



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY
GROUP FOR INTERNATIONAL
FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR
BELIEF

Annual Report 2024

This is a report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for or International Freedom of Religion or Belief. This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group.

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Executive Summary

The 2024 inaugural Annual Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief (APPG FoRB) provides a comprehensive overview of global efforts to safeguard and promote religious freedom, a fundamental human right. This report outlines the APPG's mission and its collaborations with international stakeholders. It highlights the continuing challenges individuals face worldwide in practicing their beliefs without fear.

A significant portion of this report focuses on “Countries of Particular Concern,” where religious persecution is alarmingly severe. It explores countries such as Afghanistan, where the return of the Taliban has endangered religious minorities, and Bangladesh, where Hindu and Christian communities face rising violence and intimidation. In China, Uyghur Muslims and other religious groups endure state-imposed restrictions and cultural repression. North Korea enforces brutal penalties for any unauthorized religious practice, while in Nigeria, violence between Christian and Muslim communities escalates due to terrorist groups like Boko Haram.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo faces relentless attacks from militant groups targeting religious figures and communities. In Pakistan, Christians and the Ahmadiyya community are persecuted under blasphemy laws, facing forced conversions and legal discrimination. In Iran, Baha'is and Christian converts suffer systemic repression, while in Eritrea, unauthorized religious practices lead to imprisonment. Across Egypt, despite constitutional protections, Copts and other Christians encounter social and legal obstacles, including difficulties in church construction.

This report underscores the need for international cooperation to address these ongoing abuses. It calls on governments, NGOs, and civil society to work together to challenge religious repression and support the rights of persecuted communities. The APPG FoRB remains dedicated to advancing religious freedom through parliamentary engagement, debates, and advocacy while acknowledging the significant challenges ahead.



FOREWORD

By the Chair

It is my honour and privilege to present this inaugural edition of the annual report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief. For over a decade, I have stood in defence of individuals persecuted for their faith or beliefs, both here in the UK and around the world. As someone who believes that religious liberty is fundamental to our shared humanity, I am driven by a deep conviction that no one should ever suffer violence, imprisonment, or death for their faith—or indeed for choosing not to hold any faith at all.

Throughout my time as Chair of the APPG FoRB, we have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the struggles faced by minorities in countries like Nigeria, Iraq, and North Korea. We have heard heart-wrenching stories from people displaced, persecuted, or imprisoned solely because of their religion or belief, and we have sought to amplify their voices here in Westminster and beyond. Our group has championed their cause, whether by pressing government ministers, holding debates in Parliament, or partnering with a host of non-governmental organizations.

This year's report outlines the progress we have made, but it also serves as a stark reminder of the challenges that remain. It reflects our commitment to tackling not just state-sponsored persecution but the everyday harassment and violence that too many people face because of their beliefs. As we move forward, I hope this report will continue to shine a light on these important issues and inspire us all to redouble our efforts.

I would like to thank my colleagues, stakeholders, and the many organisations who have been instrumental in this work. Together, we are making strides to ensure that everyone, regardless of their faith or belief, can live freely and without fear. I look forward to continuing this vital work, and I encourage all to join us in defending freedom of religion or belief for all.

Jim Shannon
Democratic Unionist Party MP for Strangford
Chair, APPG FoRB



FOREWORD

By the Vice Chair

As Vice Chair of the APPG for Freedom of Religion or Belief, it's a privilege to support this vital cause. Throughout my time in Parliament, I have consistently spoken on issues that impact the most vulnerable in society, whether it's addressing the cost of living for pensioners or the rights of disabled individuals. But nothing underlines human dignity quite like the right to freely practise one's faith or beliefs, which is why our collective effort here is so important.

This year's report highlights the progress and challenges we've encountered in our mission to protect religious freedom globally. In working together, we strive to ensure that everyone, no matter their faith, has the right to live without fear of persecution.

In Wales and beyond, I've witnessed how communities are strengthened when people are free to express their faith. Let's continue working to extend that freedom to those in less fortunate circumstances.

Ruth Jones
Labour MP for Newport West and Islwyn
Vice Chair, APPG FoRB



FOREWORD

By the Vice Chair

As Vice Chair of the APPG for Freedom of Religion or Belief, it is an honour to stand alongside colleagues in continuing this essential work. Since my time as a Member of Parliament and now as a life peer, I have consistently believed in upholding fundamental rights—chief among them is the freedom to practise one’s faith without fear or coercion. The United Kingdom has long been a beacon of these values, and it is our duty to ensure they are protected globally.

The challenges faced by those persecuted for their beliefs cannot be underestimated, but nor can the strength and resilience shown by individuals and communities standing firm in their faith. This report offers a comprehensive reflection on the strides we’ve made, while also acknowledging the serious obstacles that remain.

Working collaboratively, we must continue to advocate for those whose voices are often silenced. Together, we can make a difference in advancing freedom of religion and belief for all.

The Lord Jackson of Peterborough
Vice Chair, APPG FoRB



FOREWORD

By the Vice Chair

It is an honour to join in presenting this inaugural APPG FoRB report. For over four decades, I have campaigned for the right to freedom of religion or belief as a foundational human right—one that shapes how we live, love, and express ourselves in our societies. My commitment stems not only from the moral imperative to protect these freedoms but from a belief that no society can truly thrive when its citizens are denied the right to practise their faith in peace.

In my role as a Crossbench peer, I have continually drawn attention to the plight of religious minorities around the world—from the targeted violence faced by Christian communities in Pakistan to the egregious abuses committed against the Uyghur Muslims in China. Recently, we have seen escalating attacks, including those against the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities in Pakistan, and I have made clear in the House of Lords that the UK must use its influence to defend these persecuted groups and ensure that our foreign aid is truly inclusive, benefitting those most in need.

Our work in the APPG FoRB, championed by Jim Shannon MP and other deeply committed colleagues, is more critical than ever. We must all continue to press for accountability, not just through our words but also in our partnerships with governments, NGOs, and civil society, ensuring that FoRB remains at the heart of our human rights agenda.

As we look to the future, I remain committed to this cause and to amplifying the voices of those whose rights are violated simply because of their faith. Let this report serve as both a record of our progress and a reminder of the work yet to be done.

The Lord Alton of Liverpool
Vice Chair, APPG FoRB

About APPG FoRB

Our Mission

We are the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, or APPG FoRB for short. We are a cross-party group of parliamentarians who believe that international freedom of religion or belief is a crucial human right and that it strongly correlates with other human rights including civil liberties, equality for women, and economic freedom. We therefore seek to raise the profile of FoRB in Government, in Parliament, in the media and among the general public. This report is designed to help you better understand ongoing challenges - and ongoing successes - with respect to international freedom of religion or belief and to play your part in the fight for this right to be recognised worldwide. We also highlight the contributions of APPG FoRB's current stakeholders, demonstrating the possibility for positive impact in many countries around the world, and invite all people to consider how they can contribute to FoRB and human rights in their own sphere of influence, whether an MP or Peer, potential stakeholder in the APPG FoRB, or member of civil society.

What is FoRB?

After the atrocities committed and inhumanity made manifest during the Second World War, world governments came together in a new effort to foster lasting peace and established the United Nations in June 1945. Soon after, under the leadership and guidance of United States First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, many human rights were declared and enumerated in the groundbreaking [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#). This document was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948, setting out for the first time fundamental human rights to be universally protected by all governments, without exception. Nearly eighty years later, the UDHR'S 30 Articles continue to form the basis for international human rights law, and they have paved the way for over seventy additional human rights treaties at global and regional levels. As the FoRB Foundation has written on their [website](#): "If we do nothing, we save no one, if we do something we save someone."

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

“Everyone has the freedom to think or believe what they want, including the right to religious belief. We have the right to change our beliefs or religion at any time, and the right to publicly or privately practise our chosen religion, alone or with others.”

Article 18 thus recognises that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This includes the freedom to hold any belief or non-belief, whether it is religious, secular, or philosophical. Article 18 also protects the freedom to manifest one’s beliefs, either alone or with others, in public or in private. This includes the freedom to practise one’s religion, to observe religious holidays and ceremonies, and to share religious beliefs with others. Individuals are free to have or adopt a religion or belief of their choosing and should not be forced to adhere to a particular religion or belief system against their will and should be free to change their beliefs without fear of persecution or punishment.

Unfortunately, even eighty years following the passage of the UDHR, respect for fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, is not universally demonstrated and continues to be a challenge in many areas of the world. FoRB violations range from name calling to rape, torture and radicalisation. People are socially isolated or enslaved and incarcerated for peacefully practising their faith or belief. This is a global phenomenon and can be experienced in first, second and third world countries. Look around you, where you live, where you work and what you see in the media and you can find examples of FoRB being both respected and violated; this means that wherever you live and whatever your professional role, you can make a difference.

Stakeholders

The organisations listed here support and fund the work of the APPG. If you would like further information about becoming a stakeholder, please find information for getting in contact at the end of this report.

1. ADF International
2. Aid to the Church in Need
3. Ahmadiyya Muslim Association
4. Al-Khoei Foundation
5. Brigham Young University London
6. Buddhist Society
7. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)
8. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
9. Coalition for Jewish Values
10. Coptic Orthodox Church Centre
11. Elim Pentecostal Church
12. Hindu Matters in Britain
13. International Center for Law and Religion Studies
14. Middle East Concern
15. Mosaic Middle East
16. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom
17. Open Doors UK & Ireland
18. Release International
19. Religious Freedom Institute (RFI)
20. Religious Freedom & Business Foundation
21. Sikh Hindu Human Rights Institute North America and Europe (SHHRINE)
22. United Copts of Great Britain

ADF INTERNATIONAL

ADF International is a faith-based legal advocacy organisation that protects fundamental freedoms and promotes the inherent dignity of all people. ADF International advocates for religious freedom before national and international institutions – as well as having ECOSOC consultative status with the United Nations, ADF International has accreditation with the European Commission and Parliament, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Organization of American States, and is a participant in the FRA Fundamental Rights Platform.

Contact: Lizzie Francis, Legal Counsel (Global Religious Freedom team),
efrancis@adfinternational.org

Website: www.adfinternational.org

AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED

Aid to the Church in Need is a Pontifical Foundation of the Catholic Church. Directly under the Holy See, ACN supports the faithful wherever they are persecuted or in pastoral need. Founded in 1947, the organisation is now at work in about 130 countries around the world and every year fulfils about 5,000 projects. These include Christian formation – 51 million ACN Child’s Bibles have been translated into 176 languages – training for seminarians and catechists, media projects, radio, television, support for Sisters and other religious, Mass stipends for poor and persecuted priests, transport, construction of churches, and support for refugees and displaced people. ACN is a registered charity in England and Wales (1097984) and Scotland (SC040748).

Contact: Aid to the Church in Need (UK),
12-14 Benhill Avenue,
Sutton,
Surrey
SM1 4DA

Phone: 020 8642 8668

Website: www.acnuk.org

AHMADIYYA MUSLIM ASSOCIATION

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a dynamic peace-loving Muslim community that was founded in 1889 in Qadian, India by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who claimed to be the Promised Messiah and Imam Al-Mahdi.

The community is spread across 204 countries and is also one of the oldest established Muslim communities in the UK, established in 1913. It is led by its Khalifa (spiritual leader), Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, who is based in London and guides the community’s global efforts for peace.

It has faced severe persecution in some countries, particularly Pakistan (where it is targeted by federal laws) and Indonesia, and this has now spread to some other countries as well.

The community has a strong focus on education, integration, human rights, peace and service to mankind and lives by its motto of 'Love For All Hatred For None'.

Contact: National Secretary External Affairs
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK
Baitul Futuh Mosque
181 London Road
Morden SM4 5PT

Email: ExternalAffairs@ahmadiyya.org.uk

Website: www.LoveForAllHatredForNone.org
www.StopThePersecution.org

AL-KHOEI FOUNDATION

The Al-Khoei Foundation is an international Islamic organisation with General Consultative status at the Economic and Social Council at the UN, which was established in 1989 by the late Shia-Muslim spiritual leader Imam Sayyid Abulqasim Al-Khoei. This philanthropic foundation operates a number of pioneering educational, social and religious programmes and has offices in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, France, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Iraq and Iran. It implements educational programmes which encompasses religious plurality and community cohesion. The Foundation advocates interfaith and intrafaith relations and also works to promote the role of faith in protecting human values, social development, empowerment of women and countering intolerance and extremism.”

Contact: Al-Khoei Foundation
Chevening Road
NW6 6TN
London

Phone: 020 7372 4049
Email: info@alkhoei.org
Twitter: [@alkhoei_org](https://twitter.com/alkhoei_org)
Facebook: [/alkhoei.org](https://www.facebook.com/alkhoei.org)

Website: www.al-khoei.org

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY LONDON

Contact: Cecilia Peek, Cecilia_peek@byu.edu

Website: www.byu.edu

BUDDHIST SOCIETY

The Buddhist Society was founded in 1924, with the object “to publish and make known the principles of Buddhism and to encourage the study and practice of those principles.” It is guided by an elected Council.

The Society provides a range of classes and courses in the Buddha’s teachings, as well as instruction in Buddhist meditation and daily life practice. Details of the regular programme, public talks and special events can be found on the Society’s website.

The Society provides an environment for Buddhist practice and study and increasingly makes use of online services to fulfil its declared Objects and generally to help, advise and facilitate wherever possible. The Society remains small but active, encouraging as a matter of policy the establishment of independent parallel organisations. It maintains close connections with local Buddhist monastic institutions, other Buddhist groups, organisations, and academic centres, including the SOAS Buddhist Forum.

Contact: The Buddhist Society
58 Eccleston Square,
London
SW1V 1PH

Email: info@thebuddhistsociety.org

Website: www.thebuddhistsociety.org

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE (CSW)

CSW works for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights, in the pursuit of justice. CSW works in over 20 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, defending everyone's right to freedom of religion or belief.

CSW regularly briefs senior policymakers and legislators around the world, and has testified at hearings in the UK Parliament, the European Parliament, the United States Congress and the United Nations. We also regularly work with international media, and contribute comment and analysis to publications such as the *Wall Street Journal*, the *International Herald Tribune* and the *New York Times*, as well as to broadcasters such as the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera and Sky.

Contact: Email: admin@csw.org.uk
Phone: 0845 456 5464

Website: www.csw.org.uk

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began in the United Kingdom in 1837 where there are now around 190,000 members, part of a global community of over 16 million. A key tenet is religious tolerance: 'We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all . . . the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.'

Church representatives are active participants in worldwide FoRB forums, including at the EU and the UN. The Church supports the work of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies (Provo, Utah, USA).

Contact: Church Communication Department
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Saltisford
Warwick
CV34 4TT

Phone: 0121 712 1161
Email: jared.kerr@churchofjesuschrist.org

Website: news-uk.churchofjesuschrist.org

COALITION FOR JEWISH VALUES

Coalition for Jewish Values is a rabbinic civil society organization which promotes religious liberty, human rights, and classical Jewish ideas in public policy.

Contact: info@bod.org.uk

Website: <https://coalitionforjewishvalues.org/>

COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH CENTRE

Based in Hertfordshire, The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre in the United Kingdom is the headquarters of the Advocacy, Development, and Communications and Media Offices for the United Kingdom and Europe.

The advocacy work of The Centre is both reactive in its timely response to current topical issues and proactive in its periodical release of press statements, published articles, news interviews, and briefings to both governmental and non-governmental sectors on matters of international justice, human rights and religious freedom.

Additionally, the comments and views of His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom (and director of the Centre) are frequently sought on matters of human rights, civil liberties and international religious freedom, particularly in relation to the situation in Egypt and the Middle East. His Grace is also the founder and convener of the Asylum Advocacy Group which works closely in partnership with the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom or Belief.

The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre is a hub of activity that also utilises its resources to cater for a wide variety of spiritual, youth, community, pastoral, and ecumenical activities that engage at the local, national and international level.

Contact: Phone: 020 7193 7728
Email: office@copticorthodox.london

Website: www.copticcentre.com

ELIM PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

The Elim Pentecostal Church is a growing Movement of more than 550 Christian congregations in the UK and Ireland. In a world that can feel like a desert, our 21st-century churches seek to be a place of spiritual resource within their communities.

Website: www.elim.org.uk

HINDU MATTERS IN BRITAIN

Hindu Matters in Britain state their aims and objectives as the following:

1. As a Hindu ethos based organisation, engage in dialogue with other faith organisations;
2. Act in the best interests of the UK, and India and engage with politicians and government wherever helpful.
3. Provide academic and other commentaries, as needed, for policy recommendations as regards Sanatan Hindu understanding
4. Engage where possible to ensure that news and researches as regards Hindu community and/or India is impartial, honest and true.
5. Distribute knowledge of Santan hindu Dharma.
6. Engage and promote good quality research, informing the public.
7. Never be associated with any matters or persons that spread hatred.

Website: www.hindumattersinbritain.co.uk

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES

The International Center for Law and Religion Studies is a global academic leader in the field of international religious freedom. Founded in 2000, the Center is part of the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University, one of the largest private universities in the United States. The Center's mission is to "help secure the blessings of religious liberty for all," through scholarship, networking, educational activities, and law reform efforts.

Website: www.iclrs.org

MIDDLE EAST CONCERN

Middle East Concern (MEC) is dedicated to defending the religious freedom of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. MEC provides support for individuals facing persecution due to their Christian faith, engages in advocacy, and works to raise awareness of violations of religious freedom in the region. MEC also assists with legal aid, humanitarian support, and encourages prayer for affected communities.

Website: www.meconcern.org

MOSAIC MIDDLE EAST

Mosaic Middle East's mission is to bring hope, help and healing in the Middle East. We focus on vulnerable and persecuted minorities, to relieve immediate needs and assist them in securing sustainable futures. The objectives of strengthening and empowering those in need is motivated by Christian compassion. We deliver our mission through livelihood projects initiated in partnership with local NGOs, empowering community centres for refugees, and raising awareness through advocacy both in Iraq, UK and internationally. We are also the main funders of St George's Medical Clinic in Baghdad, Iraq under the auspices of the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, and support the peace-building ministry of the Rev'd Canon Faez Jirjees the first Iraqi Anglican priest in Iraq. We provide emergency relief to those in need, regardless of sectarian division, and strive for peaceful co-existence. We are active on social media and weekly updates, as well as a quarterly print magazine called 'Restore' (obtainable here).

Mosaic Middle East is currently operational in Iraq and Jordan. Mosaic Middle East (FRRME) is a non-profit organisation registered as a charity in England and Wales (Registration number 1133576). We are also registered in Kurdistan.

Contact: Mosaic Middle East,
PO Box 229
Petersfield
Hampshire GU32 9DL
Telephone 01730 267673
Email office@mosaicmiddleeast.org
Twitter: @Mosaic_ME

Website: www.mosaicmiddleeast.org

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK Bahá'í community is made up of thousands of men, women and children from many diverse backgrounds, cultures and walks of life. The Bahá'í teachings emphasise that all of us, as creations of one God, are part of one human family. Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith said, "The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch."

Contact: Office of Public Affairs,
UK Baha'i community
27 Rutland Gate,
London
SW7 1PD

Phone: 0207 019 7780
Email: opa@bahai.org.uk

Website: www.bahai.org.uk

OPEN DOORS UK & IRELAND

Open Doors is an international charity that supports Christians who face persecution for their faith in over 50 countries around the world. We provide practical and spiritual support to persecuted Christians and campaign for greater freedom of religion or belief for all.

Contact: The Advocacy Team
Open Doors UK & Ireland
PO Box 6,
Witney,
Oxon,
OX29 6WG

Phone: 01993 777300
Email: advocacy@opendoorsuk.org

Website: www.opendoorsuk.org

RELEASE INTERNATIONAL

Release International is a UK-based charity which, through its international network of missions, serves persecuted Christians in more than 30 countries. It supports pastors and Christian prisoners, and their families; supplies Christian literature and Bibles; and works for justice. Release has been supporting persecuted Christians since 1968, providing practical aid and speaking up for the oppressed. Join us, be inspired by the faith of persecuted Christians – and make a difference!

Contact: Phone: 01689 823491
Email: info@releaseinternational.org

Website: www.releaseinternational.org

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM INSTITUTE (RFI)

RFI is committed to achieving broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, a source of individual and social flourishing, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a driver of national and international security.

We accomplish this goal by convincing stakeholders in select regions of the world that religious freedom can help them achieve their own goals—political, economic, strategic, and religious. We work to build coalitions and make religious freedom a priority for governments, civil society, religious communities, businesses, and the general public.

Contact: RFI@religiousfreedominstitute.org

Website: www.religiousfreedominstitute.org

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM & BUSINESS FOUNDATION

The Religious Freedom & Business Foundation (RFBF), founded in 2014 by Dr. Brian Grim, is the preeminent organisation dedicated to educating the global business community, policymakers, non-government organisations and consumers about the positive power that faith and freedom of religion or belief for all (including those with no religious faith) have on workplaces and the economy.

The Religious Freedom & Business Foundation is a non-partisan, nonpolitical registered 501(c)3 non-profit organisation in the United States with work worldwide. Its signature

global events are branded as Dare to Overcome, which aim to build allyship among diverse communities in workplaces and marketplaces around the globe.

We help organisations benchmark progress in workplace religious inclusion through our annual Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Index, now entering its 5th year. RFBF also produces various Guides to Religion in the Workplace, including a Guide for When a Company's Public Positions are in Tension with Employees' Beliefs.

RFBF works with people and organisations of all religions or beliefs. It does not take a position on current political debates.

Contact: contact@religiousfreedomandbusiness.org

Website: www.religiousfreedomandbusiness.org

UNITED COPTS OF GREAT BRITAIN

United Copts GB aims at promoting the principles of equality and justice for the Copts in Egypt through legitimate and peaceful means.

United Copts GB tries it best to satisfy the four axes of Activism through lobbying MP/MEPs. United Copts GB participated in several hearing sessions in the European Parliament and United Nations Minority Forums, submitted a study regarding Copts in Egypt to the UN Office of High Commission for Human Right, supported the victims of persecution as refugees in UK or in Egypt, raised the profile of persecution by several TV debates and news programmes as well as legal support to the victims of persecution in Egypt and as refugees.

United Copts GB is founding member of the European Union of Coptic Organizations for Human Rights.

Contact: Email: info@unitedcopts.org; ibrahimhab@aol.com

Website: <https://unitedcopts.org/>

SIKH HINDU HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTE NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE (SHHRINE)

The Sikh Hindu Human Rights Institute North America and Europe (SHHRINE) is an advocacy organization that focuses on promoting human rights and social justice for the Sikh and Hindu communities. Established to address historical grievances and ongoing issues of communal violence, SHHRINE works to raise awareness about human rights abuses faced by these communities, particularly in relation to events like the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India.

SHHRINE aims to provide a platform for dialogue and action to ensure that the rights of Sikhs and Hindus are protected. The organization often collaborates with various civil society groups to advocate for policy changes, support victims of communal violence, and promote interfaith understanding. SHHRINE also engages in research and documentation efforts to bring attention to human rights violations, seeking justice and accountability for past atrocities.

Contact: Shhrinstitute@gmail.com

Website: www.shhrine.org

Members

With 4 officers and over 100 members, the APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief is one of the largest in parliament. See our members listed below.

House of Commons

- ❖ Jim Allister MP
- ❖ Fleur Anderson MP
- ❖ Tonia Antoniazzi MP
- ❖ Edward Argar MP
- ❖ Dr Scott Arthur MP
- ❖ Alex Baker MP
- ❖ Saqib Bhatti MP
- ❖ Bob Blackman MP
- ❖ Gregory Campbell MP
- ❖ Alistair Carmichael MP
- ❖ Sir Christopher Chope MP
- ❖ Feryal Clark MP
- ❖ Geoffrey Cox MP
- ❖ Tan Dhesi MP
- ❖ Anna Dixon MP
- ❖ Stephen Doughty MP
- ❖ Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP
- ❖ Alex Easton MP
- ❖ Tim Farron MP
- ❖ Richard Foord MP
- ❖ Nusrat Ghani MP
- ❖ Preet Kaur Gill MP
- ❖ Fabian Hamilton MP
- ❖ Dr Rupa Huq MP
- ❖ Imran Hussain MP
- ❖ Adam Jogee MP
- ❖ Ruth Jones MP
- ❖ Mike Kane MP
- ❖ Danny Kruger MP
- ❖ Edward Leigh MP
- ❖ Emma Lewell-Buck MP

- ❖ Dr Julian Lewis MP
- ❖ Carla Lockhart MP
- ❖ Rachael Maskell MP
- ❖ Kerry McCarthy MP
- ❖ Siobhain McDonagh MP
- ❖ Blair McDougall MP
- ❖ Brendan O'Hara MP
- ❖ Taiwo Owatemi MP
- ❖ Chris Philp MP
- ❖ Mark Pritchard MP
- ❖ Yasmin Qureshi MP
- ❖ Marie Rimmer MP
- ❖ Liz Saville Roberts MP
- ❖ Gavin Robinson MP
- ❖ Matt Rodda MP
- ❖ Andrew Rosindell MP
- ❖ Sam Rushworth MP
- ❖ Mrs Sarah Russell MP
- ❖ Jim Shannon MP
- ❖ David Smith MP
- ❖ Nick Smith MP
- ❖ Sarah Smith MP
- ❖ Wes Streeting MP
- ❖ Gareth Thomas MP
- ❖ Sir Stephen Timms MP
- ❖ Tom Tugendhat MP
- ❖ Valerie Vaz MP
- ❖ Catherine West MP
- ❖ Sammy Wilson MP

House of Lords

- ❖ Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon

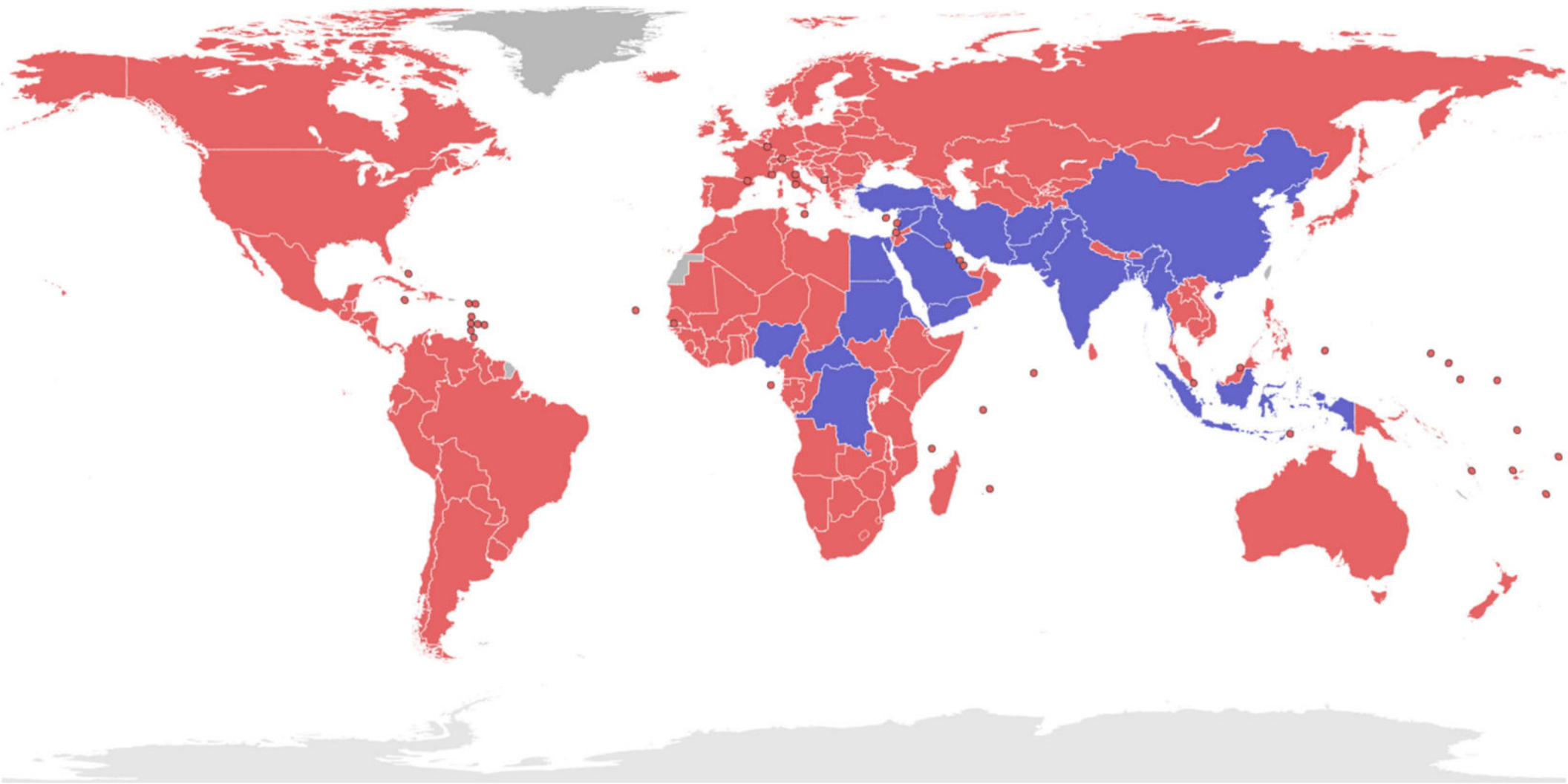
- ❖ Lord Alton of Liverpool
- ❖ Lord Anderson of Ipswich
- ❖ Baroness Anelay
- ❖ Lord Boateng
- ❖ Baroness Brinton
- ❖ Bishop of Bristol
- ❖ Lord Carey of Clifton
- ❖ Lord Clarke of Hampstead
- ❖ Lord Collins of Highbury
- ❖ Lord Cormack
- ❖ Bishop of Coventry
- ❖ Baroness Cox
- ❖ Lord Curry of Kirkhaele
- ❖ Lord Dholakia
- ❖ Lord Dodds of Duncairn
- ❖ Baroness Eaton
- ❖ Lord Evans
- ❖ Lord Green of Deddington
- ❖ Lord Griffiths of Burry Port
- ❖ Bishop of Guildford
- ❖ Bishop of Hereford
- ❖ Lord Hunt of Kings Heath
- ❖ Baroness Hooper
- ❖ Lord Hylton
- ❖ The Lord Bishops of Leeds
- ❖ Lord Loomba
- ❖ Lord Moylan
- ❖ Bishop of Newcastle
- ❖ Lord Parekh
- ❖ Bishop of Peterborough
- ❖ Lord Polak
- ❖ Lord Popat
- ❖ Lord Rennard
- ❖ Lord Selkirk
- ❖ Baroness Sherlock
- ❖ Lord Singh of Wimbledon
- ❖ Baroness Smith of Newnham
- ❖ Bishop of St Albans
- ❖ Baroness Stroud
- ❖ Lord Suri
- ❖ Lord Triesman
- ❖ Baroness Verma
- ❖ Baroness Whitaker
- ❖ Lord Whitby
- ❖ Lord Wigley
- ❖ Bishop of Winchester
- ❖ Bishop of Worcester

Countries of Particular Concern

The following twenty countries are among those that are of particular concern for our stakeholders. We will present individual stakeholder engagement in and research on each of these countries in turn. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of countries in the world where the freedom of religion or belief is infringed; additional information about FoRB violations in countries not on this list can be found on the individual websites of our stakeholders.

1. Afghanistan
2. Bangladesh
3. Central African Republic
4. China
5. Democratic Republic of the Congo
6. Egypt
7. Eritrea
8. India
9. Indonesia
10. Iran
11. Iraq
12. Myanmar
13. Nigeria
14. North Korea
15. Pakistan
16. Saudi Arabia
17. Sudan
18. Syria
19. Türkiye
20. Yemen

(These countries are highlighted in blue on the world map below.)



Afghanistan

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Afghanistan Country Report:

The legal framework surrounding freedom of religion in Afghanistan has undergone substantial changes since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, effectively nullifying the 2004 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Under Taliban rule, the country is governed by a de facto Islamic emirate led by the Amir ul-Muminin, the "Commander of the Faithful," with limited transparency regarding the nation's legal structure. A provisional government, made up exclusively of Taliban members, was quickly established to manage affairs. While the Taliban initially indicated that the 1964 royal constitution would be used as an interim framework where it did not conflict with Islamic law, it has not been practically implemented, with the Emir exercising unilateral authority over legislative, judicial, and administrative functions. In essence, the Taliban's interpretation of Sharia dominates governance, sidelining principles such as separation of powers or constitutional protections for rights, especially those of women and religious minorities.

The Taliban administration has issued multiple decrees restricting women's rights, including bans on secondary education for girls and limitations on women's freedom of movement, dress, and participation in public life. In May 2022, a Taliban manifesto outlined the principles of an Islamic emirate, specifically highlighting an independent judiciary, an Islamic army, and a legal system grounded in Hanafi jurisprudence. This represents a regression for the Shi'a minority, who had limited recognition of Ja'fari (Shi'a) jurisprudence under the 2004 Constitution but

are now required to adhere to Hanafi-based laws, including taxation requirements from which they were previously exempt. In practice, there has been little accommodation for Shi'a practices, and some Ja'fari teachings have even been removed from educational institutions in Shi'a-majority areas.

Religious minorities, including Hazaras, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, face intensified persecution. The Taliban have failed to include these communities in governance, and public statements claiming protections for minorities are contradicted by the reality on the ground. Hazaras, Afghanistan's third-largest ethnic group and predominantly Shi'a Muslims, have been targeted both by the Taliban and by IS-KP (Islamic State-Khorasan Province), which frequently attacks minority religious sites and gatherings. The UN has documented severe human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and instances of cruel and inhumane punishment by the Taliban, along with an upsurge in violence against the Hazara and other minority communities.

International agencies such as the UN and Human Rights Watch have condemned the Taliban's violations, including public floggings, executions, and restrictions on media reporting, which exacerbate the risks faced by minorities. Despite Taliban assurances, religious freedoms remain severely curtailed, and the humanitarian situation for minority communities remains dire, with little hope for substantive protections under the current regime.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Bangladesh

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need,
SHHRINE



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Bangladesh Country Report:

The constitutional status of religious freedom in Bangladesh is fraught with ambivalence and contradiction. While the constitution grants every citizen “the right to profess, practise, or propagate all religions” (Article 41, 1, a), it simultaneously designates Islam as the state religion, while also establishing secularism as a constitutional principle. Specifically, the Preamble and Article 8 regard secularism as a fundamental principle of state policy. Article 12, which was reinstated in 2011, calls for secularism by eliminating communalism, religious discrimination, and the politicisation of religion. However, Article 2A affirms Islam as the state religion, stating that equal rights for Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and other religions will be upheld.

The paradox endures. In 2016, the High Court of Bangladesh upheld Islam’s status as the state religion despite rising Islamism and ongoing religious tensions. Bangladesh, having gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, has long grappled with the question of its core identity. Officially, the ruling Awami League (AL) promotes secularism, yet militant Islamism is deeply rooted in society, fostering significant hostility towards religious minorities.

Although Sunni Islam plays a central role in Bangladesh’s identity, many citizens take pride in its historically moderate traditions. Following independence, Bangladesh adopted a secular constitution in 1972. However, under General Ershad’s military rule in 1988, Islam was declared the state religion. Since then, secularist and Islamist movements have struggled to shape

the nation’s identity. This conflict has polarised the nation, dividing it into “secularist” and “Islamist” factions. As historian Samuel Berthet notes, “Relations between religion and state are pivotal in the history of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, but also in the history of the project of the Bangladeshi nation since its creation in 1971.” Bangladesh’s independence movement associated secularism with its national identity, while religion was tied to its history as part of Pakistan.

Bangladesh is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, underscoring a commitment to human rights. However, the country lacks an anti-blasphemy law. Instead, the Penal Code of 1860 criminalises offences that “outrage religious feelings,” and the Information and Communication Technology Act (ICT) of 2006, strengthened in 2013, penalises content perceived as religious defamation. In 2018, the Digital Security Act (DSA) granted authorities extensive powers to arrest individuals without a warrant. Critics argue this law has suppressed free speech, with hundreds of journalists, activists, and critics arrested.

The Awami League has often opposed militant Islamism, but its secular policies can paradoxically incite backlash, intensifying religious polarisation and sometimes infringing on religious liberties. For instance, prosecuting Islamist leaders for war crimes related to the 1971 war has faced criticism for legal irregularities and provoked hostility from conservative factions. Islamist militants, in turn, have retaliated with violent campaigns against secularists and religious minorities, particularly

Hindus and Christians. This violence surged in recent years, with a notable outbreak in October 2021, following a Facebook post that alleged desecration of the Quran at a Hindu festival, sparking attacks on over 100 Hindu sites.

Christians face threats as well, especially in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), where violence has increased. Local Catholics have voiced concerns over rising insecurity, while several NGOs report that ethnic and religious minorities are vulnerable to land grabs. For example, members of the indigenous Santal Catholic community protested in August 2022 against a government official accused of land seizures in Dinajpur.

While Bangladesh has provided sanctuary to nearly one million Rohingya refugees, the

ongoing violence from militant groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) complicates their situation. Many Rohingya refugees recently rallied to express their desire to return to Myanmar, but instability there leaves them with few options.

Prospects for religious freedom in Bangladesh remain uncertain. Though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has pledged to uphold secularism, progress is hindered by political and social division between secularists and religious conservatives. In this climate, a free and open society that respects religious liberty for all citizens remains elusive.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from SHHRINE

Genocide of Hindus led by Bangladeshi Islamists. (August 2024)

Hindus constitute about 8% of Bangladesh's 170 million people and have historically largely supported Hasina's Awami League party, which identifies as largely secular. Since the departure of PM Sheikh Hasina, situation has reached a boiling point, with the Hindu community living in constant fear for their lives and the safety of their loved ones. The lack of a strong government response has only emboldened the attackers, who continue to wreak havoc across the country.

On Sunday, August 4, violent clashes in Bangladesh resulted in the death of approximately 100 people, including a Hindu councillor. Reports indicate that Hindu homes and temples, such as those belonging to ISKCON and the Kali temple, were specifically targeted, forcing devotees to seek shelter. International human rights organizations have condemned the violence and called for immediate action to protect the Hindu minority. However, the Bangladeshi authorities have been slow to respond, and the situation remains dire.

Alarming incidents of butchering and raping Hindus are on the rise. There is no law and order and the Hindus are facing a harrowing time. The world community must no longer remain a silent spectator to the genocide of Hindus in Bangladesh and must urgently intervene.

Systematic Desecration of Temples Highlights Growing Violence Against Hindus in Bangladesh. (October 2024)

Hindus in Bangladesh faces increasing threats to their safety and religious practices, as evidenced by the recent theft of a ceremonial crown from the esteemed Jeshoreshwari Kali temple in Satkhira.

The theft occurs against the backdrop of escalating violence and intimidation towards minority religious communities in Bangladesh. Throughout the recent Durga Puja festivities, Hindus expressed heightened fears for their safety and the safety of their sacred sites. On Friday 11th October 2024, a firebomb was thrown at a temple in Dhaka's Tantibazar area, sparking panic among worshippers.

Communal tensions rose in the country after Prime Minister Hasina's resignation on August 5th, 2024. Hundreds of Hindu businesses and places of worship were attacked amid unprecedented political turmoil in the country.

In a terrifying escalation of threats against religious minorities in Bangladesh, a leader has delivered a venomous ultimatum, warning the Hindu community to leave the country within seven days or face extermination. The violent rhetoric, delivered at a charged rally, underscores growing fears for the safety of minorities especially Hindus in the region as extremism takes hold. "Your fathers are gone, your aunts are scared, you too go away," the leader declared, leaving no room for ambiguity in his intentions. His words were a sinister warning to the Hindu and Buddhist communities, urging them to leave or face brutal consequences.

These troubling developments underscore the fragility of religious tolerance in Bangladesh, a nation that was founded on the principles of

secularism and pluralism. The systematic desecration of Hindu temples and the theft of religious artifacts not only threaten the cultural heritage of the Hindu community but also raise alarm about the broader implications for religious freedom in the country.

SHHRINE is deeply saddened and outraged by the ongoing attacks on Hindu religious sites in Bangladesh, the theft of the ceremonial crown from the Jeshoreshwari Kali temple is not just a loss for the temple itself, but a loss for the entire Hindu community. It is imperative that the Bangladeshi government take immediate action to ensure the safety of all religious communities and restore a sense of security and respect for all faiths. As the situation continues to evolve, we call upon local authorities and international organizations to take a stand against these acts of violence, uphold the principles of secularism, and protect the rights of all minority religious groups.

Central African Republic

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Central African Republic Country Report:

The legal framework of the Central African Republic (CAR) reflects constitutional guarantees for religious freedom, but its practical application varies across religious communities, particularly Christians and Muslims. The Constitution of 2016 emphasizes the CAR's secular character, affirms freedom of conscience, assembly, and belief, and bans religious intolerance. Yet, real-world challenges reveal ongoing tensions between legal ideals and actual practices.

While all recognized religious groups have the right to establish radio programs and stations, issues persist in how rights are exercised and respected. For instance, the CAR signed a 2016 agreement with the Holy See to facilitate Church-state cooperation, yet delays in implementation limit religious activities. Similarly, residency permits for foreign missionaries face long delays, hindering religious operations.

The CAR mandates the registration of religious groups, demanding a minimum of 1,000 members and religious training for leaders, which can impact newer or smaller faith communities. While registration is ostensibly inclusive, denials are permissible if groups are deemed offensive to public morals or public health. The recent approval of the Russian Orthodox Church highlights the selective approval process amid growing Russian influence in CAR, which is perceived as politically charged.

Ethnic and religious tensions persist, exacerbated by socio-economic hardships and alleged abuses by security forces and foreign mercenaries. Muslims, particularly those perceived as aligned with rebel groups, experience harassment and violence. Reports highlight attacks on Muslims, with the UN reporting human rights abuses by CAR security forces and their allies. Incidents like the 2021 Bambari mosque attack illustrate this, where forces allegedly targeted Muslims, amplifying feelings of discrimination and mistrust within the Muslim community.

Contrary to government denials, evidence from international organizations points to ongoing religious-based violence. Despite assurances from some Muslim leaders about religious tolerance, other community figures report targeted violence, fostering concerns that such marginalization may incite future extremism.

While no recent, substantial cases of anti-Christian violence were reported, tensions remain as the Catholic Bishops Conference criticizes resource exploitation and the influence of foreign forces. Recent attempts to revise the CAR's Constitution were met with resistance from religious groups, with Catholic bishops refraining from committee participation due to insufficient public consultation. This highlights the role religious organizations play as societal watchdogs but also underscores the risks involved in opposing political authorities.

Despite legal protections, the CAR's religious freedom landscape is complex, affected by administrative delays, selective recognition, and religious violence. The Constitution promises religious freedom, but systemic flaws and socio-

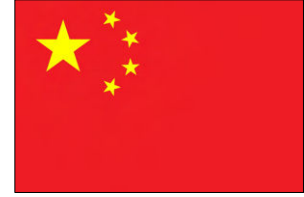
political dynamics create uneven applications. Christian-Muslim relations remain tense, with some improvement for Christians yet heightened risks for Muslims. The CAR's international partners should monitor the country's religious freedom status closely, emphasizing the need for

transparency and equitable application of religious rights to prevent further violence and maintain social cohesion.

[Read the full report here.](#)

China

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of China Country Report:

China's 1982 constitution (revised in 2018) formally guarantees freedom of religious belief, stating that no one may compel individuals to follow, or not follow, any religion, nor discriminate based on religious beliefs. It also permits only "normal" religious activities, with no definition of what constitutes "normal," while explicitly prohibiting religious practices deemed to disrupt public order, harm citizens' health, or interfere with the state's educational system. Additionally, religious organisations must not be "dominated by foreign powers." In practice, this protection is limited to the five state-approved religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism) as regulated by seven government "patriotic" associations, excluding all religious activities outside these structures, often subjecting them to punishment and suppression.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) requires its members and military personnel to practice atheism, while the government restricts religious education and participation for anyone under 18. The 2018 revised Regulations on Religious Affairs introduced further limitations, including restrictions on religious content distribution, religious schools, and charitable activities. As of March 2018, the United Front Work Department of the CCP assumed direct management of religious affairs, replacing the State Administration of Religious Affairs and tightening control over religious institutions.

Further legislation includes the National Security Law and the 2016 NGO Law, which grants the government broad powers over foreign organisations and imposes severe

restrictions on their operations in China. The 2021 Measures on the Management of Religious Clergy and the 2022 Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services reinforced state control over clergy and prohibited unapproved online religious content. Additional financial regulations effective from June 2022 put CCP and government agencies in charge of the finances of religious institutions, ensuring that these resources are directed towards "sinicisation," or the alignment of religion with socialist values.

Incidents over the review period reflect heightened repression against religious minorities. Crackdowns have escalated, particularly against unregistered Protestant churches, Catholic clergy, and other independent religious groups, often resulting in arrest, detention, and severe prison sentences for religious leaders and followers. For instance, the Uyghur Muslim community in Xinjiang has faced particularly harsh treatment, including mass detentions, forced labour, and restrictions on religious practices. The persecution extends to other ethnic Muslim groups and Hui Muslims, whose religious symbols have been removed and traditions suppressed. Tibetan Buddhists also face restrictions on their cultural and religious practices, and religious symbols and sites have been desecrated.

The independent Uyghur Tribunal in the UK has described the treatment of Uyghurs as genocide, with similar statements from US officials. In 2022, the outgoing UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported possible crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, citing widespread arbitrary detention, family separations, and

cultural destruction. Falun Gong practitioners continue to face arrest, and the government has intensified monitoring of Hong Kong's religious institutions.

In Hong Kong, where the right to religious freedom was previously respected, new levels of self-censorship and state influence have emerged, with clergy refraining from politically sensitive topics and growing state control over religious schools. Articles in pro-Beijing media have criticised Church activities, indicating

further pressure on religious freedom in Hong Kong.

Prospects for freedom of religion in China remain bleak, with the current crackdown being the most severe since the Cultural Revolution, as religious freedom is subordinated to political loyalty and alignment with CCP ideologies.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Report:

The 2006 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) recognises the secular nature of the state and protects religious pluralism. It prohibits discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or opinion, and ensures the freedom to practise religion publicly and privately. Religious groups may build places of worship, raise funds locally and internationally, and engage in proselytism. Religion is taught in schools, and a 1977 convention established cooperation between the government and religious communities for educational purposes. In 2016, the DRC signed an agreement with the Holy See to address Catholic education, religious welfare services, and administrative matters for religious personnel.

The secular state in DRC coexists with strong religious influences in political and social spheres, especially through organisations like the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) and the Ecumenical Council of Congo (COE). These groups address political, educational, and social issues, and the president's oath of office invokes God. Despite this structure, persistent violence affects the eastern DRC, particularly from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist militant group allied with the Islamic State. The ADF has targeted civilians and religious leaders, often forcing conversions to Islam and abducting children as soldiers. UN reports indicate the ADF was responsible for over 1,300 civilian deaths in 2021, and its acts have been labelled as crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The violence has led to widespread displacement, with millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) across North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces. Attacks attributed to the ADF have included brutal massacres, kidnappings, and desecration of churches, with local leaders criticising both the DRC government and UN forces for inadequate responses. In 2021, President Félix Tshisekedi declared a state of siege in North Kivu and Ituri, where violence has continued, impacting both Christian and Muslim communities. Key Muslim figures critical of Islamic militancy have been assassinated, leading to concerns within the local Islamic community.

The situation has strained religious harmony and drawn attention to the conflict's underlying financial motives, particularly the exploitation of valuable minerals in the eastern region. High-profile church leaders have called for international assistance, with some accusing neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda, of benefiting from illegal mining operations in DRC. Violence during Ramadan, and incidents targeting Christian groups, have intensified fears of a deliberate strategy to destabilise religious communities.

The Catholic Church has been directly affected, with multiple attacks on church properties and personnel, leading to statements from DRC's Catholic bishops condemning these actions as serious violations of religious freedom and democracy. The postponed visit of Pope Francis due to health issues added to the community's concerns, although Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, visited in his stead to show support.

As violence continues, religious leaders report an escalating sense of vulnerability. Incidents involving murder, abduction, and vandalism of religious sites underscore the need for a stronger government and international response. Meanwhile, local churches remain targeted, and

religious leaders continue to appeal for protection and support for the displaced, who face severe hardships.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Egypt

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Egypt Country Report:

Egypt's 2014 constitution, later amended in 2019, established various religious freedom rights alongside provisions favouring Islamic principles. It frames Egypt as the birthplace of key religious figures and doctrines, describing Islam as the state religion and Shari'a as the basis for lawmaking. Non-Muslim groups—mainly Christians and Jews—are allowed to follow their own religious laws for personal matters, while Al-Azhar University is protected as a premier institution for Islamic teachings. Though equality under the law is proclaimed, and political parties cannot be based on religion, the actual implementation often diverges from constitutional assurances, especially in relation to religious minorities.

The constitution includes specific protections for Christians and Copts, yet the government restricts conversions from Islam, does not legally recognise the Baha'i faith, and issues ID cards that label religious affiliation solely for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Although a Church Construction Law passed in 2016 aimed to ease building permits for churches, its enforcement has been inconsistent, with ongoing administrative and social obstacles that fuel tensions, especially in rural areas. Customary reconciliation, a practice commonly used to resolve disputes, often disadvantages Christians, as it can result in pressure on victims to dismiss or reduce charges, obscuring systematic violations.

Despite ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Egypt reserved the right to override it with Shari'a, limiting international commitments. Legal measures

targeting extremism and blasphemy are frequently used to curb freedom of speech, with high-profile cases against perceived blasphemy, anti-state activity, or terrorism charges. This includes the detention or sentencing of Muslim Brotherhood members, Shia and atheist activists, and religious minorities. Notable incidents reflect these tensions: state seizures of Muslim Brotherhood assets, mass trials, and ongoing legal restrictions on publishing or importing certain religious materials.

Meanwhile, government-led initiatives, like Egypt's "Holy Family Trail" for spiritual tourism, indicate a selective promotion of religious heritage. Certain reform attempts, such as school curricula revisions to incorporate common values of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, continue to provoke heated public debate. The state also recently took steps to facilitate inheritance rights for Copts and promote civil society engagement, but with limited impact. When President Sisi acknowledged atheism and expressed support for religious tolerance, he faced considerable backlash, demonstrating the deep-rooted societal resistance to religious diversity.

While some positive changes occurred, such as legalising churches or permitting school curriculum adjustments, the gap between formal law and on-the-ground reality is wide. Laws that theoretically protect minority rights are inconsistently applied, and secular advocacy groups regularly report on issues like employment discrimination, denied rights in personal matters, and obstacles to church construction.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Eritrea

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Eritrea Country Report:

Eritrea's constitution, ratified in 1997 but never implemented, includes freedom of religion as a right under Article 19. Despite this, the government's 1995 decree recognises only four religious groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea, the Catholic Church, and Sunni Islam. All other religious practices are deemed illegal. Even these recognised communities face heavy restrictions, with the state closely controlling the Orthodox Church and Muslim community leaders. Leaders of the Catholic and Lutheran Churches have slightly more autonomy, but all religious groups must obtain government permission to print literature, refrain from political discourse, and submit semi-annual reports on their activities.

Religious groups not officially recognised by the state face significant hurdles, with a complex registration process that allows for state harassment. Even approved communities face restrictions, such as the inability to receive foreign funding unless registered as NGOs, and those that do must allow authorities to monitor their finances.

Since gaining independence, Eritrea has been governed by President Isaias Afwerki and the ruling party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), with little tolerance for dissent or civil rights. Forced conscription has been used to compel individuals to fight in foreign conflicts, including Ethiopia's civil war, often with punitive measures for religious objectors. It is reported that between 500 and

2,500 individuals are detained at the Mai Serwa prison solely for their religious beliefs.

While some releases of detained religious prisoners occurred in early 2021, notably among Evangelical and Orthodox Christians as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, arrests continue. In March 2021, 35 Christians were detained during prayer meetings, and in May, the government targeted the Catholic Church, closing or nationalising schools and threatening further seizures of Church-run establishments. Catholic leaders spoke out, asserting that these closures undermine the Church's social services and the rights of its members.

In 2022, several religious figures were detained or forced into conscription. Teenagers attending Mass were forcibly conscripted by soldiers, and incidents of church leaders' arrests continued. Despite brief releases of some clerics in late 2022, Eritrea remains classified by the US as a "Country of Particular Concern" for religious freedom violations.

The prospects for religious freedom in Eritrea remain bleak, with severe restrictions on religious, political, and civil rights. The government's emphasis on national "martyrdom" over individual freedoms and ongoing repressive policies create a hostile environment for religious practice. Eritrea's deteriorating economy, forced conscription, and lack of freedoms have driven thousands to seek asylum, and the ongoing political climate offers little hope for improvement.

[Read the full report here.](#)

India

Stakeholders: ADF International, Aid to the Church in Need, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Religious Freedom & Business Foundation



Update from ADF International

This past year brought escalating life-threatening violence to Christians in India. In February, the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh erupted in attacks, resulting in decimated churches, looted villages, and thousands of displaced people. Not long after, in May, Christians and other religious minorities in the northeastern state of Manipur experienced similar violence, culminating in a full humanitarian crisis.

Our partners in India are challenging anti-conversion laws at the country's Supreme Court, highlighting them as egregious violations of international human rights law, which contribute to a culture of intolerance and violence.

Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of India Country Report:

India's constitution guarantees religious freedom, asserting a secular approach that treats all religious traditions equally. However, this secularism has diminished since Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, coinciding with a rise in Hindu nationalism. Historical interreligious tensions persist, exacerbated by the growing influence of Hindu nationalist groups, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), within government and society.

Legal provisions for religious freedom are embedded in the constitution, notably in Articles 25, 26, 27, and 30, which safeguard the rights of individuals and religious groups to profess, practice, and manage their affairs. Nevertheless, recent years have seen an increase in restrictions, particularly regarding foreign funding for religious organisations. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) has been

used selectively to target NGOs associated with minority religions, limiting their operational capacities.

The political landscape has also seen the introduction of anti-conversion laws in various states, justified by the ruling party as necessary to prevent coercive conversions. However, these laws disproportionately affect minority faiths, particularly Christians and Muslims, while rarely being enforced against Hindus. This legal environment has fostered an atmosphere of intimidation, with reports of violence against Christians rising sharply, particularly following the BJP's electoral successes.

Since Modi's re-election in 2019, the rights of Muslims have been particularly jeopardised. Significant actions taken by the government include the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status and the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act, which excludes Muslims from eligibility for citizenship based on

religious persecution. Incidents of violence against Christians and Muslims have become increasingly common, often incited by Hindu nationalist rhetoric, and local authorities frequently fail to intervene.

Numerous documented attacks illustrate this growing intolerance, with the Christian community experiencing targeted violence and harassment. Reports indicate a substantial increase in incidents against Christians,

reflecting the broader climate of hostility fostered by the ruling party's support for Hindu nationalism. In contrast, the legal framework intended to protect religious freedoms appears increasingly compromised, as state actions seem to favour the majority religion while discriminating against minorities.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

India's constitution establishes a secular state, with Article 25 guaranteeing the "freedom of conscience and free profession, practice, and propagation of religion." However, this right is increasingly curtailed by federal and state-level laws that limit religious freedom. India is a signatory to international agreements like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which underscores the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), yet the Indian government faces criticism for its handling of religious minorities.

India's Freedom of Religion Acts, commonly known as "anti-conversion laws," are in force in 10 states, with several more considering similar legislation. These laws are framed to prevent "forced" religious conversions, but their vague language and broad definitions often criminalise legitimate religious conversions and are weaponised against minority communities. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 further exacerbates religious discrimination by offering a pathway to citizenship for religious minorities from neighbouring countries, but specifically excludes Muslims. Meanwhile, restrictions on foreign funding under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) have been used to limit the activities of NGOs that advocate for human rights and FoRB, particularly those working with marginalised communities.

Key Issues

The rise of Hindu nationalism, particularly under the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has amplified religious tensions and led to increased discrimination against Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an influential Hindu nationalist organisation associated with the BJP, promotes a vision of India as a Hindu nation, often casting religious minorities as threats to Indian culture and unity. This ideology is echoed in BJP-led government policies, which often disproportionately affect minority communities. For instance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has faced criticism for remaining silent during incidents of communal violence and for rhetoric that casts Muslims as "infiltrators."

Anti-conversion laws are a significant driver of FoRB abuses. These laws often target Christian and Muslim communities, with accusations that they engage in "forced" or "fraudulent" conversions, particularly of vulnerable Hindu communities. In Uttar Pradesh, one of India's largest states, authorities have intensified the enforcement of anti-conversion laws, leading to the arrests of pastors and individuals involved in interfaith marriages. In some cases, Christians are detained and even physically assaulted by vigilante groups who claim to protect Hindu values. State authorities frequently support or fail to prosecute these

vigilante actors, allowing mob violence and harassment to continue with impunity.

The CAA has also led to discrimination against Muslims, who are excluded from the act's provisions despite comprising a significant part of India's population. Coupled with the National Register of Citizens (NRC) policy, which aims to verify citizenship status in regions with large immigrant populations, the CAA has stoked fears among Muslims of potential statelessness. In Assam, where the NRC process is most advanced, many Muslim residents have been labelled "foreigners" and detained in camps, while the CAA provides protections to non-Muslim immigrants in the same region. These policies are widely seen as targeting Muslim populations and represent a serious FoRB violation under international standards.

Religious violence, often referred to as "communal violence" in India, has been a recurring issue, with attacks on Muslim and Christian communities. High-profile incidents, such as the 2020 Delhi riots following protests against the CAA, saw Muslim homes, businesses, and places of worship targeted, resulting in widespread destruction and dozens of deaths. In many cases, law enforcement agencies were criticised for their failure to intervene or for participating in the violence. Additionally, hate speech and derogatory language used by political leaders have contributed to a culture of impunity around such violence, creating an environment where minorities feel unsafe and marginalised.

Christians in India face specific challenges, with churches often targeted by vigilante groups claiming that Christians convert Hindus forcibly. In some states, Christians are prohibited from gathering for worship, while pastors and churchgoers face harassment, arrest, and even physical violence. Educational institutions and public places in states with strong Hindu nationalist sentiment are hostile environments for Christians, who report being ostracised or pressured to adopt Hindu practices.

Recommendations for the UK

Given the scale and severity of FoRB violations in India, the UK can play an influential role in advocating for the protection of religious minorities through diplomatic engagement, support for civil society, and multilateral initiatives. Recommended actions include:

- Engaging in Diplomatic Dialogue on Anti-Conversion Laws:** The UK should encourage India to review its anti-conversion laws to ensure they comply with international human rights standards. Diplomatic engagement could include urging India to adopt clearer legal language to prevent misuse and protect legitimate religious practices.
- Publicly Condemning Discrimination and Violence Against Minorities:** The UK can issue statements condemning specific instances of violence against religious minorities, including the misuse of anti-conversion laws and discriminatory practices under the CAA. These public statements can amplify the challenges faced by minorities and add pressure on India to uphold its constitutional commitments to secularism and religious freedom.
- Supporting Civil Society and Human Rights Organisations:** The UK should offer support to NGOs and grassroots organisations working to protect FoRB in India. Financial assistance and capacity-building initiatives could help these organisations document abuses, advocate for victims, and push for legal reforms.
- Promoting Educational Reforms:** The UK could work with Indian civil society to address biased content in educational curricula that perpetuates stereotypes against religious minorities. Collaborating on educational initiatives that promote religious tolerance could reduce communal tensions over time.
- Raising Concerns on International Platforms:** The UK can highlight India's FoRB issues at the United Nations, Commonwealth meetings, and other multilateral forums. By raising these issues internationally, the UK can increase awareness of India's human rights

challenges and encourage other nations to support reforms.

6. **Addressing Restrictions on Foreign Funding:** The UK should urge India to amend the FCRA and allow foreign funding for NGOs focused on human rights and religious freedom. Highlighting the impact of these restrictions on civil society could encourage India to reconsider the act's limitations on international support.

7. **Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms:** Establishing monitoring mechanisms to track religious violence and FoRB violations in India could provide valuable data for advocacy and policy-making. The UK could publish annual reports on FoRB in India, keeping the issue in the public eye and supporting advocacy for vulnerable communities.

Update from the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

U.S. State Department–Sponsored Delegation from India – Salt Lake City, Utah

leaders working on religious freedom issues in India.

On April 11 and 12, 2024, the ICLRS hosted a U.S. State Department delegation of influential

Update from the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation

One of the outcomes of Dare to Overcome India 2023 was that the Principle Scientific Advisor to the Government of India invited "Dare to Overcome" (a global project of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation) to curate Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 – Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions – on their [Manthan platform](#). Through this platform and in partnership with others, Dare to Overcome now initiates and promotes Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives addressing [SDG 16](#).

SDG 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Dare to Overcome supports this through several initiatives, including its [awards](#) to business leaders advancing SDG 16 as well as its annual [conference](#) in New Delhi which celebrates successes in inclusive business practices that build peace and prosperity. Our mantra 'Unity in Diversity' calls businesses to not only put this to

practice in their workplaces, but also in Corporate Social Responsibility ([CSR](#)) initiatives that promote the same values among the coming generation's workforce.

Indeed, India is the global leader in CSR, thanks to the [Enactment of Companies Act, 2013](#) (by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India) is "one of the world's largest experiments of introducing the CSR as a mandatory provision by imposing statutory obligation on Companies to take up CSR projects towards social welfare activities. This has made India the only country which has regulated and mandated CSR for some select categories of companies registered under the Act. This CSR Initiative will push the nation towards achievement of sustainable development goals and public-private partnership in transforming India."

SDG 16 CSR Pilot: Dare to Overcome Human Rights, Business Skills & Peace Secondary School Curriculum

In 2024/25 we will pilot our Dare to Overcome Human Rights, Business Skills & Peace

Secondary School Curriculum in India. The curriculum teaches soft business skills that both reinforce human rights knowledge and promote inclusive peace. The curriculum has 10 30-to-60-minute lessons on 10 distinct human rights and associated business skills

The pilot includes securing local partners for the following:

1. Adapt the Colega Human Rights for Secondary Curriculum (Teacher's [Manual](#) and Facilitator's [Toolkit](#)) produced by the Geneva Office for Human Rights Education to the Indian context. It has currently been adapted for schools in Fiji, Ghana, Guatemala, Ivory Coast, Philippines, and the USA. India will be the first to pilot the business skills component.
2. Adapt the Dare to Overcome's Business Skills Curriculum to the Indian context (see [PPT](#) and [outline](#)).
3. Pilot the curriculum in a Secondary School.
4. Assess the impact of the curriculum.
5. Present the curriculum at 2024 Dare to Overcome as a CSR option for companies to support.
6. Expand the pilot and impact assessment to schools in underprivileged areas.
7. Propose the curriculum to India's Ministry of Education as well as State Ministries for adoption.
8. Long term: Expand the initiative regionally and globally.

Potential partners for curriculum adaptation and for impact assessment include the National Institute of Advanced Studies ([NIAS](#)), in Bengaluru, and the [MIT World Peace University](#), in Pune.

Our Dare to Overcome Human Rights, Business Skills & Peace Secondary School Curriculum begins by providing a foundational knowledge of ten important human rights guaranteed by the laws and Constitution of India as well as recognised by the United Nations. As each right is taught, it is combined with logically related soft business communication and analysis skills, and end with a demonstration of how these rights and skills promote inclusive peace.

For example, the knowledge portion of Lesson 3A is Freedom from Discrimination, and the associated soft business skill is Networking. The activity of trying to find someone "just like you" teaches the value of connecting with others no matter their differences. The step towards peace is that exploring the good that comes from being with people who are different from ourselves.

This curriculum is especially suited for [Secondary Education](#): "the education from ninth class to tenth class, which provides a foundation for lifelong learning by preparing students for further study and enabling them to acquire work-related skills necessary for entry to the workforce."

By 2030, it is estimated that India will have more than 90 million people joining the workforce. This skill-based curriculum will help develop cohorts of holistic, lifelong learners who are not only equipped with relevant skills for the evolving workplaces of the future but are also flexible, innovative leaders ready to take on the unknown challenges of tomorrow's world.

This is a practical and economically empowering approach to building FoRB for all.

Indonesia

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need,
International Center for Law and Religion Studies



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Indonesia Country Report:

Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country, operates as a secular state with constitutional guarantees for religious freedom, although certain restrictions exist to protect the rights of others. The nation adheres to "Pancasila," a philosophical framework emphasizing belief in one God, justice, unity, democracy, and social justice. While the constitution mandates a belief in a deity and protects the six officially recognised religions—Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism—the rights of adherents to other faiths and those who are agnostic or atheist are not equally safeguarded. Shari'a law is not enforced nationally, but many local jurisdictions have adopted Shari'a-inspired regulations, with estimates suggesting there are at least 151 such bylaws across several provinces.

Articles 28E and 29 of the constitution affirm the rights of individuals to choose and practice their religion, yet blasphemy laws and regulations introduced over the decades impose limitations. The new Criminal Code adopted in December 2022 retains provisions punishing blasphemy and heresy, echoing the previous blasphemy law instituted in 1965 under President Sukarno. Additionally, the Coordinating Body to Monitor Indigenous Beliefs has implemented tools to report "deviant" religious practices, underscoring state control over religious expression.

The process for establishing new places of worship is tightly regulated, requiring extensive documentation and community approval. Local

authorities must form Religious Harmony Forums, often dominated by the larger religious communities, which can lead to further marginalisation of minority faiths. Moreover, the government has issued decrees targeting the Ahmadiyya community, pressuring its members to adhere to interpretations of Islam deemed acceptable.

Despite Indonesia's historical reputation for pluralism, recent years have seen a decline in religious tolerance. The USCIRF reported minimal progress in improving religious freedom conditions, highlighting incidents of violence against religious minorities, such as the Palm Sunday attack in Makassar in 2021, and ongoing discrimination against groups like Shi'as and Ahmadis. Furthermore, a string of blasphemy convictions, including the harsh sentencing of a Christian YouTuber, illustrates a biased application of laws.

While there have been notable efforts to advance interfaith dialogue, as evidenced by meetings between Indonesian officials and the Vatican, the overall landscape for religious freedom remains precarious. New laws prohibiting sex outside of marriage further disadvantage women and ethnic minorities, while local implementations of Shari'a continue to exacerbate tensions. As Indonesia grapples with these challenges, the future of religious freedom appears uncertain, necessitating careful observation and advocacy to support the country's rich tradition of pluralism.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

Multi-Faith Collaborations in an Inclusive Society – Jakarta, Indonesia

ICLRS Director Brett G. Scharffs participated in the Leimena Institute's Conference "Multi-Faith Collaborations in an Inclusive Society" in Jakarta, Indonesia, 10–11 July, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. This conference, co-organized and cosponsored by the Center, featured Indonesia Minister of Foreign Affairs Luar Negeri as the keynote speaker and involved

leaders from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. The conference was attended by ambassadors or embassy officials from 22 countries, was covered by more than 30 press outlets, and was attended by 160 people from Indonesia and other countries, as well as 4000 online participants from more than 20 countries. Brett G. Scharffs and one other representative of the ICLRS were featured speakers in plenary sessions.

Iran

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Iran Country Report:

Iran operates as an Islamic republic with a theocratic constitution established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, making Ja'fari Shi'ism the official religion. The constitution recognises Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as protected religious minorities, allowing them limited freedom to worship and maintain religious societies. However, converts to Christianity, primarily from Protestant churches, face severe persecution as they are not officially recognised, and their faith is often treated as a form of apostasy, which can incur heavy penalties under Shari'a law.

The Iranian penal code contains blasphemy laws, enforcing strict punishments, including the death penalty, for insulting Islamic figures. In 2021, amendments to Articles 499 and 500 expanded legal grounds for prosecuting religious minorities, especially Christians and Baha'is, making any proselytising or perceived anti-Islamic activity punishable by imprisonment.

Throughout the reporting period, government actions severely restricted religious freedoms for minority communities. Christian converts faced harassment, arrests, and imprisonment, often labelled as threats to national security or as supporters of foreign influence. House churches are systematically raided, and members

detained, while the Baha'i community experienced extensive discrimination, including property confiscations, restrictions on burial practices, and denial of educational opportunities.

Protests in response to the morality police's treatment of women, sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, evolved into a larger movement against the compulsory hijab and broader governmental control. This unrest has been met with violent crackdowns, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of arrests. Amid this turmoil, Iran's security forces have focused particularly on regions with Sunni Muslim, Kurdish, and Baluch populations, indicating ethnoreligious dimensions in state repression.

The current outlook for religious freedom in Iran remains bleak. Amendments to the penal code have codified further restrictions on religious minorities, and ongoing protests suggest that governmental tolerance for dissent and religious diversity may decline further. Iran's response to religious and political dissidence is increasingly stringent, reinforcing an environment where freedom of religion or belief is actively suppressed.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

Iran's constitution recognises Islam as the official religion of the state, establishing a theocratic government that enforces a strict interpretation of Shi'a Islam. While the constitution grants limited protections to specific religious minorities—Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians—other religious communities face persecution and are frequently excluded from legal protections. The constitution's Article 23 technically forbids the investigation of individuals' beliefs, and Article 14 calls for ethical treatment of non-Muslims. However, these provisions are overridden by a legal system that criminalises apostasy and heavily restricts freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The Islamic Penal Code includes vague laws, such as prohibitions on “enmity against God” and “corruption on earth,” which are routinely used to silence dissenters, punish religious minorities, and justify severe sentences, including execution.

Iran is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which mandates FoRB, yet it disregards these obligations by prosecuting religious and ideological dissent. Converts from Islam face particular persecution, with charges such as “blasphemy” carrying significant penalties. The government also monitors, restricts, and suppresses the activities of Christian converts, Baha'is, Sunni Muslims, and Sufi Dervishes, regarding them as threats to the state's religious identity and political stability.

Key Issues

One of the most heavily persecuted groups in Iran is the Baha'i community, which is not officially recognised and is often labelled as a heretical sect. Baha'is face systematic discrimination, including barriers to employment, education, and access to state services. In recent years, Baha'i-owned properties have been confiscated, homes raided,

and places of worship desecrated. Baha'i students are barred from universities, and businesses owned by Baha'is are frequently shut down. In 2023, over 120 Baha'i families in Mazandaran province reported the confiscation of their land and homes by local authorities, a continuation of a decades-long effort to economically disenfranchise the community.

Christians, especially those who have converted from Islam, also face harassment, imprisonment, and violence. While Iranian Armenians and Assyrians are allowed to practice Christianity in their own languages, any attempt to evangelise or hold services in Persian is criminalised. Christian converts from Islam are particularly targeted, facing surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and harsh sentences. Many of these individuals are tried under “national security” charges for attending underground church services or distributing religious materials. In April 2024, Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, a prominent Christian leader, was sentenced to six years in prison under vague charges of “endangering national security.” Cases like his highlight the regime's zero-tolerance approach towards individuals who deviate from state-imposed religious norms.

Iran's Sunni Muslim population, concentrated in ethnic minority groups like the Kurds and Baluchis, faces restrictions on worship and representation. Sunni mosques are tightly monitored, and the establishment of new Sunni places of worship in major cities like Tehran is generally prohibited. Sunni leaders report harassment and intimidation, especially when advocating for their communities' rights. During the 2022 protests following the death of Mahsa Amini, a Sunni woman from the Kurdish minority, Sunni activists who spoke out were frequently detained and tortured, underscoring the intersection of ethnic and religious discrimination.

Sufi Dervishes, who follow a mystical branch of Islam, are also targeted by the state. Iran's

government views Sufism as incompatible with its strict interpretation of Shi'a Islam, leading to widespread harassment, surveillance, and arrests of Sufi practitioners. In recent years, there have been multiple raids on Sufi communities, particularly targeting the Gonabadi Sufis. In 2024, several Gonabadi Sufi leaders were detained under charges of "anti-state activities," further exemplifying the state's intolerance for religious diversity within Islam.

Iran's legal system is also used to control women's dress and behaviour, which the regime enforces under religious mandates. The "morality police" monitor adherence to Islamic dress codes, with severe punishments for women who defy these laws. The death of Mahsa Amini in police custody in 2022, allegedly for violating the dress code, triggered nationwide protests and heightened international scrutiny of Iran's gender-based FoRB abuses. These protests, known as the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, led to mass arrests, with hundreds detained and subjected to harsh sentences for participating in demonstrations against compulsory hijab laws.

Recommendations for the UK

The UK has an essential role in addressing FoRB violations in Iran through diplomatic pressure, multilateral engagement, and support for civil society. The following recommendations outline key actions:

1. **Publicly Condemn FoRB Violations and Gender-Based Persecution:** The UK should continue to issue statements condemning Iran's persecution of religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Sunnis, and Sufis, as well as its enforcement of compulsory hijab laws. These public statements can amplify international awareness and reinforce the UK's commitment to human rights.
2. **Support International Mechanisms for Accountability:** The UK should advocate for the renewal and strengthening of the mandate of the UN Special

Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, ensuring sustained international monitoring. Supporting UN-led investigations into Iran's human rights abuses, especially against religious minorities, would provide greater transparency and apply pressure on Iran to improve its FoRB protections.

3. **Apply Targeted Sanctions on Perpetrators of FoRB Abuses:** The UK can implement targeted sanctions on Iranian officials and institutions responsible for FoRB abuses, such as those involved in repressing religious minorities and enforcing hijab laws. Sanctions on officials linked to human rights abuses could deter further violations and signal the UK's support for religious freedom.

4. **Support Exiled Iranian Civil Society and Human Rights Groups:** The UK could provide funding and resources to Iranian civil society organisations operating in exile. Supporting NGOs that document human rights abuses, including FoRB violations, can strengthen advocacy efforts and create a record of abuses for future accountability.

5. **Raise FoRB Issues in Multilateral Forums:** The UK should engage with allies in the European Union, United Nations, and other international bodies to bring attention to FoRB abuses in Iran. This coordinated approach could amplify international pressure and encourage a unified response to Iran's human rights violations.

6. **Encourage Reforms in Iranian Higher Education:** The UK can advocate for greater access to education for religious minorities in Iran, especially Baha'is. Raising this issue in diplomatic dialogues could encourage Iran to reconsider its policies that deny educational access based on religious affiliation.

7. **Promote Internet Freedom and Access to Information:** The UK can support initiatives to increase Iranians' access to free and open information, including supporting VPN services or satellite internet access. Access to independent information would allow Iranians to learn about their rights and document abuses, fostering greater awareness of FoRB.

Update from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom

Situation of the Bahá'í Community in Iran: September 2024

This briefing note summarises the most salient and urgent details of the human rights situation of the Baha'i community in Iran, focussing mainly on abuses of their individual and collective rights by agencies of the Iranian government in the last 12 months. One of the key trends observed in reports has been an intensification of attacks against Bahá'í women seeing a significant increase in arrests and summonses, with dozens of women facing baseless criminal charges and prison sentences.

In recent months respected voices in international human rights discourse have published substantive reports that attest to the gravity of the systematic persecution of Baha'is in Iran. The international NGO, Human Rights Watch, produced a report in April 2024 - [“The Boot on My Neck”: Iranian Authorities’ Crime of Persecution Against Baha’is in Iran | HRW](#) – that argued that the treatment of Baha'is in Iran had reached the definition of crimes against humanity.

Delivering his final report as mandate holder at the UN Special Rapporteur on Iran in June 2024, [UN Special Rapporteur Says There Is “Evidence of Genocide in the 80s” in Iran - Iran Press Watch](#) Dr Javaid Rehman, spoke of evidence of genocide in Iran's conduct towards minorities including Baha'is and Kurds.

This document offers the context and drivers for Iran's mistreatment of its peaceful Baha'i community, as well as thematic cases of how and where Baha'is are suffering violations of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith:

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions, emerging from Iran in the mid-nineteenth century. Today there are

Bahá'í communities in 188 countries around the world. They follow teachings that include the oneness of humanity, independent investigation of truth and the equality of men and women. Since the inception of their faith, Bahá'ís have faced episodes of violent oppression. Further to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, however, the government of Iran has persecuted Iranian Bahá'ís, who comprise the country's largest non-Muslim religious minority, with over 300,000 members, as a systematic policy of the state

Current Situation:

In recent months, there has been an intensification of attacks against Bahá'í women seeing a significant increase in arrests and summonses, with dozens of women facing baseless criminal charges and prison sentences. These women have been traumatically separated from their families, some with young children, and have been exposed to the cruelty and violence of the Iranian judicial system. By mid-2024, 72 of the 93 Bahá'ís summoned to court or prison had been women, accounting for more than three-quarters of those persecuted.

At the UN General Assembly in November 2023 the Third Committee on Social, Cultural and Humanitarian adopted another resolution – the 36th in succession – on the situation of human rights in Iran, and in which the text expresses “serious concern” of the persecution of the Bahá'í community “in particular”.

Thematic Areas of Persecution and Illustrative Cases

The scope and depth of Iran's persecution is too vast and ceaseless to be contained into a short summary. The following section of this note identifies the principal areas of denial and abuse of rights that Baha'is suffer, and offers recent cases that are illustrative of far greater volumes of Iranian Baha'is who face “cradle to grave” persecution.

Detentions and Imprisonment:

In recent months, there has been an intensification of attacks against Bahá'í women seeing a significant increase in arrests and summonses, with dozens of women facing baseless criminal charges and prison sentences. By mid-2024, 72 of the 93 Bahá'ís summoned to court or prison had been women, accounting for more than three-quarters of those persecuted.

Baha'is in all locations across Iran may be subject to arrest, short term detention and release on exorbitant bail costs. Terms of imprisonment between several months and up to five years may be issued by courts through the wider powers of amendments to Articles 499 bis and 500 bis in the Islamic penal code, which includes offences such as “propaganda against the order of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the benefit of groups or institutions”

Authorities also make greater use of Tazir laws, which are understood to be “discretionary punishments” were a qadi – a religious judge – may impose penalties for offenses that not specifically provided for in Shariah jurisprudence.

A number of Baha'is are sentenced to much longer sentences. Three notable cases include Fariba Kamalabadi, Mahvash Sabet and Afif Naeimi. These three individuals had already served 10 years of imprisonment from 2008 for their membership of a seven member body, the Yaran, that constituted a leadership committee for the 300,000 strong Baha'i community. They were re-arrested on 31 July 2022, and Iranian authorities have denounced them as part of the “central cadre of the Baha'i espionage party.

In reality they are peaceful, loyal Iranian citizens whose only “crime” is to serve their Faith community. They are believed to now be amongst the longest serving prisoners of conscience in the world today.

Denial of Access of Economic Rights:

For over almost five decades, the Iranian government has employed various forms of economic strangulation of Bahá'ís. Over the past year, the seizure and destruction of Bahá'í-owned properties and farmland has intensified, in an attempt to rob them of their right to earn a living. In May 2024, Bahá'í-owned rice paddies in Ahmadabad and Mazandaran provinces were bulldozed by government agents, leading to the destruction of crops and irrigation berms.

Additionally, in January 2024, farmlands, rice paddies and walnut orchards belonging to Bahá'í families in the village of Ahmadabad were forcibly seized by Iranian officials who claimed the lands on behalf of the Iranian government.

This policy, as with many abuses detailed in this briefing note, are mandated directly from the 1991 “secret memorandum” of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, which remains the blue-print for the economic and cultural extirpation of a viable Baha'i community in Iran.

Denial of Access to Education:

An alarming development in the Iranian government's ongoing campaign against Bahá'ís' access to higher education surfaced in September 2023, where Bahá'í individuals seeking admission to universities were asked to sign a mandatory declaration form renouncing their beliefs as a prerequisite for admission.

Bahá'í youth who seek alternative avenues for education are harassed by Iranian authorities. Bahá'ís who are denied access to university often attend classes in their own homes, which are organised by the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an ad hoc educational facility created to provide young Bahá'ís access to higher education, from which they had otherwise been barred. However, in February 2024, the home of Mrs. Zabihi, where a BIHE exam was taking place, was raided and textbooks confiscated by intelligence agents. Following insulting and violent behaviour towards Mrs. Zabihi by the agents, her young son protested their actions

and was subsequently beaten in front of his mother.

Incitement to Hatred and Propaganda:

Over the past year, there has been a conspicuous rise in orchestrated hate campaigns and hate speech targeting the Bahá'í community, particularly following the social uprising after the killing of Jina Mahsa Amini which had no connection to the Bahá'í community.

Since 2023, approximately 163,726 posts of hate speech materials have appeared on government-controlled social media and web pages. The same negative content is often republished under different titles to reinforce misinformation, and identical messages are broadcast simultaneously across various sites, indicative of a well-organised campaign. For example, religious leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have issued several decrees labelling Bahá'ís as “deviant,” “morally corrupt,” “misguided,” or “unclean.”

Denial of Bural Rights and Desecration of the Dead

Another trend observed in the past year is the progressive erosion of Bahá'í burial rights, as well as measures taken by the Iranian government to vandalise, destroy and seize control of Bahá'í cemeteries across Iran. In March 2024, more than 30 new graves containing 55 deceased Bahá'ís at the Khavaran mass grave in Tehran were razed by the Iranian authorities, with grave markers removed, and bulldozers used to flatten the resting places. Iran's government has used this site to forcibly bury Bahá'ís for more than two years, without allowing families to be present or respecting Bahá'í funeral practices.

Need for Continued Multi-Lateral Oversight and Action:

- This briefing note has been drafted to coincide with the 57th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council;

- And the 79th annual session of the UN General Assembly in New York, and notably the work of the Third Committee.

- Whilst the UK is not a current member of the UN HRC, it still has speaking rights as UN Member.

- The Baha'i community of the UK has made requests of the UK government to raise the plight of Baha'is in Iran **within an Agenda Item 4 statement in respect Human rights situations that require the Council's attention;**

- In addition or as an alternative, a second request has been made to the UK government to raise the worsening persecution of the Baha'is in Iran in Interactive Dialogues with relevant UN Special Mechanisms, notably the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

- With reference to diplomatic actions at **the 79th session of the UN General Assembly**, and specifically in respect of Third Committee resolution on The Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran;

- The Baha'i community observes that it is vital that this General Assembly resolution adequately addresses the surge in assaults on Bahá'ís;

- The Baha'I community has accordingly requested the UK government, as a member of the core group on this resolution, should strengthen this year's draft and our office has offered suggested language for Operative Paragraphs 26 and 27 in the resolution as follows:

- *Suggest language for paragraphs 26 and 27, UNGA resolution on Human Rights Situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran:*

- *“26. Expresses serious concern about ongoing severe limitations and increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, restrictions on the establishment of places of worship, undue restrictions on burials carried out in accordance with religious tenets, attacks against places of worship and burial and other human rights violations, including but not limited to the increased harassment, intimidation, persecution, arbitrary arrest and detention of, and incitement to hatred that leads*

to violence against, persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities, including Christians (particularly converts from Islam), Gonabadi Dervishes, Jews, Sufi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Yarsanis, Zoroastrians, and, in particular, Baha'is, who have suffered cumulative impacts of 45 years of crimes against humanity of persecution, including attacks, harassment and targeting, who face increasing restrictions and systemic persecution by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on account of their faith and have been reportedly subjected to mass arrests and lengthy prison sentences, as well as the arrest of prominent members and increased confiscation and destruction of property, and calls upon the Government to cease monitoring individuals on account of their religious identity, to release all religious practitioners imprisoned for their membership in or activities on behalf of a minority religious group, to cease the desecration of cemeteries and to ensure that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief, including the freedom to have, to change or to adopt a religion or belief of their choice, in accordance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;"

- 27. Calls upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to eliminate, in law and in practice, all forms of discrimination on the basis of thought, conscience, religion or belief, including restrictions contained in article 499 bis and article 500 bis of the Islamic Penal Code, the continuing enforcement of which has significantly escalated discrimination and violence, as well as economic restrictions, such as the closure, destruction or confiscation of businesses, land and properties, the cancellation of licences and the denial of employment in certain public and private sectors, including government or military positions and elected office, the denial of and restrictions on access to education, including for members of the Baha'i faith, who have suffered cumulative impacts of 45 years of crimes against humanity of persecution, and other human rights violations against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities, condemns

without reservation antisemitism and any denial of the Holocaust, and calls upon the Islamic Republic of Iran to end ongoing systemic impunity for those who commit crimes against persons belonging to recognized and unrecognized religious minorities

- We further hope that the UK government will mention the situation of the Bahá'ís in its statement at this year's Third Committee

Influencing Decision-Makers:

The Bahai community engages with and seeks the support of Parliamentarians in bringing influence to bear on government and decision-making processes.

We encourage and welcome elected representatives in legislative offices who may be willing to reinforce the concerns for the Iranian Baha'i community through Parliamentary Debate, Questions, Motions and other mechanisms that may amplify our requests to UK government, notably the FCDO across the Autumn of 2024.

History and Background:

The actions taken by the Iranian authorities to remove the social and economic rights of the Bahá'ís are driven by the provisions of a 1991 memorandum of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council. It was prepared at the request of the Supreme Leader to deal with what was termed "the Bahá'í Question", and remains the policy of the Iranian government towards its Bahá'í citizens. This memorandum states that the government's dealings with the Bahá'í community should be "*in such a way that their progress and development are blocked.*"

Article 13 of the Constitution begins; "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are considered the only recognized religious minorities." As such, the Bahá'í community are specifically denied the status of a religious minority and may be judged to be "unprotected infidels" in state policy and in the law.

Iraq

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Iraq Country Report:

Iraq's constitution recognises Islam as the state religion and a primary source of legislation, with protections for other religious groups like Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabeans. The state guarantees religious freedom, prohibits racial and religious discrimination, and provides for the protection of holy sites. However, Muslims cannot legally convert to other religions, and insulting religious beliefs is punishable by imprisonment.

Following ISIS's defeat, religious minorities still face challenges, particularly from ongoing sectarian violence. Over 200,000 Yazidis remain displaced, and Christians are cautious about returning to areas once controlled by ISIS due to security and economic instability, compounded by Turkish military actions in northern Iraq. Despite these hardships, there have been some positive developments. In March 2021, Pope Francis visited Iraq, promoting tolerance and coexistence, and Iraq subsequently established a national day dedicated to these values. The Iraqi

parliament also passed the Yazidi Survivor Law to support ISIS survivors, although its benefits have yet to fully materialise. Efforts have also been made to counter property expropriation affecting religious minorities.

Recent years have seen ongoing support for displaced Iraqis, including substantial US humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, religious minorities continue to experience violence and marginalisation, with limited political representation and inadequate legal protections. Christian communities in particular struggle with socio-political challenges and ongoing emigration concerns. Though a new government under Prime Minister al-Sudani has been formed, Iraq remains politically unstable, and genuine religious freedom remains uncertain. Iraq's religious minorities await equal citizenship and protections, yet the country's volatile political climate threatens these prospects.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Myanmar

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, International Center for Law and Religion Studies



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Myanmar Country Report:

Myanmar's 2008 Constitution nominally protects freedom of religion for citizens, recognising Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism, but it also upholds Buddhism's "special position" as the majority faith. While laws prevent the abuse of religion for political purposes, they also enforce restrictions similar to blasphemy laws, penalising acts that insult or disturb religious practices. Additional 2015 "Protection of Race and Religion" laws impose controls on interfaith marriages and conversions, heavily regulating the rights of non-Buddhist minorities. The constitution bars members of religious orders from voting or holding public office, while the government restricts the political activity of Buddhist clergy.

Since the military coup on 1 February 2021, repression has intensified across Myanmar, with widespread human rights violations, mass arrests, and the displacement of over a million people. The military regime's ethno-religious nationalism has led to targeted attacks on places of worship, especially Christian churches and communities, perceived as resisting the junta. Reports indicate extensive destruction of churches, especially in Chin and Kayah states, with the army justifying attacks by claiming resistance fighters were being harboured in religious sites. Leaders and places of worship have faced continued violence, with religious buildings targeted as symbols of community and resistance, and clergy subject to harassment, detention, and sometimes fatal attacks.

Historically, ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Christians in minority-dominated regions, have suffered state-sponsored persecution. High-profile incidents include the targeted killing of a Baptist pastor and the occupation and desecration of churches by military forces. Despite appeals for peace from Myanmar's Catholic Cardinal and other religious leaders, attacks on Christian, Muslim, and dissenting Buddhist communities have persisted. The junta's release of controversial Buddhist nationalist Ashin Wirathu, known for his anti-Muslim rhetoric, signals tolerance for extremists who align with its nationalist agenda.

Muslim Rohingyas also face ongoing, severe repression. The U.S. has officially designated the military's actions as genocide, with over 153,000 Rohingyas internally displaced, living in harsh conditions, while nearly a million remain as refugees in Bangladesh. Buddhist dissenters opposing the junta face similar treatment, with monastic leaders and critics of the military subjected to arrest, imprisonment, and, in some cases, death.

The February 2021 coup extinguished prospects for religious freedom in Myanmar, closing off spaces for dialogue and civil society advocacy. Under military rule, religious freedom is expected to deteriorate further as the regime continues to exploit ethno-religious nationalism to justify repression. Ongoing persecution and humanitarian crises are anticipated, with little hope for religious tolerance or reform under the current dictatorship.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

Myanmar's 2008 Constitution grants Buddhism a privileged position, declaring it the "special position of Buddhism" while ostensibly recognising other religions. However, Myanmar's legal framework has long failed to protect freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for minority groups, particularly those of non-Buddhist faiths. Ethnic and religious minorities face discrimination enshrined in law, including restrictions on interfaith marriage and conversion. The situation worsened dramatically after the military coup on 1 February 2021, which ousted the civilian-led government and reinstated authoritarian rule. The military, known as the Tatmadaw, implemented martial law, restricted civil liberties, and intensified its crackdown on ethnic and religious minority communities.

In the past three years, Myanmar has witnessed extreme violence against its ethnic and religious minorities, with targeted attacks on Christian, Muslim, and other non-Buddhist groups. According to the United Nations (UN), over 18.6 million people in Myanmar now require humanitarian assistance, and more than three million are internally displaced. The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has documented severe violations against religious figures, including monks, pastors, and imams, many of whom have been arbitrarily detained, tortured, or killed. Churches and other religious sites have also been desecrated, repurposed for military use, or destroyed, further exacerbating FoRB violations under the military regime.

Key Issues

The Tatmadaw's actions have systematically targeted ethnic and religious minorities, particularly those in the states of Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Shan. These areas have large Christian populations who have faced intense persecution since the coup. Churches have been

bombed, pastors murdered, and entire villages destroyed. In the first half of 2024 alone, the UN reported a 141% increase in airstrikes against civilian targets, including religious buildings, and a 380% rise in the destruction of homes and community structures. Altsean Burma, a civil society group, documented over 700 airstrikes in this period, surpassing the total number for the entirety of 2023.

Christians, who make up a substantial portion of the population in these regions, are especially vulnerable to persecution. In Chin State, where nearly 90% of the population identifies as Christian, the Tatmadaw has conducted airstrikes on villages and Christian institutions. Churches have been repurposed as military bases, with soldiers occupying these spaces and disrupting religious practices. Pastors and religious leaders in Chin State have been targeted, with some detained and others forced to flee to avoid torture and imprisonment. The Chin Human Rights Organisation has reported numerous instances of arbitrary detentions, where individuals are accused of supporting anti-junta activities simply for practising their faith.

Muslim communities, particularly the Rohingya, continue to face some of the most severe FoRB restrictions in Myanmar. The Rohingya population has been systematically stripped of citizenship and subjected to decades of discrimination, violence, and forced displacement. Many Rohingya remain in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, living in squalid conditions with limited access to health care, education, and employment. Despite widespread condemnation, the junta continues to deny citizenship to Rohingya Muslims, restricting their freedom of movement, marriage rights, and access to education.

The military has also imposed internet shutdowns in several states, restricting access to information and hindering communication between ethnic minority communities and

international observers. These shutdowns have exacerbated the isolation of affected communities, further enabling military repression. Additionally, the Tatmadaw's actions against religious minorities have fostered a climate of impunity, as Myanmar's judiciary lacks the independence necessary to hold military officials accountable for their actions. This lack of accountability has emboldened the Tatmadaw to escalate its repression without fear of repercussion.

Recommendations for the UK

The UK has a pivotal role to play in addressing Myanmar's ongoing FoRB abuses through diplomatic channels, international alliances, and support for local civil society. The following recommendations highlight strategic actions the UK could take:

1. **Promote Accountability for Military Crimes:** The UK should continue to support UN-led initiatives that investigate human rights abuses in Myanmar. This includes backing the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and working with the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute crimes against humanity committed by the Tatmadaw. The UK could also impose targeted sanctions on military leaders responsible for FoRB violations, sending a clear message that impunity will not be tolerated.
2. **Advocate for Immediate Humanitarian Access:** The UK should urge Myanmar to grant unhindered access to humanitarian organisations, particularly in ethnic and religious minority regions. Ensuring that aid can reach communities in Chin, Kachin, Shan, and Karen States is essential to alleviating the humanitarian crisis. The UK can also work through ASEAN and other regional bodies to apply diplomatic pressure on Myanmar to open up these regions.
3. **Support Documentation of FoRB Abuses:** Funding and supporting NGOs that

document FoRB violations can help build a case against the junta in the international community. The UK could also support initiatives to gather evidence of religious persecution, which could be used in future prosecutions and accountability mechanisms.

4. **Provide Support for Displaced and Persecuted Communities:** The UK can work with international partners to offer support to displaced persons and persecuted minorities, including Rohingya refugees in neighbouring countries. Financial support for organisations working in refugee camps and IDP settlements can help improve living conditions and access to essential services.

5. **Publicly Condemn FoRB Violations in Myanmar:** Regular statements from the UK government condemning Myanmar's FoRB abuses can amplify international attention to these issues. The UK should advocate for Myanmar's treatment of religious minorities to remain a priority in the United Nations Human Rights Council and other international forums.

6. **Increase Sanctions on Key Military and Economic Figures:** Expanding sanctions on military officials, along with Myanmar-based businesses linked to the Tatmadaw, would weaken the junta's financial base. Sanctions on industries that fund the military's operations, such as mining and gemstones, could reduce the junta's ability to carry out its repressive campaigns.

7. **Engage ASEAN and Regional Partners:** Working with ASEAN and neighbouring countries like Thailand and Bangladesh, the UK can encourage regional solutions to address Myanmar's humanitarian crisis. Promoting ASEAN's commitment to human rights and encouraging regional partners to offer refuge to those fleeing persecution can help mitigate the crisis.

Update from the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

Myanmar Online Lecture Series – Kachin State Comprehensive University, Laiza City, Myanmar

The Center and long-time partner IGE (Institute for Global Engagement) joined with Kachin State Comprehensive University (KSCU) in Myanmar to hold a seven-week online lecture series on “Faith and Resilience in Conflict,” 29 June–10 August. The weekly series was joined by 280 students and 79 teachers at KSCU, the majority of whom live in IDP camps in Laiza City, located in Myanmar’s liberated area bordering China’s Yunnan Province. Many of the students have lived in IDP camps since 2011 when they were in the first grade. ICLRS Director Brett G. Scharffs was a featured lecturer, along with long-time IGE associates

Hien Vu, Matius Ho, James Chen, Professor Eugene Tan (Singapore Management University), and others. The lecturers shared insights and lessons from their varying backgrounds in religion, law, mental health, and international relations and discussed how their faith has inspired them to continue their work despite challenges. Seng Mai Aung, who works for IGE and partners with Center projects, played a major role in organizing, carrying out, and translating the lecture series. This is the first lecture series IGE and the ICLRS have organized with KSCU, and the partners have agreed to conduct future lecture series for KSCU students and lecturers.

Nigeria

Stakeholders: ADF International, Aid to the Church in Need, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Open Doors UK & Ireland



Update from ADF International

Laws criminalizing so-called “blasphemy” violate human rights, including freedom of religion and free speech, and in some cases, impose death for peacefully expressing one’s beliefs. This past year, ADF International supported the legal defence of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, a young man in Nigeria sentenced to death by hanging for a WhatsApp message deemed blasphemous by a Sharia court. Currently languishing in prison, we are supporting Yahaya’s appeal at the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

The case challenges northern Nigeria’s blasphemy laws, and a win could pave the way for the repeal of these draconian laws across the region. Leveraging our international networks, we have coordinated initiatives from US

congressional representatives, the European Parliament, and the human rights procedures of the United Nations to save Yahaya and end blasphemy laws.

Blasphemy laws contribute to a culture of severe violence and persecution. More Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria than in all parts of the world combined.

We also obtained an acquittal for Nigerian preacher Daniel Kefee, falsely charged with kidnapping for helping a teenager facing threat of death from her family for converting to Christianity.

Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Nigeria Country Report:

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, operates as a federal republic with laws enshrining religious freedom and non-discrimination. The 1999 Constitution prohibits the adoption of a state religion, promotes religious tolerance, and upholds citizens' rights to freely practise and change their faith. However, religious laws and practices, particularly the introduction of Shari’a in 12 northern states, have led to substantial discrimination against non-Muslims. In these regions, Christians face restrictions such as blasphemy laws, limited access to education and employment, church-building prohibitions, and

often, a lack of legal recourse for destroyed properties. Conversely, the south-west has relatively peaceful interfaith relations.

The enforcement of Shari’a has included severe punishments, and the establishment of “hisbah” (religious police) in some states contravenes constitutional restrictions on police forces. Nigeria’s Christian community also questions the country’s alignment with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and diplomatic ties with Iran, viewing these as indications of a pro-Islamic stance from the government. Religious discrimination and violent incidents are exacerbated by the state’s partial enforcement of laws and failures to protect minority rights.

Violence in Nigeria, ranked high on the Global Terrorism Index, includes threats from groups like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Fulani extremists, all contributing to a cycle of violence largely targeting Christians. Reports document mass killings, abductions, church destruction, and displacement, which has led to a severe humanitarian crisis. Attacks by Islamist groups are often portrayed as resource conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt, which downplays the religious motives behind much of the violence.

State anti-grazing laws were introduced to curb clashes, but the federal government's perceived inaction, coupled with controversial moves such as releasing Boko Haram insurgents, has fuelled fears of government support for certain factions. The International Criminal Court found

evidence of war crimes by both Boko Haram and the Nigerian military, yet no thorough investigation of widespread attacks against Christians has taken place. Recent decisions, such as the US delisting Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern" for religious freedom, have been met with criticism.

In the 2023 elections, a presidential ticket without a religiously balanced composition sparked concerns about increased sectarian tension. The new administration will inherit a legacy of violent insecurity, economic instability, and profound social divisions, which could continue to impact religious freedoms and rights across Nigeria.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

Nigeria's constitution guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), prohibiting discrimination based on religion and ensuring the right to change and practise one's faith. Despite this, Nigeria's legal framework is uneven, with twelve northern states having adopted Sharia law, which has created significant restrictions on religious practices for non-Muslims in these regions. Additionally, Nigeria is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), reinforcing its commitment to protect FoRB. However, these commitments are frequently undermined by state-level laws and practices, as well as the government's inability to address widespread sectarian violence and FoRB abuses effectively.

Ethnic and religious tensions are further exacerbated by political and socio-economic factors, with religious affiliations often coinciding with ethnic identities, deepening divisions. In the north, Christian minorities face

significant challenges under Sharia law, including restricted access to worship sites and a lack of legal protections in religiously-motivated cases. FoRB violations are not only institutionalised but also perpetuated by extremist groups, particularly Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), whose attacks have traumatised communities across the country.

Key Issues

Violence by extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP has inflicted severe suffering on Christian and Muslim communities alike, though it is often motivated by a desire to impose strict interpretations of Islamic law. In northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has carried out mass abductions, bombings, and brutal attacks against Christians and moderate Muslims. In 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, many of whom remain missing. Kidnappings continue to this day, with extremist groups targeting students, religious leaders, and community figures. The violence has displaced millions of Nigerians, creating a

severe humanitarian crisis that disproportionately affects religious minorities.

Another major issue involves violence perpetrated by Fulani militia groups, primarily targeting Christian farming communities in the Middle Belt. These attacks are often portrayed as ethnic or land-related conflicts, but there is a strong religious component, as the violence frequently targets Christian villages. The Fulani militias have overrun villages, burned churches, and displaced tens of thousands. In recent years, the situation has worsened as these militias have gained access to advanced weaponry, resulting in escalating levels of violence. Reports of land seizure and forced displacement highlight a possible campaign of ethno-religious cleansing in parts of the Middle Belt, where Christian communities are often uprooted or killed, leading to fears of an unfolding atrocity.

Despite a rising trend of abductions across the country, the government's response has been inadequate. Kidnappings for ransom have become a significant source of funding for armed groups, affecting communities in the north and increasingly spreading to other regions. Christian leaders and their congregants are frequently targeted in these attacks. Church raids have led to tragic losses of life, contributing to a pervasive climate of fear and insecurity. Schools, especially those associated with Christian missions, have been increasingly targeted by kidnapers, endangering children's lives and disrupting education.

In Nigeria's Sharia states, non-Muslims face legal and social discrimination. Churches often struggle to obtain building permits, and existing places of worship are sometimes demolished under local orders. Christian residents report limited access to services, and children from minority religious groups face pressure to conform to Islamic practices in schools. These restrictions prevent non-Muslims from fully practising their faith and reinforce their marginalisation in majority-Muslim areas. Additionally, cases of underage Christian girls

being forcibly married and converted to Islam have been documented, with local authorities rarely intervening to protect victims or prosecute offenders.

Recommendations for the UK

To address these pressing FoRB issues, the UK can play a key role in supporting Nigeria through diplomatic engagement, support for civil society, and targeted international action. The following recommendations outline specific actions for the UK:

- 1. Increase Support for Humanitarian Aid and FoRB Protections:** The UK should work with international partners to provide humanitarian aid for displaced persons in Nigeria, with a focus on supporting religious minorities affected by extremist violence. Aid efforts should include psychological support and resources for communities recovering from Boko Haram and Fulani militia attacks.
- 2. Encourage the Nigerian Government to Reform FoRB Protections:** The UK should engage with Nigerian authorities to promote legislative reforms that ensure equal protection for all religions, particularly in Sharia states. Reforms could include streamlined processes for building permits for churches and other non-Muslim places of worship, as well as protections against forced conversions.
- 3. Support Monitoring and Reporting of FoRB Violations:** The UK could back NGOs and international organisations that document FoRB abuses in Nigeria, creating a record of human rights violations that could pressure the government to take action. Monitoring can also support accountability measures and identify trends to prevent future abuses.
- 4. Apply Targeted Sanctions on Perpetrators of FoRB Violations:** The UK should consider targeted sanctions against individuals and groups responsible for severe FoRB violations, including leaders of Boko Haram, ISWAP, and other groups perpetrating religious violence. Sanctions could deter further

violations and demonstrate the UK's commitment to human rights.

5. **Engage with Regional and International Partners to Address Cross-Border Extremism:** Nigeria's conflict with extremist groups like Boko Haram has regional dimensions, with impacts in neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. The UK can collaborate with these nations to develop coordinated strategies to combat extremist violence and support FoRB protections across the region.

6. **Strengthen FoRB in Educational Settings:** The UK could support initiatives aimed at promoting religious tolerance in Nigeria's educational system, working with local NGOs to develop curricula that foster interfaith understanding. Programs could focus on youth in both Christian and Muslim communities to reduce sectarianism and prevent future conflict.

7. **Promote Dialogue and Reconciliation Efforts:** The UK could encourage Nigeria to pursue dialogue and reconciliation initiatives between communities affected by religious violence. By supporting interfaith peace-building programs, the UK can help reduce tensions in conflict-prone areas, particularly in the Middle Belt and northeastern states.

8. **Publicly Address Nigeria's FoRB Challenges in International Forums:** The UK can raise Nigeria's FoRB issues in international platforms such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth, calling for increased scrutiny of FoRB abuses in Nigeria and encouraging a coordinated international response.

Update from the International Center for Law and Religion Studies

Seminar on Law and Religion Studies – Abuja, Nigeria

The ICLRS had a remarkable opportunity to help organize a program with the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS), 14–15 August, for the 72 law school deans in Nigeria, encouraging them to introduce the subject of law and religion to their law school curricula. NIALS is the leading law reform and legal institute in Nigeria and is attached to Nigeria's Supreme Court.

We gave each dean a copy of our groundbreaking casebook, *Law and Religion: National, International, and Comparative Perspectives*, as well as a supplement with Nigerian cases corresponding to each chapter of the casebook.

This opportunity arose as a result of the ICLRS's support of Professor Ahmed Salisu Garba, a Muslim law professor, formerly of Bauchi State University, who is interested in promoting religious freedom and who has participated in many Center programs, including the inaugural year of the Oxford Young Scholars Fellowship on Religion and the Rule of Law. His participation in that program resulted in him publishing a scholarly article that so impressed the university president that he invited Professor Garba to organize a Center on Law and Religion Studies at Bauchi State, modeled after the ICLRS. Professor Garba's work came to the attention of NIALS, we met with their leadership in Victoria Falls in May, and this seminar was the result.

Update from Open Doors UK & Ireland

Last month Open Doors published its report "No Road Home: Christian IDPs displaced by extremist violence in Nigeria". Violence against

Christians in sub-Saharan Africa has escalated to alarming levels, yet the world remains silent. Open Doors World Watch List research states

that over 90% of Christians killed for their faith last year were in sub-Saharan Africa. Violence comes in a context of increasing persecution and discrimination. In the past decade, the number of countries recorded by Open Doors as places where Christians experience high levels of persecution has more than doubled from 12 to 26. The key findings for the report and some select recommendations are summarised below. You can read the full report, find case studies and see all the recommendations at <https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/No-Road-Home-Advocacy.pdf>.

Key Findings:

Extremist violence across parts of Nigeria over the last decade has resulted in mass displacement of Christian communities, amongst others. In the northern state of Borno, where Islamic militants thrive and target Christians, and in Plateau state, where Fulani militant violence results in uprooted Christian communities, the problem is unrelenting. While the root causes of the violence are complex and Christians, and non-Christians alike are impacted, this research illustrates the specific vulnerabilities of displaced Christians. They have been singled out for violence, face harsh living conditions, and experience faith-based challenges throughout their displacement journey.

Drivers of displacement: Targeted violence and a failure to protect Christian communities has resulted in mass internal displacement.

Though violence has affected both Christians and non-Christians, recorded testimonies indicate that Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and militant Fulani groups have deliberately targeted Christians or Christian communities, their livelihood, faith leaders and places of worship.

Nigerian state security personnel regularly failed to respond in a timely or effective manner to violent attacks against Christians. This failure

created distrust in the security forces among Christians. Furthermore, widespread impunity by the state for the perpetrators of violence encouraged an environment where more violence and greater displacement can and does take place.

Experiences in displacement: Inadequate and poorly distributed resources, faith-based discrimination and insufficient understanding of specific displacement experiences increased the vulnerabilities of Christians during displacement.

The limited resources available to IDPs through the United Nations, national and international actors are concentrated in North-East Nigeria; those displaced in the North-Central region have been largely ignored. Need far outpaces current funding commitments by international governments.

In Borno state, religious identity was a factor in whether Christian IDPs received support during their displacement. Christian IDPs there held the local government and members of the public accountable for unfair treatment and faith-based discrimination, particularly in terms of access to shelter, humanitarian aid, education and employment. Additionally, some efforts to pressure, coerce or force conversion to Islam by the local government and members of public were described.

In Christian-majority Plateau state, religious identity was not identified as a determining factor for support. Rather, the Nigerian government's reductive narrative describing the crisis as "clashes" and the failure of international agencies to recognize the scale of displacement appears to have greatly inhibited national and international support for thousands of displaced people. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) official numbers of IDPs in Plateau are nearly 80% lower than those reported by local communities.

Risk of return: Faith increases the level of risk for displaced Christians who try to return home.

Christians, particularly in Borno state, reported it is relatively safer for Muslims to return to their homes as they have not been further targeted for their faith by Boko Haram or ISWAP. Christians in Borno also recounted that state officials pushed them to return involuntarily and left them to fend for themselves without adequate preparation, materials or security protection.

Muslims and Christians both faced the threat of abduction, including upon return to their homes. However, militants targeted Christians and demanded a higher ransom for a Christian than a Muslim, with the highest ransom demanded for Christian faith leaders. Where Boko Haram was present, Christians reported an even higher threat level when trying to return home, as the militants often ignored Muslims or had their Muslim neighbours actively inform the militants about Christians in the area. Consequent risks included extra fines, forced conversion or even death.

IDPs from Christian communities in both Borno and Plateau states also reported land grabbing, which included attackers remaining on the land belonging to the displaced. Their attackers, whether Boko Haram, ISWAP or Fulani militants, are still an active threat for displaced Christians and their lands remain destroyed, occupied or unprotected by security forces.

Recommendations:

1. The UK should work with the Nigerian government and the international community to establish an international commission of inquiry under the auspices of the United Nations to:
 - a. investigate the nature and scale of violence in Nigeria and other seriously affected countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, with

particular sensitivity to the identity dimensions of such violence;

- b. investigate the links between and ramifications of the spread of violence across Sub-Saharan Africa, its connection with global terrorism and consequent threats to international peace and security;
 - c. advise the governments of Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan countries, national and international civil society, the United Nations Security Council, the African Union, the International Criminal Court and other stakeholders, on dealing with extremist ideologies and transnational violence, faith-based discrimination and impunity, and how to resolve conflicts and promote peace and reconciliation.
2. The UK should work with the Nigerian government to:
 - a. develop a national policy to end impunity, paying specific attention to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings;
 - b. provide training and technical support to members of the police, security forces and judiciary to counter militants and prosecute extremists.
3. The UK should support the Nigerian government to track, collect and destroy illegal weapons and do everything in its power to disarm members of violent militant groups.

North Korea

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need,
Christian Solidarity Worldwide



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of North Korea Country Report:

North Korea's constitution claims to guarantee freedom of religious belief, including the construction of religious buildings and holding ceremonies, but restricts any religious activity that could harm state or social order. The country is ideologically driven by Juche (self-sufficiency) and reverence for the Kim dynasty, with the state-controlled Workers' Party upholding Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il as eternal leaders. Though the constitution suggests religious freedom, this is contradicted in practice; the state enforces total loyalty to the Kim family, using the "Ten Principles" system to dictate ideological loyalty from a young age.

Reports by the UN and human rights organisations highlight the severe repression of North Koreans, including those who attempt to practise religion. Crimes against humanity, such as arbitrary detention, torture, and enforced disappearances, persist, with Christians facing especially harsh treatment. Under the Songbun classification system, Christians are considered "hostile" and have limited access to essentials, including healthcare. Any expression of Christianity risks punishment by imprisonment or execution, with family members also facing consequences.

International investigations face difficulties due to North Korea's closed nature, but reports such as those by Korea Future and the Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) document thousands of human rights violations,

including religious persecution. Open Doors estimates that 400,000 Christians live under the threat of labour camps or execution if discovered, and Pyongyang's government-sanctioned churches are tightly controlled, preventing genuine religious practice. Folk practices like shamanism are also repressed, though some elite North Koreans reportedly seek secret consultations with fortune-tellers. Falun Gong practitioners, mainly influenced by North Koreans working in China, face a crackdown as authorities try to stamp out the movement.

China's policy of forcibly repatriating North Korean escapees exposes them to extreme human rights abuses upon their return, violating international non-refoulement principles. The COVID-19 pandemic further isolated North Korea, tightening border controls and intensifying already limited access to information.

Although there were some positive diplomatic engagements in 2018, renewed tensions and continued missile tests have limited hopes for improved relations with South Korea or the US. North Korea remains listed as a "Country of Particular Concern" for religious freedom by the US, and international sanctions persist. Given the Kim regime's rigid control and the ideological framework idolising the Kim dynasty, prospects for any significant improvement in religious freedom in North Korea remain bleak.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), is one of the world's most repressive states, where there is no recognised freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). The ruling Kim dynasty enforces a strict personality cult that portrays its leaders as near-deities, effectively outlawing any competing belief systems. The state's laws do not protect freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief, and any form of religious expression is severely punished. Instead of guaranteeing FoRB, North Korean authorities monitor, control, and suppress religious activities, viewing them as a threat to the regime's stability. Religious affiliation or dissent from the state's ideology can lead to punishment under accusations of treason or espionage.

In 2014, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry (COI) released a landmark report documenting grave human rights violations in North Korea, describing crimes against humanity committed by the regime. The COI report highlighted how North Korea systematically persecutes religious communities, particularly Christians, as it considers religious adherence a direct challenge to the state's ideological control. The COI recommended that the United Nations Security Council refer North Korea to the International Criminal Court (ICC), underscoring the severity of the state's crimes. Despite global attention, North Korea's FoRB violations remain largely unchanged.

Key Issues

North Korea has a history of extreme measures to control and eliminate religious practices, particularly Christianity. The regime categorically prohibits Christian practices, and citizens who are discovered practising Christianity or possessing religious materials face arrest, torture, and often execution. Documented cases reveal shocking forms of punishment, such as Christians being crushed

under steamrollers, drowned, or executed by firing squad. This brutality aims to eradicate Christianity, which the regime perceives as a Western influence and a challenge to its totalitarian control. Many individuals who practise their faith in secret risk their lives and those of their families if discovered by authorities.

The state uses an extensive surveillance system to monitor citizens for signs of religious activity. This system includes neighbourhood watch groups, informants, and family members who report suspicions to authorities. North Korean citizens are also indoctrinated from a young age to idolise the Kim family, with education systems and public life centring on this cult-like reverence. Any deviation from this enforced ideology is treated as a serious offence. Children in particular are trained to report suspicious behaviours, including religious activities, as a way to demonstrate loyalty to the state.

Political prison camps, known as kwan-li-so, detain tens of thousands of people, including many arrested for practising religion. Conditions in these camps are notorious; prisoners endure forced labour, starvation, torture, and denial of medical care. Family members of individuals accused of religious activities are often imprisoned alongside them, facing collective punishment for one person's religious beliefs. The Korea Institute for National Unification estimates that between 80,000 and 120,000 people are currently detained in such camps, where torture and abuse are systemic. These prisoners have no legal recourse, and many die within the camps due to their extreme conditions.

Defectors who flee to China are also at risk if repatriated. China considers North Korean defectors as economic migrants rather than refugees, forcibly returning them to North Korea under a bilateral agreement. Once repatriated, defectors face interrogation, torture, and possible execution. Christians are especially

vulnerable, as the regime views contact with South Korean Christian missionaries in China as treasonous. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, North Korea has tightened border controls, severely limiting cross-border movement and reducing the number of defections. Despite this, reports indicate that many North Koreans continue to attempt to escape, risking their lives to flee from religious and political persecution.

Recommendations for the UK

Given the gravity of FoRB violations in North Korea, the UK has a crucial role in advocating for change through international diplomacy, human rights advocacy, and coalition-building. The following recommendations outline strategic actions the UK could take:

1. **Promote International Accountability:** The UK should continue to support UN resolutions condemning North Korea's human rights abuses and advocate for accountability measures, including referrals to the International Criminal Court (ICC). By working with like-minded countries, the UK can strengthen efforts to hold North Korea accountable for crimes against humanity.
2. **Apply Pressure Through the United Nations:** The UK should encourage the UN to maintain and expand its investigations into North Korea's human rights abuses, including violations of FoRB. Supporting the reappointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in North Korea can help monitor and report FoRB abuses, ensuring continued international awareness and pressure.
3. **Advocate for Protections for North Korean Defectors:** The UK should work with international partners to pressure China to recognise North Korean defectors as refugees under international law and end forced

repatriations. By raising this issue in forums such as the UN Human Rights Council, the UK can highlight the risks faced by defectors, particularly Christians, upon their return.

4. **Support Information Access and Freedom of Expression:** The UK can collaborate with civil society organisations to support initiatives that promote the flow of information into North Korea. Increasing access to external media, such as radio broadcasts and USB drives containing information about human rights and religious freedom, could gradually erode the regime's ideological control and provide North Koreans with knowledge of their rights.

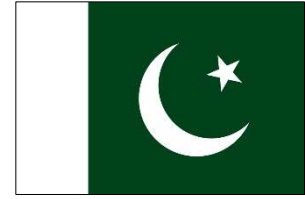
5. **Engage in Public Diplomacy and Condemn FoRB Violations:** The UK should issue public statements condemning North Korea's treatment of religious groups, particularly its systematic targeting of Christians. Regular public condemnations can apply pressure on the regime while demonstrating solidarity with persecuted individuals in North Korea.

6. **Work with International Allies to Increase Pressure on China:** The UK can collaborate with allies to pressure China to end the forced repatriation of defectors. Encouraging international consensus on this issue could compel China to consider the human rights implications of its policies and halt forced returns.

7. **Support NGOs and Advocacy Groups:** Funding and supporting NGOs that document and raise awareness of FoRB abuses in North Korea can strengthen advocacy efforts. The UK could also help NGOs working with defectors and survivors of North Korean persecution to collect evidence for future accountability efforts.

Pakistan

Stakeholders: ADF International, Aid to the Church in Need, Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, Al-Khoei Foundation, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, SHHRINE



Update from ADF International

In Pakistan, a major focus has been ending the scourge of forced conversion coupled with forced marriage. This is an egregious and pervasive human rights abuse in which girls and women often are held physically captive, forced to abandon their Christian faith, and to marry against their will. We are working alongside allied lawyers to ensure that these abuses are not met with impunity, and that Pakistani law

protects the religious freedom rights of every person.

We also facilitated the rescue of Saima Bibi and Reeha Saleem, from their abductors in Pakistan. The girls were forced to marry and convert to Islam and are now free to live their Christian faith again.

Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Pakistan Country Report:

Pakistan's legal framework on religious freedom is complex, with roots in its founding as a secular state in 1947, though this has shifted significantly over time. Under General Zia ul-Haq's rule (1977–1988), Islamic law became more integrated into the legal system. Today, Pakistan remains predominantly Muslim, with Sunnis constituting the majority and Shi'as a small minority. Other religious minorities include Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, who face significant discrimination under both law and societal norms.

The Pakistani constitution recognises Islam as the state religion but contains articles guaranteeing religious freedom. However, these provisions are inconsistently applied, especially following the 2021 introduction of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), which many argue favours Islamic teachings and marginalises minority religious education. Blasphemy laws, introduced under Zia, are severe, often misused,

and disproportionately affect religious minorities. Ahmadi Muslims are legally prohibited from identifying as Muslim, and other non-Muslims face discrimination in areas like presidential and prime ministerial eligibility, where only Muslims may hold these offices.

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan restrict free expression and religious practices. Between 1947 and 1986, only six blasphemy cases were recorded, but since the 1980s, almost 2,000 cases have been reported, with nearly half targeting religious minorities, who make up just a fraction of the population. These laws are often used to justify violence; extrajudicial killings, lynchings, and mob attacks are frequent. Ahmadis face persecution, including mosque destruction and murder, while forced conversions and marriages of Christian and Hindu girls, particularly in Sindh, remain pervasive due to weak legal protections.

Attempts to establish protections for minorities, such as the National Commission for Minorities

and proposed anti-forced conversion laws, have been limited. The National Commission lacks legislative authority, and anti-conversion legislation faced opposition from Islamic leaders and was blocked in parliament. Furthermore, minorities face economic discrimination, particularly in public employment, where low-status jobs are reserved for non-Muslims.

The security situation for minorities is precarious, exacerbated by Islamist terrorism, especially after the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan. Shi'a Muslims and other groups are frequent targets of attacks by extremist

organisations. Hate crimes, including violent assaults and desecration of places of worship, are common for both Shi'a Muslims and Hindus. Violent incidents involving Christians also persist, with Christians often accused of blasphemy and assaulted by mobs. Although there has been some judicial relief in isolated cases, overall, the application of blasphemy laws continues to create a hostile environment for religious minorities.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association

Excerpts from the report, "[The Persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan](#)."

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan faces severe persecution, driven by state policies and extremist groups. This persecution has been legally sanctioned since 1974, when the Pakistani constitution was amended to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. Subsequent laws, like the 1984 Ordinance XX, criminalized their religious practices, such as referring to their places of worship as mosques or identifying as Muslims.

Key Issues:

1. **State-Sanctioned Persecution:** The Pakistani state has enacted laws that restrict the religious freedoms of Ahmadis, such as prohibiting them from practicing Islam openly. These laws violate both Pakistan's constitution and international human rights treaties.
2. **Religiously Motivated Murders:** In 2024, four Ahmadis were murdered in separate incidents, all driven by religious hatred. These killings remain unpunished, reflecting a broader climate of impunity.
3. **Violent Hate Speech:** Inflammatory speeches from religious leaders, including open calls for the killing of

Ahmadis, have exacerbated violence. An event in September 2024 marked 50 years of anti-Ahmadi laws, further promoting violence against the community.

4. **Desecration of Mosques and Graves:** Ahmadi religious sites are frequently attacked, with over 40 mosques and 421 graves desecrated since 2021. In some cases, these acts were carried out with state complicity.
5. **Legal Discrimination:** Ahmadis are forced to vote under separate electoral rolls, requiring them to either renounce their faith or declare themselves non-Muslims. This has effectively disenfranchised the community.
6. **High-Profile Cases:** The case of Mubarak Ahmad Sani, an Ahmadi imprisoned for distributing banned religious materials, illustrates the legal hostility towards the community. His release was met with violent protests from extremist groups, highlighting the perilous situation for Ahmadis in Pakistan.
7. **Prisoners of Conscience:** Several Ahmadi Muslims are imprisoned on fabricated charges related to their religious beliefs, including blasphemy and participation in Islamic rituals.

Recommendations:

The UK Government is urged to call on the Pakistan Government to:

1. Uphold the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary.
2. Release all Ahmadi Muslims held in prison under the draconian anti-Ahmadi and Blasphemy laws;
3. Urge the Government of Pakistan to ensure that Ahmadi Muslims have their democratic right to vote.

4. End the attacks on Ahmadi Muslims and on Ahmadi mosques and graves.
5. Ensure that all religious communities including Ahmadi Muslims have the full right to freedom of religion and Ahmadi Muslims can freely practice their faith as Muslims.
6. Ensure that hate preachers from Pakistan in particular are not allowed into the UK.

Read the full report [here](#).

Update from the Al-Khoei Foundation

Parachinar Crisis: Urgent Action is Required

Parachinar is the capital of Kurram district situated in Northwest Pakistan, and is located close to Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. Kurram district has a population of around 700,000 with [42](#) per cent Shia Muslims according to the census in 2023. However, it shares borders with three Afghan provinces that are known to harbour anti-Shia militant groups including ISIS/ISIL and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

For over two weeks it has been completely disconnected from the outside world as the only main road Thall-Parachinar, leading to Parachinar is blocked. Basic medical, food and fuel needs are cut off. The Internet has been suspended since 27 September further isolating the area and preventing families from contacting their relatives outside the region. Furthermore, the fuel blockage and internet suspension have disrupted educational activities.

Local activists report that the community is in a critical state due to a lack of sufficient medical facilities. The blockade has resulted in the deaths of eleven individuals including [eight](#) children as the critically ill patients were unable to be transferred to cities with better medical facilities. Locals have also pointed towards the

failure of the government to reopen the highway which is closed for 17 days as of today. They warn of an emerging humanitarian crisis.

Parachinar has a long history of violence that might started as a land dispute; however, has turned into a violent sectarian conflict that has claimed hundreds of innocent lives. Shia Muslims also face targeted attacks from anti-Shia militant groups including the targeting of their [mosques](#).

Recent Conflict:

In August 2024, the conflict took the lives of at least 46 people and left around 200 people injured. According to the local authorities and tribal heads, the ongoing conflict has its roots in land disputes between Shia and Sunni tribes. The land originally belonged to the Shia tribe who leased it to the Sunni tribe for farming. When the lease expired this year in July, they refused to return which sparked a deadly tribal [battle](#).

Locals blame the inaction and lack of seriousness from the authorities for the escalating crisis. They warn that if the situation is not resolved, it could lead to a major humanitarian disaster. Immediate intervention is required to address the blockade that has paralysed the lives of people, restore essential

services and mediate the issue to prevent further bloodshed and violence.

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Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

Pakistan's constitution provides nominal protections for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), enshrining the rights of all citizens regardless of religion. However, this protection is undermined by a series of blasphemy laws that heavily restrict free expression and create an environment of fear, particularly for religious minorities. Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) outlines strict punishments for blasphemy, with section 295(C) mandating the death penalty or life imprisonment for insulting the Prophet Muhammad. The laws lack specific standards for evidence and intent, enabling frequent misuse. Accusations, often unfounded, have led to arrests, mob violence, and even extrajudicial killings, affecting both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

While blasphemy laws were initially designed to prevent hate speech, they are frequently exploited for personal vendettas or to target vulnerable religious communities. Pakistan has recently seen legislative actions aiming to intensify these restrictions. In 2023, a bill was passed that increases punishments for perceived insults to Islam's holy figures, raising concerns of escalating FoRB abuses. Religious minority groups, particularly Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, face systemic discrimination, often forced into marginalised roles and subjected to harassment, violence, and arbitrary detention.

Key Issues

Blasphemy accusations in Pakistan often lead to mob violence, with communities taking the law into their own hands. The high-profile case in Jaranwala, Punjab, in August 2023 is a stark example. A Christian colony was attacked by a large mob after accusations of blasphemy were made against two young Christian men. Community members were threatened, and over 20 churches and hundreds of homes were vandalised. Despite assurances from local authorities, police were unable to prevent the mob's actions, highlighting the impunity and lack of legal protection for religious minorities in such cases.

The Ahmadiyya community, considered non-Muslim by the state since a constitutional amendment in 1974, faces persistent persecution under Pakistan's anti-Ahmadiyya laws. These laws prevent Ahmadis from identifying as Muslims, restrict their religious practices, and subject them to charges under sections 298(B) and (C) of the PPC, which criminalise any attempt by Ahmadis to refer to their faith as Islam. Between January and November 2023, 111 Ahmadis were charged under these laws, with attacks on Ahmadi mosques and grave desecration a recurring issue. The Ahmadi community endures severe discrimination, from employment limitations to barriers in educational access, rendering them among Pakistan's most marginalised religious groups.

The forced conversion and marriage of Christian and Hindu girls, particularly in Punjab and Sindh provinces, remain a severe and underreported problem. Abductions and forced marriages are often facilitated by loopholes in the legal system, enabling perpetrators to avoid prosecution by claiming the girl willingly converted to Islam and consented to marriage. Most of these girls come from lower-caste Hindu and Christian communities, making them especially vulnerable. Although forced conversions are illegal under Pakistani law, a lack of effective law enforcement allows this practice to continue largely unchecked. Families who report such cases are often intimidated or face social stigma, deterring them from pursuing justice.

Educational discrimination also persists, with textbooks and curricula perpetuating stereotypes about religious minorities. This bias reinforces societal prejudices, exposing students from religious minority backgrounds to harassment and alienation. The National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP) includes Islamic teachings, and religious minorities must attend Islamic studies classes or risk being singled out, reinforcing a culture of religious intolerance within educational institutions.

Recommendations for the UK

To address these issues, the UK can play a key role in promoting FoRB in Pakistan through a range of diplomatic, civil society, and multilateral approaches:

1. **Advocating for Blasphemy Law Reform:** The UK should encourage Pakistan to reform its blasphemy laws, which disproportionately impact religious minorities. Diplomatic discussions could focus on removing mandatory death penalties, instituting safeguards to prevent misuse, and setting higher evidentiary standards. These measures could help reduce false accusations and mob violence.
2. **Supporting Protections for Vulnerable Communities:** The UK could

provide support to Pakistani NGOs and community groups that work with religious minorities, helping them raise awareness and advocate for legal protections. This could include funding for organisations that document FoRB abuses, which can apply pressure on Pakistan to improve protections for vulnerable groups.

3. **Highlighting Forced Conversion Cases:** The UK should encourage Pakistan to implement stronger legal measures against forced conversions and marriages. International pressure can be applied to ensure that Pakistan enforces its existing laws on abduction and forced marriage, especially in cases involving minors.

Working with international bodies, the UK can help document these cases, providing evidence for legal reforms and accountability.

4. **Addressing Anti-Ahmadiyya Legislation:** The UK should advocate for the repeal of discriminatory laws targeting the Ahmadiyya community. Diplomatic efforts could emphasise the need to protect all religious communities under international human rights law, encouraging Pakistan to align its policies with these standards. Supporting documentation of anti-Ahmadi crimes can also bring these issues to international attention.
5. **Supporting Education Reform:** The UK can support initiatives aimed at reforming Pakistan's education curriculum to promote religious tolerance and inclusivity. Collaborating with local NGOs, the UK could help develop educational materials that celebrate diversity and remove content that promotes religious discrimination.
6. **Public Statements and Diplomatic Engagement:** Regular public statements condemning specific instances of FoRB violations could apply pressure on the Pakistani government. Engaging in forums such as the United Nations Human Rights Council can help maintain international scrutiny, reinforcing the need for legal and policy reforms.
7. **Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms:** The UK should support mechanisms to monitor and report on FoRB

violations in Pakistan, such as an annual review by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Regular reports would ensure that FoRB issues remain a central focus of the

UK-Pakistan relationship, fostering accountability.

Update from SHHRINE

Jamaat-e-Islami - the Pakistan-backed political party that brought down the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her political partners blamed Jamaat-e-Islami, its Islami Chhatra Shibir student wing and other associate bodies for inciting violence during recent student protests over a quota system for government jobs. Jamaat -e-Islami was founded by Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, a figure associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, with the mission of establishing an Islamic state. The name translates to "congregation of Islam," while its student wing, Chhatra Shibir, means "student camp." The organization's ideology promotes an Islamic conquest, aiming to bring the world under Islamic rule.

The actions of the Islamist organisation Jamaat-e-Islami have been contentious since the liberation of Bangladesh. The country's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, banned the organisation due to its members' involvement in forming auxiliary forces like Razakars, Al-Badr, Al-Shams, and the Peace Committee. These groups were implicated in committing atrocities against Bengali freedom fighters, particularly targeting Hindus. Jamaat-e-Islami has established a widespread presence beyond Bangladesh. In Pakistan, it remains a major political force, despite its involvement in militant activities through its student wing, Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba. The organisation has connections with various militant groups, including Gaza-based Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Muslim brotherhood. Hindu houses and businesses have been strategically attacked in 27 districts of Bangladesh and there is an orchestrated attempt

to takeover their property after forcing them to flee, if not butchering them.

44 Shia Muslims killed in pro-Taliban militants' attack on Parachinar.

Human Rights violations continue. The Shia community in Parachinar of Pakistan, has again been subjected to genocide, leaving numerous fatalities and widespread fear," said a noted Kashmiri Shia leader Aga Syed Hassan on Monday.

As per media reports, at least 36 people lost their lives with 162 more sustaining injuries in armed confrontations against Shia Muslims by extremist Sunni tribes and Afghanistan Taliban in Pakistan's volatile tribal district in the northwest. This region, sharing a border with Afghanistan, has a troubled history of anti-Shia violence.

In a statement, Aga Syed Hassan termed the killings as "inhuman barbarism" which have no place in a civilised society.

The tragedy is not only an assault on human life but also a grave violation of religious freedom and human rights. The victims were targeted for their faith, echoing historical injustices against Shia Muslims," he said.

"These acts of violence are intended to sow division and perpetuate a cycle of hatred and fear. The individuals behind these atrocities are enemies of peace and human harmony," Aga Hassan added.

He called for immediate and decisive action to bring the perpetrators to justice, urging authorities to ensure the safety and security of the Shia community in the region.

Brutality in Balochistan.

The entire region has become a war zone. The situation in Balochistan continues to worsen as the Pakistani army have brutally cracked down on the Baloch community, as they gathered across Balochistan for Baloch National Gathering.

Thousands of protestors have come together to voice their concerns about the persisting human rights violations of the Baloch community.

Baloch protestors allege that Pakistani army are trying to stop them from participating in a nationwide gathering, which hold the government and the army accountable for their brutality.

Balochistan has now become a completely war-torn region. And the Pakistani state is using all its machinery and power to commit the worst human rights violations.

Since July 28, 2024, Pakistani authorities have detained hundreds of people in response to the Baloch National Gathering, a march seeking to raise awareness of human rights concerns in Balochistan. Some protesters attacked security forces, killing one soldier and injuring others.

Over the months, massive protests have been rocking Balochistan over the decision of the administration to turn the area into a China-built Gwadar port into a military installation zone.

Balochistan has the highest number of enforced disappearances in all of Pakistan, with the authorities wilfully ignoring calls for accountability for years. Following this, the military forces burst the tyres of all the convoy's vehicles, rendering them useless, and shattered the windows with direct fire.

The Baloch National Gathering has called for accountability for the numerous cases of enforced disappearances in Balochistan over

many years. Such “disappearances” have long been a feature of the conflict between the government and armed militants in Balochistan. Pakistan’s security forces have also carried out enforced disappearances to silence peaceful critics of the government.

International law defines an enforced disappearance as the detention of anyone by state forces or their agents who refuse to acknowledge the detention or whereabouts of the person, placing them outside the protection of the law.

Alarmed by surge in attacks on Ahmadis, UN experts have a message for Pakistan.

Concerns expressed about persistent attacks.

Concerned over rampant discrimination and violence against the minority Ahmadi community in Pakistan, a panel of U.N.- backed independent experts expressed grave concern on Thursday, urging authorities to ensure their protection.

The experts, who work under a Human Rights Council mandate but do not speak for the United Nations, said in a statement that they were alarmed by reports of violence and discrimination against Ahmadis. Ahmadis are adherents of Ahmadiyya, an Islamic messianic movement that originated in the late 19th century.

“We urge Pakistani authorities to take immediate action to address this situation,” they said.

The experts highlighted two incidents earlier this month in which two Ahmadis were killed. Police at the time said they arrested the attackers.

In their statement, the experts also expressed concern over instances of arbitrary arrests and detentions of Ahmadi worshippers to prevent and obstruct their participation in religious festivals and rituals.

“Ahmadis’ right to peacefully manifest their beliefs must be respected,” they said.

Pakistan’s Parliament declared Ahmadis non-Muslims in 1974. Since then, they have been repeatedly targeted by Islamic extremists, drawing condemnation from domestic and international human right groups.

The Ahmadiyyas believe that the Messiah Ghulam Ahmad lived after Islam’s prophet Muhammad and insist that they are part of Islam. The minority group was declared as non-Muslim in Pakistan in 1974 by former PM Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

Since then, the group has been facing both legal and social discrimination in the Islamic country, and the attacks on their properties have increased manifold in the past decade. It is pertinent to note that the Islamization of Pakistan, which political analysts say started during former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s government in the 1970s, went on to culminate in the 1980s under the former military dictator General Zia ul-Haq’s draconian regime.

It was during Haq’s era that the Ahmadis were banned from calling themselves Muslims.

They were also barred from opening mosques in the country and their existing places of worship were brutally shut down or desecrated by hard-line Islamists with the support of the state.

According to Pakistan’s National Commission for Human Rights, more than 280 Ahmadis were killed in targeted violence from 1984 to September 2023. Another 415 faced assaults, 51 Ahmadiya worship places were damaged, 39 were set on fire and 18 were forcibly occupied besides 46 others that were sealed by the authorities.

Report reveals at least 70 acts of violence against Pakistani Christians in the first half of 2024.

After Jaranwala, the violence against Christians in Pakistan has not ceased.

After last August’s violence against the Christian community in Jaranwala, Punjab, the country has witnessed a further wave of violence and hatred against Christians in the first half of the year 2024.

Dignity First, a human rights organisation released the report ‘Persecution Watch’, based on research on the persecution of Christians in the first six months of this year, which highlights violent attacks, incidents of discrimination, killings, torture, abductions, sexual violence, land grabbing, evictions, forced conversions based on faith, and accusations of blasphemy against Christians. Yousaf Benjamin, executive director of Dignity First, said that the actions advanced in the past six months (January to June 2024) are alarming and that, therefore, the authorities must take immediate practical measures to ensure protection and religious freedom for minority groups. Benjamin revealed that there have been more than 70 violent attacks in six months, affecting more than 140 Christian families on the basis of their religious identity. There have been five violent attacks in the Punjab province alone. Of these 5 attacks, 3 targeted Christian families and another 2 targeted churches.

Six Christians were arrested for alleged blasphemy, including two women in Punjab. According to reports, one woman was mentally unstable, while one Christian died after being tortured by an angry mob. ‘Persecution Watch’, a biannual fact-based report compiled by DIGNITY First, calls on the authorities to immediately prevent marginalised sections, eliminate extremism, promote religious tolerance and take immediate practical measures to ensure religious freedom and security.

Heart-wrenching religious persecution in Pakistan.

Anil Kumar and his family, unable to bear the constant threat of kidnappings, rape, and forced

conversion to Islam, has joined a growing exodus of Hindus seeking safety across the border.

Kumar's ordeal speaks volumes about the plight faced by the Hindu minority in Pakistan. Countless families are living in fear, their lives marked by discrimination and violence.

As Kumar and his family begin to start a new life in a new country, they are joined by a growing number of hopefuls eagerly awaiting the chance to escape the oppressive conditions in their homeland and to live in safety and dignity.

Additional Developments - October 2024

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has expressed grave concerns about the rise of religious intolerance, blasphemy, forced kidnappings, and the conversion of Hindu and Christian minority girls in Pakistan.

These concerns were raised during the second day of the review of Pakistan's human rights conditions by the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) committee. The review brought up serious issues regarding freedom of expression, media freedom, and religious intolerance in Pakistan. The UN Committee noted that federal and provincial legislative frameworks impose unnecessary barriers to exercising these rights. NGOs face financial inspections and harassment, while university students must sign declarations rejecting political activity as a condition for admission. Pashtun and Baloch students are subjected to arbitrary disciplinary actions due to their political activities.

The committee also expressed alarm over the increasing cases of forced conversions and kidnappings of Hindu and Christian girls, who are often not returned to their families but instead sent to shelters lacking proper protection, exposing them to further violence.

Additionally, the UN committee criticized Pakistan's failure to address the rising attacks

and threats against Shia Muslims, Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, and Sikhs, including blasphemy accusations, targeted killings, lynching, mob violence, and desecration of places of worship. The committee noted that society has become increasingly intolerant of religious diversity, with minorities facing constant persecution and discrimination.

The report also condemned the use of the Exit Control List (ECL) to restrict the movement of dissenters and highlighted issues with passport applications requiring religious declarations, particularly for Ahmadi applicants. The committee stressed the need for careful implementation of defamation laws to avoid repressing freedom of expression.

The committee also raised concerns about the passport application process, particularly for Ahmadi applicants who are required to identify as non-Muslims to obtain passports. Additionally, the committee emphasized the need for careful implementation of defamation laws in Pakistan to ensure they do not suppress freedom of expression.

Defamation remains a criminal offense under the PPC and the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act, with penalties including imprisonment and fines. The Punjab Defamation Bill 2024, passed without stakeholder consultations, is worrisome as it focuses on prosecuting public officials and allows fines without proof of actual damage, potentially leading to repression or intimidation.

While the report highlighted these critical issues, it also held the Pakistan government and its federal agencies accountable for various concerns, including child rights, anti-rape laws, media restrictions, self-censorship, internet outages, online surveillance, and bonded labor. The committee called for greater transparency and the protection of rights for all citizens.

SHHRINE urges the UK government to take note of the increasing religious intolerance and human rights violations against minorities in Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Saudi Arabia Country Report:

Saudi Arabia's legal framework is deeply entwined with Sharia, where the King, as an absolute monarch, governs based on Islamic law. Recent decades have seen some economic and social modernisation, particularly under King Abdullah and current Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 reforms, aimed at reducing the nation's reliance on oil. The country's population of around 36 million is predominantly Sunni Muslim, with Shi'a Muslims making up about 10-12%. Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi interpretation of Islam imposes severe restrictions on women and mandates strict penalties, including capital punishment, for various offences. Religious freedom is not recognised, and conversion from Islam is punishable by death, although courts increasingly impose lengthy prison terms instead.

Non-Muslims are prohibited from public worship, and while they may theoretically practise privately, inconsistent enforcement leaves expatriates vulnerable to harassment. In education, Islamic studies are mandatory, even for non-Muslim students in private schools. The legal system lacks a written penal code, resulting in wide variance in sentencing, often with lesser rights and compensation for non-Muslims and women. A 2017 counterterrorism law criminalises public criticism of the King or Crown Prince, as well as any expression

perceived as challenging Islam, promoting atheism, or practising non-Islamic religions.

Recent years have seen both symbolic improvements and crackdowns. The Shi'a community experienced reduced sectarian tensions, with Ashura commemorations tolerated. Reforms, such as replacing flogging with prison sentences and limiting religious police powers, have slightly reduced public harassment. However, harsh punishments for dissent persist. Shi'a activists, clerics, and reform advocates continue to face imprisonment, execution, and restricted fair trial rights. The government executed 120 people in the first half of 2022, including those charged with "apostasy" or blasphemy. Notable cases include clerics facing death sentences and bloggers enduring lengthy prison terms for criticising Islam online.

Despite government-led interfaith conferences and revisions to remove some anti-Christian and antisemitic content from textbooks, significant religious intolerance remains. The government's control over reform signals that any advances toward religious freedom are limited and precarious. While young Saudis drive a push for modernisation, meaningful religious freedom is unlikely under the current regime, with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom maintaining Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Sudan

Stakeholders: ADF International, Aid to the Church in Need, Christian Solidarity Worldwide



Update from ADF International

We leveraged our networks to rescue Christian couple Nada and Hamouda and their children from Sudan, who required immediate passage to

safety even after their legal defense, facing 100 lashes and possible death for their conversion.

Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Sudan Country Report:

The 2019 Sudanese constitution, issued by the transitional government, formally recognises the right to non-discrimination on religious grounds and enshrines freedom of religion and worship. It states that individuals are free to practice their beliefs without coercion, allowing ethnic and cultural groups the liberty to exercise their customs, languages, and religions. Despite this, Sudan's history of religious persecution under previous regimes, particularly before 2019, prompted the emigration of many religious minorities, and ultimately led to South Sudan's independence.

In 2020, the transitional government repealed repressive laws, including those enforcing apostasy and flogging for blasphemy, banned female genital mutilation, and removed restrictions on alcohol for non-Muslims. These reforms marked a liberalisation period that included peace agreements with various armed groups and legal adjustments to attract foreign investment. The government's attempts to amend the school curriculum to be less discriminatory toward non-Muslims faced backlash and threats, resulting in the resignation of a key official, leaving the curriculum unchanged.

Following the 2019 uprising, the government restored Christmas as a public holiday, appointed a Christian woman to the Sovereign Council, and issued an apology for past persecution of Christians. In 2020, Sudan declared itself a secular state, distancing itself from decades of Islamic rule, and repealed the death penalty for apostasy. However, these advances ended abruptly in October 2021, when General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan led a military coup, reinstalling an authoritarian rule. The military also appointed former al-Bashir loyalists, signalling a regression in religious freedoms.

Throughout this time, religious minorities have continued to face targeted violence and harassment. Instances of church property destruction, threats against Christian activists, and attacks on church members occurred. Police responses to such incidents were often insufficient, reflecting the heightened influence of extremist elements and a reluctance among law enforcement to protect minority rights. Notably, Sudan's anti-apostasy law was repealed in 2019, yet apostasy cases still arise, particularly following the military's return to power.

The prospects for religious freedom in Sudan are dim under the military regime, despite earlier

constitutional promises of secularism. Demonstrations against the authoritarian government have been met with violence, underscoring the fragile status of religious freedoms. Bishop Yunan Tombe Trille recently urged Sudanese citizens to overcome divisive

factors and work towards a peaceful, inclusive nation, though current developments suggest continued challenges for religious minorities.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Introduction and Legal Framework

Sudan's legal and political landscape has been unstable for decades, with a recent resurgence of violence following the October 2021 military coup. The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), formerly known as the Janjaweed militia, have been engaged in a brutal conflict since April 2023. This ongoing power struggle has resulted in severe human rights abuses, particularly against religious and ethnic minorities. The 2005 Interim National Constitution, which guaranteed freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and acknowledged Sudan as a secular state, was replaced by the constitutional declaration of 2019. This document aimed to transition Sudan toward democracy, but progress was halted by the 2021 coup, which reinstated authoritarian rule.

Sudan is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which mandates FoRB, yet its legal system, dominated by Islamic principles, often fails to protect these rights. Since the coup, laws that were intended to safeguard FoRB have been undermined. Under military rule, Islamist ideology has reasserted influence over governance, increasing repression against non-Muslim communities, especially Christians. The military regime's close ties with hardline Islamist groups have emboldened non-state actors, leading to a resurgence in religious and ethnic intolerance, often enforced by the state and extremist factions alike.

Key Issues

Sudan's civil conflict has disproportionately affected civilians, especially those from minority religious backgrounds. Christian communities, particularly in the capital Khartoum and in regions such as Darfur, face severe persecution. The SAF and RSF have attacked churches, forcibly removed Christians from their homes, and repurposed places of worship as military bases. In April 2023, RSF fighters seized an Anglican Cathedral in central Khartoum, expelling congregants, including the Archbishop and his family, and damaging church property. In November 2023, the SAF destroyed one of Sudan's oldest churches in Omdurman, which served both Episcopal and Evangelical communities. These attacks exemplify the military's disregard for FoRB and reflect an alarming pattern of targeting Christian sites.

The conflict has also led to widespread displacement, with over 8.1 million people internally displaced and over two million fleeing Sudan altogether. In Darfur and other regions, entire communities have been forced to abandon their homes, and religious and ethnic minorities, including Christians, have been disproportionately affected. The RSF, which controls large parts of Darfur, has been accused of using food scarcity as a weapon, blocking aid supplies, and targeting humanitarian convoys. These actions have compounded the suffering of religious minorities, many of whom already face marginalisation in access to resources and services.

The SAF and RSF both claim to respect religious freedom, yet their actions indicate otherwise. Both groups have targeted Christian clergy and congregants, often accusing them of supporting opposition movements. Pastors and church

leaders have been detained and accused of harbouring political dissidents, creating a climate of fear within religious communities. Additionally, religious leaders who attempt to assist displaced or vulnerable individuals have faced harassment, arrest, and violence, making it increasingly difficult for communities to practice their faith openly.

Sudan's laws still impose restrictions on religious freedoms despite the repeal of certain oppressive measures in recent years. Apostasy, while officially decriminalised in 2020, continues to carry stigma, and converts from Islam to other religions face societal and familial pressure, as well as threats of violence. Cases have emerged where Christians who fled RSF-controlled areas were detained upon arrival in SAF-controlled zones, indicating a lack of consistency in FoRB protections across different territories.

Recommendations for the UK

The UK has an important role in advocating for FoRB in Sudan, especially given its historical ties and influence within international bodies. To address the current crisis, the UK should consider the following actions:

1. **Promote Accountability for Atrocities:** The UK should support initiatives within the UN to investigate and document human rights abuses committed by the SAF and RSF, including attacks on religious sites and persecution of minorities. Endorsing the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan and its extended mandate would enable further documentation of crimes, supporting future prosecution efforts.
2. **Apply Targeted Sanctions on Key Figures:** The UK could impose targeted sanctions on SAF and RSF leaders responsible for FoRB violations and other human rights abuses. Freezing assets and restricting travel for those involved in atrocities could help pressure Sudan's leadership to cease attacks on religious communities and respect FoRB.

3. **Support Humanitarian Access:** Working with international organisations, the UK should advocate for safe humanitarian corridors to provide aid to displaced and persecuted communities. Special attention should be given to minority religious groups who are often overlooked in aid distribution. The UK could also push for UN-led coordination to ensure aid reaches conflict-affected areas, especially in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains.

4. **Strengthen Support for Religious and Civil Society Leaders:** The UK can provide support to Sudanese civil society groups and religious organisations that work to document abuses and support victims of violence. Capacity-building initiatives and funding could empower these groups to continue their advocacy and offer direct assistance to persecuted communities.

5. **Publicly Condemn FoRB Violations:** The UK should make regular public statements condemning attacks on religious minorities and places of worship, reinforcing its commitment to protecting FoRB in Sudan. By raising these issues in the UN Human Rights Council and similar forums, the UK can increase international pressure on Sudan's military leaders to cease their repressive actions.

6. **Encourage Diplomatic Engagement with Regional Partners:** The UK could collaborate with Sudan's neighbouring countries and the African Union (AU) to promote stability and prevent regional spillover of the conflict. Regional engagement can support Sudanese refugees and encourage diplomatic solutions that prioritise the protection of religious and ethnic minorities.

7. **Promote an Inclusive Transitional Government:** The UK should advocate for an inclusive transition plan that respects FoRB and includes representatives from all of Sudan's diverse religious and ethnic communities. Supporting a negotiated resolution that recognises the rights of religious minorities will be critical to fostering long-term peace and stability in Sudan.

Syria

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Syria Country Report:

Syria's constitution, amended in 2012, establishes Islam as the president's religion and an essential source of legislation, while ostensibly safeguarding religious freedom and equality. Although proselytising is restricted, particularly regarding conversions from Islam to other religions, conversions to Islam are permitted. Additionally, the penal code criminalises actions that might incite religious tensions or defame religious practices, reflecting the government's aim to preserve public order among Syria's diverse communities.

Since the civil war's outbreak in 2011, exacerbated by regional and global interventions, Syria's social and political landscape has significantly shifted. President Assad's Alawite government has retained or regained most of Syria, though certain areas remain under the control of foreign-backed factions. The conflict has intensified divisions among Syria's religious and ethnic communities, with Sunnis forming the majority alongside significant minorities, including Alawites, Christians, and Druze. Despite official recognition as Shia Muslims since 1974, Alawites, like other minority groups, face scrutiny or hostility from various factions.

Recent years have seen numerous incidents affecting religious groups. Turkish-backed forces have looted Christian sites, Yazidis have faced repression, and reports suggest that Iran is working to bolster Syria's Shia population through incentives. Iran has allegedly expanded

its religious influence by constructing Shia shrines, using them to justify its military presence. Turkish incursions have damaged Christian villages, displacing local residents, while the government's restructuring of Sunni religious authority signals a further tightening of religious oversight.

While traditional Christian communities find solace in church support amid widespread poverty, displacement and emigration continue. Yazidis have suffered under enforced Islamic laws, and Christian landowners have reported expropriations in Kurdish-led areas. Extremist groups like ISIS and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham persist, imposing strict religious practices and occasionally targeting minority populations. Additionally, Israeli airstrikes aimed at countering Iran's influence have impacted civilian areas.

Although direct conflict has subsided, Syria remains divided along religious and ideological lines, with ongoing tensions undermining prospects for religious freedom. While the government nominally permits worship, minority communities—especially Christians and Yazidis—face continual restrictions, economic hardships, and pressures from various factions, pushing many to leave Syria. The persistent instability suggests that religious freedom will likely remain constrained for those who choose to stay.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Türkiye

Stakeholders: ADF International, Aid to the Church in Need



Update from ADF International

We provided legal support in over 20 cases where foreign missionaries in Turkey have been banned or deported for sharing the Gospel and

filed key cases at the European Court of Human Rights.

Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Türkiye Country Report:

Turkey's constitution designates the state as secular, with provisions for freedom of belief and worship. However, religious affairs are managed by the state-controlled Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), primarily serving Sunni Islam, which receives significant state funding. Religious instruction in public schools is compulsory and Sunni-focused, with exemptions for Christians and Jews only. Other religious groups, like the Alevis, cannot opt out. Turkey only recognises Armenians, Greeks, and Jews as minority groups, but they and other religious minorities lack legal rights to own property collectively or seek legal action, relying instead on foundations to manage property and assets.

Religious minorities face restrictions in training their clergy, with only Sunni Islamic training permitted. Institutions like the Greek Orthodox seminary remain closed, while synagogues are protected but subject to anti-Semitism, particularly online. Christian refugees from the Middle East, mainly Chaldeans and Syriacs, face challenges such as limited freedom of movement and lack of worship spaces.

Under the ruling AKP and President Erdoğan, Turkey has increasingly used religion for political influence, especially in Islamic countries and Africa. This shift has deepened ties between religion and politics domestically,

impacting social tolerance and contributing to hate speech targeting Armenians and foreign, non-Muslim populations.

Legal obstacles heavily restrict minority religious foundations, which are essential for managing property and services for their communities. A recent 2022 regulation on foundation governance added restrictions, such as mandatory local residency for board members, which disproportionately affects dispersed communities like the Greeks, Assyrians, and Jews, potentially threatening their foundations' existence.

Christian communities lack seminaries to train clergy, leaving them reliant on foreign pastors, who often face visa issues. Protestant groups, mostly in larger cities, operate under legal constraints that prevent them from establishing formal places of worship, restricting access to subsidies and tax benefits.

The overall environment for religious minorities is increasingly restrictive. Discrimination in Turkey remains largely legalistic rather than violent, but the impact is steadily eroding religious and cultural diversity, pushing the country towards a mono-religious identity and limiting prospects for religious freedom.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Yemen

Stakeholders: Aid to the Church in Need, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom



Update from Aid to the Church in Need

Summary of Yemen Country Report:

Yemen's 1991 Constitution declares Islam as the state religion, with Islamic Shari'ah as the source of legislation. The president must be a practising Muslim, and while non-Muslims can run for office, they must fulfil their religious duties. Freedom of thought is theoretically protected, but in practice, there are significant restrictions on religious expression, including prohibitions on proselytising and conversion from Islam. Building new places of worship requires government approval, which is often difficult to obtain.

In education, Islamic instruction is compulsory, and religious practices in public schools reflect the dominant sect in each area, with non-Zaydi residents facing pressure in Houthi-controlled regions. Yemen has seen political instability since the Houthi takeover in 2014, resulting in a protracted civil war that has severely impacted governance and the enforcement of laws, particularly in areas controlled by the Houthis. This conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced and reliant on aid.

Religious minorities, including Baha'is, Christians, Hindus, and Jews, face increased

harassment, particularly in Houthi-controlled territories. Reports indicate arrests, forced conversions, and systematic persecution of these groups. The government, weakened by conflict, struggles to protect rights or enforce laws, leading to harsher conditions for those in Houthi regions.

The situation for religious communities is dire, with a dwindling number of Jews remaining in Yemen and the Christian community shrinking due to violence and persecution. Recent reports highlight ongoing trials of Baha'is and the persecution of religious minorities, alongside propaganda that incites hostility towards them.

The Houthi insurgency, bolstered by Iranian support, has created an environment where radical ideologies flourish, and children are recruited for military purposes under the guise of ideological training. Efforts for peace remain complicated, with temporary ceasefires failing to establish lasting resolutions. The prospects for religious freedom and human rights in Yemen are bleak as long as the civil war continues.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Update from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom

Situation of the Bahá'í Community in Yemen: September 2024

It is estimated that there are presently a few thousand Yemeni Bahá'ís, all loyal citizens to their country representing its rich and diverse culture and living in both urban and rural

settings including cities such as Sana'a, Taiz, Hodayda, Ebb, Aden, Mukalla, Dhale, Shabwa, and the Socotra Islands.

Despite living through a turbulent period of civil conflict in Yemen, the Yemeni Baha'is have refused to side with one group or another and have instead endeavoured to serve all people. Bahá'ís have notably contributed to the betterment of Yemen in various fields including construction, medicine, tribal reconciliation, education, humanitarian and disaster relief.

Recent Developments

On 25 May 2023 Houthis staged a violent raid on a peaceful Baha'i gathering in Sana'a, detaining and forcibly disappearing 17 members of the Yemeni Baha'i community, who had gathered in a private home to elect the community's national governing body.

Due to sustained international pressure, the Houthis gradually released the 17 Bahá'ís. However, the suppression of the Bahá'í community in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen persists, with severe restrictions on their ability to practice their faith and maintain community life. The denial of fundamental freedoms, including the right to assemble and worship, remains a critical issue.

The last four jailed Yemeni Baha'is were released recently in a development that concludes a shameful episode, beginning in May 2023, when armed and masked men from Yemen's de facto Houthi authorities detained 17 innocent Baha'is in a [violent raid](#) on a private home. The raid attracted international media coverage when footage of the armed agents bursting into the peaceful Baha'i gathering [appeared online](#).

Abdul Elah Al Boni, Muhammad Bashir, Ibrahim Juail, and Hassan Thabet were released after facing significant, but ultimately unsuccessful, pressure to renounce their faith through forced participation in "cultural courses" conducted by Houthi agents, which

essentially amount to attempts at forced indoctrination.

"The Baha'i International Community welcomes the release of these four Yemeni Baha'is but these 17 Baha'is should never have been arrested in the first place. The group had gathered in a private home for a peaceful community activity: a fundamental human right protected by international law and the freedom of religion or belief."

The raid last year prompted repeated calls by the international community for the release of the detained Baha'is. In August 2023 six members of the United Nations Security Council ["deplored the detentions"](#) and more recently, in May, a powerful coalition of United Nations Special Rapporteurs, European parliamentarians, ambassadors, international human rights organizations, and a Nobel laureate addressed the matter alongside the [#FreeYemeniBahais](#) campaign online.

Thirteen of the 17 detained individuals were released over the past 15 months, with the latest, Abdullah Al-Olofi, [freed in June](#) 2024. Several Yemeni tribal leaders and religious figures played a major role in the release of the Baha'i detainees. Despite all the ongoing efforts, the Baha'i community in the Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen continues to be persecuted and its members are deprived of the freedom to hold gatherings or otherwise practice their faith.

Incitement to Hatred

On 2 June 2023 the Mufti of the Houthis, Shams al-Din Sharaf al-Din, gave a speech at Friday prayers and focussed his sermon the arrest of the Baha'is. Within his comments, he explained that some of the reasons the security forces recently arrested some Bahá'ís is due to Bahá'ís having direct contact with Israel; they have broadcasted live from Israel; there are intimate relationships between the Bahá'ís without marriage; and that they solicit money for their cause.

He stated that America, Britain and the Jews are behind the existence of movements whose aim is to harm Islam such as the Ahmadiyya, which is based in Britain, and which is the basis for forming such movements. He further stated that America, Britain and the Jews are supporters of the Bahá'í Faith. Most alarmingly, he further stated that Prophet Muhammad said: "Whoever changes his religion, kill him."

Recent History of Arrest, Torture and Threat of Execution Against Baha'is

Hamed bin Haydara, the longest incarcerated of a second group of innocent Yemeni Baha'is who suffered arrest and detention before the May 2023 raids, had his January 2018 death sentence upheld in a sham trial in 2020, and was sent into exile. Mr bin Haydara had previously been subjected to detention, torture and forced to sign a false confession while blind-folded, On March 25th 2020, President of the Houthis' Supreme Political Counsel Mahdi al-Mashat, gave a televised address in which he issued a pardon in the case of Mr bin Haydara and ordered the release of all six Baha'is detained in prison in Sana'a. Mr bin Haydara was first arrested in December 2013, and was tortured while in custody and coerced into giving false confession.

On 30th July 2020 the six Bahá'is were finally released from prison. Whilst it is welcome that these innocent men are freed from detention are no longer face the threat of execution, the unfortunate reality is that they been subjected to a form of forced exile. Their personal assets remain confiscated, and at an extraordinary court hearing on 28th August, a judge declared the released Bahá'is as "fugitives" from justice.

In February 2021 nineteen Bahá'is were summoned before a Houthi court for the resumption of their trial and they too are at risk of being declared fugitives.

Recent International Engagement and Opportunities For Scrutiny

Yemen was the subject of a "Universal Periodic Review" process through the UN Human Rights Council in the regular session of May 2024.

Whilst the UK government will not now have the opportunity to feed in to Yemen's next UPR cycle and human rights record until 2029, the UN system offers other important spaces to influence the Houthi authorities to improve human rights for Baha'is and all Yemenis under its de facto jurisdiction.

Several of the UN "Special Procedures" for example report on mandates that are relevant to Yemen. The Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and others may respond to question from UK missions to New York or Geneva in the range of Interactive Dialogues that are included in the agenda for major multi-lateral human rights spaces.

There is also the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen, who have reported to the UN on security and human rights issues, and the Baha'I community encourages UK government to submit information about the abuse of the Baha'is to this body.

In Autumn 2021 the UN Human Rights Council failed to adopt a Western-backed resolution on the situation in the Yemen, and this has ended the mandate of Group of Eminent Experts that monitored rights, including those of the Bahá'is.

In 2022 Dr Nader Al-Sakkaf, of the Yemeni Baha'í Office of Public Affairs gave expert testimony to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Swedish Parliament. During his statement he noted the creation of the National Council for Minorities in Yemen. From the information we have to date, this appears to be an NGO that has been established in Aden. It is not known whether this has been registered by the Presidential Commission of the Yemeni government, nor is it known if this organisation has any contact with Yemeni minorities living in areas under Houthi control.



AFTERWORD

By the Director

As we draw this year's report to a close, I wish to take a moment to reflect on the collective efforts of our stakeholders in advancing freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) across the globe. Throughout this report, you will have seen the significant strides made in promoting FoRB, as well as the ongoing challenges that persist in many parts of the world. Our work remains as vital as ever.

What has been particularly heartening this year is witnessing the collaboration among governments, NGOs, faith-based organisations, and civil society. Together, we have addressed critical issues, such as the persecution of religious minorities, the enforcement of blasphemy laws, and the devastating impact of conflict on faith communities. However, there have also been notable successes, as stakeholders across various regions continue to advocate for and protect the rights of individuals to believe, or not believe, as they choose.

This report serves not only as a record of our collective achievements but also as a call to action. There is still much work to be done. In the face of ongoing challenges, we must remain steadfast in our commitment to FoRB, ensuring that these fundamental freedoms are upheld for all people, regardless of their faith or belief.

I extend my deepest thanks to our stakeholders for their dedication. Together, we will continue to make strides towards a world where everyone can enjoy the freedom of religion or belief without fear or discrimination.

Your efforts, large and small, have a lasting impact, and I look forward to working together in the year ahead to build on the progress we've made.

Julie Jones
Director, APPG for Freedom of Religion or Belief

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