



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX February 2021

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-six session

22 February–19 March 2021

Agenda item 3

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

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.

[01 February 2021]

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

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. TAKE ACTION TO ADDRESS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION AROUND THE WORLD

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2021 Open Doors, a human rights watch group, ranked the 50 worst countries for Christians to live. These countries are notorious for their restrictions on religious liberty whether through government or societal persecution. These issues must be addressed so that Christians may freely and peacefully practice their religion without fear of arrests, violence, or even death.

In the past, we have submitted reports to the Human Rights Council detailing atrocities being carried out against Christians in Nigeria, Pakistan, and India as well as submitted Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) on Somalia and Libya. This report will highlight religious persecution in the 10 worst places for Christians to live according to the Open Doors report.

2. COUNTRIES OF CONCERN

North Korea

Christians in North Korea are forced to practice their faith in extreme secrecy because of fear of persecution and arrest. In fact, those caught practicing their beliefs or even possess religious text risk being arrested, tortured, or even killed.[1] Christians are forced gather secretly to worship and keep their beliefs to themselves.[2] The fear of being caught is so strong that one North Korean defector even described how someone would cower under a blanket or in a toilet when praying.[3] Christians, are particularly at risk because the ruling Workers Party view Christians as foreign agents and therefore view Christianity as a political crime.[4]

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan Christians are forced out to live their faith in secrecy out of fear of violence from Islamic extremists.[5] Furthermore, Christians who converted from Islam face being disowned by their family, driven from their communities, or even killed.[6] This is largely due to the fact that Afghanistan is a largely tribal country and therefore leaving Islam is viewed as betraying the tribe.[7] In fact, in some cases Christians who left Islam are sent to psychiatric hospitals because leaving Islam is considered to be an act of insanity.

Somalia

In Somalia, Al-Shabaab, an al Qaeda affiliated terrorist organization that is attempting to establish an Islamic state in Somalia and has expressed a desire to eradicate Christians from the country, has caused a great deal of death and destruction.[8]

For example, in August 2020, Al-Shabaab militants stormed a hotel armed with AK-47s and explosive devices; they detonated a car bomb located outside of the hotel before shooting their way in. This heinous attack resulted in the death of 11 citizens and one police officer.[9]

Libya

While Christians are permitted to practice their faith to some degree, the government imposes many limitations on how they are allowed to do so. Under Article 291 of the Libyan Criminal Code, "Anyone who publicly attacks the Islamic religion, which is the official religion of the State according to the Constitution of Libya, through expressions

that are inappropriate for God, prophets, or messengers, shall be punished by a penalty or detention for a period not exceeding two years”.[10]

Muslims who convert to Christianity also face extreme prejudice and discrimination from family members and even the broader community.[11] As a result, Christians face the risk of being attacked simply for their Christian beliefs.[12]

Pakistan

Within Pakistan, one of the worst forms of persecution that Christians, as well as other minorities, face is allegations of blasphemy against Islam. In December of 2020 Pastor Raja Warris published a faith-based post on Facebook which was critical of Islam and therefore viewed as blasphemous and hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims.[13] As a result, an angry mob formed in the neighborhood where the pastor lived and they threatened to kill him. Police then proceeded to arrest the Pastor for committing blasphemy, a charge where if convicted would face up to 10 years in prison.

Eritrea

Eritrea only permits four religious communities to legally operate within the country: the Coptic Church of Eritrea, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea.[14] In May of 2019, more than 171 adults and children were arrested for gathering to worship in Asmara.[15] The next month, Eritrean security agents raided a gathering of worshippers belonging to the Faith Missions Church and proceeded to arrest the members as well as confiscated property.[16]

In 2019 Daniela Kravetz, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, stated that “I urge Eritrea to live up to its International commitments as a member of the Human Rights Council and allow religious institutions to operate freely and all of Eritreans to exercise their right to freedom of religion within the country”.[17]

Yemen

The Constitution of Yemen establishes that “Islam is the religion of the state”.[18] The laws of Yemen are also dictated by Sharia and any religious activity of non-Muslims is strictly forbidden. In fact under the law it is forbidden to commit apostasy.[19] Under Article 259 of the criminal code “Anyone who turns back from or denounces the religion of Islam, is punished by the death penalty after being questioned for repentance three times and after giving him a respite of thirty days”.[20]

Iran

According to reports, the Iranian government ‘s religion-based abuses includes raids of house churches and arrests and sentencing of house church members. In November of 2020, Iranian intelligence agents conducted house raids of twelve Christian homes. Although no one was arrested these agents confiscated personal belonging such as phones, laptops, Bibles, and other Christian literature.[21]

Nigeria

Christians in Nigeria face a true and dangerous threat from Islamic militant groups such as Boko Haram, as well as from Fulani herdsmen, a group of Islamic nomadic herders.[22] It is estimated that since 2015 an estimated 11,500 Christians have been killed, 2,000 churches destroyed, and has displaced and estimated four to five million Christians.[23]

For example, on the days surrounding Christmas 2020, Boko Haram terrorists carried out attacks in several villages located in northern Nigeria.[24] These attacks resulted in the deaths of approximately 12 Christians and multiple churches and homes being destroyed.

Zakariya Musa, the head of media for EYN, stated “The renewed attacks are coming almost on daily basis in different ways, resulting in killings, kidnapping, destruction of properties”.

India

India is currently experiencing an escalation of religiously motivated hostility and violence that targets Christians and other religious minorities. These acts of hostility can be seen at both the civil and governmental levels, and is a growing threat.

Part of the reason for the hostility against Christians is a result of Hindu nationalism, “which advocates for the belief that India belongs to Hindus and people of other faiths should find somewhere else to live, work and worship”.^[25] In addition, “[s]everal states in India have adopted anti-conversion laws, and the ruling Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), [which came to power in 2014] has made it clear that it wants to impose these laws nationwide”.

3. REQUEST

It is imperative that these egregious violations of religious freedom and religious intolerance are put to rest. These countries must work to ensure that their constitutions and domestic laws truly protect the human right to religious freedom of all of its citizens.

-
1. The National Interest: There Shall Be No God But Kim: Religious Freedom in North Korea, USCIRF (2 Aug. 2020), available at <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/oped/national-interest-there-shall-be-no-god-kim-religious-freedom-north-korea>.
 2. N. Korean Christians Keep Faith Underground, AP (1 Feb. 2019), available at <https://apnews.com/article/a7079dea595349928d26c687fa42a19c>.
 3. Id.
 4. The National Interest: There Shall Be No God But Kim: Religious Freedom in North Korea, USCIRF (2 Aug. 2020), available at <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/oped/national-interest-there-shall-be-no-god-kim-religious-freedom-north-korea>.
 5. Afghanistan, WORLD WATCH MONITOR, available at <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/afghanistan/>.
 6. Afghanistan, OPEN DOORS, available at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/afghanistan/>.
 7. Afghanistan, WORLD WATCH MONITOR, available at <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/afghanistan/>.
 8. CTR. FOR STRATEGIC & INT’L STUD., AL SHABAAB 3 (July 2011), available at http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/4039~v~Al_Shabaab.pdf.
 9. Hotel Assault in Somalia’s Capital Raises Fresh Questions About Al-Shabaab, WSJ (17 Aug. 2020), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hotel-assault-in-somalias-capital-raises-fresh-questions-about-al-shabaab-11597686674>.
 10. Libya Penal Code, art. 291.
 11. Libya, OPEN DOORS, available at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/libya/>.
 12. Id.
 13. Pakistani Christian Charge with Blasphemy Over Social Media Post, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (7 Jan. 2021), available at <https://www.persecution.org/2021/01/07/pakistani-christian-charged-blasphemy-social-media-post/>.
 14. Eritrea: A Country With Several Restrictions To Freedom Of Religion Or Belief, IPPFORB (27 Jun. 2019), available at <https://www.ippforb.com/newsroom/2019/06/27eritrea-a-country-with-several-restrictions-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief>.

15. General Briefing: Eritrea, CSW (1 May 2020), available at <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/05/01/report/4653/article.htm>.
16. Id.
17. UN Expert Urges Eritrea to Allow Religious Institutions to Operate Freely and Respect the Right to Freedom of Religion, OHCHR (21 Jun. 2019) available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24721&LangID=E>.
18. Constitution of Yemen art. 2, available at https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=en.
19. BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, H.R. AND LAB., U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, YEMEN 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT (2019).
20. Yemen: Republican Decree, By Law No. 12 for 1994, Concerning Crimes and Penalties, 1994, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3fec62f17.html>.
21. Christian Homes Targeted In Coordinated Fardis Raids, ARTICLE 18 (11 Nov. 2020), available at <https://articleeighteen.com/news/7270/>.
22. Nigeria, OPEN DOORS, available at <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/nigeria/>
23. Nigeria Is a Killing Field of Defenseless Christians, GENOCIDE WATCH (13 Apr. 2020), available at <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/04/13/nigeria-is-a-killing-field-of-defenseless-christians>
24. Nigerian Christians Killed in Christmas Eve Attacks, BAPTIST STANDARD (5 Jan. 2021), available at <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/world/nigerian-christians-killed-in-christmas-eve-attacks/>
25. India, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/india/>