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Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Requesting That The Human Rights Council Address Religious Persecution In Countries That Are Notorious For Persecuting Christians

1. INTRODUCTION

Freedom of worship and belief is a fundamental human right that has been enshrined in numerous human rights instruments. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”⁽¹⁾ This right includes the freedom to “manifest [] religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”⁽²⁾ This right is also enshrined with similar language in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Christians are the most persecuted religious group around the world with more than 310 million Christians being subjected to extreme levels of persecution.⁽³⁾ Open Doors, a human rights watch group, has listed the following as the top countries for religious persecution.⁽⁴⁾ In these countries, Christians are arbitrarily arrested, attacked, assaulted, and killed because of their faith.

2. VIOLATIONS

North Korea

North Korea has no religious freedom and imposes severe punishments on those who practice or claim religion.⁽⁵⁾ Christians, in particular, are subjected to severe persecution. They are murdered, tortured, or forced into labor camps.⁽⁶⁾ The North Korean government not only punishes the individual Christian member of a family, but also punishes the family of the Christian regardless of the family’s beliefs.⁽⁷⁾ In order to hide their faith, Christians secretly gather in their homes to pray and worship.⁽⁸⁾ Reports estimate that there are 50,000 to 70,000 Christians inside labor camps in North Korea, imprisoned simply because of their faith.⁽⁹⁾ These Christians have no hope of ever being released.⁽¹⁰⁾ These camps have been compared to Nazi prison camps where the only way of “release” is escaping the prison camp⁽¹¹⁾.

Somalia

Religious persecution in Somalia comes from Islamic militants and Muslim families of converts.⁽¹²⁾ Christian converts face execution, house arrest, sexual violence, and are forced to participate in Islamic rituals.⁽¹³⁾ Because Somalia is a Muslim country, the family unit plays a role in the persecution of anyone who rejects Islam.⁽¹⁴⁾ Church leaders face persecution from Al Shabaab, an Islamic militant group at war with the government.⁽¹⁵⁾ Al Shabaab targets church leaders and kills them to instill fear in others.⁽¹⁶⁾ On March 29, 2024, Al Shabaab militants killed six Christian men who were sharing their faith with Muslims.⁽¹⁷⁾

Yemen

Yemen is a country caught up in a civil war between two Islamic groups, neither of which support religious freedom.⁽¹⁸⁾ Christians who live in the areas controlled by Al-Qaeda are subject to imprisonment and death.⁽¹⁹⁾ Those who live in the areas controlled by the Houthis are subject to strict religious prohibitions and heavy spying which makes practicing their faith nearly impossible.⁽²⁰⁾ In Yemen, the common punishments Christians face are torture, losing custody of children, and banishment from their communities.⁽²¹⁾

Libya

In Libya, the threat of religious persecution comes from Islamic militant groups and the families of Christian converts.(22) Family members consider it shameful if one member converts to Christianity from Islam.(23) Christian converts face pressure from their families to convert back to Islam and are often forced to participate in a pilgrimage to Mecca.(24) Men and women face different threats if their conversion to Christianity is discovered.(25) A man who is discovered to be a Christian faces losing his job, being kicked out of his home, and being abused.(26) Women who are discovered to be Christian face sexual violence, house arrest, forced marriage, and even murder.(27) Additionally, Islamic militants kidnap men and women and murder Christians.(28)

Sudan

Christians in Sudan suffer religious persecution, are viewed as outcasts, and are discriminated against within their own communities.(29) Those who convert from Islam to Christianity face violence, forced marriage, rejection from their families, and losing custody of their children and inheritances.(30) Church leaders face false charges and attacks by Islamic extremists.(31) Additionally, Islamic terrorists have been reported to abduct and kill Christian men.(32)

Eritrea

Christians in Eritrea face imprisonment, indefinite forced military service, house raids, and extreme censorship.(33) The government only recognizes three Christian denominations, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Lutheran Church. Any deviation from these three recognized churches leads to persecution and discrimination. The government in Eritrea places heavy restrictions on Christians and monitors their internet usage and phone calls. Even church leaders from recognized churches are not spared from imprisonment if they speak on a subject contrary to the government's viewpoint.(34) In fact, between July 2023 and July 2024, more than 200 Christians were unlawfully arrested in Eritrea.(35)

Nigeria

While the government allows for religious freedom, Islamic militant groups in Nigeria are responsible for the extreme persecution of Christians.(36) More Christians are killed in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world by a large margin.(37) Islamic militants kill Christian men and kidnap and sexually abuse Christian women, while children are often kidnapped for ransom.(38) In 2024 alone, it was reported that 3,100 Christians were killed and 2,830 were abducted in Nigeria.(39)

Pakistan

Pakistan has the world's most severe blasphemy laws, providing mandatory death penalty for speaking disparagingly about the Prophet Muhammad and life imprisonment for desecrating a copy of the Quran. It is commonly known that these laws are abused to carry out personal matters, and most blasphemy accusations are false. Further, these false allegations lead to mob violence against Christian communities. The ECLJ's affiliate in Pakistan is currently representing four Christians in blasphemy cases, three of whom are on death row. Shahzad Masih, who was sixteen when he was arrested over a false blasphemy accusation, has spent seven years in prison. The Lahore High Court is yet to hear his appeal even though the WGAD has held that his conviction violates several fundamental rights and his detention is arbitrary. The Pakistani government has done nothing to honor the WGAD decision. In another case, a death row prisoner, Amoon Ayub, has spent over ten years in prison and is waiting for the Supreme Court to hear his appeal. In the third case, Ahsan Masih was recently sentenced to death. His appeal is pending before the High Court.

Iran

The government in Iran views and labels Christians as a threat to the nation because of Western influence.(40) Christians are punished with long imprisonments where they are treated worse than the other inmates.(41) Those who convert from Islam face the worst persecution. They are arbitrarily detained, interrogated, and imprisoned. While the state allows the Armenian and the Assyrian churches to exist, even these churches face surveillance.(42)

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Christians face persecution and discrimination by the Taliban.(43) The Taliban have said that they will kill anyone who claims to be a Christian. The Taliban conduct door-to-door searches to find Christians. While the underground church does exist, these Christians are at a risk of being executed, tortured, or enslaved. Additionally, Christian converts face persecution by their own family members.

India

In India, Hindu extremists believe that all Indians must be Hindu and they desire to eradicate Christianity and Islam from the nation.(44) Twelve states in India have enacted anti-conversion laws that are supposedly designed to protect Hindus from “forcible” conversions.(45) However, these laws are often used to persecute Christians through mob violence.(46) From January to September 2024, there were an estimated 800 incidents of anti-conversion laws being used to persecute religious minorities and approximately sixty pastors and other Christians are in jail for violating these laws.(47)

3. REQUEST

Religious freedom is a fundamental right that must be protected by every country. Christians all around the world have been harassed, imprisoned, and killed because of their faith. The countries mentioned above have the worst record of persecuting and discriminating against Christians. We respectfully urge this Council to ask these countries to act according to their international obligations and take immediate action to protect Christian minorities from persecution and allow them to freely practice their faith.

(1) G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 18 (Dec. 10, 1948).

(2) Id.

(3) World Watch List 2025, OPEN DOORS.

(4) Id.

(5) North Korea, OPEN DOORS UK.

(6) Id.

(7) Id.

(8) North Korea, GLOBAL CHRISTIAN RELIEF.

(9) Id.

(10) Id.

(11) Id.

(12) Somalia, OPEN DOORS UK.

(13) Id.

(14) Id.

(15) Id.

(16) Id.

(17) Id.

(18) Yemen, OPEN DOORS UK.

(19) Id.

(20) Id.

(21) Id.

- (22) Libya, OPEN DOORS UK.
- (23) Id.
- (24) Id.
- (25) Id.
- (26) Id.
- (27) Id.
- (28) Id.
- (29) Sudan, OPEN DOORS UK.
- (30) Id.
- (31) Id.
- (32) Id.
- (33) Eritrea, OPEN DOORS.
- (34) Eritrea, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.
- (35) Ngala Killian Chintom, Eritrea Arrests Over 200 Christians in One Year, CRUX (July 4, 2024).
- (36) Nigeria, OPEN DOORS UK.
- (37) Id.
- (38) Id.
- (39) Hannah Brockhaus, Nigeria Tops Report for Number of Christians Killed, Kidnapped in 2024, CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY (Jan. 15. 2024).
- (40) Iran, OPEN DOORS.
- (41) Id.
- (42) Id.
- (43) Afghanistan, OPEN DOORS.
- (44) India, OPEN DOORS.
- (45) Id.
- (46) Id.
- (47) India Pastor Arrested on False Charges of Conversion, OPEN DOORS (Nov. 6, 2024).