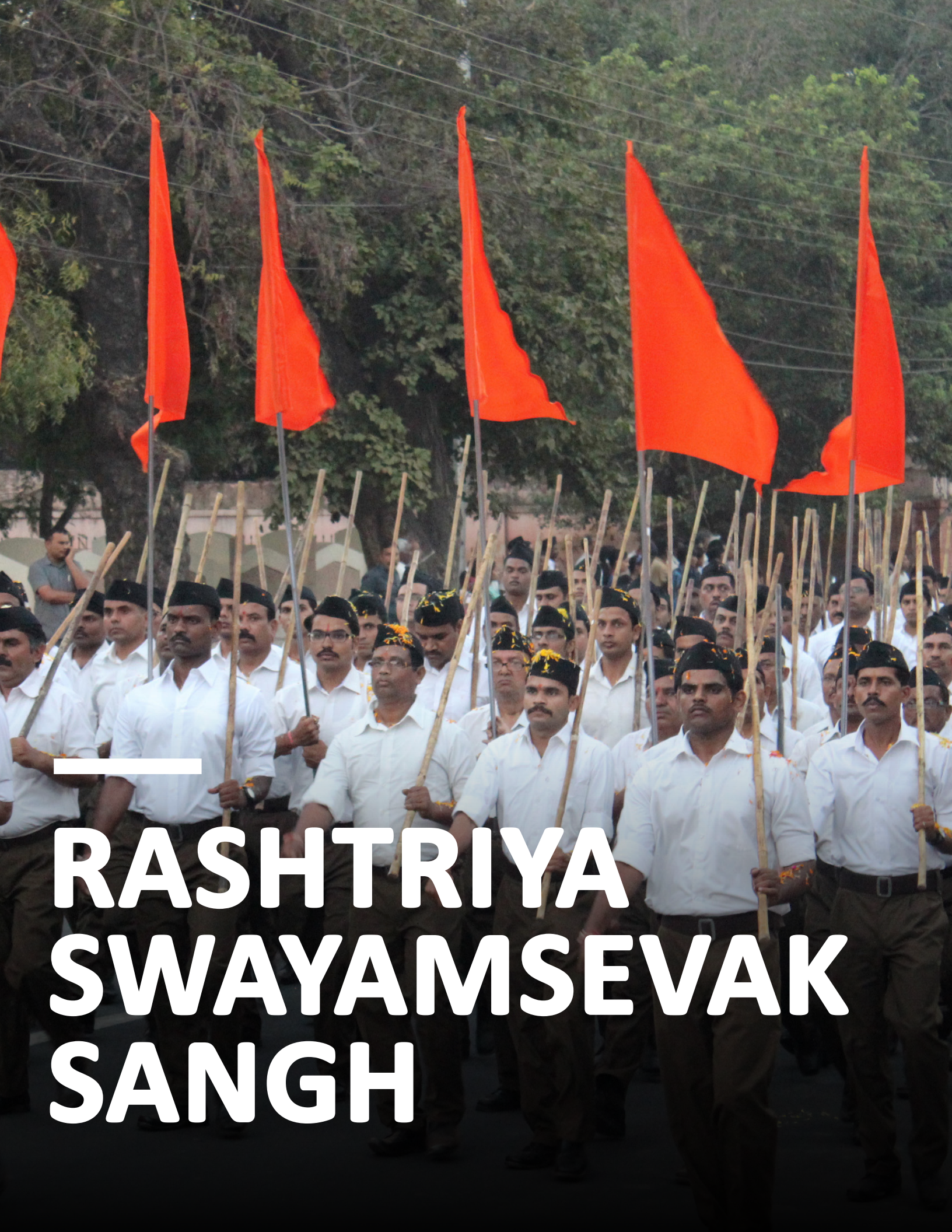
ADVOCATE

Urge the Biden Administration to keep the IRGC designated as a FTO.



Share the atrocities of the IRGC with your Congressional representative





RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH

CHRISTIANS HAVE NO PLACE IN AN RSS INDIA

FOLLOW ANY RELIGION YOU WANT, AS LONG AS IT'S HINDUISM.

The RSS continues to gain power, influencing the government and citizens toward Hindu nationalism.

SUMMARY

- The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a Hindu Nationalist group that has been influencing India for almost one hundred years
- RSS admires nationalist governments, sending envoys to learn from Hitler's Nazi party in the 1930s.
- The current prime minister, Narendra Modi, and the chief minister of the most powerful state, Yogi Adityanath, are both members of the RSS.
- The RSS is the unofficial military arm of Sangh Parivar. They train and conspire; they create mobs and incite violence in the name of a purely Hindu India.
- Though there is supposedly freedom of religion in India, but with RSS influence



OVERVIEW

India's government is increasingly adopting pro-Hindu nationalist ideologies backed by the numerous Hindu nationalist groups making up the Sang Parivar (a term used to describe a collection of Hindu nationalist groups spawned by the RSS). The RSS is one such group that has risen to power. The Hindu nationalist group principally founded the Hindutva movement in 1925, with the goal of preserving Indian national and religious identity. Under the guise of protecting Hindu values in India, the RSS has taken an uncompromising and often violent stand against religious minorities in India. They have leveraged their political power to push for laws that further persecute religious minorities, such as the "anti-conversion" laws (in India known as Religious Freedom Laws) that have been adopted in nine states.

There are an estimated 5-6 million members of the RSS, with more than 56,000 branches. They are a nationalist party through and through, drawing inspiration from and modeling their structure off the worst fascist regimes in history. One of the early leaders of the RSS, M.S. Golwalkar, wrote in his book *We, Our Nationhood Defined*, "To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging of the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here...a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by." The book was written decades ago, but the RSS has shown that they still hold to the sentiment of ousting non-Hindu influences from India.

QUICK FACTS

YEAR GROUP FORMED

1925

CURRENT LEADER

Mohan Bhagwat

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Hindu (Radical Hindu Nationalism)

PREDOMINATE REGION

5 to 6 million followers across India.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 1925**
Hindu extremists form the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), with the avowed purpose of creating a purely Hindu Indian nation.
- 1930**
RSS leaders make several study trips to Nazi Germany.
- 1948**
A year after India gains independence, a former RSS member assassinates Mohandas Gandhi.
- 1950s**
The RSS forms the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) as its political wing.
- 1980s**
The BJS becomes the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
- 1990s**
Severe wave of religious freedom abuses occurs throughout India, BJP influence often present in incidents.
- 1996**
The BJP emerges as the second-biggest party in Parliament when the Congress party, which has governed India almost exclusively since independence, suffers its worst-ever election setback.

2000

2000s

BJP tones down its hardline rhetoric, focusing on economy rather than religion.

2010

2010s

BJP increases its involvement in government positions and grows focus on religion. Anti-conversion laws are increasingly introduced in the later half of the 2010s.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) actively persecutes the Christian community in India. They mobilize mobs and protests, advocate for laws that suppress religious freedom (Anti conversion laws), slander Christians, falsely accuse them, and see them arrested or killed.

The most powerful man in India, Narendra Modi, is a proud member and supporter of the RSS. The government has aligned itself with a radical group that endorses the abuse of religious minorities.

The opposition claims that RSS members have total control of the dissemination of information. The government has allied with the media to espouse their pro-Hindu nationalist rhetoric while silencing the opposition. The RSS is said to control the Central Bureau of Investigation and Enforcement Directorate, essentially allowing RSS party members to manipulate the executive system to benefit their Hindu-nationalist agenda. The same beliefs that view Christians as a scourge that contaminates the Hindu majority nation. The constitution of India outlines the rights of the citizens to not be discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, yet the institutions that are meant to enforce these rights are controlled by a party who would sooner see them taken away than make any concession to their intransigent beliefs.

Since last year's 2021 Persecutor of the Year Awards, two more Indian states have enacted anti-conversion laws. These laws continue to be an effective weapon to punish and silence religious minorities while touting "religious freedom." The total number of states with Anti-Conversion laws in effect is 11 of India's 29 states.

India is currently not designated as a country of particular concern, despite suggestions from ICC and other concerned parties such as the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



PHYSICAL
VIOLENCE AND
IMPUNITY



FORCED
RECONVERSIONS



ANTI-CONVERSION
AND BLASPHEMY
LAWS



SOCIAL
BOYCOTTS

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY:

Hindu nationalists physically attack Christians, beat them, and incite flash mobs to additional acts of violence.

FORCED RECONVERSIONS (GHAR WAPSI):

Radical Hindu nationalists use violence and social pressure to force religious minorities to “reconvert” to Hinduism. These programs are called Ghar Wapsi, which translates to Home Coming.

ANTI-CONVERSION LAW AND BLASPHEMY LAWS:

Both legal structures facilitate a climate of impunity for Hindu nationalists and promote the Hindu nationalist sentiments and actions against non-Hindus.

SOCIAL BOYCOTTS: Hindu radicals and local villagers will pass local resolutions outlawing the practice of Christianity in the village. Christian members of the village are discriminated against—unless they agree to recant their faith—by disallowed from collecting water from the village well, buying and selling goods in the village, or interacting with other Hindu members of the village.



ATTACKED

Pastor Sathil, his wife, and his brother were injured in an attack by radical Hindu nationalists in January 2022 for alleged conversion activities. One night, a radical Hindu nationalist mob went to his house and burst in. They assaulted him, his wife, and his brother. They beat up the three with wooden clubs and fists. They were beaten so severely that Pastor Sathil feared they would kill him and his family if they continued to be there. They ran to the fields nearby in the dark. Once the mob dissipated later that night, the three were admitted to the hospital with serious injuries, including a heavy hit on Pastor Sathil's head.



IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Convert or Flee

In January, two Christians sustained severe injuries when radical Hindu nationalists brutally attacked a Pastor and his Church members. According to Pastor Hemanth Kandapan, the radicals broke into the house where the worship service was going on in the village of Odagoan, Chhattisgarh, East India. They beat Pastor Hemanth and the believers in the congregation, while an angry Hindu nationalist mob waited for them outside.

"I was under house arrest for nearly nine hours," said Hemanth Kandapan, "The entire time I was heckled and abused by the mob, even in the presence of the police."



Forty Christians Forcibly Re-Converted in India

Forty Christians were forcibly re-converted into Hinduism in a central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on Jan. 31, 2022. The members of Shalom Kalashya Church in Phuldavidi village located in Jhabua district were threatened by the radical Hindu nationalists with dire consequences if they refused to re-convert into Hinduism. The drive of reconversion by right-wing groups such as VHP and Bajrangdal is part of the larger goal to make Jhabua a conversion-free district.

According to local sources, the leaders of the VHP and Bajrangdal organized a re-conversion (Ghar Wapsi) ceremony at a temple in the village, where 40 Christians, including Anandi Ben and her family, were forced to do the rituals of breaking the coconut and eating food (Prasad) offered to gods.

Pastor Assaulted

A Christian pastor was assaulted by a mob of radical Hindus in Delhi. The mob accused him of being on a conversion mission and forced him to chant "Jai Sri Ram" or "Glory to Lord Rama," before attacking him and stealing his bag. A few bystanders told the mob to take the pastor to the police, but the mob said the police were not answering the phone and decided to deal with him themselves.

Families Exiled

Two families were socially boycotted for refusing to recant their Christian faith in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. As part of the social boycott, the two Christian families were strictly prohibited from fetching drinking water from the only public water source in the village, forbidden to purchase groceries from the store in the village, and prevented from work.

Pastor Murdered

Yalam Sankar, a Christian pastor, has been brutally murdered in Angampalli village, Bijhapur district of Chhattisgarh state, Central India. Five masked men broke into the pastor's house, dragged him out, and stabbed him to death. The family and the entire Christian community in the region are appalled and devastated.

Outlawing Christianity

A pastor shares his experience after false conversion charges.

Many Indian states have anti-conversion laws that allow for the arrest and abuse of Christians.

Pastor Brahma was arrested September 2021 for alleged conversion charges. He was taken by the police during their morning service and was kept in the station before eventually being moved to jail.

While he was in police custody, he was reported to have been ruthlessly beaten by the police, as well as starved for 24 hours while being interrogated. During his interrogation, police went to his house and looked for any evidence to make a case against the pastor.

They ransacked the house, confiscating Bibles and songbooks. The presence of Hindu nationalist mobs forced the family to move to another village.

ICC provided the funds for the family to afford food, clothing, and rent in their challenging time. The family was very grateful. Pastor Brahma expressed his gratitude, "Thank you so much ICC for your great help to us. My family and I are very happy for your great support. ICC stood with us when we were lonely and discouraged. In times of trouble and hopelessness, you stood with us. We are really strengthened and encouraged."

The future is uncertain for Pastor Brahma and his family, but ICC supports them and any Christian family suffering at the hands of radical Hindu nationalists, the police who sympathize with RSS beliefs, and the government that is becoming increasingly intransigent.

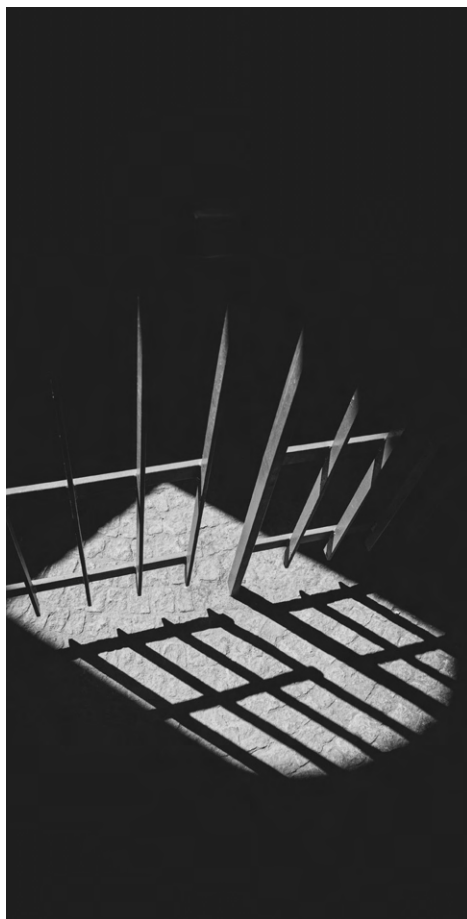


ICC AT WORK



A HOME TO PRAY IN

Ishani is a 20-year-old Christian woman living with her husband's family. Last October, the family interrupted her prayers with the local Christian pastor and scolded her. They had told her not to pray in their house or invite Christians over. They hit her and drove her out of the house, disowning her. When she tried to return with her husband, also a Christian, the brother-in-law refused to let them back in the house. He declared, "You and your wife become Christians, so there is no place for you both in this house and village, also there will be no right upon our land and property." They were driven from the village, in need of a new home. ICC supplied them with the money needed to rent a place, purchase food, utensils and blankets.



ARRESTED FOR PREACHING

Pastor Sareek is a cross-cultural missionary, making him an outsider to the state he currently practices his evangelism. This made him an even bigger target for Hindu nationalists already on the hunt for Christians. One such radical lured the pastor and three other believers to his house under the false pretense of praying for the sick. The police were waiting for them, and they were arrested for violating the anti-conversion laws. While they deal with the false accusations and court corruption, ICC provided food rations to the families of the four men.



RESTORATION AFTER FIRE

Pastor Kalindi is the senior minister at his Church in India. Earlier this year, the church building was set on fire by radical Hindu nationalists. Church books, furniture, electrical equipment, instruments, and the entire roof were reduced to ashes. ICC is coordinating with the pastor to repair as much of the church as we can. There have been no arrests or even a serious investigation into what caused the fire. RSS agents walk away from arson with impunity.



**2.3% OF INDIA'S
POPULATION IS
CHRISTIAN**

ACCORDING TO CIA WORLD FACTBOOK

ICC RECOMMENDS

- RSS should be designated as an Entity of Particular Concern (EPC) by the U.S. Department of State.
- The United States should impose individual sanctions on known leaders of RSS using the Global Magnitsky Act.
- All bilateral meetings that the United States conducts with India should have a standing agenda item pertaining directly to RSS and their ongoing extremist activities.
- All aid and economic benefits sourcing from the United States to India must be made conditional to measured improvements made by India to foster religious freedom.
- The United States must pressure Indian leadership to publicly condemn the RSS and their leadership.

TAKE ACTION

GRASSROOTS

Contact Congressional leaders and encourage them to raise the issue of Hindu nationalism as a direct threat to democracy and societal stability in South Asia.

U.S. POLICY

United States diplomatic corps needs to raise these issues directly with their Indian counterparts in their bilateral meetings.

U.S. POLICY

United States should tie economic and military partnership advancement to a tiered system of improvement. India needs to make intentional steps to improve religious freedom conditions for religious minorities. These steps would be rewarded with further economic and military cooperation.

U.S. POLICY

United States leadership (Congressional and Executive) needs to call on the Modi government to publicly condemn Hindu nationalism and its various manifestations.



SAHEL JIHADIST GROUPS

THE MELTING POT OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

MILITANT JIHADISM IS SPREADING ACROSS AFRICA'S SAHEL

Though jihadist groups sometimes spar over territory and resources, a common sense of Islamic supremacy animates them all and is increasingly driving them together in Africa's Sahel

SUMMARY

- The Sahel is debilitated by poverty, desertification, and weak governances—all factors that make civilian populations more vulnerable to jihadist attacks and recruiting.
- As with militant jihad anywhere in the world, Christian communities in the Sahel are at particular risk as their belief system stands in direct opposition to jihadism.
- Recent years have seen not only a rise in jihadism but an increase in these groups' sophistication, coordination, and resources.
- In addition to the direct threat that these jihadist groups pose to societal order in the region, governments' helplessness in the face of their rise has created mass discontent and political upheaval.



OVERVIEW

The Sahel is a strip of land stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea immediately south of Northern Africa's Sahara Desert. It consists of five core countries—Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania, and extends to include parts of Senegal, Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Eritrea.

The Sahel is home to some of the poorest countries in the world, but at the same time, some of the world's fastest-growing populations. Most of these populations are farmers or herders, and desertification is taking away their livelihoods which is fueling ethnic clashes and furthering division among communities. Jihadist groups capitalize on the political instability in these

regions and grievances of the people. They operate easily due to weak government structures within the region and are easily able to recruit members—usually adolescent boys—to their cause by offering them services their government fails to provide.

Any effective response to this crisis must involve a robust coalition capable of handling a dynamic, international enemy. Jihadism in Africa is an amorphous problem made of entities comfortable operating across borders and under a decentralized command structure. Any solitary attempt to quash jihadist groups in just one area will shift the problem elsewhere, ultimately making the problem worse.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2010

2009

Boko Haram starts in northern Nigeria, eventually becoming one of the world's deadliest terror groups.

2012

Islamist militant groups take over northern Mali and declare it a caliphate, ruled by Sharia law, which lasts for 10 months.

JANUARY 2013

An intervention by French troops reclaims the government for the Malian state, yet jihadist groups remain active in the north.

2014

Boko Haram kidnaps 276 mostly Christian schoolgirls, leading to international outrage (#bringbackourgirls) and military action, moving the terror group into the less governed Lake Chad region. Kidnapping for ransom becomes a lucrative strategy for terror groups and many mass kidnappings continue to this day.

2015

2015

The Islamic in the State Greater Sahara (ISGS), based in Mali, pledges allegiance to Islamic State in 2015 and since then has spread throughout the Sahel region, including the tri-border region between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

2015

Boko Haram splits, with a significant faction pledging allegiance to Islamic State and forming Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)

JANUARY 2016

30 people are killed in a double terrorist attack perpetrated by the Mali-based group al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) at the Splendid Hotel and the Cappuccino restaurant in Ouagadougou. Many of the victims are Western expatriates. The incident marks the rise in jihadist activity in Burkina Faso.

MARCH 2017

The Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) terror group is founded, quickly becoming one of the deadliest terror groups in the world

2020

JUNE 4, 2021

160 people are killed in and around the village of Solhan by Islamist militants in the bloodiest jihadist attack to date witnessed by Burkina Faso.

JAN - DEC 2021

Each month of last year sees jihadist attacks in Niger, making 2021 the first time Niger experiences jihadist attacks carried out with frequency.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

The Sahel region of Africa has received global attention due to the marked rise in extremism over the past decade, in what is now considered an epidemic of jihadism.

Mali is known to be the epicenter of the Sahel's insurgency, ever since jihadists hijacked a coup attempt in 2012 and established a caliphate. Though French military troops drove out the Jihadists just months later, the northern portion of the country has remained a hotbed of terrorism. Many extremist groups call northern Mali their safe haven and continue to train and recruit their militants from there while conducting attacks across borders into Niger and Burkina Faso.

In 2021, Burkina Faso experienced a record year of conflict and replaced Mali as the epicenter of Sahel terrorism. On June 4, 2021, the country underwent the bloodiest attack yet in its six-year struggle with jihadists. Al-Qaida affiliates killed more than 135 civilians over two nights. Seven months and several attacks later, soldiers staged a coup and announced a government run by a military junta.

In Niger, attacks doubled in 2021 compared to 2020. In March 2021, insurgents raided three villages in Niger's Tahoua region bordering Mali and massacred 137 civilians. Blamed on affiliates of the Islamic State, the attack followed a January attack that killed 100, as well as an attack weeks earlier which left 58 civilians dead. In addition to battling terrorists in its tri-border region with Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger also faces ongoing attacks by Boko Haram in its southeast.

In addition to Niger, Boko Haram has some presence in Chad and Cameroon. Most of the Boko Haram activity, however, remains in northern Nigeria where they have maintained an insurgency for 13 years. Now split into two factions, Boko Haram seems to be making a comeback after its territory was significantly reduced in 2015, the year it pledged allegiance to Islamic State and created the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram soldiers, largely forced out of northern Nigeria, entered the Lake Chad Basin where weak governance has enabled them to regain strength.

As Jihadists continue to gain momentum throughout the Sahel, they will deepen their influence across borders and claim territory further into Western Africa. If left without international intervention, 2022 is projected to be a year of expansionism for radicals on a quest for global Jihad.

SAHEL JIHADIST GROUPS

JAMA'AT NASR AL-ISLAM WAL MUSLIMIN (JNIM) COALITION: Coalition of Salafi-jihadist insurgent groups operating in the Sahel. Founded in 2017, JNIM has waged a campaign of violence against civilians, local security forces, international militaries, and UN peacekeepers.

ISLAMIC STATE IN THE GREATER SAHARA (ISGS): Operationally independent subgroup of ISWAP, primarily operates in portions of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It seeks to establish a Salafi-Jihadist caliphate primarily by seeking to inflame community tensions and violently compete with other jihadist groups. It is known for its violence against civilians.

ISWAP: Recognized by the Islamic State as its West African presence, the group is an umbrella organization for all IS factions in West Africa. It is primarily active in the Chad Basin, where it fights extensively with Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

BOKO HARAM: Closely affiliated with Islamic State, primarily operates in northeastern Nigeria.

AL-QAIDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM): Islamist militant branch of al-Qaida seeking to overthrow the Algerian government and institute an Islamic theocracy in Algeria.



KIDNAPPED

Sister Gloria Cecilia Narvaez was abducted outside of a church in Karangasso, southern Mali, where she had been working as a missionary for 10 years.

A video was released in July 2017 by the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), a branch of al-Qaida that claimed responsibility for her abduction.

"Gloria Cecilia Narváez was sent by her congregation to Mali to preach Christianity and convert Muslims to their religion," the abductors said in the video. "She and her congregation only intend to strip the Muslims of Mali of their beliefs and replace them with lies."

Thankfully, Sister Narvaex was released in October 2021

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



Islamic Militants Take Advantage of Chaos

West Africa continues to suffer from Islamic militants responsible for acts of terrorism and violent persecution of Christians in the region. Countries in the region that face imminent threats include Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Niger, and Togo to name a few.

Islamic militants have used this tension to recruit new members while also

capitalizing on weak government intervention in West Africa. In May 2021, a coup took place in Mali, likely due to the perceived lack of governmental response to insurgents. A similar coup occurred in 2022 in Burkina Faso. Mixed reactions exist among citizens of both countries, with some viewing the takeovers as liberation while others express concern about harsh treatment.

Terrorists Kill 41

Burkina Faso authorities have declared two days of mourning after Islamic terrorists killed at least 41 people on Dec. 23.

The ambush is one of the deadliest single-day losses on the civilian militia to date. In November, at least 53 people were killed by insurgents in an attack on a security post, prompting protests over the government's failure to restrain the

ongoing attacks.

"In this painful circumstance and as a tribute to the valiant VDP and civilians who fell in defense of the homeland, the president of Burkina Faso decrees a national mourning period of 48 hours," government spokesperson Alkassoum Maiga said in a statement.

Eight Soldiers Killed

Eight soldiers were killed and at least seven injured on Dec. 29 in western Mali, the army said in a statement.

"A unit in the Nara area was the target of a complex attack combining IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and heavy weapons," the statement said.

The army also said that "on the side of the assailants, 31 bodies were discovered."

While no group has claimed responsibility for the attack, armed groups have brought terror to the Sahel region for years, killing thousands and displacing millions.

Jihadists have had control over much of Northern Mali since a coup attempt in 2012, which has enabled them to recruit, train, and equip fighters for nearly a decade. From there, fighters have crossed the borders into Niger and Burkina Faso, persecuting anyone who opposes their extremist agenda, especially Christian believers.



An Appeal to Governments

Wife of missionary kidnapped in Niger 5 years ago appeals for his release

The wife of a California missionary who's held hostage in Niger since 2016 spoke out at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

Detailing the incident, Els Woodke, the wife of Jeff Woodke, stated:

"Some men drove to his house in the early evening in a small pick-up truck, got out, killed both of Jeff's guards and forced Jeff into the truck at gunpoint.

"The truck was followed for a while by Jeff's neighbors but was last seen driving into the night north toward the Malian border. Now more than five years later he remains hostage, held by jihadists somewhere in the Sahel."

Woodke explained that her husband was in Niger to minister to nomads and provide them with permanent homes.

"It was not sustainable to have that many people going out with their herds and... living the nomadic lifestyle," she said. "So Jeff was helping people to find fixation points. So to that end, he would dig wells, he would build schools, he organized grain banks."

Woodke stated that her husband was believed to have been kidnapped by the West African affiliate of ISIS.

"He has been held by ISIS GS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in the Greater Sahara) for most of his captivity," she said.

Citing "multiple sources of information," Woodke asserted that her husband "was moved from the custody of ISIS GS to the custody of JNIM (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin), a West African affiliate of al-Qaida."

According to the Christian Post, Woodke now believes that her husband is in the custody of JNIM.

"We feel that this is the most opportune time for Jeff to be released since he was kidnapped," she said.

"Today, I am making very specific appeals for help from the governments of Mali and the United States," she said. "To the government of Mali, I ask that you make the release of Jeff and all hostages held by JNIM and the affiliated groups to be a precondition of negotiations with JNIM."

Woodke asked Secretary of State Antony Blinken "to honor the promise you made to me and to the families for other

American hostages when you met with us" and vowed to "not take any options off the table in Jeff's case."

The ISGS, based in Mali, pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2015 and since then has spread throughout the Sahel region, including the tri-border region between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, the site of frequent attacks by jihadist groups.

Please continue to pray for the end of Islamic extremism. Please join us in praying for Jeff Woodke and his family, that the Lord would grant them peace, and release Mr. Woodke from his captors. Please pray for the governments involved in this case to act quickly and efficiently, so that Mr. Woodke can be reunited with his family.



Els Woodke during a news conference on November 17. Photo by Cliff Owen/AP Photo

ICC AT WORK



REACHING FAMILIES

In the beginning of this year, by the grace of God, ICC reached out to more than 200 families of martyred pastors and missionaries, as well as active and retired pastors and missionaries persecuted in Northern Nigeria.

The north is the stronghold of Islam in Nigeria, and is frequently targeted by Boko Haram terrorists. ICC provided food and other essential items as well as cash assistance to these families located in the heart of Christian persecution.

CALLED TO PREACH, WITH NEW WHEELS

Pastor John* was captured by Jihadists in Burkina Faso along with his son, and seven church congregants. Miraculously, he was released four months later, though the rest of the group remains in captivity. When he returned home, Pastor John received trauma training, and felt called to continue to preach in the war-torn region. To help, ICC provided pastor John with his own motorbike, to enable him to minister to his community and preach the gospel to the unreached.

*Name changed for security.





**3.4 MILLION
PEOPLE **DISPLACED****
ACCORDING TO UN REFUGEE AGENCY

ICC RECOMMENDS

- That the United States continue investing in counterterror operations in Africa, with a special eye to training local troops.
- That the international community consider how terrorism in the region impacts Christian communities and extend special protection to them.
- That networks between groups be disrupted.
- That international funding be allocated to the area's vulnerable Christian populations, both in aid and in combatting extremist thought.

TAKE ACTION

PRAY

Pray for Christian communities in areas of terrorist control.

STAY INFORMED

The growth of the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in the Sahel threatens Christian communities in the region. Read two articles ICC published about the complex issues of the Sahel.



Growth of
Islamic State
in the Sahel
Threatens
Christian
Communities



Islamic State
in Central
and Southern
Africa a Threat
to Vulnerable
Christian
Populations



INDIVIDUALS





—
**AYATOLLAH ALI
KHAMENEI**

A DESPOT OF DEATH FOR CHRISTIANS

CHOKING OUT FREEDOM OF RELIGION

The Grand Ayatollah of Iran continually works to prevent the spread of Christianity in Iran and to punish those who choose to openly worship.

SUMMARY

- The Grand Ayatollah is the leader of Iran and exerts control over virtually every aspect of Iranian life.
- The position first gained total power in the country as a result of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which overthrew the U.S.-backed government.
- As an Islamic Republic, Iran poses severe limits on the ability of Christians to live out their religion and worship.
- Under the leadership of the Ayatollah, Iran has been designated as a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. Department of State for severe religious freedom violations.
- The Ayatollah is responsible for the brutal torture and execution of many Iranian Christians.



ABOUT

OFFICIAL TITLE

Supreme Leader of Iran

ASSUMED OFFICE

August 6, 1989

BORN:

April 19, 1939

OVERVIEW

Ali Khamenei currently serves as the Grand Ayatollah of Iran, also known as the Supreme Leader. In this role, Khamenei is Iran's spiritual leader and oversees the entirety of the government, exerting control over every aspect of Iranian life. While Iran regularly holds elections for Parliament and the executive role of president, these elections are widely considered corrupted and undemocratic, with the Ayatollah heavily influencing the results. In addition to the power the supreme leader exerts over these branches of government, the Ayatollah wields ultimate command over Iran's judicial branch and security forces, which are the two major drivers of persecution against Christians in the country. The tremendous power of the Grand Ayatollah dates to the Iranian revolution of 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini seized power from the U.S.-backed government and made Iran into the Islamic theocracy it is today. As a result of this unchecked power partnered with a conservative theocracy, the Ayatollah has consistently persecuted Iran's Christian population through imprisonment, torture, and executions for decades. Despite claims from the Ayatollah that the Iranian government respects freedom of religion, his actions and the actions of those under his command have conveyed a radically different message.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1980

1979

Iranian Revolution puts the Grand Ayatollah as the Supreme Leader of Iran overseeing all Iranian affairs.

1981

Ali Khamenei becomes president of Iran.

1989

Following the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ali Khamenei becomes the Grand Ayatollah.

2020

2021

Ayatollah Khamenei heavily influences presidential election, allowing the new president to be Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline cleric known for severe human rights abuses.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Iran, an officially Shia Islamic country known for its harsh religious enforcement, has long been closed to the outside world. This makes sharing the gospel and practicing Christianity challenging, forcing the church underground and keeping Christianity at bay with constant arrests and torture of pastors. The Grand Ayatollah at the helm of Iran directs all this persecution by controlling virtually every aspect of Iranian life, dealing grave brutality to those who do not conform to his strict conservative ideologies.

Although the Ayatollah recently has been claiming that there is religious freedom for all in Iran, evidence from the ground shows that this is not the case. It is true that the Ayatollah's government allows Christian worship within Iran, but this is only for certain Christians, such as Assyrians and Armenians, whose roots in Iran date back centuries. For Protestant Christians and Christian converts (Muslim Background Believers or MBBs), there are no churches where they can worship. As a result, many Persian-speaking Christians, or Christians who converted and thus do not worship in the same language as Assyrians and Armenians, revert to worship in house churches, which the Ayatollah views as a threat to national security and as grounds for arrest.

Therefore, under the Ayatollah's harsh policies, Christians found attempting to spread the faith in Iran or worshipping in a house church are often arrested and sent to Evin Prison, a brutal prison in Tehran well known for its torture of prisoners. ICC reported on the human rights abuses in Evin to the U.S. government, finding that dozens of Christians held there on account of their faith had faced horrid living conditions, violence from guards, and a lack of proper medical care.

However, despite the Ayatollah's attempts to limit the spread of Christianity in Iran, the purported religious uniformity of Iran by its regime may be far from the reality of its religious demography. A survey released in February of this year by a Netherlands-based research organization named GAMAAN (in English, the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran) showed a startling amount of religious diversity among Iranians, with only a third of participants claiming to be Shia Muslims. Christian ministry to countries like Iran has become easier for accessing information and communication, causing the Ayatollah's regime to increase its scrutiny of online platforms and attempt to heavily regulate internet use within the nation. While persecution under the Ayatollah's crushing rule remains a brutal reality, there is still hope for the spread of Christianity in Iran.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



IMPRISONMENT



TORTURE



RESTRICTIONS ON
WORSHIP



EXPORTING
PERSECUTION

IMPRISONMENT: Under the direction of the Ayatollah, Christians are consistently arrested for attempting to worship and discuss their faith.

TORTURE: Once imprisoned, Christians continually face brutal living conditions and torture by prison guards.

RESTRICTIONS ON METHODS OF WORSHIP: Christian converts in Iran are prevented from congregating for worship services. They are not allowed to have any registered churches, and house churches are considered a threat to national security by the Ayatollah.

EXPORTING PERSECUTION: The Ayatollah suffocates Christianity throughout the Middle East by aiding militias in Iraq and groups like Hezbollah that harass Christians regularly.



LOCKED UP

Youcef Nadarkhani is an Iranian who converted to Christianity at age 19 and became a pastor in the country. He was initially arrested in 2016 along with four other Christians when authorities under the direction of the Ayatollah raided several house churches, charging Pastor Youcef with promoting “Zionist Christianity.” Although a court reduced his sentence and he has been able to leave prison on furlough on a few occasions, Pastor Youcef continues to suffer greatly from his treatment in the Iranian prison system for his willingness to live out his faith and share it in worship with others.



IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



Three Converts Arrested

While gathering for a church prayer meeting, Ahmad Sarparast, Morteza Mashoodkari, and Ayoob Poor-Rezazadeh were arrested around 10 p.m. on Sept. 5, 2021. Intelligence officers raided the home and transferred the three Christian converts to an unknown location for interrogation.

The converts were arrested in

Rasht, where the Christian convert community has been heavily impacted by persecution. Currently, 11 local Christians are serving long prison sentences, including Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani. Another Rasht local, Mohammadreza Omid (Youhan), is living in internal exile and four more are currently awaiting their sentencing.

No Place to Worship

Three Iranian Christian converts submitted a joint letter questioning how and where they can worship when their long prison sentences are complete. Babak Hosseinzadeh, Behnam Akhlaghi, and Zaman Saheb Fadaie, were all arrested on charges of “acting against national security” for participation in a house church. However, Iran only recognizes churches for Christians of Armenian and Assyrian descent, leaving Persian converts without an option to worship.



Victims of Iran’s Article 500 Summoned to Serve Prison Sentences

In a two-day span, five Iranian Christian converts were summoned to begin serving prison sentences. On Nov. 10, authorities summoned Milad Gourdazi, Amin Khaki and Alirez Nourmohammadi to serve three-year prison sentences each. On Nov. 11, 2021, authorities summoned Habib Heydari and Sasan Khosravi to complete their one-year prison sentences.

One year prior to their summoning, intelligence agents raided the homes of Milad, Amin and Alirez, along with other converts, and confiscated personal belongings and Christian literature. Though no one was immediately arrested, the converts faced harassment. They were ultimately charged under the amended Penal Code Article 500 for “propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam” and given the maximum sentence of five years, which was later reduced to three years. The three Iranian Christians were originally summoned in September but their prison time was postponed due to an additional hearing scheduled for Dec. 16. Their presence is now not required at the hearing and authorities ordered them to begin their sentencing immediately.



Maryam Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh in a 2014 photo (World Watch Monitor)

Embracing the Call to Suffering

Many years ago, two Iranian women named Maryam and Marziyeh were radically saved. Like so many others they were inspired to share the Good News, so they devoted their life to ministry and began blanketing Tehran with Bibles.

Each night, they would carry roughly 140 New Testaments in their backpacks around Tehran. Regardless of the weather, the women would trek out into the night to drop the New Testaments into mailboxes throughout the city. After almost three years, they distributed 20,000 New Testaments in different parts of Tehran. The women also had two house churches in their apartment.

One early morning in March 2009, Marziyeh received a phone call from a stranger. He had some questions about their car documents and asked her to go to the police station.

Acting under policies set by the Ayatollah, the police then ransacked their apartment and discovered the Bibles and other Christian materials. The women were transferred to the police station. They said their goodbyes to one another, fearing that their time on earth was dwindling. In a moment where they felt helpless, they started praying in tongues. Maryam said, “We really praise God for this gift because we could see how, in those difficult moments, the presence of Holy Spirit really strengthened us and helped us and prayed on our behalf.”

Upon their arrest, the women were soon sent to the notorious Evin Prison, also known as Iran’s “torture factory.”

When they entered Evin Prison, Maryam and Marziyeh were surprised to see many respectful intellectuals behind bars, including other prisoners of conscience, imprisoned simply because their beliefs were against the Ayatollah. The women

even encountered children who were in prison because of the crimes of their parents.

Inside Evin Prison, they had many opportunities to share their faith with other prisoners. One day, one of the interrogators became angry because he heard that they were sharing their faith within the prison.

During their time in prison, people from around the world began sending letters to them. As thousands of letters flooded in, the jailers were put on high alert, knowing that the world was watching. As a result, the women began receiving better treatment from the guards. At the same time, the guards were deeply touched as they read through the letters.

Despite attempts by the Ayatollah to keep Iranians like Maryam and Marziyeh from freely living out their faith, these two strong women persevered.

ICC AT WORK

EVIN PRISON

Evin Prison is one of the most notorious places within the harsh Iranian prison system. Commonly referred to as the “torture factory,” Evin is in Tehran and houses many prisoners of conscience, including Christians arrested on account of their faith. Guards at Evin regularly mistreat prisoners, torturing and abusing them. An ICC report from 2020 revealed that 60% of arrested Christians in Iran had served time at Evin. During the COVID-19 pandemic, prisoners were regularly denied the medical care they needed after an outbreak of the virus. Several Christian prisoners, including Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, were at great risk of exposure due to overcrowding and poor living conditions. As a result of the atrocious persecution in the prison, ICC asked the U.S. Treasury Department to impose Global Magnitsky sanctions against Evin Prison for its grave human rights abuses. This request was granted in an effort to bring these abuses to an end.



AIDING THE CHURCH

Because of the Ayatollah’s crackdown on Persian-speaking Christians through the arrest of house church members, many such Christians live in constant fear that they will be taken by authorities and brutally tortured. ICC has worked to come to the aid of these Christians by supporting Persian-speaking house churches so that their members can continue to spread the Gospel to their neighbors. Additionally, ICC has provided medical aid to families affected by harsh persecution, alleviating some of the suffering caused by the crushing policies of the Ayatollah. Despite the struggles that Iranian Christians face daily, ICC staff has worked tirelessly to ensure that these people remember that they are not alone. Even by organizing a letter-writing program for prisoners suffering in Evin, ICC strives to reach every Iranian Christian and empower them to live out their faith amidst the darkness of the Ayatollah’s regime.



547,000 CHRISTIANS LIVE IN IRAN

ESTIMATE BY WORLD CHRISTIAN DATABASE

ICC RECOMMENDS

- The United States should ensure that religious freedom is emphasized as a requirement for any deals with Iran under the Ayatollah.
- The U.S. Department of State should continue to sanction Iran as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom violations.
- The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps under the Ayatollah's command should remain designated as a foreign terrorist organization.
- The United States and its allies should continue to push the Ayatollah on his claims of expanding religious freedom in Iran.
- U.S. officials should continue to inquire with Iranian officials regarding the status of Christian prisoners of conscience arrested under the Ayatollah's policies.

TAKE ACTION

LISTEN

Hear from two survivors of Iran's Evin Prison on ICC President Jeff King's Podcast



SHARE

Learn about the harm of the Ayatollah's prisons and spread these videos of testimonies from prisoners.





**NASIR
EL-RUFAI**

NIGERIA'S MOST NOTORIOUS GOVERNOR

FROM SHIFTING THE BLAME TO LOCKING DOWN VILLAGES

Governor Nasir El-Rufai would like the world to think that he's simply incompetent. The reality is much more sinister.

SUMMARY

- Since taking the governorship in 2015, El-Rufai has repeatedly placed entire Christian communities under house arrest after they were attacked by militants, making them vulnerable to follow-up attacks that have killed hundreds over the years.
- El-Rufai has a history of inflammatory comments on the religious tensions in Nigeria.
- El-Rufai is one of Nigeria's most prominent politicians and a close associate of President Muhammadu Buhari.
- El-Rufai has amassed significant wealth as founder of El-Rufai and Partners, a construction consulting firm.
- Social media shows the El-Rufai family vacationing in Florida, shopping in Paris, and attending exclusive private schools in Canada even as militant bands attack innocent Christians back home in Kaduna State.



ABOUT

OFFICIAL TITLE

Governor of Kaduna State

ASSUMED OFFICE

May 29, 2015

BORN:

February 16, 1960

PARTY AFFILIATION

All Progressives Congress
(2013-Present)

OVERVIEW

The last several months of 2016 were violent ones in Kaduna State. An estimated 50,000 houses were burned, 215 people were injured, and more than 100 were killed in Kaduna's Jema'a Local Government Area (LGA) in the last quarter of 2016 alone.

On Christmas Eve 2016, Fulani militants stormed the village of Goska in Jema'a, killing 14 and wounding dozens more. The attackers managed to burn 80 houses before running away.

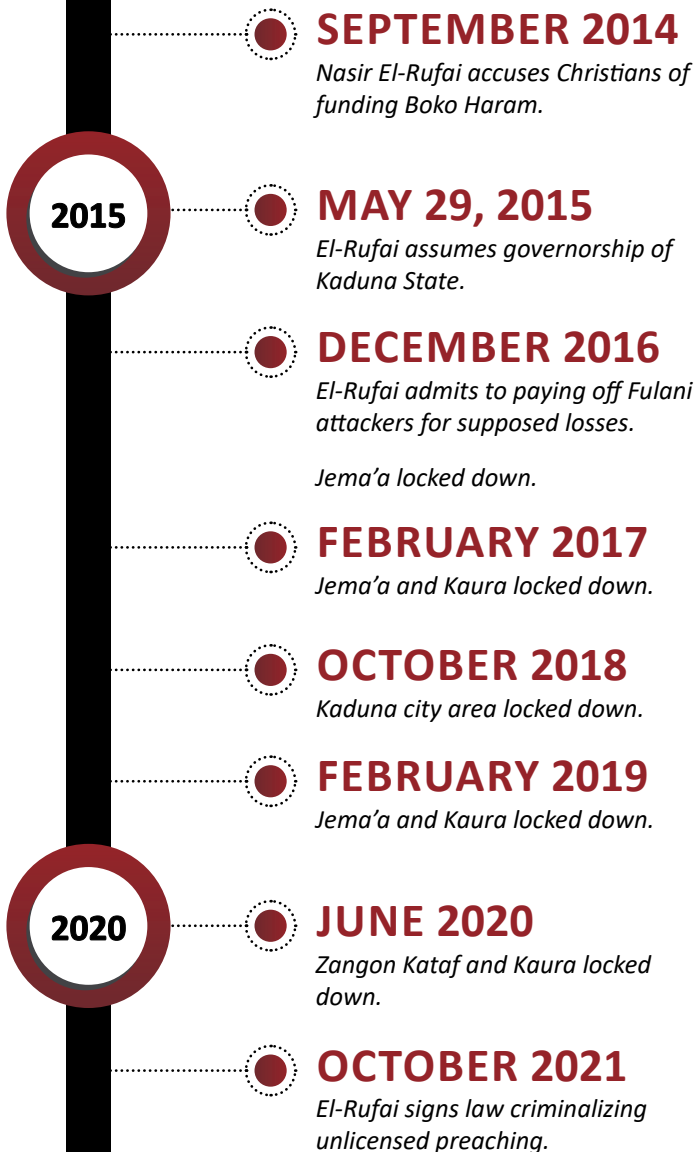
The Goska attack attracted international attention not because violence in Jema'a was new, but because, just five days earlier, Goska had been rendered helpless by Governor Nasir El-Rufai, who had put the entire community under house arrest. Restricting movement, he said at the time, would make it impossible for the attackers to travel to their victims' villages. Instead, it made

it impossible for villagers to look out for incoming attackers or effectively organize for collective defense.

Despite international condemnation of the lockdown in Goska, El-Rufai has imposed at least five more lockdowns since the 2016 attack. In a pattern now all too familiar, villagers protest the lack of security provided by the El-Rufai administration, El-Rufai locks them down, and they are attacked by militants.

Though he would like the international community to think that the violence in Kaduna is due to bad actors operating outside of his control, the reality is that El-Rufai is actively endangering his people and making the persecution problem worse.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 
- A vertical timeline with a black bar on the left. Red circles mark the years 2015 and 2020. Red dots mark specific events. Dotted lines connect the events to the timeline bar.
- SEPTEMBER 2014**
Nasir El-Rufai accuses Christians of funding Boko Haram.
 - 2015**
 - MAY 29, 2015**
El-Rufai assumes governorship of Kaduna State.
 - DECEMBER 2016**
El-Rufai admits to paying off Fulani attackers for supposed losses.
Jema'a locked down.
 - FEBRUARY 2017**
Jema'a and Kaura locked down.
 - OCTOBER 2018**
Kaduna city area locked down.
 - FEBRUARY 2019**
Jema'a and Kaura locked down.
 - 2020**
 - JUNE 2020**
Zangon Kataf and Kaura locked down.
 - OCTOBER 2021**
El-Rufai signs law criminalizing unlicensed preaching.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Nasir El-Rufai's political career has been marked by increasing hostility toward Christians. In the leadup to his governorship, he accused the Christian Association of Nigeria of funding the Boko Haram terror group to make Muslims look bad. This wild claim had no basis in reality, but it did serve as a preview of El-Rufai's perspective toward Christians.

During the unrest in Goska, El-Rufai released a statement claiming that the Fulani were from Cameroon and Niger and that he had located the attackers and compensated them for losses they claimed to have sustained during the fighting. El-Rufai's comments were clearly designed to cast him as a justice-oriented leader trying to creatively stop the killings. However, the fact that he personally knew who the attackers were, engaged in conversation and financial transactions with them, and then let them go without any attempt at justice is concerning in the extreme.

"We got a group of people that were going round trying to trace some of these people in Cameroon, Niger Republic and so on to tell them that there is a new governor who is Fulani like them and has no problem paying compensations for lives lost and he is begging them to stop killing. There are one or two [Fulani communities] that asked for monetary compensation. We said no problem, and we paid some," El-Rufai said.

This statement is particularly insidious considering a post by El-Rufai on Twitter in July 2012 threatening anyone who might challenge the Fulani, even in the line of military duty, "We will write this for all to read. Anyone, soldier or not that kills the Fulani takes a loan payable one day no matter how long it takes." Also, when he took office as governor in 2015, he proclaimed, "The Fulani have nothing to fear, since a Fulani [is] now governor of the state." These statements, taken together, help illuminate the permissive atmosphere El-Rufai has created that has led to the deaths of so many Christians at the hands of Fulani militants.

After years of efforts, El-Rufai enacted a law in Fall 2021 giving Kaduna State the authority to license—or revoke the licenses of—religious teachers in the state. By criminalizing unauthorized religious teaching, this law treads unprecedented ground in Nigeria. It has never been done before and suggests that dark days are ahead for religious freedom in Kaduna while El-Rufai and his type are in charge.

3,348

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE KIDNAPPED IN KADUNA STATE IN 2021

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



RESTRICTIONS ON CHURCHES



IMPRISONMENT



DENIAL OF RIGHTS



LEGAL RESTRICTIONS

RESTRICTIONS ON CHURCHES: The religious restrictions introduced by Governor El-Rufai in 2021 include regulations on open-air evangelism and the playing of religious messages on loudspeakers. These regulations apply to Muslim and Christians equally—on paper at least. The restrictions have yet to be enforced, and if history is any indicator El-Rufai is likely to apply them mainly to churches rather than mosques.

IMPRISONMENT: Kaduna has repeatedly imprisoned journalists who dare to report on persecution in the state. In addition, Governor El-Rufai has imprisoned the entire leadership of Christian groups in the state multiple times. He uses this imprisonment technique to exert pressure on the groups and sometimes holds these leaders for months at a time without formal charges.

DENIAL OF RIGHTS: Governor El-Rufai's use of community-wide lockdowns to punish Christian communities is among the deadliest forms of government persecution in Nigeria. It has led to hundreds of deaths over the years of El-Rufai's governorship and threatens to kill even more if the pattern is not stopped.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS: In October, 2021, Governor El-Rufai announced sweeping restrictions on religion in Kaduna State. These restrictions most notable include a requirement that pastors receive a state-issued certification before preaching. Failure to do so, according to the new law, is a criminal offence. This is a very concerning development in a state already beset with persecution issues.



MARTYRED

Gunmen killed Reverend Dauda Bature, the pastor of the Evangelical Church Winning All in Kaduna State, in mid-December 2021, a month after his kidnapping.

According to Reverend Joseph John Hayab, the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Kaduna State, Reverend Dauda was kidnapped on his farm on Nov. 8, 2022. The abductors demanded a ransom payment, which Reverend Dauda's wife raised and delivered herself.

"They asked the wife to bring the money which she took to them on November 18," an unnamed source told the Nigerian Daily Post. "They kept her until December 6 and released her to go and look for more money." The gunmen killed Reverend Dauda just days later.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

A RISE IN VIOLENCE

Governor El-Rufai Shifts Blame

Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Nigeria's Kaduna State announced that, in Kaduna, 1,192 people were killed, 3,348 were kidnapped, and 891 were injured in violent attacks in 2021. These numbers represent a significant rise over 2020 when the official death toll stood in the hundreds.

At the press conference, El-Rufai attempted to shift blame to the federal government. "The Kaduna State Government appeals to the Federal Government to create a Theatre Command...to confront the insurgency," he said.

As he nears the end of his second and last term, El-Rufai has little to show for his nearly seven-year tenure. Hailed the "reformist governor" by local and international media alike, he has overseen a marked rise in violence in recent years. While some of this rise can be attributed to outside factors, such as terrorist groups and local militancy, the rise in violence also has to do El-Rufai's failure to actively combat violence against Christians.



Clamp Down on Preaching

Reviving an antiquated rule from Nigeria's years under military dictatorship, Nigeria's Governor Nasir El-Rufai has reintroduced the Religious Preaching Edict of 1984. The renewed regulations criminalize preaching without authorization and aims to control not only who can preach but also the content of their sermons.

The legislation empowers an Interfaith Preaching Regulatory Council to implement the regulations. "Anyone who doesn't follow this procedure and begins to preach without authorization, will be liable to pay a fine and may even be imprisoned," El-Rufai said in an interview.

Justifying the need for these new regulations, El-Rufai claimed that, "Most times, it is preachers that are the worst culprits" and insisted that "before someone can start preaching, he should be very knowledgeable, [and have] understanding and experience to preach in a manner that will bring about peaceful coexistence" as judged by the Council. "The council will have to certify whoever wants to preach in Kaduna state as having the requisite knowledge, temperament, experience and foresight."

Journalist Luka Binniyat Released on Bail

On Feb. 3, 2022, Luka Binniyat was released on bail after fulfilling the stringent terms for his release. Binniyat is a Nigerian journalist who writes for the Southern Kaduna's People Union and for the Epoch Times.

He was arrested on Nov. 4, 2021, after writing an article critical of the lack of government response to attacks made against Christians in Southern Kaduna. One such attack left 38 farmers dead. Binniyat's article included a quote from a Southern Kaduna senator where he discussed the government's use of the Kaduna State Commissioner for Internal Security to detract attention from killing Christians in the state.

The senator has since claimed that he never gave this quote, and Binniyat was accused of defamation. On Jan. 27, 2022, Binniyat pled not guilty to all charges, including cyber-related offenses for supposedly disseminating false material through a computer.

The stipulations for bail were extensive, with Binniyat needing two sureties from Kaduna who both owned properties, with proof of ownership certificates. Binniyat struggled to meet the bail terms due to an additional requirement that the property ownership certificates needed specific certifications during the current Kaduna governor's term in office.

Binniyat was likewise arrested in 2017 after writing an article with false information, which he attempted to have rescinded before publication. The case against Binniyat is widely considered to be a political move against journalists on the part of Nigerian officials in Southern Kaduna, who are aware of the continued attacks made against Christians in the state.

There is even reason to believe that the governor of Kaduna, Nasir El-Rufai, has played a part in the violence against Christians. In addition to a long history of inflammatory comments and rumor-spreading against Christians, El-Rufai has repeatedly endangered Christian communities in his state by putting whole county-sized areas under house arrest. Hundreds have died while under his lockdowns.

Pray that the Nigerian government will arrest perpetrators of terrorism and journalists will be allowed to freely express concerns about Christian persecution in Nigeria.



ICC AT WORK

HELP FOR THE FAMILY OF AN IMPRISONED BREADWINNER

When her husband Luka drew the wrath of the Kaduna State government in 2021 for writing an article on persecution, Gladys Binniyat knew that her life, and the lives of their six children, would change. “I want to celebrate Christmas with my husband,” she said. “It is becoming difficult to feed the children. His absence is affecting us.”

Luka was the primary breadwinner in the family, so his long imprisonment—which lasted until February 2022—made it difficult for the family to make ends meet. Fortunately, an ICC staffer in Nigeria knew the Binniyat family and was able to arrange for ICC to provide sustainable assistance to Gladys while Luka was in prison.

The unfortunate reality of persecution is that it impacts not just individuals but families and communities, too. ICC seeks to bandage the wounds of those hurting from the persecution of loved ones.



KADUNA FARMS

Armed militants have known for years that Governor El-Rufai’s administration does not take their crimes seriously. As a result, they mercilessly ravage entire Christian communities for profit and hate.

Many of these communities are farming villages whose continued survival depend on crops. In several communities across Kaduna, ICC has stepped in after an attack and helped get the village back on its feet by starting large community farms capable of feeding hundreds with extra to sell at the market. This kind of sustainable assistance is critical in the effort to promote the long term viability of Christians in Kaduna.



Governor El-Rufai and one of his three wives, Hadiza, enjoy the St. Regis Mauritius Resort, where rooms cost an average of \$655 per night, according to Google analytics. The El-Rufai family's great wealth allow them to travel the world in luxury.



200+ CHRISTIAN VILLAGERS DIED

WHILE UNDER EL-RUFAI'S HOUSE ARREST ORDERS

ICC RECOMMENDS

- That the United States impose targeted, individual sanctions against Governor Nasir El-Rufai for his severe violations of human rights. These sanctions would restrict his and his family's luxurious lifestyle and, if made public, would serve as a powerful deterrent for other Nigerian governors who might want to do similar things to Christians.
- That the U.S. publicly condemn Kaduna's new anti-preaching law in statements and in its annual report on religious freedom.
- That Nigeria be added back to the U.S. Department of State's Countries of Particular Concern list.
- That the international community recognize the religious component of the crisis in Nigeria in addition to the other issues contributing to the issues there.
- That international aid to Nigeria be conditioned on the government seriously addressing state-level persecution.

TAKE ACTION

READ THE REPORT



ICC compiled a detailed report about El-Rufai. Scan the QR code with your mobile device to read it.

STAY INFORMED

Follow ICC on social media—Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram—to stay up to date and share the latest news on El-Rufai.



**RECEP TAYYIP
ERDOĞAN**

RECLAIMING AN EMPIRE

THE PRESIDENT OF TURKEY'S EVIL AGENDA

Despite his appearance toward his allies in Washington, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan continues to export Christian persecution across the Middle East.

SUMMARY

- Erdoğan continues to operate Turkey's foreign policy to expand the nation's military reach to the limits of the former Ottoman Empire at the expense of Christians.
- Christians in northern villages of Iraq and Syria constantly live in fear of airstrikes from Turkey.
- Christian-heritage sites throughout Erdoğan's sphere of influence have been desecrated due to his harmful Ottoman rhetoric.
- Erdoğan's government continues to suffocate the Christian community within Turkey and silence any challenges to his religious freedom record.
- Under Erdoğan, Turkey exports persecution and enables other persecutors in the region like Afghanistan to further harm Middle Eastern Christians.



ABOUT

OFFICIAL TITLE

President of the Republic of Turkey

ASSUMED OFFICE

August 28, 2014

BORN:

February 26, 1954

PARTY AFFILIATION

Justice and Development Party (AKP)

OVERVIEW

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the current president of Turkey with ambitions to expand his influence across Turkey's former Ottoman Empire, which terrorized Christians throughout the Middle East for centuries into the early 20th century. Since the 2016 coup attempt against him, Erdoğan has ushered the nation into a new chapter, one which includes a significant emphasis on foreign policy and military expansionism. Countries previously part of the Ottoman Empire, and countries with a significant Muslim population, are specifically targeted for engagement by Turkey's military or Turkish-paid mercenaries. The unique religious freedom concerns that were once contained within the boundaries of Turkey's borders are now found wherever Turkey has gained influence. They include attacks against Christians, desecration of Christian sites, and suffocation of Christian communities. Equally concerning is how Turkey has leveraged those religious freedom issues of neighboring countries for its own benefit at the expense of the local population. In short, Erdoğan's military expansionism has had the impact of exploiting Christians, exporting persecution, and enabling perpetrators to commit even more egregious actions. If this is how Erdoğan's policies treat vulnerable Christian communities outside of its own borders, then how much more so within?

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2021

JULY 2021

Erdoğan declares that Turkey “has nothing that contradicts the Taliban’s beliefs” and opens up official talks with Taliban leaders in Afghanistan.

SEPTEMBER 2021

Turkey establishes command representation for special forces in Baku, Azerbaijan, following Azerbaijan’s war with Armenia.

At the UN General Assembly, Erdoğan condemns use of mercenaries despite his implementation of mercenaries in Libya and Artsakh.

OCTOBER 2021

Erdoğan visits Artsakh, where he used mercenaries to fight Armenian Christians in the 2020 Karabakh War.

NOVEMBER 2021

Turkish military stage offensive in northern Syria alongside mercenaries.

2022

FEBRUARY 2022

Turkish bombings in Iraq and northern Syria continue under the guise of counterterror operations.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Led by Erdoğan, Turkey has positioned itself not only as the regional superpower, but also as a major influential player that dictates the terms for how those countries outside of the Islamic world interact with Muslim-majority nations. By the end of 2019, Turkey had evolved enough that it had contributed “more than a quarter of the entire world’s humanitarian aid,” according to the Borgen Project. Turkey’s Foreign Ministry confirms on its website that the reason for this rapid expansion of humanitarian aid is because of the ongoing crises within Turkey’s regional vicinity. However, it is also clear that the escalation of many regional crises occurred in large part because of Turkey’s expanding military activities. Turkey is also the world leader in hosting refugees, a situation that predates its recent military expansion but which has become a key negotiating point affecting the outcome of multiple conflicts.

For example, just days before the Taliban gained control of Kabul, Afghanistan, Turkey’s President Erdoğan extended an invitation for the Taliban to visit Turkey. This followed an earlier statement by Erdoğan that, “Turkey has nothing that contradicts their beliefs.” Such a validation from arguably the most influential Islamic country in the region further empowers the Taliban. On the day of Kabul’s fall, the son of the Taliban’s founder was quoted as saying, “Turkey is a country that hosts many Afghans and that we want to build close relations with. We consider Turkey an ally and not an enemy.”

In addition to contributing to the Afghan crisis, President Erdoğan also has manipulated refugee crises. For example, hundreds of people poured into the streets of Ankara and targeted Syrian refugees in what some described as “a wave of xenophobia that resembled a pogrom.” While the Syrian incident was sparked by something unrelated to Afghanistan, it did reflect just how poorly national sentiment has developed toward refugees. The conflicts that Turkey contributes toward has the effect of worsening humanitarian conditions. When people attempt to flee, they often have nowhere to go except Turkey. However, once there, they face exploitation at best. At worst, their lives continue to be threatened. The highly Islamic language which permeates and often justifies these situations pushes religious minorities into further vulnerability. Erdoğan worsens crises in the name of Islam, then Turkey makes it clear that help is conditional. While this challenges all refugees, Christians are at a particular disadvantage.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



MILITARY ATTACKS



DESECRATION OF
RELIGIOUS SITES



ENABLING
PERSECUTION



DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST
CHRISTIANS

MILITARY ATTACKS AGAINST CHRIS-

TIANS: Under the guise of counterterrorism operations, Erdoğan's military has been conducting drone strikes against Christian villages in northern Iraq and Syria.

DESECRATION OF CHRISTIAN RELI-

GIOUS SITES: Both inside and outside Turkey, Erdoğan's government has either allowed or directly ordered the desecration of historic Christian heritage sites, damaging them or converting them away from their intended purpose.

ENABLING OTHER MAJOR PERSECUT-

ING NATIONS AND ENTITIES: By aiding private military contractors and militias, Erdoğan's government continually facilitates persecution throughout the region.

EXPORTATION OF DISCRIMINATION

AGAINST CHRISTIANS: Erdoğan's continued use of veiled rhetoric to promote nationalist Islamic Turkic ideology spreads anti-Christian hate around the world.



LOCKED UP

Osman Kavala is a Turkish philanthropist who is being detained in Turkey for protesting President Erdoğan's government and Turkey's religious freedom record. Kavala repeatedly encouraged dialogue about the Armenian genocide, an atrocity that killed or displaced an estimated 2 million Armenian Christians in the 20th century and which Turkey denies to this day. Kavala worked for the protection of non-Muslim cultural sites and the recognition of religious diversity in Turkish society, work that quickly caught the attention of Erdoğan. Despite international calls for Kavala's freedom, Erdoğan refuses to grant him freedom and continues to silence his voice.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

ERDOĞAN FLAUNTS GENOCIDE ACCUSATIONS

Turkey Threatens Those Who Recognize Genocide

On Oct. 26, 2021, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met his Azeri counterpart Ilham Aliyev in Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenian: Artsakh). Turkey supported Azerbaijan's invasion of Artsakh in Fall 2020, where the two conducted genocide against Artsakh's Armenian-Christian majority.

President Erdoğan's visit to Artsakh came just days after he threatened to expel 10 Western ambassadors whose countries had called for the release of Osman Kavala, a jailed Turkish philanthropist who dedicated his life to the recognition of the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Turkey actively suppresses all information pertaining to the 1915 Genocide, allowing the authorities to build upon those genocidal policies that removed Christianity from the country.



Erdoğan Condemns Mercenaries Despite Engagements

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan delivered an address at the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). During his speech, President Erdoğan explicitly condemned the use of terrorists as mercenaries for foreign engagements. Interestingly, many organizations, including International Christian Concern (ICC), have presented evidence that suggests Turkey engaged in specifically this international law violation.

Turkish Airstrike

Turkish bombardment continued in early February targeting regions in Syria and Iraq that included refugee camps, civilians and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The airstrikes directed at the SDF occurred at the same time as the U.S. coalition engaged with Islamic State militants during the Syria prison attack.

Village Flees in Fear

Christian and Kurdish villages in northern Iraq continue to fear Turkish bombardment as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. On the evening of Nov. 6, Turkish aerial bombing fell on the Christian village of Father Samir Youssef and another nearby Christian village for the first time in over a year. Turkish offensive in northern Iraq continues to escalate and increase in scope, driving more Christians from their homelands.

Turkey Targets Christians

Turkey's supposed fight against terrorism in Syria and Iraq coincides with their bombing of Christian and other minority communities. The long-standing fight against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a designated terrorist organization by Turkey, the EU, and the US, has spilled beyond Turkey's own borders and even PKK territory. The most recent campaign that began at the end of August has killed at least a dozen civilians.



Despite Genocide, Armenian Couple Finds New Life

Born into a Syrian-Armenian family that has been on the run since the turn of the 19th century, Ani is accustomed to the severe persecution perpetrated on Christians. Growing up in Aleppo, Syria, she was living with aging parents in the city when ISIS began its assault and takeover. Already familiar with discrimination, Ani and her fellow Christians were now exposed to a reign of constant terror as they were targeted everywhere from home to the workplace.

Fearing for her life and those of her elderly parents, Ani first fled with her family to Lebanon and eventually on to her family's historic homeland of Armenia. "The good thing that happened during all these years is that I married and have a wonderful family." Ani started a new life in Armenia with her husband, Davit. Yet, despite having escaped persecution already,

similar challenges reared their ugly head toward the young couple again.

In a move reminiscent of the Armenian genocide, Turkey supported Azerbaijan's war provocation in Nagorno-Karabakh during 44 days of war in 2020. Turkey President Erdoğan's support included sending Syrian terrorist fighters composed of former ISIS members to serve as mercenaries. The conflict displaced thousands of Armenian Christians from their homes and, although a ceasefire was signed in November, the region remains volatile. The terrorists that Ani and Davit escaped from were now threatening their new homeland and community.

Widespread anxiety and fears of a continued genocide are difficult enough, but it further complicated Davit's ability to start a new life and made finding

work impossible. "It's not easy to leave everything and start a new life. Because I have a disability in my right hand, it was not easy for me to find jobs in Armenia as all of the companies told me I was disabled and could not work for them."

Starting a small taxi business seemed like one viable option, yet finding enough funds in a nation so recently engulfed in war was a challenge that seemed insurmountable. That was when ICC was able to step in and provide the remaining funds needed to purchase a vehicle to start a business for Davit's family, providing for Ani and her 1-year-old daughter. Despite the pain of the past and fears for the future, Ani expresses nothing but gratitude for God's faithfulness. "I thank God for his miracles and presence, especially during the difficulties."

ICC AT WORK

ON THE GROUND

To investigate the harmful effects of President Erdoğan's actions against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and destructive anti-Christian rhetoric, International Christian Concern (ICC) staff traveled to California to talk with some members of the Armenian diaspora in San Francisco, where there had been several attacks against the Armenian community. Corresponding closely with an increase in anti-Armenian comments from Erdoğan and the eventual invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan and Turkish-paid mercenaries, an Armenian church as well as a school were attacked in San Francisco in 2020. An unknown assailant lit two Molotov cocktails in St. Gregory's Armenian Church and the KZV Armenian School nearby was vandalized with graffiti and shot at on two separate occasions. To document these attacks and their connection to President Erdoğan's actions, ICC published a report with testimony from Armenian-American Christians discussing the reach of Erdoğan's persecution throughout the world, even in a country like the United States.



THERE WHEN THE DUST SETTLES

For years, President Erdoğan has directed the Turkish military to conduct airstrikes in northern Iraq and Syria as part of its counterterrorist operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). In reality, these strikes regularly target vulnerable Christian villages in those areas, killing or displacing believers and making it increasingly difficult for Christians to exist in lands where the faith has thrived for 2,000 years. In response to the trials faced by Christians in Syria and Iraq, ICC has come to the aid of these communities by increasing its presence on the ground in the Levant, the region containing the two countries. This allows it to better respond to the continued violence from Erdoğan's military and help to rebuild the lives of those who have faced such violence. ICC's staff is hard at work in the region to fight back against the transgressions of Turkey and to help preserve the historic Christian communities inhabiting the Middle East.



ICC RECOMMENDS

- U.S. leaders should continue to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and condemn Erdoğan's abuses in all high-level meetings with Turkish officials.
- The U.S. and its allies in NATO should reevaluate Turkish membership and hold Turkey to human rights benchmarks for its participation in the alliance.
- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom should continue to inform Congress on Turkish airstrikes in northern Iraq and Syria.
- The Department of State should designate Turkey as a Special Watch List country for violations of religious freedom.
- Governments should call on Turkey to release all prisoners of conscience detained for promoting rights of religious minorities.

TAKE ACTION

ACTION ITEM

Read ICC's report on anti-Armenian persecution in the United States stemming back to rhetoric from President Erdoğan



ACTION ITEM

Watch this two-part interview with ICC's Middle East analyst on President Erdoğan's comments on the Taliban





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KIM JONG-UN

A DYNASTY OF CHRISTIAN DEATHS

UNDER THE KIM REGIME, CHRISTIANITY CONTINUES TO FACE SEVERE PERSECUTION.

The Kim family has kept North Korea the most isolated nation on the planet and the most dangerous place for Christians.

SUMMARY

- There are an estimated 400,000 Christians in North Korea, all practicing in secret.
- The Kim regime views Christians as a vessel of American imperialism and a threat to the regime and its deified leadership. Having loyalties apart from those to the Supreme Leader is forbidden.
- To avoid detection, all Christians practice in secret, usually alone or in very small communities.
- North Korea operates several political prisons and hard labor camps where Christians, dissidents, and their associates face severe punishment and abuses.
- Many North Koreans flee the tyrannical regime every year, most through routes in China and occasionally by crossing the treacherous demilitarized zone to South Korea.



ABOUT

OFFICIAL TITLE

Supreme Leader

ASSUMED OFFICE

December 17, 2011

BORN:

January 8, 1983

PARTY AFFILIATION

Korean Worker's Party

OVERVIEW

Kim Jong-un is the third generation of the Kim Dynasty. Like his predecessors, he has maintained the brutal persecution of Christians. Before the Korean War, the northern half of Korea had a thriving Christian population to the point that its capital, Pyongyang, was regarded as the "Jerusalem of the East." However, once the peninsula was split and war broke out, life in North Korea quickly changed course.

After the Japanese were pushed from Korea in World War II, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was declared by the Communists in the northern half of the peninsula. Kim Jong-Un's grandfather, Kim Il-Sung, declared the nation's guiding principle to be Juche (JOO-chay), originally an offshoot of Marxism, later to become a hardline policy of national self-sufficiency and the deification of the Supreme Leader.

The full extent of the Kim regime's persecution and crimes against humanity are not fully known, as information coming out of the closed nation is limited. The world's knowledge of the scale and severity of Christian persecution is gained through satellite imagery and the stories of survivors and defectors who risked their lives to flee the country. Most defectors have fled the country through the nation's northern border into China. Some, however, have risked crossing through the treacherous demilitarized zone to South Korea.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1945

AUGUST 17, 1945

Korea formally is formally divided on the 38th parallel.

SEPTEMBER 9, 1948

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is declared.

JUNE 25, 1950

Korean War begins.

1994

JULY 8, 1994

Kim Il-sung, regarded as the "sun of mankind," dies. His son, Kim Jong-il, succeeds him.

2006

OCTOBER 9, 2006

Kim Jong-il conducts North Korea's first nuclear weapons test.

2011

DECEMBER 17, 2011

Kim Jong-un announced as third-generation successor.

FEBRUARY 13, 2017

Kim Jong-un has half-brother Kim Jong-nam assassinated in Malaysia

JUNE 12, 2018

Kim Jong-un and U.S. President Donald Trump meet in first U.S.-North Korea summit.

JUNE 30, 2019

First sitting U.S. president steps into North Korea.

EXPERT ANALYSIS

Kim Jong-un's regime has consistently been a threat to Christians who, like political dissidents, represent a threat to the stability of the state and the regime. Under the state's Juche ideology, which deifies Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, Pyongyang remains the pinnacle of state-sponsored persecution.

The practice of Christianity came to be seen as a diverging loyalty from the Supreme Leader and under the influence of American imperialism; this paranoia started early in the North's statehood as it sought to centralize the power of its first leader, Kim Il-sung. Therefore, being a Christian is often considered a political crime, punishable by harsh penalties, including imprisonment, torture, and even execution.

The enforcement of the Kim family's anti-religious posture is carried out by the North Korean State Security Department (SSD) and the Ministry of Public Safety (MPS), which each operate several complex networks of informants to monitor any potential dissidents and threats to the state. Those held by the regime are quickly taken to detention centers, where they face several abuses, or are sent to political prisons or hard labor camps, each reminiscent of Soviet gulags. Within these camps, Christians and other "dissidents" there endure hard labor, torture, and other grave atrocities.

To further protect the Supreme Leader's legitimacy from these ideological or political threats, the North Korean dictatorship keeps its citizens closed off from the outside world, allowing them to know only what happens within the confines of the hermit kingdom and what information is shared by state-controlled media. Christians are forced to rely on whatever small access they have to the gospel. Many of the Christian materials in North Korea come from other Christians and defectors who smuggle them into the country. These Christians and defector groups have used various methods to get this material into the country, including by river or by balloon. Unfortunately, this sort of smuggling has been discouraged by the South Korean government, which has sought to reduce tensions with the nuclear North, which is enraged over such actions.

This anti-Christian enforcement goes well-beyond punishing practitioners alone, and guilt is attributed by association: If one person is found to have access to a Bible or carrying out Christian activities, all of their associates are vulnerable to the state's punishment. This nightmare situation has made practicing Christianity in North Korea incredibly dangerous, forcing Christian groups to operate secretly in small groups. However, fearing for their lives, many seek the chance to escape, although the journey out of Korea is treacherous and the consequences of being caught are severe.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



ARRESTS
IMPRISONMENT/
TORTURE



EXECUTION



SOCIAL
REJECTION/
OSTRACISM



CENSORSHIP

IMPRISONMENT, TORTURE, AND FORCED LABOR: Christians arrested by the regime have been subjected to cruel punishments in North Korea's labor or prison camps, including severe beatings, starvation, sexual abuse, solitary confinement, and long hours of hard labor.

EXECUTION: Christians have often been sentenced to death by execution or by hard labor in one of the country's many labor camps for their practice of Christianity.

SOCIAL REJECTION AND OSTRACISM: Because of North Korea's demonization and severe punishments of Christians, believers are often rejected by family and friends to avoid guilt by association.

CENSORSHIP: Information in North Korea is heavily regulated by the regime to prevent "social instability." Christians, like all North Koreans, are cut off from accessing the gospel or information from outside sources.



North Korean propaganda against American missionaries.

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN



DEFECTOR

Ilyong Ju is a Christian defector from North Korea. At the age of 12, his entire family fled the country to seek freedom from the regime. Though they made it to safety, many of his relatives were unable to escape and are either being held within one of the country's political prisons or have been executed after being caught sharing the gospel. In 2019, Ju was among the 27 survivors of religious persecution who met with President Trump and urged him to raise the crisis of Christian persecution with his North Korean counterpart. Ju is currently studying to become a human rights lawyer to help others like him.

IN THE NEWS

A MOUTHPIECE FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

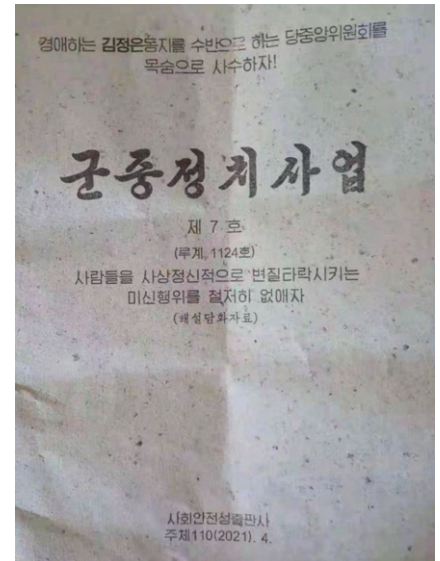
Spreading the Gospel to North Korea through Radio

North Korea, the isolated authoritarian nation of North Korea remains No.1 on the Open Doors "World Watch List" of countries where Christians are targeted and persecuted.

Under the reign of the Kim family, North Koreans are taught to revere only their supreme leaders and nothing else. They are deprived of their rights to freely practice faith. Christianity is seen as the state's enemy, and Christians must be secretive about their faith or else they might be arrested or face death.

In order to serve the underground Christians in North Korea and bring the Good News to the East Asian country, ICC partners with the Seoul-based Free North Korea Radio (FNKR) to provide the message of hope daily. Currently, FNKR broadcasts two hours every day seeking to enlighten the people of North Korea.

FNKR devotes 30 mins of each broadcast to gospel programs in the morning and the afternoon to spread God's love and grace amongst the people of North Korea. The content of the program includes Bible reading, sermon from a South Korean pastor, Christian radio drama featured North Korean defectors, reading of "Tortured for Christ" written by Richard Wurmbrand, and popular gospel songs translated into Korean.



North Korean Christians Sent to Remote Village for Possessing Bible

For having a Bible, a group of North Korean Christians was sent to remote village with hard labor and limited rations.

Open Doors UK recently shares the story of Bae*, a Christian leader who had her Bible destroyed and forced to live in exiled place yet refuses to abandon her underground church inside North Korea.

Bae spends her day working in the fields picking crops in the

village she's forced to live in. By night, she and her housemates cover the windows with blankets, light a small candle, and sit in a tight circle before getting out a book to read.

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," she reads.

Although Bae was offered to stay in China, she turned down the offer and continues to serve her underground church.

Living as a Christian in North Korea

Listen to Jeff King's interview with North Korean defector Jinhye Jo, who talks about her time in the children's prison camps and how she had to hide her faith or die.



Tortured for their Faith

Korea Future Initiative (FKI) released findings showing that more than 200 Christians who escaped North Korea were torture victims, their age ranging from 3 to 80 years old. Women, especially pregnant women, witnessed horror daily, as pregnant women were injected with medicine to trigger labor.

Worship Freely

When she was 17 years old, the North Korean Christian Sookyung Kang fled from her repressive country because she wanted to be able to worship God with freedom. Christianity is seen as an enemy of the state in North Korea. Once arrested, Christians face imprisonment, torture, or even execution.

Hope for the Hermit Kingdom

In a time where the Kim regime is doubling down on religious persecution, radio broadcasts are needed more than ever. A leaked official document distributed in April 2021 stated that, “Currently, South Korea and the United States have been spreading the gospel through leaflets and radio broadcast affecting North Koreans’ minds. They have been spreading a bogus rumor about believing in God and trusting God in all things.”

This piecemeal case demonstrated the effectiveness of spreading the Gospel through radio broadcasts and smuggled USB flash drives. The Kim regime sees these activities as threats and actively works to eradicate these channels of communication. However, the North Korean government often struggles in its efforts to stamp out these programs.

According to a North Korean defector, identified by the surname Jang, “Right now, people inside North Korea want to rise up against the regime. There is so much discontent inside, and it is at every level of society. ... When North Koreans come to South Korea, they fully realize how bad their situation was in North Korea. It is humiliating, and they wonder how much of their life was lost because they were born in North Korea. ... I guarantee you, we will continue to fight to end the Kim regime, so please be our friend and ally.”

Jang also added, “There are many underground churches in North Korea that are striving to spread the gospel. For instance, during Christmas in 2020, some people secretly handed out Christmas gifts to others.”

The success of these activities reminds us that hope is alive in North Korea, regardless of the brutal measures taken to prevent it.



A church in North Korea.

ICC AT WORK

GOSPEL RADIO INTO NORTH KOREA:

ICC continues to partner with the Seoul-based Free North Korea Radio (FNKR) to provide a daily message of hope in North Korea. Currently, FNKR broadcasts two hours every day over shortwave radio, including 30 minutes of Gospel programming.

Free North Korea Radio studio.



BIBLES FOR NORTH KOREA

ICC is collaborating with a partner to explore new possibilities of sending Bibles into North Korea. This new approach is in response to a leaflet ban enforced by the South Korean government.

North Korean defectors studying the Bible together.



50,000-70,000
CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED
IN NORTH KOREA

ICC RECOMMENDS

- Continue to designate North Korea as a “Country of Particular Concern” for religious freedom violations.
- The U.S., alongside its allies, must continue to pressure North Korea on its human rights record and demand accountability for its gross violations.
- The U.S. must pressure North Korea’s allies, such as Russia, China and several African nations, to end their support for the regime, which helps to prolong the regime’s reign of persecution.
- The South Korean government must repeal the “leaflet ban,” passed in 2020, and allow Christian and defector groups to resume sending messages of hope over the DMZ.

TAKE ACTION

ADVOCATE

Contact your member of Congress to let them know that you are concerned about the severe persecution taking place in North Korea, and the U.S.’s relationship with countries enabling it.



FAST AND PRAY

Participate in the annual Fast and Pray for North Korea event that usually takes place on April 28. Scan the QR code with your mobile device for more information.



REPORTS

RESEARCH FROM THE SOURCE

ICC exists to serve the persecuted Christian community around the world. In addition to delivering assistance to the persecuted Church, one way ICC conducts advocacy and awareness together is through its reports.

ICC staffs a team of expert analysts on persecution that have compiled their research into a series of reports. These publications summarize the issues using first-hand knowledge from ICC field staff and victims themselves of what persecution looks like through the eyes of the persecuted.

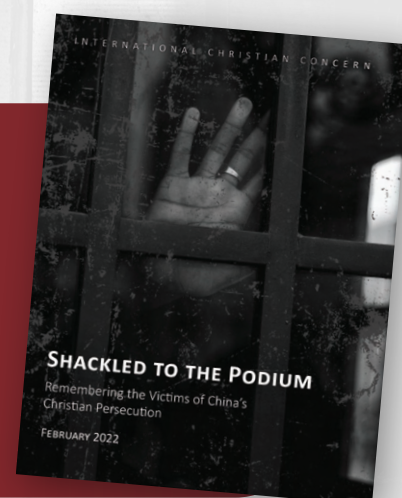
Combining this first-hand knowledge and the geopolitical expertise of ICC's Washington D.C.-based analysts, these reports help to illuminate major trends in international religious freedom with the aim of informing governmental leaders in the West on persecution issues and empowering them to enact policy that promotes real change for the body of Christ.

The following pages include samples of ICC's reports from this past year, which can also be found on ICC's website at www.persecution.org/reports.

SHACKLED TO THE PODIUM

The world gathered for the opening ceremonies of the 2022 Winter Olympics amongst a backdrop of genocide and persecution in plain sight. International Christian Concern highlighted several Christian victims of persecution against the oppressive Chinese regime.

READ NOW:

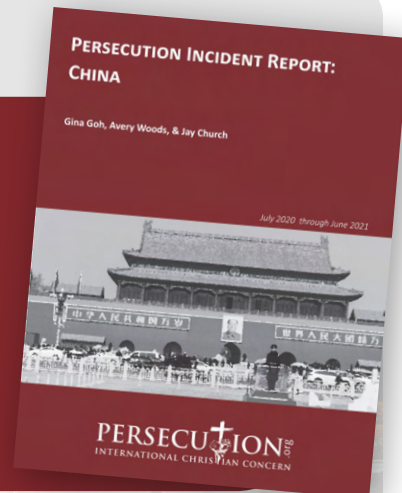


To read the full report, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit: www.persecution.org/reports

PERSECUTION INCIDENT REPORT: CHINA

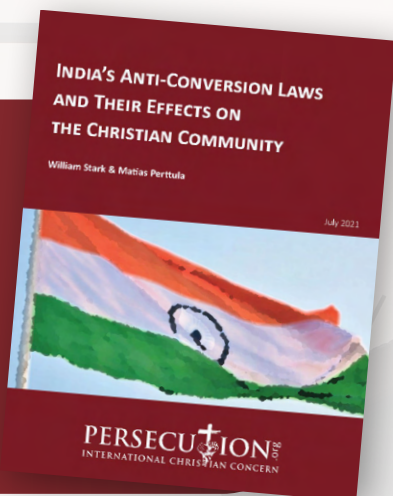
International Christian Concern (ICC) works vigorously to track persecution in China, and published an incident tracker summarizing specific events where the Chinese government targeted Christians for practicing their faith.

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READ NOW:



INDIA'S ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

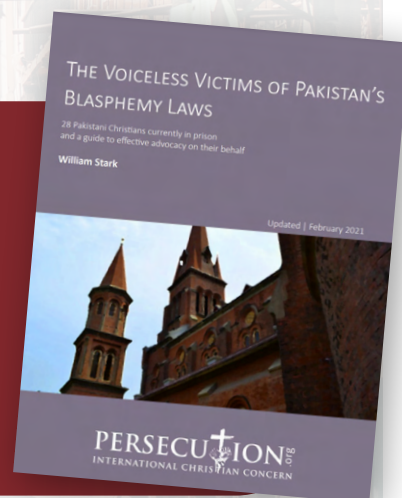
India's constitution guarantees religious freedom to all. However, religious minorities, including Christians, have dramatically suffered under the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party since 2014. International Christian Concern has studied the effects of anti-conversion laws and its effect on Christian communities.

To read the full report, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit: www.persecution.org/reports

THE VOICELESS VICTIMS OF PAKISTAN'S BLASPHEMY LAWS

The international community swiftly condemned the Burmese military when it overthrew Myanmar's civilian government in February 2021. The preservation of democracy is crucial for religious minorities protection. Caught in the Crossfire considers the history of Christians and suggests policy stances moving forward.

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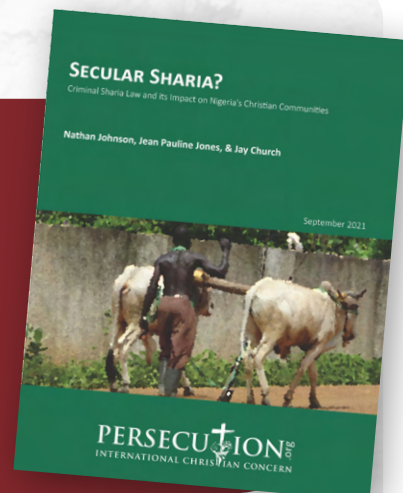


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SECULAR SHARIA?

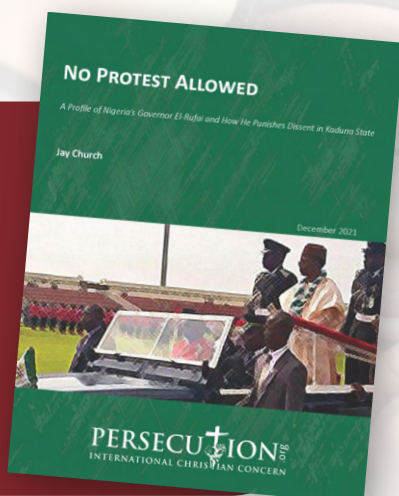
The Nigerian government is not blameless in the matter of sectarian violence. *Secular Sharia?* Considers the ways Nigerian state governments contribute to discrimination and violence against Christians, and includes the use of Sharia criminal law in twelve northern states.

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READ NOW:



NO PROTEST ALLOWED: A PROFILE OF NIGERIA'S GOVERNOR EL-RUFAI

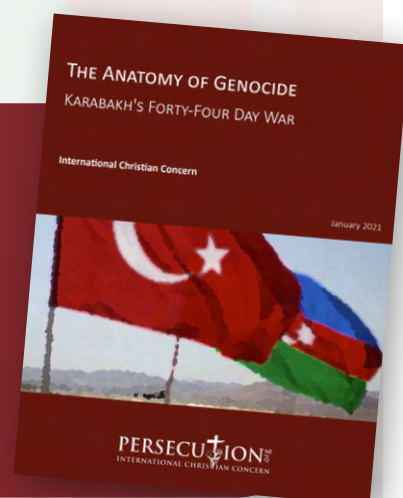
In this report, ICC aims to highlight two issues: first, El-Rufai's continued abuse of Christian communities under his jurisdiction and, second, the extravagant lifestyle enjoyed by him and his family. Together these factors make El-Rufai an ideal candidate to be sanctioned by the U.S. government and other governments around the world.

To read the full report, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit: www.persecution.org/reports

THE ANATOMY OF GENOCIDE — KARABAKH'S FORTY-FOUR DAY WAR

The dynamics of the 44 Day War are deeply complex but have strong religious freedom implications impacting the future of Karabakh's local community. The strategic planning by Turkey and Azerbaijan shows an intent of mass extermination, thereby genocide, of Karabakh's Armenian residents because of their combined faith and ethnic identity.

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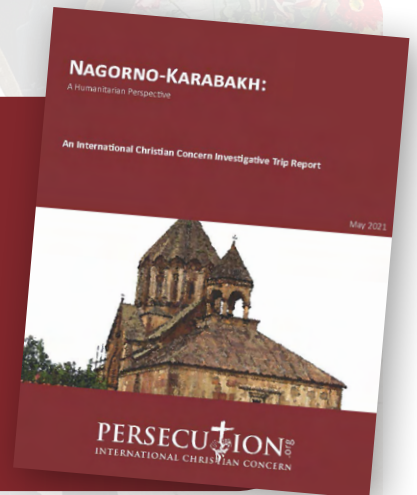


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NAGORNO-KARABAKH: A HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

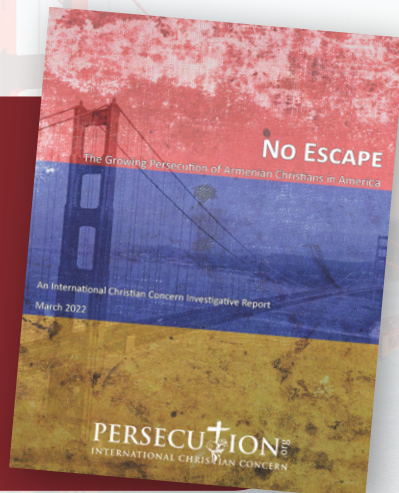
The outcome of Azerbaijan and Turkey's policy of domination of Nagorno-karabakh (Armenian: Artsakh) is one which sows continuous fear, shame, and helplessness amongst those they displaced. International Christian Concern visited Nagorno-Karabakh in May 2021 and conducted a field investigation, the results of which are contained in the report, Nagorno-Karabakh: A Humanitarian Perspective.

READ NOW:



To read the full report, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit: www.persecution.org/reports

READ NOW:



NO ESCAPE: THE GROWING PERSECUTION OF ARMENIAN CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA

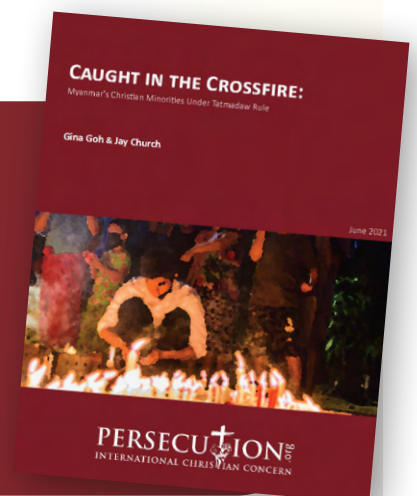
Armenians have a long history of targets of persecution, hatred and genocide. Unfortunately, this history continues to repeat itself around the world, including the United States. International Christian Concern met with community members and leaders in San Francisco, where three major hate crimes against Armenian Christians occurred.

To read the full report, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit: www.persecution.org/reports

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

The international community swiftly condemned the Burmese military when it overthrew Myanmar's civilian government in February 2021. The preservation of democracy is crucial for religious minorities protection. Caught in the Crossfire considers the history of Christians and suggests policy stances moving forward.

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