

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN PRESENTS

PERSECUTOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS

20
21

THE ANNUAL LIST OF
THE WORLD'S TOP
PERSECUTORS

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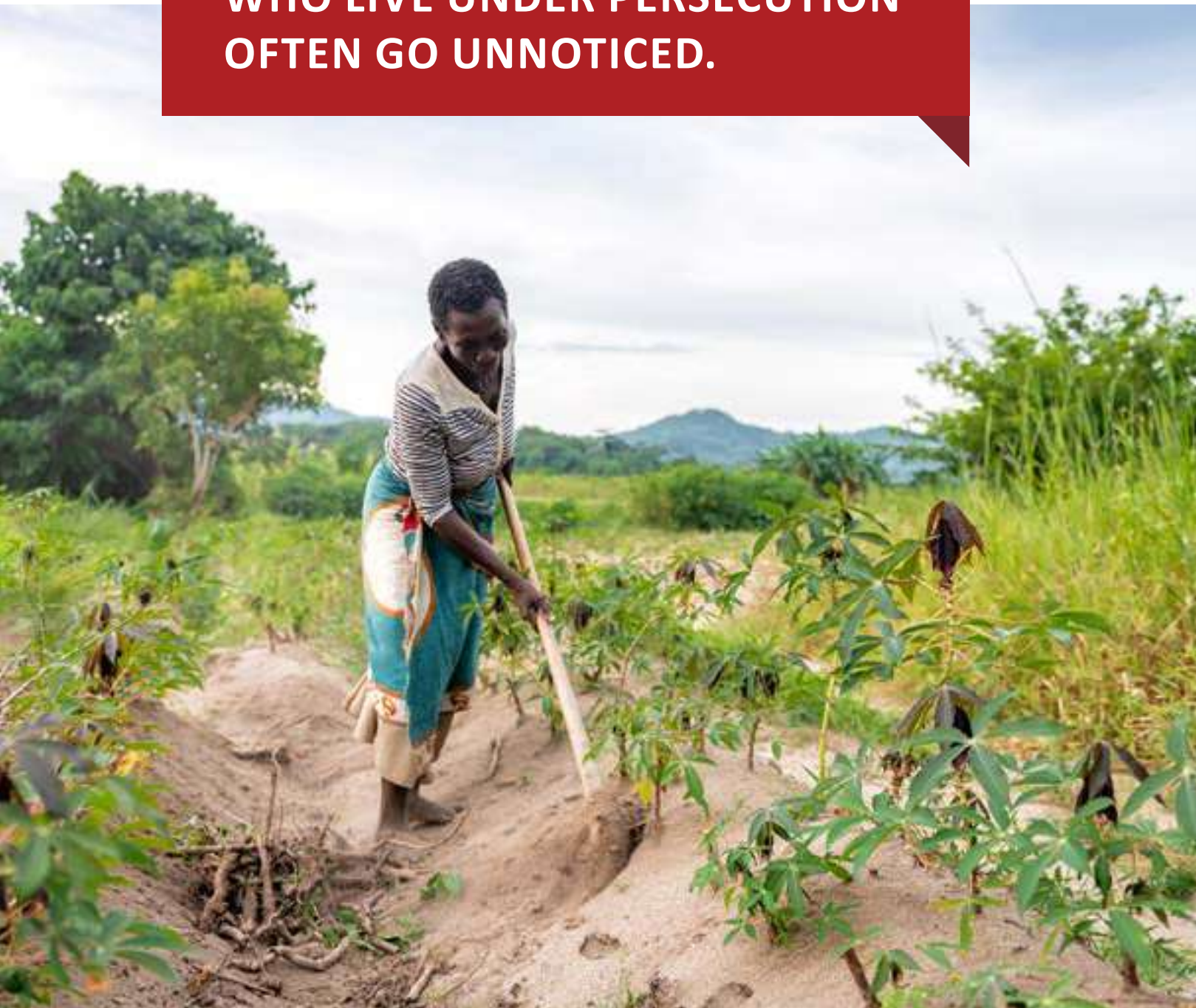
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THE CHALLENGES OF THE MORE
THAN 200 MILLION CHRISTIANS
WHO LIVE UNDER PERSECUTION
OFTEN GO UNNOTICED.



LETTER FROM THE **PRESIDENT**

For nearly two decades as president of International Christian Concern (ICC), I've witnessed the shrinking space of religious freedom for all faiths around the world. While there has been a great reduction in religious freedom across the board, Christians have a special bullseye on their back and have become the most persecuted faith group in the world.

Christians in many places face a daily torrent of threats; everything from job discrimination to systematic imprisonment, rape, torture, and assassination. All of this echoes what Jesus said more than 2,000 years ago: *"You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me,"* Matthew 24:9 (NIV).

Unfortunately, the challenges of the more than 200 million Christians who live under persecution often go unnoticed. They are hidden by dictators, fundamentalist actors, and entities as well as drowned out by more popular news, geopolitical issues, sports, and the latest celebrity gossip.

This report was created as a tool to help us cut through the noise and serve as a quick and effective guide to understand the who, what, why, and where of Christian persecution.

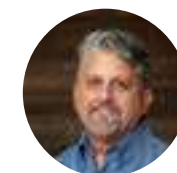
While there is a playful note in giving "awards" to countries, entities, and individuals for persecution, rest assured that the activities of the recipients of our "awards" are life-crushing and deadly.

After looking through the report (and the background reference reports) I'm sure you will sense our team's immense effort behind this document and I want to publicly thank our gifted and talented ICC staff. Our ten-plus analysts, our fellows, and our 50-plus international staff, have put in thousands of hours of research.

These heroes fight daily to make the world better and release the prisoners of religious persecution. I'm grateful for each one of them.

Shining a light on the dark suffering of the persecuted makes all that work worthwhile. The light is our most effective tool to fight the government officials, the judges, the torturers, and the dictators, that beat, imprison, rape, and kill those with different belief systems than themselves.

I pray that you will join our effort to force open the prison door—to let the light in to set the prisoners free.



JEFF KING

President, International Christian Concern

AWARDS SUMMARY



TIME TO NAME NAMES

Here are International Christian Concern's (ICC) selections for the 2021 Persecutor of the Year Awards. ICC chose the top persecutors in three categories: country, entity, and individual. Whenever a report like this is prepared, it is helpful to keep in mind the numerous candidates which could have received our "awards." There is always a subjective element in ranking countries in terms of their human rights records.

For instance, we could have chosen North Korea for worst persecuting country. But since persecution in North Korea is so fused with Kim Jong-un, we selected him as our top individual. Nigeria earned the country designation for its brutal crackdown on Christians. And while the Taliban takeover didn't catch ICC by surprise, they once again are crushing the hopes and dreams of believers, earning the Taliban our top spot for 'entity.'



INDIVIDUAL AWARD

KIM JONG-UN

The successive Kim dynasties have tortured and killed millions of individuals viewed as political threats in North Korea. While most people are familiar with the Kim methodology dealing with political threats, it is less well known that the Kims have targeted Christians with a special vehemence. It is typical for the regime to assign life prison sentences for three generations of one family if a member is discovered to be a true Christian. The Kims have created a religious system modeled on the faith (God/Father/Son) with Kim Jong-un playing the part of the Son that is to be worshiped. Any threat to the Son and over-arching religious system is mercilessly crushed. For that reason, Kim Jong-un is our 2021 awardee for Top Individual Persecutor.



ENTITY AWARD

THE TALIBAN

With the withdrawal of U.S. forces in August 2021, the Taliban quickly regained control of Afghanistan. The group immediately began to search for the roughly 10,000 Afghan Christians in hiding. Almost all of these Christians are converts from Islam and are therefore apostates under a death sentence. Since the Taliban took control of the country, Christians began receiving calls saying, "We're coming for you." The Taliban are also going door-to-door to find out who is and isn't going to mosque. Already, some suspected Christians have had their homes searched. While their apologists in Qatar and Pakistan say this leopard has changed its spots, our sources tell us the Taliban have just begun a very dark journey where not all will make it to the morning. Given the disregard for any religion other than their own, the Taliban receive our 2021 award for Top Entity Persecutor.



COUNTRY AWARD

NIGERIA

Nigeria is one of the deadliest places on earth for Christians, as 50,000 to 70,000 have been killed since 2000. Nigeria is home to the infamous Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram, which has displaced millions of people and killed tens of thousands of others. Fulani militants killed more Christians in the past several years than Boko Haram and have displaced Christian farmers. In addition, conservative Islamic communities have allowed the forceful conversion and marriage of young Christian women and discriminated against Christians seeking employment. With these groups operating in the country and the government's complacency, Nigeria is our 2021 awardee for Top Country Persecutor.



OVERVIEW

A REPORT TO SHINE LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Since 1995, International Christian Concern (ICC) serves victims of religious persecution by bandaging and building the persecuted church and making the world aware of their suffering. Our activities revolve around three activities: Assistance, Advocacy, and Awakening.

In terms of Awakening, we strive to bring the suffering of Christians to light since their plight receives little attention from the international press. This is often due to realpolitik and the prioritization of geopolitical concerns and national interests above human rights issues. But it is also due to a lack of information available to the press and government officials. It is for this reason that led us to produce this report, representing thousands of hours of effort.

This publication is a summation of insights and analysis compiled from countless victim interviews, 50 indigenous international ICC staff, and their massive network of contacts in numerous countries throughout the world.

Because of their longstanding track-record as trusted sources, ICC analysts are routinely sought out for their valuable analysis and insights by journalists and government officials alike.

Our team of Washington, D.C.-based analysts spend thousands of hours annually reporting on and analyzing reports from our overseas staff and sources. Every day, they research and post persecution news on our website, *Persecution.org*. Throughout the year,

they also develop in-depth reports on countries with the worst religious freedom records. Those reports are foundational to the building of this report and can be found in the last few pages of this report.

This huge expense of time and effort is to bring to light what our persecuted brothers and sisters experience in the dark, and to shed light on the suffering they endure to live out the faith they have chosen.

The cost of their suffering is great, as families are tormented daily and torn apart because of their faith and where they live. They find themselves in the horrors and complexities of persecution amidst geopolitical squabbles, Islamic extremists, fanatical leaders, and more.

The founders of the U.S. made religious freedom a preeminent right among other freedoms such as speech, assembly, press, etc. It is also highly correlated with economic advancement, tolerance, democracy, and women's rights.

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

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

PERSECUTION PRIMER

In the previous century, more Christians were murdered for their faith than in any century in recorded history. From Indonesia to India and beyond, Christians are economically marginalized, denied education, beaten, tortured, raped, imprisoned and often murdered for their faith. While their oppression is limitless, it is usually unseen by the world.

persecution noun
per-se-cu-tion | \,pər-si-'kyū-shən

- 1: the act or practice of persecuting especially those who differ in origin, religion, or social outlook
- 2: the condition of being persecuted, harassed, or annoyed

[HTTPS://WWW.MERRIAM-WEBSTER.COM/Dictionary/PERSECUTION](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/persecution)

SOURCES OF PERSECUTION



CULTURAL: Christian persecution occurs as a result of social and cultural discrimination. Human beings in general are afraid and intolerant of that which is different. In places like India, Christians are discriminated against, denied employment, physically attacked, and sometimes even murdered.



ISLAM: Radical Islam is very intolerant toward other faiths, and in radical Muslim countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Indonesia, Christians suffer greatly. This ranges from job discrimination to the abduction, rape, and forced conversion of Christian women. Persecution is most violent in these countries and often includes the imprisonment and murder of Christians.



MARXISM: In communist countries like Cuba, China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea, Christians are targeted because they vest their faith in the Lord and not the Marxist regimes.

TYPES OF PERSECUTION

DIRECT



ARRESTS
IMPRISONMENT/
TORTURE



ASSASSINATION
MARTYRDOM



ATTACKS ON LIFE
& PROPERTY



RESTRICTIONS
ON CHURCHES &
BIBLES



FORCED
CONVERSIONS



CRIMES AGAINST
WOMEN



EDUCATION
DISCRIMINATION



JOB
DISCRIMINATION



DENIAL OF
RIGHTS



LEGAL
RESTRICTIONS

UNDERSTAND ICC

OUR MISSION

Since 1995, International Christian Concern (ICC) has relieved the suffering of the worldwide persecuted Church and helped it grow in strength and breadth by providing effective assistance, advocacy, and awareness with integrity toward God and donors.

OUR THREE A's

ASSIST

ICC builds and bandages the persecuted Church. We bandage the wounds of victims, care for the wives and children of martyred pastors and rebuild communities when attacked. We build the Church by broadcasting the Gospel, delivering Bibles, and training pastors in the most hostile areas of the world.

ADVOCATE

ICC works with government officials to free imprisoned Christians and challenge countries that persecute. ICC actively seeks to influence policies and legislation that touch the daily lives of the persecuted. Through our work with U.S. legislators and the U.S. Department of State, we help free prisoners and push back against countries that persecute.

AWAKEN

ICC works daily to make the world aware of the suffering of persecuted believers. Many Christians are not aware of persecution because the press largely ignores it. ICC awakens the Church and the world to the very real sufferings of God's children via daily news updates, social media, investigative reporting, and our monthly magazine.

MAJOR ICC PROJECTS

NIGERIA FARMS

Devastated by attacks on the lifeline of their community, ICC helps Christian farmers rebuild their lives through the Nigeria Farms initiative. We've helped more than 10 communities, building farms that each feed about 500 Christians.

GENERATION TRANSFORMATION

We break generational persecution through the power of education, small business grants, and vocational training. By attacking the root with this three-fold attack, we envision the next generation transformed.

HOPE HOUSE

In a culture that tells Christian children that they will forever be second-class citizens, Hope House provides an opportunity for a better life by providing Christian students in Egypt with supplemental classes and Bible classes.

OUR APPROACH TO FIELD MINISTRY AND PROJECTS

ON THE GROUND STAFF

ICC employs indigenous field staff around the world to be our eyes, ears, and feet on the ground. These are people from the culture who carefully assess and evaluate each project to ensure that assistance is delivered efficiently and effectively. Most importantly, we equip Christians living in persecuted countries to face the enemy head-on through programs such as persecution preparedness trainings.

INSPECTED PROJECTS

A sad truth of international ministry is that scammers abound and are always ready to rip off well-meaning Western believers and churches. With a smiling face these people will propose relief projects to Western organizations and then offer to implement and verify them.

ICC counters these dishonest practices by thoroughly verifying the effectiveness and integrity of relief projects. We achieve this by having a separate party responsible for receiving payments and verifying the projects. Those implementing, initiating, and managing a project in the field are monitored by the third party.

TEACH THEM HOW TO FISH

ICC ministers to the immediate needs of those affected by persecution. Although we step in to help the persecuted in dire circumstances, we do much more than provide one-time aid. For instance, when a pastor is murdered, we assist his wife and children with necessary food, clothing, and shelter. We then go a step further and give the family livestock or a simple business they can operate on their own so that they have an independent and sustainable source of income.

For more information, please visit:
www.persecution.org/understand-icc



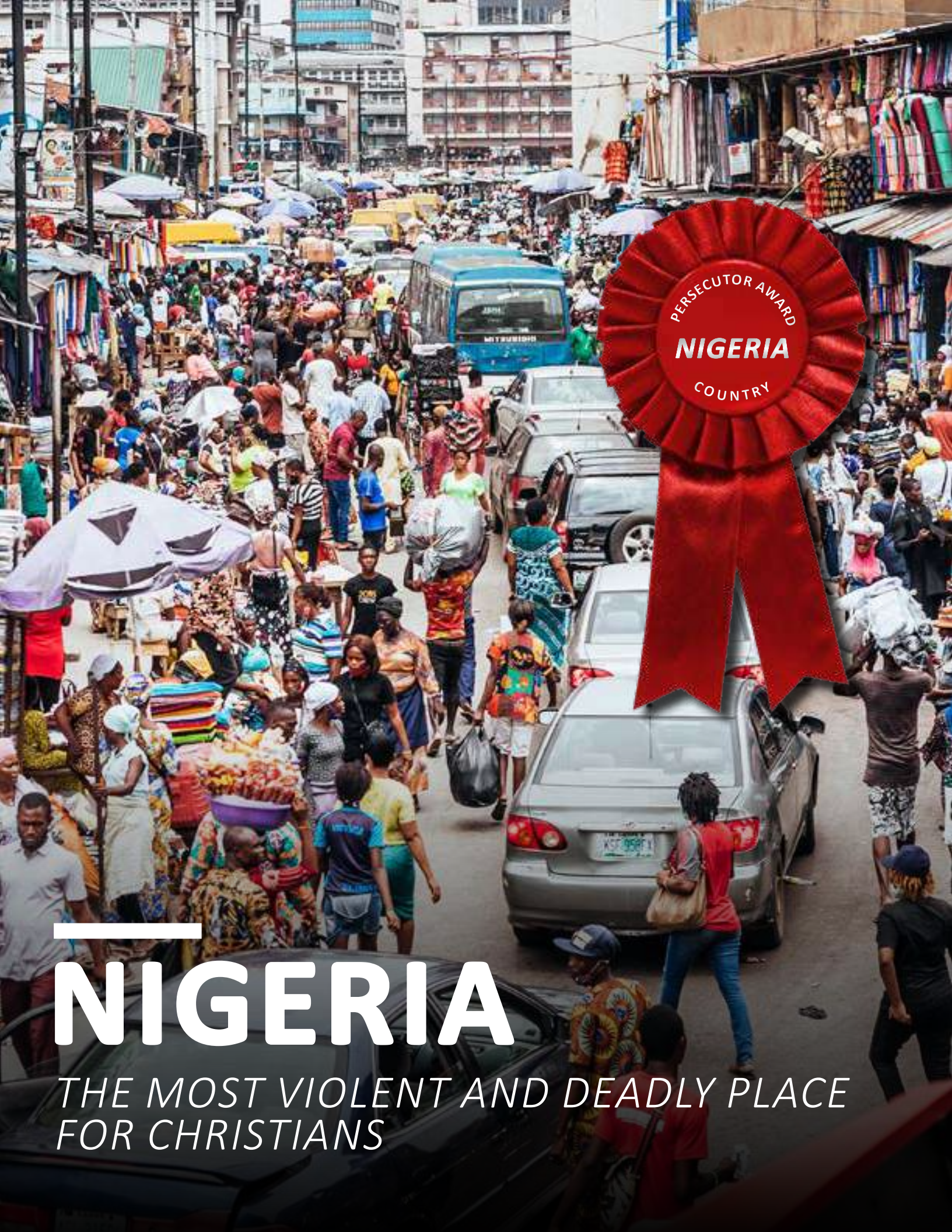
WHERE WE WORK

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

WASHINGTON, D.C.
(ICC HEADQUARTERS)

COUNTRIES





NIGERIA

THE MOST VIOLENT AND DEADLY PLACE FOR CHRISTIANS

OVERVIEW

Nigeria is arguably the most dangerous place to be a Christian in the world today. In the North, a very hostile group of Muslim extremists have attacked and devastated the minority population of Christians.

In the Middle Belt, armed Islamic terrorists from the Fulani tribe have been killing Christians and stealing their land at a prodigious rate for the last 20 years. Combined, they have killed more than 50,000 Christians.

The Fulani are traditionally nomadic herders, but that era is closing out, which is the reason for the massive land grab. Between the mass murder and land stealing, 2.5 million Christians have been displaced.

The killing and mass stealing of land never stops because the security apparatus (military, police, etc.) of Nigeria are largely controlled by Muslims. Nigerian leaders tell the West that this is a complicated problem between herders and farmers with tribal overlays. The truth is that we are watching a slow genocide of Christians in the North and Middle Belt accompanied by an immense land grab all abetted by the security organs of State.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

Three main perpetrators of persecution exist in Nigeria and hold responsibility for this widespread devastation: Boko Haram, Fulani militants, and Islamic conservative communities.

All three of these groups affect Christians in a different, significant way.

Boko Haram's violence has displaced millions of people, many of whom are Christians, and killed tens of thousands of others.

Fulani militants have killed more Christians in the past several years than Boko Haram and have displaced millions of Christian farmers. Conservative Islamic communities have allowed the forceful conversion and marriage of many young Christian women and have discriminated against Christians seeking employment throughout the 12 Sharia states.

Despite the devastation, the Nigerian government failed to adequately respond to these threats.



SUMMARY

POPULATION:
212 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN
45% Muslim
45% Christian
10% Indigenous Religions

MAJOR SOURCES OF PERSECUTION:
Terrorist Groups
Sharia States in norther Nigeria
Conservative Islamic Communities

Religion furthers the divide between people groups. The country is nearly split in half between Muslims and Christians, each representing approximately 46 percent of the population, with the rest holding to traditional religions.

ICC FINDINGS

Despite a government which touts itself as secular and democratic, it allows devastation to happen to its poorer, rural communities, often along religious lines. The government also allows northern Nigeria to subjugate citizens to the rules of religions that they do not adhere to, by allowing Sharia law to oversee both religious and civil/criminal matters.

These issues will continue as long as the government controls all security at the federal level. It will also need to stop allowing Islam to have complete dominance in the North, ending Sharia's ability to punish people without their consent. Otherwise, the number of people killed in the past decade—in the tens of thousands—will quickly escalate to hundreds of thousands at the hands of terrorists and extremists.

BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is one of the deadliest and most well-known terrorist groups in the world today. Its destructive power and capability are only matched by that of al-Shabaab in Somalia and ISIS in the Middle East.

Founded in 2002 by Islamic teacher Mohammed Yusuf of Borno State, the group aims to end all Western influence in Nigeria and establish a Caliphate. Its official name is *Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad*, which in Arabic means “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad.”

However, it quickly became known as “Boko Haram” by the local population due to its hatred for all things Western, especially education. “Boko Haram” roughly translates to “Western education is forbidden.”

This hatred of the West and Islamic principles has been the focus of the group since it was founded. This includes any political, social, educational, or religious activity that is seen as having a Western influence. Boko Haram seeks to establish a strict Islamic Caliphate in northeastern Nigeria that could enforce Islamic law on all who live in their area.

THE RISE OF BOKO HARAM

From 2002 to 2009, Mohammed Yusuf continued to run the group as it became increasingly aggressive. Then, in 2009, the Nigerian government began to understand just how dangerous Boko Haram was becoming. The group conducted multiple attacks against police institutions and started a shootout with the Nigerian government in Maiduguri. The Nigerian government then decided to try and stop the organization and killed Yusuf in his home city of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State.

For a fleeting period, the death of Yusuf and several other leaders seemed to disband the group until 2010, when a video was released by Abubakar Shekau announcing

his assumption as leader of the terror group. Then, a massive prison breakout took place in Bauchi State, letting hundreds of Boko Haram militants back on the street (Guardian 2010).

AN ERUPTION OF GROWTH

Under the new leadership of Shekau, the group quickly grew in aggression, violence, and size. Over the next five years, the group terrorized much of northern and central Nigeria, specifically targeting government officials, police officers, and Christian churches and schools.

They gained international attention in 2014 after kidnapping of 276 girls from Chibok, Nigeria. This kidnapping led to the international community starting the viral #BringBackOurGirls hashtag campaign (BBC 2017). Most of these girls were Christian and nearly half of them, 112 in total, are still missing more than six years later (VOA 2020).

BOKO HARAM SPLITS

In 2015, Abubakar Shekau and Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its leader at the time, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi (BBC 2015). A year later, ISIS transferred Boko Haram’s leadership to Mohammad Yusuf’s son, Aby Musab al-Barnawi (NT Times 2016). When this happened, the terror group split in two.

Many fighters remained loyal to Shekau, who was unwilling to accept the new leadership, and kept the original name. The other half is known as the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) under the control of al-Barnawi.

TERRORISM MULTIPLIED

Although the two groups clash and follow different ideals in their fights, they continue to spread devastation in northern Nigeria.

For those not strictly following Sharia law, Shekau’s faction uses brutal tactics including using improvised explosive

devices, using women and children as suicide bombers, and executing random killings in busy markets.

Barnawi’s faction focuses on attacking military and governmental targets and tries to gain local Muslims’ support by not attacking them. These differences in motivation and tactics make it possible to tell which group conducted an attack.

In February 2018, ISWAP kidnapped another 110 girls from a school in Dapchi, Nigeria. During the abduction, 109 Muslim girls and one Christian girl were taken. Five girls were killed due to the roughness of the abductors. One month later, the group released 104 of the girls, all of whom were Muslim (CNN 2018). They did not require ransom and only instructed the girls and their parents not to attend Western-style schools. However, ISWAP did not release the lone Christian girl.

Leah Sharibu, a 14-year-old, was told that she would be released if she converted to Islam (USCIRF 2020). However, according to several of the girls who were released, Leah refused to convert and said that she “could not deny Jesus.” She has been missing ever since, with only one proof of life audio clip released in 2019.



Despite the devastation, the Nigerian government fails to adequately respond to threats.

FULANI MILITANTS

The Fulani militants, though a little-known group, account for a major persecutor of Christians in Nigeria.

The Fulani are an ethnic group, so not all Fulani commit these crimes. Many articles covering this violence report that Fulani herders or Fulani kill Christians. This is dangerous rhetoric as most live in peace with their neighbors. However, there are groups of radical Fulani militants who use their trade in cattle to move throughout the country, killing Christians, destroying villages, and taking land in the Middle Belt.

The Fulani ethnic group is about 25 million people who span sub-Saharan Africa from Mali to Ethiopia. They are predominately herders and have been for centuries, and by trade are spread across the African continent. Within the country, Fulani total approximately 5 million people or 2.5 percent of the total population. They live mainly in the northern part of the country but move south during the dry season in search of water and grass for their cattle.

In the early 1800s, the Fulani established

the Sokoto Caliphate under the rule of Usman Don Fodio. Don Fodio, the Sultan of Sokoto, continued to lead this empire for more than a decade. This established empire held control over much of what is modern Nigeria until the British colonized. Even after the British took control in 1903, they left much of the governance to the already established Fulani emirates in the north, so the Fulani retained control over much of the country until Nigeria’s independence in 1969 (Falola and Heaton 2008).

Upon the nation’s independence, Fulani leaders retained control over much of Nigeria, holding onto the power that they had held for so many years. Men such as Ahmadu Bello, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and Major General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua helped guide the new country through the turbulent years after they gained their independence and helped to continue the tradition of Fulani leadership in government.

Today, the Sultan of Sokoto is still a revered and honored position in Nigeria, though it holds no actual political power.

Despite the lack of functional power, nearly every president in Nigeria has sought the approval and support of the Sultan because of his sway over majority populations in the north. This means that Fulani leaders still hold great power today in many political and social areas.

Many Fulani have held high-ranking political positions throughout the past several years. President Muhammadu Buhari is Fulani and has emplaced many military and judicial Muslim and Fulani leaders as well (DailyPost 2020).

As Nigeria continues to struggle to establish a national identity, the Fulani retain control of leadership positions. Many Christians see this as a sign that the Fulani have established a sort of nepotism, keeping all the power for themselves and their people. Christians also believe that they use this history and power to legitimize the attacks and occupation of lands throughout Nigeria’s Middle Belt.

CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES

Conservative Islamic communities represent by far the smallest of number of incidents throughout Nigeria. But it’s one of the most personal and painful. Sharia law guides many of the highly conservative Islamic communities throughout Nigeria, and especially in the north. Twelve states have Sharia as their guiding law.

In many cases, young women are kidnapped and forcefully married to older Muslim men. Often, the women are abducted by a group of men and wake up in unfamiliar houses. There, older women wearing

traditional Muslim clothing care for them and teach the young women Arabic and the Quran over the following weeks or months.

If her parents try to bring her home, they are harassed, attacked, and denied the ability to see their daughter. The parents are dragged to the Islamic courts where they are told their daughter is now a Muslim woman with a new name and the wife of a Muslim man. They lose all rights to see their daughter. In certain instances, the courts deny that the girls are related to the parents at all.

When the parents then get the police involved, they are often met with either hostility or indifference. Between June 2018 and October 2019, at least 11 young girls were being held against their will in Kaduna State according to the Hausa Christian Foundation.

A group of lawyers has been working for months to get these girls released into the custody of their parents, but it can take years to make this happen—if it ever works at all.



HISTORY

One of the world’s most diverse nations is nestled between the Sahara Desert and the Atlantic Ocean. Roughly 200 million people call the largest country in Africa, and the sixth largest country in the world, home.

Three main people groups live in Nigeria: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

The Hausa are often connected with the Fulani and called Hausa-Fulani. Together, they make up the largest population at approximately 28 percent. Though Fulani form only 2.5 percent by themselves. They mainly live in the north of the country.

The second group is the Yoruba, which makes up about 20 percent of the population and inhabits the country’s southeastern region. The Igbo, the third largest group, represents approximately 18 percent of the population.

Outside of these three ethnic groups, there are another 250 smaller ethnic groups in Nigeria and around 450 distinct languages still in use today. Many of these smaller language groups do not speak any of the common languages of Nigeria—English, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba—making communication and unification extremely difficult.

THE CHASM OF RELIGION

Religion furthers this divide between people groups. The country is nearly split in half between Muslims and Christians, each representing approximately 46 percent of the population, with the rest holding to traditional religions. The Hausa and Fulani are nearly all Muslim, and the north is the stronghold of Islam in Nigeria.

States such as Sokoto, Kano, Jigawa, and others still have Emirs as traditional rulers. The Yoruba and Igbo, along with many of the smaller groups are mainly Christians and live mostly in the southern parts of Nigeria.

This leads to many tensions in the middle of the country, where the Muslim north meets the Christian south. These tensions have been designated by many as the “Middle Belt Crisis.”

CHRISTIANS UNDER SHARIA LAW

Sharia law established in 12 of the northern states furthers this split between the north and south. These 12 states are: Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Niger, Yobe, Gombe, Borno, Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa, Kebbi, and Bauchi.

Sharia law is defined as “Islamic canonical law based on the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (Hadith and Sunna), prescribing both religious and secular duties and sometimes retributive penalties for lawbreaking,” according to Oxford Reference.

Sharia law deals with the religious state of a person’s life. Despite Nigeria’s Constitution calling for freedom of religion and stating in Section 10 that “the Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion” (Constitution 1999), these 12 northern states have created Sharia courts, provided special rights to Muslim citizens, and used Sharia law in the creation and implementation of laws. Some have tried to claim that these courts and laws only govern those who are already Muslims, but this is not true. Islamic conservatives use these courts against Christians, especially young women.



50,000-70,000
CHRISTIANS KILLED
SINCE 2000

ICC AT WORK

Because of these concerning trends, International Christian Concern (ICC) analysts work tirelessly to research and report on the religious freedom violations of Nigeria.

In September 2021, ICC published *Nigeria: Secular Sharia? Sharia’s Harmful Impact on Nigeria’s Christian Communities* summarizing our findings from studies of the past two decades since the institution of Sharia in Nigeria’s 12 Northern States.

ICC also published a report in the government of Hungary’s Budapest-Report on Christian Persecution 2020, detailing the current situation of Nigeria, its history, and its struggles with terrorism and extremism.

Through ICC’s Nigeria Communal Farm project, we sent aid to thousands of Christian farmers who have been displaced from their land or have had

family members killed. These farms serve 75 of the neediest families in areas where violence is often still occurring.

ICC continues to support education for more than 100 children who have been displaced from the far north by Boko Haram, partner with an orphanage that serves children whose parents were killed by Fulani militants, give small businesses to dozens of widows, and supply medical care for many who suffer violent attacks.

While these immediate humanitarian needs are being met, ICC also advocates in Washington, D.C. by engaging and educating policymakers on these crucial issues. ICC continues to advocate for Nigeria’s inclusion as a Country of Particular Concern for severe religious freedom violations by the State Department and United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. should appoint a Special Envoy to Nigeria. The Department of State should empower this individual to study and address government complicity in the violence in addition to the threat posed by armed militant groups, which is the typical extent of policy discussions on Nigeria.
- The U.S. should pressure Nigeria to abolish the use of criminal Sharia law. Currently, Sharia courts are allowed to impose punishments as severe as cutting off limbs and the death penalty for purely religious offenses. This is antithetical to the secular system mandated by the Nigerian Constitution and should not be tolerated by the international community
- The U.S. should consider redirecting Nigeria humanitarian aid to organizations with a vested interest in the country as a whole rather than to the Nigerian government which directs a hugely disproportionate amount of aid to the northeast of Nigeria and often to local Muslim leaders
- The U.S. should continue to designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern for its egregious violations of human rights and should impose all the penalties normally associated with that designation.



DOWNLOAD THE REPORT:
SECULAR SHARIA? ON PAGE 134.

CHINA

CRACKDOWN OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES



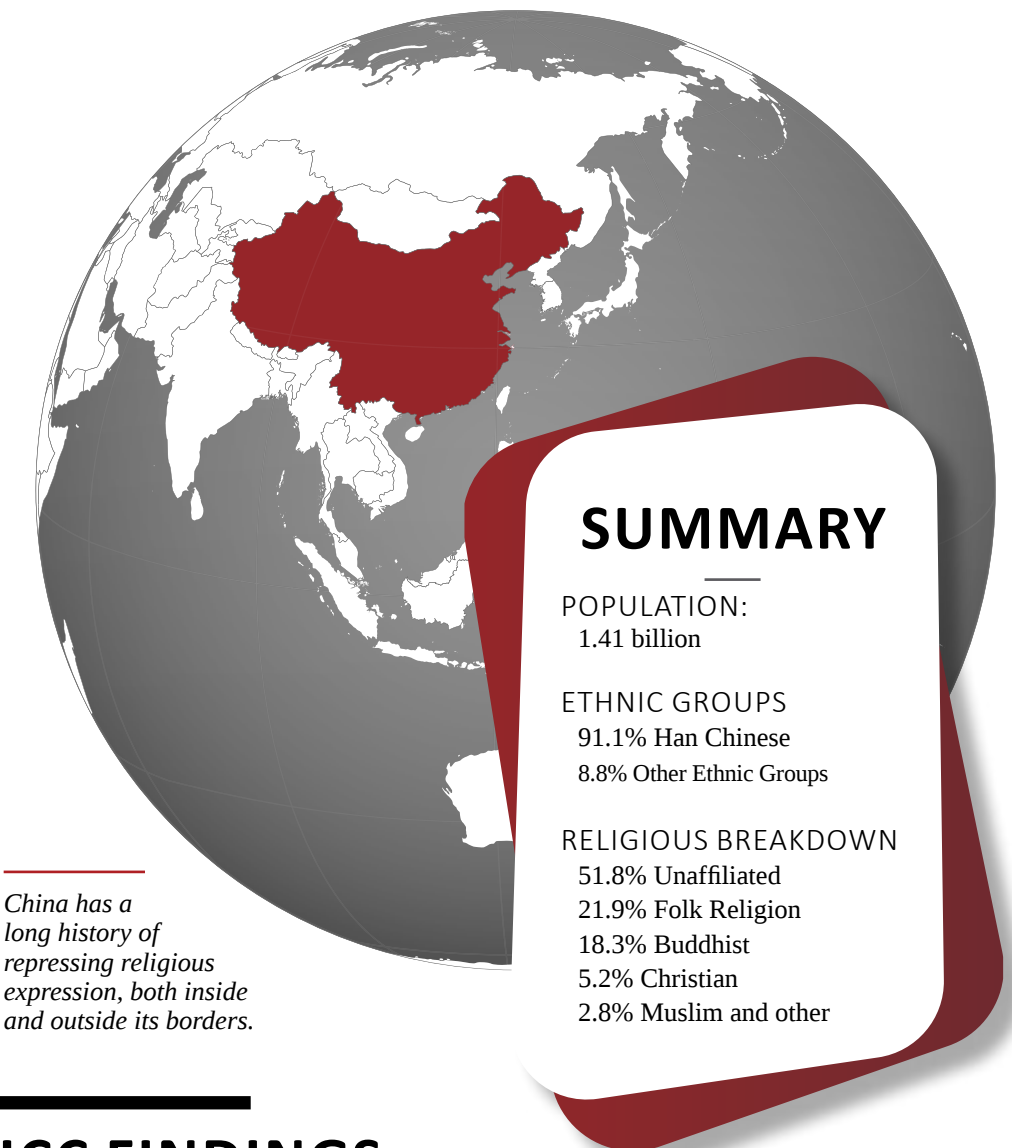
OVERVIEW

The election of President Xi Jinping in 2013, saw China begin a long-standing and severe crackdown on its Christian citizens. Xi is an old school Maoist and the number one enemy of Christianity in China.

Thousands of churches, state-approved or not, have seen their crosses demolished since 2014. The “Sinicization” campaign, a plan to make religious groups within China submit to socialism and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) ideology by assimilating them into a unified identity with Chinese characteristics, challenges the fundamental beliefs of Christians. Authorities closely monitor or jail prominent Christian leaders, such as Wang Yi and Zhang Chunlei, under trumped-up charges.

Western countries have accused China of committing crimes against humanity and possibly genocide against the Uyghur population (and other Muslim-majority ethnic groups in the north-western region of Xinjiang). Despite this, Beijing continues to detain millions of Uyghur Muslims in the so-called “re-education camps” with torture, forced labor, rape, and abuses.

The situation in Hong Kong is also noteworthy. When the National Security Law came into effect in 2020, the “one country, two systems” framework promised by Beijing began to crumble. Authorities arrested a Hong Kong pro-democracy citizen over a sticker with Amos 5:24 printed on it. Dozens of pastors and Christian leaders decided to flee, fearing that they might face persecution. Religious freedom in Hong Kong might soon look like that of China.



China has a long history of repressing religious expression, both inside and outside its borders.

ICC FINDINGS

Due to the frequency of raids and arrests, people easily feel numb about the religious persecution against Christians in China. Newspapers around the world feature stories of Uyghur Muslims in concentration camps. The religious persecution of Falun Gong practitioners living in China are also frequently featured in newspapers.

According to a 2017 Freedom House report, at least 100 million believers belong to groups facing high or very high levels of religious persecution, namely Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims, and

Falun Gong practitioners.

The persecution of these religious minorities under Chinese President Xi and the CCP has reached an all-time high, hitting numbers that have not been seen since Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution. Olivia Enos, a senior policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation, shared in an interview with International Christian Concern (ICC) President Jeff King, talking about President Xi, saying, “We have not seen such an authoritarian figure since Mao.”

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

The 2018 revised Regulations on Religious Affairs (RRA)—an act scholars have pointed out as unconstitutional and unlawful as an administrative decree—has now become the legal basis for the local authorities to crack down on the “illegal gathering” of Christians. Last year, police raided house churches from Sichuan, Shanxi, Henan, Fujian, Guizhou, and Yunnan. As a result, some disbanded since they were not registered with the state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches.

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING

To make matters worse, on February 1, 2020, the Administrative Measures for Religious Groups came into effect, which furthers government control over all religious groups. The 41 articles detail religious organization, observation, finances, activities, and communications at both the national and the local levels. Chinese churches are required to register with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement or the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. Under these measures, church leaders can be arrested, and their churches disbanded.

Yet, this was not enough in the eyes of the CCP. Beijing enacted the “Measures for

the Administration of Religious Personnel” in February of 2021 and enforced the measures on May 1. Those who hold any formal role in a religious group must pledge allegiance to the CCP and resist foreign interference.

COUNTRY ABOVE ALL ELSE

To be recognized and registered, religious personnel should “love the country, uphold the CCP’s leadership, uphold the socialist system, abide by the Constitution, laws, regulations and statutes, practice the socialist core values, support China’s religious principle of independence and self-determination, support China’s policy of Sinification of religion, support national unification, ethnic solidarity, and religious harmony and social stability.”

These rules consist of seven chapters with 52 articles and apply to all religious personnel—pastors, bishops, priests, Buddhist and Taoist monks, etc.—and require those holding any religious function formally register with the government.

RED TAPE ON RELIGION

The CCP continues to craft more decrees, placing red tapes on the various aspects of Chinese citizens’ religious life. “Measures

for the Management of Religious Institutes” came into effect in September 2021. The regulations attempt to turn religious institutes into CCP’s propaganda education bases and transform future religious clergy into party officials.

Outside of these legal frameworks, the CCP employs social pressure to force house church Christians to renounce their faith or join state-vetted churches. Authorities pressure employers, schools, landlords, and businesses serving house church Christians to convince the Christians to leave their church or faith.

Under “Sinicization,” the Chinese government calls for an interpretation of religious teachings and doctrines in ways that conform to “China’s outstanding traditional culture,” promote patriotic education and activities within religious communities. It impels religious communities to exhibit Chinese ‘characteristics and style’ in all religious thinking, institutions, rituals, behavior, and architecture, among other aspects.

With crackdown intensifying against churches, both state-sanctioned and underground, there is no longer a safe place for Christians in China.

were churches shut down or demolished but pastors and church attendees were often arrested.

There were 43 separate instances in which Christians were arrested. Based on ICC’s incident tracker, several pastors, leaders, and attendees of the Early Rain Covenant Church are being detained.

ICC continues to offer support and resources to Christians in China who face a growing tide of persecution.

HISTORY

While the People’s Republic of China’s Constitution states that freedom of religious belief is a fundamental right enjoyed by all citizens, the reality of the CCP dictates religious life for the Chinese people.

The CCP views those who practice faith outside state control as a threat to the regime; they must follow the state-sanctioned religious organizations. Foreign religions in the eyes of the CCP—Christianity and Islam—are subject to greater scrutiny. Those who do not first love the country and the CCP leadership can be harassed, disbanded, arrested, or worse, incarcerated.

China has a long history of repressing religious expression, both inside and outside its borders. Over the last several decades, it has forced abortions on its

citizens, sterilized women without their consent, and killed religious minorities to sell their organs on the black market. House churches are an attempt to escape government scrutiny, but even they are often raided and their members arrested on charges of working against the state’s interests.

Since the 1980s, China has seen significant growth in Christianity. Today, Protestantism is the country’s fastest-growing religious group. China’s opening and reform steered the party to be tolerant of religious practices. A Chinese Christian scholar told ICC that Beijing has turned on a “yellow light” in recent decades to allow religions to exist—until Xi came along, and everything regresses.

Beijing and other local governments have evolved in their crackdown against churches throughout China. In recent months, China has employed various legal measures to suppress and control the activities of religious groups, especially those of Christians.

Even if the churches do not hold Sunday services physically at their sanctuaries during the pandemic, virtual service, small group gatherings, or even Christian funerals are still seen as illegal. Together with the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, the local police and district office would go after these meetings, whether at someone’s home, rented hotel room, beach side, or funeral home.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- First, the U.S. should seek ways to economically penalize the use of religious prisoners of conscience in factories. Much of the conversation on Sino-U.S. relations is focused on their respective economic interests, and the way that trade between the two countries should be regulated. The U.S. economic interest is a valid concern of its own, but human rights and religious freedom concerns must be included in these discussions.
- Second, the U.S. diplomatic apparatus should work to increase the profile of religious freedom issues in its communications with its Chinese counterparts and the greater international community. The Obama administration made it standard practice to raise the issue of prisoners of

conscience in diplomatic conversations with governments who engage in this practice, and, more recently, the Trump administration issued an executive order on international religious freedom with similar requirements. This kind of diplomatic pressure is important to the overall goal of advancing religious freedom and should certainly be practiced regarding China.

- Third, it is important that the U.S. leads the global community in a coordinated pressure campaign against China’s religious repression. Whether through joint statements, economic policies, or even travel restrictions of offending Chinese officials, a coordinated international effort stands the best chance of

creating real change in China. The Global Magnitsky Act has been utilized in this vein already and should continue to be used to pressure China.

- Fourth, policymakers should rally behind legislation that calls China out for its religious freedom violations and imposes specific consequences for such behavior. The issue of international religious freedom is one that should be at the core of U.S. interests. Both sides of the political debate agree that China’s flagrant disregard for religious freedom must be stopped. It is only by coming together that effective policy will be passed, and the U.S. will send a clear message to China that its persecution of religion is unacceptable.



INDIA

HINDU NATIONALISM ABOVE ALL ELSE

OVERVIEW

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took power in 2014, Christian persecution has skyrocketed. Inspired by the notion of establishing India as a Hindu nation, Modi and the BJP have passed laws and enforced policies targeting Christians and limiting their religious freedom. After seven years of BJP rule, the number of documented incidents of Christian persecution have more than doubled.

The religious freedom situation in India deteriorated in 2020 to such a degree that the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended India be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC)—a designation reserved for the world’s worst violators of religious freedom.

In 2021, USCIRF once again recommended India be designated a CPC as many of the issues highlighted in the 2020 Annual Report continued to escalate.

According the USCIRF, “The government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), promoted Hindu nationalist policies resulting in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.”

Indian Christians have seen their rights curtailed and their communities under increasing attack in the last seven years of BJP rule. The international community recognized this decline with leading bodies, like USCIRF, recommending India as a CPC.

Under the current leadership of the BJP, India forfeits religious freedom in exchange for nationalistic policies used by politicians to maintain and expand power. India’s religious minorities, including Christians, feel the consequences of this exchange most.

SUMMARY

POPULATION:

1.34 billion

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

79.8% Hindu

14.2% Muslim

2.3% Christian

1.7% Sikh

2% Other/Unspecified

SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

Government Oppression

Religious Nationalism

Religious Extremism

Cultural Threat



ICC FINDINGS

In June 2021, International Christian Concern (ICC) surveyed more than 500 Indian Christians regarding the deteriorating situation in India. According to that survey, over 70% of Christians reported they were concerned for their personal safety as Christians in India. Additionally, 71% of those surveyed reported they felt Modi and the BJP were not protecting their religious

freedom rights.

The increasing number of persecution incidents and results from ICC’s survey paint a grim picture for the future of India’s Christian community. With the continued rise of Modi and the BJP’s Hindu nation, it is likely the persecution of India’s Christians will only increase.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

Significant issues facing Christians in India include physical assaults on people, properties, and places of worship, anti-conversion laws, blasphemy laws, impunity, forced “re-conversion” to Hinduism, and generalized discrimination in India’s legal and social structure.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY

Attacks on Christians and other religious minorities often go unpunished. In most cases, Hindu nationalist political leaders use anti-minority rhetoric for political gain. This hate speech inspires more assaults on minorities. When the police and local authorities take no action against the radicals, it emboldens radicals. Year after year, attacks on minorities are reported in greater number and severity.

ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS

Formally called Freedom of Religion Acts, anti-conversion laws allow state governments in India to regulate religious conversions and criminalize forced religious conversions. Hindu radicals use false accusations of forced religious conversions to harass pastors and justify violence. Currently, anti-conversion laws have been enacted in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand. BJP-led governments in Haryana, Assam, and Karnataka all publicly called for anti-conversion laws to be enacted, explicitly citing the false narrative of fraudulent mass conversions to Christianity and Islam as a

justification.

FORCED RECONVERSIONS (GHAR WAPSI)

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

BLASPHEMY LAW

India has a blasphemy law that criminalizes any action that offends the religious sentiment of another. Hindu radicals use false blasphemy allegations to harass pastors and justify violence.

SOCIAL BOYCOTTS

Hindu radicals and local villagers will pass local resolutions outlawing the practice of Christianity in the village. As a punishment for Christian members of the village, they are socially boycott. This means they are discriminated against unless they agree to recant their faith. Often Christians are disallowed from collecting water from the village well, buying and selling goods in the village, or interacting with other Hindu members of the village.

GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS (FRCAS AND SC BENEFITS)

The Government of India uses several programs to discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities. To stop funds for Christian ministry from entering the country, NGOs must adhere to FCRA

regulations. These regulations allow the government to scrutinize and ban any foreign funds from coming into the country that it finds concerning. This is used to cancel many Christian ministries. Scheduled Caste Benefits (and affirmative action program for low-caste peoples) is denied to Christians and Muslims by law. This stops low-caste individuals from converting to Christianity or Islam because they would automatically lose government benefits. This is especially harmful to Christians, as 80 percent of the Christian population in India come from low-caste backgrounds.



■ Anti-conversion laws enacted
■ Anti-conversion laws proposed or desired

VIOLENT ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS UNDER THE BJP



BEFORE THE BJP

147

IN 2014

AFTER THE BJP

366

IN 2019

327

IN 2020*

* COVID-19 lock downs affected the country for several months and likely suppressed the activities of religious extremists

“



“BJP politicians publicly advocate for India to become a Hindu nation, and demonize religious minorities, including Christians.”



Yogi Adityanath, the Hindu Nationalist Leader, is responsible for many of the anti-Christian rhetoric in India today.





HISTORY

Religious freedom is a fundamental right guaranteed to all Indians by the country's constitution and laws. According to Article 25 of India's constitution, citizens are free to profess, practice, and propagate the religion of their choice. This has been the law of the land for the last seven decades.

In recent years, however, religious freedom has come under increasing attack by radical Hindu nationalists and followers of the Hindutva ideology.

Laws and policies target Christians and limit religious freedom. Religious extremists have the green light to terrorize Christians with impunity. Above it all, a nationalistic political platform is used to normalize and justify the growing religious intolerance that has taken hold of India.

The persecution of Christians in India goes back to the community's earliest traditions. According to tradition, Thomas, one of Christ's 12 disciples, brought the Gospel to Southern India. After several years, he was martyred in Madras (modern-day Chennai, located in Tamil Nadu).

From the country's founding in 1947 to modern day, the persecution of Christians steadily increases. Hindu nationalists, who

have been a part of India's political system since independence, pursued political platforms that have gained traction in recent years.

RISING TENSIONS

In August 2008, anti-Christian riots swept across the Kandhamal District of India's Orissa (now called Odisha) state. Tensions between Christians and Hindu nationalists had been simmering for months and when the leader of the Hindu nationalists was murdered by local Maoists, Christians were wrongfully blamed.

This instigated almost three months of riots. Mobs of Hindu radicals went from village to village burning churches, sacking Christian homes, and murdering Christians. The riots are still considered India's worst incident of Christian persecution in its modern history.

In 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi, claimed a landslide victory in India's national elections. Since then, the BJP has gone on to political success. A major part of the BJP's platform is Hindu nationalism.

DEMONIZATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

BJP politicians publicly advocate for India to become a Hindu nation and demonize religious minorities, including Christians and Muslims, and anti-nationals. BJP governments also perpetrates anti-Christian policies, such as anti-conversion laws.

Under the BJP's leadership, radical Hindu nationalists operating in local gangs enjoy complete impunity for their attacks on minorities. Churches are demolished, pastors beaten, Christians "re-converted," and entire communities socially ostracized with no reaction by authorities. Instead, BJP leaders continue to use religiously divisive rhetoric for political gain, encouraging more attacks.

This leads to an ever-escalating cycle of persecution in India. Persecution certainly predates the 2014 BJP political victory, but since that victory, persecution has significantly accelerated. According to the Open Doors World Watch List, India is ranked the 10th worst country in the world for Christians.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The State Department should adopt USCIRF's recommendation and designate India as a Country of Particular Concern.
- U.S. officials should prioritize religious freedom, minority rights, and the repeal of anti-forced conversion laws in all meetings with their Indian counterparts.
- The U.S. Treasury Department should work with the State Department to identify individuals and entities known for severe religious freedom violations within India as candidates for Global Magnitsky sanctions.
- The U.S. government should pressure the Indian government and Prime Minister Modi to allow USCIRF commissioners to make official trips to India for comprehensive reviews of religious freedom conditions.

ICC AT WORK

PERSECUTION RESPONSE

One of International Christian Concern's (ICC) primary missions in India is to provide direct and practical relief to victims of persecution. Each year, ICC serves hundreds of individuals and families whose lives are affected by persecution. The aid ICC provides ranges from food aid to medical assistance to legal aid to housing. In whatever way an individual's life is affected by persecution, ICC is there to serve and make things right.

PERSECUTION PREPAREDNESS TRAINING

Since the rise of the current BJP-led government, ICC provides persecution preparedness trainings for church leaders and other members of India's Christian community. This one-day training helps make church communities safer. It prepares them for instances of persecution by informing them of their religious freedom rights and providing a system through which incidents of persecution can be reported.

MADHYA PRADESH REPORT & PREVIOUS SURVEY

In 2021, ICC studied the effects of

the anti-conversion law enacted in Madhya Pradesh state. As a part of this study, ICC monitored and documented instances of persecution because of the law's enactment. We discovered that more instances of persecution happened in Madhya in the six months following the law's enactment than happened in the two preceding years combined. ICC also surveyed more than 500 Christians in Madhya Pradesh to get their perspective on the effects of the new law on their community.

ADVOCACY EFFORTS

This year, ICC held its annual Policy Day during the first International Religious Freedom Summit, where ICC analysts highlighted the growing persecution in India. Presenting findings from the recent survey of Indian Christians, ICC advocacy staff educated policymakers on persecution in India and recommended to the U.S. State Department that India be designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom violations. ICC also collected signatures for a petition calling on the governments of various states in India to repeal their anti-conversion laws to allow Christians to fully and freely practice their faith.



DOWNLOAD THE REPORT: INDIA'S ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS ON PAGE 136.

IRAN

A MACHINE TO ARREST, IMPRISON, AND TORTURE CHRISTIANS

OVERVIEW

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution, its government has relentlessly targeted its Christian citizens. Arrests, imprisonment, and torture in Evin Prison are the standard tools used against them.

The government's decades-long, anti-Christian campaign has only resulted in the explosion of Christianity within Iran's borders.

In 2021, heavily manipulated presidential elections were held that resulted in the election of Ebrahim Raisi (see our section on him in the "Individuals" section).

Raisi, a mass murderer and Iran's former Judiciary chief, is the first Iranian president to ever be elected while under sanctions by the United States.

Sadly, the election of Raisi signals Iran's intent to continue its brutal efforts against the Church. Ironically, Iran's continued efforts to crush the Church will only continue to increase the spread of the very thing they are trying to kill.

In 2021, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended that Iran be designated as a Country of Particular Concern for its persecution of minority religious groups within its borders. It is anticipated that such persecution will worsen under Raisi's presidency.

ICC FINDINGS

A variety of political trends have led to the recent rise in persecution against Iranian Christians. Most importantly, Iran's effort to establish a Shia Islamic state whose legal system strictly adheres to Sharia law poses a major threat not only to the religious freedom of Christians, but to their lives as well. Iran's government has made clear its intentions of limiting Christianity to (at-best) a tiny ethnic minority by harshly punishing conversion, closely monitoring

church activities, and surveilling Christians online.

Corruption is a notable reason for the grave failure of Iran's legal system to adequately protect Christians and preserve human rights.

Judges are most often appointed not on merit, but by their political-theological opinions and association with the Iranian

elite. Judges are required to attend Islamic seminary and demonstrate a deep knowledge of Sharia. During the recent presidential election, corruption took center stage as Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, methodically disqualified every significant opposition to his preferred candidate, Ebrahim Raisi, paving the way to his uncontested victory. His election is a serious threat to a Christian community that is already reeling from intense persecution.

SUMMARY

POPULATION:

85.9 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

99.4% Muslim (mostly Shia)
0.3% Christian, Jewish, other

MAJOR SOURCES OF PERSECUTION:

Government: Judiciary, the IRGC, the seminary structure

Iran is a country that had tremendous ethnic and religious diversity before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Today, though official estimates vary, 90-95% of Iranians subscribe to Shia Islam, with the remaining 10% of the population following a unique array of minority religious traditions.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

LEGAL ISSUES

Iran’s Constitution designates Iran as a theocracy under the Twelver Ja’Fari School of Shia Islam. However, Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1975, which guarantees that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion” (Article 18). This contradiction in foundational Iranian legislation is instrumental in the rise of legal persecution against the country’s minority religious groups.

Iran’s Constitution provides protections and recognition for Iran’s minority Christian,

Zoroastrian, and Jewish communities. It even mandates representatives for these groups in Iran’s parliament. These groups are permitted to practice freely and gather, but are also strictly defined by ethnic and historical, rather than religious ties.

While there are between 500 thousand and 800 thousand Iranian Christians, Iran only recognizes and provides representation for ethnic Assyrian and Armenian Christians (excluding Christian converts and leaving them particularly vulnerable to persecution at the hands of the Iranian government). Representation, however, does not mean

that ethnic-religious communities have religious freedom. They are given strict boundaries to follow, and the penalties for breaking these rules are severe.

Persecution at the hands of the Iranian government, particularly its judicial system, is the most pressing concern for religious freedom. Restrictions on religious life for Iranian Christians can best be defined by two major themes: limitations on the gathering of Christians and the severe legal persecution of individuals (especially converts from Islam).

RESTRICTIONS ON CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Iran views Christianity as a subversive threat to its goals of establishing a Shia Islamic state. The Iranian government actively takes steps which limit the ability of Christians to congregate, engage in fellowship, and worship together. While Iran has allowed some ethnic Christian churches to remain open, it is merely a loose propaganda commitment. Within the Assyrian and Armenian Christian parishes, only four are currently allowed to operate.

Further, converts are prohibited from attending services. Church activities are

closely monitored to prevent new adherents from joining. To dissuade evangelism and conversion, the government has prohibited the use of Persian in Christian services. Members found with Christian literature in Persian are subject to prosecution.

Only 130,000 Iranian Christians are ethnically Assyrian or Armenian, a small percentage of the total Christian population. The remainder brave severe risks to practice their faith, often with devastating consequences. House churches have provided secret fellowship for Iranian

PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS

As anti-Christian rhetoric from the government has amplified in recent years, arbitrary arrests, detainments, and lengthy imprisonments have skyrocketed. Many arrests took place without necessary warrants. Once detained, Iranian Christians face a litany of gross violations of their human rights and dignity.

Converts to Christianity are subject to intense interrogation on the nature of their conversion, which frequently involves torture, solitary confinement, sexual abuse, malnourishment, and medical neglect. Christians are prosecuted on charges of threatening national security, usually along the lines of promoting “Zionist Christianity” by engaging in evangelistic house church activities.

Iranian courts frequently demand egregiously inflated bail rates for Christians and criminal trials involving Christians are notoriously unjust, often lasting mere minutes. Christians are often convicted of grave crimes over extremely trivial matters.

For example, Christian convert Israeil Maghrebinejad was sentenced to three years in prison in early 2020 for insulting Islam by responding to a text message that was critical of Iran’s government with a smiley face emoji.

Under Iran’s Islamic Penal Code, Christians convicted of subversion face sentences ranging from three months to ten years in prison. Three individuals were internally exiled, while still others were denied

Christians who cannot access one of the few government-permitted churches.

As house churches have quietly grown in number, they have drawn attention from the Iranian government. The government spews intensely critical rhetoric and propaganda against the house church movement to combat so-called evangelical subversion, vilifying Christians as heretical, deviant parasites. This blatant hostility is a direct contributor toward anti-Christian sentiment and persecution.

access to higher education, forbidden from adopting, stripped of property, or banned from working. Corporal punishment is an increasingly common sentence by Iranian courts toward Christians prompting international out cry. On June 8, 2021, Iran’s parliament passed a bill that could allow the death penalty for those convicted of espionage or cooperation with foreign countries, a charge that Christians frequently face in Iranian courts.

Imprisonment, severe mistreatment while incarcerated, unfair trials, and the denial of other human rights are sadly only increasing as Iran’s Supreme Leader and government continue to escalate their attack on Christianity.

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Corruption is a notable reason for the grave failure of Iran’s legal system to adequately protect Christians and preserve human rights.

HISTORY

Iran is a country who had tremendous ethnic and religious diversity before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Today, though official estimates vary, 90-95% of Iranians subscribe to Shia Islam, with the remaining 10% of the population following a unique array of minority religious traditions. This 10% is primarily comprised of Sunni Muslims, but also contains significant populations of Christians, Zoroastrians, and Bahais, all of whom have a long-established historical presence in the country.

Tragically, this religious diversity and beauty has been accompanied by severe persecution at the hands of the Shia majority—a trend that worsens each year. Since the revolution, the Iranian government has undertaken immense efforts to create a homogeneous Shia Muslim society that upholds the standards of Islamic Sharia Law. This policy has come at a grave cost for human rights and the religious freedom of Sunnis, Christians, Bahais, Zoroastrians, and other minority communities.

Defining the nature of this persecution and exploring the causes of its recent surge are important for analyzing what the future holds for religious freedom in Iran.

OTHER ISSUES

IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN IRAQ

Iran’s mistreatment of Christians is unfortunately not limited by Iran’s borders. Iranian-backed militias, which were crucial in the defeat of ISIS in Northern Iraq, are present in the areas formerly occupied by ISIS.

Many Christians fled Iraq’s Nineveh Plains during the genocide committed by ISIS. Rather than ceding the recovered territories to the control of the Iraqi military and law enforcement, as requested, Iranian-backed militias have instead retained control and established a proxy-type system of government. Their operational method resembles that of a mafia, requiring protection money from those who suffered the ISIS genocide, threatening and harassing residents, and often hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid. They retain a significant and growing political influence in Baghdad, allowing them to pursue these activities with little consequence.

ICC AT WORK

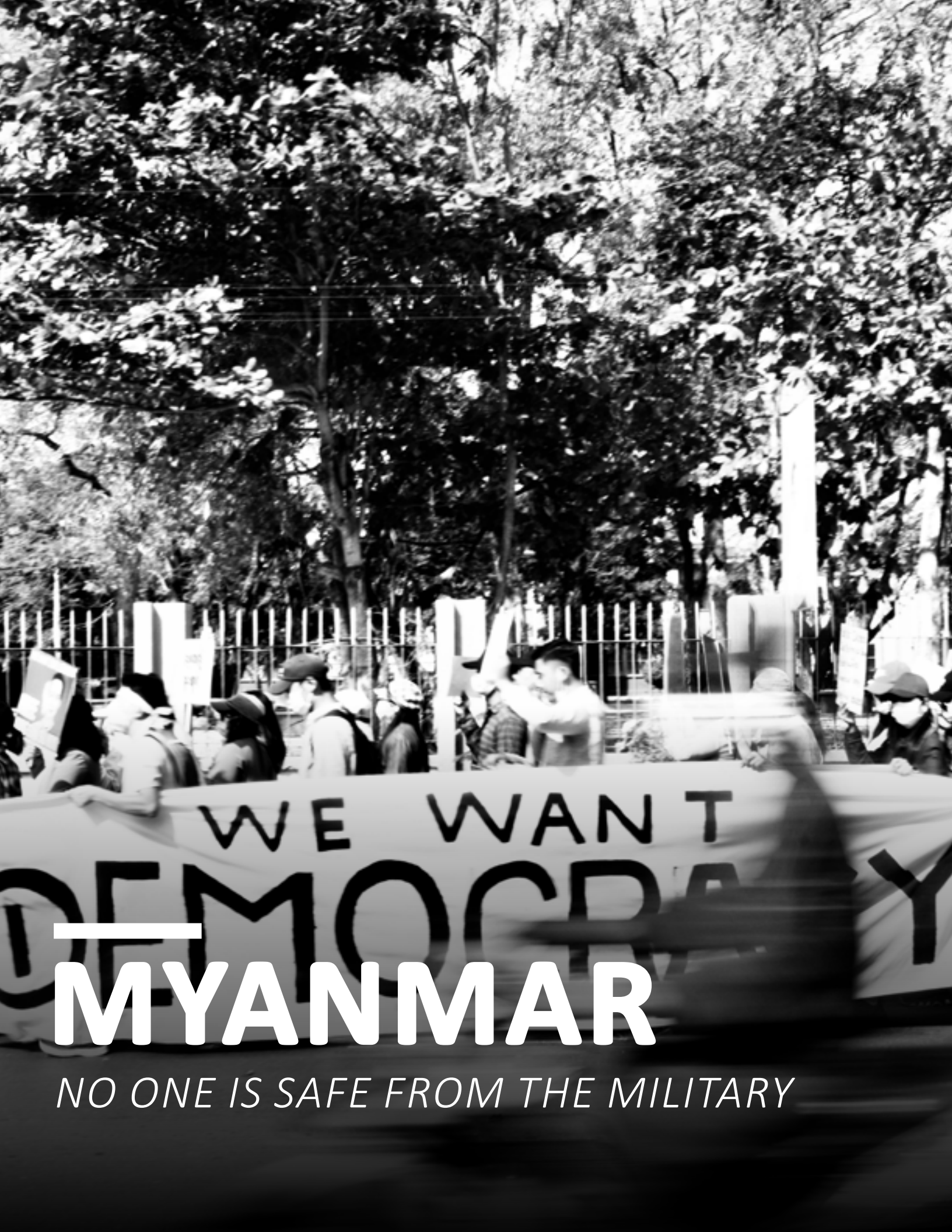
International Christian Concern (ICC) analysts consistently follow updates on the ground from Iran to identify areas in which staff can push U.S. government officials to benefit Iranian Christians.

For example, ICC recently conducted research on persecutory practices within the Iranian judicial system and successfully submitted the names of certain judges who had consistently given out harsh punishments to Christians on account of their religion to the Treasury Department as candidates for sanctions from the United States.

ICC regularly provides relief and development support for Iranian families facing persecution. We also work to help them have access to legal resources to help them navigate through the consequences of persecution.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. Department of State should continue to designate Iran as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom violations.
- USCIRF should continue to report to Congress on new instances of persecution against Iran’s religious minorities.
- The Biden administration should emphasize the importance of religious freedom in all high-level meetings with Iranian officials in negotiations.
- The Biden administration should pursue Global Magnitsky sanctions as recommended by ICC against Iranian officials with known records of human rights abuses.



MYANMAR

NO ONE IS SAFE FROM THE MILITARY

OVERVIEW

Myanmar is a patchwork mosaic of ethnic and religious groups.

Though a strong majority of the population is ethnic Burman and an even greater percentage is Buddhist, the communities that make up the remainder are well-established, well-organized, and for the most part predate the formation of the modern state by centuries.

In many cases, Myanmar's ethnic minorities have taken on a distinct religious identity as well. About 20-30% of ethnic Karen are Christians, while other groups—such as the Chin—are over 90% Christian. This overlap of ethnic and religious identity has created a volatile situation for believers. In Chin State, for example, the majority of the population is Christian which makes it a target-rich area for the military.

When the Tatmadaw seized power on February 1, 2021, observers warned that minority groups in the country would suffer as a result. In the months since, the Tatmadaw has increased their attacks against the largely Christian Karen and Chin tribes. The total civilian death toll in February is well over 1,000 and steadily climbing.



ICC FINDINGS

The Tatmadaw's campaign of violence against Myanmar's minority population is of the worst sort imaginable. Not content with laws that discriminate against Christians and others, the Tatmadaw also waged a decades-long physical war that

claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions more. Rape, extra-judicial killings, torture, and bombings on civilian areas are all acceptable moves in the Tatmadaw playbook.



7,000+ CIVILIANS ARRESTED

NEARLY 6,000 STILL IN DETENTION

The Tatmadaw has arrested many who they suspect lack support for military rule.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

As it solidifies its grip on power, the Tatmadaw is ramping up a full-scale military campaign against the country’s minorities. In addition to the methods listed above—rape, extra-judicial killings, torture, bombings—the Tatmadaw also engages in other, more subtle tactics.

Earlier this year, it blocked shipments from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The shipments contained lifesaving food and medical supplies intended for 50,000 refugees sheltering in the town of Mindat in Chin State. Mindat provided an early pocket of resistance to the Tatmadaw takeover and has since been the victim of a severe military assault, including mortars and rockets. The Tatmadaw even shut off water to the town, worsening the humanitarian crisis there.

The Tatmadaw has also arrested many suspected of lacking support for their rule. Since February, the Tatmadaw has arrested over 7,000 civilians. The majority of those—nearly 6,000—are still in detention as of this writing. Using this method, the Tatmadaw hopes to shut down dissent without provoking an even more severe reaction from the people than it already has.



1,000+ CIVILIANS KILLED

SINCE THE TATMADAW TOOK POWER

The Tatmadaw increased attacks against religious and ethnic minorities around the country. Since February 2021, the military population has killed well over 1,000 civilians and that number is steadily climbing.

HISTORY

Myanmar has a long history of military dictatorships and religious oppression. The two combine with a violent form of nationalism to create an extremely dangerous environment for everyone not ethnically Burman and religiously Buddhist. The Tatmadaw sees little place for religious and ethnic minorities. Though the coup changed Myanmar’s balance of power in favor of the military and away from the civilian government, the military has long enjoyed the lion’s share of authority in Myanmar.

The military controlled not only the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Border Affairs, but also the Ministry of Home Affairs and the General Administrative Department. The latter regulates the local and regional levels of government.

At the national level, the military reserved a full 25% of seats in parliament for itself in a power-sharing arrangement enshrined in the constitution, which it wrote in 2008. This baked-in representation essentially gives the military veto power over any

attempts at constitutional reform, such as an attempt to revoke the military head’s authority to declare a state of national emergency, which Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing did on February 1.

Capitalizing on these formal power structures, the Tatmadaw has waged an internal war against ethnic and religious minorities for years. The military’s violent campaign most notably targets Rohingya Muslims and entails significant violence against Christians and other minorities.

According to the UN, the military’s actions against the Rohingya constitute a genocide. The military now enjoys virtually unhindered power in the country as it further advances their goal to wipe out the Rohingya.

When Myanmar’s military staged a coup in the early morning hours of February 1, 2021, the world responded with outrage. Myanmar’s most recent experiment with democracy was still in its early stages and encouraged and supported by the international community. Despite troubling

reports of religious persecution and other human rights violations pre-coup, the international community was generally positive towards Aung San Suu Kyi, the country’s State Counsellor and de facto leader.

Suu Kyi is a Nobel Peace Prize winner and a symbol of Myanmar’s nascent democracy. She has helped raise Myanmar’s profile on the international stage and was, for years, the country’s principal representative to the rest of the world.

Her decision to defend the Tatmadaw in 2019 raised eyebrows and suggested that the military exercised influence over her. However, she still represented the only real counterweight to the military and their brutal violence. She even included a few Christians in her cabinet and promoted greater social acceptance of minority faiths.

Suu Kyi is currently under arrest and faces spurious criminal charges, such as violating COVID-19 protocols, corruption, and illegally importing walkie-talkies, levied against her by the military.

“

The international community must continue to push back against the Tatmadaw and do everything in its power to protect the Burmese people.

ICC AT WORK

International Christian Concern (ICC) worked on the ground in Myanmar for years, responding to incidents of persecution and helping support the persecuted church in that country. Field staff gather reports, respond with assistance, and help to facilitate ICC’s ministry in the area.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The international community must continue to push back against the Tatmadaw and do everything in its power to protect the Burmese people from the threat posed by their new military government.
- To that end, ICC recommends that members of the international community continue to impose targeted sanctions on the Tatmadaw, recognize and support the remnants of the civilian government gathered under the National Unity Government flag, pressure the Tatmadaw’s regional allies in China and Russia, and create a cohesive bloc committed to pressuring the Tatmadaw into compliance with democracy and international norms on human rights.
- In 2021, ICC published a report designed to raise educate policymakers on the specific challenges faced by Myanmar’s Christian minority populations. In it, ICC also made and expounded on the recommendations outlined above. In addition, ICC conducted a series of meetings and events in Washington, D.C. to promote the issue to policymakers.



DOWNLOAD THE MYANMAR REPORT ON PAGE 137.



PAKISTAN

BLASPHEMY LAWS, FORCED CONVERSIONS,
AND ATTACKS ON CHURCHES

OVERVIEW

The persecution of Christians in Pakistan is severe and complex. Daily, society treats Pakistani Christians as second-class citizens simply due to their religious identity. Christians also face many other forms of abuse, including false blasphemy accusations, physical assaults, attacks on places of worship, abductions, and forced conversions to Islam.

Due to this discrimination and abuse, Pakistan is recognized as one of the world's worst persecutors of Christians. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recommended that Pakistan be designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in part due to the persecution faced by the country's Christian community.

"Religious freedom conditions in Pakistan continued to worsen. The government systematically enforced blasphemy laws and failed to protect religious minorities from abuses by non-state actors. There was a sharp rise in targeted killings, blasphemy cases, forced conversions, and hate speech targeting religious minorities," USCIRF's 2021 Annual Report stated.

Despite this and other severe violations of human rights against religious minorities, Pir Noor-ul-Haq Qadri, Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, claimed in March 2021 that religious minorities enjoyed total freedom of religion in Pakistan.

In 2020, International Christian Concern (ICC) documented 118 incidents of persecution against the country's Christian community. The documented incidents included false blasphemy accusations, abductions, forced conversions, forced marriages, physical violence, religiously motivated murders, and instances of intimidation.

In 2021, similar numbers of incidents are being reported. In just the first six months of 2021, ICC has documented more than 50 incidents of persecution.

SUMMARY

POPULATION:
238 million

RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN
96.5% Muslim
3.5% Other (Christian, Hindu)

SOURCES OF PERSECUTION
Radical Islam
Government Oppression
Religious Nationalism
Cultural Threat

Over the first six months of 2021, ICC documented an escalation in blasphemy accusations against Christians. At least five blasphemy incidents were recorded between January and June. As a result, seven Christians, including Salamat Masih and Haroon Ayub from Lahore, Tabitha Gill from Karachi, an older Christian woman from Kasur, two Christian nurses from Faisalabad, and a female tutor from Quetta, were falsely accused of committing blasphemy against Islam.

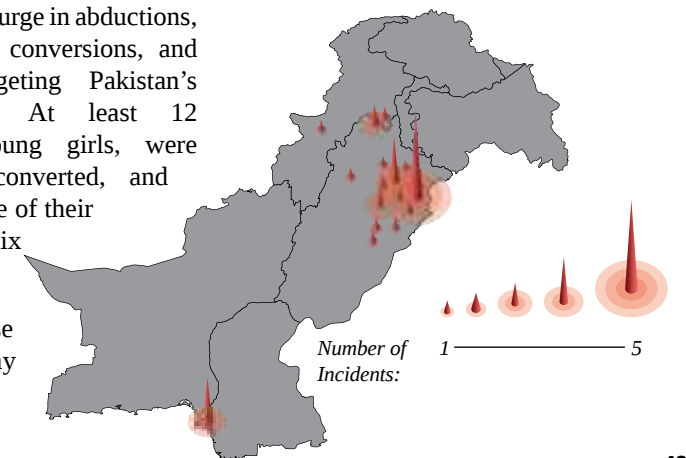
ICC also documented a surge in abductions, sexual assaults, forced conversions, and forced marriages targeting Pakistan's Christian community. At least 12 Christians, mostly young girls, were abducted, forcefully converted, and forcefully married to one of their abductors in the first six months of 2020.

Unfortunately, these surges in both blasphemy

allegations and forced conversions only represent the continuation of ongoing trends in Christian persecution in Pakistan.

SEVERITY

ICC has gathered and verified reports from various sources, including news reports, social media posts, and personal testimonies. Below is a map with confirmed cases of incidents of persecution.





ICC FINDINGS

ICC has been profiling the cases of Christians accused of blasphemy in Pakistan over the past two years. Twenty-nine Christians profiled by ICC were defendants in 25 blasphemy cases at various levels of the judicial process. While it is unlikely these individuals and their cases represent all Christians affected by Pakistan's blasphemy laws, these were 25 that ICC could confirm with a high degree of certainty.

To verify a case and compose a profile, ICC collected the name of the individual charged with blasphemy, the First Information Report associated with the blasphemy charges, the section or sections of the blasphemy laws charged, the date of the arrest, the status of the individual case, and a brief overview of the blasphemy accusation. This information was collected through media sources, human rights activists, local NGOs, relatives of victims, and local lawyers representing cases.

Out of the 29 Christians, 21 were adult men, four were adult women, and four were minors. Out of the 25 cases, five were before a High Court in Pakistan seeking to appeal either a death sentence or a sentence of life imprisonment. Out of these five cases, ICC documented two sentences of life imprisonment and four death sentences. Twenty cases were before a Sessions Court, most waiting for the initial trial to take place. In one case, where Shehzad Masih was the defendant, ICC was able to confirm the blasphemy accusation but was unable to confirm the judicial level to which the criminal case had proceeded.

ICC will continue to follow these cases, raise awareness and generate international advocacy for these and other Christians imprisoned on blasphemy charges.

Christians in Pakistan claim that brutality against their minority is increasing daily. Incidents of brutality against Christians in Pakistan are increasing and require immediate action.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

FALSE BLASPHEMY ACCUSATIONS

According to the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), a human rights organization in Pakistan, at least 200 people were accused of committing blasphemy in 2020. Of that number, 75 percent were Muslims, 20 percent were Ahmadis, 3.5 percent were Christians, and the remaining 1.5 percent were from other religions or were unidentified.

Christians and other religious minorities suffer greatly under Pakistan's blasphemy laws and account for 54 percent of all blasphemy accusations, despite making up just 3.6 percent of the population. In many cases, blasphemy accusations have their roots in personal, professional, or business disputes where the false allegations are the final trump card for a member of Pakistan's majority community.

Blasphemy allegations against minorities are highly inflammatory and can spark mob lynchings, vigilante murders, and mass protests. In most cases, Christians accused of blasphemy must go into hiding and relocate even if the allegation is proven false.

FORCED CONVERSIONS & FORCED MARRIAGE

According to a 2014 study by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace Pakistan, as many as 1,000 Christian and Hindu women and girls are abducted, forcefully married, and forcefully converted to Islam every year.

Many victims are minors taken from their families, sexually assaulted, married to an

assailant, and held in captivity justified by falsified marriage and conversion documents. Violence, threats, and grooming tactics are used to compel victims to make statements in court supporting their captors.

The issue of religion is also often injected into these cases to place religious minorities at a disadvantage. Playing upon religious biases, perpetrators know they can cover up and justify their crimes by introducing the element of religion.

ATTACKS ON PLACES OF WORSHIP

Historically, Christian places of worship have been targeted by extremists for deadly terrorist attacks. In September 2013, All Saints Church in Peshawar was attacked by two suicide bombers connected to the Pakistani Taliban. Over 100 Christians were killed in the explosions that occurred in the church's courtyard following a church service. The incident remains Pakistan's single worst incident of Christian persecution.

In March 2015 and 2016, Christians were again targeted by suicide bombers connected to the Taliban during the Easter holiday. In 2015, two churches in the Christian-majority Youhanabad neighborhood of Lahore were attacked, killing over 15. In 2016, Christians celebrating Easter in Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park were targeted and attacked.

In December 2017, Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta was attacked by suicide bombers connected to ISIS. At least nine Christians attending a Christmas

worship service at Bethel Memorial Methodist Church were killed in the attack.

In recent years, major terrorist attacks on Christian places of worship have not been reported. However, many Pakistani Christians fear the possibility of these attacks whenever celebrating major Christian holidays.

DISCRIMINATION

Pakistani Christians face extreme levels of discrimination due to their religious identity. For many of their Muslim counterparts, Christians are meant to be locked into a second-class status in Pakistan where they work the filthiest jobs and have no hope of advancement.

This discrimination is most obviously seen in the number of Christians involved in Pakistan's sanitation workforce. In Pakistan, Christians make up between 80% to 90% of the sanitation workforce, including the country's street sweepers, janitors, and sewer workers. This percentage is an extreme over-representation as Pakistani Christians make up less than 2% of the country's overall population.

This over-representation is due to discriminatory hiring practices and a discriminatory school system designed to keep Christians from advancing educationally or economically. In many cases, job advertisements for sanitation positions, considered the lowest and filthiest, are explicitly reserved for non-Muslim, a codeword used for Christian, applicants only.



118 INCIDENTS OF PERSECUTION

AGAINST PAKISTAN'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTED BY ICC IN 2020

In 2021, similar numbers of incidents are being reported. In just the first six months of 2021, ICC has documented more than 50 incidents of persecution.

HISTORY

Since the country was founded in 1947, Christian persecution in Pakistan has dramatically increased. Originally, Pakistan was supposed to be the country for religious minorities in South Asia who feared persecution at the hands of the Hindu majority in India.

On August 11, 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, widely considered the founder of Pakistan, gave a speech evidencing this original idea:

“You are free. You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste, or creed. That has nothing to do with the business of the state.”

While the August 11 speech is still celebrated today, Jinnah’s words remain a mostly unfulfilled promise to Pakistan’s religious minorities. In fact, for many Christians, the fulfillment of this promise seems less likely as time goes on.

The persecution of Christians in Pakistan to a dramatic turn for the worst under the leadership of General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988. Under the leadership of General Zia, many human rights previously enjoyed by Pakistani citizens were curtailed. In addition to these abuses, Islamic nationalism was used by General Zia to solidify his control of the country.

In his first televised speech to the country as the head of state, General Zia said:

“Pakistan which was created in the name of Islam will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of an Islamic system as

an essential prerequisite for the country.”

Following this policy, General Zia’s regime enacted many of the political and legal structures that are now used to abuse the country’s Christian minorities. Chief among these legal structures are Pakistan’s notorious blasphemy laws.

After Pakistan added Sections 295-B and 295-C to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws in 1987, the number of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan skyrocketed. Between 1987 and 2017, 1,534 individuals in Pakistan were accused of blasphemy. These accusations have disproportionately affected Pakistan’s Christians and other religious minorities.

Christians, who make up Pakistan’s largest religious minority, only make up 1.6 percent of the total population. Out of the total 1,534 blasphemy accusations, 829 accusations (54 percent), were made against religious minorities. 238 (15.5 percent) were made against Christians specifically.

Blasphemy allegations against Christians are highly inflammatory and can spark mob lynching, vigilante murders, and mass protests. In most cases, Christians accused of blasphemy must go into hiding and relocate—even if the allegation is proven false.

For Pakistan’s Christian community, the blasphemy laws have been weaponized by religious extremists in the years following the General Zia regime to enforce their second-class status. Petty disputes between Christians and members of Pakistan’s Muslim majority can easily explode into a false blasphemy allegation.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- U.S. diplomats should advocate for Pakistani prisoners of conscience in every meeting with Pakistani officials, especially victims of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws listed in ICC’s report, The Voiceless Victims of Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws.
- The U.S. State Department and Treasury Department should sanction Pakistani officials known for perpetuating the pattern of unjustified imprisonment of Pakistan’s religious minorities.
- The U.S. State Department should again designate Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).
- The U.S. should communicate to Pakistan that it must swiftly and fairly adjudicate blasphemy cases and others like them.
- U.S. government officials should advocate for far-reaching reforms to the Pakistani education system to eliminate bigoted and prejudiced material from the curriculum and promote religious freedom.
- The U.S. should use its foreign aid to Pakistan, including military aid, to tangibly and visibly advance the human rights policy priorities.

ICC AT WORK

PERSECUTION RESPONSE: ALL SAINTS CHURCH

Every year, ICC responds to many individual cases of persecution. In each case, ICC assesses the needs created by persecution and strategically targets solutions based on that need. Sometimes this means ICC provides simple one-time assistance, like paying medical bills or providing food aid. In other, more complicated cases, ICC’s responses are more complex and long-term.

On September 22, 2013, two suicide bombers, connected with the Pakistani Taliban, detonated themselves inside the courtyard of All Saints Church as congregants were leaving a worship service. More than 600 Christians were exposed to the deadly blasts and when the dust settled, over 100 were killed and scores more injured.

Among the most vulnerable survivors were the children orphaned or those whose parents were injured so severely they could no longer support their families. In the months following the bombing, ICC launched a program, the goal of which was, and to this day is, to support the education of the children who would have been forced to drop out of school because of the bombing.

Smith Sabir, now in high school, was only a 3rd grader when he lost both of his parents in the bombing. Despite the evil that stripped him of his parents at a young age, Smith advocates for good, and his compassion toward others is a true demonstration of Christ’s love.

“I miss my parents a lot, but at the same time I want to be strong for my younger brother, Musa Sabir. I want him to get a good education and live a dignified life as I dream of it,” Smith told ICC.

“Often I keep thinking about God’s strange plans,” Smith continued. “He took my parents to heaven, but He gave me ICC to take care of me, to stand with me, to strengthen me, and to build my future. I have learned a lot from ICC on how to love others and engage in charity work. I would love to follow in ICC’s footsteps in the future if I could.”

GENERATION TRANSFORMATION

For many Christians in Pakistan, persecution takes the form of job discrimination, poor education, and lack of access to capital creating a vicious cycle of oppression meant to keep Christians locked in as second-class citizens. In response, ICC launched a program called Generation Transformation.

This three-fold initiative attacks the root causes of persecution. Focusing on one persecuted community at a time, ICC funds and aids entrepreneurs, taking the best and the brightest persecuted Christian children and giving them a top-notch education in private high schools and colleges. The initiative is also providing motivated individuals with vocational training to turn them into carpenters, plumbers, and electricians.

Through this program, ICC hopes to break the cycle of persecution and oppression for Pakistan’s Christian community, raising up

a new generation of Pakistani Christians who can achieve their full potential.

BLASPHEMY REPORT

In 2020, ICC published a report entitled the “The Voiceless Victims of Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws.” This report, which is regularly updated, continues to document all the legal cases in which Pakistani Christians are charged with committing blasphemy in Pakistan.

The report also provides practical recommendations for the international community on how to best advocate for blasphemy prisoners in Pakistan. ICC has drawn lessons from the Asia Bibi case and years of experience working with Christian victims of blasphemy in Pakistan to distill these practical recommendations.

BLASPHEMY RESOLUTION

ICC worked with partners in informing decision-makers in Congress on the severity of blasphemy laws and how they specifically impact Christians around the world, especially in Pakistan. ICC advocated for the passage of a resolution “Calling for the Global Repeal of all Heresy, Apostasy and Blasphemy Laws” sponsored by Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Senator James Lankford (R-OK). ICC hosted several briefings on these laws and continued to advocate for more action from members of Congress to condemn these laws and keep up the pressure for more religious freedom around the world. With ICC’s support, the resolution passed in Congress.



DOWNLOAD THE PAKISTAN BLASPHEMY REPORT ON PAGE 139.

TURKEY

CHRISTIANS UNWELCOME IN A GROWING ISLAMIC STATE

OVERVIEW

In the past few decades, Turkey has been on a downward trajectory in terms of persecution of Christians, ever since the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2003 as head of state.

While Erdogan was elected as a reformer, he quickly worked to eliminate all opposition and destroyed any institutions that were potentially a threat to him including the military, the press, and the judiciary. He has become president for life, and unfortunately has shown himself to be a radical Islamist who sees himself as a man of destiny sent to restore the Ottoman Empire.

President Erdogan continually fosters a sense that Islamic nationalism is central to the Turkic identity. This helped solidify popular support for the government at the expense of Turkey's Christians, who do not fit into this mold.

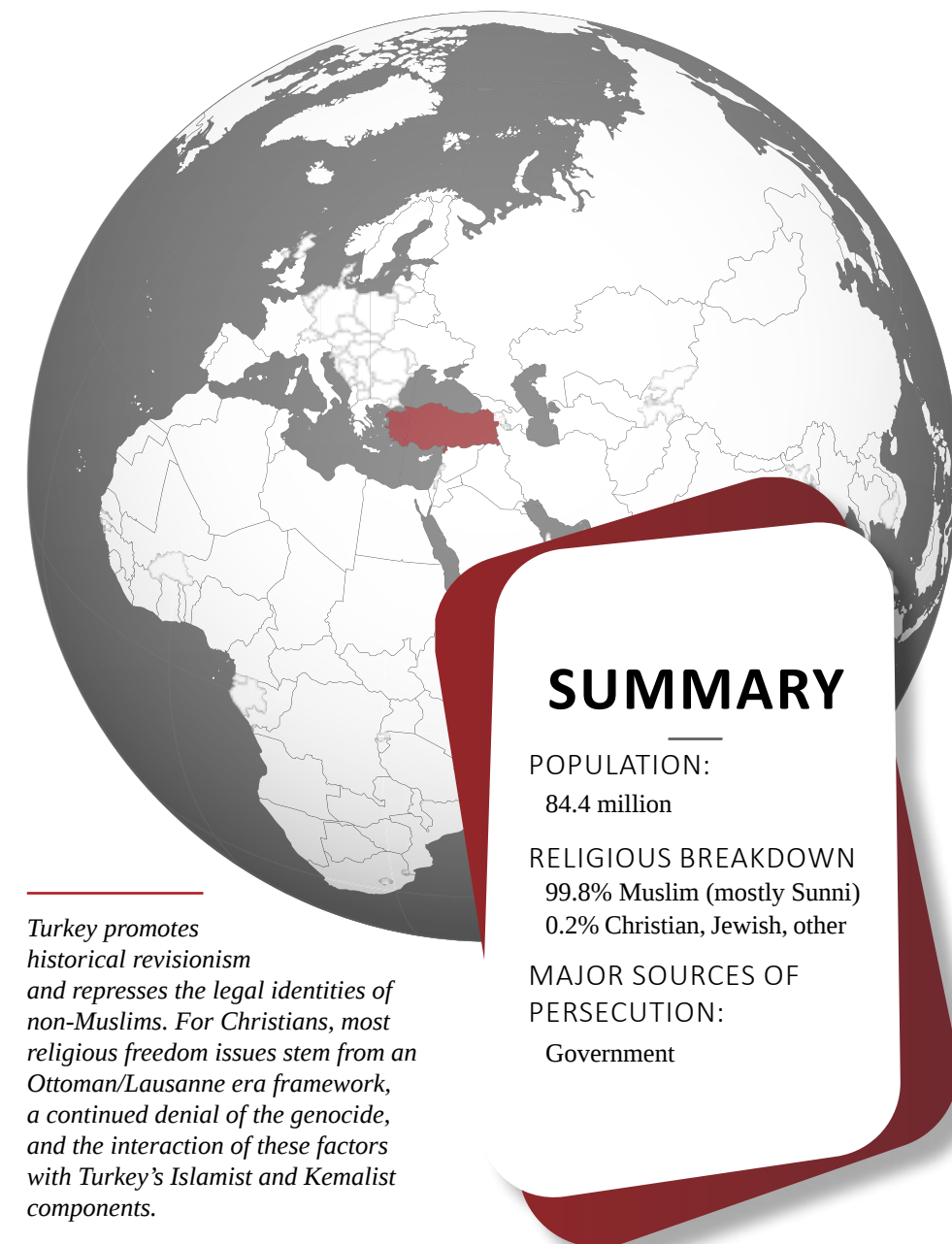
Additionally, Turkey is increasing its military presence throughout the region, expanding this idea of Turkic-Islamic nationalism dating back to the Ottoman Empire.

In 2020, Turkey used its military reach against Christians in Nagorno-Karabakh, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and others. As a NATO ally of the United States, Turkey's actions represent an incredibly concerning trend that, if left unhindered, could accelerate the demise of Christianity in the Middle East.

ICC FINDINGS

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's regional (if not global) ambitions are increasingly alarming as he exports radical Islam and attacks Christians beyond the borders of Turkey.

Since the attempted coup in 2016, Turkish leaders, led by Erdogan, have undergone a campaign to reinvigorate the legacy of



the Ottoman Empire. This involves a two-pronged approach.

First, the Turkish government has fostered a sense of Islamic nationalism within Turkey by equating the Turkish identity as synonymous with Islam through its rhetoric and symbolism, while also engaging in a concerted effort to limit the spread

of Christianity throughout the Turkish citizenry.

Second, Turkey has used its foreign policy to expand militarily throughout the region, engaging in conflicts throughout the countries that comprised the former Ottoman Empire.



FORMS OF PERSECUTION

CHOKING OUT CHRISTIANITY INTERNALLY

Despite Christianity’s long history in the land that is present-day Turkey, the Christian population is shrinking as a result of a concerted effort by the government to inhibit its growth. One way in which leaders do this is by issuing visa bans on foreigners practicing their Christian faith.

Because Turkey prohibits local churches from training their own leaders, many have become dependent upon foreign Christians.

However, in recent years, the government has systematically denied these evangelists visas to stay in the country, for some even after they had lived in the country for decades. In such cases, the evangelists are denied visas due to “N-82 security codes,” tagging the Christian evangelists as threats to national security, without providing any evidence.

MILITARY EXPANSIONISM

Turkey has been slowly expanding its military presence throughout the Middle East and North Africa over the last decade, maintaining forces in many countries that comprise the former Ottoman Empire. In the past year, the examples of Artsakh and northern Iraq stand out in particular.

In Artsakh, Turkey sent former ISIS fighters as mercenaries to fight alongside the Azerbaijani military to invade Artsakh. Their campaign destroyed Christian heritage sites in an attempt to rid the memory of Armenian Christianity from the historical land.

Additionally, Turkey continues to conduct airstrikes against Christian villages in northern Iraq, justifying these civilian casualties as merely part of their fight against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

CLOAKED RHETORIC

Turkish officials often mask the language they use to promote anti-Christian Turkic nationalism by using phrases unfamiliar to a Western audience. For example, the term “Red Apple” is a term that dates back to the time of the Ottoman Empire. It was used to refer to new targets of conquest for the empire. In the present day, the Turkish Directorate of Communications has used the term in reference to Christian sites as targets of conquest for Turkic Islamic nationalism. For example, the government used this term in reference to the Hagia Sophia, a historic church dating back to the 6th century long seen as a strong symbol of Christianity’s rich history in Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), before converting the cathedral into a mosque.

HISTORY

Throughout its history, Turkey has sought to maintain a stature of leadership; a role which includes the responsibility to uphold and promote human rights. However, Turkey instead promotes historical revisionism and represses the legal identities of non-Muslims. For Christians, most religious freedom issues stem from an Ottoman/Lausanne era framework, a continued denial of the genocide, and the interaction of these factors with Turkey’s Islamist and Kemalist components. For this reason, addressing this framework holistically is key for the sincere and long-term promotion of religious freedom.

A HISTORY OF EXPANSION, REPRESSION, AND GENOCIDE

The early Christian Church was born in the ancient lands today known as the Republic of Turkey. Formerly these lands were part of the Byzantine Empire, which was the seat of the Eastern Orthodox Church and an important center of Christianity, until the invasion of Turks from Central Asia. The subsequent Ottoman Empire was sustained by Islam, rapidly reaching Asia Minor, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Under the Ottoman Empire, Christians and Jews had a second-class status. As “people of the book,” they received a degree of protection but had fewer rights and privileges than Muslims.

The Ottoman Empire’s demise coincided with a desire for reform, the rising Turkish nationalism through the ‘Young Turks’ movement, and the establishment of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Non-Muslims were initially part of this reformist movement, but they were seen as an internal security threat and frequently blamed for economic woes and military

failures.

This blame eventually culminated in a genocide that left more than two million Christians dead, mostly Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians. Survivors faced forced conversion and Turkification, displacement, or deportation.

ESTABLISHING A NEW IDENTITY

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk led the Turkish army in a war of independence, resulting in the 1923 establishment of the modern Republic of Turkey. As part of this establishment, Turkey and Greece agreed to a compulsory population exchange. More than a million Christians from Turkey were resettled in Greece, and nearly half a million Muslims from Greece resettled in Turkey.

The same year, the Lausanne Treaty was signed. Articles 37-43 of the treaty stipulate the rights of non-Muslims, but the subsequent Turkish legal system lacks implementing regulations and has failed to grant them adequate legal status. This severe handicap remains today.

Additionally, the recognition granted to Christian communities by the treaty is generally interpreted by Turkey to only apply to non-Muslim communities who were recognized in the former Ottoman Empire, including Jews, Greeks, Armenians and, to some extent, Assyrian Christians. Excluded Christian groups include Latin-rite Catholics and Protestants.

KEMALISM

Kemalism was born during this period and introduced sweeping reforms that replaced Turkey’s Ottoman Islamic history with a

modern, secular nation with limited public display of religion.

In a major reform, the Arabic alphabet replaced the Latin alphabet. This made Ottoman history less accessible and distanced the new republic from past atrocities. It allowed for the development of a new national narrative of the Republic of Turkey.

However, this narrative excluded ethnic and religious minorities: Turkey was the country of the Turks. The Kemalist slogan, “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk,” (Turkish: Ne mutlu Türküm diyene) continues alienating Turkish citizens who are not ethnically Turkish.

Turkey evolved into one of the most stable and developed countries within the Middle East region. The country joined NATO and petitioned for membership within the European Union. Turkey’s own domestic political environment continued swinging between the extremes of Kemalist secularism and Ottoman-styled Islamism.

Today, Turkey’s beleaguered Christian community numbers approximately 160,000 (including different Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant communities), less than 0.2% of the total population. The Church is no longer bound by ethnicity, and now includes several thousand adherents who are ethnically Turkish (converts from Islam to Christianity).

Conversion is permitted under Turkish secular law, but individuals may be targeted by extremists as “apostates” from Islam and proselytizers of the Christian faith, regardless of whether they are evangelizing.



RELIGIOUS MINORITIES COMPRISE 0.2% OF TURKEY’S POPULATION.

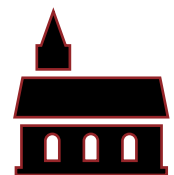
ICC AT WORK

Because of these concerning trends, International Christian Concern (ICC) analysts have worked tirelessly to research and report on the religious freedom violations of Turkey.

Last December, ICC worked with partner organizations to publish a report entitled, *Turkey: Challenges Facing Christians 2016-2020*, summarizing the findings from a study of the past four years of religious freedom conditions in the country since the coup attempt. ICC also came to the aid of Armenian Christians who had been devastated by the Karabakh War, during which Turkey supported Azerbaijani efforts to rid the region of Armenians and their Christian heritage.

Serving as one of the only non-Armenian humanitarian organizations on the scene, ICC quickly hired field staff to deliver much needed relief to the population there. While these immediate humanitarian needs were being met, ICC also advocated in Washington, D.C. for this Christian population, holding a Congressional briefing and meeting with several offices on this important yet underreported topic.

As a result of these efforts, Congress has condemned Turkey's human rights abuses on numerous occasions, redirected funding toward Armenian populations in Nagorno-Karabakh, and ceased U.S. funding to the Azerbaijani military.



**~160,000
CHRISTIANS
IN TURKEY**



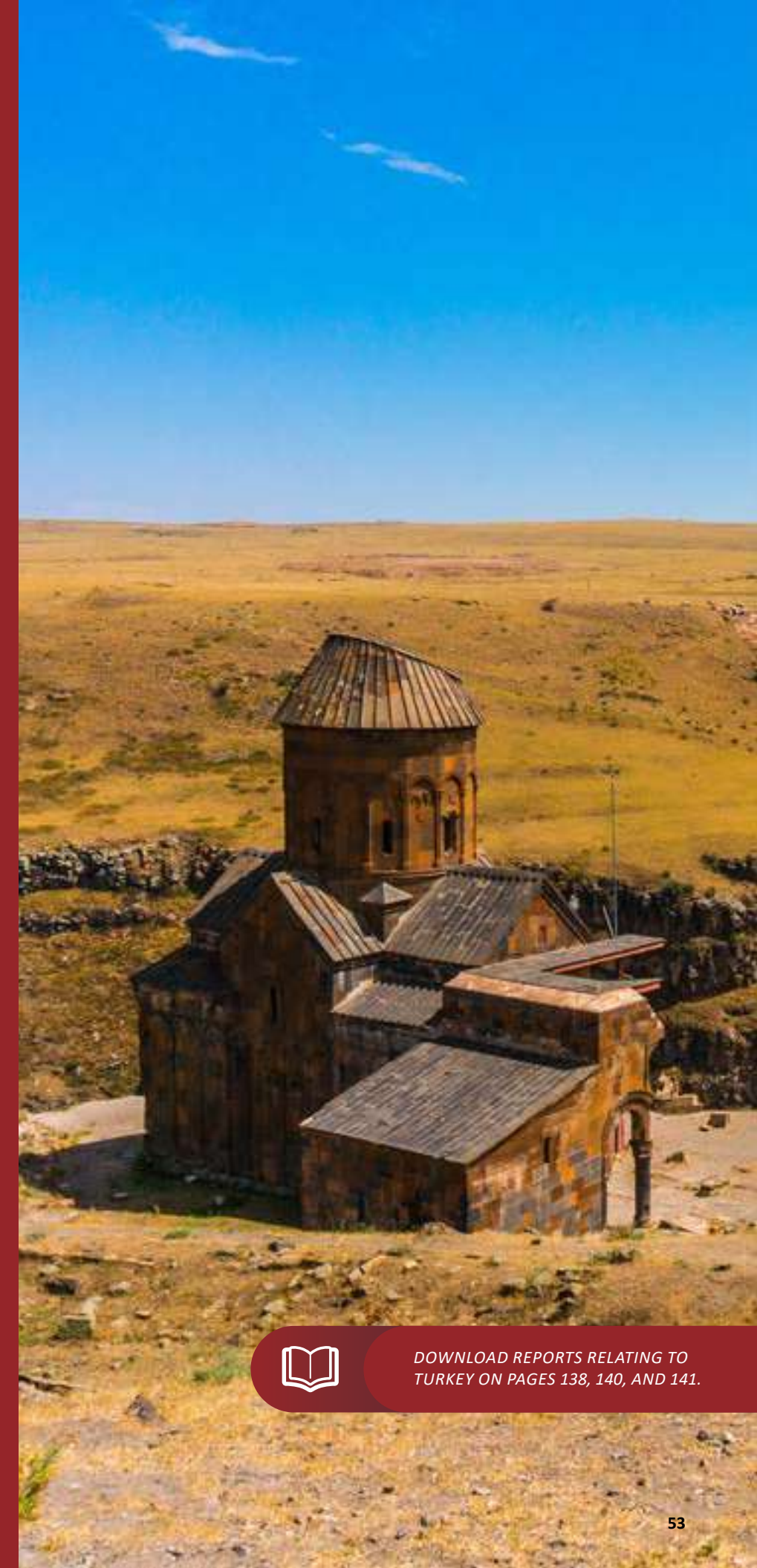
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The Turkish government fosters Islamic nationalism. Turkish identity is synonymous with Islam.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

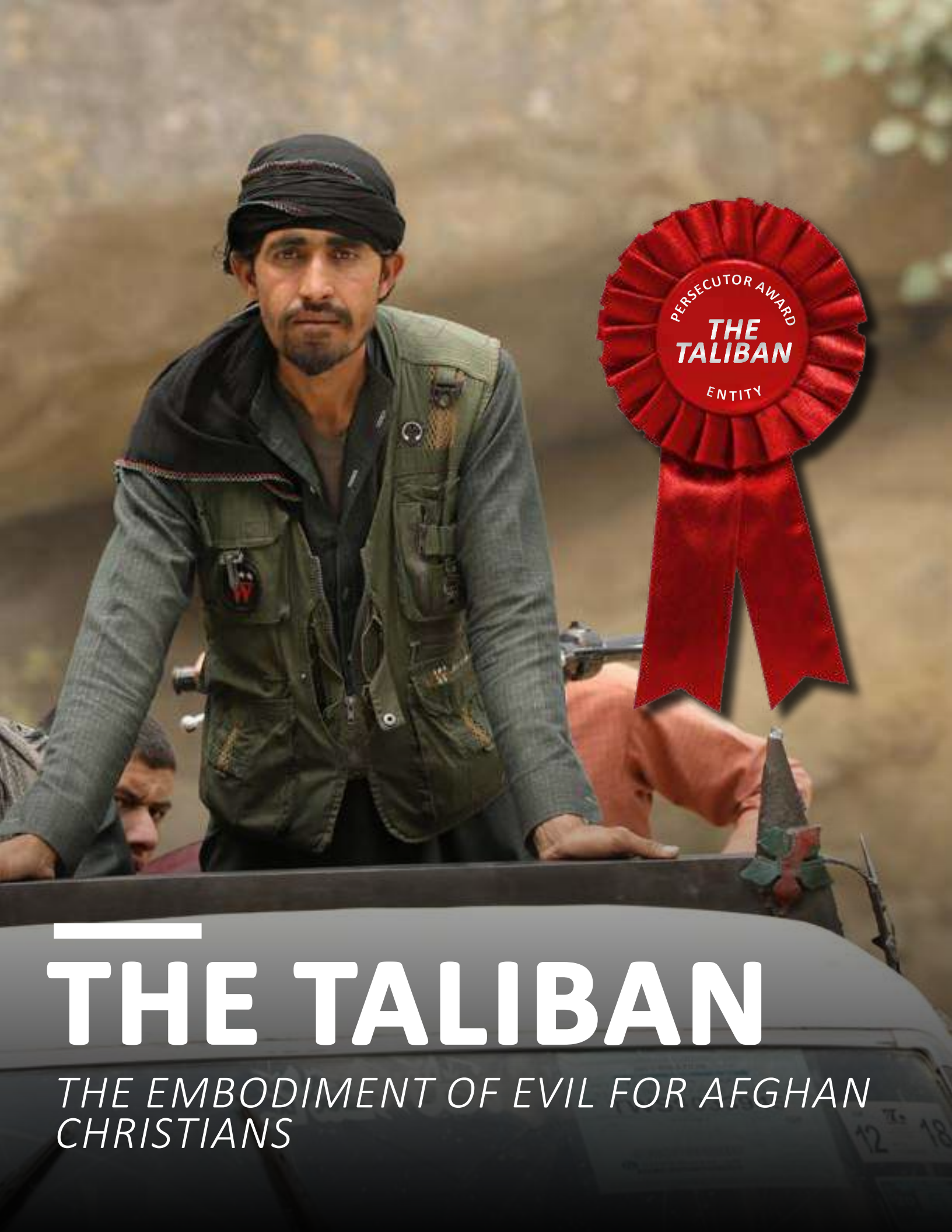
- U.S. officials should emphasize the importance of human rights and religious freedom in Turkey, as well as in its foreign engagements, in all high-level meetings with their Turkish counterparts.
- The U.S. Congress should evaluate the U.S.-Turkey NATO partnership amidst the deterioration of human rights in Turkey's nationalist expansionism throughout the Middle East and north Africa
- The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom should continue to monitor the status of Christians' ability to worship and conduct evangelical work freely and report on this status to Congress
- The U.S. should work with the UNESCO to protect Christian sites within Turkey and in Artsakh that are threatened by Turkish nationalist influence



DOWNLOAD REPORTS RELATING TO
TURKEY ON PAGES 138, 140, AND 141.



ENTITIES



THE TALIBAN

THE EMBODIMENT OF EVIL FOR AFGHAN CHRISTIANS

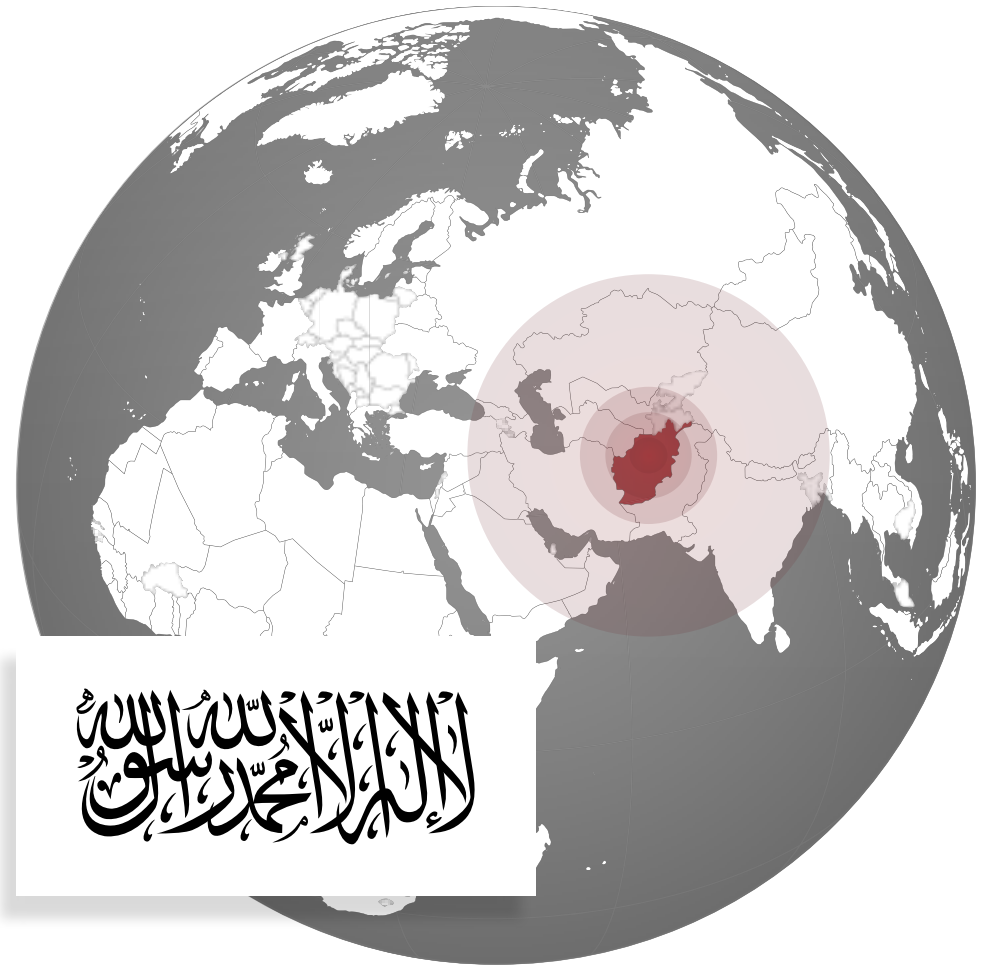
OVERVIEW

The Taliban are one of the worst oppressors of Christians with a long track-record of brutal crimes. Their speedy rise to power in Afghanistan this summer after the withdrawal of U.S. forces, spelled immediate doom for thousands of Afghan Christians. Many were forced to flee the country or go further into hiding.

Most of their membership hail from the Pashtun areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan, who were radicalized in traditional Islamic schools and adhere to a radical form of Islamic law known as Sharia. The group also included Tajik and Uzbek students. Mullah Mohammad Omar founded the movement in September of 1994 in Kandhar, Afghanistan with 50 students. The movement gained a large following and quickly had almost 15,000 students, mostly Afghan refugees from the Soviet invasion. The beginning of the Taliban was primarily motivated by the suffering people of Afghanistan. The Taliban blamed this suffering on the lack of adherence to strict moral code of Islam, which was the basis of teaching in their religious schools.

The Taliban's adherence to strict Islam compels them to excommunicate and even kill anyone who does not follow their radical interpretations of Islam. As a religious dictatorship, those under their rule are not free to practice their faith traditions and are not allowed to critique the governing policies of the Taliban. Their strict adherence to Sharia law does not allow room for other political entities. Their use of extreme violence is justified in their radical religious interpretation of the Quran and other teachings. All violence associated with expanding their domain is justified by their definitions of Jihad or, rather, the Holy War—a fundamental component of their belief system.

The Taliban fully supports and implements extreme Islamic punishments that include extreme and brutal methods of public executions of convicted murderers and adulterers, along with amputations of



people convicted of theft.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has labeled them an Entity of Particular Concern (EPC).

U.S.-AFGHANISTAN WAR

The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to respond to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The Taliban was overthrown and routed but soon emerged in insurgency warfare against the United States and other allies. The war was marked by setbacks on both sides, leading to a stalemate with the United States becoming exhausted and eventually pursuing peace options with the Taliban. President Donald Trump signed a conditional peace agreement with the Taliban in 2020, committing to a 14-month withdrawal timeline to pull out all U.S. personnel. The war finally came to an end this year after 20 years.

U.S. WITHDRAWAL

The United States withdrawal from Afghanistan was intended to give power over the existing Afghan government. As soon as the United States' support ended and the military withdrew, the Afghan government began to collapse. In the summer of 2021, the Afghan military quickly conceded territory rendering the country vulnerable to a Taliban takeover of the country, which unfolded quickly and culminated in the Taliban conquest of the capital Kabul on August 15. The final days of withdrawal were marked by chaos at the Kabul airport, with thousands of panicked Afghans and foreign nationals seeking to flee Taliban rule. The United States and its fellow allies struggled to maintain order at the airport, resulting in masses trying to climb U.S. transport planes and other means of escape. The Taliban had promised general amnesty to Afghans, but reports of violence, intimidation, and persecution began to surface just days after the fall of Kabul.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IMPLICATIONS

The Taliban ideology does not tolerate any other religion or faith separate from their interpretation of radical Islam. From 1996 to their overthrow in 2001 by the United States and NATO forces in the wake of 9/11, the Taliban’s previous rule was marked by oppression, discrimination,

hatred, and extremism against all who disagreed with the group’s leadership. The Taliban targeted religious minorities, including Hazara Shia Muslims in various violent methods. They targeted Christians through violence and oppressed anything that posed a threat to their superiority in Sharia law. What little hope Afghanistan had for religious freedom during the U.S.-

backed Afghan government is now lost under the Taliban. Conversion from Islam is categorically denied by the Taliban, rendering any who do as apostates, who are subject to the deadliest punishments under the Taliban’s Sharia law.

ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) has followed the Taliban’s role in Afghanistan, in both pre- and post-9/11 contexts. The Taliban’s methods have evolved and adapted in each context leading up to the recent United States withdrawal and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

As the U.S. withdrawal began to speed up in the months leading up to the final U.S. withdrawal of troops at the end of August 2021, ICC was at work with the underground Church in Afghanistan. ICC reported on initial incidents of intimidation, violence, and other forms of persecution Christians began to face. The rapid takeover of the Taliban created a swiftly evolving and fluid situation for the Church, especially for those looking to escape the country to a more welcoming environment for Muslim background believers.

Initial efforts amidst the chaotic first two weeks of August were focused on gathering all relevant information on the most at-risk Christians looking to escape the country, and working with partners to get them through the gates at the Kabul Airport. Christians seeking to leave the country were turned away at the airports time and time again as the evacuating countries were able to only focus on specific categories of escapees. ICC hosted weekly briefings for members

of Congress and their staff as well as other non-governmental stakeholders, bringing up-to-date information from the Christian community on the ground and the initial impact of the Taliban’s emerging rule.

The new reality of the Taliban rule within the borders of Afghanistan began to set in and the Church is once again underground. Some were able to escape from Afghanistan to neighboring countries and beyond, but for most, life will be marked by the contextual reality set in place by the extremism in the Taliban regime.

While general calls for amnesty for all Afghans were originally made by the Taliban leaders, reports of violence, attacks, and intimidation proved an alternative reality. Afghan Christians hold no false hope of religious freedom in the country, a context that was firmly established as the Taliban appointed a hard-line interim government in the beginning days of September. Taliban leadership is established in the foundational principles of fundamentalist Islam and extremist Sharia law. Christians are mostly all Muslim converts numbering roughly between 8,000 and 12,000. ICC will work to help these Christians as they face this new reality.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

EXTREME VIOLENCE: Motivated by extremist Islam, the Taliban instituted brutal punishments on ‘violators’ through various means, such as chopping off hands from accused thieves. Many groups have documented the Taliban’s atrocities against women, such as widespread rape and forced marriages of minors, indiscriminate and extra-judicial killings, and targeting of civilian populations through bombings.

EXTREME SHARIA: Taliban uses an extreme form of Sharia law to discriminate against women, girls, and religious minorities. In the past, they banned education for women and girls, shut down schools, and murdered teachers. They also shut down cultural outlets such as movie theaters and banned photography. They destroyed non-Islamic religious symbols like the Bamiyan Buddha statues. They targeted Christians through various means of persecution, intimidation, and violence.

GUERRILLA WARFARE AND INSURGENCY: Throughout the 20-year war the United States waged in Afghanistan, the Taliban engaged in guerrilla warfare and insurgency against the United States and NATO allies, using various forms of violence like the IEDs, suicide bombings, and targeted killings.

OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY: Taliban received more than \$1.6 billion in 2020, mainly from the sale of illegal drugs, extortion, and other forms of criminal activity.

“



“I try to live in the shadows. Sooner or later, they will come for me.”

– Ali, a member of the minority Hazara community

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- ICC recommends that the U.S. Department of State designate Afghanistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and implement all policy implications as is pursuant to the CPC designation. Additionally, the United States should implement various layers of sanctioning authorities, including Global Magnitsky, on known violators of religious freedom within the Taliban leadership, included with visa restrictions for these individuals.
- ICC encourages U.S. leaders to work in concert with the international community to monitor developments within Afghanistan as it pertains specifically to human rights abuses including the treatment of religious minority communities. Specifically, the United States must create a special category for Afghan refugees who are severely at-risk of persecution from the Taliban.
- The United States should work with the international community to ensure the Taliban do not restrict the free movement of people out of the country.
- The United States must continue to pressure the Taliban not to restrict the freedom speech, press, assembly, and other basic freedoms for Afghan citizens.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1979

SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN:

Islamic Mujahideen fighters (backed by the U.S.) begin fighting the invading Soviet forces. A group similar to the Taliban's original leadership fought against the Soviets during this time for the Hezb-i Islami Khalis and Harakat-i Inqilab-e Islami factions of the Mujahideen fighters.

1989-1992

SOVIET UNION COLLAPSE AND WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN:

As the Soviet Union collapsed, and so did the regime it had backed in Afghanistan headed by Mohammad Najibullah. A power-sharing accord reached in Peshawar reached by competing political factions, and the interim government takes over in the new Islamic State Afghanistan which is paralyzed from the start due to competing political factions.

1994

TALIBAN OFFICIALLY FORMED:

Taliban officially emerges in 1994 as one of the prominent factions in the chaotic period promising to root out current corruption and establish a purely Islamic society. It consists by-and-large of students (Talib) from the predominantly Pashtun areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan. The students have been educated in traditional Islamic schools and also fought during the Soviet-Afghan War. The movement is led by Mohammed Omar, starting with 50 students in Kandahar and quickly spreads throughout Afghanistan and shifts the domestic power and influence away from Mujahideen warlords. By November of 1994, they control Kandahar City, and by early January 1995, the Taliban controls 12 Afghan provinces. Sources indicate heavy Pakistani involvement in creating the Taliban.

1995

NO US RECOGNITION OF TALIBAN, TALIBAN SETBACKS AND WINS:

The U.S. does not officially recognize the Taliban. Ahmad Shah Massoud successfully resists the Taliban take over-blowing a series of setbacks to the Taliban Advance. However, the movement continues to push, and eventually, Massoud retreats to the north and creates the Northern Alliance.

1996

ISLAMIC EMIRATE OF AFGHANISTAN ESTABLISHED:

The Taliban takes Kabul in September of 1996 and creates the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Capital city is transferred to Kandahar and the Taliban institute nation-wide oppression with extreme Islamic law. The Northeastern part of Pakistan is held by the opposition that becomes known as the Northern Alliance. An estimated 1 million people flee the Taliban to Massoud-controlled areas.

1998

BRUTAL REPRESSION:

Reports emerge of the brutally repressive tactics of the Taliban against various segments of society. Women's oppression by the Taliban gains worldwide condemnation. Religious police lead the way in various abuses and violence. Religious minorities are targeted, including Christians and others, such as Hazara Shias, of whom 8000 are massacred in August of 1998. The famous Buddha statues are bombed in 1999. Brutal Sharia law is used to punish women, thieves, shut down movie theaters, forced prayer, and a number of other repressive actions.

2001

U.S. AND NATO INVASION

Following the September 11 attacks in 2001 by the Taliban-backed Al-Qaeda terror network, led by Osama bin Laden, the U.S. leads a multinational coalition to invade Afghanistan and topples the Taliban, and decimates the Al-Qaeda network. The invasion starts a 20-year occupation by the United States with attempts to build a new government.

2003

THE TALIBAN ANNOUNCE INSURGENCY AGAINST US AND ALLIES:

After being decimated and routed by the United States, the Taliban regroup and begin an insurgency against the United States. Mohammad Omar goes public with the declaration. Civilians will be heavily targeted during this insurgency.

2008-2009

THE INSURGENCY CONTINUES AND TARGETS WESTERN NGO:

The Taliban kill three women working with the International Rescue Committee, accusing the women of being spies. The Taliban are responsible for 75% of civilian casualties in 2009 and 80% in 2010. U.S. Commander McChrystal claims that Taliban leadership is located in Quetta, Pakistan stirring more confusion in the regional mix. The U.S. plans to pay Taliban fighters to switch sides.

2010

FIGHTING, DIPLOMACY AND TARGETED KILLINGS:

The UN lifts sanctions on the Taliban and asks them to be removed from Terror Watchlist. Calls for peace talks with the Taliban and Afghan government resonate from Europe and from McChrystal's troop surge. The Taliban continue with insurgent tactics and targeted killings of opposition leaders and members, NGO workers, etc.

2015

ISIS RELATIONS:

Taliban has a poor relationship with ISIS in Iraq. ISIS recruits defectors from Taliban who are disappointed and disgruntled with Taliban leaders and lack of success on the battlefield.

2017

QATAR CONNECTION:

Qatar facilitates and offices for the Taliban to conduct meetings with foreign governments including the U.S. Department State, the UN and many others. Later the U.S. and the Afghan government demand the office be shut down. Qatar will later facilitate the Doha Agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban

2018

DEADLY AMBULANCE:

Taliban conducts a deadly suicide bombing killing over a 100 people in Kabul.

2019

TALKS OF PEACE:

Afghan officials and Taliban leaders meet in Moscow to begin peace talks.

2020

TALIBAN IN COME AND TRUMP PEACE AGREEMENT:

It was estimated that the Taliban made 1.6 billion dollars from illegal drugs, mining, extortion and taxes, as well as donation and exports. The Trump administration signs conditional peace agreement with the Taliban calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops within 14 months, provided that the Taliban hold their end of the bargain. Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob becomes acting leader of Taliban.

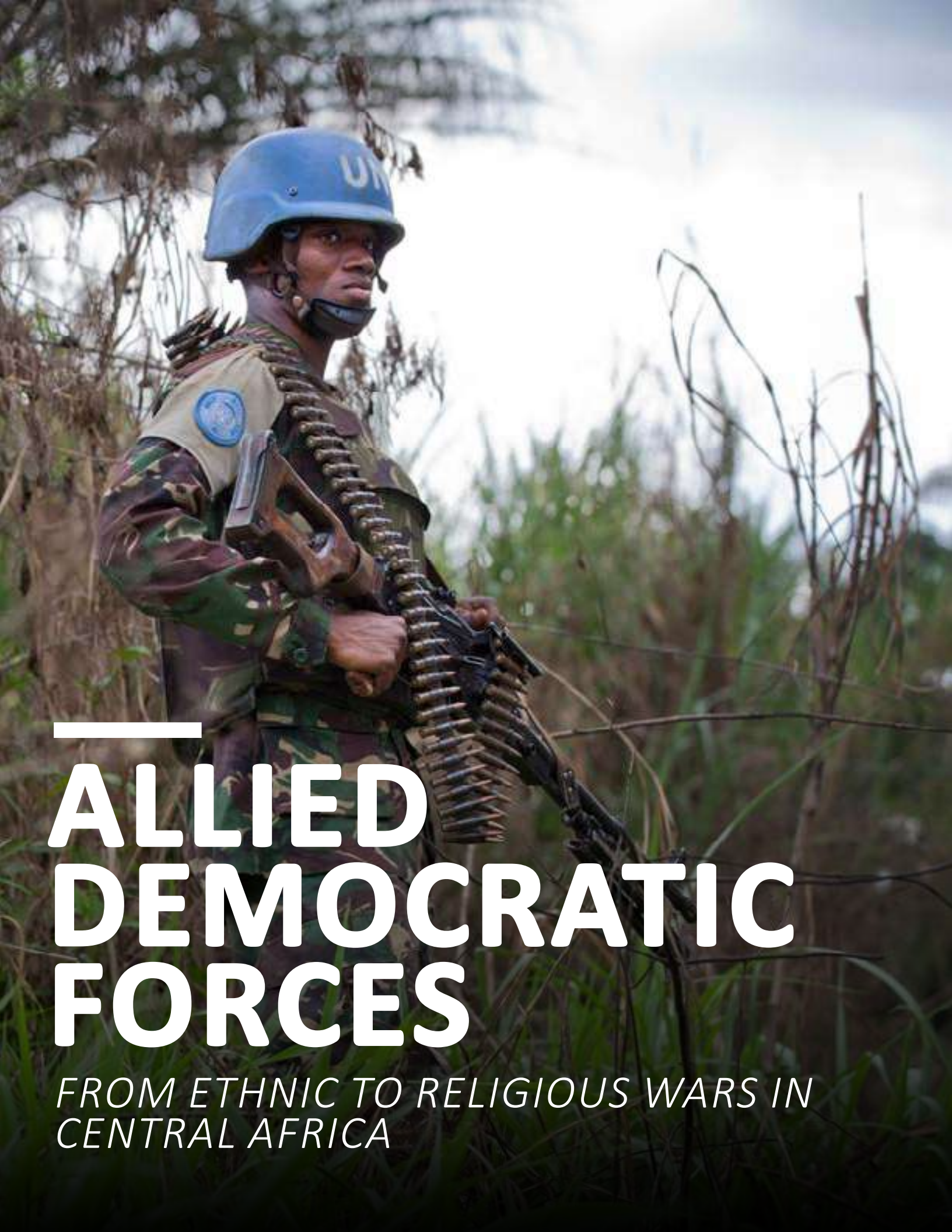
2021

U.S. WITHDRAWS:

United States and its allies withdraw forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban take over the country within days as the Afghan government collapses causing a major evacuation crisis for the United States and others. August 15, 2020, the Taliban assume control of Kabul and begins solidifying control over the rest of the country.

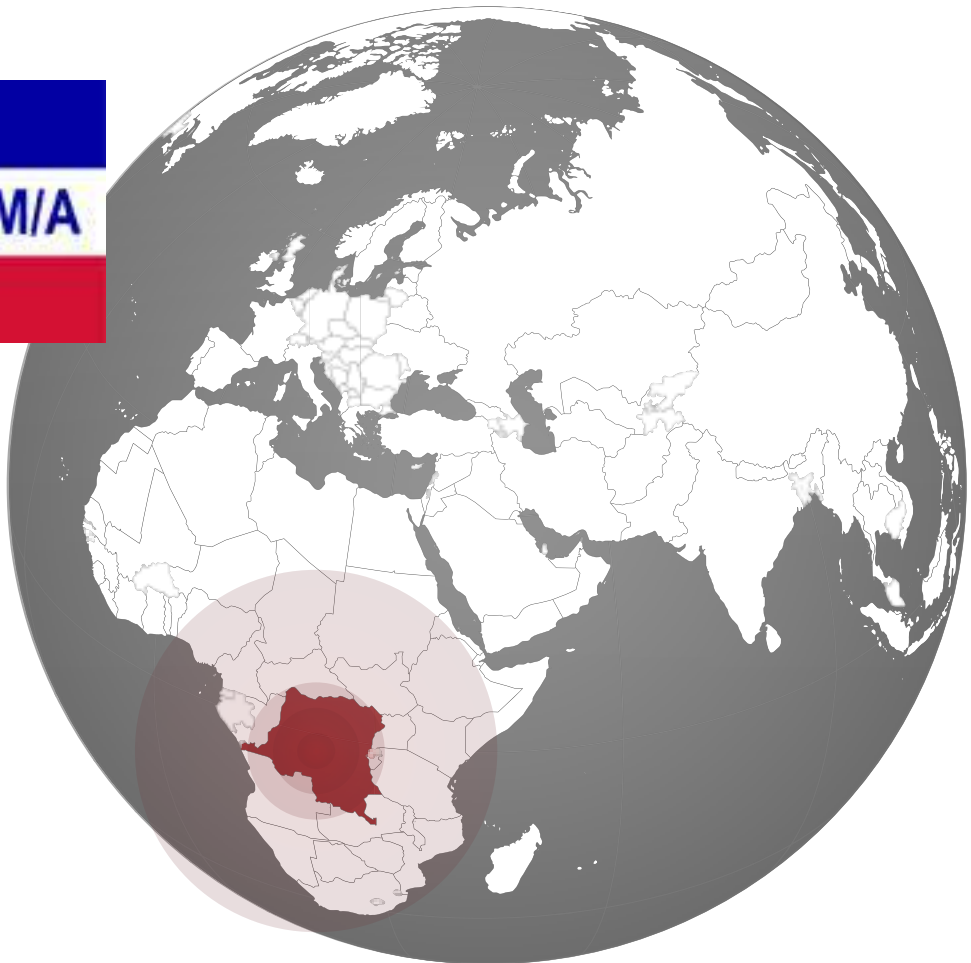
"Afghanistan's diverse ethnic and religious minorities are at risk of violence and repression..."

- Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations Human Rights Chief.



ALLIED DEMOCRATIC FORCES

FROM ETHNIC TO RELIGIOUS WARS IN CENTRAL AFRICA



OVERVIEW

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF): The name sounds like a group most Americans could get behind. However, unlike their name, the ADF of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) cares nothing for democracy, freedom, or unity.

This Islamic Extremist group has long caused mass devastation and destruction in eastern DRC, where they routinely conduct mass murder, extortion, and destruction of property. They have increased their relationship with the Islamic State in recent years and conducted more extreme Islamic ideology propaganda.

ORIGINS

The ADF was the culmination of multiple rebel groups and former military officers. These groups, including the Allied

A member of the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), during a joint MONUS-CO-FARDC operation against the ADF in Beni.

Democratic Movement, the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), the Uganda Muslim Liberation Army, and militant members of the Tablighi Jamaat movement and others, followed one man, Jamil Mukulu, a former Christian who later converted to Islam.

Jamil Mukulu grew up in a Christian home but decided as a young man to join Islam. As he grew and studied, he decided to travel to Saudi Arabia, where he learned at the feet of Salafi teachers. When he returned home, he brought with him a new, more radical ideology.

In 1991, Mukulu and a group of militants attacked the headquarters of the Uganda Military in Kamapala. He was captured and held until 1995. After he regained his freedom, Mukulu went on to join the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), a rebel group fighting to overthrow the Ugandan government. NALU's then leader, Amon Bazira, was

killed in late 1995.

Mukulu seized this opportunity to create his Islamic militant group, which would seek to create an Islamic Caliphate. He unified the above-listed groups and others into the Allied Democratic Forces, appointing himself as the group's supreme commander.

Between 1995 and 2010, the group was fairly quiet. They continued to fight the Ugandan government from the Rwenzori mountains of Uganda due to its sympathetic people, close access to DRC, and mountainous terrain. Though their original claims were about establishing an Islamic Caliphate, they didn't act on this claim or use propaganda. This lack of chaos helped them stay below government radars and avoid making interactions with military forces. As a result, they were able to recruit and slowly build their strength.

In 2010, the group resurfaced in Eastern DRC, in a region known as North Kivu. The

group found freedom to train, men to recruit, and resources to grab. The government of DRC was unable to effectively fight off the insurgent group due to the dense jungle and mountain terrain of eastern DRC. Between 2011 and 2013, ADF is believed to be responsible for the killing and abduction of hundreds of people. Then in 2013, they truly began to take aggressive actions.

CAUSING CHAOS

In 2013, the group reportedly started campaigning and recruiting in earnest. During this time, one defector said ten men joined the ranks of ADF each day. With this, they began conducting more blatant attacks throughout the Kivus and into Uganda. In September, their action led to the displacement of 60,000 people from their homes and communities. As these attacks increased, the government of DRC sent their military to intervene. They pushed Makulu and his leaders out of their headquarters camp in early 2014 but could not stop the group from conducting attacks elsewhere.

In mid-2014, ADF conducted several major attacks, believed to have killed more than 250 people. Their violence and destruction led to even greater attempts by the DRC military to push them out of the country. Throughout the rest of 2014 and into 2015, ADF continued to recruit and conduct attacks, while the less agile DRC military tried to stop them.

CHANGE OF POWER

While chasing after the ADF, the DRC military finally forced Mukulu and his leadership to flee the country. They decided to run to neighboring Tanzania, where they thought they would find some safety and refuge. Despite this, in early 2015, Mukulu was captured and turned into the Tanzanian government. The Tanzanian government then turned Mukulu over to the International Criminal Court, which has been holding him ever since. The court

decided in 2015 not to turn Mukulu over to the government of DRC, which in 2014 convicted him of terrorism and murder and sentenced him to death in absentia. The International Criminal Court is trying him for murder, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

In his absence, one of Mukulu's lieutenants, a man named Musa Baluku, took over as the supreme commander of the ADF. For the first few years, little changed about the group and its actions. However, this change of power has since caused terrible violence for the Christian population of Eastern DRC. Unlike his predecessor, Baluku wanted to tighten connections with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In 2019, Baluku pledged allegiance to ISIS while there was tension in the ADF, causing a split, with some of the members claiming Mukulu as their leader. Most, however, followed Baluku. This tightening of relations with ISIS has led to more extremist ideology and targeting those they consider infidels. The group under Baluku has since changed its name to the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP).

Now, as subordinates to ISIS, ISCAP is more often targeting Christians and those of other beliefs. They are closely following their leader's extremist ideology and will likely continue to in the future. This will mean far more death and destruction for the majority-Christian communities in eastern DRC unless something stops it. The group is also trying to increase its influence in the region, spreading further east into Mozambique and claiming attacks in that area.

Democratic Republic of Congo military personnel (FARDC) patrol against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) rebels near Beni in North-Kivu province, December 31, 2013. REUTERS/Kenny Katombe/File Photo



ICC FINDINGS

The ADF killed Rev. Ven. Batsemire Ngulongo Yesse for refusing to convert to Islam on January 29, 2020, at his home in Eringeti, North Kivu, Congo. He was among 35 other Christians killed that night in different villages West of Beni. In March 2020, International Christian Concern (ICC) organized a meeting with his wife, son, friend, and a pastor from Congo at Bwera district, Western Uganda. We heard their story and provided them with food and clothing, and funds as they adjust to living without their breadwinner.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

AMBUSHES: ADF continues to use ambush methods to conduct their attacks, often appearing out of the dense forest, attacking quickly, and then retreating to the safety of the trees. This is true for those traveling along the road or living in more remote villages.

EXECUTIONS: ADF uses a similar method to other terrorist groups in Africa to intimidate and hurt Christian populations. They target Christian men, especially leaders, making them recite the Islamic Shahada, the statement of faith, or executed on the spot.

RAIDS: The ADF conducts many raids on small towns and villages. These raids increase the organization’s supplies, though this also often includes murdering civilians and destruction of property.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- ICC urges the United States government to continue to track the actions of the ADF, as they pose a grave threat to Christians in DRC. As with all similar African extremist groups, U.S. leaders should ensure that they do not continue to expand their influence throughout the region.

“Our father left a gap that no one can fill. He was a great man who loved God deeply, cared, and protected us.”
— Rev. Batsemire’s son

2019

JULY 22

ADF militants attack the cities of Eringeti and Oicha, killing a total of 12 civilians (nine in Eringeti and three in Oicha). 10 civilians, including children, are abducted. That same day, the ADF clashes with Congolese soldiers in the towns of Mangboko and Masulukwed, resulting in 11 fatalities.

AUGUST 27

A major ADF attack on Boga in the DRC’s Ituri Province results in the abduction of 100-200 civilians and the looting of livestock, medicine, and food. Congolese soldiers engage in combat with the attackers, but no casualties are reported and there are conflicting reports of the effectiveness of the military’s response. The attack lasts for about three hours.

NOVEMBER 15-16

During the night of November 14–15, ADF insurgents attack a neighborhood in Beni, looting shops and homes. At least 15 civilians are killed, many of them by machete. It is believed the ADF carried out the attack in response to the renewed Congolese army offensive.

DECEMBER 6

Two ADF attacks in the villages of Mantumbi and Kolokoko kill 17 civilians—two of whom are beheaded by machete

2020

JANUARY 28

38 civilians hacked to death in Oicha.

JANUARY 30

21 civilians killed in three separate attacks.

FEBRUARY 18

12 civilians killed and several houses set ablaze in a village east of Beni.

MARCH 1

24 civilians and 12 others killed in an attack on a village in Ituri province.

MAY 26

At least 40 civilians killed in Ituri province.

SEPTEMBER 10

35 killed in Ituri province.

OCTOBER 20

1,335 prisoners were freed when the ADF attacked Kangbayi central prison.

OCTOBER 28-30

40 people killed in ADF attacks in the villages of Baeti and Lisasa. People kidnapped and churches set on fire.

OCTOBER 30

21 killed, 20 abducted, and many buildings including a Catholic church set ablaze.

DECEMBER 31

25 civilians were massacred by ADF on New Year’s Eve in the village of Tingwe.

2021

JANUARY 4

25 civilians were killed and several more kidnapped by ADF during their attacks on Tingwe, Mwenda and Nzenga villages.

MARCH 11

The United States designates the ADF as a designated terrorist group.

MARCH 31

23 civilians were killed in a village near Beni.

MAY 31

57 civilians were killed in displacement camps near the towns of Boga and Tchabi in eastern DRC, according to the UN.

“All the years that I spent with my husband have been fantastic years. He showed us the way and led the way. His killers knew that by murdering him, they would shake the faith of many in the Anglican Church of Congo. We have remained strong amidst the challenges that have come after his killing. We are hopeful that one day we shall live with Christ in a place without pain, discrimination, and death.”

- Rev. Batsemire’s wife



AL-SHABAAB

RUTHLESS ATTACKS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

OVERVIEW

Al-Shabaab, directly translated as “the Youth,” is a jihadist militant organization that aims to create an Islamic state in Somalia. The terror group is in affiliation with Al-Qaeda (AQ). Since 2006, it has been fighting to overthrow Somalia’s central government and establish a caliphate under its strict version of Sharia law.

Somalia has a tumultuous history, with a constant turnover of governments resulting in a devastated region susceptible to insurgency. In 1991, the fall of Siad Barre’s authoritarian regime left various groups vying for power, leading to a civil war that still rages today.

One of these groups, known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), arose in the early 2000s as a coalition of 11 Sharia courts. The ICU was in opposition to Somalia’s U.N.-recognized and U.S.-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG). To gain control over the country, the ICU created a powerful militia that would eventually splinter off to form the al-Shabaab terrorist organization.

Ethiopia, a Christian nation, invaded Somalia and defeated the ICU in December of 2006. As a result, al-Shabaab retreated to Somalia’s south. It organized a series of guerrilla-style attacks against the western-backed Ethiopian forces and the TFG. Experts believe this period of warfare further radicalized the terror group and strengthened its opposition to the Western world and those it considers anti-Muslim.

Despite an international coalition of forces fighting to secure Somalia against al-Shabaab, the terrorist group has become one of the largest and most active in the world.

In 2008, the group underwent a series of changes, transforming itself from a local movement into an AQ-affiliated terrorist group committed to a global jihadist ideology. Regional conquest expanded



from defeating Somalia’s allied forces to aligning with AQ in the war against the West.

Following the death of Ayro, al-Shabaab’s leader, in May 2008, al-Shabaab members integrated into Al-Qaeda’s leadership under Sheikh Ahmad Abdi Godane, also known as Abu Zubair.

As a result, al-Shabaab began to adopt common Al-Qaeda strategies, such as suicide attacks and explosives, to accomplish its goals alongside their usual guerilla-styled tactics.

Today, Ahmed Umar leads al-Shabaab, who took power after a U.S. drone strike killed former leader Abdi Godane. Between 6,000 and 7,000 fighters make up the group.

As a closed country where Islamic extremists circulate freely, Somalia has been a region of terror for Christians, and the Church operates in secret as al-Shabaab desires to eradicate all believers from the country. Christians make up only 0.33% of

the population.

Al-Shabaab enforces a strict ban on un-Islamic behavior and implements punishments under its interpretation of Sharia law, including floggings, amputation of limbs, and public executions. They also banned and continue to block international aid from reaching millions of suffering citizens.

Al-Shabaab fighters actively attack Somalia’s surrounding nations such as Kenya and Ethiopia.

Attacks on Kenya have been occurring for nearly a decade because the Kenyan military has supported the central government in Somalia. These attacks most often involve the killing of Christians in small villages or who are riding on buses. These attacks happen many times a year and have led to the deaths of more than 100 Kenyan Christians over the past five years. The group also targets churches, police stations, shopping centers, communication towers, and Christian aid workers.

ICC FINDINGS

In the early morning hours of August 17, 2017, al-Shabaab militants killed five people and burned down several homes in coastal Kenya’s Maleli village. The attack devastated residents, forcing them to leave their farmland within the fertile belt along the dense Boni forest and move into makeshift tents within an IDP camp.

When ICC heard of the attack, our reps on the ground interviewed several of the affected families and gifted them with boda-boda’s—a common form of taxi in Kenya that serves as a means of sustainable income. Through this project, these families could restart their lives by creating their small businesses, allowing

them to rebuild their homes and take care of their day-to-day needs.

ICC regularly implements projects assisting the families of those killed by al-Shabaab in Kenya. These attacks occur on buses traveling near the Kenya-Somalia Border, villages near the border, and sometimes larger locations such as hotels and malls in bigger cities. In nearly all attacks that al-Shabaab conducts in Kenya, they identify Christians, separate them from the larger group, and execute them on the spot. This leaves many families without breadwinners. To help, ICC provides business and immediate aid for the families of those killed.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

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



4,000+ PEOPLE KILLED

IN THE PAST DECADE BY AL-SHABAAB
More than 3,000 of those deaths have occurred since 2015.

Source: VOA News

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

TARGETING NON-MUSLIMS:
Insurgents often separate Christians from Muslims by looking at an individual’s national ID (which state religion), name, or forcing suspected Christians to say the Shahada, an Islamic statement of faith. When the targets cannot say it or refuse, they are executed. Muslims walk free.

SUICIDE BOMBERS:
Al-Shabaab uses suicide bombings to target high-value individuals, institutions, and spaces antithetical to its mission. The majority of the group’s suicide bombing occurs in southern Somalia, primarily the country’s capital of Mogadishu.

“We thank our brothers, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who have been, and continue to be, the pioneers of external operations that target the heart of the Crusader enemies.”

— Al-Shabaab

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 2008** **MARCH 2008**
The U.S. Department of State officially designated al-Shabaab as a foreign terrorist organization.
- 2010** **JULY 2010**
The group’s first major attack is unleashed in Kampala, Uganda, killing 75 people gathered together during the World Cup soccer game screening.
- 2013** **SEPTEMBER 2013**
67 people are killed during a 48-hour long siege at Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. Militants separate Muslim shoppers from non-Muslim. Non-Muslims are murdered.
- 2014** **NOVEMBER 2014**
28 teachers traveling to Nairobi for the Christmas holiday are killed by al-Shabaab after being forced to recite the Islamic statement of faith.
- 2015** **APRIL 2015**
Garissa University College Massacre. Al-Shabaab militants storm a Kenyan University, separate Muslims and Christians, and systematically shoot the Christians. 148 are killed.
- 2017** **SEPTEMBER 2017**
Al-Shabaab kills four Christians in Lamu, Kenya. The insurgents go from house to house, calling out the Christian victims before dragging them into the street, shooting, and beheading them.
- 2019** **JANUARY 2019**
Al-Shabaab attacks a hotel in Nairobi, Kenya killing 26.
- 2019** **DECEMBER 2019**
Nine Christian passengers are killed while traveling to Mandera from Nairobi, Kenya.
- 2020** **DECEMBER 2020**
Al-Shabaab attacks a Kenyan military base where U.S. troops are stationed, killing three U.S. members.

BOKO HARAM

PURVEYORS OF VIOLENCE AND
KIDNAPPINGS IN NIGERIA

OVERVIEW

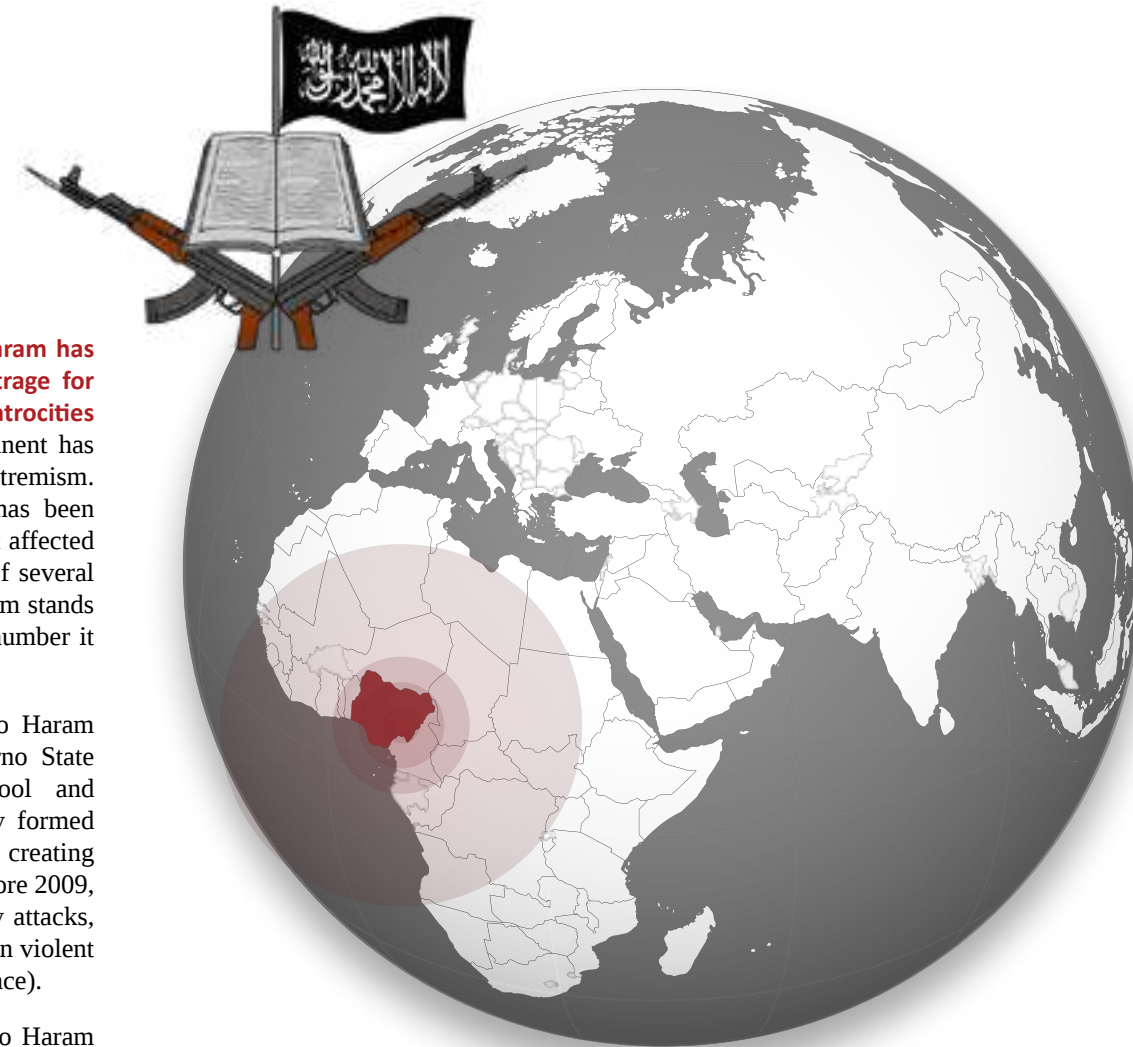
The terrorist group Boko Haram has garnered international outrage for its mass kidnappings and atrocities in Nigeria. As a result, the continent has seen a steady rise in violent extremism. Over the past decade, Nigeria has been one of the African countries most affected by terrorism due to the activity of several groups. In that period, Boko Haram stands out above the rest for the sheer number it has killed.

Mohammed Yusuf founded Boko Haram in 2002 in the northeastern Borno State of Nigeria. Originally a school and religious complex, Yusuf quickly formed a movement promoting jihad and creating an Islamic state in the region. Before 2009, Boko Haram didn't carry out any attacks, focusing on recruitment rather than violent attacks (though it promoted violence).

Abubakar Shekau took over Boko Haram after Yusuf was executed in 2009 and quickly pushed the group to commit acts of violence. While Yusuf provided an ideological foundation for the group, Shekau mobilized it into the deadly entity it is today.

Boko Haram has maintained an off-and-on relationship with the Islamic State for years. Shekau pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015. However, the group rejected him a year later for being too extreme in his tactics and targeting Muslims who did not support Boko Haram in its mission. This rejection led to the creation of two separate entities—Boko Haram, led by Shekau, and Islamic State West Africa Province, led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi.

A Nigerian army convoy vehicle drives ahead with an anti-aircraft gun, on its way to Bama, Borno State, Nigeria.



Boko Haram has killed more than 19,000 people through acts of terrorism and led an anti-government insurgency responsible for over 37,000 deaths in combat. Though the group does have some presence in neighboring Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, most of its activity is in Nigeria.

The name Boko Haram is a combination of Arabic and Hausa, a local Nigerian language, and broadly refers to the idea that western influence is forbidden. Some, pointing to local usage of the word, argue that “Boko” refers explicitly to Western education rather than western influence as a whole. Regardless of how one interprets their name, the group’s violence speaks for itself.

“

“Unity will not be achieved, there is nowhere that Allah said a Muslim should unite with a Christian.”

— Abubakar Shekau, former leader of Boko Haram

ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) has responded to Boko Haram activity in Nigeria for years, both on the ground and at the international level.

On the ground, ICC helped victims of the Chibok kidnapping in 2014 with farming assistance designed to economically restore them, giving them a sustainable means of sustenance. Helping these victims and their families run farms allowed them to regain a degree of control over their future and

delivered years of dividends from ICC’s initial investment of guidance and farm supplies.

At the international level, ICC joined a plethora of organizations in years of advocating for victims of Boko Haram kidnappings. This includes Leah Sharibu, who was kidnapped along with about 110 other girls in 2018 by Boko Haram. Since that time, every other girl was released—Leah is reportedly kept prisoner because

she refuses to recant her Christian faith and adopt Islam.

ICC continues to research and write on the issue of Boko Haram violence toward Christians in Nigeria. It is a continuing problem unlikely to improve unless the international community finds a way to work effectively with the Nigerian government to combat Boko Haram.



OVER 100,000 PEOPLE KILLED

BY THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

VIOLENT ATTACKS:

Boko Haram works in many of the same ways as other terror groups around the world. Bombings and mass shootings in public places and houses of worship are common tactics in the Boko Haram playbook. Over the years, it has killed tens of thousands of people and displaced over two million people from their homes.

It is also known for attacks targeting children, a strategy it seems to have settled on in 2014 when it killed 59 male students at a boarding school in Burni Yadi, Yobe State, and kidnapped 276 female students in Chibok, Borno State. Since then, it and other groups have continued to target schools in a twisted attempt to use children as a tool for their ideological agenda.

KIDNAPPINGS:

Boko Haram has kidnapped thousands of schoolchildren since the Chibok kidnapping. The rate of kidnappings only seems to increase as armed groups realize

its effectiveness in grabbing headlines and raising cash through the extortion of parents or state governments for ransom money. No level of the Nigerian government has demonstrated any real ability to push back against this trend.

The Nigerian national government is considering legislation that would criminalize paying ransoms for the return of abducted schoolchildren. If passed, the bill would amend the Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011 by making paying ransoms a felony punishable by a minimum of 15 years in prison.

Critics of the proposed legislation believe it misses the point. They argue the fundamental problem at play is the lack of effective security measures and law enforcement, not desperate parents trying to get their children back.

The Nigerian government has had an inconsistent narrative on kidnappings and ransoms over the years. Though it officially

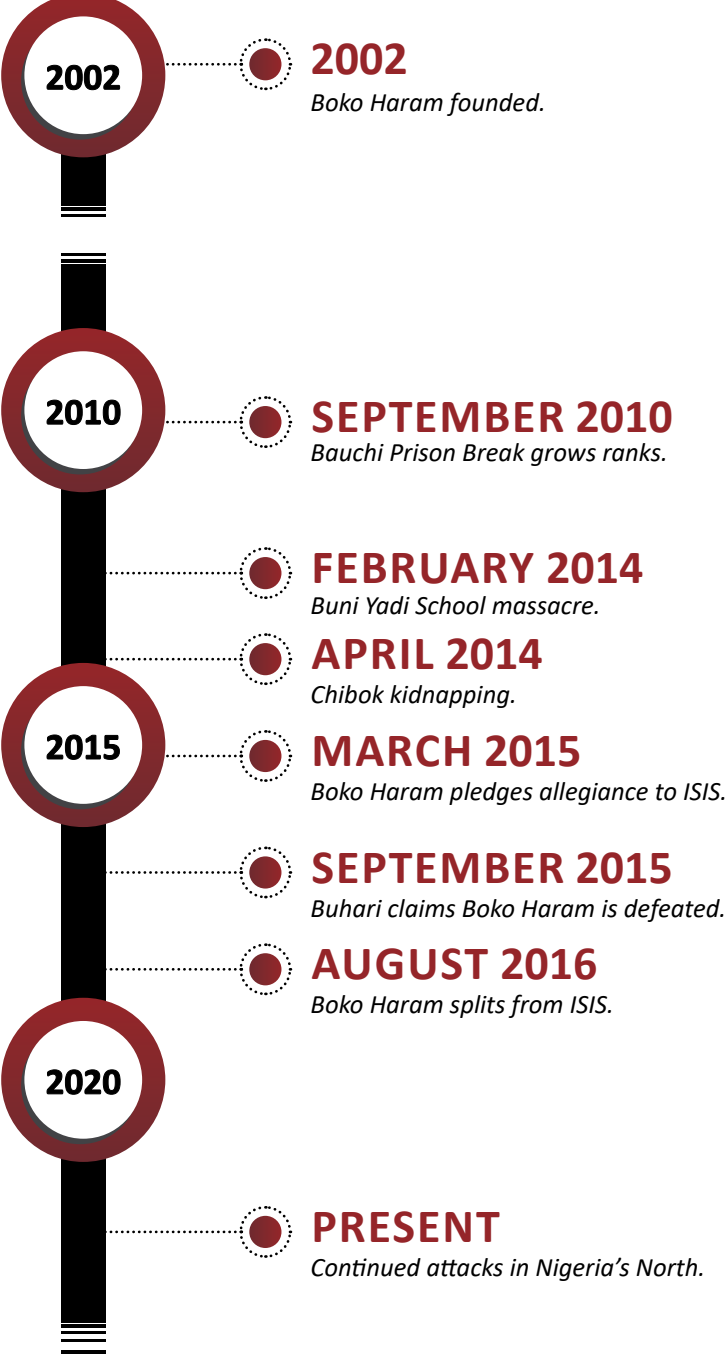
condemns the practice, the government regularly pays ransoms.

Governor Nasir el-Rufai of Kaduna State even publicly boasted that he is in contact with certain Fulani militants and paid them to stop specific attacks. Whatever the truth of that claim, however, attacks have increased under el-Rufai’s governorship.

As Nigeria wrestles with responding to the violence within its borders, the United States and others in the international community must increase the pressure on Nigeria to effectively address the problems it is facing. Ransom payments or not, the authorities should tirelessly pursue bandits, Islamist terrorists, and violent Fulani militants in the pursuit of justice.

The havoc created by Boko Haram is nearly incalculable. The damage created by their deadly attacks and extortion of communities lasts for decades or even generations.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The United States and others have long assisted Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram. In addition to years of counter-terrorism training, the United States sold attack aircraft and other large military equipment to the Nigerian government to build up its capabilities against Boko Haram. The international community has spent billions to combat Boko Haram’s influence in Nigeria. So far, the Nigerian government has seemed essentially helpless against an Islamic insurgency that has only grown in recent years and is now joined by other groups, like Islamic State West Africa Province, in the fight for Islamist control of Nigeria.
- The United States should continue to contribute to the fight against Boko Haram, but as it does so, it should pressure the Nigerian government to produce tangible results. Reports of military incompetence and even complicity with militants should be investigated and addressed appropriately. While funds should not necessarily be withheld from Nigeria’s counterterror efforts, the United States must insist on tangible results as a condition of continued assistance.



EAST INDONESIA MUJAHIDEEN

ACTS OF TERROR IN CENTRAL SULAWESI

OVERVIEW

Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT), also known as East Indonesia Mujahideen, is one of the militant groups in Indonesia behind many acts of terror in Central Sulawesi. The Poso-based group is also often referred to as the mouthpiece of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Emerging as an Al-Qaeda affiliate in 2012, MIT was the first Indonesian jihadist group to join the Islamic State (IS) in 2014. Born out of Jemmah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT), an Indonesia-based militant group seeking to establish an Islamic caliphate, MIT is often seen as closest to establishing IS-held territory in Indonesia. On July 18, 2016, MIT's former leader and Indonesia's most wanted terrorist until his death, Abu Wardah (Santoso), was killed amid intensive military and police operations. The group's presence has since waned and has less than ten remaining fighters hiding in the jungle.

Since 2012, MIT has targeted government officials and security forces in Indonesia. It has brutally killed numerous civilians, including Christians and police officers. Their attacks on victims often include beheadings and the use of explosives and shootings. Last November, four Christian villagers were killed while their houses and church were torched in Sigi regency. In May, MIT slayed four Christian farmers in Poso when they were working in a coffee plantation.

MIT was labeled a terrorist group by the U.S. Department of State in 2015 and the United Nations Security Council under the Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee.



ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) was the first group to break the news on the killing of four Christians by MIT at Salvation Army's service post in Central Sulawesi in 2020. The ICC article received more than 200,000 views, most from Indonesia. While the Indonesian government attempted to downplay MIT's religious motivation behind the attack, ICC emphasized the Christian persecution.

After the Sigi attack, ICC's field staff visited the site. We later assisted the community with a coffee grinder, a corn crusher, and a chainsaw.

On May 11, five sword-wielding MIT militants murdered four Christian farmers from Kalimago, Poso regency. ICC plans to visit the victims' families and partner with the local church to host a counseling event for the traumatized youth. Unfortunately, the plan has been postponed due to the deterioration of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

“

“Several times they were swinging the machete towards the back of the neck of my father until the head was separated from the body. Seeing what I saw, immediately I ran and grabbed my child to save ourselves. I could only hold my child as my mother ran towards my father. They caught her and tied my mother. I took my child and ran into the forest as fast as possible. It turned out that my mother was not only tied up but also splashed with blood.”

- Pinu, one of the victim's wives.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

TERRORIST ATTACKS: With its allegiance to IS, it comes as no surprise that MIT seeks to terrorize, invoke fear, and attract international attention as it fights to establish a caliphate. Beheadings, shootings, and burning of bodies and properties are common measures taken by MIT against its targets. Desperate for recognition, MIT strives to commit deadly and gruesome attacks.

UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY TO HACK AND RECRUIT: What made MIT stand out is its capacity to take advantage of technology to carry out actions. They caught authorities by surprise after they hacked the Indonesian military (TNI-AD) site and the sites of several other government agencies. Santoso and his followers have distributed a dozen videos, audios, and messages in Indonesian to various extremist forums to recruit and propagate. Through these mediums, they spread threats, especially to Indonesia’s elite counter-terrorism unit, Densus 88.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Indonesian government has an elite counter-terrorism unit, Densus 88 (Detasemen Khusus 88, or Special Detachment 88), to fight the war against terrorism. It does a decent job taking down the leaders and members of terrorist cells. However, radicalism continues to grow and spread throughout the predominantly Muslim country.
- The deradicalization programs, whether by the Indonesian National Counter-terrorism Agency (BNPT) or NGOs, seem not to be very effective. Some people argue that the very idea of the program and its approach are not well adapted to its audience. Some scholars contend that the so-called deradicalization interventions intended to normalize Islamic radicals in Indonesia have turned them toward a different kind of radicalism. With that, Jakarta should audit the current programs to build a successful rehabilitation and robust deradicalization.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2010

Santoso and his followers collected weapons and established military training sites to make Poso the Islamic State’s Indonesian base.

2012

Santoso, who took part in the Muslim-Christian conflict that wrecked Poso from 1998 to 2001, was appointed Amir, or leader of the MIT.

OCTOBER 16, 2012: MIT received international attention after killing two police officers in Tamanjeka Hamlet, Masani Village.

2014

MIT became the first Indonesian group to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State.

2016

JULY 18, 2016: Santoso died in a gunfight with the police in the remote jungle in Poso. MIT leadership was taken over by a native of Poso, Ali Kalora.

2020

NOVEMBER 27, 2020: MIT fighters killed four Christians – including beheading one victim – and torched homes and Salvation Army’s service post during an attack on Lembantongoa village in Sigi regency, Central Sulawesi.

MAY 11, 2021: MIT militants killed four Christian farmers in Poso. The body of one of the victims was found decapitated and charred.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2021: The leader of MIT, died in an exchange of gunfire with Indonesian security forces in the jungles of the mountainous Parigi Moutong regency, Central Sulawesi province.

Tombs of the four men killed in the Sigi attack.





GREY WOLVES

STARTING WARS, FAKING PEACE

OVERVIEW

Grey Wolves! The name hides an extremist ideology behind the cloak of a vague metaphor. Who exactly are Turkey’s Grey Wolves (Turkish: Bozkurtlar)? There is no easily identifiable leadership structure, yet their activities often appear coordinated. They use a vocabulary commonly associated with racism, and they are responsible for some of the most egregious religious freedom violations in Turkey’s modern history.

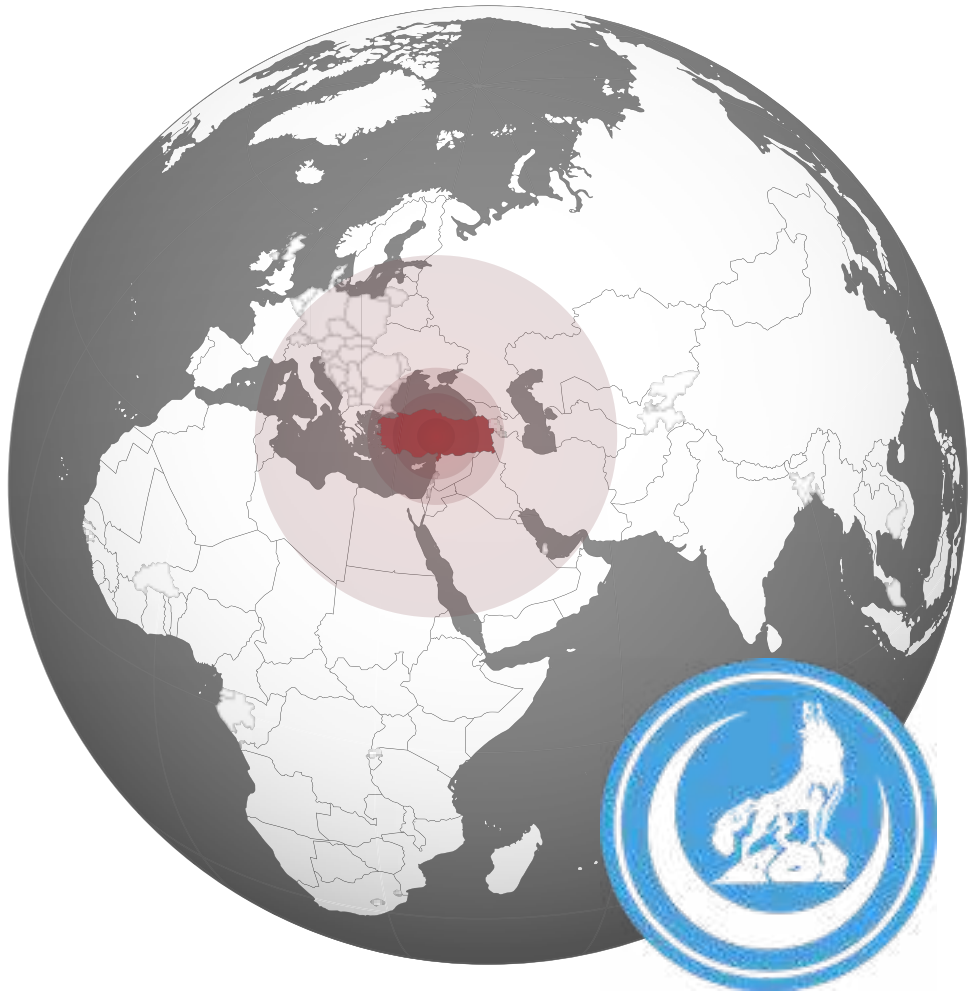
Turkish media frequently denies that the Grey Wolves exist, yet many government officials have an irrefutable connection. To those unfamiliar with it, the Grey Wolves’ language at times sounds harmless, but hidden underneath such language is the capacity to ignite a firestorm.

That firestorm has been ignited, the fruit of which is most evident throughout the many regional conflicts Turkey is engaged within. The time has come to officially name the Grey Wolves as a significant driver of persecution and an entity of concern for religious freedom violations.

UNDERSTANDING TURKISHNESS

The preamble to Turkey’s Constitution explains that the protection of Turkishness is a core component of the country’s identity. It states, “That no protection shall be accorded to an activity contrary to Turkish national interests, Turkish existence and the principle of its indivisibility with its State and territory, historical and moral values of Turkishness.”

There is no question that Turkey’s historical and moral values are rooted in the Ottoman Islamic Empire. The demise of the empire following World War I led to the creation of the modern Republic of Turkey. Most of the territory previously controlled by the empire was lost, and new countries emerged. The empire previously enjoyed a status as the heart of the Muslim world, but after the empire’s dissolution, that heart moved elsewhere. Who was to blame for



these changes? Non-Turks, the Christians. **THE GREY WOLVES AND MHP**

As one ethnic Turkish Muslim convert shared with ICC, “I became a Christian and immediately felt like I betrayed my country. I still feel that way. During the independent war, we fought against lots of countries, and some bishops blessed the Turks’ enemies. That’s why people started to hate Christianity and Christians. Also, some of the enemies’ flags had crosses, like Greece... Turkish people believe that if you aren’t Muslim, you’re an enemy. When you ask people’s religion here, some people will say I’m a Turk. Because people believe that if you’re a Turk, then you have to be Muslim.”

The marriage of a Turkic ethnic identity with an Islamic religious identity is ingrained within Turkey’s culture, and it

“I became a Christian and immediately felt like I betrayed my country. I still feel that way. During the independent war, we fought against lots of countries and some bishops blessed the Turks’ enemies. That’s why people started to hate Christianity and Christians. Also, some of the enemies’ flags had crosses, like Greece... Turkish people believe that if you aren’t Muslim, you’re an enemy. When you ask people’s religion here, some people will say I’m a Turk. Because people believe that if you’re a Turk, then you have to be Muslim.”

– Anonymous Turkish Christian

is a marriage radicalized by Turkey’s Grey Wolves. When identifying themselves, they use many names, including the terms ultra-nationalists and idealists (Turkish: Ülkücü).

They are sometimes described as the fascist paramilitary arm of Turkey’s Nationalist Movement Party (Turkish: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP)), a political party aligned with the ruling government’s AKP party three years ago. This alliance legitimized the Grey Wolves ideology throughout society. A popular slogan used by the MHP describes the unification of ethnicity and religion as, “Our bodies are Turkish; our souls are Islamic. A body without a soul is a corpse.”

They make it clear that regional expansionism is a goal of this unification. The MHP’s website states, “(Our vision) is to make our country a super power and a ‘leading country’ both in her region and in the world with a new concept of Turkey-centered civilization and world order.” Indeed, the evidence of this goal is everywhere.

Turkey is not the same country as it was three years ago, and its ability to influence across continents remains unparalleled compared to other Middle Eastern countries. The underlying Grey Wolf ideology of the MHP has not only been exported globally, but is involved in several racist religious freedom abuses.

For outsiders looking in, understanding the Grey Wolves can be challenging. This is particularly true since Turkey’s state-run media often denies an organization known as the Grey Wolves but affirms its existence in other contexts.

For example, the Daily Sabah stated that “Bozkurt” means Grey Wolves in Turkish, and its use has been banned in France and Germany, even though no such movement with the name exists.” In a separate Daily Sabah article, the Turkish Foreign Ministry affirmed the Grey Wolves’ existence. It said, “The fact that a regulation published on Feb. 11 (2019) in accordance with the Austrian Interior Ministry’s so-called “symbols law” includes the ‘grey wolf,’

which is the symbol of a legal political party in our country, is on the same list as the symbol of a bloody terrorist organization like the PKK is a complete scandal.”

THE ÜLKÜ OCAKLARI CULTURAL CENTERS

The legal political party in question, the MHP, claims that they do not support extremism, instead often referring to the Grey Wolves through different names, particularly the Idealist Movement. Anadolu Agency quoted the 2020 MHP Deputy Chairman saying, “The cultural and social representative of the idealist movement is still Ülkü Ocakları and the political representative is MHP.”

Ülkü Ocakları Cultural Centers, or Idealist Cultural Centers, are the Grey Wolves’ education arm responsible for exporting its ideology abroad. An obvious hierarchal structure does not necessarily connect the centers, nor is there an obvious and consistent academic standard. Ideology unifies the group, and the centers commonly use materials produced by Grey Wolf influencers.

For example, Ahmet Arvasi is sometimes regarded as the “ideological father” of the Idealist Movement. His book, The Turkish Islamic Ideal,, was key for framing the kind of Islamic-Turkic nationalism that the Grey Wolves are known for.

The nuances of the meaning of Islamic-Turkic nationalism are debated throughout the Ülkü Ocakları Cultural Centers and other parts of society, but the end result is very clear. Through these centers, the Grey Wolves have gained a foothold across multiple countries. Violence follows wherever they are established. France banned the Grey Wolves, and Germany’s Parliament has passed a similar motion. Austria banned the Grey Wolf salute. There have been multiple calls for the European Union to pass similar resolutions and even include the Grey Wolves on the terror list.

SECURITY LEVEL: WEAPONIZED GLOBALIZATION

Pan-Turkism is the driving goal of the Grey Wolves, which means the physical

and ideological unification of ethnic Turks worldwide.

While not its first military activity in Syria, Turkey’s 2018 invasion set precedent and gave Turkey powerful access to other armed actors, many of whom had connections with ISIS and other extremist groups. Syrian Turkmen became powerful allies, and Grey Wolf schools were developed as well as humanitarian programming that aligned with those values.

Turkey deployed Syrian mercenaries prior to 2018, but the legitimization of Grey Wolf ideology into military and foreign policy changed the mercenary dynamics. The motivation for mobilization changed. For example, Libya was seen as seen as a necessary geographical placement for long-term goals at home. A mercenary could “do his duty” in Libya because it would help him later in Syria.

The deployment of mercenaries to Artsakh showed a motivational change. Mercenaries were motivated on the basis of uniting Turks by targeting Armenian infidels. Unlike in other deployment contexts, global masses were also weaponized in addition to the mercenaries. For example, Grey Wolf “death squads” patrolled Armenian neighborhoods in France and Armenian Christian sites in the U.S. were targeted.

The message was clearly sent: Turkey’s Grey Wolves are worldwide, and they are ready at a moment’s notice.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IMPLICATIONS

As self-described Turkish nationalists, the Grey Wolf movement can be easily labeled as racist. But the religious freedom implications that flow from the definition of Turkishness are profound.

It is no coincidence that the instances of Christian persecution inside modern Turkey’s borders often include a Grey Wolf element.

In 1981, a member of the Grey Wolves attempted to assassinate Pope John Paul II. A Grey Wolf member murdered Father Andrea Santoro in Trabzon in 2006. The 2007 assassination of Armenian journalist

“*“Our bodies are Turkish; our souls are Islamic. A body without a soul is a corpse.”*

– Common Grey Wolf slogan

Hrant Dink is widely believed to have been executed by the Grey Wolves—either funded by or with the foreknowledge of Turkish Intelligence. The Grey Wolves are also believed to have had some involvement in the 2007 Zirve Publishing House murders.

These incidents are well-known amongst the religious freedom advocate community and demonstrate a pattern of targeted assassinations conducted by a handful of perpetrators. Each case involves a sense of mystery—a sense of unanswered questions that will have to remain unanswered after the passage of so many years.

Today, the religious freedom incidents involving the Grey Wolves are different, though the mystery remains. Their activities appear globally coordinated by an invisible hand, and their ideology appears militarized and organized in conflict zones. It is an unprecedented cross-border exportation of ethnic-religious freedom abuses.

For example, the Sultan Murad Brigade in Syria is one of Turkey’s main allied groups and maintains close relationships with the Grey Wolves and MHP. Members often post pictures while making the Grey Wolf salute, and several international organizations documented their involvement in multiple human rights violations.

They are, quite simply, terrorists.

When Turkey encouraged Azerbaijan to begin a conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenian: Artsakh) in Fall 2020, Turkey provided military

support by paying Syrian mercenaries to fight alongside the Azeri army. A number of those mercenaries were from the Sultan Murad Brigade. International Christian Concern (ICC) documented dozens of photos and videos showing unidentified fighters using the Grey Wolf salute during the Karabakh war. The Syrian fighters were explicitly recruited to “kill Christians.”

Videos and photos show a particular kind of brutality toward Armenian Christians during this war, including beheadings. The Grey Wolf salute punctuates many of these violent activities.

The Grey Wolves have a long history of terrorism toward ethnic-religious minorities, but their skill-set has evolved. They are stronger than in the early 2000s. Three years ago, the MHP’s political alliance with Turkey’s ruling AKP legitimized them, giving the Grey Wolves a new sense of unity.

They are militarized, they are efficient, and they are on the move globally. Their mission is Pan-Turkic Islamism, and any ethnic Christian who exists within their targeted sphere is at risk.

Now is the time to name the Grey Wolves for what they are: an entity of particular concern for religious freedom.



ICC FINDINGS

Because of the growing influence of the Grey Wolves around the globe, ICC works to investigate the group’s reach and spread, inform relevant U.S. government officials, and hinder their development through awareness and advocacy campaigns.

More specifically, ICC staff researched the use of Grey Wolf symbolism and rhetoric throughout the 2020 Karabakh War. It documented the research in a report on the conflict to spread awareness about the pervasiveness of the group (Report on page 140).

ICC also sent two of its Washington, D.C. analysts to Artsakh to establish humanitarian networks on the ground for delivering much-needed aid after the war. In discussions with victims of the war and newly-hired staff, ICC discovered that it was correct in its evaluation of the involvement of the Grey Wolves within

the Azerbaijani military and the Turkish-paid mercenaries who had fought against Armenia in the war, specifically targeting the Christian identity of Armenians living in Artsakh.

Another major concern of ICC was whether the Grey Wolves had infiltrated the United States. To examine this possibility, ICC analysts met with Armenian leaders in San Francisco after the Armenian community had been attacked on multiple occasions in 2020 by vandalization and arson. Although no explicit connections between the Grey Wolves and these attacks were discovered, Grey Wolf ideology was prevalent in the violence against the Armenian community.

ICC will continue to monitor Grey Wolf activity in the United States with the expectation that this presence will continue to grow as the group expands.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

CLOAKED LANGUAGE:

The Grey Wolves rely upon a vocabulary of coded phrases that hide the true meaning from outsiders. This includes phrases such as the Red Apple, the Blue Homeland, the Great Turan, etc. Understanding this vocabulary is the language of the elect, cultivating an us versus them mentality within communities.

LEAKED OUT VISION:

State-run media begins preparing the electorate for major policy decisions months in advance through misinformation. An enemy is identified, blamed for shared social issues, dehumanized, eventually conquered, with the victor labeled as a savior/ power figure. For example, Daily Sabah headlines regarding Artsakh circled this pattern: “Armenia Main Obstacle to Permanent Peace, Stability in South Cauca-

sus” (07/20), “Armenian Attacks Not Just Against Azerbaijan, Target Turkic World as Whole” (09/20), “Ankara Played Crucial Role in Baku’s Victory” (12/20), “Turkish Influence on the International Balance of Power” (06/21).

DISMANTLED AGENCY:

Pursuing actions that reduce the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. Threats or acts of violence, such as aggressive demonstrations surrounding the Armenian Patriarchate in Fall 2020, are an obvious dismantling of agency of choice. Rhetoric from the ruling parties (AKP and MHP) can also dismantle one’s agency to explore alternatives. For example, state denial of the 1915 Genocide means that citizens cannot research this subject matter safely from within the country.

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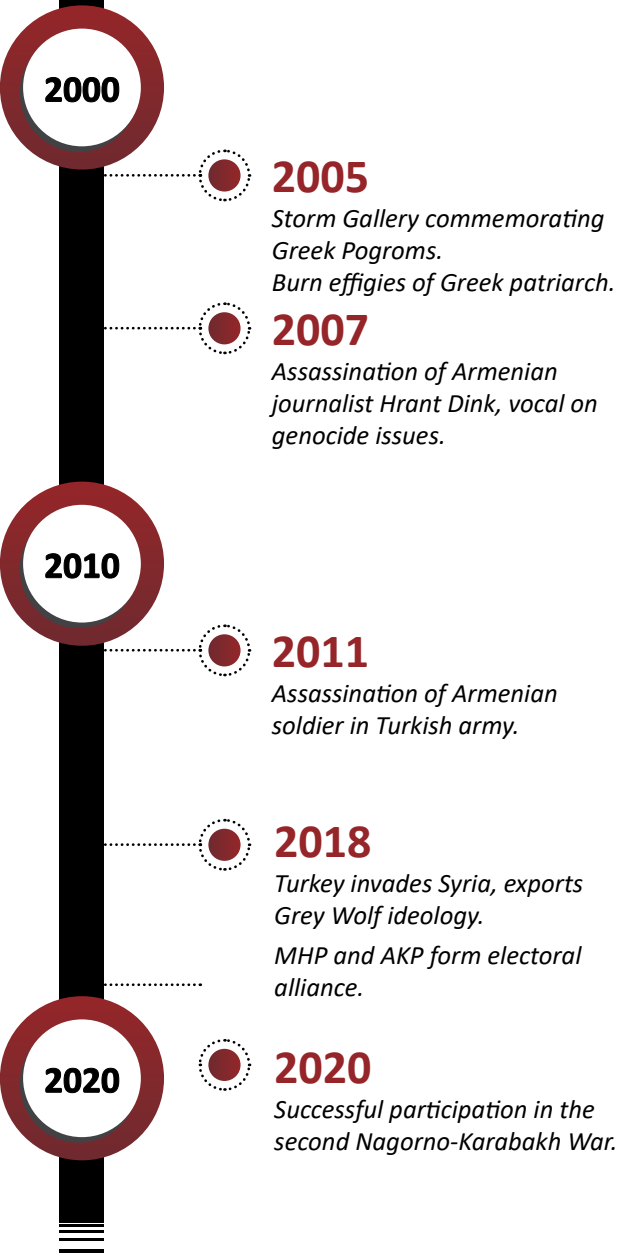
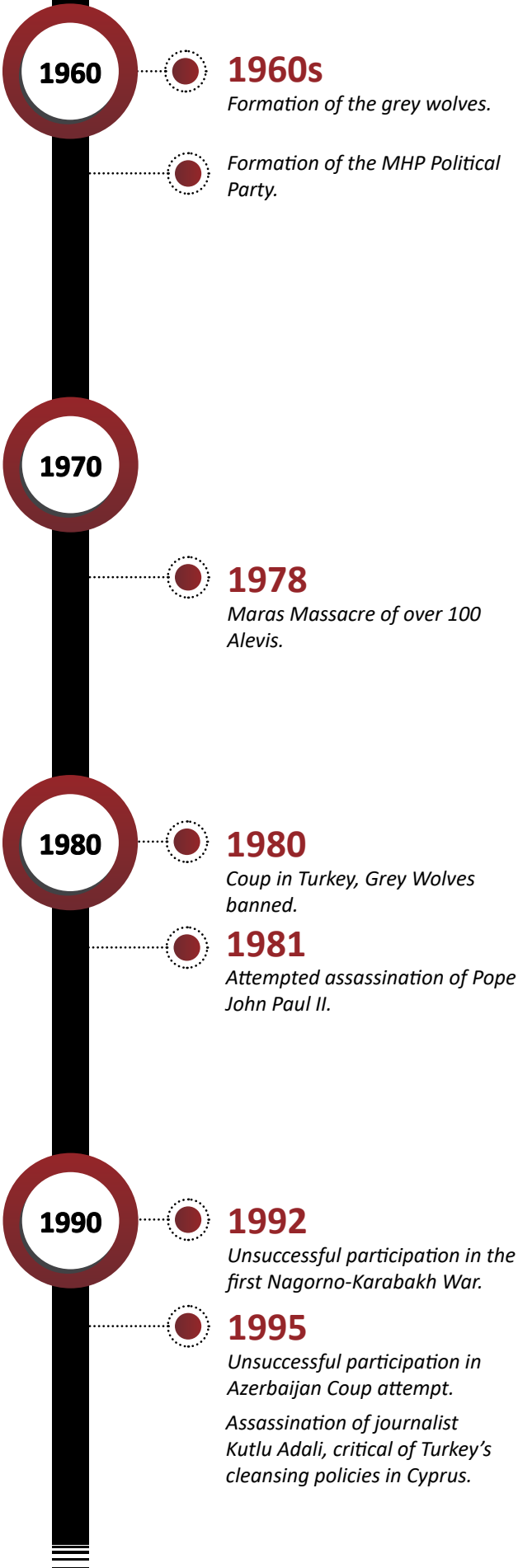


“Our vision is to make our country a super power and a ‘leading country’ both in her region and in the world with a new concept of Turkey-centered civilization and world order.”

— From MHP website (of which the Grey Wolves are commonly referred to as the paramilitary arm).

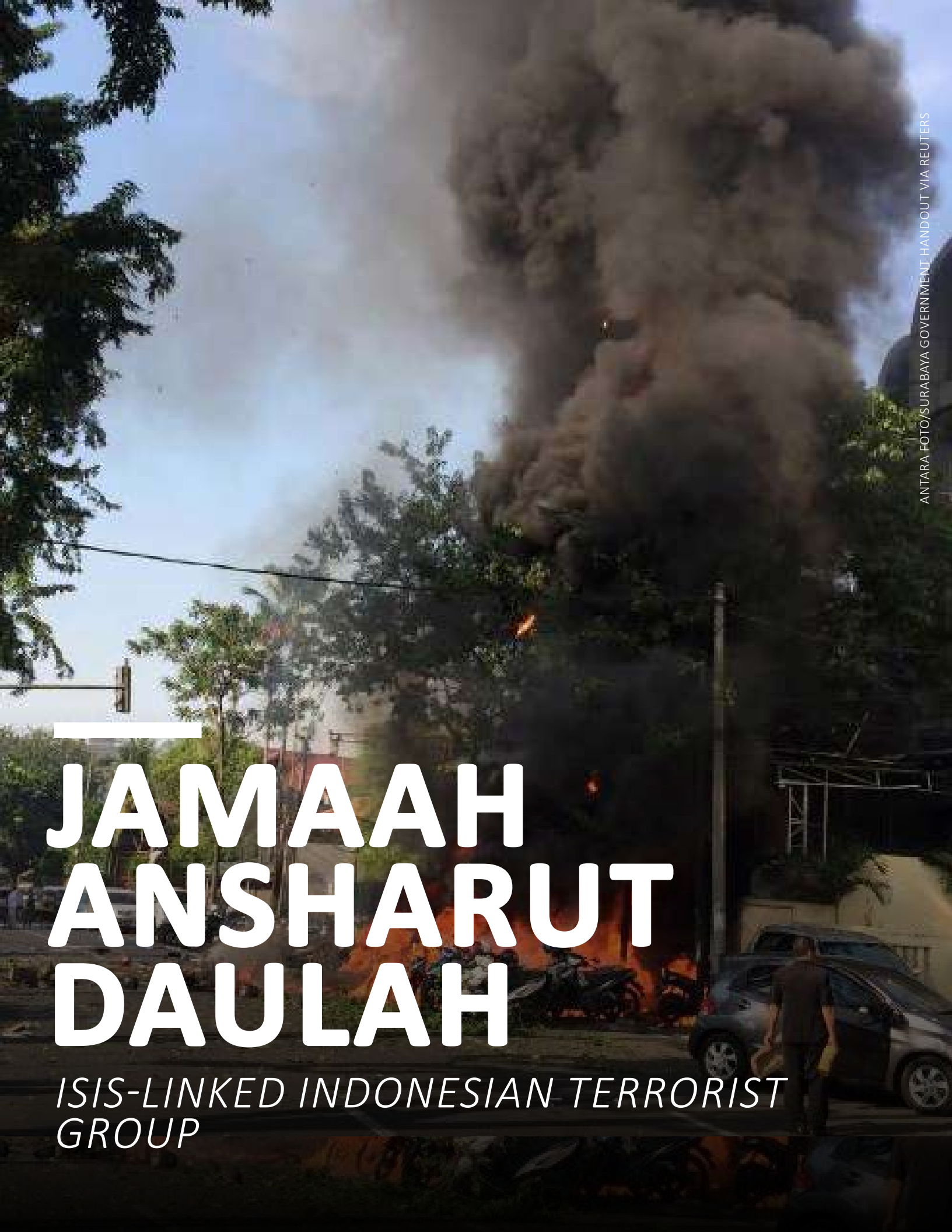
DISCREDIT, DISTRACT, ESCALATE:

Whenever a legitimate human rights abuse is observed by a third party, rather than evaluating the merit of those claims, the third party is evaluated and condemned. Often, there is a threat of an escalation of tension as part of an attempt to discredit and distract. For example, MHP leader Bahçeli responded to U.S. recognition of the genocide by saying, “Biden’s description crippled by scandal, and then Turkey-U.S. relations, are at risk of skidding to completely different mediums. With a mindset that tries to cast a genocide shadow into a country with which it has established friendship and strategic ties, it is probable that nothing will be the same as before.”



ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- ICC recommends that the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom designate the Grey Wolves as an Entity of Particular Concern for religious freedom.
- Additionally, to follow the lead of some Western European countries, ICC also recommends that the U.S. Department of State designate the Grey Wolves as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.
- To further educate the American audience on the danger of the Grey Wolves, ICC also plans to work with members of Congress to publicly condemn the use of Grey Wolf ideology and rhetoric in statements made by Turkish government officials.



ANTARA FOTO/SURABAYA GOVERNMENT HANDOUT VIA REUTERS

JAMAAH ANSHARUT DAULAH

ISIS-LINKED INDONESIAN TERRORIST GROUP

OVERVIEW

Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) is an Indonesia-based terrorist group composed of nearly two dozen Indonesian extremist groups pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group was formed in 2015. Currently, it is the largest ISIL-affiliated terror network in Indonesia and has followers across the archipelago. Unlike Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) that targets embassies and hotels, the group sustains a campaign of violence over Christians and law enforcement.

JAD believes in an extremist interpretation of jihadist ideology, allowing Muslims to fight non-believers in defending their version of Islam. This interpretation is evident in its use of bombs and violence when they attack their targets and victims.

Since its founding, JAD has been the most active terrorist group in Indonesia. It is behind several attacks against churches and police, such as the attack against a police post in Jalan Thamrin in Central Jakarta in January 2016; a church bombing in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, in November 2016; armed assaults on police officers in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, in September 2017; coordinated suicide bombings on three churches by six members of the same family in Surabaya, East Java, in May 2018; and the 2019 Jolo Cathedral bombings in the Philippines.

The United States government designated JAD a terrorist organization in January 2017 in a move to disrupt Islamic State operations in Southeast Asia. In June 2018, JAD founder and leader Aman Abdurrahman was sentenced to death by the South Jakarta District Court. A month later, the same court disbanded JAD.

Motorcycles burn following a blast at the Gereja Pantekosta Pusat Surabaya (Pentecost Church Central Surabaya), in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, May 13, 2018.



ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) has served the victims of terrorist attacks orchestrated by JAD on numerous occasions. Starting from Samarinda church, ICC provided funding for the young victims of the bombing in 2016 to have the much-needed surgeries done in China and Malaysia, given the lack of adequate healthcare in Kalimantan.

In 2018, ICC helped repair a car damaged during the Surabaya church bombings. Traumatized by the attack, the Christian family's daughter would not ride the car with marks as it reminded her of that horrific day. The repair helped her mend her fear.

After the Palm Sunday attack in March 2021, ICC also provided transportation expenses so that family members of the victims could come to Makassar to take care of three local nursing school students. The cell phones destroyed in the attack were also replaced with ICC support.

“

“I remember the time after the incident. The children didn't want to attend Sunday School. The parents said that so many police would come to protect them, so the kids had a little bit of courage. But, when the kids could not find the police around them, they started crying and got scared.”

— Pastor Paraninangi of Oikumene Church.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

TERRORIST ATTACKS: As an umbrella group that hosts Islamic State supporters in Indonesia, JAD is behind the major terrorist attacks in recent years. Their jihadist ideology drives them to take out the “infidels” and law enforcement with suicide bombings or lethal weapons. Since its founding, JAD has killed more than 50 and wounded hundreds.

EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN: Even though the involvement of women in suicide bombings is not an entirely new phenomenon for Indonesia, the 2018 Surabaya church bombings involving both women and children was particularly concerning as it shows the success of radicalization of entire families. While the children were too young to comprehend their parents’ aspirations, the deeply rooted extremist ideas were so convincing that their parents decided to sacrifice their young ones for their afterlife rewards.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Although the Indonesian government has an elite counter-terrorism unit, Densus 88 (Detasemen Khusus 88, or Special Detachment 88), to fight the war against terrorism, and it does do a decent job taking down the leaders and members of these terrorist cells, radicalism continues to grow and spread throughout the predominantly Muslim country.
- The deradicalization programs, whether by the Indonesian National Counter-terrorism Agency (BNPT) or NGOs, seem not to be very effective. Some people argue that the very idea of the program and its approach are not well adapted to its audience. In fact, some scholars argue that the so-called deradicalization interventions intended to normalize Islamic radicals in Indonesia have instead turned them towards a different kind of radicalism. With that, Jakarta should audit the current programs to build a successful rehabilitation and robust deradicalization.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2015

NOVEMBER 2015: JAD was established through a meeting in Batu, Malang, East Java.

2016

NOVEMBER 13, 2016: A terrorist threw a Molotov cocktail toward the Oikumene Church in Samarinda, East Kalimantan province, killing a child and wounding three others.

2018

MAY 13, 2018: Three churches in Surabaya were attacked by suicide bombers, including women and children, leaving 28 people dead.

JULY 31, 2018: The South Jakarta District Court has banned JAD as a “forbidden organization.”

2019

JANUARY 29, 2019: Two bombs carried by a JAD couple exploded in the morning at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines. Twenty people were killed, and 102 others injured.

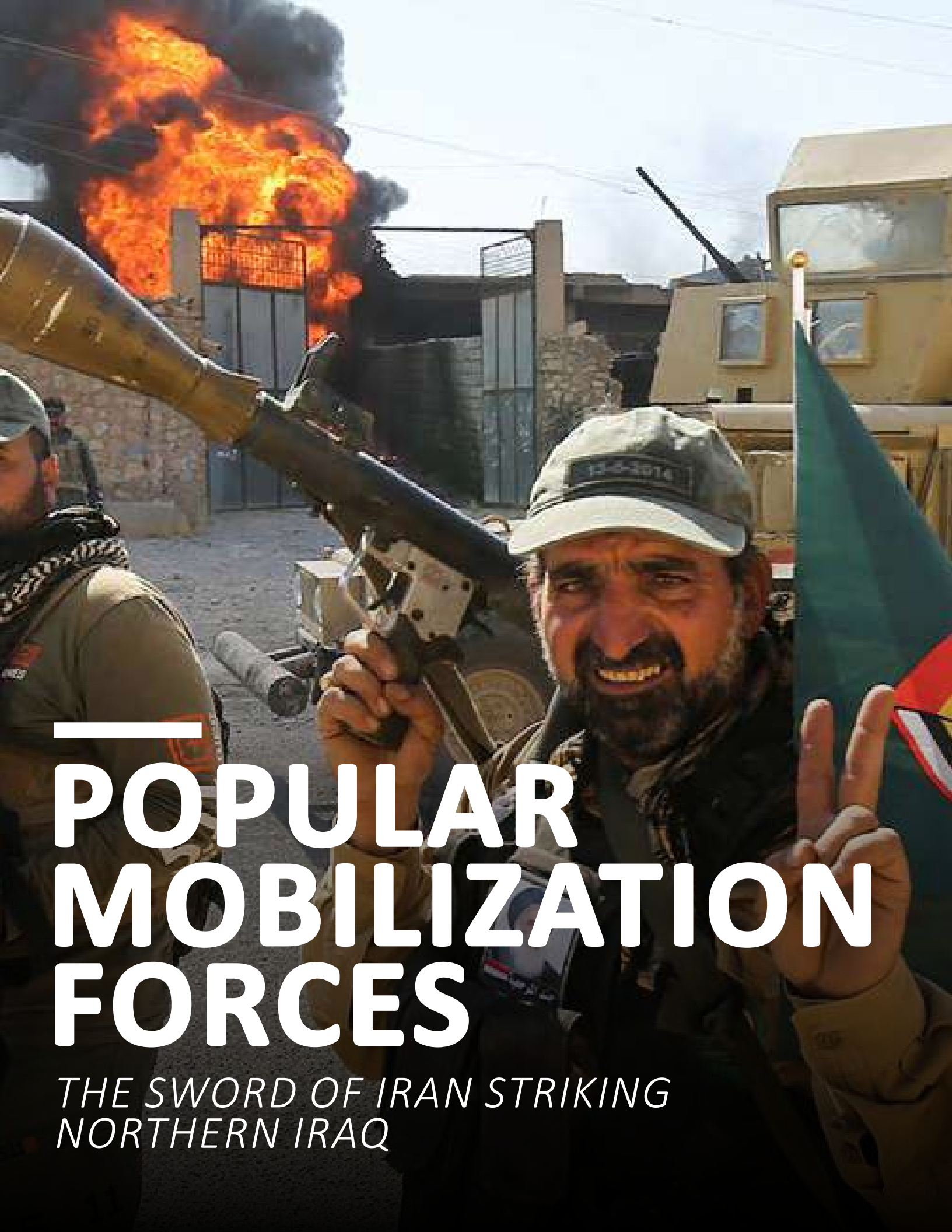
OCTOBER 10, 2019: Another JAD couple stabbed Indonesia’s chief security minister Wiranto. Wiranto survived and was flown by helicopter to Jakarta, where he underwent surgery.

2021

MARCH 28, 2021: A suicide bombing occurred at the Sacred Heart of Jesus Cathedral in Makassar, Sulawesi, on Palm Sunday. Several were wounded.

Samarinda Church attacked in 2016 by a JAD member.





POPULAR MOBILIZATION FORCES

THE SWORD OF IRAN STRIKING
NORTHERN IRAQ

OVERVIEW

The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) is an umbrella term for a group of militias in Iraq that are supported and backed by the Iranian government. The PMF receives funding, orders, and other types of resources from Iran. They are closely connected with Iranian-backed political parties in Baghdad, effectively providing the muscle for Iran to implement and force its own policy goals within Iraq. Quite often, this comes at the expense of Iraq's Christians.

The PMF was first established in 2014 as a coalition of primarily Shia-militias. They mobilized to fight against ISIS, a Sunni-terrorist group that committed genocide against Iraqi Christians and Yazidis. ISIS seized a significant amount of territory within Iraq, stunning the international community with the capture of Mosul in the Nineveh Plains, one of the most religiously diverse areas of Iraq.

The PMF represented a significant component of those fighting back against ISIS and participated in liberating territories formerly held by the extremists. However, the PMF then took control over the Nineveh Governorate and has refused to cede their position back to Iraq's Federal Government, citing national security reasons.

The PMF used its position of paramilitary strength to function as a de facto shadow government across the Nineveh Plains. Before ISIS, Shia Muslims did not have a strong presence in the region. But the PMF has used its influence to force demographic change in favor of Shia Muslims. For example, the city of Bartella is historically and overwhelmingly Christian. The genocide forced residents to relocate.



Today, Bartella is primarily a Shia stronghold of the PMF, and Christians cannot safely return. The PMF also controls or exerts significant influence over local resources, infrastructure, and governance.

Iran's strategy behind the PMF is to create a "Shi'ite Crescent" that creates a safe passageway for Iranian interests spanning across Iraq and toward the Mediterranean Sea. As a major country of concern for religious freedom, it is unsurprising that Iran has exported these tactics into the PMF structure. Christians displaced by ISIS are allowed to return to Nineveh. However, the PMF creates multiple barriers that effectively discourages or prohibits Christians from returning. PMF forces overall pose a threat to the continuation of Christian existence in northern Iraq by presenting security challenges for the country. A stable and secure Christian community is not a sustainable goal as long as the PMF continues to operate in northern Iraq at the direction of Tehran.

ICC FINDINGS

As Christians began to return to their homes in northern Iraq and to face the challenges posed by the PMF militias, ICC used its resources on the ground to compile periodic Transitional Justice Reports to track the issues impacting the daily lives of Christians within the Nineveh Plains. ICC is actively providing humanitarian relief and development support throughout Iraq, allowing us to cultivate a network of Christians across the country. Many beneficiaries are recovering from ISIS. They and others often share a similar struggle with the kinds of persecution promoted and encouraged by the PMF. ICC continuously advocates for improved security conditions within Iraq, with ideas gained through our firsthand experience of navigating the country's difficult environment. We have seen the positive benefits of such advocacy, allowing us to facilitate small but important safe havens for Christians during their moments of need.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE: Much of the physical violence associated with PMF affiliates occurs in Iraq’s federal areas, such as Baghdad. Iraq has seen a significant spike in assassinations and kidnappings since 2020. These events have caused an alarming outcry by many Iraqis, who remember the frequency of targeted kidnappings and assassinations during the early 2000s. The latest series of incidents occur within a similar environment in that there is an increase in militia tension. In Iraq’s current domestic landscape, many of these militias are heavily backed by Iran.

For Christians, it is something that is observed with concern and frustration. The assassinations of activists send a clear message that speaking of human rights issues is intolerable by militias. The perpetrators of such incidents often go unpunished. Christians suffered significant human rights abuses during the genocide of ISIS, and the problems they currently face are primarily driven by competing

paramilitary factions. A spike of activist assassinations sends the message that speaking out about their challenges could come with serious consequences. For those residing in PMF strongholds such as the Nineveh Plains, the message is clear: stay silent about any challenges caused by the hands of the PMF or risk losing everything again.

INTIMIDATION: Although checkpoints are a regular feature of Iraq and serve as a necessary security precaution, PMF checkpoints are a prime example of how they can be used in negative and unethical ways.

Crossing these checkpoints can prove, at best, intimidating, and at worst dangerous, for anyone traversing them whose background and identity is different from that promoted by the PMF. A significant amount of humanitarian work poured into Nineveh following the ISIS genocide, much of it directed toward the victims of that genocide, who were predominately

religious minorities. Humanitarian aid can be blocked at checkpoints, beneficiaries extorted for so-called “protection money,” among other harassment and intimidation tactics.

POLITICAL MANIPULATION: Multiple Iraqi sources have described the PMF as almost equal to, or perhaps worse, than ISIS due to their paramilitary and political control integration. Their role in defeating ISIS boosted Iranian-backed groups in Iraq, solidifying their role within Iraq’s government structure. Feelings persist throughout Iraq that Iran’s influence is the driving force behind most political decisions. Its presence is not always welcomed, creating much tension as different groups compete for leadership. For Christians, it is a frustrating experience. What often starts as sectarian tension eventually builds into conflicts that force massive displacement of Christians, such as what happened in the early 2000s and 2014.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- As ICC continues to cover the crimes committed by the PMF militias against Iraq’s Christians, ICC recommends that United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) designate the PMF militias as an entity of particular concern for religious freedom. ICC also reiterates USCIRF’s recommendation to the U.S. State Department and Treasury Department to continue implementing the sanctioning tools that it has access to against PMF leaders to curb the influence of the group.

“That’s supposed to have been done years ago. I know the US waited a long time to have a good reason to target them. The US could never have done that unless they targeted the embassy. [But] we must consider the amount of guns those militias have before doing a big crime like that. The militia will be angry and use their guns to take revenge from anyone related, but there will be more victims or innocent people killed.”

- An Iraqi Christian on Regarding the US airstrikes on an Iranian General and PMF leader

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2014

PMF EMERGES
PMF forces emerged after the June capture of Mosul in Iraq’s Nineveh Plains. While most had some presence in Iraq dating back even to the 1980s.

2017

EXPANSION
ISIS is declared militarily defeated in Iraq and the PMF accelerated the process of becoming entrenched in Nineveh. An Imam Khomeini School was opened.

2018

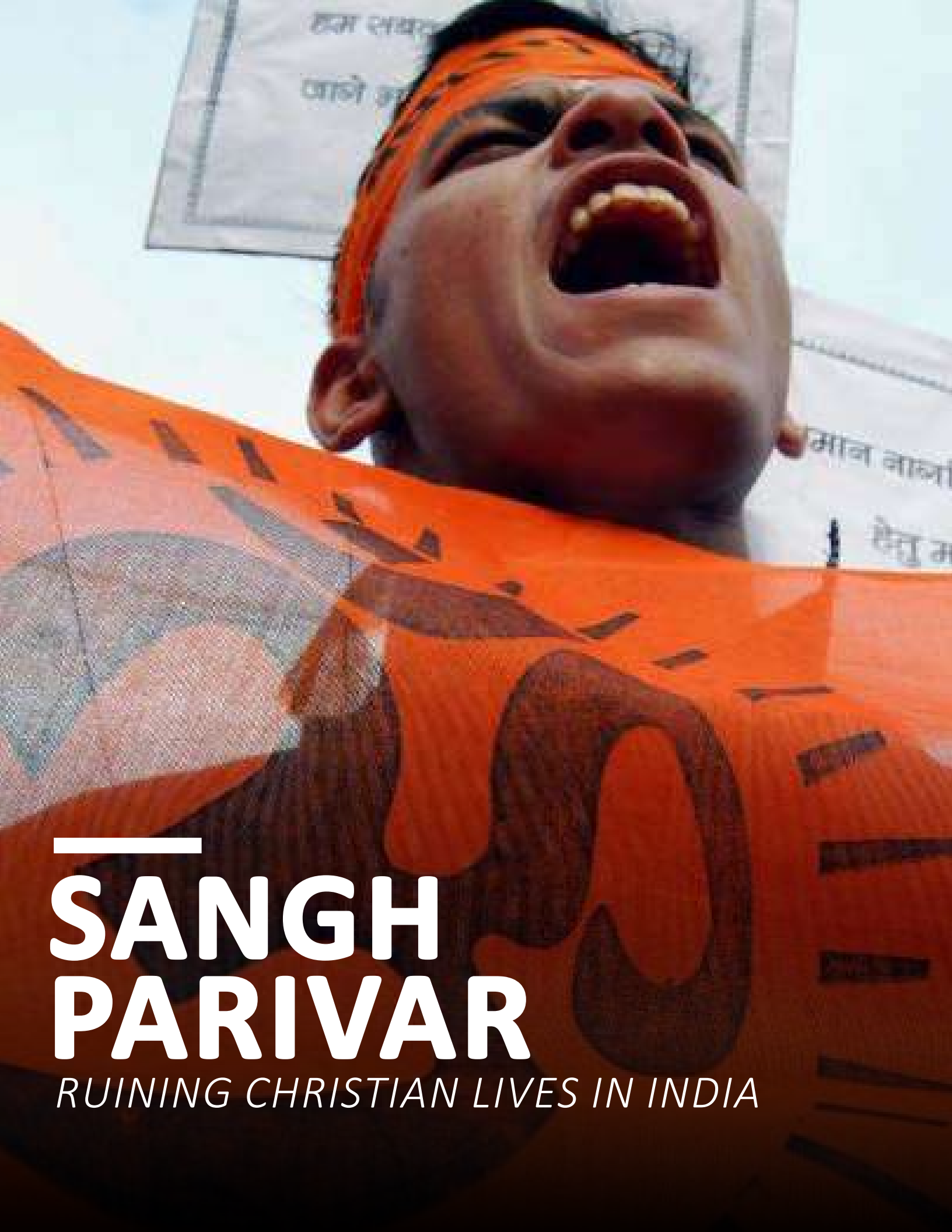
PMF GAINS SUPPORT
the largest electoral blocs of the national election drew significant support from PMF networks

2019

“COUNTERTERRORISM”
PMF continues to serve and even grows its role as a counter-terrorism partner in Iraq, further solidifying its influence within Iraq’s security structure.

2020

INCREASE IN TERROR
An increase of assassinations and kidnappings by groups affiliated with the PMF. The Iraqi government makes various attempts to control the PMF, including having Iraq’s Counter Terrorism Service (CTC) to temporarily detain 12 members of a proxy group. A U.S. airstrike kills an Iranian general whose leadership was crucial for the PMF. Despite attempts to rein in the PMF, Iran’s influence only continues to grow in Iraq.



SANGH PARIVAR

RUINING CHRISTIAN LIVES IN INDIA

OVERVIEW

The literal meaning of Sangh Parivar is ‘Family of Organizations,’ a term used to refer to the web of Hindu nationalist organizations operating in India with a single agenda: to make India a Hindu nation.

The various groups under the Sangh Parivar are adherents of a single ideology called Hindutva, meaning ‘Hinduness.’ It seeks to establish a theocratic Hindu-majority state where religious minorities, including Christians, are relegated to second class status and Hinduism is protected and promoted. The establishment of this state would be a complete rejection of India’s founding principles, which provide religious freedom and equal protection to all religious groups.

The term ‘Sangh Parivar’ was originated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological parent of the Hindutva, to absorb as many organizations as possible that share similar interests in making India a Hindu nation. Some of the most prominent organizations that are part of the Sangh Parivar include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP), the Bajrang Dal, and the Visva Hindu Parishad (VHP). These organizations play a unique and complementary role in the Sangh Parivar’s push to establish India as a Hindu nation.



ICC FINDINGS

While the Sangh Parivar has a single agenda, the establishment of India as a Hindu nation, each member of the Sangh Parivar has a unique and complementary role. These various groups pursue different lines of influence, mutually cooperating and supporting each other’s activities. Over the years, International Christian Concern (ICC) has documented how the more prominent Sangh Parivar groups have worked together to the detriment of India’s religious minorities.

RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH (RSS): The RSS is an ideological founder of the Hindutva movement and was founded in 1925. The RSS, however, claims they

are simply a cultural organization, working to protect Hindu culture from Western influence. As a member of the Sang Parivar, the RSS fuels a religiously intolerant narrative that views all non-Indic faiths, like Christianity and Islam, as foreign and something to be feared.

The RSS demonizes Christians and other religious minorities through these hateful narratives, instigating violence in the streets. The RSS also uses these narratives to advocate for laws and policies that are discriminatory against religious minorities.

It is estimated that there are more than 6 million members of the RSS across India in over 50,000 locations. These members meet daily and dedicate part of their meetings to martial arts training. Many

members eventually use this training against religious minorities.

BHARATHIYA JANATHA PARTY (BJP): The BJP is the political wing of the Sangh Parivar. Using the hateful narratives established by the RSS and the millions of RSS members across India, the BJP uses political victories to establish India as a Hindu nation.

BJP politicians often use hate speeches against Christians for political gain. These speeches help spread the hateful narratives established by the RSS. They also help instigate violence against Christians in the streets.

BJP politicians then use political support garnered by these narratives to pass laws

that discriminate against Christians. Anti-conversion laws and cow slaughter bans name just a few of the laws and policies the BJP enacts as a part of their nationalist agenda. These laws also provide a legal cover under which street thugs can attack Christians with impunity.

VISHVA HINDU PARISHAD (VHP): The VHP mobilizes resources within and outside India to support the Hindutva movement. The organization uses these resources to support religious programs and projects that further establish India as a Hindu nation and alienate religious

minorities.

For example, the VHP targets Christian Educational and Health Institutions, accusing these institutions of converting large numbers of Hindus to Christianity to make India a Christian nation. They also sow the narrative that there is a conspiracy led by “Western agencies” to take over India. These narratives only help fuel the fires of intolerance against Christians and other religious minorities, justifying violence and discriminatory laws and policies.

BAJRANG DAL: The Bajrang Dal is the youth wing of the Sangh Parivar. This group is often mobilized as foot soldiers to enforce the Hindutva ideology on the street level. Operating under the umbrella of impunity created by the BPJ and fueled by the hateful ideology espoused by the RSS, members of the Bajrang Dal attack Christians and their places of worship, hold rallies against Christians, and intimidate any who they view as an enemy of the Hindu nation. In recent years, the severity of attacks by the Bajrang Dal has increased even to the extent of targeted killings.

they are discriminated against unless they agree to recant their faith. Under these conditions, Christians are not allowed to collect water from the village well, buy or sell goods in the village, or interact with other Hindu members of the village.

GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS (FCRAS & SC BENEFITS): The Government of India, led by the BJP, uses several programs to discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities. To stop funds for Christian ministry from entering the country, NGOs must adhere to ever stricter FCRA regulations. These regulations allow the government to scrutinize and ban any foreign funds from coming into the country that they find concerning. This has been used to cancel many Christian ministries. Scheduled Caste Benefits (and affirmative action program for low-caste peoples) is denied to Christians and Muslims by law. This stops low-caste individuals from converting to Christianity or Islam because they would automatically lose government benefits. This is especially harmful to Christians as 80% of the Christian population in India comes from low-caste backgrounds.

FORCED RECONVERSIONS (GHAR WAPSI): Members of the Sangh Parivar use violence and social pressure to force Christians to “reconvert” to Hinduism. These programs are called Ghar Wapsi, which translates to Home Coming.

BLASPHEMY LAWS: India has a blasphemy law that criminalizes any action that offends the religious sentiment of another. Like anti-conversion laws, members of the Sangh Parivar use false blasphemy allegations to harass pastors and justify violence against Christians.

THE CYCLE OF IMPUNITY: Attacks on Christians and other religious minorities often go unpunished. In most cases, BJP leaders use anti-minority rhetoric for political gain. This hate speech inspires more assaults on Christians by street-level members of the Bajrang Dal and RSS. When the police and local authorities take no action against these perpetrators, they are emboldened. Year after year, attacks on Christians are reported in greater number and greater severity.

SOCIAL BOYCOTTS: Local villager leaders, often inspired by leaders from Sangh Parivar, pass local resolutions outlawing the practice of Christianity in the village. As a punishment, Christian members of the village are socially boycotted. This means

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

ANTI-CHRISTIAN NARRATIVES AND HATE SPEECHES: One of the key methods members of the Sangh Parivar use to persecute Christians is propagating anti-Christian narratives and hate speeches. Narratives paint Christianity as a foreign religion seeking to destroy the very fabric of Indian culture, and something to be feared cultivates intolerance and justifies attacks on Christians. These narratives are even used to justify the passage of discriminatory laws, like anti-conversion laws, that blatantly deny Christians their religious freedom rights and create a legal umbrella under which they can be persecuted with impunity. Hate speeches given by leaders of the Sangh Parivar groups help propagate these narratives, ever-increasing the level of religious intolerance in India and instigating more attacks.

ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS: Formally called Freedom of Religion Acts, anti-conversion laws allow state governments in India to regulate religious conversions. These laws also criminalize forced religious conversions. Members of the Sangh Parivar, especially those perpetrating acts of violence on the street, use false accusations of forced religious conversions to harass pastors and justify violence. Currently, anti-conversion laws are enacted in nine states across India.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Note: Due to the broad reach of the Sangh Parivar, its inclusion of many groups, and centuries-long history, ICC has just tracked the last 12 months as a timeline to show how these groups work together to persecute Christians. Sangh Parivar leaders often use carefully managed trigger points to inspire spikes in persecution on the street level.

2020

SEPTEMBER

BJP leaders in the Chhattisgarh State Government removed reservation benefits for tribals who converted to Christianity. This policy, and the hate speeches used to justify its enactment, triggers a spike in attacks on Christians in the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh.

NOVEMBER

The BJP-led State Government of Uttar Pradesh enacts a new anti-conversion law, blaming Christians for numerous forced religious conversions of Hindus to Christianity. In the months that followed, a surge of religiously motivated attacks on Christians was documented until the state was placed in lock down due to COVID-19.

NOVEMBER

The Chief Minister of Karnataka State announces his government’s intention to enact an anti-conversion law, citing illegal conversions to Christianity. A surge in attacks on Christians was documented following this announcement.

2021

JANUARY

Madhya Pradesh enacts an anti-conversion law. Following the enactment of the law, a vast number of independent house churches were closed. After six months, ICC documented at least 47 incidents of persecution against Christians in Madhya Pradesh.

JUNE

The arrest of two Muslim men in Uttar Pradesh on the charges of converting 1,000 Hindus to Islam triggered more than twenty incidents of Christian persecution in just two months.

AUGUST

Bajrang Dal and VHP hold a rally in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, against conversions to Christianity. Increased attacks on Christians in Chhattisgarh were documented following this rally.

“Let us drag people from the church and stop conversions at any cost.” Sahu challenged those gathered at the rally to make the Bastar District a “conversion-free zone.”

- Amit Sahu, President of the Chhattisgarh BJP

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Last year, during the first annual International Religious Freedom Summit, ICC highlighted persecution in India perpetrated by the various arms of the Sangh Parivar and educated policymakers on the brutal reality for Indian Christians. During this event and in the report that accompanied it, ICC recommended that the U.S. State Department designate India as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for religious freedom violations. In 2020, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended that the State Department make this designation, the highest of its kind, for the first time in decades. In 2021, USCIRF reiterated this recommendation, citing the deterioration of persecution over the past year in India due to the influence and ideology of Sangh Parivar groups. ICC reiterates USCIRF’s recommendation and urges the State Department to designate India as a CPC to push back against BJP influence.
- ICC also continues to urge all United States officials to bring up religious freedom concerns in meetings with members of the Indian government. Because the United States is closely allied with India, putting such an emphasis on religious freedom would hopefully impact human rights in India to improve the lives of Indian Christians and hinder persecution perpetuated by Sangh Parivar.



TEHREEK-E-LABBAIK

FOMENTING POLITICAL UNREST IN PAKISTAN

OVERVIEW

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) is a far-right political party in Pakistan.

Founded by Khadim Rizvi in 2015, the party has quickly become a major force in promoting an extremist Islamic fundamentalist vision for the country. They recently made international headlines for staging violent protests in response to comments made by the president of France. Pakistani police eventually arrested the TLP's leader, Saad Rizvi, but were quickly forced to release him after the party staged three days of violent protests.

Aside from their well-known protest movements, the TLP's primary goal is to convert Pakistan into an Islamic political state, implement Sharia law, and preserve the country's infamous blasphemy law. In line with these ambitions, they have frequently praised or been connected to extremist attacks on religious minorities, specifically Christians and Ahmadis.

ICC FINDINGS

In collaboration with a United States government agency, International Christian Concern (ICC) profiled the top five threats to religious freedom in Pakistan, the TLP being among them. ICC provided a detailed profile and history of the TLP and made policy recommendations to best counteract the party's influence in the country.



FORMS OF PERSECUTION

POLITICAL ACTIVISM: The TLP seeks political representation in Pakistan's local and national legislatures as a political party. Being only six years old, the party has yet to garner significant victories in the country. TLP's only victories in the 2018 general election were three seats out of 168 in the Sindh regional assembly and none in the National Assembly. However, after the controversy with the French president's statements on blasphemy and the subsequent mass protests in 2020 and 2021, their growing grassroots popularity could significantly benefit them in the 2023 general election.

MASS PROTESTS: In late 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron defended a French teacher who was murdered for using a caricature of Muhammad in a class on free speech. His statements triggered protests, largely led by the TLP, across Pakistan as they called for severing diplomatic ties with France. Only after the Pakistani government brokered a deal with the TLP in November did the protests cease. However, the TLP launched another wave of protests in April 2021 when the government failed to act on their demands for diplomatic consequences for France. Deadly protests broke out across Pakistani cities for a week as TLP supporters blocked routes in and out of major cities. The protests only ended after hostages were exchanged on both sides (including the TLP's leader), and the Pakistani Assembly agreed to debate expelling the French Ambassador.

BLASPHEMY LAW SUPPORT: As an Islamic fundamentalist political party, the TLP primarily supports those who commit honor killings connected to blaspheming Muhammad and intimidating officials who may acquit accused blasphemers. When Pakistan's Supreme Court acquitted Christian Asia Bibi of blasphemy, TLP supporters held a mass protest and refused to unblock streets until Asia was hanged. TLP leadership threatened the judges who had freed Asia, and the government reprimanded party leadership for their threats.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGISLATION: The U.S. government should consider visa restrictions and sanctions on the leadership of TLP, especially Saad Rizvi. The TLP has been an instrumental force behind significant civil unrest in Pakistan and has openly presented itself as an opponent to global free speech. Moreover, it has repeatedly demonstrated violent hostility to Pakistan’s religious minorities, and anyone accused of blasphemy.

POLICY: The government has taken a substantial step by banning the TLP. However, this status can be challenged before the country’s Supreme Court. The U.S. should encourage the Pakistani government to defend its ban on the party and pursue the necessary requisites steps to disband the party officially.

In addition, the U.S. should encourage the Pakistani government to keep a watch out for Rizvi and his political allies to ensure they do not attempt to resurrect the TLP under a different name while pursuing the same ends.

GRASSROOTS/MEDIA/BOYCOTTS: Like many extremist organizations, the TLP has become well-versed in using social media to reach their target audience and create viral content, thanks mainly to their leader, the 27-year-old Saad Rizvi. Social media companies, especially Twitter, should apply their purported social media ethos and take responsibility for viral, anti-Christian rhetoric that aggravates a culture already hostile to religious minorities. These companies should ban producers of hateful and misleading content directed at religious minorities, create the machine learning systems necessary to identify these narratives on their platforms, and take proactive steps to keep this content from spreading.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2015

Party founded by Islamic scholar, Khadim Hussain Rizvi.

2018

JULY 2018: Receiving an estimated 2.2 million votes in elections across Pakistan, TLP wins three seats in the Sindh regional assembly.

SEPTEMBER 2018: TLP’s heavy criticism of Princeton economist Atif Mian leads to Mian’s dismissal from government service for being a member of the Ahmadi religious minority.

OCTOBER 2018: TLP triggers mass protests in response to Asia Bibi’s acquittal.

2019

A senior TLP official is found connected to the killing of a college English professor for allegedly “blasphemous” remarks.

2020

OCTOBER 2020: TLP praises the killer of French teacher Samuel Paty for the use of a caricature of Mohammad in class, referring to the killer as a “Shaheed” (saint/martyr); TLP holds mass protests over comments by the French president that require government intervention.

NOVEMBER 2020: Khadim Rizvi dies, passing leadership of TLP to his son, Saad Rizvi.

2021

APRIL 2021: The TLP reignite protests over comments by the French president’s 2020 comments, leading to Saad’s arrest (and subsequent release) and the Pakistani government banning the party.





INDIVIDUALS



KIM JONG-UN

THE “PRESIDENT OF PERSECUTION”

OVERVIEW

Under the leadership of Kim Jong-un, countless individuals in North Korea have lost their lives, been tortured, or sentenced to long terms of hard labor for their faith. Outside of a few tightly controlled state institutions allowed for show, the regime relentlessly punishes all religious practices.

Human rights watchdogs have pointed for years to North Korea as one of the most severe violators of religious freedom. It is a socialist system that prohibits dissent and demands absolute devotion to the Kim family, which has ruled since 1948 after Japanese control ended.

Kim Jong-un, the self-styled Supreme Leader in his late 30s, has ruled since April 2012 after his father, Kim Jong-il, died.

In the North Korean government, all authority comes from Kim. He retains ultimate authority over every area of government and has purged many top officials.

Despite strict prohibitions on emigration from the country, defectors who escape the country regularly tell stories of horrific government abuse. The prison system, for example, is used to punish political enemies—including Christians—with severe mental and physical torture. Stories of this abuse abound and include incidents of violence against women, children, and even infants designed to force the populace into submission to Kim’s authority.

As Supreme Leader, Kim is morally and legally responsible for the systematic abuses perpetrated by the system he heads. Recognizing this fact, western governments worldwide have sanctioned Kim in a largely futile attempt to impose some form of accountability for his actions.

ABOUT

KIM JONG-UN

OFFICIAL TITLE:
Supreme Leader

ASSUMED OFFICE:
December 30, 2011

BORN:
January 8, 1982

PARTY AFFILIATION:
Workers’ Party of Korea



ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) historically reported on the lack of religious freedom in North Korea, producing research on the topic for the U.S. government.

In addition, ICC works to assist North Korean Christians, both in and outside the country, through the support of various programs like literature distribution and radio broadcasts intended to strengthen and encourage this oppressed community of believers.



“Religion is a kind of myth. Whether you believe Jesus or Buddha, it essentially believes a myth.”

— Kim Il-sung

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

The North Korean government under Kim uses every means at its disposal to persecute people of faith. Seemingly no tactic is off-limits—including reports of authorities making women kill their newborn infants as punishment for supposed crimes. Sharing one’s faith, owning a Bible, or being associated with someone who does is ample grounds for torture, indefinite imprisonment, or even execution.

The government works to create a system where citizens owe sole allegiance to the state and Kim as the state’s head. Other loyalties are strictly prohibited. Even having contact with someone outside the country can draw the wrath of the authorities.

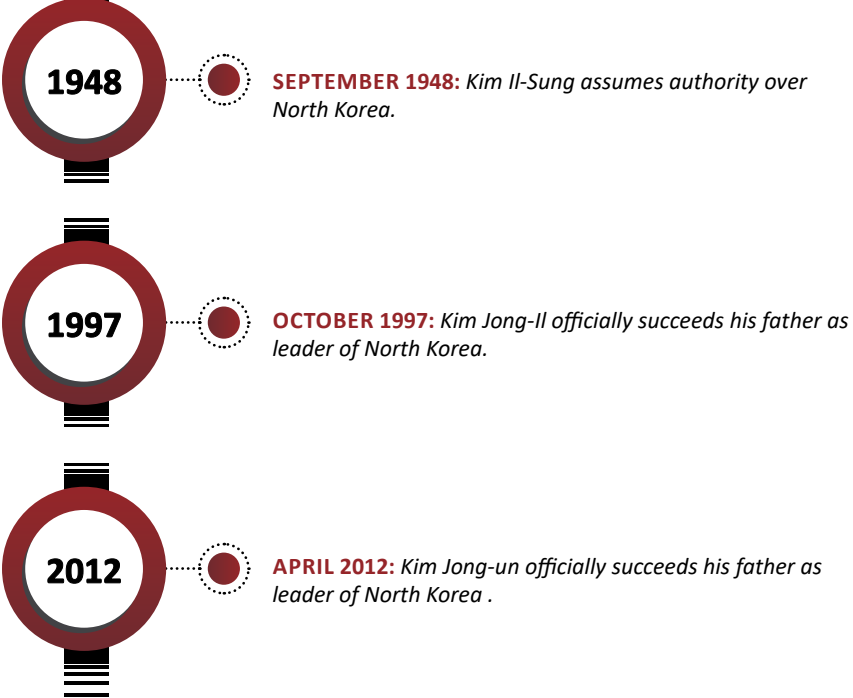
One of the primary instruments for North Korea’s campaign against religion is its network of prisons. Separated into political prisons and so-called “reeducation camps,” Christians caught by the authorities can be sent to either. In addition to camps inside the country, North Korea also sells prisoners to work in large rural prison camps in Russia.

Kaechon Political Prison Camp, located about 50 miles northeast of Pyongyang, is a typical example of the system of oppression operated by Kim. There, somewhere between 15,000 and 50,000 prisoners live in grossly inhumane conditions. Torture and extrajudicial killings are commonplace.

A pregnant woman at Kaechon testified to the UN that at the camp, guards kicked her until she went into labor, beat her unconscious, and woke up to find her baby’s corpse in a pile of bodies.

As a result of Kim’s oppression, Christians practice their faith exclusively in secret. Believers worship alone or in very small underground gatherings since even the slightest hint of their faith can be devastating. Nevertheless, Christianity exists even in the prisons. Bold prisoners occasionally share their faith with others, risking worse treatment or death to spread the gospel.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



“Religious people should die to cure their habit.”
— Kim Il-Sung

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The religious freedom issues in North Korea may seem unsolvable. After all, they have only gotten worse in the decades since the Kim family took power. It seems highly unlikely that religious freedom will rise to the top of U.S. foreign policy objectives in the country as long as North Korea presents a nuclear threat.
- Yet, it would be a mistake to give up on religious freedom in North Korea. Seven members of the UN Security Council expressed their concern in December 2020, saying that North Korea’s “human rights violations pose an imminent threat to international peace and security.” China and Russia objected to a request by these countries to conduct a public briefing on the human rights situation in North Korea.
- The U.S. and its allies should continue to pressure North Korea on its human rights record.
- Additionally, the U.S. should pressure North Korea’s allies, namely China and Russia, to stop their support for the regime. Through its influence on the international stage, the U.S. is well equipped to exert pressure on North Korea and its allies in the region.



EBRAHIM RAISI

FROM MURDERER OF CHRISTIANS TO
ISLAMIC LEADER

OVERVIEW

In July 2021, Ebrahim Raisi was elected the president of Iran in an election heavily manipulated by Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Raisi, a hardline conservative, dominated his lone moderate opposition thanks to severe election manipulation by Khomeini.

In the months leading up to election day, a panel of officials under the Supreme leader's jurisdiction disqualified every candidate with the potential of competing with Raisi, eliminating all barriers on his road to eventual victory.

Beyond the implications of Raisi's election on democracy in Iran, or lack thereof, his administration poses a significant threat to human rights in the country and Iran's relationship with the United States. In his first few days as president, Raisi only solidified concerns of his uncooperative, potentially dangerous tendencies. While demanding that the United States lift economic sanctions imposed by former President Trump and reinstate the controversial Iranian nuclear deal, Raisi said that even if he were granted the opportunity to meet with President Biden, he would refuse.

Raisi is the first-ever Iranian president to be elected while under United States sanctions imposed in response to his horrific human rights record. In 1988, as part of a judicial death commission, Raisi helped sentence more than 30,000 Iranians to death for political subversion in trials that lasted mere minutes.

ABOUT EBRAHIM RAISI

OFFICIAL TITLE:
8th President of Iran

ASSUMED OFFICE:
August 3, 2021

BORN:
December 14, 1960



ICC FINDINGS

While Raisi served as the judiciary chief, International Christian Concern (ICC) closely followed developments of persecution within the justice system of Iran. ICC staff compiled evidence supporting the continued abuses of human rights happening at Evin Prison, one that Raisi oversaw, and submitted a report to the U.S. Department of Treasury for Global Magnitsky sanctions against the prison.

As Raisi moves into his new role as president, ICC analysts are already tracking how Christians on the ground will be affected and working to serve them when persecution increases.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

TORTURE: As judiciary chief, Raisi sentenced many Christian converts to torturous punishments, such as flogging, on account of their Christian beliefs. Raisi also sentenced multiple Christians to prison for their religion, sending them to facilities like Evin Prison that are known violators of human rights and regularly torture inmates for forced conversions.

EXECUTION: Raisi has a long history of sentencing prisoners of conscience to death. Raisi served as a judge on Iran’s infamous “Death Committee,” a judiciary panel that handed down thousands of death sentences to prisoners of conscience in what many human rights organizations have deemed a crime against humanity.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Currently, Iran is designated as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom violations by the State Department, in accordance with recommendations made by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.
- Additionally, several U.S. executive departments have placed various sanctions on the Iranian regime, including many members of Raisi’s cabinet as well as President Raisi himself. As ICC anticipates that persecution of Christians will continue to increase under Raisi’s leadership, as his abysmal human rights record would indicate, ICC recommends that the U.S. government keep up the pressure on the regime via the use of sanctioning capability.
- U.S. leaders should also investigate the use of new sanctioning tools that have not been fully utilized, like those under Global Magnitsky Act, which can be implemented against specific individuals or entities for human rights violations.



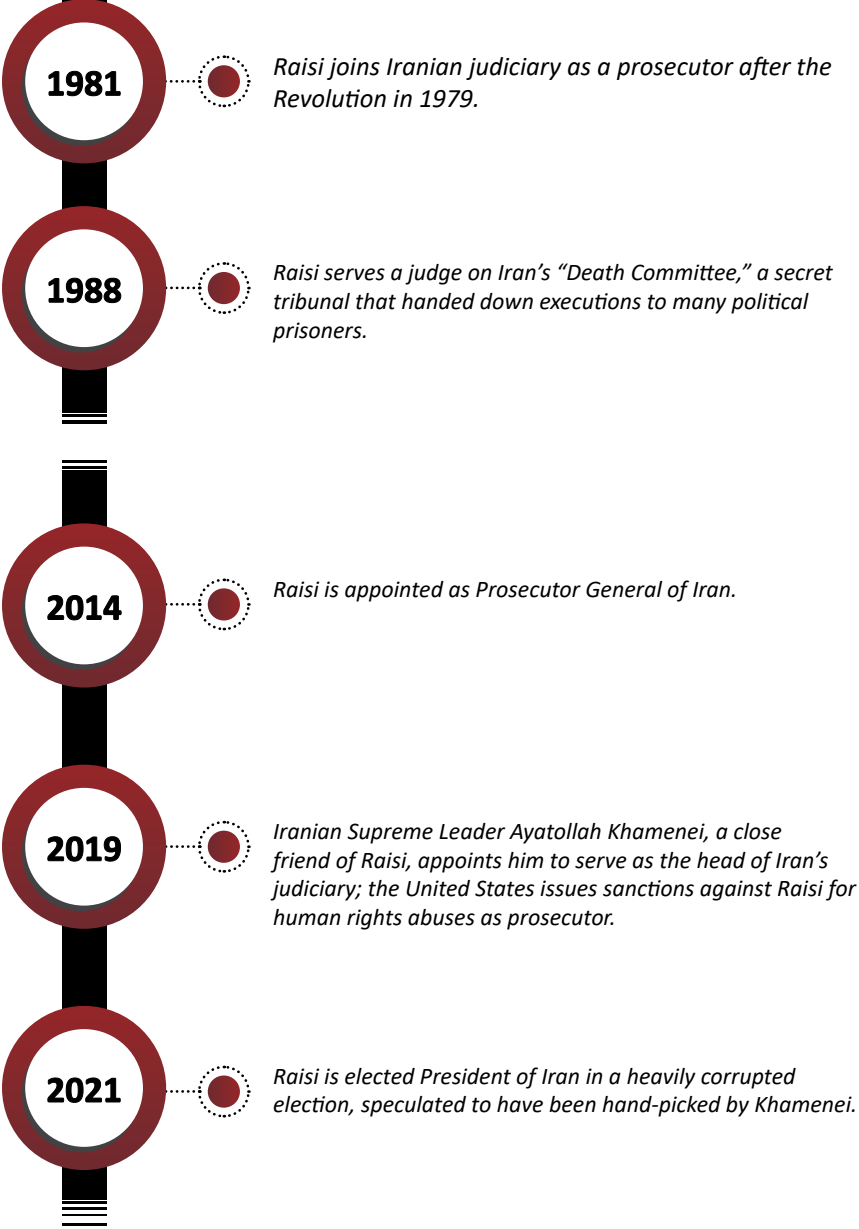
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“Preventing the mixing of men and women in the office environment is in order for men and women to be able to provide better services to the people, and this is a good move to create a suitable working environment and effort for women.”

— Ebrahim Raisi on his views of gender segregation

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



“Is the fellowship of a few Christian brothers and sisters in someone’s home, singing worship songs, reading the Bible, and worshipping God acting against national security?”

- A Christian convert sentenced to prison under Raisi’s judiciary for “propaganda against the [Iranian] regime.



NARENDRA MODI

LEADING A NATION THAT ATTACKS CHRISTIANS

OVERVIEW

As Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi is complicit in the persecution of Christians.

His administration has overseen a massive cultural shift in India from a more pluralistic society to one where Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) has dominated religious life.

Modi's administration has consistently punished all forms of dissent, whether in suppressing political protestors during the 2020 CAA riots or cracking down on human rights NGOs that seek to hold the government accountable.

Conversely, the Modi administration has frequently looked away when its Hindutva allies violently targeted religious minorities. Prime Minister Modi actively suppresses dissent through his administration and fails to hold persecutors accountable. He has sent a message throughout India that his administration will tolerate the persecution of Christians.

ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) consistently works to track the networks of persecution caused by Modi's leadership and his system of impunity.

Last year, ICC surveyed Indian Christians

to see how Modi's colleagues in BJP leadership and the passage of their anti-conversion laws throughout Indian states have affected the persecution of Christians. During the first annual International Religious Freedom Summit hosted in

Washington, D.C., ICC advocacy staff presented these findings to educate colleagues in the NGO community and government stakeholders regarding Modi's dangerous effects on Christian persecution in India.

ABOUT

NARENDRA MODI

OFFICIAL TITLE:
14th Prime Minister of India

ASSUMED OFFICE:
May 26, 2014

BORN:
September 17, 1950

PARTY AFFILIATION:
Bharatiya Janata Party



“



“I’m a Hindu nationalist because I am born Hindu.”

— Modi in a 2013 Reuters interview.

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

The Modi administration targets Christian charities and human rights organizations that challenge its image of a Hindu-dominated India.

In 2017, the government shut down the international Christian ministry Compassion International under accusations of carrying out “religious conversions.” The New York Times estimated that roughly 500 ministries in India that partnered with Compassion had to close.

In addition to outright shutting down ministries, those that remained found it increasingly difficult to receive financial support from outside India. The Modi administration instituted these burdensome

legal requirements placed on Christian ministries.

The Modi administration is also hostile to those who wish to hold it accountable for human rights abuses. For example, Amnesty International, one of the oldest and largest international human rights organizations, was forced to close its India offices due to pressure from the Modi administration. While the Indian government claimed Amnesty had violated laws on foreign funding (a similar accusation used against Christian ministries), it is widely believed the act was politically motivated to silence Amnesty’s criticism of the Indian government’s abuses.

Perhaps the most egregious act of

persecution by the Modi administration is its inaction.

There are virtually limitless reports of persecution against pastors, new or lifelong Christians, and whole churches by Indian officials and police. Hindu extremists who commit acts of vandalism, violence, and even murder frequently go unprosecuted if there is no public outcry to hold the government accountable.

This knowing inaction by the Modi administration may be the single most significant contributing factor to the dire state of religious freedom in India and a passive form of persecution that allows Hindu radicals to persecute India’s Christian minority with impunity.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY: The Modi Administration allows an anti-Christian, anti-minority culture to flourish in India by refusing government officials and communal agitators accountable. To encourage the administration to reverse course, the U.S. and its allies should consider economic and visa sanctions against key decision-makers in the Modi administration that have failed to protect India’s Christian minority.

The three other nations of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad), Australia, Japan, and the U.S., should jointly begin a meaningful dialogue on religious freedom with India, emphasizing the common human rights values all nations of the Quad possess. If necessary, the other three nations of the Quad should consider creating meaningful and measurable steps for India to help improve religious freedom conditions.

LEGISLATION: In line with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom’s (USCIRF) recommendations, Congress should move to designate India a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for “engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).”

Congress should emphasize improving religious freedom conditions at the national level with India in any future strategic or economic partnerships.

MEDIA/GRASSROOTS: For decades, India has built an international image of itself as a pluralistic nation that has respect for the beliefs of all; that image is not an accurate picture of Modi’s India. The media should make a deliberate effort to highlight the severe human rights abuses perpetrated against India’s religious minorities due to the government’s inaction. The media should show how the failure of Indian officials at nearly every level of government to investigate and prosecute radical Hindus contributes to the severity and frequency of persecution in the country.

Modi’s party, the BJP, is connected to a sprawling network of Hindutva organizations that all share the goal of seeing India become a Hindu nation. The media can expose largely hidden networks connected to the BJP and hold them accountable for any religious freedom violations they may be connected to—whether simply through funding or in the direct chain of command.

Hindu extremists have proven effective in using social media to publish false information about minorities and spread their dangerous ideologies. Meanwhile, social media companies in the last decade have become proficient in identifying and labeling target phrases that appear on their platforms. Therefore, social media companies should use this technology to track anti-Christian/anti-minority rhetoric and develop a strategy to combat Hindu extremist misinformation.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

2002

As Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi’s actions and statements following a train accident significantly contributed to a riot where radical Hindus attacked the local Muslim minority; the estimated death toll of the riot was approximately 2000, mostly Muslims.

2014

Modi, the BJP candidate, is elected Prime Minister of India.

2017

India’s Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) is used to shut down the Indian operations of major Christian charity, Compassion International, one of an estimated 11,000 NGOs stripped of its license since Modi’s election.

2018

Human Rights Watch found the Modi Administration failed to “prevent or credibly investigate” attacks on religious minority communities.

2019

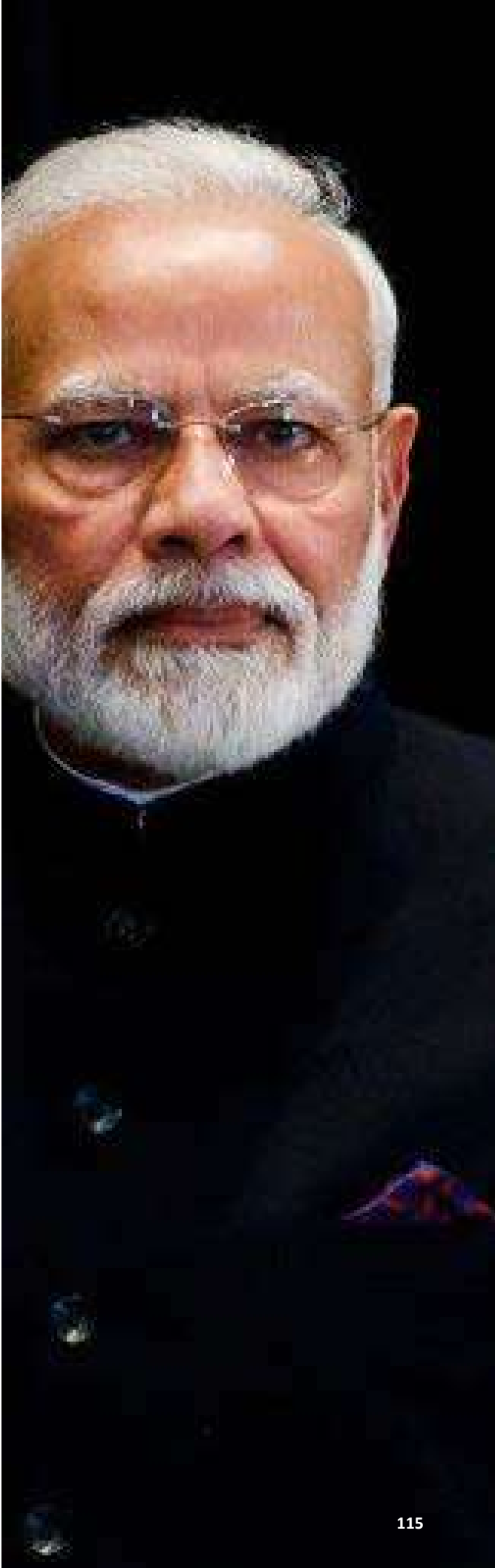
India became the tenth most dangerous country to be a Christian, according to a report by Open Doors.

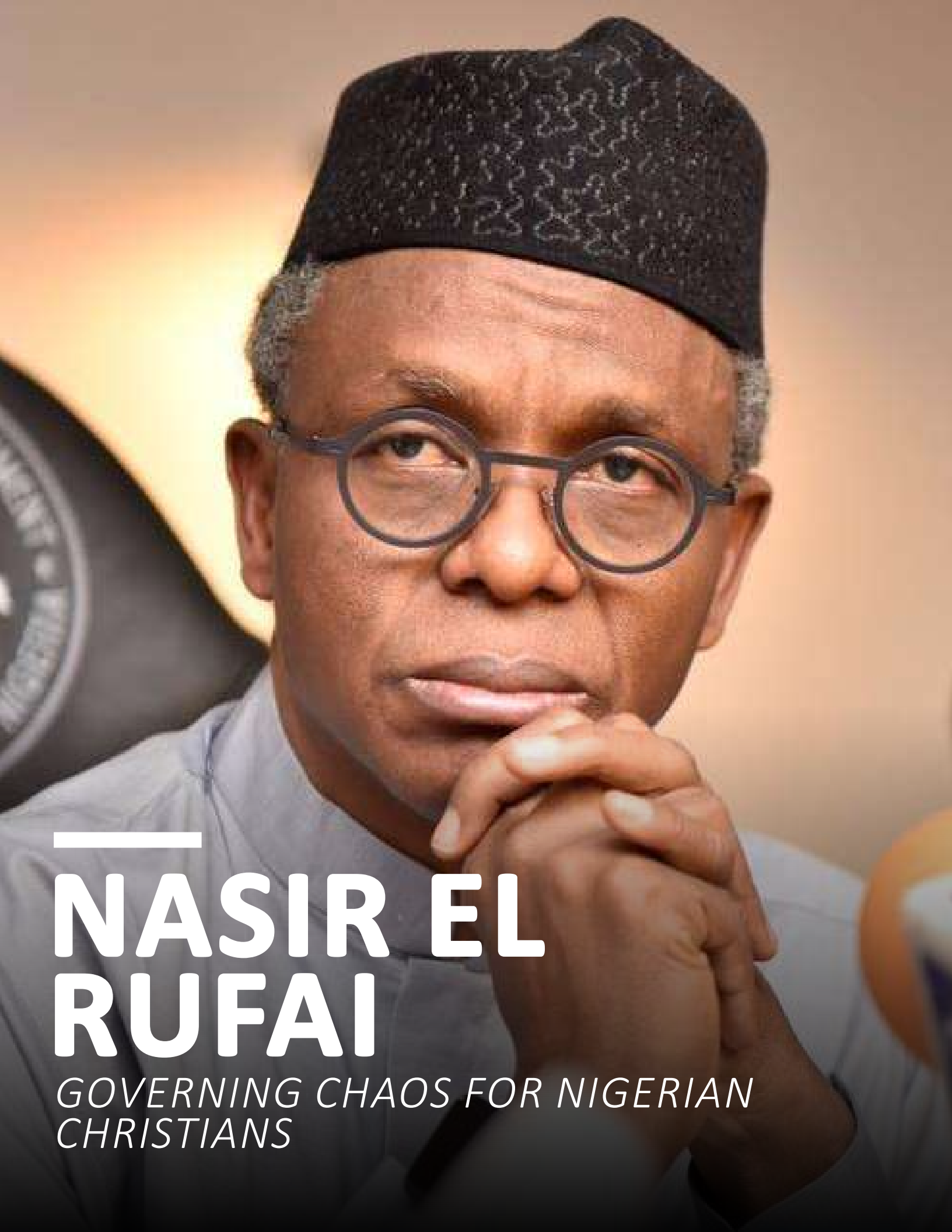
2020

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommends that Congress designate India as a Country of Particular Concern for severe religious freedoms violations.

2021

The Modi administration tightens restrictions on NGOs and Christian ministries that receive financial support outside India.





NASIR EL RUFai

GOVERNING CHAOS FOR NIGERIAN CHRISTIANS

OVERVIEW

Nasir El Rufai serves as the governor of Kaduna State in Nigeria and is complicit in extreme persecution of Christians in his region. He has used his rise to power and close ties with President Muhammadu Buhari to clamp down on Christians.

After the fall of the military dictatorship, El Rufai worked in several government positions, including as Minister of the Federal Capital Territory from 2003-2007. The President fills this position representing the capital area.

LIVING LARGE

Before becoming involved in politics, El Rufai amassed a sizable personal fortune as founder of El-Rufai and Partners, a construction consulting firm which he managed with several others during the military juntas of the 1980s and 1990s.

Though the location where he keeps his earnings is unknown, he has lived in and travels to the United States and the United Kingdom. He's very likely to have financial interests in banks tied to the American financial system.

ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) worked with the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Treasury to suggest a visa ban and sanctions on El Rufai for his continued use of lockdowns on Christian communities in Kaduna.

ICC also provides economic assistance through a series of farming initiatives to Christian communities impacted by the lockdowns. By collaborating with networks on the ground, ICC accurately compiles a record of El Rufai's harmful effects on Christians. El Rufai's actions have cost hundreds of lives and driven even more from their homes.

ABOUT NASIR EL-RUFai

OFFICIAL TITLE:
Governor of Kaduna State

ASSUMED OFFICE:
May 29, 2015

BORN:
February 16, 1960

PARTY AFFILIATION:
All Progressives Congress
(2013-Present)



FORMS OF PERSECUTION

Within a few minutes of sunset, slated for 6:14 p.m. that day on Christmas Eve 2016, militants stormed the village of Goska in central Nigeria's Kaduna State. The assault didn't last long, but the Fulani militant attackers managed to burn 80 houses and wound dozens of villagers before disappearing into the dim brush surrounding Goska. Fourteen villagers died, including women and children.

The attack happened while Goska was under a strict, 24-hour curfew, rendering them helpless and attracting international attention. The curfew was imposed five days prior by El Rufai.

The lockdown, purportedly designed to prevent attacks by banning all movement, responded to protests of the El Rufai administration's lackluster response to violence in Jema'a.

In a jurisdiction smaller than Houston, 102 people were killed, 215 were injured, and an estimated 50,000 homes were burned across 25 Christian communities in the last quarter of 2016.

Authorities only enforced lockdowns against villagers. The villagers reported seeing Fulani communities moving freely in the days leading up to the attack.

Despite international condemnation of the Goska lockdown, El Rufai imposed at least five more lockdowns since the 2016 attacks. Villagers protest the lack of security provided by the El Rugai administration. El Rufai then responds to the protesting communities by enacting lockdowns, and the Fulani militants attack the vulnerable communities.

While no evidence suggests El Rufai is directly behind these attacks, his continued use of lockdowns in the face of hundreds of deaths violates international human rights law.

El Rufai released a statement claiming he located the attackers in Cameroon and Niger and paid them compensation for losses they claimed to have sustained during the unrest. El Rufai made these comments to cast him as a justice-oriented leader, trying to stop the killings creatively.

However, it is extremely concerning that he knew who the attackers were, engaged in conversation and financial transactions with them, and let them go without any attempt at justice.

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

This statement is particularly insidious in light of a Tweet by El Rufai on Twitter in July 2012 threatening anyone who might challenge the Fulani, even in the line of military duty. “We will write this for all to read. Anyone, soldier or not that kills the Fulani takes a loan payable one day no matter how long it takes.” Additionally,

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Relatively new to democracy, Nigeria goes to great lengths to cast itself as a beleaguered nation struggling valiantly against sectarian violence. Secular democracy, the narrative goes, is the guiding principle governing Nigeria—any deviation from that is the fault of malicious non-state actors intent on spoiling what they cannot control.
- Nigeria does suffer from malicious actors—armed militant groups killed about 3,500 people and abducted 3,000 people in the first 200 days of 2020 alone—but the idea that the government plays an impartial role and is doing its best to promote justice and freedom for all is wrong. El Rufai demonstrates this on multiple occasions. The U.S. and others must push back against Nigeria’s narrative, both in broad terms and through specific actions that recognize the harsh reality facing Nigeria’s Christian community.
- Specifically, El Rufai should be sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Act and similar sanctions regimes worldwide. A public sanction

when he took office as governor in 2015, he proclaimed, “the Fulani have nothing to fear since a Fulani [is] now governor of the state.” These statements, taken together, help illuminate the permissive context El Rufai has created in which so many Christians are dying at the hands of Fulani militants.

Peddling a conspiracy theory that international election observers might try to interfere in Nigeria’s elections, El Rufai threatened that “they will go back in body bags because nobody will come to Nigeria and tell us how to run our country.”

El Rufai claimed in a tweet posted on September 8, 2014, that Christians were behind Boko Haram, funding and controlling it “to tarnish the name of Islam.” In his tweet, he specifically accused the



Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other Christians of being behind numerous church bombings and shootings. Far from a front for CAN, Boko Haram is an Islamist terror group with strong ties to Islamic State.

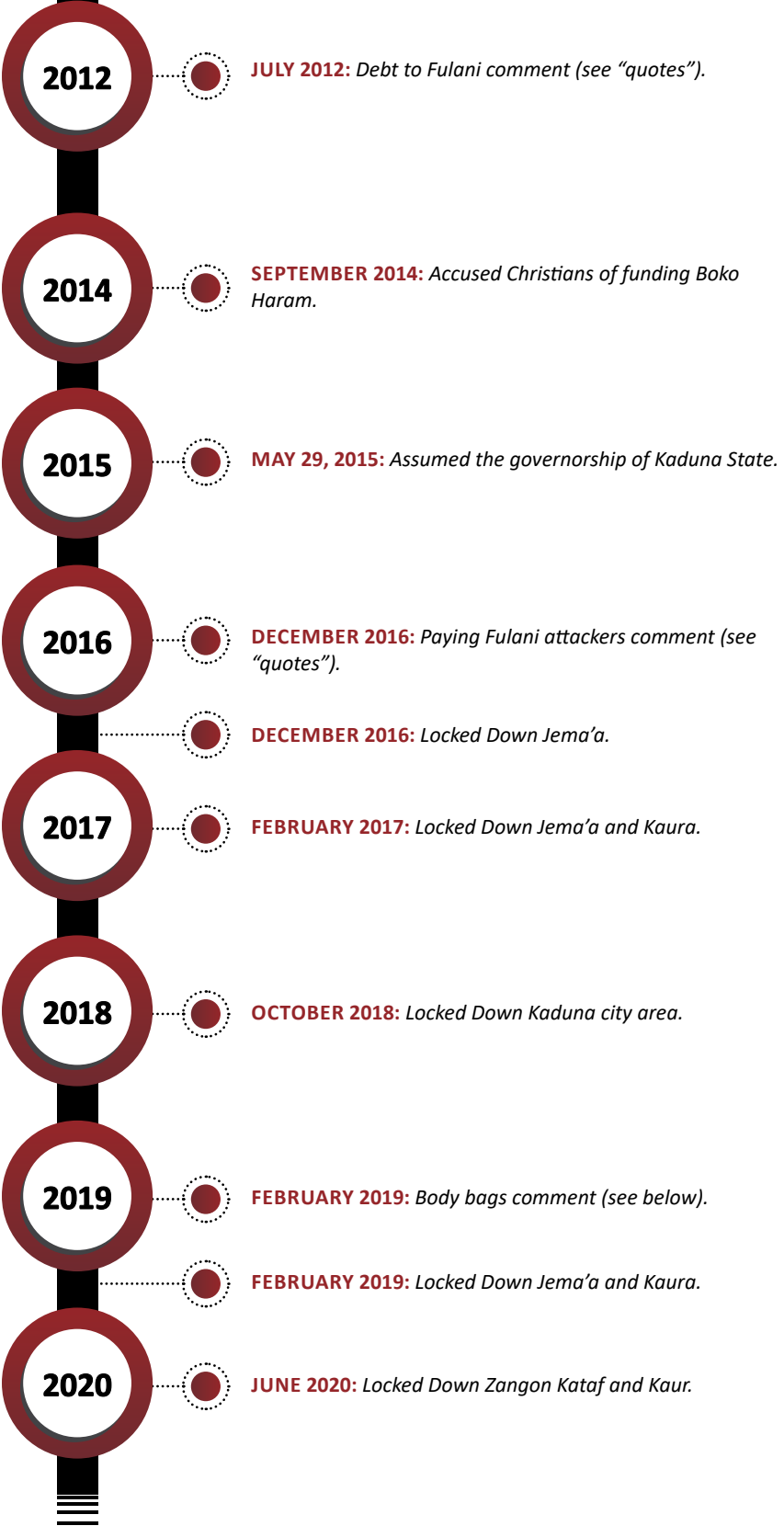
In the days leading up to his 2019 reelection, El Rufai whipped up public anger and physical violence when he falsely claimed that 130 Fulani had been killed in Kajuru, a locality near the capital city of Kaduna.

Many, including the National Emergency Management Agency and El Rufai’s own Commissioner of Police, denied his claims of an attack on the Fulani. Eleven native Catholics were killed in Kajuru a few days before his comments. Following El Rufai’s statement, suspected Fulani militants killed 127 people in Kajuru.

on El Rufai for his persecution of Christians through lockdowns would send a strong message to him and other officials in his position.

- Even without an official sanction, there is still a lot that governments and private organizations can do. Most notably, they can publicize El Rufai’s actions for the world to see. Exposure itself could very well deter El Rufai’s plans and may even lead to a quiet sanction that is not released to the public.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN

MINIMIZING CHRISTIANITY BEYOND HIS BORDERS

OVERVIEW

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's name stands out for several reasons from the list of individuals most notorious for persecuting Christians. Erdogan is the president of Turkey, a country that is a close ally with the United States and much of western Europe in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Despite this alliance with the West, Erdogan is one of the greatest threats to Christianity in the Middle East.

Turkey currently sits on land mainly inhabited by Christians shortly after the time of Jesus, but this land has since become home to a majority-Muslim population due to the conquest of the Ottoman Empire, an Islamic group comprised of ethnic Turks.

In the early 20th century, the Ottomans conducted a genocidal campaign against Armenians, killing or displacing more than two million Christians. Unfortunately, Erdogan seeks to reestablish the influence of this destructive empire by rallying around an Ottoman Turkic Islamic identity.

Elected to the Turkish presidency in 2014, many saw Erdogan as a reformer. However, in 2016, an attempted coup prompted Erdogan to solidify his power and essentially appoint himself as a lifelong president.

Since this move, Erdogan has undertaken a concerted campaign to promote an Islamic Turkic nationalism that embodies the spirit of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, he has made efforts to erase Christianity, both inside and outside of Turkey.

ICC FINDINGS

Since Erdogan's rise to power, International Christian Concern (ICC) has tracked the developments of his leadership in Turkey regarding the religious freedom of Christians in the country.

As conditions deteriorated and this freedom was slowly stripped from Christians, ICC began to take an even closer look at Erdogan's leadership and rhetoric to inform stakeholders in the United States about the threat he posed to Christianity in Turkey. This past year, in a report entitled, Turkey: Challenges Facing Christians 2016-2020, ICC staff specifically highlighted the damaging effects of Erdogan's actions and words as president, including how he has

continually used Christian sites as political leverage, attempted to erase Christianity from Turkey's history, undergone a campaign of deporting Christian evangelists, and tried to expand Turkish influence throughout the Middle East by bombing Christian villages.

Additionally, ICC analysts held several meetings with relevant government officials in Congress and the State Department following the 2020 Karabakh War to educate on Erdogan's devastating harm to Christians during this conflict, derived from ICC's fieldwork with victims and their families.

ABOUT

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN

OFFICIAL TITLE:
12th President of Turkey

ASSUMED OFFICE:
August 28, 2014

BORN:
February 26, 1954

PARTY AFFILIATION:
Justice and Development Party



FORMS OF PERSECUTION

VEILED RHETORIC: Much like the Grey Wolves, Erdogan commonly uses language and references that appear harmless to Western observers. However, it has meaning to his Turkish audience in promoting his Islamic Turkic agenda. For instance, Erdogan has used the phrase “red apple” (Turkish: Kızıl Elma) to refer to his ambitions for Turkish conquest, a term with deep Ottoman roots dating back to the original conquest of present-day Turkey.

INHIBITING IDENTITY: Erdogan and his government have slowly chipped away at the religious identity of Christians living in Turkey by equating Turkishness with Islam and preventing Turkish Christians from living free from discrimination. Additionally, Turkish Christian Protestants struggle to grow the Church within Turkey without outside help. By barring foreign evangelists from the country through entry bans, the Turkish government tries to choke out Protestantism from growing in the country. Erdogan has also significantly inhibited the work and influence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the center of the Orthodox Church, based in Istanbul (the former Constantinople) and is seen as the seat of Christian Orthodoxy around the world.

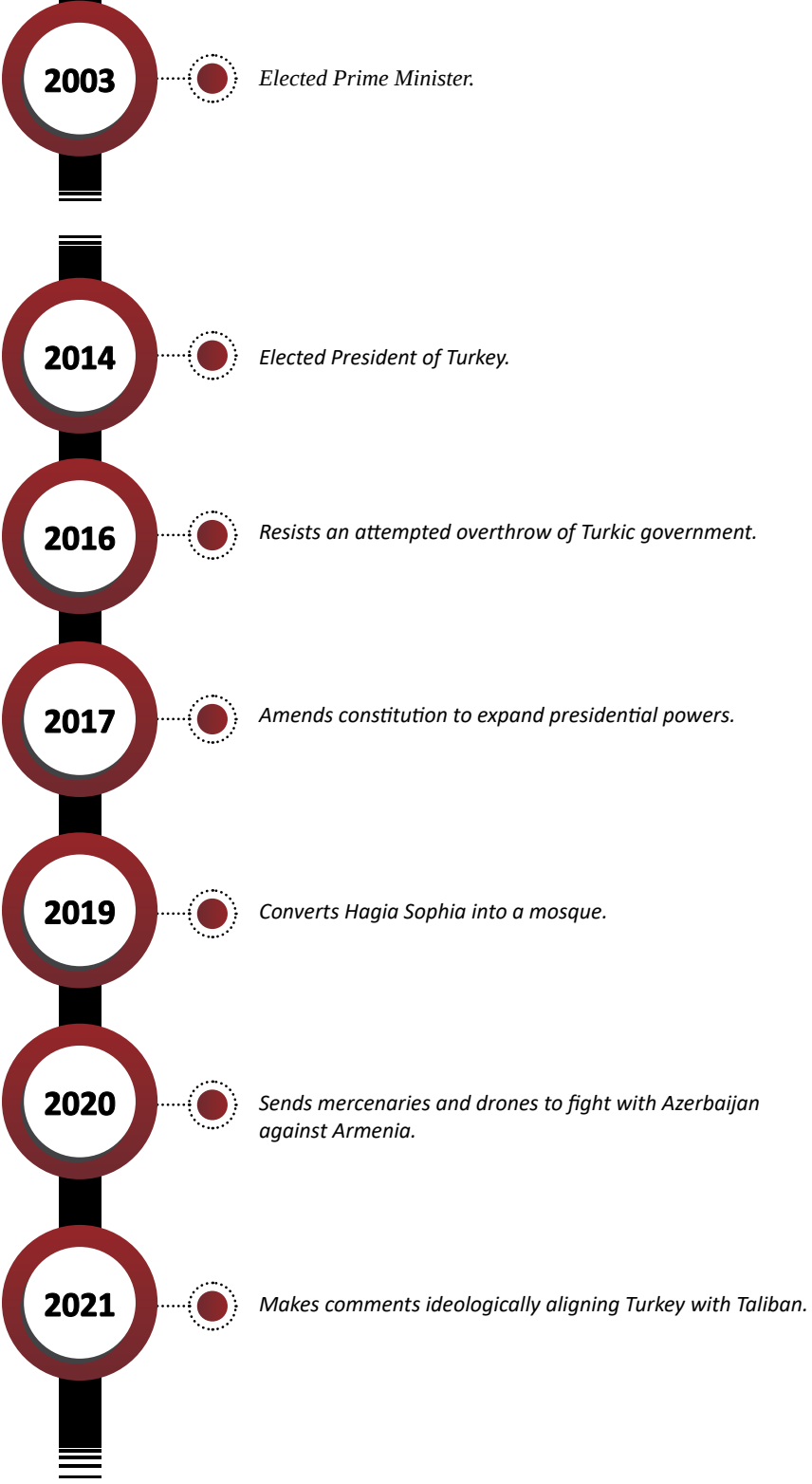
HIDDEN FOREIGN POLICY AGENDAS: Turkey today maintains a military presence in countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, countries that used to comprise the Ottoman Empire. Erdogan commonly uses excuses to expand Turkey’s military influence into countries he views as rightfully part of the Turkic empire, with persecution against Christians coming along with this influence. One example of this from last year was in the Karabakh War, where Turkey sent drones and Syrian mercenaries to fight alongside Azerbaijan against Armenia. This conflict caused many Christians to flee from their homes and be brutally attacked and murdered by these soldiers. After the war, these troops continued to desecrate Christianity by dismantling historical religious sites to erase the memory of Christianity from the land that Erdogan believed was rightfully Turkic.



ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- Turkey is increasingly becoming a danger to Christianity under the leadership of President Erdogan. His government continues to diminish human rights in Turkey and in their engagements abroad—especially for religious freedom.
- Considering these developments, the United States Congress should reevaluate Turkey’s status as a member of NATO and an ally of the U.S. Although Turkey is a valuable ally to have in the region, this should not come at the expense of Christianity in Turkey under Erdogan. U.S. officials need to continually bring up these concerns when engaging with their Turkish counterparts, and express concern over the Turkic Islamic nationalist rhetoric and policy implemented by President Erdogan.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



“As the Taliban held some talks with the U.S., it should hold these talks with Turkey much more comfortably. Because Turkey has nothing that contradicts [the Taliban’s] beliefs.”
— President Erdogan during an interview in North Cyprus





XI JINPING

PUSHING NATIONALISM ABOVE GOD

OVERVIEW

Xi Jinping has overseen nearly a decade of severe human rights violations and a systematic war on religion since he became president in 2013. His official title, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), gives him ultimate authority in the country. He has consistently used this to persecute people of faith and promote a system in which loyalty to himself and the state is unhindered by other allegiances.

Xi promotes an insidious form of ethnic, socialist nationalism that leaves no room for minority identity, ethnic or religious. Termed Sinicization by scholars, this process works systematically to root out pockets of alternative ideology, such as house churches. Xi does tolerate some religion, but only under the tight confines of the state. State-approved churches, for example, are thinly disguised mouthpieces for propaganda. The state-approved Christian church—the Three-Self Patriotic Movement—has even publicly supported Xi’s campaign against independent house churches.

ICC FINDINGS

International Christian Concern (ICC) has long reported on the lack of religious freedom in China, even producing research on the topic for the U.S. government as part of a research contract. Recognizing the importance of policy in pressuring the Chinese government to stop its war against religion, ICC has engaged in several Washington, D.C.-focused pushes to raise awareness on the issue, hosted a high-profile event on persecution in China, and published several reports on the topic over the years. In addition to its advocacy on the subject, ICC works on the ground to assist persecuted Chinese Christians as they face pressure from the government.

ABOUT

XI JINPING

OFFICIAL TITLE:
General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party

ASSUMED OFFICE:
March 14, 2013

BORN:
June 15, 1953

PARTY AFFILIATION:
Chinese Communist Party



“We will fully implement the Party’s basic policy on religious affairs, insist on the sinicization of Chinese religions, and provide active guidance for religion and socialism to coexist.”

— Xi Jinping



“

“On direct orders from President Xi Jinping, a six-month-long crackdown campaign against Protestant churches was launched in 2019 in China’s eastern province of Jiangsu, targeting the largest Christian populations. According to the new data, the previously reported number of nearly 200 closed-down venues has more than doubled. 549 sites run by both state-run Three-Self and unregistered house churches were shut in four prefecture-level cities.”

— Bitter Winter Magazine

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

INTERMENT CAMPS: Xi’s use of mass internment camps to attack religion is a relatively new development and, for good reason, has attracted significant international attention. The Trump administration officially declared the campaign against the Uyghurs a genocide in January 2021, and other governments worldwide have begun to follow suit in the months since. The Biden administration concurred with the previous administration’s assessment.

SINICIZATION: Another major effort under Xi’s rule is Sinicization, a campaign to make religious groups within China submit to socialism and CCP ideology by forcing them to accept a unified national identity with Han Chinese characteristics. This campaign intensified after the Four Requirements campaign was launched by the CCP in June 2018. All state-approved churches are required to raise the national flag, promote the Chinese Constitution and other laws, place regulations on worship, preach “Core Socialist Values,” and maintain China’s “traditional culture.”

RAIDS AND ARRESTS: A consistent trend throughout the past year has been church raids. Not only were churches shut down or demolished, but pastors and church attendees were often arrested. One example happened in September 2020 in Sichuan province when China’s Public Security Bureau deployed over 30 police officers to raid an underground Protestant house church, known as Sola Fide. When police arrived on the scene, they arrested 50 Sola Fide members, tore down crosses and other Christian symbols, and destroyed hymnbooks and Bibles.

Xi’s campaign against religion has forced believers to either practice their faith under threat and in secret or become a mouthpiece for the advance of socialist thought and the eventual eradication of free religion.

ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

- China systematically commits, and even exports, religious violence and it is no secret to the international community. In response, countries around the world have publicly condemned China, insisting that it allow its citizens to practice their religion freely. From the United States to Europe and beyond, governments around the world recognize the need to push back on the severe religious freedom violations happening in China.
- While China’s brazen disregard for religious freedom certainly merits the international condemnation it has received, it is also incumbent on the international community to take real action against China’s human rights violations and root this action in effective policy. Through economic pressure and other means, China should be motivated to change its ideological intolerance of religion.
- There is a clear case to be made for the advancement of religious freedom on the simple grounds of human rights and individual dignity. It is also in the best interests of China and the rest of the world to push for religious freedom in China. A report by a committee of UN human rights experts, published in November 2019, warned that China’s repression of minority rights posed a security risk to the country through its potential to foster anti-regime sentiment.
- The U.S. should seek ways to economically penalize the use of religious prisoners of conscience in factories. Unfortunately, much of the conversation on Sino-U.S. relations focuses on their respective economic interests and how trade between the two countries should be regulated. The United States’ economic interest is a valid concern of its own, but the discussion must also include human rights and religious freedom concerns.
- To this end, human rights observers in Washington, D.C., welcomed Customs and Border Protection’s public enforcement actions against China’s use of forced labor in 2019. More policies against the use of forced labor need to be promulgated. Research suggests that tens of thousands of Uyghurs have been sent to work in factories all across China. The problem of forced labor intersects with the issue of religious freedom in China, and the international community should respond by refusing to financially support these abuses.
- The U.S. diplomatic apparatus should increase the profile of religious freedom issues in its communications with its Chinese counterparts and the greater international community.
- Multiple administrations have recognized the importance of consistent and specific diplomatic pressure on religious freedom. The Obama administration made it standard practice to raise the issue of prisoners of conscience in diplomatic conversations with governments who engage in this practice.
- More recently, the Trump administration issued an executive order on international religious freedom with similar requirements. This kind of diplomatic pressure is vital to the goal of advancing religious freedom and should undoubtedly be practiced concerning China.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1921

Chinese Communist Party Founded.

1949

People’s Republic of China Established

2012

Xi Jinping Assumes Authority of CCP.

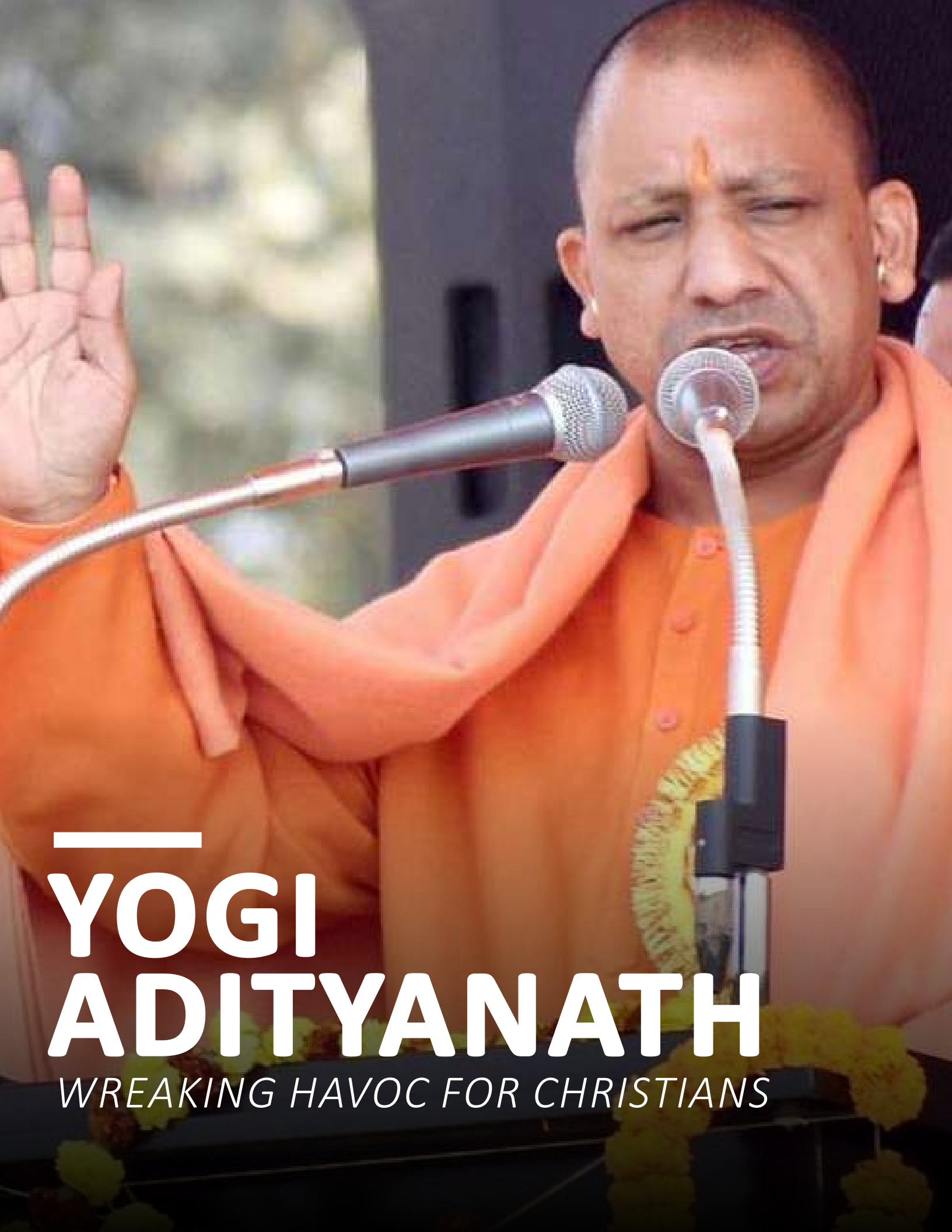
2017

First Uyghur Internment Camps Opened.

Chinese Constitution Amended to Include “Xi Jinping Thought.”

2021

The U.S. Declares Campaign Against Uyghurs a Genocide



YOGI ADITYANATH

WREAKING HAVOC FOR CHRISTIANS

OVERVIEW

Yogi Adityanath, born Ajay Mohan Bisht, is a Hindu monk and the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the most populous state in India. His position as UP's chief minister makes him one of the most influential politicians in the country from the ruling BJP political party.

However, Yogi's reputation primarily comes from his role as one of India's most inflammatory Hindu nationalists, known for targeting India's vulnerable religious minorities with anti-Christian and anti-Muslim speeches. As a politician in India, he popularized a brand of anti-Christian legislation known as "anti-conversion laws."

ICC FINDINGS

ICC has filed a request for Global Magnitsky sanctions against Adityanath with the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Treasury Department.

Global Magnitsky sanctions are one of the State Department's most effective tools for promoting human rights abroad. If the U.S. government agrees that a foreign persecutor has committed "gross violations of... human rights," the persecutor's U.S.-based assets will be frozen by the Treasury Department. The State Department will issue a visa ban on the persecutor, banning them and close family members from entering the United States.

ABOUT

YOGI ADITYANATH

OFFICIAL TITLE:
22nd Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

ASSUMED OFFICE:
March 19, 2017

BORN:
June 5, 1972

PARTY AFFILIATION:
Bharatiya Janata Party



"If a Hindu becomes a Muslim or a Christian, it is conversion, but if a Muslim or a Christian return to Hinduism, then it is homecoming. We should all support such homecomings because the person is then getting his national identity."

— Adityanath in a 2014 interview with Aap Ki Adalat

FORMS OF PERSECUTION

As Chief Minister of UP, Adityanath passed new laws that severely restricted religious freedom in his state. The 2020 Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance was passed under the guise of protecting women and poorer Indians from being induced to change their religion.

In practice, the law is used to attack Indian pastors, missionaries, and interfaith couples. Seventy-six people have been arrested and 24 police investigations are ongoing as of June 2021 under this law.

In addition, he and his administration refuse to hold police forces accountable for abuses of power when they illegal arrest and hold Indian Christians. UP police have reportedly acted in tandem with Hindu radicals to harass religious minorities, and there are several instances where UP police have used violence against minority prisoners. As of present, there has been no meaningful effort by the Yogi administration to curb the abuse of its officers.

Perhaps Adityanath is most known for is his highly publicized speeches promoting an anti-Christian, anti-minority, Hindutva narrative that seeks to ostracize the Christian minority and embolden other persecutors across the country. He is open about wanting to turn UP and India into a Hindu political state, known as a Hindu Rashtra, and effectively relegate religious minorities to second-class citizens.



ICC RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY: The U.S. government should consider issuing Glomag sanctions against Adityanath for seriously restricting the religious freedom of UP’s people and allowing for his police force and local radicals to act with impunity towards Christians and minorities. The U.S. and its allies should also issue visa locks on Adityanath and his immediate family to prevent them from traveling abroad.

Adityanath has promised to make UP the number one economy in India by the year 2026. Specifically, Adityanath has been pushing for significant advancements in the state’s electronics sector. UP’s Minister for Industry, Satish Mahana, has confirmed several Chinese companies have already started production in the state. Samsung has relocated one of its China manufacturing hubs to Uttar Pradesh in 2021. The U.S. should consider implementing economic disincentives to companies that choose to do business in UP until the Adityanath administration makes meaningful steps to correct the deplorable human rights conditions in UP.

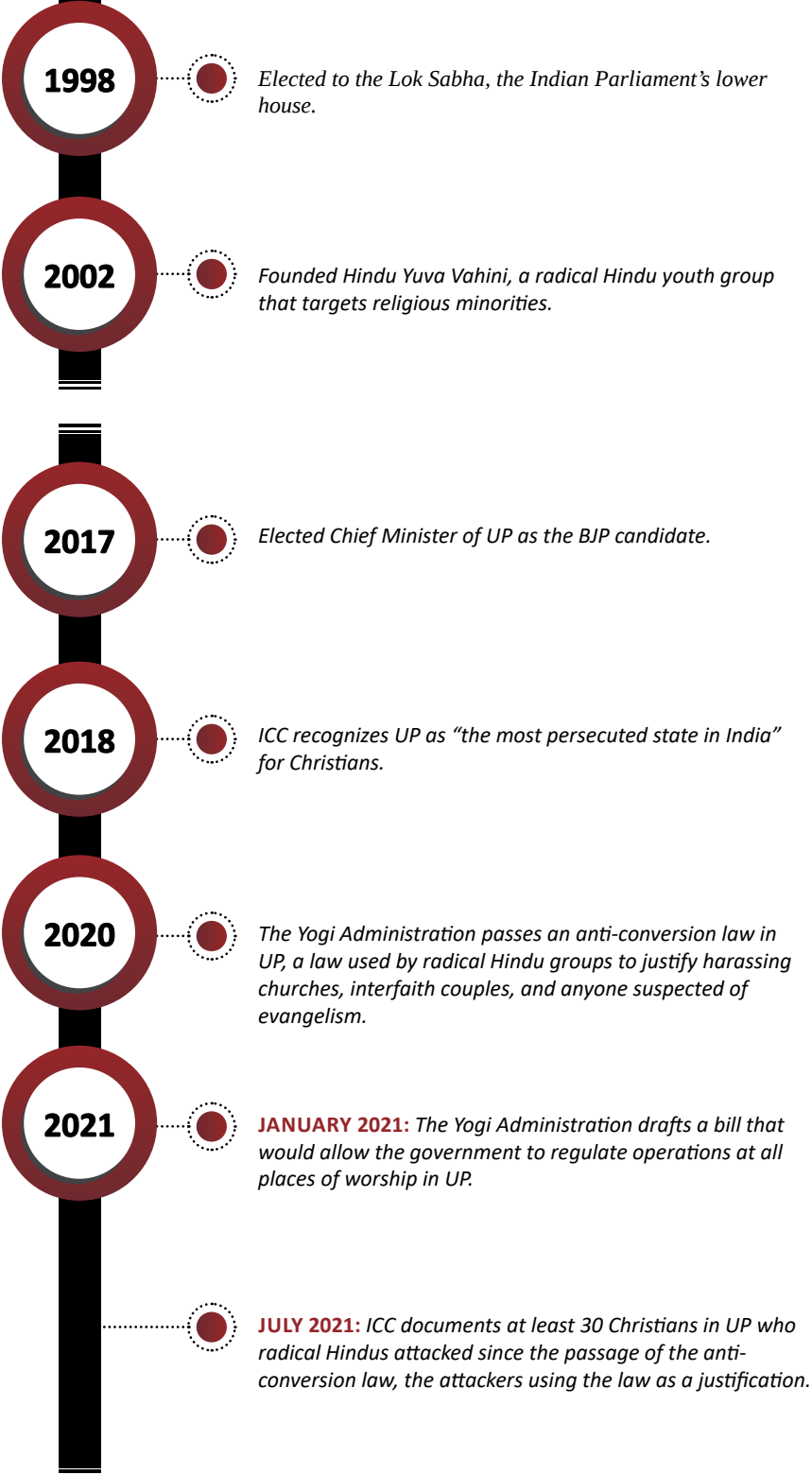
LEGISLATION: In line with USCIRF’s recommendations, Congress should move to designate India a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for “engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA).”

Congress should also mention the deteriorating religious freedom conditions in Uttar Pradesh when furthering bilateral relations with India, especially as concerns any investment into UP’s economy.

MEDIA/GRASSROOTS: Despite the significant influence Adityanath has among Hindu extremists, few outside Southeast Asia are familiar with him. The media should recognize the role Adityanath has played in creating the hostile anti-Christian, anti-minority climate in UP and India through his refusal to prosecute persecutors and his vitriolic speeches.

Hindu extremists have proven effective in using social media to publish false information about minorities and spread their dangerous ideologies. Meanwhile, social media companies in the last decade have become proficient in identifying and labeling target phrases that appear on their platforms. Social media companies should use this technology to track anti-Christian/anti-minority rhetoric and develop a strategy to combat Hindu extremist misinformation.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



REPORTS



RESEARCH FROM THE SOURCE:

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

ICC staffs a team of expert analysts on persecution that have compiled their research into a series of reports. These

publications summarize the issues using first-hand knowledge from ICC field staff and victims themselves of what persecution looks like through the eyes of the persecuted.

Combining this first-hand knowledge and the geopolitical expertise of ICC's Washington D.C.-based analysts, these reports help to illuminate major trends in international religious

freedom with the aim of informing governmental leaders in the West on persecution issues and empowering them to enact policy that promotes real change for the body of Christ.

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



SECULAR SHARIA?

The notion that Nigeria is a well-intentioned but under-resourced country struggling to contain sectarian violence is woefully incomplete. The Nigerian government may be under-resourced, but it is not blameless in the matter of sectarian violence. Indeed, though government forces have fought to quell sectarian violence in some instances, in other cases, it has at least exacerbated the problem if not created it in the first place.

This report considers ways that Nigerian state governments contribute to discrimination and violence against Christians. In particular, twelve northern states have adopted Sharia criminal law, leading to problems for Christians in the region and impacting their ability to

participate as equal members of society.

In addition to being unconstitutional, the use of Sharia to adjudicate criminal matters has done significant real-world harm. This report considers eight specific instances where a departure from secularism has harmed Christians in northern Nigeria.

Finally, ICC makes three policy recommendations to the U.S. government—first, the establishment of an official stance against non-secularism in northern Nigeria; second, a reworking of aid delivery, which the government distributes in a way that disadvantages Christians; and third, the appointment of a Special Envoy to address issues in the region.



READ NOW:

To read the full report, please scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit:



www.persecution.org/reports

PERSECUTION INCIDENT REPORT: CHINA

International Christian Concern (ICC) works vigorously to track persecution all around the world. In 2020, ICC published a report on China and the restrictions that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) puts on Christians. With it, ICC published an incident tracker summarizing specific events in which the Chinese government targeted Christians for practicing their faith in the year leading up to July 2020. This targeting takes many forms, including Sinicization, the closure or demolition of places of worship, the arrest of Christians, social pressure, and the utilization of its legal framework to restrict legitimate religious activity.

Again, in 2021, ICC has tracked incidents of persecution in China and compiled them in this report. Picking up where the 2020 report left off—at the beginning of July

2020—this report summarizes ICC reporting on the topic in the last year. While the data included in this report began in July 2020, given the limitations of reporting from China where reports often are delayed due to security concerns some incidents could be traced back to as early as March 2020. Most of these reports are based on information from China Aid, Bitter Winter, Radio Free Asia, and Chinese Christian Fellowship of Righteousness.

Readers should note that the number of incidents recorded below does not represent the complete number of cases that took place. For example, even if hundreds of crosses were removed, this report would record it as a single incident if it happened all at once. In addition, while the data here is correct to our best knowledge there could be many cases that were not recorded in this report.



READ NOW:

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

Religious freedom is a fundamental right guaranteed to all Indian citizens by the country’s constitution and laws. However, the religious freedom rights of India’s religious minorities, including Christians, have been in severe decline since the political rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 and its enactment of the Hindutva ideology.

Since 2014, attacks on religious minorities have dramatically increased and policies have been enacted that curtail religious freedom. In 2020, the religious freedom situation in India deteriorated to such a degree that the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended India be designated a Country of Particular Concern (“CPC”), a designation reserved for the world’s worst violators of religious freedom.

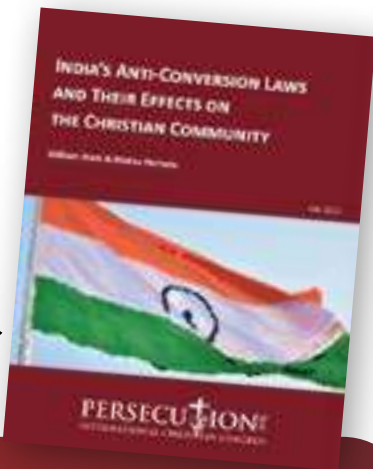
State-based Freedom of Religion Acts, more popularly known as anti-conversion laws, are among the most sinister policies enacted by BJP-led governments that have increased hostility against India’s religious minorities. In the nine states that have enacted these laws, all of them led by the BJP, the laws have been used to spread disinformation about minorities and provide legal cover for radical Hindu nationalists and their activities.

On January 9, 2021, Madhya Pradesh became the latest state to enact an anti-conversion law. The enactment of this law unleashed a new wave of persecution for the state’s Christian minority.

International Christian Concern (ICC) studied the effects of the enactment of Madhya Pradesh’s anti-conversion law from January to June 2021. During this time, ICC documented the instances of persecution experienced by the state’s Christian community and the number of churches closed as a result. ICC also surveyed over 500 Christians regarding the enactment of the new anti-conversion law and its effects on their community.

Taken together, these bodies of evidence show the enactment of the anti-conversion law in Madhya Pradesh had a significantly negative effect on the state’s Christian community. The law dramatically increased the number of persecution incidents endured and led to an overall climate of fear for the state’s Christians.

Unfortunately, the enactment of other anti-conversion laws have had similar effects on Christian communities in other states. For this reason, the international community, including the United States of America, must be utilized international pressure to repeal these laws and advocate for the recovery of religious freedom in India.



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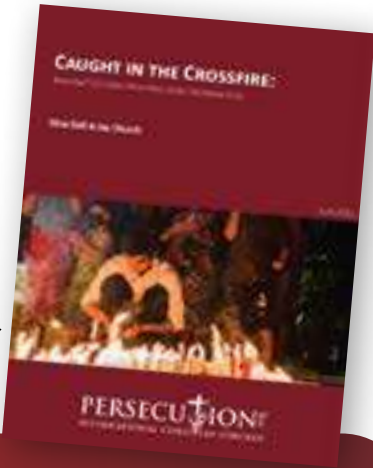
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CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE: MYANMAR’S CHRISTIAN MINORITIES UNDER TATMADAW RULE

When the Burmese military overthrew Myanmar’s civilian government in February, the international community responded with swift condemnation of the Tatmadaw and vocal support for Myanmar’s pro-democracy movement. The preservation of democracy in Myanmar became a common theme of discussion, and analysts began speculating what the coup might mean for trade, the world economy, and international relations.

But amid all these concerns, another issue—one predating the coup by

decades—bears focused attention as well. The protection of Myanmar’s many ethnic and religious minority groups, long persecuted by the Tatmadaw, is a critical matter and one that must rank high on the international community’s list of priorities. This report considers the history and future of Christians in the Kachin, Chin, Rohingya, Karen, Indian, and Chinese ethnic groups as well as those in Wa State and suggests several international policy stances with potential to improve their situation going forward.



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NAGORNO-KARABAKH: A HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

ICC urges the international humanitarian and religious freedom community to further investigate this situation. Awareness, assistance, and advocacy are the three greatest needs. ICC makes the following humanitarian observations:

- International, third-party access is a crucial ongoing need, in large part because the conflict continues despite the November 9th ceasefire statement.
- International recognition of the religious freedom components of this war is an immediate necessity.
- Peacekeepers are not police. They inherently cannot and are not those responsible for responding to kidnappings, shootings into Artsakh from conquered territories, and other types of criminal activity. These activities remain ongoing.
- Artsakh's residents remain under threat to their physical integrity, which has created an absence of safety and stabilization that ensures that the consequences of the war are ongoing.
- Humanitarian needs are immediate and ever-growing. Current solutions are not long-term, and require the presence of multiple humanitarian groups working in coordination to address key assistance issues.
- Azerbaijan and Turkey's seizure and presumed destruction of personal properties includes that of personal identification papers for displaced persons, further isolating them from humanitarian solutions.
- Relocation to permanent housing and livelihood development are essential humanitarian needs. This includes vocational training, as several IDPs come from a "white collar" background that is not likely to be reestablished quickly.



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UPDATED REPORT: THE VOICELESS VICTIMS OF PAKISTAN'S BLASPHEMY LAWS

According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2018 Factsheet on Blasphemy, roughly one-third of the world's nations maintain a law, or a set of laws, punishing the crime of blasphemy.

In Pakistan—one of three countries where blasphemy is punishable by death—these laws are widely abused to settle personal scores and incite religious hatred. Due to widespread religious intolerance and bias, members of Pakistan's religious minority communities are disproportionately accused and punished under the country's blasphemy laws.

In 2018, Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, was acquitted of the blasphemy charges that had kept her on death row for nearly a decade. The lessons learned from her case, including the international advocacy critical to her acquittal, help to create a template for advocating on behalf of other religious minorities facing similar charges in Pakistan.

In this report, International Christian Concern (ICC) reviews Pakistan's blasphemy laws and the experience of religious minorities under these laws. ICC goes on to analyze the Asia Bibi case and draws out important lessons that should be applied to similar, ongoing cases.

This report provides the profiles of 24 current cases in which 28 Pakistani Christians sit charged with or convicted of committing blasphemy. These cases need appropriate international advocacy to come to a successful conclusion. Towards this end, this report provides practical recommendations for the international community which ICC has drawn from the Asia Bibi case and from years of experience working with Christian victims of blasphemy in Pakistan.



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REPORT: THE ANATOMY OF GENOCIDE – KARABAKH’S FORTY-FOUR DAY WAR

“War erupted in the South Caucasus on 27 September 2020 when Azerbaijan and Turkey launched a joint military operation named Operation Iron Fist into the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenian: Artsakh). A truce was brokered by Russia forty-four days later which ceded significant parts of Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

During those forty-four days, Azeri and Turkish-paid Syrian mercenaries published multiple accounts and footage demonstrating possible war crimes against the local community. Following the truce, Turkey entered a peacekeeping role alongside Russia. Nevertheless, Turkey demonstrates biased support to Azerbaijan, who persists in violating the truce’s terms and the basic principles of human rights.

The dynamics of this conflict are deeply complex, but have strong religious freedom implications impacting the future of Karabakh’s local community. The strategic planning by Turkey and Azerbaijan show

an intent of mass extermination, thereby genocide, of Karabakh’s Armenian residents because of their combined faith and ethnic identity.

These identities are important to the Pan-Turkic ideology driving Azerbaijan and Turkey’s activities in Karabakh. This ideology is hidden behind highly symbolic language. Tactics used to promote this ideology include erasing Christianity from the historical memory of Karabakh, dehumanizing local residents, dismantling their identity, and using a variety of impression management maneuvers to limit the ability of international observers to name this war for what it is: genocide.”



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REPORT: TURKEY – CHALLENGES FACING CHRISTIANS 2016-2020

This report analyzes how the dynamics of historical revisionism and legal status have impacted Turkey’s Christian community, as well as those living in neighboring regional areas under Turkish influence. The report is not a comprehensive catalogue of violations against Christians, but through relevant case-studies found the following themes of religious freedom abuses:

- Emphasis on forming and maintaining the Turkish identity around Islam
- Suppression of legal status for Christians and their institutions
- Historical revisionism as a type of virtue signaling
- Excluding Christians from full acceptance and participation in Turkish society
- Neglecting the place of Christians in the lands, their history, heritage and suffering
- Using intimidation tactics to suppress the cultural and ethnic expression of Christians
- No active promotion of human rights
- Exploitation of the vulnerabilities of Christians

- (Ab)use of Christians as an international bargaining chip and domestic political leverage

“The institutionalized use of religious freedom as a political bargaining chip should prompt caution amongst human rights advocates. Another point of caution is the cultural perception within Turkey of how these issues are discussed within the international community. As in most Middle Eastern cultures, the concepts of honor and shame play an important role within Turkish society.

“Through this report, it is our earnest desire to encourage an open dialogue between the international community and Turkey, aimed at restoring trust and relationship. We hope a transparent dialogue will contribute to policies which recognize, uphold, protect, and promote the rights of Christians living in Turkey. It is through these small yet important steps of honoring the other that true reforms can ultimately be brought about.”



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