



# **International Perspectives ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**Proceedings of Conferences on Religious Freedom  
2010 - 2012**





*Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)  
in the European Parliament*

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Brussels, 14th August 2013  
ISBN: 978-2-9601408-0-4

Published by: EPP Group  
Edited: COMECE  
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Translation&Design: Irmina Nockiewicz



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collected by Joe Vella Gauci



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**FOREWORD**

**INTRODUCTION**



# FOREWORD

JAN OLBRYCHT

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## FREEDOM OF RELIGION - A UNIVERSAL VALUE

Freedom of religion is a universal value. The freedom to profess and practice one's faith, to believe, and the freedom of expression and behaviour in public life as a believer, is the birthright of every human being. It is ingrained in every human heart. This is what we, Europeans, believe. Those rights are justly recognised under international law. The promotion of international religious freedom is one of the priorities of the European People's Party (EPP) Group at the European Parliament. It is a priority for me, as Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for interreligious dialogue and intercultural activities.

The release of this publication is an important part of those efforts. It is a clear-eyed look at the state of religious freedom in different parts of the world. It incorporates a broad spectrum of contributions: from academics and researchers, to faith leaders and representatives of religious organisations. Some of these individuals showed immense bravery in coming forward and sharing their observations with Members of the European Parliament. Their stories show that we, as an international community, have a lot of work to do.

The contributions identify global problems of discrimination and violence against Christians and other religious groups, including the troubling issue of the increasing use of laws governing blasphemy and apostasy. These laws are frequently used to repress dissent, and to harass political opponents. Laws such as those violate fundamental freedoms of expression and religion.

When religious freedom is undermined or attacked, not only those unjustly targeted are threatened, but also the given country's own stability. Thus, attacks on religious freedom are both an ethical and a foreign policy concern for the European Union.

Because we defend others' rights of religious freedom in Europe, the EU needs to press various leaders worldwide to do more to safeguard freedom of belief and to promote religious tolerance. That is why the EU must urge all countries, especially those identified in the contributions, to take action to safeguard this fundamental freedom.

This publication encourages decision-makers and the broader public to work on, and discuss those matters in a cross-cultural and international perspective. While serious challenges to religious freedom remain, I will continue promoting religious freedom as an integral part of our political engagement.

Jan Olbrycht MEP  
Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament  
responsible for interreligious dialogue and intercultural activities

# INTRODUCTION

JOSÉ LUIS BAZÁN

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## THE RIGHT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

### **Religious freedom, a cornerstone fundamental right**

Religious freedom is an inalienable and universal fundamental human right, recognised by major International and European Human Rights legal instruments. It is the foremost of human rights for it expresses the most fundamental reality of the person,<sup>1</sup> and, as stated by Arcot Krishnaswami the United Nations Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, it is probably the most precious of all human rights.<sup>2</sup> Religious freedom is at the pinnacle of all other freedoms,<sup>3</sup>

*"[and] to the extent that it touches upon the most intimate sphere of the spirit, one can even say that it underlies the raison d'être, intimately anchored in each person, of the other freedoms."*<sup>4</sup>

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1 Benedict XVI, *Speech to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of New Year greetings*, 9 January 2012, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2012/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20120109\\_diplomatic-corps\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2012/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120109_diplomatic-corps_en.html)

2 Arcot Krishnaswami, *Study of discrimination in the matter of religious rights and practices*, United Nations, New York, 1960, viii. Krishnaswami was referring to the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/Krishnaswami\\_1960.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Religion/Krishnaswami_1960.pdf)

3 Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 14 September 2012, point 26, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20120914\\_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20120914_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente_en.html)

4 John Paul II, *Religious freedom and the final Document of Helsinki*, 5: cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 November 1980. See also Pope John Paul II, *Letter to the heads of state of the nations who signed the Helsinki Final Act (1975) on the eve of the Madrid Conference on European Security and Cooperation*, 1 September 1980, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf\\_jp\\_ii\\_spe\\_19801114\\_atto-helsinki\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf_jp_ii_spe_19801114_atto-helsinki_en.html)

As rightly pointed out by Pope John Paul II, the right to religious freedom *“is also a point of reference of the other fundamental rights and in some way becomes a measure of them. For it is a matter of respecting the individual’s most jealously guarded autonomy, thus making it possible to act according to the dictates of conscience both in private choices and in social life.”*<sup>5</sup>

Actually, the right to religious freedom is the gateway which is intimately connected to many other fundamental rights and freedoms such as: freedom of expression (e.g. in the distribution of religious texts), conscience (e.g. in relation to compulsory military service), assembly (e.g. for worship), association (e.g. founding a religious community), the right to equality and non-discrimination (e.g. employment in the public sector; opportunities in the health sector; avoiding designation of religion in identity documents), the right to education (in accordance with parents’ religious convictions), the right to property (e.g. ownership of places of worship by a religious community), the right to asylum (e.g. when someone is persecuted for his religious beliefs or practice), etc.

The fact that the right to religious freedom of individuals, communities and institutions includes both the public and private spheres should be highlighted. The Court of Justice of the EU has reminded us that as religious freedom is one of the foundations of a democratic society, its public dimension is part of its core nature. Therefore, no national authority anywhere in the world can reasonably expect that any person should renounce the practice of certain acts under his freedom of religion in order to avoid a risk of persecution, including the observance of a certain religious practice in public that is of particular importance to the person concerned in order to preserve his religious identity, even though that practice is not a religious obligation.<sup>6</sup>

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5 John Paul II, *Message for the celebration of the Day of Peace*, 1 January 1988, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19871208\\_xxi-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19871208_xxi-world-day-for-peace_en.html)

6 Judgment in Joined Cases C-71/11 and C-99/11, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland v Y and Z*, 5 September 2012, in particular para. 70. See José Luis Bazán, *“Reinforcing religious freedom through asylum”*, *Europeinfos* n° 153, October 2012, <http://www.comece.eu/europeinfos/en/archive/issue153/article/5138.html>

## The increasing number of religious believers worldwide

In today's world, peoples and nations are mainly composed of religious believers (atheism and non-religious affiliation is a minority phenomenon worldwide). In mid-2010, with an estimated global population of 6.9 billion, the percentage of religious believers of all denominations was about 88.4%, while non-religious or agnostics were 9.6%, and atheists 2.0% of the total population.<sup>7</sup> Similar figures are provided by other sources.<sup>8</sup>

The expected future world trends show that both in relative and absolute terms, the numbers and proportion of religious believers will increase.<sup>9</sup> Christian denominations will remain the majority worldwide (33.4% of global population in 2025, and 34.3% in 2050), followed by Muslims (22.8% in 2025 and 25% in 2050), and Hindus (13.4% in 2025, and 13.2% in 2050).<sup>10</sup>

The phenomenon of secularisation in Europe - which is a complex process but a definite trend - does not correspond to the general tendencies worldwide, as figures show. The particularities of social

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7 Britannica on line, *Worldwide Adherents of All Religions by Six Continental Areas*, Mid-2010, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1731588/Religion-Year-In-Review-2010/298437/Worldwide-Adherents-of-All-Religions>

8 The statistics provided by the CIA *Factbook*, *world figures* (2009) are: Christian 33.35%, Muslim 22.43%, Hindu 13.78%, non-religious 9.42%, atheists 2.04%. Viewed at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2122.html>

9 According to the study by David Barrett and Johnson Todd entitled *World Christian Trends* (William Carey Library, 2001, <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/wct-1-2.pdf>), religious believers will increase their proportion of the world population from 84.8% (in 2000) to 86.8% (in 2025) and 88.1% (in 2050). It means that in absolute numbers religious believers worldwide will become 6.789.038.025 [Would it not be better to say 6.789 billion] (in 2025) and 7.851.949.855 [and 7.852 billion] (in 2050). Figures for religious believers (both, in relative and absolute numbers) are even higher in 2025 (90.52%), according to the "*Status of Global Mission, 2010, in Context of 20th and 21st Centuries*", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 34, No. 1. 2025 Total population of 8,010,511,000: Religious: (7.251.543.000) Non religious (625,648,000) and Atheist (133,320,000), <http://www.worldchristians.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/ibmr20101.pdf>

10 Barrett, David and Todd Johnson, *World Christian Trends*, op. cit. According to the "*Status of Global Mission, 2010, in Context of 20th and 21st Centuries*", op. cit., the figures in 2025 would be: Christian (33.80%, 2,708 billion), Muslim (24%, 1.962 billion) and Hindus (13.71%, 1.098 billion).

evolution in Europe – with an increasing and worrying hostility towards religions in many European countries and societies - might distort the understanding of the role of religions outside Europe. As the Georgetown University Professor of Sociology José Casanova wrote:

*“Religions are here to stay (...) and are likely to continue playing important roles in the ongoing construction of the modern world”.*<sup>11</sup>

From a global perspective, the figures clearly show that it is not reasonable to expect a reduction in the number of believers and in the role of religion in social and public life in the international scene, but rather to expect the opposite.

### **The increasing number of religious persecuted, mainly Christians, in the world**

The worrying situation of religious believers in some countries is of particular concern. In some of them, persecution, mainly of Christians<sup>12</sup>, is a daily reality. Given this situation, in terms of international justice, the goal of universal relevance is an improvement in the exercise of religious freedom throughout the world, notably for religious (including Christian) minorities. It is of the utmost importance to keep in mind that at least 75% of all religious persecution in the world is directed against Christians. The number of the Christian faithful discriminated against, oppressed or persecuted in this regard amounts to some 100 million people.<sup>13</sup>

Because of this situation, for several decades now our world has witnessed a constant migratory flow of religious minorities, including Christian minorities. This flow has been witnessed, inter alia, from predominantly Muslim countries in the direction of Europe, North America and Australia. Therefore, an improvement in the respect shown

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11 José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 6.

12 Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith*, 2011 Edition,  
[http://www.aidtochurch.org/pdf/P&F\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.aidtochurch.org/pdf/P&F_FINAL.pdf)

13 Secretariat of COMECE, *Religious freedom. Pillar of the Human Rights Policy in the External Relations of the European Union. A Report to the Bishops of COMECE*, May 2010, pp. 6-7,  
<http://www.comece.org/site/en/activities/policyareas/fundamentalrights/religiousfreedom>

towards religious freedom, inter alia, in countries of the Middle East, should - together with other factors (particularly economic factors) - contribute to a stemming of the demographic haemorrhage which has affected these religious minorities who have found themselves abandoned by the international community and to whose assistance the EU is called upon to act.<sup>14</sup>

### **The role of religions in social, economic and political issues**

A better comprehension of religion in the world is key to understanding the main social, economic and political issues, and help to resolve the political and socio-economic problems that fuel conflicts.

Unfortunately, religion is too many times misused for political interests and power fights.<sup>15</sup> For example, a Report on Afghanistan published by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in 2012 shows the misuse of religion by the Taliban for recruitment purposes.<sup>16</sup> We can find other cases in which religion is just a tool or an instrument for gaining or maintaining political power, even using it as a 'war mark', as is the case for erroneous and extremist interpretations of jihad.

The abuse of religion in the political sphere is linked to discrimination and persecution against other religious minorities, mainly Christians, but also fuels international conflicts and even wars. Religiously motivated violence, as Benedict XVI stated during the Meeting for Peace in Assisi in 2011, does not correspond with the true nature of religion, but rather with its opposite, "*it is the antithesis of religion and contributes to its destruction.*"<sup>17</sup>

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14 Secretariat of COMECE, *Religious freedom. Pillar of the Human Rights Policy ...*, op. cit., p. 7.

15 See José Luis Bazán, "La religión, ¿factor de paz o de conflicto?", *Revista Atenea* nº 46, Mayo 2013, pp. 76-80.

16 EASO, *Country of origin Information report. Afghanistan. Taliban Strategies – Recruitment*, July 2012, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/european-asylum-support-office/bz3012564enc\\_complet\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/european-asylum-support-office/bz3012564enc_complet_en.pdf)

17 Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World, Assisi, 27 October 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2011/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111027\\_assisi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111027_assisi_en.html)

Even religious tolerance, which in fact exists in a number of countries, does not have much effect since it remains limited in its field of action. In law and practice, a religious majority often 'tolerates' the existence of religious minorities, in countries in which fundamentalist religious law becomes state law, but they are frequently constrained, in multiple and insidious forms at the personal and social, cultural, administrative and political levels.<sup>18</sup>

For these reasons, there is a need to move beyond tolerance towards religious freedom<sup>19</sup>, from a restrictive and negative perspective of religions to a wide and positive one.<sup>20</sup> While religious tolerance creates a gap between a religious majority and minorities, and promotes discrimination against the latter, religious freedom reinforces the rule of law, assures a common standard for all citizens promoting an inclusive citizenship, strengthens the equality of all members of the society before the secular state law, and prevents direct and indirect discrimination towards religious minorities. Freedom cannot be divided.<sup>21</sup> Promoting the religious freedom of minorities expands the social freedom of all citizens, and firms up all freedoms and other human and fundamental rights intimately connected to freedom of religion.

Religious freedom also guarantees diversity and pluralism in a society, which is a substantial element of democracy, as the European Court of Human Rights has maintained for decades.<sup>22</sup>

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18 Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, op. cit., point 26.

19 Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, op. cit., point 27.

20 As for example, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 1510 (2006), 28 June, Freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs (point 4): "*Religions have contributed to the spiritual and moral values, ideals and principles which form the common heritage of Europe.*" See also, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, 25 November 1981, Preamble: "*Convinced that freedom of religion and belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism and racial discrimination, (...)*".

21 John Paul II, *Message for the celebration of the Day of Peace*, 1 January 1981, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19801208\\_xiv-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19801208_xiv-world-day-for-peace_en.html)

22 See, for example, *Handyside v. UK*, 4 November 1976, para. 49.

Both extremes (either fundamentalism or ideological secularism) look for an artificial homogeneity, harming social freedom and putting at high risk the real foundations of democracy, although in different ways and manners. Only when persons, communities and institutions are integrally free in practice to follow their religious convictions, does a real and natural pluralism appear in society, which is at the same time respectful of all other believers (religious or non religious).

The freedom of individuals, communities and Churches to profess and practise their religion is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence. Peace, which is built up and consolidated at all levels of human association, puts down its roots in the freedom and openness of conscience to truth.<sup>23</sup>

As Pope John Paul II stated:

*"True religious feeling cannot fail to promote true peace. The public authorities, by recognizing - as they should - religious liberty, favour the development of the spirit of peace at the deepest level of people's hearts and in the educational institutions fostered by believers."*<sup>24</sup>

The suppression, violation or restrictions of religious freedom have caused suffering and bitterness, moral and material hardship, and even today there are millions of people enduring these evils. By contrast, the recognition, guarantee and respect of the right to religious freedom bring serenity to individuals and peace to the social community; they also represent an important factor in strengthening a nation's moral cohesion, in improving people's common welfare, and in enriching cooperation among nations in an atmosphere of mutual trust.<sup>25</sup>

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23 John Paul II, *Message for the celebration of the Day of Peace*, 1 January 1988, op. cit.

24 John Paul II, *Message for the celebration of the Day of Peace*, 1 January 1979, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19781221\\_xii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19781221_xii-world-day-for-peace_en.html)

25 John Paul II, *Message on the value and content of freedom of conscience and of religion*, 14 November 1980, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19801114\\_atto-helsinki\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1980/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19801114_atto-helsinki_en.html)

Therefore, it is of utmost importance for social and international peace to promote freedom of religion, particularly in those cases in which its misuse for political interests is evident. That is why, not surprisingly, the then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton provided in 2012 a stalwart rationale for U.S. foreign policy on worldwide religious freedom -which is rooted in the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) signed by her husband- asserting:

*"For the United States (...) religious freedom is a cherished constitutional value, a strategic national interest, and a foreign policy priority (...) Religious freedom is both an essential element of human dignity and of secure, thriving societies. It's been statistically linked with economic development and democratic stability."<sup>26</sup>*

### **A correct understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere**

A correct understanding of the role of religion in the public sphere and in its relations with the State is of utmost importance, in order to avoid two extremes: fundamentalism (which considers the law of a particular religion as applicable to all citizens, even those who do not share that religion) and ideological secularism (which emphasises religion as a threat to social peace and, therefore, intends to exclude religion - all religions - from the public sphere).

Concerning fundamentalism, Pope John Paul II warned us:

*"Extremely sensitive situations arise when a specifically religious norm becomes or tends to become the law of a state without due consideration for the distinction between the domains proper to religion and to political society. In practice, the identification of religious law with civil law can stifle religious freedom, even going so far as to restrict or deny other inalienable human rights".<sup>27</sup>*

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<sup>26</sup> See Eric Patterson, "Clinton Declares Religious Freedom a National Interest," *First Things*, 12 September 2012, <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/clinton-declares-religious-freedom-a-national-interest>

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Message for the XXIV World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1991, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_08121990\\_xxiv-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121990_xxiv-world-day-for-peace_en.html)

This message pronounced 20 years ago is still valid and has unfortunately been confirmed by the political evolution in certain countries. Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never proposed a revealed law to the State and to society, that is to say a juridical order directly derived from revelation.

But it is also the case that ideological secularism - which is not a neutral approach towards religion but rather the opposite: an active, militant and partisan ideology - when seeking for the breakdown of a right and fair cooperation between State and religious institutions, supports social intolerance against religious believers and institutions, and restricts the public dimension of religious freedom, hijacking the moral integrity of the person.

In order to face both extremes there is a clear need to rightly give religion a positive meaning for social life as a driving ethical force and to neutralise any attempt to misuse religious or secular discourse to promote persecution, intolerance and discrimination.

### **International religious freedom in the EU perspective**

It is part of the EU's main task to promote European values everywhere at all times, including one of the main fundamental rights such as religious freedom.

A recent document published by the Secretariat of COMECE entitled *Compilation Report on Religious Freedom at the European Parliament and the European External Action Service (EEAS) (January 2010 – September 2012)*,<sup>28</sup> shows the public reaction by the European Parliament and the EEAS concerning violations of the right to religious freedom in the international arena. The European Parliament has adopted a more explicit approach to violations of the right to religious freedom, making more visible the persecution and discrimination against people, religious communities and Churches, with less fear of mentioning the victims and their religion of belonging. On the other hand, the EEAS has been more reluctant towards an explicit

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<sup>28</sup> *The Compilation Report* was produced [edited?] by José Luis Bazán and Joe Vella Gauci, <http://www.comece.org/site/en/activities/policyareas/fundamentalrights/religiousfreedom/article/5321.html>

and visible approach of the victims and has had a certain tendency to use and repeat certain conventional formulas. An 'action oriented' policy is sometimes lacking, and concrete actions should be taken by the EEAS in order to reinforce freedom of religion in its external policies. This weakness in promoting religious freedom and in fighting against violations of the right to religious freedom was recognised by Catherine Ashton in her speech at the European Parliament in 2012, when she said that:

*"the EU needs to strengthen its policy on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, which is so fundamental to a free society".*<sup>29</sup>

One of the new initiatives of the EEAS to reinforce its policy on freedom of religion in third-countries is the so-called "*EU Guidelines for the Protection and Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief*", a non-binding instrument to be distributed amongst its civil servants in all EU Representations around the world. These Guidelines, which follow international standards (particularly, Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) will provide an understanding of the international standards concerning the right to freedom of religion or belief, and will also give an orientation on how to react when there is a violation of such right.<sup>30</sup>

The timid response and the - sometimes - lack of decisions and actions by the Council of the EU when systematic violations of the right to religious freedom have been taking place in several parts of the world during recent years have been quite disappointing. The Council's 2009 and 2011 *Conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the*

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29 Catherine Ashton, *Speech on the report on Human rights in the world and the EU's policy on the matter*, Strasbourg, 17 April 2012, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/12/270>

30 The Council of the EU will eventually adopt the draft text of the Guidelines in June 2013. At the time when this contribution had already been written, some issues were still unclear on how the final version of the Guidelines would deal with the collective and institutional dimension of religious freedom, the risk of an extreme interpretation of the equality principle which would undermine religious freedom, and the recognition of the right to conscientious objection.

*basis of religion or belief*,<sup>31</sup> were examples of non action and even an expression of the internal disagreements with some Member States which were putting obstacles to a more assertive and practical response to some critical situations in third-countries.

It is time for the EU to use several instruments that it has at its disposal: from the human rights clause in trade and commercial agreements, to the so-called '*more for more*' principle,<sup>32</sup> to be applied not just in the neighbourhood policies, but across the countries where the EU gives assistance, in order to make more effective the protection and promotion of religious freedom.

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31 Council of the EU, Conclusions of 16 November 2009, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/111190.pdf>  
Council of the EU, Conclusions of 21 February 2011, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/genaff/119404.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/genaff/119404.pdf)

32 See, European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication on European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a Stronger Partnership*, Brussels, 20.3.2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/docs/2013\\_enp\\_pack/2013\\_comm\\_conjoint\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/docs/2013_enp_pack/2013_comm_conjoint_en.pdf)





**CHAPTER 1**

**PERSECUTION  
OF CHRISTIANS  
- 2010**



## **SERVE THE SUFFERING**

Open Doors was established in 1955 when a Dutch missionary, Anne van der Bijl, or Brother Andrew as many people came to know him, started to travel to Eastern Europe in a Volkswagen Beetle with Bibles but with, first and foremost, a warm heart for those that were not free to live their faith. That is still an important characteristic of the work of Open Doors: just to be there to listen and to comfort people who are persecuted for their religious convictions.

Open Doors is a Christian organization therefore most of the information we have about violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief is about Christians. This is not to say, however, that we do not support religious freedom for other groups. Freedom for just one group of people is no freedom!

We cooperate with others whenever possible in platforms and coalitions like the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID) here in Brussels.

Within 55 years Open Doors had grown out into an almost worldwide ministry with offices in over 20 countries in the free world and representations in almost 50 countries where Christians are persecuted.

Open Doors is almost entirely supported by individual donations. The annual income is around 60 million USD and we have almost 600 people employed worldwide.

We were really surprised and honoured when we learned about our nomination for the Sacharov prize this year. We take it as an important recognition of the work we are doing serving those suffering and as an encouragement to keep on doing it. As the ECR is one of the organizers of this conference, I would like to take the opportunity to thank them for the nomination.

## **The Suffering**

Violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief take place all over the world and it affects an estimated 100 million people. Figures, however, are highly dependent on the definition used and on the estimation of the number of Christians in a particular country. How many Christians are there in China? And should they all be included? Nevertheless, although we might not always realise it here, it seems fair to say that there are still many people in the world whose religious rights are violated, sometimes in very brutal ways.

Open Doors annually releases the so-called World Watch List, ranking 50 countries where the costs of faith are greatest. Based on a questionnaire with 50 questions covering various aspects of religious freedom, countries are then compared. Some of the questions are broad and will affect all religions or beliefs while other questions e.g. those on incidents, focus on Christians only.

This year the top ten consists of North-Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos, and Uzbekistan.

Before I go into more detail, I would like to highlight two general issues affecting religious minorities in a number of countries.

### **Registration requirements**

The first issue is the registration of religious communities. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, every human being has the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief. From a human rights point of view, there is no reason to object to a registration system for faith groups. In practice, however, registration is regularly used to control religious groups. If neither the process nor the requirements are clear, applications can drag on indefinitely. Pending approval, new groups are usually not allowed to operate. Furthermore, the registration requirements themselves can limit Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In Eritrea, for example, all religions but four were banned in May 2002. They had to re-register with the government before they would be allowed to

operate. Some refused to re-register but none of those who tried have so far been registered, despite the fact that back in 2006 officials of the Religious Affairs Department in Asmara had already acknowledged that several groups had met all the requirements. In April 2005 it was even proudly announced in the UN Human Rights Commission that the Seventh Day Adventists would soon be registered. More than five years later they are still waiting as are several other groups. In the meantime, hundreds of Christians have been arrested resulting in almost 2,000 believers in prison right now.

In Uzbekistan, as in other countries in Central Asia, all faith groups are obliged to register with the government before they can operate. I was tempted to say, operate freely; however, even with official registration, this will not be the case. Registered churches, from whatever strand, are strictly monitored and several registered faith groups have seen their premises raided and sealed and properties confiscated.

It is almost impossible to get state registration in Uzbekistan and, therefore, most Protestant groups operate unofficially. They face fines, threats, beatings, prison, loss of jobs, confiscation of literature and many other things as local authorities are often opposed to the presence of a Christian Uzbek church.

Pastor Dmitry Shestakov from Andijan was arrested in January 2007 and convicted and sentenced to 4 years in a prison camp.

In May 2008 Uzbek State television repeatedly broadcast an hour long programme about Protestant churches. *"In the Claws of Ignorance"* encouraging hatred and intolerance of religious minorities. The programme continues to be used by officials to warn the people of Uzbekistan against Christians.

Pastor Tohar Haydarov, belonging to a non-registered Baptist church in Uzbekistan, was arrested in January and sentenced to 10-years in prison for possession and manufacturing of drugs. His fellow believers insist that the case against Haydarov has been fabricated and that the police planted the drugs on him and in his apartment. The police searched the flat of Haydarov in his absence.

It is not only the Christian community in Uzbekistan that is under pressure. Seven Muslim men have recently been sentenced to three-year labour camp terms for holding unauthorised private religious lessons. Four others received suspended jail terms.

Religious minorities in other countries in Central Asia face similar difficulties related to the registration of faith groups as those in Uzbekistan.

China could take up a conference on its own. There is also an obligation for faith and belief groups to register and there is strict government control. Registered churches are not completely free to live their faith as they see fit. Other faith groups fail to register or even refuse to register on religious grounds. These are the so-called 'house churches'. Some of them, sometimes even having as many as several thousand members, are tolerated where other groups, counting just a few dozens of members, are under high pressure for no obvious reason.

So far I have dealt with issues related to church registration. Another general issue I would like to highlight is related to the personal registration of believers.

### **Personal registration (apostates)**

Especially in the Middle East, there are several countries where your religion is printed on your ID card or passport and registered in your personal file with the government. Based on the religion registered, you need to follow religious classes at school. Changing your religion to another or to none is impossible unless you want to change your religion to Muslim.

This rigid registration system causes serious difficulties for those who want to leave Islam and start to live as a Christian for example. A Muslim man can marry a Christian wife but a Christian man cannot choose a Muslim spouse. So, whom should a former Muslim woman marry after her conversion? As long as she is officially registered as adhering to Islam, she can only marry a Muslim. Let us assume that she will find a Muslim man who has also converted to her faith at least on paper their

relationship can be officially recorded. However, Muslims can only be married in a Mosque. This is usually interpreted as a reaffirmation of their adherence to Islam.

Children born to this couple inherit the Muslim faith from their parents who actually live as Christians. Based on their registration, they are obliged to attend Islamic classes at school. And by the time that they want to start their own family, history repeats itself.

To break this cycle, Egyptian Mohammed Hegazy filed an official request to get his religion changed on his identity papers. He filed his request in August 2007. Now, three years later, his case is still pending. Meanwhile, he is regarded an apostate and under severe pressure from both authorities and society, including his own family members. Hegazy lives in hiding. Unable to work, the former journalist is supported by friends and other Christians.

Pastor Mahjeed from Kurdistan, Iraq, who converted from Islam to Christianity, faces similar problems to those of Mohammed Hegazy. He refused to register his son with the local authorities as he did not want him to be registered as Muslim. The son of Pastor Mahjeed is now around school going age but, as long as he does not legally exist, entering a school will be problematic.

And these are just two examples of a problem faced by many people in the Middle East.

### **How do we serve the suffering (persecuted)**

Open Doors is serving the suffering in its own way. We endeavour to strengthen persecuted Christians so that they can stay where they are, in the country where they were born and grew up. Open Doors provides Bibles and other Christian literature, training for both pastors and lay leaders, socio-economic development projects and, last but not least, advocacy.

In many countries, religious minorities are regarded as second-class citizens. For them, it is very difficult to get education, to find a job

and, thereby, to house and feed their families. Open Doors is therefore providing funds to establish small enterprises in various countries so that Christians can sustain their families.

Religious minorities, often ostracized in their own country, have great difficulties in getting the news out to people of influence and power such as you here today. Hence, much suffering goes unnoticed. Furthermore, as many members of the minority group are not aware of their human rights, they take their suffering for granted.

Open Doors is training persecuted Christians in creating awareness of their human rights. Based on this new knowledge, we encourage them to claim their rights and speak out against any injustice experienced. Of course, this is not possible in all situations and in all conditions. Nevertheless, we deem it necessary to start fighting this battle from the inside out.

As it is not possible for all persecuted believers to speak out for themselves, Open Doors in 2004 established an International Advocacy Department to be the voice of persecuted believers in the political realm such as at the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Parliament, and national governments. These multilateral and national entities have the opportunity to defend the cause of religious minorities that neither they themselves, nor NGOs like Open Doors, have.

### **How can you serve the suffering?**

This brings me to the final question of my contribution today: What can you do to serve the suffering? Or, formulated in another way: What can you do to defend and promote Freedom of Religion or Belief for all?

According to the website of the Council of the European Union:

*"The European Union is fully committed to promote the universal principles of liberty and democracy, respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms in its Common Foreign and Security Policy, as well through its presence in international fora, or through its financial instruments managed by European Commission."*

Similar quotes can be found on the website of the European Commission.

Furthermore, the Council concluded last November:

*“The Council underlines the strategic importance of freedom of religion or belief and of countering religious intolerance, and reaffirms its intention to continue to give priority to the issues as part of the European Union’s human rights policy.”*

Hence, the European Union has high ambitions as far as religious freedom is concerned. Therefore, it should play an important role in the 30 human rights dialogues and in all other contacts with third-countries. In my opinion, the European Parliament should continue to remind the European Commission - and especially the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton - of these core values of the EU’s external policy.

There is a new strategy to hasten the exit from the [economic] crisis and to provide the building blocks for growth - Europe 2020 - and rightly so. However, focusing on economic growth and trade should not be to the detriment of Europe’s attention to human rights.

At plenary meetings of the Parliament there is a reserved time slot for urgency resolutions. Through these resolutions, many human rights violations have been addressed, but what about the impact and follow-up on these resolutions? Do you really take these resolutions seriously?

Furthermore, there are several commissions and many delegations, well positioned to discuss human rights violations including violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief. The Human Rights Unit consists of committed people ready to support your commission or delegation to address human rights violations. But they need you to put the issues on the agenda.

The European Commission is currently negotiating a Free Trade Agreement with India. India is an important trading partner and a market with huge potential. However, it is also a country with a

huge Dalit population treated as second-class citizens, child labour is widespread, environmental problems are serious and 3 million out of a population of 25 million Christians are harassed and discriminated against. I do realize that 3 million Christians out of a total populace of a billion people does not form a high percentage; however, this must never be an excuse to neglect the serious problems these people are experiencing every day. I was therefore shocked to learn that even in the European Parliament there are people advocating against a social paragraph in the new Free Trade Agreement. This is bad news for India, but it would also set a dangerous precedent for other negotiations yet to come.

I know that several people argue that the best way to promote human rights is by promoting economic development. That might be true for economic and social rights but I fail to see the direct link between economic development and civil and political rights.

From Pakistan, we continue to receive serious allegations of discrimination against Christians in the aftermath of the devastating floods. As an NGO, we do our utmost to pay special attention to these people while reaching out to the victims; however, in doing so, we make ourselves extremely vulnerable to accusations of proselytization and soul harvesting. Therefore, we solicit your support to address these issues in your contacts with Pakistani officials.

Since March 2010, the Kingdom of Morocco has expelled more than 120 foreigners from the country on short notice (usually no more than 48 hours), denied re-entry, or refused the renewal of residency. Some of them have been accused of proselytizing; however, no official cases have been filed and they did not get the opportunity to defend themselves before the court. These actions against foreign nationals appear to be in contradiction of both international and Moroccan law. It is alarming to see that most of those expelled from Morocco were living peacefully and productively within their communities and providing vital humanitarian services. Among them businessmen, educators and social workers. We understand many of these individuals resided in Morocco for more than a decade in full compliance with Moroccan law.

A letter to King Mohammed VI of Morocco on the matter has been drafted and you are kindly invited to sign this letter that is open for signatures both in the European Parliament and the US Congress.

Earlier this year, the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID) suggested a permanent all-party working group with civil society organisations. Such a group should endeavour to address in a relevant manner issues pertaining to Freedom of Religion or Belief and concerning the implications of religious or convictional presence in society for European policy-making. It should allow an open and active discussion of these issues, and especially help feature Freedom of Religion or Belief for all higher up the agenda of the European Union. If you are interested in this initiative, please let me know.

I could go on for a while, but time does not allow me to discuss the situation of Christians in Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Mauritania, Egypt, North Korea and others in more detail but you can make the assessment yourself. The information on violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief is available. I can only encourage you to use the information and to check the political channels at your disposal to address these issues

Whether you believe it or not, Freedom of Religion or Belief protects us all - believers and non-believers alike - and it is definitely worthwhile defending and promoting, both within Europe and abroad.

## **A CATHOLIC CHARITY WORKING TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS**

The international Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need has, virtually from the time of its founding in Belgium in 1947, provided help for oppressed and persecuted Christians. The initial beneficiaries of this help were the approximately 12 million Germans driven from their homes in the East at the end of the Second World War.

In the 1950s the focus shifted to the countries behind the Iron Curtain, where Christians were oppressed and persecuted by the Communist regimes. Today, Aid to the Church in Need provides assistance to Christians all over the world, wherever it is required.

### **Underlying trend 1:**

#### **anti-religious political ideologies are on the wane**

If we look back at recent years, two trends are apparent:

Firstly: discrimination towards and the oppression of religious communities on atheistic ideological grounds are declining. The political sea-change of 1989, the collapse of the Communist regimes in central and eastern Europe and the break-up of the Soviet Union brought new freedom for religious communities.

Even in the remaining Communist states, there are signs that restrictions are being relaxed.

In China, the Communist ideology, an explicitly atheistic and, consequently, anti-religious world view, is losing its appeal. The masses have long been searching for alternatives, which is the reason for the rapid growth of religious communities there.

At the same time, the Chinese State is heavily reliant on the assistance and support of religious communities, in particular Christians, in solving its complex social problems.

Cuba is another example: there, too, the Communist Government is no longer able to solve the country's economic and social problems alone, meaning that it needs the support of other groups within society. Accordingly, there are signs here too of a growing acceptance of the Church.

So that is the first underlying trend: political regimes firmly opposed to religion are on the decline.

**Underlying trend 2:  
Intolerant religious ideologies are spreading**

There is, however, a second, contrasting trend: in the last 20 or 30 years the oppression and persecution of faith communities for reasons of religious ideology has increased substantially. These ideologies firmly support religion, but just one religion - their own.

This can be seen in India, for example. There, Hindu organisations that wish to create a religiously homogeneous Hindu State, in which there is no room for other faiths, have been gaining ground. In 2008 in particular, recurring violent anti-Christian clashes left many dead. In many Muslim countries, too, intolerant religious movements are becoming increasingly influential, above all in the political arena, substantially reducing the rights of non-Muslims.

In some Muslim countries, the social pressure on Christians is so great that it has prompted a mass exodus. In Iraq, following the fall of Saddam Hussein, acts of brutality are systematically forcing Christians out of the country. More than half of all Christians there have already fled.

I would now like to look at three countries in greater detail: China, India and Pakistan.

**China: Religious communities under strict control**

In the People's Republic of China, the State recognises five religious communities: Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants. They are closely monitored by the State. The main principle governing

religious policy is that religious communities must adopt a nationally-orientated, patriotic line. This means that they must be independent of foreign influences.

As the number of religious followers has risen drastically in the last few years, the government apparatus is carefully watching to make sure that religious communities do not threaten the Communist Party's monopoly on power. State control is justified on the grounds that nothing should be allowed to jeopardise national unity or upset the social harmony.

Nevertheless, many believers in the People's Republic of China refuse to submit to State registration and control. They organise their own gatherings. Sometimes they have to meet in secret, giving rise to the use of the name 'Underground Church' for the unregistered Catholic Church. Protestant Christians use the term 'house churches'. The other officially sanctioned religious communities also include groups that refuse to register with the State.

From the Government's point of view, these unregistered groups are acting illegally. In some regions and provinces the authorities turn a blind eye to them. In others, they pursue these illegal activities. In some cases, the groups' meeting venues and places of worship are destroyed, with occasional arrests leading to fines or prison sentences.

Within the Catholic community, for instance, at least 12 bishops and just as many priests are currently behind bars or otherwise prevented from carrying out their pastoral duties.

The Catholic Church is viewed with great suspicion by the Chinese State. The centre of the Catholic Church is in Rome and it is from here that the Pope leads the global Church. One of the Pope's main tasks is to appoint bishops for the world's various dioceses, including China. However, the Beijing Government officially opposes what it sees as 'interference in internal affairs'.

China's religious policy provides for a different model. In 1957, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association was founded. It is supposed to

ensure the 'Church's alignment with Socialism', along with a 'patriotic ethos'. To that end, it intervenes in many ways in diocesan and parish life. Its responsibilities include the selection and consecration of bishops, independently of the Church's leadership in Rome.

However, this arrangement contradicts the Catholic notion of the Church. In view of the absence of any connection with the Pope, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association is not recognised by the Vatican. Nor is the State-controlled Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Nevertheless, the Vatican does not view the Catholic Church in China as divided, but as one Church, albeit one that is plagued by severe internal tensions caused by State interference. This is because, although the State pushes for independence from Rome, members of the State-sanctioned church also feel a connection with the Pope as part of the global Catholic Church.

Many of the bishops initially selected and consecrated without Rome's approval have striven for unity with Rome and are now recognised by the Holy See, meaning that they enjoy relations with the Holy Father. In order to help the Catholic Church deal with the highly complicated situation, Pope Benedict XVI wrote a pastoral letter in June 2007 addressed to all Catholics in China. Its main concern was to call Catholics in China to unity and reconciliation and to instruct them to support and strengthen the internal cohesiveness of the Catholic Church in China.

Verdict: The Communist Government of the People's Republic of China continues to interfere heavily in religious life.

### **India: Hindu nationalism**

In some parts of India, radical Hindu movements have gained in prominence over the last few years. They follow the ideology of Hindutva ('Hinduness') and wish to make India one large Hindu nation, with emphasis on the 'purity of race and culture'. There is no place for Christians or other religious minorities, such as Muslims. They are given the choice of converting to Hinduism or leaving the area. There are even political parties that have adopted these efforts as part of their programmes.

This political movement is behind the introduction of so-called anti-conversion laws in several Indian states. The aim of this legislation is to hinder or prevent people from crossing over from Hinduism to another religion. The anti-conversion laws are a threat to every non-Hindu who, in some way, promotes his or her religion. 'Unauthorised conversion attempts' are punishable by prison sentences of three to five years and heavy fines.

The state of Orissa in eastern India is seen as the stronghold of this political and religious movement. In the last few years it has been the scene of brutal attacks on Christian settlements. In December 2007 and August 2008 more than 100 Christians were killed and thousands injured. Their homes were burnt down and their churches destroyed. Fifty-thousand Christians were forced to flee and seek shelter in refugee camps. Many of them are still unable to return to their settlements.

Alongside the political and ideological motives for the violence, economic interests also play a role. The state of Orissa is one of the poorest in India. Some three-quarters of people there belong to the indigenous tribes and to the Dalits, the casteless, the untouchables who belong at the bottom of the social heap.

All these people live in crippling poverty. They earn a pittance working in the fields and on the plantations of owners of large estates. The Christians in Orissa want to end this exploitation and ensure fairer wages and the opportunity for Dalits to attend school and receive a good education.

The large landowners fear that the Christians' activities will destroy the basis of their exploitative economic system. Consequently, they are seeking to curb the influence of the Church and any further access to Christian communities. With the help of radical Hindu groups, they are stoking up violence directed at Christians, with the aim of intimidating them.

### **Christians in Muslim countries: second-class citizens**

In simplified terms, Islam takes one of two possible attitudes towards Christianity.

The first is 'tolerance': Christians are described in the Koran as 'people of the Scripture', because they possess a book of revelation, the Bible. In the early stages of the writing of the Koran, Christians were held in a certain esteem.

On that basis, Christian communities within Muslim societies are tolerated. They may retain and practise their religion, subject to certain restrictions: Any further display of their faith is not permitted. The construction of new churches or even the repair and renovation of existing churches can sometimes be problematic, because the necessary State authorisation is hard to obtain. The Christian religion cannot be promoted and missionary activity is strictly forbidden.

Christians have only limited civil rights. For example, Christian men are not allowed to marry Muslim women. They must first convert to Islam. That is the first attitude towards Christians: tolerance, but with limited rights.

Later verses of the Koran view Christians more negatively, accusing them of falsifying the Gospels. In view of their staunch refusal to join the Muslim community and convert to Islam, they are now seen instead as 'infidels', from whom Muslims should steer clear or even openly fight. The Koran features the repeated call to kill the 'infidels'. It is to these verses of the Koran that the stricter Islamic groups adhere, those that want a purely Islamic State, in which all people, without exception, are Muslim. These hard-line groups are attempting to put pressure on Christians either to convert to Islam or to leave the country. And this pressure is repeatedly exerted by violent means.

Muslims' behaviour towards Christians therefore depends on whether the latter are seen as part-believers, religious frauds or hardened infidels.

### **Lack of freedom: a ban on religious conversion**

In some countries, Muslims who switch religion face severe consequences. From the point of view of Islam, a convert is not changing his or her religion, but leaving the Muslim faith community. For Muslims, that is not a private affair but a public act. The convert is deciding against the Muslim community and rejecting the Islamic State: from a Muslim perspective that is high treason and a cause of great shame.

Converts are often threatened with violence from their own family, who wish to restore the family honour sullied by the apostate. Moreover, the killing of an apostate is not seen as criminal behaviour, but rather as the duty of every Muslim.

Once their change of faith is made public, most converts lose their job. They also face having their property confiscated.

The gravity of these consequences means that converts from Islam frequently have to practise their new faith in secret, in constant fear of persecution and reprisal.

### **The misuse of Islamic law: Pakistan's blasphemy law**

In Pakistan, too, the social climate has changed in the last few years: the influence of fanatical, intolerant and violent groups is growing all the time.

In some areas of north-west Pakistan, Christians have received anonymous threatening letters, in which they are ordered to convert to Islam within 10 days. The letters state that if they fail to carry out this order they will be executed and their churches shut. Threats of this kind from radical Islamic groups were not previously a problem in Pakistan.

The situation of Christians is made particularly precarious and dangerous by the so-called blasphemy law. Anyone suspected in Pakistan of dishonouring the Koran or insulting the Prophet Mohammed fears the worst. The Pakistani criminal code establishes severe penalties in this case: dishonouring the Koran is punishable

by a life sentence, while insulting the Prophet can even result in the death penalty.

The danger is that there are an increasing number of false accusations against Christians. Even when a Christian facing such a charge is acquitted by the competent court, he or she must live in fear of being killed by fanatical Muslims. Fanatics of this kind often act on their own initiative to ensure 'justice' against 'blasphemers'. Just a few weeks ago, in July 2010, a Protestant pastor and his brother were shot dead in front of a court building. They had been arrested for allegedly insulting the Prophet Mohammed.

### **Help for oppressed minorities**

I have given just a few examples of the oppression of Christian minorities. The specific task of a religious charity like Aid to the Church in Need is to nurture contact with these minorities, to encourage them to rebuild their burned-down churches and to assist their pastoral work financially. Praying for each other is also important. And we wish to act as a mouthpiece for those unable to speak out themselves.

The political and social causes of the oppression of religious minorities cannot be tackled by a Church charity alone. Above all, we need the help of politicians.

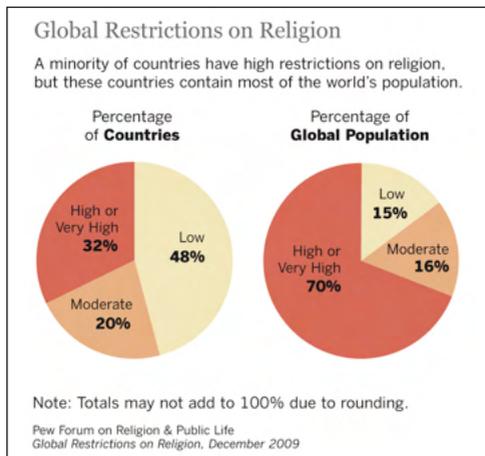
Together we must support the moderate forces working to build free and tolerant societies on the basis of the democratic rule of law.

## GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

I would like to begin by thanking Members of Parliament Mr. Konrad Szymanski and Mr. Mario Mauro for sponsoring this briefing and for the opportunity to summarize selected findings on restrictions on religion around the world from the ongoing study by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, a non partisan research group based in Washington, D.C., with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.

### Global Context

Overall, our study finds that more than 60 nations – nearly one-third of the countries in the world – have high or very high restrictions on religion. Some of these restrictions result from government actions, policies and laws. Others result from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups. Both kinds of restrictions are relatively low or moderate in about two-thirds of all countries. But because some of the most restrictive countries are very populous, nearly 70 percent of the world’s 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion.



Some restrictions result from government actions, policies and laws. Others result from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups. The highest overall levels of restrictions are found in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran, where both the government and society at large impose numerous limits on religious beliefs and practices. But government policies and social hostilities do not always move in tandem. Vietnam and China, for instance, have high government restrictions on religion but are in the moderate or low range when it comes to social hostilities. Nigeria and Bangladesh follow the opposite pattern: high in social hostilities but moderate in terms of government actions.

Among the world's 50 most populous countries (plus all countries with very high restrictions) shown in the following chart, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India stand out as having the most restrictions when both measures are taken into account, while Japan, Brazil, Mozambique, Peru, South Africa and Taiwan have the least.<sup>1</sup>

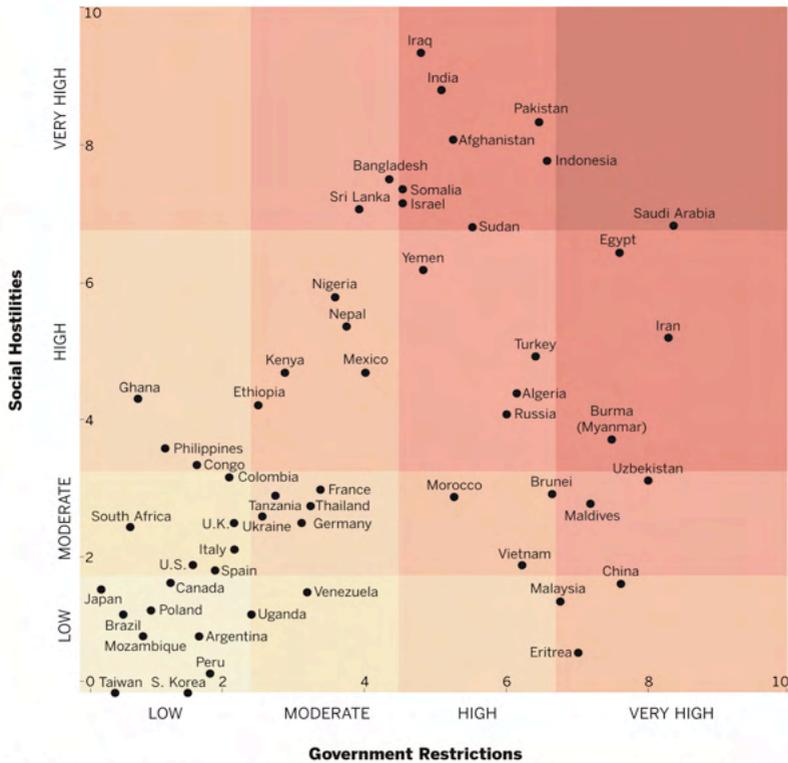
These overall findings are based on a series of more than 30 measures phrased as questions, such as, "*Does any level of government interfere with worship or other religious practices?*" And, on the social side, "*Is there mob violence related to religion?*" We answered the questions for each country by combing through annual editions of 16 widely cited and publicly available reports on international religious freedom by the U.S. State Department, the United Nations Special Rapporteur, the Council of the European Union, the U.K. Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and numerous other reports by other organizations, including the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch.

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is very likely that more restrictions exist than are reported by the 16 primary sources, taken together the sources are sufficiently comprehensive to provide a good estimate of the levels of restrictions in almost all countries. The one major exception is North Korea. The sources clearly indicate that North Korea's government is among the most repressive in the world with respect to religion as well as other civil and political liberties. (The U.S. State Department's 2008 Report on International Religious Freedom, for example, says that "*Genuine freedom of religion does not exist*" in North Korea.) But because North Korean society is effectively closed to outsiders and independent observers lack regular access to the country, the sources are unable to provide the kind of specific, timely information that the Pew Forum categorized and counted ('*coded*' in social science parlance) for this quantitative study. Therefore, the report does not include scores for North Korea.

## Religious Restrictions in the 50 Most Populous Countries

This chart shows how the world's 50 most populous countries and selected others score in terms of both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion. Countries in the upper right have the most restrictions and hostilities. Countries in the lower left have the least.



Note: The Pew Forum categorized the levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion by percentiles. Countries with scores in the top 5% on each index were categorized as "very high." The next highest 15% of scores were categorized as "high," and the following 20% were categorized as "moderate." The bottom 60% of scores were categorized as "low."

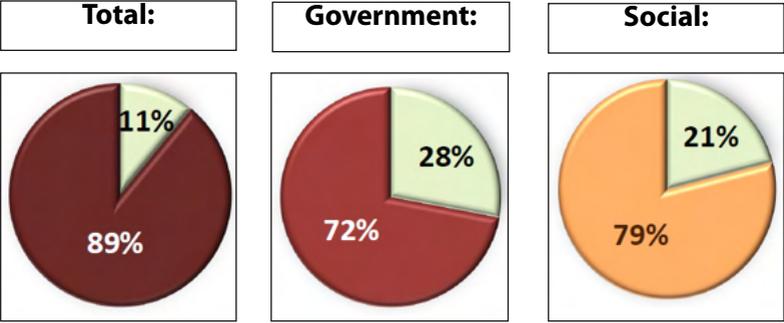
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life • *Global Restrictions on Religion, December 2009*

Although high restrictions are found in a minority of countries, the extent of restrictions is broad. Every country studied has some restrictions on religion, and there may be strong public support in particular countries for laws aimed, for example, at curbing 'cult' activity (as in France), preserving an established church (as in the United Kingdom) or keeping tax-exempt religious organizations from endorsing candidates for elected office (as in the United States).

But many of the restrictions measured throughout the world involved some degree of force or coercion. For instance, from mid-2006 to mid-2009 (the overall time period considered hereinafter), government and/ or social harassment or intimidation of religious groups was reported in nearly nine-in-ten countries (89%). National or local government actors harassed or intimidated religious groups in 143 countries (72%), while private actors, including individuals and social groups, harassed or intimidated religious groups in an even greater number of countries – 157 (79%). The brunt of these restrictions is often felt most directly by religious minorities or minority traditions of the majority faith.<sup>2</sup>

**Harassment of Religious Groups in Countries of the World**

In what percent of countries was there harassment or intimidation of religious groups by any level of government or by individuals or groups in society?



Source:  
 PEW FORUM'S FORTHCOMING UPDATED REPORT ON GLOBAL RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION

<sup>2</sup> While the Pew Forum's study does not have specific statistics on the extent to which people are harassed for having no faith at all, the study's 2009 report found that converting from one religion to another – including to no religion at all – resulted in social tensions in 57 countries (29%), which included physical violence in 32 countries (16%) for the period from July 2005 through June 2008. Additionally, the study found that private individuals or groups used force or the threat of force to compel adherence to religious norms in 49 countries (25%).

## **General Patterns in the Harassment of Religious Groups**

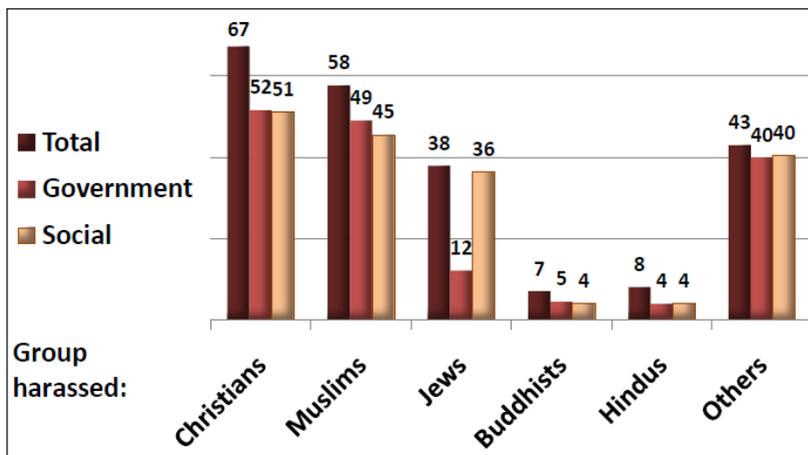
Harassment of religious groups occurs in a wide variety of contexts, but tends to occur in a greater share of countries where, for instance, constitutions provide limited or contradictory protections for religious freedom. Also, as will be further explored in subsequent Pew Forum reports, harassment of religious groups occurs to a greater extent in countries where governments penalize the defamation of religion, including penalizing such things as blasphemy, apostasy, and criticisms or critiques of a religion or religions.

In preparation for today's hearing on the topic of persecution of Christians, I have conducted a further analysis of the Pew Forum's data and compiled the number of countries in which Christians as well as other religious groups faced governmental or social harassment during the time period studied. While this analysis gives some sense of the global nature of the harassment and persecution of religious groups, it is important to note that these data do not measure the severity of the harassment or persecution. And, since this analysis looks at only aggregate groups for a finite period of time, it is not possible to say whether one religious group is harassed or persecuted to a greater or lesser extent than other religious or ethnic minorities, or whether incidents of persecution are rising or falling around the globe. Also, since other members of this panel will be providing specific examples of the persecution of Christians, I will confine my remarks to the global data on harassment of religious groups.

Nevertheless, the data are revealing. Christians, the world's largest religious group, were harassed by government actors in 102 countries (52%) and social actors in 101 countries (51%). Since both sources of harassment do not always occur in the same country, all together Christians faced some form of harassment in two-thirds of all countries (133 countries, or 67%).

## Percentage of Countries where Different Religious Groups were Harassed

In what percent of countries were the following religious groups harassed or intimidated by any level of government or by individuals or groups in society?



While Christians faced governmental and societal harassment in a larger share of the world's countries than did other religious groups individually, many other religious groups faced substantial persecution around the world as well. For instance, Muslims, who account for nearly one-in-four of the world's population according to a recent study by the Pew Forum, also experienced substantial harassment, though in slightly fewer countries worldwide. Overall, Muslims were harassed in 115 countries (58%), including harassment by government actors in 97 countries (49%) and by social actors in 90 countries (45%).

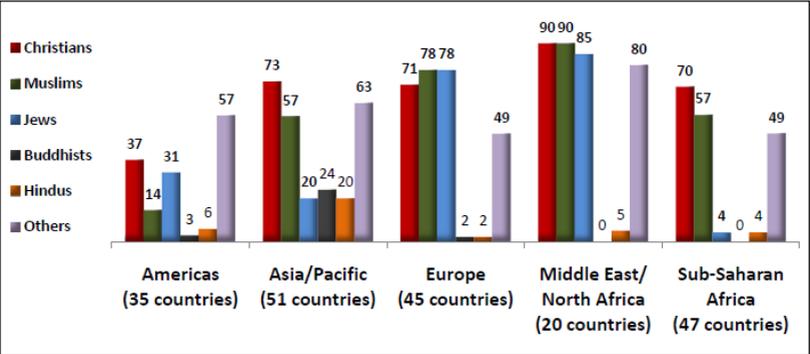
Although the global Jewish population makes up approximately 0.2 percent of the world's population, governmental or societal harassment of Jews was reported in 75 countries (38%) during the three-year period under examination. In 72 countries (36%), Jews were harassed by social groups or individuals, and in 24 countries (12%), they were harassed by government actors.

In comparison, Buddhists and Hindus, who combined account for approximately one-fifth of the world’s population, experienced harassment in relatively fewer countries across the three-years studied, Buddhists in 14 (7%) and Hindus 16 (8%) countries. Members of smaller religions – including ancient groups such as Sikhs and Zoroastrians, newer faith groups such as Baha’is and Rastafarians, as well as more localized groups that practice Voodoo and tribal religions – experienced harassment in approximately 40 percent of countries, again far higher than their global share of the world’s population, which is estimated to be slightly less than 13 percent.

**Global Patterns in the Harassment of Christians**

Considering the combined effects of government and social intimidation, Christians were harassed in a greater percent of countries in the Middle East and North Africa (90%) than in other regions. Notably, however, Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa also faced harassment in the same portion of countries (90%) as did Christians. Jews and members of smaller religious groups, such as Baha’is, also faced harassment in at least 80 percent of countries in the region during the study period.

**Percentage of Countries where Religious Groups were Harassed in World Regions**  
 In what percent of countries are religious groups harassed by government or private actors?



Source: PEW FORUM'S FORTHCOMING UPDATED REPORT ON GLOBAL RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION

Two regions stand out where Christians were harassed in a larger percentage of countries than other religious groups. In Asia-Pacific, Christians faced harassment in 73 percent of countries, a greater portion than did members of religions that are more numerous in the region, including Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Christians are in the majority, Christians were harassed in 70 percent of countries.

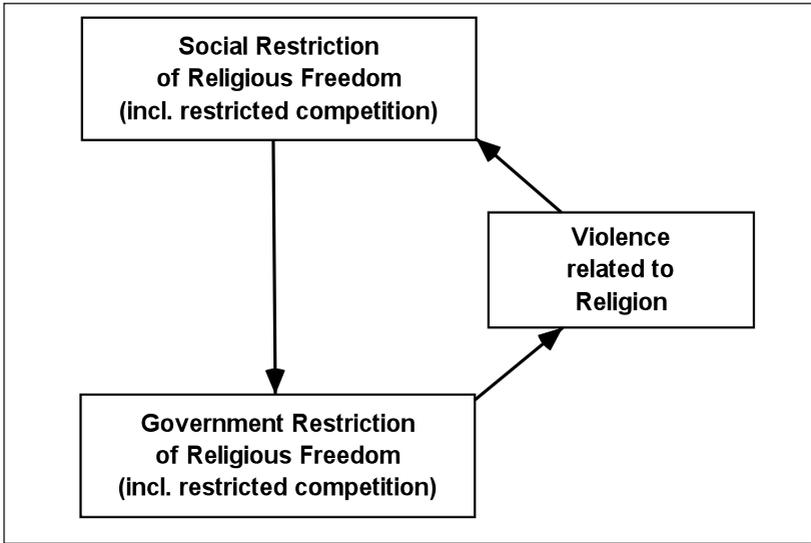
In Europe, Muslims and Jews faced government and/or social harassment in a slightly larger share of countries (78%) than did Christians, though the portion of European countries where Christians were harassed was also high. Christians faced harassment in more than 70% of countries in Europe.

In the Americas, Christians faced harassment in 37 percent of countries, second to members of smaller religious groups such as Rastafarians and other newer or indigenous faiths. Jews were harassed in more countries in the Americas than were Muslims.

### **Some implications**

My colleague at Penn State University, Roger Finke, and I published an analysis of the relationship between restrictions on religion and religion-related violence in the *American Sociological Review*, which we develop further in our book, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, December 2010). Our statistical analysis finds that social and governmental restrictions on religion are associated with more violence and conflict, not less. Specifically, we found that social restrictions on religious freedom lead to government restrictions on religious freedom and the two act in tandem to increase the level of violence related to religion, which in turn cycles back and leads to even higher social and government restrictions on religion, creating the religious violence cycle.

**Percentage of Countries  
where Religious Groups were Harassed in World Regions**  
In what percent of countries are religious groups harassed  
by government or private actors?



*Structural Equation Model, 143 countries, populations > 2 million*

One unique aspect of these statistical findings is that social restriction of religious freedom (or social religious intolerance) tends to drive government restrictions more than vice versa. Examples include the social pressures in India for anti-conversion laws, calls for Shari'a law in northern Nigeria and parts of Indonesia, expulsions of evangelicals in Chiapas, Mexico, and numerous religious rebellions from China's long history including the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Rebellion. One of the clearest historical examples of the way social restrictions of religious freedom can feed into the religious violence cycle is the Holocaust. Research by Hannah Arendt and more recently by William Brustein has shown that the Nazi government's violence toward Jewish people reinforced pre-existing social prejudices, creating a cycle of violence that was banally carried out with the support of many in German society. The irony is that while publics generally place a high value on religious

freedom for themselves, this does not always translate into protecting the religious freedom of minorities in the same societies.

In closing, as the noted sociologist Peter Berger has stated, the 21st century is a *“global age of explosive, pervasive religiosity.”* Accordingly, this study is part of a larger, ongoing effort – the Global Religious Futures Project, jointly funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation – that aims to increase knowledge and understanding of religion around the world. In the coming months the Pew Forum will release an update of the Global Restrictions on Religion report that was provided to you today, which will allow us to measure changes in religious restrictions and the treatment of religious groups over time. Please see our website ([www.pewforum.org](http://www.pewforum.org)) for more information on this and other studies.

## **PERSECUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE SUDAN MAY ENCOURAGE THEM TO CHOOSE SECESSION IN THE FORTHCOMING REFERENDUM 9<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2011**

### **The Sudan**

This Conference is being held here just less than 90 days before the people of my country make a historical choice, between unity and partition. It will be the first time, since the split between Eritrea and Ethiopia, that a nation state in Africa will be given the right of self-determination and is a major departure from the African continent's cardinal principle of recognizing and enforcing borders as inherited at independence.

There is, however, a real and imminent threat to the security of the people of Sudan and indeed the whole region. If the referendum goes well, it will bring peace to a country which has suffered almost five decades of brutal civil war and made my country a beacon of hope to the world. If however the promises of the CPA are not honoured and the referendum does not deliver a credible result reflecting the aspirations of the people, then Sudan will descend into violence and instability which will affect the whole region.

Opportunities to encourage the principal parties and to prepare adequately for the referendum process, with all its complex logistics and technical requirements, are rapidly dwindling. Meanwhile the parties are deadlocked on key issues including the referendum in the region of Abyei, which will also have its plebiscite to decide between unity with the North or joining the South. They are also negotiating post-referendum arrangements in a climate of mistrust. Clearly there is no time to waste. The CPA guarantors (especially UK, EU, USA), the UN and the international community need to demonstrate a renewed political will and commitment to enhance their engagement, not just until the referendum, but throughout the coming months and years of transition.

The Sudanese Church in her prophetic role has accompanied the Sudanese people in times of peace and war. The Church has been building peace, providing basic services and serving millions of Sudanese people across the generations, as international aid actors have come and gone. It is an indigenous Church, sharing the hopes and suffering of the people, giving voice to those who often are not heard. It represents the vast majority of the population of southern Sudan and a significant number of people in the north.

We the Church have witnessed acts of unimaginable violence and contempt for mankind. Helpless and stricken with grief, we are attempting to come to grips with the inconceivable. How can we talk about a peaceful referendum without recalling with concern the persistent persecution of Christians which the Sudan has experienced? Have the brutal facts not crushed any commitment to voting for united Sudan?

I am not here to criticize my fellow brothers and sisters who follow the Islamic Faith, but only those who in the name of Islam have taken it as their obligation to wipe the Christian faith from Sudan and declaring Sudan as an Arab Islamic country in which the other diversities of the Sudan are not given due recognition and equal rights. A unity based on a national framework which is not inclusive and which does not draw on the totality of Sudan's ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and regional diversities is not likely to be supported.

I am very aware that a negative image of Islam might be reinforced by what we are saying as the Church and we are fully conscious of potential misunderstandings. However, we are at the same time confident they can be avoided. We are confident because our country, Sudan, is a product of more than 2000 years of history and it is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious country; and, although Islam is part and parcel of Sudan, there are other faiths that make up the mosaic of our country and therefore it is problematic to say that Sudan is an exclusively Islamic country in the same way that it would be wrong to say that Sudan is an exclusively Christian country. ALL faiths must be respected, and our cry is therefore very legitimate and it is backed by history.

Indeed, I think that this Conference can make a positive contribution to the dialogue between civilizations and religions of which Sudan could also potentially play a role given its diversities which I have just mentioned. I take a lead in this respect from the Second Vatican Council which subjected Christian traditions to a critical review while providing a positive assessment of other great traditions, thereby offering a sound point of departure for new co-operation and a constructive dialogue. The influence of God's spirit is appreciated in non-Christian civilizations and religions and it forms the theological basis for inter-religious dialogue, the aim of which is to understand the essence of other faiths and to learn from one another.

Condemnation, segregation or annihilation even are no longer the issues. On the contrary, what really matters is constructive co-operation. Unfortunately, my country Sudan has missed this golden opportunity.

The organizers of this conference want us to investigate the reality or otherwise of Christian persecution in particular countries, and what dimensions such a persecution takes. I find the formulation useful because religious persecution today hardly occurs in the same manner as it did in the early history of the Church or at the time of the Crusades and the Jihads.

Where it occurs today, religious persecution is often not blatant but subtle, and what sometimes camouflages as religious violence in some parts of the modern world is the cumulative result of a complexity of interlocking factors, including failure in the socio-economic and political structures of many societies, involving real and perceived injustices, widespread poverty, large scale youth unemployment, and the resultant resentment, anger, crime, violence and war. It is also embedded, as is the case in Sudan, in the way the national framework is structured.

Put simply, in my country the national framework, since independence in 1956, imposes only one vision of race, culture and religion, namely Arab Islam, over the rest of the country which, as we have seen, is heterogeneous. This is the fundamental problem facing the Sudan, and which is responsible for religious persecution and discrimination.

I believe that any sincere reflection on Christian persecution today must get to the core of what persecution is. Meanwhile, the English dictionary defines a persecuted person as someone who is a subject of harassment, torture, humiliation, intimidation, and oppression. The reason for persecution may be due to one's religious beliefs, one's racial inheritance or one's cultural practices or typically may be political. Here we shall restrict ourselves to the persecution of Christians based on their religious beliefs in the Sudan.

I believe that a discussion on this theme is most apt for two reasons. First of all, the missionary mandate enjoins us to preach the Gospel to all the ends of the earth, welcome or unwelcome. In His life, the experiences of Jesus Christ and His early disciples testify to the fact that persecution was going to be a hallmark of the faith. When we look at the experiences of the Prophet Muhammad and his early followers, it is possible for us to argue that every religion has always experienced persecution and that the ability to withstand persecution has by and large been the mark of all true believers, radical Islamic groups and immigrant prophets of salvation, i.e. sectarian preachers.

The Christian side should continue and intensify its general information and educational work in respect of Islam and inter-religious encounters. Only those who are familiar with the fundamental tenets of Islam and the whole range of its possible interpretations can adopt a positive attitude towards it. The greatest threat to Christian minorities in the Sudan would be the formation of a Christian ghetto. This would fit in nicely with the concepts of certain Islamic circles. In other words, Christianity would be tolerated as a written religion, but Christians would be turned into second-class citizens. To understand the essence of this, we need to go back to the history of the Sudan.

### **Sudanese problem**

The fundamental problem of the Sudan which many characterize as the problem between Northern and Southern Sudan is as old as the Sudan itself. This problem was acknowledged as far back as the Second World War. The uprising in 1955 of Southern soldiers in the two Southern towns of Nzara and Torit was the first visible outburst of a deep-seated crisis

that had been brewing for a long time. What came to be known as the so-called 'Southern Problem' was a web of complex issues ranging from inequalities in development between North and South to inequalities in opportunities afforded to the peoples of the two portions of the country by the central government. These were compounded by racial and religious differences between the two peoples.

There exists historical animosity generated by the slave trade – which still propels the Northern elite to treat the African peoples as their slaves. This view is shared with emphasis by Tim Niblock: Southerners in modern times were to say that the memory of the Northern slavers had been kept alive to this day because the Northerners continued to treat the Southerners as though they were slaves and had ruled the south since independence like colonialists. Many Northerners find this version untrue and distasteful, blamed the Christian missionaries for keeping hostility alive by exploiting the theme of Northerner slavers.

It would also be appropriate here for me to dispel the notion of a '*Southern problem*' so that it is never misunderstood and misused again.

The problem in Sudan is really a '*Sudanese problem*'. It is, as we have said earlier, the problem of a national framework which is defined in only two parameters - Arabism and Islamism - and yet the Sudan is such a diverse country! Therefore those who do not fit into these two parameters are automatically excluded, marginalized and discriminated against. This, Honourable Members, is what Southern Sudanese by and large, have refused to accept. It is also worth mentioning that it is not only the South that has rejected this narrow framework, but also the people of Darfur, as well as those of Eastern Sudan, not to mention the transitional areas of Abyei, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile. Therefore, it becomes clear, and reinforces our point that we are facing a '*Sudanese problem*' for which viable solutions must be found. Even in the far north, there are groups that are resisting this national framework that has been imposed on the country.

To look deeper into this problem, the elite in the North, irrespective of whether the regimes were civilian or military, have held the political, military and economic reins of the country and portrayed the Sudan as an Arab and Islamic-orientated country. The elite claim historical bonds with the Arab world. This pro-Arab outlook was well demonstrated during the Israel-Egyptian conflict and the Gulf war, in which the Khartoum government sent manpower and resources to help fight in defence of their Arab brothers, while these resources could have solved the desperate situation in Southern Sudan and other marginalised areas.

The Southern part of the country as some of you may know is socially, geographically, culturally, and economically oriented toward Africa south of the Sahara. Its ethnic communities, split by colonial borders, still maintain their expanded family interaction. Arrogance and disdain towards the South was to be a hallmark of the various governments in Khartoum simply because the African culture is demeaned in the wake of a national framework that is built around Arab Islam.

This is indeed indicative of a much deeper problem in Sudan!

### **Let us again go back into history for a moment**

From the 6th century onwards the whole of Northern Sudan was evangelized as far as the border with Egypt. But these flourishing Churches were completely wiped out by the advent of Islam as from 640 A.D. until 1317 A.D. when Christianity at Dongolla was brought to an end. The second evangelization which was introduced much later, in 1881, is the one which got rooted among the African Sudanese, and has been battling for survival up to today.

Dr. Hassan el Tourabi, the ideologue of the Islamic movement's real influence in the Arab world, put himself forward as the leader of the National Islamic Front (NIF) movement which defined and directed the policies and programmes of the Government of Hassan el Bashir which nursed a vision of a nation whose state religion would be fundamentalist Islam, and whose culture would be distinctly Arab. From 1983 onwards, he was responsible for what can only be described

as a brutal application of Islamic Sharia, which meant to all intents and purposes that non-Muslims and non-Arabs were reduced to becoming second-class citizens. This should not have come as a surprise to anyone because, as we have seen, any system which imposes one particular racial, cultural and religious vision over the rest of the country to the exclusion of other diversities is bound to create discrimination, which in turn breeds resentment and even rebellion. This is the sad story of my country Sudan.

The restrictive national framework which has characterized all regimes in Sudan has entrenched the persistent persecution and discrimination against Christians and non-Arabs in the Sudan has become more pronounced as political contests for dominance have ensued. From the early days after independence, non-Muslims and those who do not identify themselves as Arab were told in no unclear terms that there were advantages in being Muslim and in identifying with the Arab culture. To this effect, the dominant elite adopted as a guiding philosophy the dictum of One religion, One People, One Race. Thus, the first Premier Minister of Sudan, Ismail Al Azhari, began a massive campaign to convert Sudanese to Islam across the country. He went on to register the Sudan as member of the Arab league the second day after independence. Being a Muslim and identifying with the Arab culture and race for example, became the basis for ascending to any meaningful economic or political office in the country.

A special feature of life in the Sudan today is the existence of radical Islamic groups, who are prepared to assert their ideas at gunpoint and are not prevented by the state authorities from providing military training for their militias and deploying them in areas of conflict. They are known as the '*holy warriors*' or Mujahidin literally meaning: soldiers of holy wars or Jihad, whose violations of human rights during ethno-religious purges, which included the destruction of Christian churches, is never punished by any state court.

The Sudanese Catholic Bishops in their pastoral letter *The Family of God the Father on Journey towards Justice and Peace*, issued in 1998, offers a concise description of the impact of the Sudanese conflict:

We the Catholic Bishops of the Sudan, being critically aware of the devastating civil war in our country and mindful of our responsibilities as bishops, have discussed among many other things the issue of peace in the Sudan.

We also reflected on the situation of human rights in general as on the famine currently affecting the country. We noted with the greatest concern the devastating consequences of the on-going civil war on the civil population and property as represented by the continuing loss of innocent lives This amounts to ethnic cleansing and destruction of property; rampant sense of frustration and hopelessness; broken families, spread of crimes and immorality including rape; dislocation and displacement of whole populations resulting in unprecedented suffering, impoverishment and dehumanization.

The influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries no doubt relates to the agonizing effects of this war. We also note with regret certain practices which undermine the dignity and worth of the human person. In particular, we deplore extrajudicial punishment, disappearances, slavery and slavery-related practices, torture, restrictions of freedom of expression, discriminative Islamic laws on non-Muslims, manipulation of the media, bombardment of the innocent civilian by military war planes, lack of genuine dialogue between Muslims and Christians, forced Arabization and Islamization. We disapprove of the use of food for faith or as a weapon...We cite the situation of war to express our total rejection of it.

**Since 2005 interim period,  
what has improved and has not improved?**

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) endorsed that despite all the evils which took place in the past, the government of Northern Sudan must make unity attractive to all Sudanese and in particular, to Southerners and those living in the marginalised areas. The call to make unity attractive was a radical message giving the parties the opportunity to revisit the restrictive national framework and make it more inclusive of all races, cultures, religions and regions, which could have created a space for Southerners and others in the marginalized

areas to participate on an equal basis as Sudanese. Some positive outcomes of the CPA are as follows:

Despite minor violations, the ceasefire still holds.

The first Vice President of the Sudan is a Christian and a Southerner. Despite setbacks, some major protocols in the CPA have been implemented. Some developmental projects have been implemented in the Southern Sudan and other marginalized areas.

Southerners have a government of their own, which though young and faced with several challenges is close to the people.

There are, however, a number of issues that still need to be addressed.

As yet, there is no agreement on the boundary between North and South.

The application of Islamic law has not changed and minorities who constitute 25% of the population are not exempted from its applications in the North.

In reality, the former NIF elite (now NCP) control the Government of National Unity, even though the SPLM participates in it. All Government of Unity programmes and projects are purely Islamic.

No movement in a number of crucial areas to prepare for a credible referendum process in Southern Sudan and Abyei.

Popular consultations in Southern Kordofan and Southern Blue Nile states will not meet the aspirations of a large number of the populations in those areas, even if these were to be free and fair.

There is therefore a real danger that violence could break out again, given that these areas will remain in the North. Such violence could easily draw in the South and potentially spread to the whole country.

Christians in the north remain at risk. Already there is inflammatory rhetoric including reports of threats and a climate of fear. Just last week on 29th September 2010, the Minister of Information, Mr. Kamal Mohamed Obeid, declared in a press conference in Khartoum that: If the referendum

resulted in separation, the Christians will not enjoy citizenship rights in the north as they would be considered citizens of another state. There are now growing and valid fears about what an independence vote would mean for an estimated 1.5 million southerners living around Khartoum and other northern towns, many of them long-term residents of internally displaced peoples' camps and other settlements.

Activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) continue to devastate people in southern Sudan, mainly in my diocese. The LRA is no longer a Ugandan issue; it is regional, covering four countries. Indeed it represents a new dimension of warfare, an indigenous way of recruiting mercenaries. Official forces, whether SPLA, UPDF or UN, have failed to protect civilians. This group of Rebels, the LRA on 14th August 2009, broke into one of my parishes of Ezo and abducted 27 Christians who were at prayers; in the forest these rebels literally crucified 17 of them to the ground with pieces of wood. Four days later in Nzara they attacked our Chapel of Nzara parish, caught 12 people and nailed them to the ground in the form of a cross. The Church emphasizes that there can be no military solution to this issue and a negotiated settlement must be pursued.

Making unity attractive for the Christians or for Southerners to vote for unity is made all the more difficult by the reluctance of the Khartoum elite to constitutionally separate religion from the State and drastically change the national framework to make it more inclusive of all the diversities that make up the Sudan. Without this, the international community should expect the result of the referendum to be secession, if the state of affairs remains like this.

### **Way forward for peace in the Sudan and elsewhere**

Campaign for dialogue in many ways is the noble cause for which all of us must labour!

The struggle for religious freedom requires two attitudes that are not easily reconciled with one another. On the one hand, there is a need for SPIRITUALITY OF PEACE FOR ALL BELIEVERS. At the end of the study on 'Christian and Muslims and the Challenge of Human Rights'

the authors state that: Many developments in the Islamic world may give us cause for scepticism at present. On the other hand, there are repeated examples of successful encounters. However, it is not optimistic or pessimistic forecasts which count, but a fundamental open-mindedness towards the potential of the other side - and that potential may indeed, be surprising.

On the other hand, it is important not to link one's own tolerance to the tolerance practiced by others. This is explained very well by Ernst Nagel, who died recently after many years as the head of the Institute for Theology and Peace in Hamburg. He said:

*"Another outcome of this theological self-contemplation is that one's own attitude to dialogue does not depend on the good behaviour of one's partner."*

We, the Sudanese minorities, particularly the Christians, urge the support of the international community for a peaceful referendum which must sponsor permanent peace in the Sudan either as one or two separate countries, where no one can be discriminated on the basis of religion, gender or ethnic affiliation. We are people of hope and we hope that our efforts will bear fruit and we will live in a peaceful environment in our beloved country. Our faith is in a peaceful struggle. We will continue it until we achieve our goal of a just society, where we are considered equally human and Sudanese.

Can this conference recommend to the EU to put pressure on the United Nations to empower its legislation to protect the rights of minorities, especially the Christians? Can the UN come up with a Commission on International Religious Freedom in its consortium with a strong power to bring justice to any country which persecutes its citizens of particular faith or belief? Which types of atrocities does ICC persecute, can the killings and persecutions of Christians not qualify?

I would like to conclude my speech with the saying of that great peace lover, Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in non-violent protest. He said *"What is faith worth if it is not translated into action?"* And this is what we are doing. Thank you very much for your kind attention.

## **IN IRAQ: PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS BUT WE ARE NOT GIVING UP**

### **The Beginning**

Most of you probably do not know about Christians in Iraq. Christianity entered Mesopotamia (Iraq) from the beginning of the Christian era. According to the best-known and most widely disseminated version, the Apostle Thomas was the first one to evangelize those regions during his travel to India. At the time of the Muslim conquest in 637, about one half of the population of what is now Iraq and a great part of Iran was Christian. Iraq's Christians are one of the world's oldest Christian communities. Their native tongue is Aramaic, the language of Christ, they speak Arabic. Obviously few Christians have suffered worse in recent years than these Iraqis.

### **The Situation Today**

For us our future is linked to the Muslims who are the majority, but at the same time we are worried about the growth of religious extremism and political Islam. Extremists are the big danger for the whole world. Their strategy is to impose their rules and their ways even in the countries where they are minorities. There is no clarity on the future of the Islamic world scene!

The Christians in the Middle East in the early twentieth century were 20% of the population; but today they account for less than 10%. In Iraq, according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, there were approximately one million Christians in Iraq prior to the war. Today, there are only about 500,000.

In Iraq in recent years there have been alarming numbers of religiously motivated killings, abductions, beatings, rapes, threats, intimidation, forced conversions, marriages, and displacement from homes and businesses, and attacks on religious leaders, pilgrims, and holy sites; and the smallest religious minorities in Iraq have been among the most

vulnerable, although Iraqis from many religious communities, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, have suffered in this violence. Members of small religious minority communities in Iraq do not have militia or tribal structures to defend them, do not receive adequate official protection, and are legally, politically, and economically marginalized.

In Iraq, the number of Christians is continuing to diminish. Maybe they will disappear under continued persecution, threats and violence carried out by extremists who are leaving us no choice: conversion immediately to Islam or to consign their property and leave the country or to pay a monetary tribute to the Jihad if they want to avoid their death. 51 churches have been attacked (three churches in my diocese). One bishop and three priests kidnapped and murdered and about 900 innocent Christians have been killed since the United States-led invasion in 2003. Hundreds of thousands have fled their homes and are staying in neighbouring countries as refugees. They are looking for a secure place to live and to educate their children to the same levels they themselves achieved before the war. Since six months ago, Iraqi politicians have not been able to form a new government.

### **What is to be done?**

There is a danger of the extinction of the Christian community in Iraq and other countries. For these families, the war has been a disaster. Americans are not only responsible for that tragedy, but they are responsible for a stable and peaceful future. They should not leave them behind and pull their troops out of Iraq without caring.

Also the international assembly is responsible for keeping religious and ethnic minorities in their lands to continue their presence and uphold their heritage and witness. The lack of planning on stopping the fatal exodus that afflicts our community is worrying.

The future of Christians in Iraq, but also in the Middle East has one of two ends: Emigration, or to accept living as a second-class citizen with many difficulties and fears.

The question that requires an urgent and decisive response is: "*How can the Iraqi Christians be helped?*"

To survive these times, we need strong support from all, with a clear 'political' vision and precise plans, not only for protecting and encouraging Christians to stay home and to hope, but also for fostering reconciliation among Iraqis, to promote human rights in that area and asking the governments to respect the rules. Christians have been, and can continue to be today, an instrument of dialogue, peaceful coexistence, and collaboration with our Muslim brothers who appreciate their qualifications. The migration of Christians in the Middle East is therefore a big loss for both.

The international community must take on its responsibility and come to a common agreement with the local authorities to respect the dignity of the human person and rights based on equality and full citizenship, with partnership commitments and protection. The strength of a state should be based on credibility in applying laws equally to all citizens, without discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims, majority and minority.

The international community should try to help the migrants to come back home and to facilitate and guarantee that; but also to resettle particular cases of Iraqis who have no prospect of returning to Iraq or whose situations are so perilous that life in Iraq is simply not possible, but without encouraging and facilitating the migration. They can undertake to finance some projects in the villages where Christians are living; for instance, schools, dispensaries, roads, agricultural projects. We have to go beyond survival to a stable life of future witness and presence.

We hope the next synod for the Middle East Churches, which will be held from 10th -24th October, will pay close attention to our problems. It is an opportunity to review the whole situation for Christians in the Middle East; because there are so many crucial issues to tackle and we therefore hope this synod will be highly productive.

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

I do not know how appropriately my presentation fits within the scope of this conference. However, I will offer my reflections on religious freedom not as a legal expert but as a student of social science. Before I begin, I should, at least very briefly, introduce India to you so that you will be able to understand that of what I speak in the right context. As you know, India is the largest democracy in the world. Indian territory is divided into 28 states and 7 union territories. Each of these states has its own state government besides a central government for the whole of India.

Of the population, Hindus constitute 82.0%, Christians 2.34%, Muslims 12.12%, Sikhs 1.94%, Buddhists 0.76%, Jains 0.41% and others 0.43%. India has around 21 major languages and over 1700 dialects, spoken by its people as mother tongues. It has a number of diverse cultures and religious practices. India is a country with countless diversity but living in relative harmony.

As part of the social context, it is important to know one crucial dimension of Indian society, the caste system. The Hindu community is divided into four major castes. Brahmins the priestly caste, at the top of the hierarchy; the Kshatriya, the warrior caste comes next, then the Vysya, the business people; and the Sudra at the bottom. Below this caste system are the 'outcastes'. The 'outcastes' are treated as 'untouchables' in the society. The sudras and the outcastes are expected to do service to the 'upper castes'. These 'untouchables' have been doing services to the 'upper castes' such as manual scavenging-removal and disposing of the night soil, disposal of the carcass of anything that is dead and rotten etc. They were not allowed to study or to read the scriptures of religion and knowledge, violation of which would meet with very cruel punishment. This most de-humanising system has undergone tremendous changes with the process of democratization and the

introduction of affirmative action policies in favour of the deprived sections.

There were many movements in the country to break away from the caste system seeking possibilities of living together, outside the caste structure. It is to this context that Islam and Christianity arrived through rulers, business people and missionaries. These religions were attractive to the most oppressed communities of caste India. The oppressed caste embraced Christianity and Islam with a hope of having a dignified life in the new religion. It was a search for human purposeful life.

### **Freedom of religion in the Indian context**

Article 25 of the Indian Constitution offers freedom of religion and it says: Subject to public order, morality and health, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and propagate religion.

I know that legal interpretation or academic discourse of the above is not what is expected from my presentation but rather a reflection of how it is realized in our country. Nevertheless, a brief comparison of significant points between Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 25 of the Indian Constitution is necessary. The UDHR Article 18 offers:

- a. The right to change one's religion - individual, or in community
- b. There is no factor that restricts/controls this process.

Whereas Article 25 of the Indian Constitution offers:

a. The right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion. 'Propagation' does not unequivocally offer the right of choice. It is interpreted in a contradictory manner by people of different views. The Supreme Court of India does not agree that propagation includes the decision of the individual to convert.

b. This freedom is subject to: public order, morality and health. Union Government and State governments have the right to pass legislation to restrict/control religious expressions in the name of public order.

The Indian context has two major issues in relation to the realization of Article 18 of UDHR and Article 25 of the Indian Constitution.

1. The legislation is not categorical in offering freedom of religion in its complete sense including the choice of a person to convert.
2. Indian society is intensely communalized. It would be difficult to implement even the best of the most progressive legislation in this communalized context.

Having said that, let us see what the reality on the ground in India is.

### **Christian experience in India**

Christians have been and continue to be making significant contributions to education and social and humanitarian work in the country. Nevertheless, they have become the main target of the dominant community, Hindus, in recent years. Attacks on Christians where there is physical violence against the leadership of the Church, killing of priests, raping of nuns, destruction of Christian institutions -schools, colleges, churches, cemeteries etc. (Human Rights Watch/Asia report 1999). I will state just one or two experiences of Christians in the country.

We know of the incident in which the Australian Missionary, Graham Staines, working with leprosy patients and his two little sons were burnt alive in Manoharpur Village, in Orissa during 22-23 January 1999.

Another incident is that of the Khandamal violence. The Asian Centre for Human Rights has reported that over 50 persons have been killed in the violence which spread in the district of Kandhamal in Orissa on 25 August 2008. Most of them were Christians. Many people have fled their villages. Some 5000 people have taken shelter in relief camps. According to informed sources, 200 villages have been affected. Hundreds of churches including house churches have been burnt down.

Though such stray incidents continue to occur in the country, they could just be seen as aberrations in the system. I would prefer to view

these cases as instances of a law and order problem rather than cases of religious persecution. Such criminal incidents do occur within single communities as well. Of course, the Indian State could not effectively curb the occurrence of such unlawful acts. Therefore, it suggests a crisis of governance exists in India that needs to be addressed and discussed by academia.

The secular fabric of Indian society is very much intact. We have a well-established judicial system which takes care of the democratic and cultural edifice of the political system. The role of the judiciary is very much evident in the recent verdict in the much talked about conflict between Hindus and Muslims on the disputed land in Ayodhya.

Indian society is by and large peaceful, drawing its spirit from the ideals of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi. He propagated the notion of *Sarvadharmā Samābhava*, the equality of all religions. This is an important notion, particularly in a world where we are witnessing an increase in religious fundamentalism and religious conflict. Although it was clear to Gandhi that there was only one God, he was realistic enough to recognize that different religions would always exist. Gandhi stated that

*"belief in one God is the cornerstone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions"* (Harijan, Feb.2, 1934).

He believed that all religions are complimentary to one another. The specificity of any one religion cannot run counter to another, cannot be at variance with universally accepted principles. This forms the basis of the cultural ethos in India.

What we need now is a situation in which everyone would respect and treat every individual and all communities equally. Creating an atmosphere conducive to enabling every man and woman, irrespective of their identities, to enjoy such freedom is the most

important aspect. Only then would the Laws and the Covenants, national or international, become meaningful in its spirit. It is time we filled the vacuum in Parliamentary democracy with a just, egalitarian ethos and an ideology of governance and human welfare. It is time the empowerment of the Dalits, the tribals and the minorities and the protection of their rights are guaranteed and they would feel proud of being born in such an India with her plurality of cultures and religions. Protection of religious rights is but a necessity of democracy. It is time also for national, international solidarity to uphold not just freedom of religions but the right of everyone to have a life with dignity and the exercise of his/her conscience freely.

## **VIETNAMESE MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES ATTACK DEGAR CHRISTIANS**

I would like to let you know that there are no words which I can use to express my deep appreciation and thanks for being invited today to speak in front of this body of the European Parliament. The cry of my people have been buried by the repressive power of the Vietnamese government for a long long time now but because of your compassionate hearts, Mr. Mauro and Mr. Szymanski, our cries and sufferings will be heard by the Members of the European Parliament. Therefore, I would like to reiterate that I am so honoured and so thankful for being able to speak to you today.

To my surprise, the United Nations has finally sent an independent expert on minority issues, Ms. Gay McDougall, to the Central Highlands of Vietnam to uncover the truth about the situation of the Degar or Montagnard people in the Central Highlands.

In her statement on the 21st of July 2010 Ms. McDougall states, *"I am concerned that minorities are achieving poor results in education relative to Kinh students. One of the problems that has been identified is that minorities lack adequate opportunities to be taught in their own minority languages from the earliest years of education and struggle with being taught only in Vietnamese."*

This is a strong statement that Ms. McDougall has put forth, and I am afraid that if the Vietnamese government continues to manipulate the education system of the Degar people, we as an ethnic group will cease to exist as we are identified by our culture and language.

She also raises concerns relating to the rights of the Minorities addressed directly to the Vietnamese government by stating that:

*“As in many countries with such diversity, numerous challenges exist to ensuring that members of minority groups can fully realize all their economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and live in conditions of equality. The rights of minorities include freedom to practice their religions without restriction, freedom of association and expression, the right of peaceful assembly, the equal right to own and use land and the right to participate fully and effectively in decision-making regarding issues that affect them, including with respect to economic development projects and re-settlement issues”.*

So what can the international community do to help? There are rules and laws set forth by the United Nations, which are very important for all people around the world. It is because of these laws and rules that we are able to struggle for our freedom and rights as indigenous people through non-violent strategies. We are therefore so thankful. But, to most of the member states of the United Nations, these rules and laws have no meaning at all. So what good are rules and laws if they are not enforced? They then become just mere words on paper and discouraging to say the least for those who are dependent on the help of the United Nations.

Furthermore, we the indigenous Degar people of the Central Highlands have been peacefully struggling for our rights to co-exist with the Vietnamese people in harmony and equality since 1958. But, the Vietnamese government is always finding ways to accuse our people of something so that they can destroy our race of people instead of looking for the best way for reconciliation.

At the present time, we the indigenous Degar people are acknowledging that the Vietnamese government is committing genocide whether we struggle for our human rights or not.

The Degar people are no longer going to wait for the Vietnamese government to give us our rights as defined under the United Nations rules and laws. And, we cannot wait for the United Nations to act on their rules and laws to help solve our problem because they continue to ignore our people's sufferings.

We are therefore going to go ahead and live out our rights accordingly to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and so on.

We are going to start with our right to freedom of religion. Death will become of every man but the Bible speaks of hope for life for our souls. It is through God's Word that Degar Christians are drawing encouragement, strength, and hope. The second right we are going to exercise is the right to co-exist with others in harmony, peace and prosperity.

Since the Hanoi government invaded our homeland, they have deprived us of all of our rights, confiscated all of our farmlands, closed all of our churches, taken away our right to worship our Lord God and so on.

This goes against their constitution, which has been worded very agreeably. For instance, Article 70 chapter 5 of the Vietnamese Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizen says:

*"The citizen shall enjoy freedom of belief and of religion; he can follow any religion or follow none. All religions are equal before the law. The places of worship of all faiths and religions are protected by the law. No one can violate freedom of belief and of religion; nor can anyone misuse beliefs and religions to contravene the law and state policies".*

But in reality, this is not so.

According to this Article 70 our right to freedom of religion is protected under the Vietnamese constitution. Instead, on 20 August 2010 the Vietnamese government began its so-called 'Military Wiping Operation' to wipe out all Degar Christians. They are promoting their government-sanctioned religion while persecuting others who are refusing to follow. To combat this, we have therefore launched a campaign in the Central Highlands for Degar Christians who would be willing to sacrifice themselves for their right to freedom of religion so that the Degar people as a whole could have their own Church and preach in their own language.

In two months of campaigning, July and August, we have so far reached 203 villages with 23,945 Degar Christians volunteering to join our Sang Ae Die Degar (The Church of Degar people). During this campaign people have gathered together to worship, promote fellowship, and pray.

Unfortunately, this campaign has been met with violence by the Vietnamese government, and they have done nothing to peacefully solve the problem.

Instead, on 20 August 2010 the Vietnamese government sent hundreds and hundreds of well-equipped soldiers, riot police and local police to attack around 32 Villages of Degar Christians with some type of chemical. Many of our Christian Brothers and Sisters have been arrested.

Soldiers surround villages so that no one can escape and the riot police would enter these villages, spraying villagers with chemicals that we do not know about and beating them up while afterwards the local police handcuffed them and threw them on their army trucks and took them away.

At the police station those arrested would be forced to sign some kind of paper by threatening them with torture and imprisonment. Some of them were sent back home where

their families were forced to take them to the hospital and pay the bills. Some of them were sent directly to prison and their whereabouts are not known.

So far, 24 of them have been sent to prison and their whereabouts are unknown. We are afraid that they will end up like our two brothers, Ksor Daih and Ksor Jak who were arrested on 24 February 2004. They were later released with severe injuries with broken backbones and legs.

Recently, our Christian Brother Rahlan Hlan was arrested on 28 August 2010 and was released on 1 September 2010 because they did not want him to die at their hands. So far, his family has spent 600,000 VD for his treatment but we do not know whether or not he will live or die from his injuries from torture.

Up to the present time, the Vietnamese government continues to attack our villages, arresting, torturing and then sending the villagers back to their families to be treated or sending them directly to prison.

In addition, the Vietnamese government is now using their sanctioned religion, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam, to fight against other religions in order to control the Degar people.

According to my knowledge, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (ECVN) is not a real church of God but it is only a camouflage for the military strategy of bringing people under its control. It has been reported by VietBao Daily Online on 13 June 2007 and posted by Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the government will be heading a new project to control the Degar people.

This special project was established on 20 September 2007 as an attempt to help the minority ethnic group in the Central Highlands, or so they would have the world believe. This special programme states that the government must recruit and train 21,811 Communist Party cadres to be pastors throughout the Central Highlands.

The main mission of these cadre pastors is to preach the gospel under the leadership of the Communist Party. This we know is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ but the gospel of the government. The ultimate goal is to have the believers under the control of the government, worshiping the party above God. In other words, the believer must not put God above all.

According to our belief, it is totally wrong and we do not want to follow this. As Christians, God takes priority in our lives and it doesn't matter what it will take for us to follow Jesus, we will do it. We will submit our lives daily into the hands of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and into the hands of Almighty God the Father. We fully understand that we will be persecuted for our beliefs. In Matthew 24:9 Jesus says,

*"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me".*

Therefore we know what is ahead of us and we therefore find comfort is God's Word.

It is because of our resilience in our belief that the Vietnamese government is forcing our Christians to follow their sanctioned church. By infiltrating the Church they believe they can better control the Degar people. But because we refuse to follow, the Vietnamese government has resorted to using military troops and police forces to arrest, torture and imprison us. How can we therefore say that the Vietnamese government supports freedom of religion? Are we not citizens of Vietnam? Does their constitution not protect us from persecution? If we are not citizens then what are we?

I sit here before you today humbly asking the Members of the European Parliament and the International Community to help convince the Vietnamese government to peacefully resolve this issue. They must stop the persecution of its own citizens, especially the indigenous Degar people of the Central Highlands.

Vietnam must honestly begin to respect all of the United Nations treaties which they have ratified.

And lastly I would like to say that while the world may hate us we know that our God loves us:

*"If God is for us who can be against us?" (Roman 8, 31).*



CHAPTER 2



**CHRISTIANS  
IN THE ARAB WORLD  
– ONE YEAR AFTER  
THE '*ARAB SPRING*'  
2012**



## TENSIONS AND ASPIRATIONS OF ARAB CHRISTIANS

During the Award Ceremony on 14th December 2011, Jerzy Buzek, then EP President, underlined that

*"[by] awarding the Sakharov Prize to the five Arab Spring activists, the European Parliament recognises the efforts of all those who struggle for dignity, basic freedoms [including Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience] and political change in the Arab world".*

Taking his words as a yardstick, we would like to analyse how the so-called 'Arab Spring' is affecting Christians scattered throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

The Eastern Churches have coexisted with Islam for fourteen centuries and this notwithstanding the difficulties and challenges which evolved throughout the centuries, from the time of the Crusades (11th-13th centuries). These difficulties and challenges are often linked to political problems and to the East-West conflict.

The so-called 'Arab Spring' in the Maghreb and Mashriq in early 2011 must be considered as one of the most crucial historical turnarounds and paradigm shifts of the 21st century. The events that the region has been witnessing are very significant and also quite indicative.

In the context of these 'Arab Revolutions' young people have cried out for freedom, equality, the right to work, citizen's rights and the dignity of the human person. Their great desire is to explore how to live in dignity in their respective countries, searching for how to live in peace and prosperity.

However, the aforesaid events are occasionally overshadowed by barbarous incidents committed by several individuals or small groups appertaining to different political and religious beliefs. As a consequence, the road that leads to the attainment of true democracy becomes even more unclear.

The fundamental objective should be: respect for all citizens; the elimination of parallel societies; respect for diverse religious and ethnic minorities and communities; and the creation of socio-political systems worthy of safeguarding human rights and democratic values.

The source for the new legislation should be the universal values that endorse the respect for human persons and their legitimate rights. Furthermore, within the socio-religious context, one must take into account the religious dimension that is crucial for social regulation – *“where the temporal remains charged with religious values”* and to be seen to *“participate in the same humanity”*.

To conclude, please allow me to borrow and make my own the words of His Eminence Cardinal Tauran, uttered during a particular meeting dealing with the topic of Christian-Muslim relations, where he stated that Christians and Muslims are facing three perennial challenges, namely: the issue of identity; the issue of recognising each other's difference; the issue of sincerity thus proposing the faith to the other with respect and dignity.

These words were also reiterated in the speech which the Maronite Archbishop of Damascus, His Grace Samir Nassar was meant to deliver during this evening's seminar.

My contribution would surely be incomplete, if I do not also direct your attention from the onset to the *fuoro esterno* of the Arab Uprisings. As rightly stated by Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom (European Commissioner for Home Affairs) :*“The Arab Spring [has] also caused tensions in the EU.”* In fact, she explained this kind of tension by the *“inward-looking and security oriented [behaviour]”* of the EU Member States, *“instead of reaching out and protecting”*.

Her exact words are:

*“It is as if we had said to them: It is wonderful that you make a revolution and want to embrace democracy but, by all means, stay where you are because we have an economic crisis to deal with here.”*

Speaking of the 'Arab Spring', she conceded that,

*"The revolution may have started, but the process of the Arab Spring is still in its early stages."*

She reminds the EU of its '*special responsibility*' which is that of helping these individual Arab countries to attain

*"Respect for human rights and promoting democratic values",* which after all *"are basic principles which the EU was founded upon."*

## **CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB WORLD**

### **Introduction**

Open Doors was established in 1955 by a Dutch missionary, Anne van der Bijl, or Brother Andrew as many people came to know him. He started to travel behind the so-called Iron Curtain with bibles and with a warm heart for those who were not free to live their faith.

Over the years, Open Doors grew from being merely a one-man show into a worldwide ministry with offices in over 20 countries in the free world and representation in almost 50 countries where Christians are persecuted.

Open Doors is almost entirely supported by individual donations. The annual income is around 60 million USD and worldwide we have more than 800 people employed, mainly local staff.

Given the history of the organisation, we are first and foremost supporting Christians whose right to freedom of religion or belief are violated. However, let me emphasize that we are wholeheartedly defending religious freedom for all. This includes the right not to adhere to a religion or belief. Freedom for just a select group of people is no freedom.

Today, we focus on Christians in the Arab World, one year after the so-called Arab Spring. Regretfully, there is little to celebrate. The initial excitement has been replaced by disappointment and even fear.

In the limited time available, it would be impossible to cover the whole Arab World. Therefore, I will limit myself to Libya, Egypt, and Syria. But first some initial comments on the region.

## **Initial comments**

The Middle East and North Africa is a vast and diverse region with ancient cultures but also with some relatively young nation states. Unlike in many of our western countries, tribal background and family ties are very important. Strong leaders tried to keep the nation state together and to avoid sectarian strife. Privileges, financial benefits, and fear were frequently seen as necessary to keep the country together. Dissenting voices were strongly suppressed.

Eventually, people stood up against the dictatorial regimes in the region, desperate about the structural poverty and unemployment they were facing. We should not be surprised that, in their frustration about their own poverty and the wide spread corruption, people long for strict law and order and embrace Islamic law as a possible solution. It is quite unlikely, however, that the Islamist parties will solve the economic problems that led to the uprising.

One of the most important benchmarks of a democracy is not the fact that people can vote, neither is it that the majority gets what it wants. The most important benchmark of a democracy is how the majority treats minorities, be they based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. Regretfully, there are clear signs that room for minorities has not increased since the revolutions in the Arab World. On the contrary.

Although the focus of this meeting is on Christians in the Arab World, we fully realize that the right to freedom of religion or belief is not the only human right that is frequently violated at the moment.

## **Libya**

During Gadaffi's reign, Libya did not have a real constitution. The country was ruled by the so-called Green Book and by Gadaffi's will. The feared and omnipresent secret police made sure that restrictions on the organization of church activities and distribution of Christian literature were enforced and evangelism was criminalized.

Most Libyan Christians are afraid to meet with other believers, as any kind of religious gathering, other than Islamic, for Libyans is forbidden.

Expats are allowed to have their own churches but Libyans are not allowed to attend. This last year, many expat churches had their permits withdrawn, and at least two Christians were imprisoned and possibly tortured. Christians who are released from prison are generally expelled from the country.

During the uprisings that started in February 2011 and led to civil war, Christians were more open about their faith in Jesus Christ. These Christians now fear the consequences of their witness.

Because of the unrest, 75 per cent of the expat Christians left the country and it is not clear how many Christians remain or will return.

The National Transition Council (NTC), currently ruling the country, has already revealed its intentions regarding religious freedom by setting a dangerous precedent. Under their supervision, the St. Georges Church in Tripoli was ransacked when they took control of Tripoli. Also, two Christians have been held hostage by the NTC because of importing Christian books. The NTC is expected to implement Sharia law and make Libya an even more Islamic state than before. The promised 'democracy according to Sharia' will make the position of Christians even more difficult than before, in a country where all citizens were already considered Sunni Muslims by law.

Conversion from Islam is generally not accepted by society. People who want to be baptized, travel abroad.

Earlier this year, Christians were shocked when a Muslim mob desecrated and damaged a cemetery with Christian and Jewish graves of British and Italian war veterans close to Benghazi. The police arrested three culprits but released them after several hours as they were 'too dangerous'.

## **Egypt**

Egypt is home to an estimated 10 million Christians (9 million Coptic Christians, half a million Roman Catholics, half a million evangelicals and believers from a Muslim background). Over the last one and a half years, more than 100,000 Christians have left the country.

Coptic Christians have not been involved in politics for a long time. They joined the revolution rather late in the process. This leaves unabated the fact that individual Christians turned out in significant numbers on Tahrir square, standing side by side with Muslims. There even have been joint celebrations and prayer meetings with both Muslims and Copts participating. However, this coalition did not hold for long.

Anti-Christian sentiments are on the rise and the situation is volatile. Rumours about two Coptic ladies allegedly being held against their will for wanting to convert to Islam, were enough to mobilize hundreds of Muslims in protest.

The incident, generally referred to as the Maspero Massacre in October 2011, left 26 people dead, 23 of them Coptic Christian.

Recently, a judge in Upper Egypt has upheld a six-year prison sentence for a Coptic Christian, Makarem Diab, wrongly convicted of 'blasphemy' against Islam and inciting sectarian strife. According to Compass Direct, the action against Diab is yet another example of how members of the Muslim majority in Egypt are increasingly using religious-based laws to persecute Christians or even Muslims who do not conform to a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam.

Gamal Abdou Massoud (aged 17) was convicted of inciting strife and insulting Muhammad, for which he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Both Diab and Massoud were convicted under laws that have been on the statute book for many years but that were rarely applied during the Mubarak era. The stricter application of these laws in recent months reflects a hardening attitude towards freedom of expression in some parts of Egypt.

It is still impossible for a Muslim to officially change his religion on his ID card to Christian. This has huge implications for the personal lives of those who want to leave Islam. They often cannot register their marriage or register the children born into their family other than as Muslim.

## Syria

Syria has more than 20 million inhabitants and roughly 10 per cent of them are Christians. They lived in relative peace under the secular regime of President Bashar al-Assad. As long as Christians did not disturb communal harmony or threaten the government, they were tolerated and had freedom of worship. The recognized Church in Syria is respected in society although every Christian meeting is monitored by the secret police. These Churches cannot and will not evangelize openly in Syria because of political pressure and agreements with other religious leaders.

Converts from Islam to Christianity face many problems, mostly from family and friends.

Anti-Christian sentiments are clearly on the increase amidst the current violent and chaotic situation in the country.

As one of the minority religions, most Christians have been supportive of the Alawite regime in the past, since that regime gave them relative peace and respite. But nowadays, most Christians are not supportive of any regime; they just want agreement and a peaceful situation. But supporting the Alawite regime in the past has made them vulnerable to attacks from the opposition. They are also at risk for religious reasons, as fundamental Islamic groups oppose any religion other than Islam in the country.

Anti-Christian tensions first appeared in the form of threats. During several demonstrations, Christians reportedly were forced to participate or were called upon to immigrate to Lebanon. The situation has further deteriorated. Recently, Christian meeting places – mainly churches – have been raided, resulting in physical damage.

Christians are not yet leaving the country in large numbers; however, they are concentrating in safe(r) places within the country.

Prospects for the Christian minority in Syria are bleak. In the city of Homs, for example, the Sunni Muslims gained power on the streets

when the government pulled out its troops for a few days. Some of the radical elements in this group have raided several churches.

Several fundamentalist Muslim taxi drivers vowed that they will harm all women taking their taxi unveiled. These women, mostly less orthodox Muslims and Christians, are being kidnapped, raped, or even killed.

## **Europe**

The Arab World is no doubt changing rapidly. However, given the information at hand, it is quite unlikely that freedom of religion or belief will improve - on the contrary. The push for Sharia law, including severe punishment for converts, is a clear threat to religious liberty.

In this pivotal time for the region, it is crucial for Europe to stand by the people, including the Christian minorities. Europe must use its contacts and influence in the region to foster human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Several countries are in the process of reviewing their constitutions. Open Doors calls upon both the European Commission and the European Parliament to offer any expertise and support in this process. Human rights should get a central place in the new or reviewed constitutions, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. Under current circumstances in the region, this is by no means a given.

We urge High Representative Lady Ashton to put Freedom of Religion or Belief at the centre of her human rights policy and we support her statement that the European Union needs to strengthen its policy on freedom of religion or belief, which is fundamental in a free society. Be assured that Open Doors is more than willing to provide any information needed.

Finally, Open Doors is eagerly looking forward to the finalisation and the publication of an ambitious EU Action plan on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

## **CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB CONTEXT AFTER THE UPRISINGS**

The Arab world is in turmoil and upheaval. Roughly a year ago, protests broke out which the Orient has not previously witnessed to such an extent.

Thousands of people demonstrated. There was an existential distress that drove the people on to the street. In Egypt, for example, 40% of its citizens are living below the poverty line. The social inequality in Egypt and other Arab countries is crucial; a small rich elite governs a large poor majority of the population.

A serious problem is the high unemployment rate, especially among the young people. Even when they are well educated, they often cannot find employment. However, those who are unemployed, have no income, cannot consequently afford their own apartment, thus are hardly in a position to start a family. And this in a culture where people traditionally get married early and where it is expected that in their mid-twenties they can already support a family with several children.

The desperation of the young people was in the end larger than the fear of the omnipresent police and the intelligence services, greater than the fear of arrest and torture.

In fact, the abuses in Egypt and other countries represent a striking disregard for the dignity of the individual. Therefore, the dignity of the person stood at the centre of the claims. The demonstrators requested freedom, just living conditions, participation foremost in the political arena, and democracy.

It was surprising that in these days of the uprising, Muslims and Christians protested together and protected each other when they were at prayer. They were unanimous in their desire for decent policies.

Calls for an Islamic theocracy, however, have not been heard. The introduction of Sharia law has not been discussed.

All these incidences were a true sign of hope and accordingly the notion of an 'Arab Spring' was raised. Yet, very soon the picture of harmonious unity was showing the first cracks. In Egypt, struggles for power and influence began after the dismissal of President Hosni Mubarak. An increase in attacks on Christian churches in Cairo and other places has been seen. Some expressed their suspicion that members of the old regime or of the military circles operated as masterminds behind the attacks.

Eventually, the surprisingly clear election victory of Islamist parties in the first free and democratic voting turned the hopes of the Christians into worry.

### **The continual triumph of Islamic parties in North Africa**

After the fall of the previous authoritarian governments, the new (transitional) governments had allowed more political freedoms. So far banned Islamist political parties have been officially approved to take part in elections while being legalized. Also, new Islamist political parties have been established. The many young people who participated in the demonstrations were, however, not in a position to create in such a short time their own powerful political parties for the parliamentary elections. Therefore, only a few representatives of the popular uprisings achieved election as politicians in the new parliament. Clear election winners were rather the Islamist political parties. They were surprisingly supported by a vast majority of the population.

In Tunisia, the Islamist party '*Ennahda*' ('Revival', 'Renaissance') won the election in October 2011 – a party which had been banned until the spring of 2011 and now provides the prime minister of the country. Moreover, Ennahda politicians hold important ministerial posts in the new government.

In Morocco, the Islamist 'Party for Justice and Development' achieved more than double the number of parliamentary seats in the legislative

elections in November 2011 and now includes the prime minister and key ministers in the government.

In Egypt, Islamist parties won an overwhelming majority of 70 percent. The election winner was the Muslim Brotherhood with its 'Party for Freedom and Justice'. A surprising high number of votes were also recorded for the Islamist movement of the Salafists and their 'Party of Light' (Nour-party). One of its main targets is the introduction of the Shari'a.

In Libya, new Islamist parties have been established. And in the upcoming National Assembly elections in Algeria (May 10, 2012), a victory for Islamist parties can also be expected.

Hence, we observe in recent months, a triumph for the Islamist parties in North Africa.

### **A new lack of freedom?**

Yet, violent Islamist groups also became active. In particular, Salafist groups have been acting in an aggressive manner in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. In Libya and Tunisia during the last few months, sacred places of the Sufis (Sufi shrine) and graves of saints (marabouts) have been destroyed. These places play a major role in popular Islam, but are condemned and rejected by the Salafists as idolatry. The Salafists are also gaining influence in the mosques. With their help, wahhabitic ideas are increasingly spreading from Saudi Arabia in the Arab 'West' (Maghreb). The Islamist movements are aggressive in their statements which indicate a high tendency towards violence. This raises fears that they will prevail in the political process and in determining the course of society.

All this will result in greater Islamisation in North African countries, even to the reintroduction of the Shari'a. However, such a development will not bring more, but less individual freedom to the people. Secular authoritarian regimes were swept away by the popular uprisings. Through the new free elections new governments will come to power which, due to their Islamic orientation, may establish new

authoritarian and intolerant structures. Religious and authoritarian governments will replace secular and authoritarian governments. For religious minorities, this does not offer any promise. Accordingly, Christians in the North African and Arab countries are worried about their future.

### **Christians look to the future with concern**

The initial hopes for more democracy and more freedom - especially freedom of religion - seem not to have been fulfilled. On the contrary: The more the State promotes the Islamisation of society, the more complicated becomes the situation of Christians.

The extreme example is Saudi Arabia which sees itself as THE Muslim country par excellence, as guardians of the holy places of Islam and as guardians of the religion. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is seeking to create a perfect Islamic society. Islam is the State religion. The Koran and the Shari'a are the foundation of the State. Nothing is allowed to jeopardize the 'perfect religious purity' of this country.

This is the reason why in Saudi Arabia solely Islam is recognised and allowed as the religion. Any witness of a non-Islamic religion in public is strictly prohibited, thus even the visible wearing of a cross or a rosary, the public presentation of a Bible and even, of course, public prayer meetings and church services. Throughout Saudi Arabia there is not one Christian church or sanctuary. And this although more than 1 million Christians are living in Saudi Arabia, who still represent 4% of the population. However, the Christians are, almost without exception, foreigners working in Saudi Arabia, mainly from the Philippines, but also from Europe or America.

A few weeks ago, the supreme legal scholar in Saudi Arabia, the Grand Mufti Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah Al al-Shaikh, called for a general prohibition on the construction of churches in the entire Arabian Peninsula followed by the threat to destroy all existing churches, such as those in the Gulf States.

### **Strict forms of Islam: Salafiyya and Wahhabiyya**

In Saudi Arabia, Islam dominates in the form of Wahhabiyya. This is a very conservative and strict version of Islam, a very puritan form which rejects many of the elements of popular approaches to Islam, such as veneration of saints and pilgrimages to tombs of saints. The State encourages this form of Islam, not only within its territory of Saudi Arabia, but also across its borders with a considerable amount of money (from the oil industry). Funded by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in particular, the 'Muslim World League' supports throughout the world schools and mosques, where the Wahhabi Islam is taught.

Closely related to Wahhabism in its underlying ideas is Salafism, also known as Salafiyya. The name is derived from the Arabic word for 'ancestors'. The Salafists would like to pursue their lives like those of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions in the early days of Islam in the 7th Century. This initial period appeals to the Salafists as the ideal period of Islam, as the 'Golden Age'. At that time, Islam was in the Salafists' regard still lived in a pure manner; subsequently all Muslims have to return to this 'true Islam'.

Salafists are striving for a theocratic state in which no 'invented by people' laws are applicable, but where only the Shari'a is in force. In order to build this 'ideal' Islamic society, all influences of the Western culture have to be eliminated according to their views. This also includes Christianity, which they often misunderstand as 'Western' religion, as an adulterated religion with heresies, which is why Christianity is perceived in their interpretation as an inferior religion. Nowadays, Salafism is considered as the fastest-growing radical movement in Islam.

### **Bloody persecution in Iraq - and soon in Syria?**

Hence, in Saudi Arabia, there is no religious freedom. However, Christians have not been killed for their faith.

Yet, that does happen in Iraq. Since the fall of the dictator Saddam Hussein in April 2003, we are witnessing in this country the worst persecution of Christians in present times. Up until now about 2,000

Christians have been killed in attacks and kidnappings, including six priests and a bishop. More than thirty churches were targets of bombings. More than half a million Christians have fled Iraq.

This wave of bloody violence in Iraq could be in store for the Christians in neighbouring Syria. In the wake of the 'Arab Spring' popular protests against the abuses in the country occur even there, but were bloodily suppressed by the government. The conflicts escalated having subsequently developed into a full-scale civil war which continues to the present day and which has already resulted in the deaths of thousands of persons. However, civil war and chaos could lead, as in Iraq, at worst to oppression and persecution of Christians in Syria. This would end a long tradition of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Once again, a Christian community, whose origins may go back to the time of the apostles, is in danger of extinction.

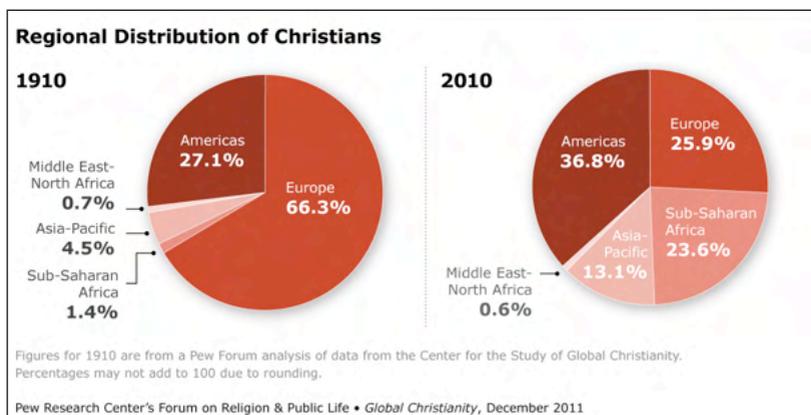
It also depends on us, on our attitude and our policies whether the Christian churches in Syria and other Arab countries will survive or not.

## RISING RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION: PART OF THE CONTEXT OF THE ARAB SPRING

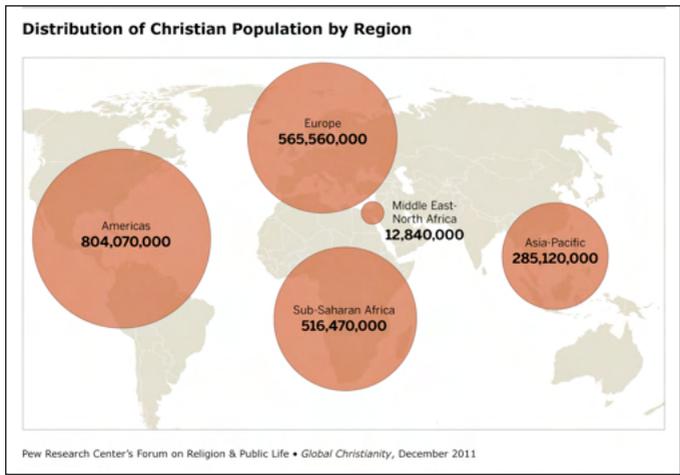
To provide context for this Parliamentary Briefing on “*Christians in the Arab World: One year after the Arab Spring*,” it is useful to provide a general picture of the size and distribution of Christian populations worldwide, focusing on the Middle East-North Africa region in particular. Following this, findings on global restrictions on religion are discussed with a particular focus on the Middle East-North Africa region.

### Christianity in the Middle East & North Africa: Global Context

A comprehensive demographic study of more than 200 countries by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life finds that there are 2.18 billion Christians of all ages around the world, representing nearly a third of the estimated 2010 global population of 6.9 billion. Christians are also geographically widespread – so far-flung, in fact, that no single continent or region can indisputably claim to be the centre of global Christianity, according to the study.



A century ago, this was not the case. In 1910, about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe, where the bulk of Christians had been for a millennium, according to historical estimates by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Today, only about a quarter of all Christians live in Europe (26%). A plurality – more than a third – now are in the Americas (37%). About one in every four Christians lives in sub-Saharan Africa (24%), and about one-in-eight is found in Asia and the Pacific (13%).



Clearly, Christianity has spread far from its historical origins. Though Christianity began in the Middle East-North Africa, today that region has both the lowest concentration of Christians (about 4% of the region's population) and the smallest number of Christians (about 13 million) of any major geographic region.

Despite the relatively small size of the Christian population in the Middle East-North Africa region, three times as many Christians live in the Middle East-North Africa region today (12.8 million) as lived in the region 100 years ago (4 million). Nevertheless, the Christian share of the region has gone down from 9.5% in 1910 to about 4% today.

<sup>1</sup> Historical figures are courtesy of Todd M. Johnson of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. Johnson is co-editor of the *ATLAS OF GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Overall, the Middle East-North Africa region is home to less than 1% of the world's Christians. Only about 4% of the region's residents are Christian. Although Christianity began in this region, it now has the lowest overall number of Christians and the smallest share of its population that is Christian of the five major world regions. Christians are a minority in every country in the region. About half (47%) of all Christians in the region live in either Egypt or Sudan. Lebanon has by far the highest percentage of Christians (38%) in the region. The only other countries in the region where more than 10% of the population is Christian are the Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. (For purposes of this report, South Sudan is included in Eastern Africa.)

### Christian Population by Region, 1910

<i>Regions</i>	ESTIMATED 1910 CHRISTIAN POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT WAS CHRISTIAN	PERCENTAGE OF WORLD CHRISTIAN POPULATION
Americas	165,890,000	95.9%	27.1%
Europe	405,780,000	94.5	66.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	8,560,000	9.1	1.4
Asia Pacific	27,510,000	2.7	4.5
Middle East-North Africa	4,070,000	9.5	0.7
<b>World Total</b>	<b>611,810,000</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Pew Forum analysis of data from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life  
*Global Christianity*, December 2011

### Christian Population by Region, 2010

<i>Regions</i>	ESTIMATED 2010 CHRISTIAN POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT IS CHRISTIAN	PERCENTAGE OF WORLD CHRISTIAN POPULATION
Americas	804,070,000	86.0%	36.8%
Europe	565,560,000	76.2	25.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	516,470,000	62.7	23.6
Asia Pacific	285,120,000	7.0	13.1
Middle East-North Africa	12,840,000	3.8	0.6
<b>World Total</b>	<b>2,184,060,000</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

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About 44% of Christians in the region are Catholic, including many Eastern-rite Catholics. Roughly the same proportion (43%) are Orthodox Christian. More than one-in-ten are Protestant (14%).

<b>10 Countries in Middle East-North Africa with the Largest Number of Christians</b>				
<i>Countries</i>	ESTIMATED 2010 CHRISTIAN POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT IS CHRISTIAN	PERCENTAGE OF WORLD CHRISTIAN POPULATION	
Egypt	4,290,000	5.3%	0.2%	
Sudan	1,760,000	5.4	< 0.1	
Lebanon	1,620,000	38.3	< 0.1	
Saudi Arabia	1,200,000	4.4	< 0.1	
Syria	1,060,000	5.2	< 0.1	
United Arab Emirates	940,000	12.6	< 0.1	
Kuwait	390,000	14.3	< 0.1	
Iraq	270,000	0.9	< 0.1	
Qatar	240,000	13.8	< 0.1	
Bahrain	180,000	14.5	< 0.1	
Subtotal for the 10 Countries	11,960,000	5.7	0.5	
Total for Rest of Region	880,000	0.2	< 0.1	
Total for Region	12,840,000	3.8	0.6	
<b>World Total</b>	<b>2,184,060,000</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

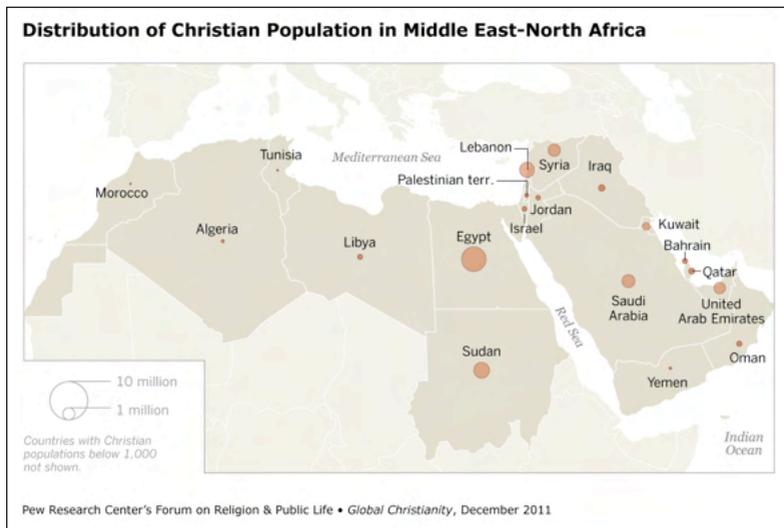
Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

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## Spotlight on Egypt

No nation in the Middle East-North Africa region has a larger Christian community than Egypt. Though media reports sometimes suggest that Christians make up 10% or more of Egypt's population of approximately 80 million people, census and survey data analyzed for this report indicate that Egypt's Christian population is about half that size. The study finds that there are 4.3 million Christians in Egypt — more than in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria combined.

Nine-in-ten Egyptian Christians are Orthodox Christian. Most Christians in Egypt belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is an Oriental Orthodox church.



Census and demographic survey data suggest that the Christian share of Egypt's total population has been declining. The highest share reported in the past century was in 1927, when the census found that 8.3% of Egyptians were Christian. In each of the eight subsequent censuses, the Christian share of the population gradually shrank. The most recent census, in 2006, found that about 5% of the population was Christian. The Pew Forum's 2011 report on the global Muslim population estimated that approximately 95% of Egyptians were Muslim in 2010.

Although Egypt's Christian population is overwhelmingly Orthodox, other Christian denominations and movements have a significant presence in the country. For example, there are an estimated 140,000 Egyptian Catholics and more than 250,000 Egyptian Protestants. Evangelical, pentecostal and charismatic movements have influenced Protestantism in Egypt, leading, for example, to the formation of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services, founded by evangelical layman Samuel Habib in 1950 to promote community development.

**Size of Christian Traditions  
in Middle East-North Africa**

Traditions	ESTIMATED 2010 CHRISTIAN POPULATION	PERCENTAGE OF REGION'S CHRISTIAN POPULATION
Catholic	5,580,000	43.5%
Orthodox	5,510,000	43.0
Protestant	1,730,000	13.5
Other Christian	10,000	< 0.1
<b>Total Christian</b>	<b>12,840,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add exactly due to rounding.

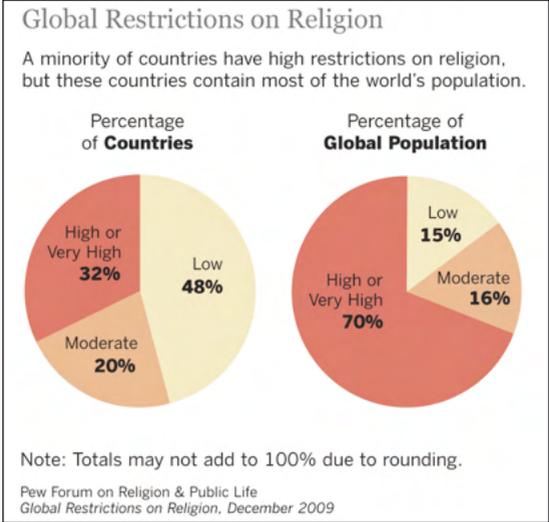
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For more than half a century, the United Nations and numerous international organizations have affirmed the principle of religious freedom.<sup>2</sup> For just as many decades, journalists and human rights groups have reported on persecution of minority faiths, outbreaks of sectarian violence and other pressures on individuals and communities that impinge upon their freedom of religion or belief. But until the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life published *Global Restrictions on Religion* in 2009 and the second report, *Rising Restrictions on Religion* in 2011,<sup>3</sup> there had been no quantitative study that reviewed an extensive number of sources to measure how governments and private actors infringe on religious beliefs and practices around the world.

2 According to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the foundational documents of the U.N., "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practise, worship and observance."

3 This builds on work I started ten years ago at the Pennsylvania State University. See: Grim, B.J. (2004). *The Cities of God versus the Countries of Earth: The Regulation of Religious Freedom (RRF)*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University. Grim, B.J. and R. Finke (2006). "International Religion Indexes: Government Regulation, Government Favoritism, and Social Regulation of Religion." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 2: Article 1. Grim, B.J., R. Finke, J. Harris, C. Meyers and J. VanEerden (2006). "Measuring International Socio-Religious Values and Conflict by Coding U.S. State Department Reports." In *JSM Proceedings, AAPOR-Section on Survey Research Methods [CD-ROM]*. Alexandria, VA: American Statistical Association. (pp. 4120-4127)

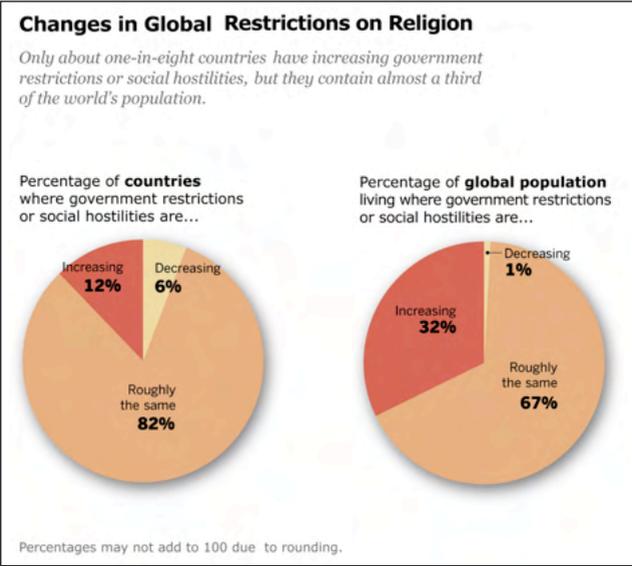
This section summarizes key findings from the studies and the next section focuses on the Middle East and North Africa, a region that has recently undergone a series of popular uprisings. The article concludes by reviewing a test of the relationship between restrictions on religion and violent religious persecution from *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, Cambridge University Press, 2011).



The studies by the Pew Forum find that approximately 70% of the world's population lives in countries with high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices, the brunt of which often falls on religious minorities — including, in some cases, people who are secular or non-religious. Additionally, more than 2.2 billion people, nearly a third (32%) of the world's total population, live in countries where either government restrictions on religion or social hostilities involving religion rose substantially between mid-2006 and mid-2009. Only about 1% of the world's population live in countries where government restrictions or social hostilities declined.

This overall finding is based on a series of 33 core measures – all available online – phrased as questions, such as, “*Is public preaching*

limited by any level of government?" And on the social side, "Is there mob violence related to religion?" Pew Forum staff answered the questions for each country by combing through three separate years of 18 widely cited and publicly available sources of information, including reports by the United Nations, International Crisis Group, the U.S. State Department, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House and the Council of the European Union. The study covers 198 countries and territories, representing more than 99% of the world's population for the three-year period of July 2006 through June 2009.

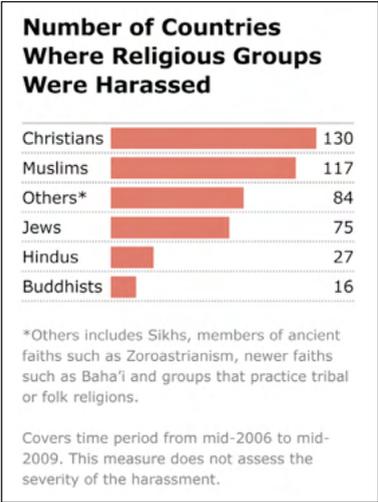


### Main Findings from the Study

First, the extent of violence and abuse related to religion, certainly one of the harshest measures of restrictions on religion, increased in more places than it decreased. The number of countries in which governments used at least some measure of force against religious groups or individuals rose from 91 (46%) in the period ending in mid-2008 to 101 (51%) in the period ending in mid-2009. This violence was wide-ranging, including individuals being killed, physically abused, imprisoned, detained or displaced from their homes, as well as damage to or destruction of personal or religious properties.

In nearly three-quarters of all countries, private citizens or groups committed crimes, malicious acts or violence motivated by religious hatred or bias. Such acts occurred in 142 countries (72%) in the period ending in mid-2009, about the same as in the previous reporting period (141 countries or 71%). However, the number of countries that experienced mob violence related to religion rose from 38 (19%) as of mid-2008 to 52 (26%) as of mid-2009.

Religion-related terrorist groups were active in 74 countries around the world in the period ending in mid-2009, a slight increase from the period ending in mid-2008.<sup>4</sup> The groups carried out acts of violence in half of the 74 countries. This includes people who were killed, wounded, displaced from their homes, kidnapped or had their property destroyed in religion-related terrorist attacks.

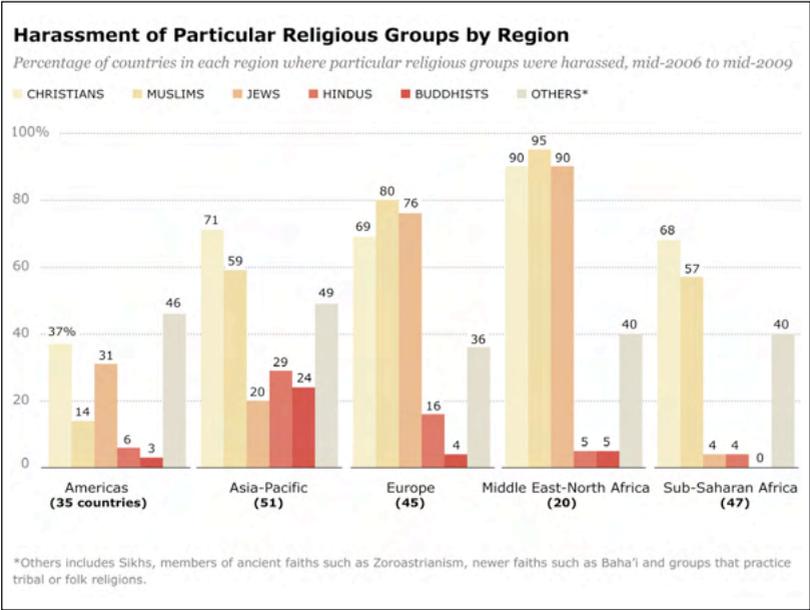


Adherents of the world's two largest religious groups, Christians and Muslims, who together comprise more than half of the global population, were harassed in the largest number of countries. Over the three-year period studied, incidents of either government or social

<sup>4</sup> Religion-related terrorism is defined as politically motivated violence against noncombatants by sub-national groups or clandestine agents with a religious justification or intent. In all cases, the study was careful to identify a clear religious element. Religious people may be the target, as is the case sometimes with FARC in Columbia, or religion may be the motivation, as is the case with al-Qaeda.

harassment were reported against Christians in 130 countries (66%) and against Muslims in 117 countries (59%). Buddhists and Hindus, who together account for roughly one-fifth of the world's population and who are more geographically concentrated than Christians or Muslims, faced harassment in fewer places; harassment was reported against Buddhists in 16 countries (8%) and against Hindus in 27 countries (14%).

In proportion to their numbers, some smaller religious groups faced especially widespread harassment. Although Jews comprise less than 1% of the world's population, government or social harassment of Jews was reported in 75 countries (38%). Incidents of harassment involving members of other world religions – including Sikhs, followers of ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, newer faith groups such as Baha'is and Rastafarians, and localized groups that practice tribal or folk religions – were reported in 84 countries (42%).



During the period from mid-2006 to mid-2009, harassment of religious groups was most widespread in the Middle East-North Africa,

the region that also has the highest levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion. There were reports of government and/or social harassment of religious groups and individuals in all 20 countries in the region. Religious groups also faced some form of harassment in 93% of the countries in Europe (42 of 45 countries); 90% of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region (46 of 51 countries); 85% of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa (40 of 47 countries); and 77% of the countries in the Americas (27 of 35 countries).

Harassment of Christians, Muslims and Jews was highest in the Middle East-North Africa. Although this is a predominantly Muslim region, followers of Islam were harassed in an even higher percentage of countries in the region than were Jews or Christians. Buddhists and Hindus faced the most harassment in the Asia-Pacific region, the part of the world with the largest concentrations of these two religious groups.

Muslims were harassed in 80% of the countries in Europe and more than half of the countries in Asia-Pacific (59%) and sub-Saharan Africa (57%). Christians were harassed in more than two-thirds of the countries in Europe (69%) and sub-Saharan Africa (68%). Christians also faced harassment in nearly four-in-ten countries in the Americas (37%). Jews were harassed in more countries in the Americas (31%) than Muslims (14%).

In each region of the world, members of other world religions and groups that practice tribal or folk religions faced harassment in a substantial number of countries. Indeed, these groups were harassed in at least four-in-ten countries in the Asia-Pacific region (49%), the Americas (46%), sub-Saharan Africa (40%) and the Middle East-North Africa (40%). In Europe, such harassment was reported in a third of the countries (36%). In the Americas, followers of Native American faiths and adherents of other world religions were harassed in a larger share of countries (46%) than Christians (37%), Muslims (14%), Jews (31%), Hindus (6%) or Buddhists (3%).

Three main findings from the study are worth looking at in some more detail, particularly because they help explain why, on average,

the Middle East and North Africa region has both the highest government restrictions on religion and the highest social hostilities involving religion of the five main regions analyzed. The three findings – phrased as questions – are: First, do constitutional protections for religious freedom matter? Second, do blasphemy, apostasy and anti-defamation of religion laws matter? And third, is there a relationship between government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion?

**Do Constitutions Matter?**

Nearly all of the 198 countries included in the Pew Forum study either call for freedom of religion in their constitutions or basic laws (143 countries) or protect at least some religious practices (an additional 48 countries). But not all constitutional promises are clear and unqualified. In fact, more than half of countries (111, or 56%) include stipulations in their constitution that substantially contradict the concept of religious freedom. Afghanistan’s Constitution, for instance, appears to protect its citizens’ right to choose and practice a religion other than Islam. However, the constitution also stipulates that “no law can be contrary to the sacred religion of Islam” and instructs judges to rule according to Shari’a law if no specific Afghan law applies to a case, which in Afghanistan prescribes the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion.

Constitutional Protections	Government Restrictions Index Score...			TOTAL COUNTRIES
	DECREASED SUBSTANTIALLY	STAYED ROUGHLY THE SAME	INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY	
<i>Among the countries that had...</i>				
a constitution with <b>no protections</b> for religious freedom	0	4	3	7
a constitution with <b>contradictions</b> concerning religious freedom	2	101	8	111
a constitution with <b>qualifications</b> concerning religious freedom	3	34	2	39
a constitution that <b>clearly protects</b> religious freedom	3	37	1	41
<b>Total Countries</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>198</b>

Substantial change is measured between period ending mid-2008 and period ending mid-2009.

Seven countries – Algeria, Eritrea, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia and Yemen – do not include any provisions for religious freedom in their constitutions or basic laws. The Algerian Constitution,

for example, establishes Islam as the state religion and forbids practices that are contrary to Islamic ethics.

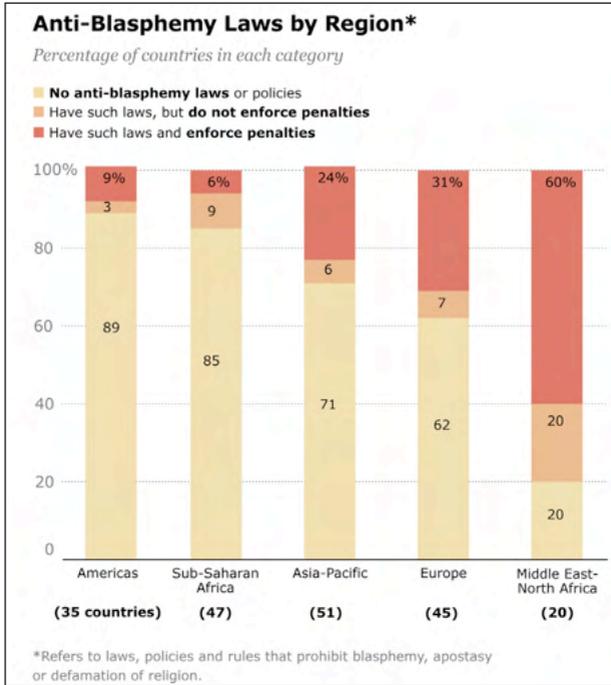
The study finds a relationship between constitutional protections for religious freedom and overall changes in government restrictions on religion. Among the countries with the least robust constitutional protections for religious freedom – that is, countries whose constitutions contain one or more substantial contradictions concerning religious freedom or provide no protection for it at all – index scores increased in 11 and decreased in only two (more than a five-fold difference). In contrast, among the countries whose constitutions provide for religious freedom without substantial contradictions (including those with limited qualifications), index scores increased in three countries and decreased in six (a two-fold difference in the opposite direction).<sup>5</sup>

### **Blasphemy, Apostasy and Anti-defamation of Religion Laws**

As of mid-2009, 59 countries (30%) had a law, rule or policy at some level of government forbidding blasphemy (remarks or writings considered to be contemptuous of God), apostasy (abandoning one's faith) or defamation (disparagement or criticism) of particular religions or religion in general. Penalties for violating these laws (which collectively I refer to as '*anti-blasphemy laws*'), ranging from fines to imprisonment to death, were enforced in 44 of the 59 countries.

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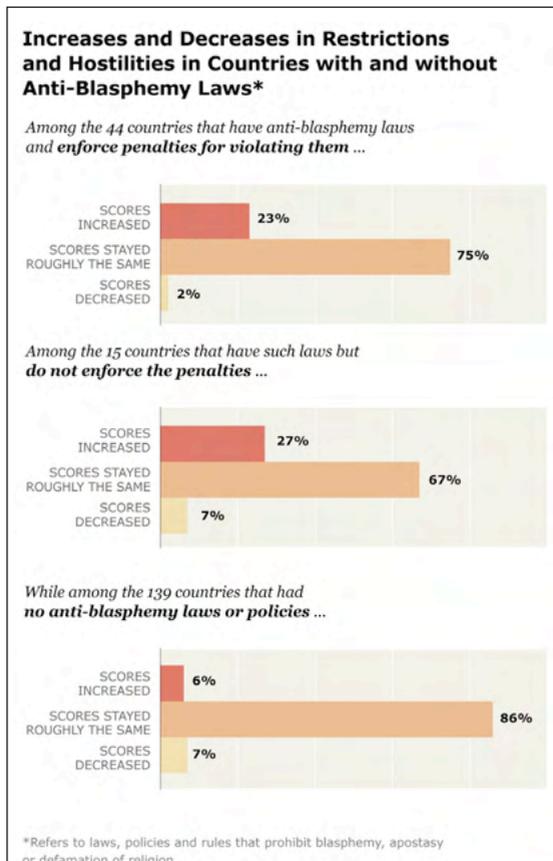
<sup>5</sup> More specifically, among the countries whose constitutions or basic laws do not provide for religious freedom, government restrictions on religion substantially increased in three (Algeria, Libya and Yemen) and did not decrease in any. In the 111 countries that provide for religious freedom but have substantial contradictions in their constitutions or basic laws (such as limiting religious freedom in order to protect '*public morals*' or making the nation's laws conform to one particular religion), government restrictions substantially increased in eight countries (Somalia, Syria, France, Malaysia, Egypt, Qatar, Hong Kong and Serbia) and substantially decreased in two countries (Greece and Nauru) – a four-fold difference. However, the pattern is reversed among the 41 countries whose constitutions or basic laws provide for religious freedom without qualification or contradiction, with a three-fold difference in the opposite directions. Among these countries, government restrictions decreased in three countries (Timor-Leste, Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Macedonia) and increased in one (Kyrgyzstan). This pattern is also seen, though more faintly, among the 39 countries whose constitutions or basic laws provide for religious freedom but include limited qualifications, such as the right to limit religious freedom to protect '*public order*'. Restrictions decreased in three of these countries (Togo, Guinea Bissau and Nicaragua) and increased in two of them (Uganda and Tajikistan). (The level of government restrictions stayed roughly the same in the vast majority of cases during the three years covered by the study.)



The Pew Forum’s study finds that while such anti-blasphemy laws are sometimes promoted as a way to protect religion and reduce social hostilities involving religion, in practice they often serve to punish religious minorities whose beliefs are deemed unorthodox or heretical, and who therefore are seen as threatening religious harmony in the country. Indeed, the study finds that overall high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices are particularly common in countries that prohibit blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the following examples illustrate the connection:

<sup>6</sup> Globally, countries that have laws against blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion were more likely to have high government restrictions or social hostilities than countries that do not have such laws. A solid majority (59%) of countries that enforce such laws had high or very high restrictions on religion (government or social) as of mid-2009. Among countries that do not have such laws, by contrast, the majority (58%) had low restrictions or hostilities.

- 75% of governments (33 of the 44 countries) that enforce anti-blasphemy laws also used force against religious groups. However, only 43% (60 of 139 countries) of governments that do not enforce anti-blasphemy laws used force against religious groups.
- Similarly, national governments in countries that enforce laws against blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion were more than five times as likely to attempt to eliminate an entire religious group's presence as those that do not have such laws (32% vs. 6%). This pattern also holds true for social hostilities involving religion.
- Mob violence related to religion occurred in more than twice the share of countries that enforce penalties for blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion than in countries where there are no such laws (45% vs. 19%).



- Also, the share of countries in which women were harassed for violating religious dress codes was 8 times higher among those that enforce such laws (48%) than among those without such laws (6%).

Not only were government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion generally higher in countries with anti-blasphemy laws, but restrictions also rose in many of these countries. From mid-2006 to mid-2009, restrictions or hostilities increased substantially in 10 (23%) of the 44 countries where governments actively enforce anti-blasphemy laws; restrictions or hostilities decreased substantially in just one country in that category (2%). In the 15 countries where such laws are on the books but are not actively enforced, restrictions or hostilities increased substantially in four (27%) and decreased substantially in just one (7%) – the same pattern as in countries where the laws were actively enforced. By contrast, among the 139 countries that do not have anti-blasphemy laws, restrictions or hostilities rose in nine (6%) and fell in 10 (7%).

These findings do not mean that anti-blasphemy laws necessarily cause higher restrictions on religion. But they do suggest that the two phenomena often go hand-in-hand: governments that impose anti-blasphemy laws also tend to have rising restrictions on religion. If the rationale for such laws is to reduce social conflict, it appears, however, that anti-blasphemy laws tend to contribute to the conflict rather than reduce it.

Anti-blasphemy laws are one of many types of restrictions where there are major differences among the five regions of the world – Asia-Pacific, Middle East-North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and the Americas. When it comes to penalizing blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion, eight-in-ten countries in the Middle East-North Africa region have such laws, the highest share of any region. In comparison, four-in-ten countries in Europe (38%), three-in-ten countries in the Asia-Pacific region have anti-blasphemy laws. By contrast, relatively few countries in sub-Saharan Africa (15%) or the Americas (11%) have such laws or policies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In the United States, a few state legal codes still contain anti-blasphemy laws, but they generally are not enforced.

## **Understanding the Middle East and North Africa**

One of the results of this research is that it provides a way to understand the context for one of the most dramatic developments of the 21st century – the so-called Arab Spring uprisings that have swept the Middle East and North Africa. While restrictions on religion may not have directly caused the unrest, it's unarguable that changes in religious restrictions are a PART of the larger social and political forces shaping the Middle East and North Africa today.

Indeed, according to the Pew Forum's study, government restrictions on religion and belief as well as social hostilities involving religion are highest in the Middle East and North Africa of the regions of the world. Moreover, the study finds that government restrictions were not only high, but they were rising in the Middle East and North Africa prior to the recent unrest that continues in the region. For instance, prior to the recent uprising in Egypt, government restrictions on religion were already very high there. By mid-2009, Egypt also had joined the 5% of countries with the most intense social hostilities involving religion. Five other countries in the region (Algeria, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Qatar) also had substantial increases in government restrictions from mid-2006 to mid-2009, while no country in the Middle East and North Africa region had a substantial decrease.

What are some of the characteristics of the region that help explain its high and rising restrictions? First, in only one country of the region (or 5%) does the constitution, or law that functions in the place of a constitution (basic law), specifically provide for 'freedom of religion' or include language used in Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Overall in the world, however, 72% of countries have such provisions. And as already discussed, the lack of such provisions is associated not only with high government restrictions, but also rising restrictions on religion.

Beyond this basic protection for freedom of religion or belief, the study found that restrictions in the Middle East and North Africa were especially high in a number of other ways. First, more than nine-in-ten governments in the region limit religious literature, broadcasting,

preaching, proselytizing and conversion. In comparison, these normal religious activities do not face such limits in the majority of the rest of the world's countries. Restrictions on religious literature, broadcasting, preaching, proselytizing and conversion not only limit the possibility for free speech and a diversity of ideas in the public forum, restrictions on conversion – in particular – limit the fundamental freedom of belief. And limits on conversion are very common in the Middle East and North Africa, where 90% of countries in the region limit the ability of people to freely choose their religious affiliation – including the freedom to have no religion at all. However, only 19% of countries worldwide place such limits on their citizens.

Overall, governments in the Middle East and North Africa region were twice as likely as governments worldwide to resort to physical force when dealing with religious groups. Instances of force toward religious groups included individuals being killed, physically abused, imprisoned, detained or displaced from their homes, or having their personal or religious properties damaged or destroyed.

Of course, the use of government force is not necessarily felt evenly by all religious groups in society, because religious minorities often bear the brunt of the force. In particular, government hostility to religious minorities in the Middle East and North Africa region is far above the world average. Two-thirds of national governments in the region displayed hostility involving physical violence toward minority or non-approved religious groups, compared with just one-third of countries worldwide. This abuse was not only by direct action, but also by inaction. In 70% of countries in the region there were instances when the national government did not intervene in cases of discrimination or abuses against religious groups. Worldwide, however, just 27% of governments stood by as such discrimination and abuse occurred.

One contributing factor to the imbalanced protection of religious minorities is that governments of nine-in-ten countries in the Middle East and North Africa region give privileges or government access to one particular religious group that is unavailable to other religious groups. Worldwide, however, only about a quarter of countries (27%)

have such an imbalance. Indeed, religious favouritism is so common that national governments in every country of the region defer in some way to religious authorities, texts or doctrines on legal issues – the most common being deference to Shari’a law.

When it comes to social hostilities involving religion, there are also major differences among the five regions of the world. Again, on average, social hostilities are highest in the Middle East-North Africa. For instance, nearly every country of the region was beset with crimes, malicious acts or violence motivated by religious hatred or bias during the three-year period of the study. And in half the countries of the region, these resulted in deaths. By way of comparison, deaths resulted from religious hate crimes in just 18% of countries worldwide.

Other serious types of religion-related violence were also much higher in the Middle East and North Africa region. For instance, acts of religion-related mob-violence and sectarian or communal violence between religious groups were more than twice as likely in the region than in the world as a whole. Also, nearly every country had religion-related terrorist groups active in the country. Moreover, half the countries in the region were affected in some way by religion-related war, compared with just 13% of countries worldwide.

Social hostilities in the region were not just present at these macro levels; they were often very personal. For instance, in two-thirds of countries, individuals or groups used violence or the threat of violence, including so-called honour killings, to try to enforce religious norms. In three-quarters of the region’s countries, individuals were assaulted or displaced from their homes in retaliation for religious activities, including preaching and other forms of religious expression, considered offensive or threatening to the majority faith.

Also, women were harassed for violating religious dress codes in twice the share of countries the Middle East and North Africa region as they were worldwide.

Of particular note, Muslims were harassed in a slightly larger share of countries in the Middle East and North Africa than were Christians or Jews.

Much of the harassment fell upon Muslim minorities, such as Sunnis in Iraq or Shias in Saudi Arabia, or groups with political agendas contrary to the interests of the government in power, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Finally, in eight-in-ten countries, there were tensions in society over conversion from one religion to another. Of particular note is that tensions over conversion become particularly high when governments get into the business of regulating it. For instance, among the 41 countries worldwide where governments limited religious conversion, incidents of social hostilities over conversions occurred in 83% of the 41 countries (34). By contrast, among the 158 countries where governments do not limit conversions, incidents of social hostilities over conversions occurred in 19% (30 countries) – a smaller share by four times. This correlation between government restrictions and social hostilities is a common pattern in the data, and one which is useful to understand for those looking to possible ways to defuse tensions and reduce conflict.

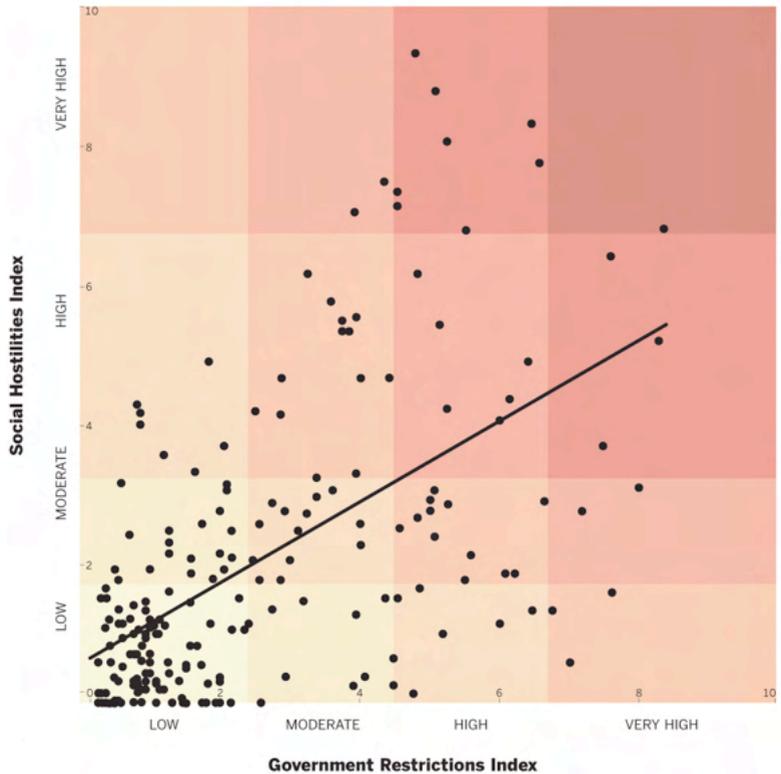
### **Is there a relationship between government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion?**

When all 198 countries and self-administering territories are plotted on a chart comparing their scores on the Government Restrictions Index and the Social Hostilities Index, it is apparent that the two measures tend to move together. Running through the graph is the so-called regression line, which plots how scores on one index are related, on average, to scores on the other index.

The upward slope of the line indicates that higher scores on one index generally are associated with higher scores on the other. Many countries are clustered in the lower left corner, showing that they are low on both types of restrictions. Though the remaining countries are fairly dispersed, most still follow the direction taken by the regression line, and very few are located in the upper left or lower right corners of the graph. This means that, in general, it is rare for countries that are high in social hostilities to be low on government restrictions, or for those that are high on government restrictions to be low in social hostilities.

## Religious Restrictions in 198 Countries

This chart shows how the world's 198 countries and self-administering territories score in terms of both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion. Correlation = .586 ( $p < .001$ , two-tailed);  $r$ -square = .34



**Note:** The Pew Forum categorized the levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion by percentiles. Countries with scores in the top 5% on each index were categorized as "very high." The next highest 15% of scores were categorized as "high," and the following 20% were categorized as "moderate." The bottom 60% of scores were categorized as "low."

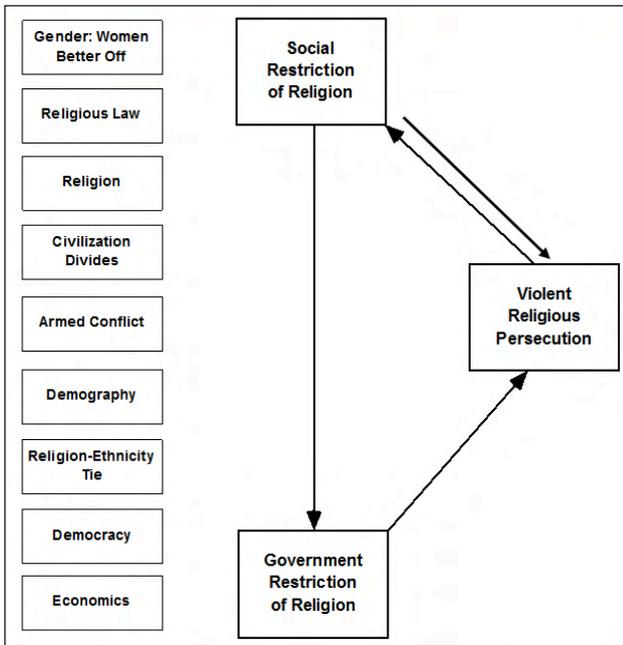
Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Restrictions on Religion, December 2009

### An Analysis of the Correlation

My 2001 co-authored Cambridge University Press book with Professor Roger Finke of Penn State University, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* provides some additional theoretical and advanced statistical analysis that helps to

further understand this correlation. In our analysis originally published in the *American Sociological Review*, we found that higher levels of regulations on religion result in more violence and conflict, not less.

**The Violent Religious Persecution Cycle**



**Structural Equation Model**  
 for 143 countries with populations > 2 million;  
 Full model at: Grim and Finke (2007),  
*American Sociological Review* 72:633-658.

Specifically, we observed that social restrictions on religious freedom lead to government restrictions on religious freedom and the two act in tandem to increase the level of violence related to religion—which in turn cycles back and leads to even higher social and government restrictions on religion. This creates what we call a violent religious persecution cycle. Our research, which looked at 143 countries with populations of two million

or more, found that when governments and religious groups in society do not erect barriers to religious competition but respect and protect such activities as conversion and proselytism, religious violence is less. These results offer a different perspective than the Clash of Civilizations theory, in that, rather than religious competition automatically leading to violence, the protection of fair religious competition is suggested to lead to less religious violence. Indeed, in the model we statistically controlled for alternative explanations and found that the specific mechanism that leads most directly and powerfully to religious persecution is not clashes between civilizations but the concrete regulatory actions of societies and governments. The important point is that the regulation mechanism we describe accounts for differences between religious traditions and offers empirically-supported conceptual clarity to one of the fundamental challenges of the twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup>

This means that restrictions on religion may just as often be directed toward Muslims in a Muslim-majority country as toward other faiths; likewise, restrictions in a Christian-majority country may sometimes affect Christians including minority denomination, as much or even more than other faiths. Of course, clashes occur across religious lines, as has been happening in Nigeria with the actions of Boko Haram, but the data indicate that such clashes are not the primary mechanism explaining restrictions and violence.

An additional contribution from *The Price of Freedom Denied* is that the analysis demonstrated that social restrictions of religious freedom (or social religious intolerance) often drive government restrictions.<sup>9</sup> Examples include the social pressures in India for anti-conversion laws, calls for Shari'a law in northern Nigeria and parts of Indonesia, expulsions

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<sup>8</sup> Page 654 in Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, 2007, "Religious Persecution in Cross-National Context: Clashing Civilizations or Regulated Economies?" *American Sociological Review* 72:633-658.

<sup>9</sup> The social restriction of religious freedom can be thought of as the gap between the value people place on living in a country with religious freedom for their own religion versus freedom for other religions. A recent survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life of populations in 10 countries from Asia, the Americas, and Africa found an average gap of 14 percentage points across the countries. For details see <http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/pentecostals-06.pdf>. Also see Grim, B.J. and R. Wike. (2010). "Cross-Validating Measures of Global Religious Intolerance: Comparing Coded State Department Reports with Survey Data and Expert Opinion." *Politics and Religion* (journal of the American Political Science Association).

of evangelicals in Chiapas, Mexico, and numerous religious rebellions from China's long history.<sup>10</sup> One of the clearest historical examples of the way social restrictions of religious freedom can feed into the religious violence cycle is the Holocaust. Research has shown that the Nazi government's violence toward Jewish people reinforced pre-existing social prejudices, creating a cycle of violence that was carried out with the support of many in society.<sup>11</sup>

Another tragic example of the religious violence cycle can be seen in Iraq since 2003, which I have written about elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

### **Concluding Observations**

The data reviewed show that religion appears to be on the rise around the globe, and with it a new sense of urgency for understanding the relationships between rising levels of government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion. Several patterns are clear. First, social hostilities involving religion have risen in Europe, and in a number of cases the rise was due to the difficulties of integrating new immigrant populations. Though I have not emphasized this point, it is clear that religious freedom faces new challenges in a variety of situations.

Second, certain laws, such as anti-blasphemy laws or contradictory constitutional protections for religious freedom, are associated with high and rising overall restrictions. Recognizing the effects of different types of restrictions is one of the new and potentially useful applications of statistical analysis when applied to religious freedom. For instance, some types of restrictions, such as government restriction on people's freedom to convert from one religion to another, are indicative of higher overall restrictions, and may be part of a select number of indicators that could serve as an early warning system of mass violence. Restrictions falling into this category were very high in

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10 See Vincent Y.C. Shih, *The Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967).

11 See William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe Before the Holocaust* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003) Also see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963).

12 Grim, B.J. (2012). "Religion, Law and Social Conflict in the 21st Century: Findings from Sociological Research," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012), pp. 249–271.

the Middle East and North Africa before Arab Spring. But, at a minimum, rising restrictions on religion were undeniably a part of the context in which the uprisings occurred.

And finally, advanced statistical analysis of these data from the book, *The Price of Freedom Denied*, indicates religion-related violence increases as restrictions on religion increase. Indeed, religion-related terrorism is mostly bred in countries where restrictions on religion are high. However, the prospects of seeing lower restrictions on religion in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia are indeed daunting. In such places, added restrictions appear to be a logical way to contain conflict. However, according to the data, higher restrictions often have the unintended consequence of fueling additional grievances that feed a cycle of violent religious persecution and conflict.

## **ON THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN LEBANON**

### **Apparent Contradictions**

I come from Lebanon. Your automatic response is probably that since it is an Arab country so technically I should be Muslim. This is what I face in my travels around the world. Basically I come from one Arab country among 22 others. But the specificity is that in this country the President is Christian. This did not happen by a miracle or by coincidence. It was as a result of a national pact. It continues to be like this after 15 years of civil, uncivilised war and after 20 years of permanent aggression from the south and more than 20 years of oppression from the neighbouring regime. And in spite of this, we are still represented 50:50 in the parliament and 50:50 in the cabinet.

### **European Support**

I was invited to share some thoughts with you and, hopefully, I might succeed in challenging some minds. I assure you, however, that I will not challenge your budget or request more funding. We thank you very much for the EU support in the Neighbourhood Programme. But it is also important to tell you that over three years you provided 150 million Euro which is for Lebanon 15 days of servicing public debt - this only to put it into perspective. It is not my intention to continue with this negative approach but would like to offer my respects to all the Europeans who suffer or offer their lives in the peace-keeping mission in the South of Lebanon. You participated from 12 countries and you represented 60% of the forces doing a great job in peace-keeping and in interacting with the population of the south.

### **Great Expectations**

Will the freedom of expression and the anger that has spilled over to the street in the face of the authoritarianism become the right and freedom for education? Would it become the right and prominent voice in the field of research? Can we see with the Arab rising a spirit of freethinking? Can we see women really enjoying freedom? How

will these societies transfer their expression and anger and political frustration or revolution, as somebody would like to call it, without a participative political culture? What is the active role of the individual and the State?

### **Lebanon Complexity**

You cannot understand the region without understanding its geopolitics. But this is not the purpose of today's seminar. And as a European politician told me once,

*"if they explain to you the case of Lebanon and you understand, it means that they did not explain well."!*

I am sure that this seminar is about awareness and not about finding solutions tonight. And every time Europe proposed a simple solution for a complex problem, it did not work. So let us agree that tonight we will share in the experience of the uprising in Lebanon and on the power-sharing between Muslims and Christians and how this could evolve. Some of the politicians look at Lebanon as a paradox; this means no solution. And some of the politicians look at Lebanon, as if it could be a draft solution – probably.

### **Three Forces**

In our experience the Iranian revolution that occurred in the late 70s has spread out over the years and it is creating a change within the Shia community beyond the Arab world. The Shia used to be down to earth, to be on the left in politics, Arab national in their identity, and very open intellectually towards modernisation.

Nowadays the revolution is developing in different directions and we can see this in Lebanon. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Wahabism, which you have heard about several times, expanded in order to become what we describe as the global solution for life through Islam: a unified, uniform society. And today it is expanding more and more and spending more and more in order to counterbalance the Shia's rise in the region and their awakening to power. The Sunni in Lebanon were known to be much modernized, very open and at the same time they rejected the protection of Syria and Islamic power in order to build with the Christians who rejected France and Western protection in 1943 in order to build Lebanon.

Today these two forces are together facing a third Islamic force which is the Muslim Brotherhood. And the Muslim Brotherhood now are more and more in line with US policy as understood from the speech of President Obama in Cairo in June 2009 and it seems like there is a kind of an alliance based and supported by the Turkish option where the army is in a *laïcité* and secular mood, where the economy is globalised and where Islam is at the basis of the politics. A very interesting formula, but this is fuelled today by the Qatari ambition and supported by the Turkish experience and history.

### **(Mis) use of Power**

So now to the role of individuals, before we move beyond voting. We have seen voting in the Arab world and we will certainly be seeing more and more voting. But the question is: will the people in power use the exclusive majority option to rule or will they call for power-sharing? While we are afraid for Lebanon, because we have experienced intervention from everybody: the Iranians, the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Americans, the Europeans; Lebanon is a very attractive hub for all these powers. We recently have the Russians, now talking about the Orthodox Church and its protection.

So basically what we would like to share today is how the Arab rising in the last year played out in politics. Mainly, all of the leaders attracted Europe a year ago by very nice concepts: democracy, the rule of law, a state that will have as reference a civil code and a human right code. But after a year and with a very systematic analysis, almost all of these leaders backed off. You can watch Tunisia on the 25th of May, you can watch Egypt in June and you can see that the speeches have changed. And if they do not change the first Article of the constitution, they will change other Articles of the constitutions.

This is very important for you to monitor - in our opinion - because as you have seen already from the experts in this seminar: If the constitutions do not guarantee rights, the States and their actions will never guarantee them.

## Christian Influence

I was invited to the South of Lebanon and to a school in the middle of the Shia region with Hezbollah influence to address the graduates – and this was a Christian school. So I said to the Sister: “How many Christians do you have in YOUR schools?” She said: “160.” -“How many students?” -“4,000.” – “What are you still doing here?” And she said:

*“There are a lot of Muslims here in this region who do not want to be Islamists nor fundamentalists; they do not want to be taken over by the free schools financed by these powers. We are here to make sure they have a choice of freedom in education, in free thinking so they can build together with Christians in the future.”*

I had the same message in Tripoli in the north of Lebanon, which is a Sunni dominated area, where they have 81 mosques, 40 them follow the Azhar in Egypt and are more and more under the influence of Muslim Brotherhood movement and the other 41 follow more the Saudi orientation and the Salafist movement. Yet in the middle of these 81 mosques in a very narrow area, in a very narrow part of the city, highly populated, there are Christians living there, still there! They are talking about how can we build together and create the space for the Muslim who does not want to be annexed by fundamentalists and Islamists. So the question for Christians is not their protection and please do not count us out. Every time we exchange with Europeans they tell us that we became less in numbers. So what? We should talk about our economic impact! Do you know that 64% of taxation in the Lebanon economy comes from Christian activities? You did not know this? So stop putting us down and look at the qualitative participatory approach that we can do with our heritage of hundreds of years! The wealthiest man on earth is from the south of Lebanon and is a Maronite. Did you know that? You did not know? He lives in Mexico, very far away. The most successful person in the automotive industry in the world today comes from the mountains of Lebanon. So this area of the world needs you to highlight its qualitative and not quantitative characteristics. We will be fewer, definitely. So what? Even with fewer, we are influential and we will remain powerful. What we need from you is increasing awareness about these facts.

## **External Fuelling**

Let me tell you how we think in Lebanon about the crisis. As Lebanese we believe there is a tension, no doubt. But it is more empowered, fuelled by external powers. You can see that we have already stopped a large ship carrying a lot of arms. So what does it mean? Somebody is sending arms. What for? Definitely, to make trouble or to pass arms through to Syria. So there is a fuelling. And we need to keep an eye on this issue. Europe is widely known to be wise. We do not ask you to be wise as other superpower do from time to time; we want you to be wise all the time and watch these acts and highlight these behaviours.

## **'Copy-and-Paste'**

And the most important thing for us is the difference when we hear the bell. When we hear the church bell in our mountains, it is a call for solidarity to confirm liberty and freedom. When I heard the bells for the first time when I came to Europe in the Seventies, I expressed these same words but somebody told me: *"No, no, here the bells are to adjust the time, not to adjust your feelings."*

We acknowledge that there has been an evolution more and more beyond morality towards ethics, a secular system, accuracy, progress; and we do support that and learned from it. But what we want you to know is that you cannot make a *'copy-and-paste'* in society. And these 12 million Christians in the Middle East, someone mentioned that it is very easy to ship them over here. They have good qualifications, we can afford this. There is a need for 70,000 engineers in Germany today. But is this what Europe wants? Vacuuming the Middle East from its Christians? Its plurality? I do not know.

I therefore close with the question: If there are no more Christians in the Middle East, is that a problem for you as Europe? I do not have the answer. All I know is what I can share with you: It is crucial for Europe to always watch the Middle East and its diversity and make the people feel that you do care. And by caring this time, maybe you can give political encouragement to preserve its plurality.

What is key is that Europe cares and I am sure by being here today, by seeing your faces, by seeing the importance you have given to this

seminar, you definitely care about our region, and its culture. I hope that you will be the people who will make the whole Parliament, not only the Christian parties, care about the Middle East.

## THE HARMS OF MISREPORTING ON EGYPT'S CHRISTIANS<sup>1</sup>

The organizers of the May 9 seminar invited Aid to the Church in Need (*Kirche in Not*), Open Doors International, and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life to submit their respective reports and analysis along with witnesses from Syria, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and Egypt. I have been selected by COMECE to be the representative from Egypt, based on my 35 years of experience in Egypt, both in development and in reporting about Muslim-Christian relations. COMECE writes: *"This seminar will help us to understand the extent of which the 'Arab Spring' is meeting the demands for more liberal values such as democracy and human rights."*

I am not very fond of most reporting from Aid to the Church in Need and Open Doors International as they tend to select issues and publish them out of context. It is true that Christians in Egypt fear the Islamization of their country, but it is wrong to place the responsibility for the many ills Egypt is facing primarily on Muslims and Islam. The focus should be on discourse rather than culpability. The reality is that Egypt is a very religious country, evidenced by the result of democratic elections where Islamists received three quarters of the vote for Parliament. Unlike their radical counterparts, there are many Islamists who are willing to engage in dialogue. Dialogue does not mean not asking difficult questions. Dialogue is also not a symptom of naiveté, as Islamophobes would have their audience believe, but rather it is a critical element of survival. Christians in Egypt have a numerical minority of a mere 5 to 7 percent making it impossible to survive in isolation, resisting engagement with their fellow countrymen.

We should mobilize both Muslims and Christians to cooperate in the pursuance of common goals for the good of both parties. Polarizing does the opposite—that is, it drives a wedge between Muslims and

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<sup>1</sup> Published by: Arab-West Report, May 8th 2012

Christians. The accusation that Muslims persecute Christians or even the accusation that Islamists persecute Christians is a destructive generalization and an obstacle on the path towards increased collaboration between Muslims and Christians.

My argument is that one must view tensions in Egypt in a much wider context: a period of transition and insecurity for all Egyptians; thugs create havoc because security is largely absent and civil authorities are struggling to implement law and order. People in the West are often only exposed to depictions of violence in Egypt. To counter that image, I have created a PowerPoint which presents a different side of Egypt. It should be noted that this presentation is intended to illustrate that Egypt is multi-faceted—not simply violent or peaceful.

My text may thus be read as a critique on the reporting of Aid to the Church in Need and Open Doors International. I would like to challenge them and anyone else to select any particular issue in their reporting and then conduct a proper investigation in Egypt. They should then make a comparison between their initial reporting and the facts found on the ground. An investigative report will, without fail, reveal a much more complex story than they have reported on a particular issue.

It is sad to see a beautiful country like Egypt deteriorate to this extent. No one knows where Egypt is headed in the coming months. I hope and pray that law, order, and prosperity will return to Egypt.

**The following is my text as presented in Brussels on May 9.**

I was asked to present you with the greetings from Coptic Orthodox Priest Father Yu'annis and Salafi Shaykh Hamdī 'Abd al-Fatāh from the village of Qufādah in al-Minya governorate. I traveled there a few days ago with a German journalist and a Danish student to speak about Muslim-Christian relations and Christian migration from the area. When Father Yu'annis heard that I would give this presentation for you, he informed his entire congregation about this on Sunday April 29, praying that the voice of Qufādah would be heard.

## **The voice of Qufādah**

Qufādah is a small village with a few thousand inhabitants, around 15 percent Christian and 85 percent Muslim. The village head is, however, Christian. Father Yu'annis has been campaigning for Salafī Shaykh Hamdī 'Abd al-Fatāh, a member of the Salafī al-Nūr party, during the last elections. If you choose to inform yourself only through the media or activist groups that claim that Christians in Egypt are persecuted, you would not even know that such relationships exist. The reality is, however, much more complicated than we are led to believe.

There is violence in Egypt—more against Christians than against Muslims. The police are largely absent, laws are often not applied and both Muslims and Christians do as they like. The situation for Christians is difficult—not just for Christians, but for most Egyptians. The Revolution—others call it a revolt, against President Mubārak has led to a tremendous economic decline, affecting millions. It has also paralyzed the state. The rule of law was already weak before the Revolution and has worsened after the Revolution. Christians feel this, as do Muslims. Christians in Egypt are scared and many would leave if they could. I do not blame them, but if they continue on this course it will be disastrous for the Christian community, which will gradually disappear.

Christians fear the Islamists, who have won over 75 percent of the seats in the last parliamentary elections—the most transparent since the Revolution of 1952. The success of Islamists shows what was already known: Egypt is a very religious country. The Christian fear stems from decades of autocratic Egyptian regimes pitting Islamists against Christians. A good number of radical Islamists have played into the hand of the regime through inflammatory statements and violence against Christians but liberal Muslims are guilty of this as well. Neither the Christian nor the Muslim community is monolithic. The majority of Islamists in Egypt are non-violent, but those who have been a party to violence against Christians certainly contributed to increased Christian anxieties.

Father Yu'annis does not fear Islamists. He is also not planning to leave his village. He was born in Qufādah and knew the village Shaykhs as children. The personal relations between he and the village Shaykhs allow him to achieve things for his community and to solve local conflicts that occur.

Local conflicts, he said, are often solved through the *urfi* (customary) reconciliation meetings organized by Shaykh Hamdī. These meetings have become the most effective form of adjudicating disputes in the absence of a competent court system. Judges are overloaded, procedures are tiresome, and costs for lawyers can be steep. Previously we have encountered Christians complaining about the lack of justice in such *urfi* reconciliation meetings. This is of course possible as the conduct of the meetings is dependent on the person who is chairing them.

Most local conflicts tend to be over land, water, buildings, and young women. A Christian girl in a village cannot dress more modern because it will lead to comments from conservative Muslims. These criticisms are then directed to her parents, which can lead to conflicts. In other cases, Muslim men also could propose marriage to Christian women, which Christian parents and the church do not want. Christian men who propose to Muslim women are always at risk as this is not accepted in Muslim society. Though this has never occurred in Qufādah, it has occurred in other parts of Egypt yielding disastrous consequences such as the church burnings of Sūl, 'Atfih and Imbābah, Cairo.

### **Understanding tensions through context**

I first came to Egypt in 1976. My wife is Egyptian and I have investigated many hundreds of reported human rights violations throughout the years. I want to make very clear that I do not like most of this reporting because it tends to be ideologically-based and extremely partisan. Ideological reporting is the effort to search only for the facts that support one's own beliefs or agenda instead of first establishing what empirical facts are known, hearing all involved parties, and investigating the reported conflict and its context. Conclusions should be then be developed carefully rather than reporting stories based on one source

only, neglecting those voices who present conflicting facts or opinions. Reports about human rights violations usually present stories without informing the public about the context. I will therefore give you some of the context that one must consider when investigating reported tensions:

1) Egypt is a relation-based society. It is thanks to good relations between Muslim and Christian leaders in Qufādah that Father Yu'annis is able to achieve so much. Christians who are living in a mental ghetto, however, who primarily develop friendships with fellow Christians or liberal Muslims, do have it harder and thus also would tend to be partisan and more negative in presenting conflicts. Good relations, though not the only solution, certainly help.

2) Non-Muslims who are negative about Muslims or Islam in general and presenting stories out of context are generally also the ones who do not build friendships (i.e. relations) with Muslims.

3) Egypt is a very religious country. This applies to both Muslims and Christians. Religion is very emotionally charged and can easily be (mis) used to rouse large numbers of people. Religion can serve as both a positive as well as a negative force. Muslims and Christians expect their religious beliefs to be respected. Not doing so can result in highly emotional, negative responses.

4) Egypt is community-oriented, unlike the individualistic society we find in Europe. Thus no one can act alone. His/her family or community will always play a role in whatever decisions are made. Personal decisions can have consequences for the community and the people are very aware of this.

5) Egypt has an honor and shame culture; honor should be protected and shame avoided. Leaving one's religion is a shame on their family and their religious community. The effort to reduce the shame is to blame the other. In Egypt no one ever makes a mistake. The mistakes are always committed by 'others'; preserving one's honor is more important than speaking the truth. And thus Open Doors went terribly wrong

when they presented Ingy's conversion to Islam several years ago as a kidnapping.

Her brother had made this claim in order to protect the honor of the family, but the stories from others around the family, including her father and a lawyer's confessions, were different. It was not a kidnapping!

6) Egypt is a class-oriented society. Class differences matter much more than religious differences. The gap between the rich and poor is shamefully large.

7) Egypt is a country where around 80 percent of the population lives close to or under the minimum subsistence level. In this section of the population you find the illiterate and the poorly educated.

8) Egypt is over populated. 85 million people are living on a piece of land the size of Belgium or The Netherlands as that is the surface area of the Nile valley and Delta. A friend of mine spoke of the '*pressure-cooker model*'—put a lot of people together in a very limited area in poor circumstances and tension and conflicts abound.

9) Egypt has been mismanaged for years. Corruption has become rampant, aided by the lack of transparency and checks and balances in the system. Such mismanagement includes Egypt being insufficiently prepared for impending water shortages, which, together with severe economic problems will create more pressure on an already strained Egyptian population.

10) Egypt has not always been plagued by sectarian tensions. This has developed during the presidency of Sadat and has continued until today. Older-generation Christians and Muslims like to refer to former days when religious tensions were much less prevalent.

These are elements that should be taken into consideration when reporting. If it is not done, then one should be more cautious in making statements. Those who are living far away from the areas of tensions and conflict usually have the most to say about what is happening in Egypt. No one should add to existing tensions in Egypt, already plagued by pressures, but this is exactly what misreporting does.

## **Freedom of conviction or religion**

Did you know that, generally speaking, Muslims are genuinely convinced that Muslim societies provide religious freedom? Europeans usually disagree. This difference is related to different understandings of the concept of freedom.

Freedom is usually related to: freedom of worship, freedom of church building, the state guaranteeing equal treatment of peoples of all beliefs, freedom to propagate one's religion, freedom to change one's religion, and freedom not to believe.

### *a. Freedom of worship*

Christians can worship as they choose. They were in fact more free than Muslims because churches could be open all day while most mosques, prior to the Revolution, could only be open during prayer times.

### *b. Freedom to build churches*

Church building can be a source of conflict. Human rights organizations report when conflicts around church building happen, neglecting when churches are being built without issue. Did you know that tens of new churches were built or expanded after the Revolution? Sure, new mosques and houses have also been built. This happened due to an absent government. It should be reported that Christians are also taking advantage of this vacuum. Human rights organizations also do not report church building after a conflict has occurred. Tens of churches were built or expanded after such conflicts but this was neglected in reporting. Most reporting also omits the role of good relations between responsible government and Muslim and Church representatives as a prime factor in whether a church building project was conducted with or without difficulty. The Mubārak government is to be blamed for the absence of just church-building law for such a long time.

After many drafts and several years of discussions involving Pope Shenouda, Members of Parliament, the Shūrā Council, and the Azhar, and the Coptic Orthodox Church have agreed to a draft church-building law in late October 2011. This a major step forward, as it is now a draft

that is also supported by Egypt's most important Muslim institution. The government position on this agreement is not clear (neither had it been on previous drafts). If the Sharaf government had stayed in office would it have sent the law to the SCAF for approval? We do not know. In any case, violence in the middle of November 2011 and the shift in leadership from Sharaf to Ganzouri put the law on hold. The Cabinet never sent it to the SCAF for approval. Then, on January 23, 2012, the People's Assembly assumed legislative powers and from that point on, any law has required the approval of Parliament. All focus is now on the presidential elections and no development is expected until a new president has assumed office. I certainly hope for a just law that, if enforced, could put an end to years of squabbling and tensions over church building.

*c. Equal treatment of all citizens by the state*

The stories about discrimination and unequal treatment are very numerous, yet not all are true. The state recognizes Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. If you are Bahā'ī, Mormon, or belong to any other religious conviction, then you are certainly the subject of discrimination. The state is only one of several culprits here; Muslim and Christian religious leaders have also advocated against giving non-Muslims and non-Christians more rights, seeing this as a protection of their own community.

Are Christians discriminated against in government positions? There are no Christians in the highest security circles, but there are Christian ministers, army, and police generals as well as Christians in other positions of authority throughout society. Here, the discussion about Christian statistics plays a role.

Activists and numerous human rights documents claim the Christian population to be at 10 to 20 percent. Proportionally then, the number of Christians in top positions is apparently too few. But research of French demographer, Dr. Philippe Fargues and other scholars show the proportion of Christians as more likely hovering around 5 to 6 percent of population. The Coptic Orthodox Church in particular disagrees, but thus far has not been willing to show researchers how they have

come to their number. The transparency with the Egyptian government is also subpar. Statistics on numbers of Christians have been published between 1894 and 1996 on the governorate-level, but statistics on the smallest administrative units have not been published. As of 2006, the Egyptian census no longer includes a question of religious affiliation, but this is no longer needed either since the introduction of electronic registration of ID cards. Those figures are not published and are only known inside the Ministry of Interior. As Dr. Fargues explained, numbers are only trustworthy if parties allow independent researchers to verify them. The habit of linking numbers to claims of discrimination or even persecution is detrimental. Christians and non-Christians should, in my opinion, focus more on procedures that would preclude discrimination as much as possible.

Conservatives, and in particular Salafī Muslims, want the public domain to be Muslim. This makes it difficult for Christians to add Christian symbols to the public spaces in heterogeneous areas. Only in areas that are entirely Christian is it possible to display Christian symbols in public areas unchallenged.

Many conservative Islamists do not want Christians to violate Islamic teaching and thus they are able to respond harshly to Christian men making advances at Muslim women. Christians are also often forced by social circumstances to be more conservatively dressed than they would like.

*d. Freedom of propagating one's religion*

Approaching Muslims with the purpose to preach Christianity or any other religion could result in severe backlashes. Propagation is not possible in public, but it is possible, however, in Christian bookstores. No one will ask for the religion of the customer entering the bookstore.

*e. Freedom to change one's religion*

For centuries Christians have been free to convert to Islam, but not the reverse. Each Egyptian has their religion marked on their identity card and it is possible to change this from Christian to Muslim, but it is not possible to change this from Muslim to Christian or any other religion.

That has consequences if one wants to marry or for any Muslim who converted to Christianity and wants to send his children to school is forced, because of his Muslim ID, to allow the school to send his children to Muslim religious classes.

f. *Persecution*

In 2001, Missio in Germany invited me to make a presentation titled, "*Persecuted Christians?*" I presented a paper and concluded this is not the case with the exception of people leaving Islam. In the past 11 years I have conducted further research and maintain the same conclusion. Persecution is systematic and organized; something we do not see in Egypt with the exception of non-recognized religions in Egypt (Bahā'īs, Mormons, and others) and with the exception of converts or apostates from Islam.

Still, discrimination certainly occurs. It varies depending on circumstances and social class, but no one should deny that discrimination exists. Discrimination does not happen only on the basis of religion—it is based on social class and family affiliation as well. It is the role of the state to promote education and enact laws and regulations to counter this as much as possible. Egypt falls short here.

Father Yu'annis of Qufādah , on several occasions and including my last visit was also very adamant that tensions in Egypt usually are initiated by Christians, either through stupidity or inciting behaviors. The problem is with the absent state and Muslims being led by emotions and taking matters into their own hands with disastrous consequences, often resulting in the excessive violence we have seen in many instances. That is why honest and fair local mediators such as Salafi Shaykh Hamdī'Abd al-Fatāh are so important.

Shaykh Hamdī'Abd al-Fatāh is no exception. This photo shows Muslims providing water all day long to Christians who were mourning for the death of Pope Shenouda.

Juergen Stryak provided us with other photos from the internet that show Muslim solidarity with Christians in Egypt. Should we then still

dare to blame Muslims in general for violence against Christians or claiming they are not 'true' Muslims? Shame on those claiming such nonsense!

### **Scandalous reporting**

Exaggerations and inflammatory reporting are endemic. Reporters tend to interview people after an incident has occurred when emotions are still high. People want to be heard and thus embellish stories. Others want to leave Egypt at any price and do not hesitate to exaggerate and claim persecution. I have investigated such claims. This does not mean that all people screaming in the hope this will bring them refugee status are claiming nonsense, but it means one should be continuously cautious with all claims being made.

One can understand reasons of exaggerations and inflammatory reporting, but good reporters should continuously search for empirical facts and context and not many use provocative statements. This makes a story more dramatic, attracts a wider audience, and helps with fundraising that primarily benefits the organizations concerned. People working with several organizations told me explicitly they make more money this way and with this money, they claim, they can better help Christians in Islamic countries. Nothing is further from the truth.

This type of reporting is in line with Islamophobic ideologues. How incredible that those who claim that almost every incident is a consequence of Muslim persecution are linked to organizations with strong anti-Muslim rhetoric? Isn't it remarkable that many are staunchly pro-Israel? Let me make it clear that I am not opposed to the state of Israel, but I do see stalwart supporters of the state of Israel who see the entire Islamic world as their enemy and thus almost any violence against Christians must be explained as Muslim-Christian violence.

I was recently with a Missio delegation visiting Coptic Catholic Bishop Kyrillos of Assiut who explained how such stories are creating additional tensions between Muslims and Christians. Instead of assisting local Christians and Muslims to find solutions they blow things up which adds to creating anger among Muslims who wonder what these organizations in the West are doing.

Exaggerations are sometimes also produced by Christian human rights activists in Egypt. In September, 2011 Coptic human rights lawyer, Nājīb Jabrā'īl claimed that since the Revolution some 100,000 Christians have left Egypt. The Coptic weekly, Watanī has investigated this and based on the information various Copts gave me I can only conclude that Nājīb Jabrā'īl made up the number. Christians have certainly emigrated and of course many want to emigrate, but citing the number 100,000 was a substantial exaggeration. But the story flew. Several (electronic) media and blogs picked this up, providing little to no space for those criticizing Nājīb Jabrā'īl. Why would they? Isn't it true that the audience of these media sources want this story as a confirmation of how difficult it is for Christians in Egypt? It is definitely hard for Christians in Egypt, but not the way it was presented by Nājīb Jabrā'īl.

Dr. Hans Jansen, professor of Islam, is often cited as an authority on Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, but the man has not been to Egypt for at least 15 years and he makes claims that he cannot possibly substantiate. That includes his claims about church building in Egypt, in addition to those claims about Islamic teaching, whereby he is providing references to extremist texts, but then claims this is true Islam. Conversely, discussions among Muslim scholars show a great variety of opinions, which are lacking in Jansen's presentations. Claiming that radical texts are true Islam is of course in line with extremists' assertions as well, but I cannot possibly imagine he would want to support those. However, several of his writings do just that.

We have documented several examples whereby misreporting has actually contributed to more violence, thus becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The burning of a church under construction in the village of al-Mārīnāb is a case in point. Christians in the village are small in number, but in order to preserve the community, the Coptic Orthodox Church wanted to give them a modest yet proper church. Permits for church building are hard to obtain and thus Christians have been tampering with documents in order to circumvent the issue. This is not unusual in Egypt. Certain Muslims in the village were opposed to the building of this church and complained to the governor of Aswan,

who did nothing, which irritated the complainants. They then decided to take matters into their own hands and set fire to the church under construction. Local Copts filmed this and placed it on YouTube that same afternoon.

Local media and websites took action immediately, reporting that again a church was burned. This prompted Copts in Cairo to respond, already incensed due to prior church burnings in 'Atfih and Imbābah (also more complicated than reported) and general economic decline and hardship. Demonstrations led by some fiery priests were organized, resulting on October 9 in the internationally reported clash between demonstrators and the army, which resulted in 27 deaths. Here, virtually every event has been misreported also. There was chaos, there were thugs aiming at disrupting the demonstration, and there was deliberate and inflammatory misreporting from Egyptian TV.

In an interview with German eyewitness, Jurgen Stryak, one sees that there may well have been organized violence to teach demonstrators that demonstrations will bring them nothing. Not long after, the same message was delivered when the police countered demonstrators on Muhammad Mahmūd Street near the Ministry of Interior, where several demonstrators were killed. The issue of al-Mārīnāb and Maspero drew international attention. Because of the serious consequences, the dispute in al-Mārīnāb had the priest brought hurriedly to court and sentenced to three months imprisonment. Was this justice? No, the vigilante Muslim gang was not tried.

We have investigated this in detail on our website. The conclusions are that misreporting does aggravate tensions. The state and its institutions are weak. Many offenses of Egyptian law are not addressed, but rather few are selectively addressed. There is also a lack of transparency, which makes it possible for all parties, not only the state, to manipulate information. Lack of transparency is one of the characteristics of a weak state and thus the institutions of the state must be strengthened.

Previously, I mentioned problems with ideological reporting versus empirical reporting. Those engaged in ideological reporting avoid

discussions and investigating other information and arguments. There appears to be no interest in discovering the truth, but rather in fostering an anti-Islamic ideological agenda. It is done cleverly. Publications and websites cite each other. This creates an echo, making the public believe the positions presented are widely accepted and that there is no doubt. When someone presents other facts and data, these are neglected—not mentioned in their publications and on their websites and if they have to respond they place you outside the group. They are the *'true defenders of human rights'* and others are not willing to make an effort to determine the validity of other information. The ideologues shout loudest and attract the most attention. Take Bat Ye'or claiming that Muslim migration to Europe is nothing else but a large *jihad* to make Europe Muslim, or take Jos van Noord falsely claiming in the largest Dutch daily newspaper, *De Telegraaf* that a boycott of tourism to Egypt is needed to put pressure on Egypt to help Christians. If we do not boycott Egypt then, in his words, we have no conscience. Van Noord does not seem to comprehend that tourism in Egypt has suffered tremendously since the January 25th Revolution to the detriment of tens of thousands of Christians and Muslims who relied on tourism for their livelihood. Does he want to kill what remains of tourism in Egypt? How irresponsible.

European officials are, according to this philosophy, of course, the great traitors. The manifesto of Breivik is an example of this. It is full of references to other Islamophobes. These Islamophobes appear to be well-funded. Europe is allowing the debate be dominated by these Islamophobes. Do not do this.

Please visit our website, [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info), for numerous examples of misreporting of human rights advocates on Muslim-Christian tensions in Egypt.

### **Europe should not allow Egypt to drown**

The head of a German NGO in Cairo told me that the economic problems of Egypt by comparison dwarf those of Greece. If Egypt should go bankrupt, prices would rise and millions would take to the streets in demonstrations that would far outweigh those that toppled

Hosnī Mubārak. This could escalate into violence targeted against Christians. It could increase pressure to migrate. It would strengthen the anti-Islamic rhetoric in Europe. Do not let the situation come to this!

If the European Parliament really wants to contribute positively to Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, it should support serious, objective research into what is happening in Egypt. It should actively oppose inflammatory reporting, for example by supporting a good media watch system. Freedom to offend and distort is nothing else but cutting off forms of communication.

Europe should also encourage dialogue with all parties in society, including Islamists. They happen to have received the votes of millions and thus cannot be treated as if they do not exist. Dialogue should be fair whereby critical questions should not be avoided.

The basic needs of any human being are food, housing, and security. Egypt is experiencing great economic hardship. Help increase the state's capacity so that it can help its citizens to make a living, ensure that the rule of law is applied and transparency promoted, and allow its citizens to live in peace and security. A more effective state will bring back tourism to Egypt and will advance economic relations between Europe and Egypt, which would benefit both parties.

I hope to see Europe provide assistance where it really matters!

## **SONS OF THE LAND: CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB WORLD**

Before I start my speech which is sub-divided into ten points, I would like to thank the organizers of this conference.

1. Christians as baptized are the sons of hope, they are the promoters of peace; reconciliation, pardon, and dialogue are the choice of the baptized person. The mission of Christ started from the Middle East and the first Christian communities were set-up on the basis of faith and on the basis of the testimony of the Apostles who spread their message in new societies.

2. Looking at these historical experiences of Christians, we see a constant scheme which characterises them which is interaction with the societies and openness to their surrounding societies.

3. What is happening now has to be interpreted in an objective fashion in a social and anthropological as well as a religious context. This is a phenomenon, which reflects change and social evolution.

4. Every development, every evolution has to lead to the development of the individual and the further development of the society. This will last in time as long as it is based on the principles of democracy, the rights, and obligations of citizens who see themselves as equal before the law. Freedom is the *raison-d'être* of this development of our societies. Freedom is an integral part of our societies. *"You should believe in truth and truth will free you"* (John 8/32). The main point, the focal point, and the most important criterion related to what is happening in this region – and this has to be evaluated and assessed one day - is respect for the principle of freedom: the principle of freedom of expression, religious freedom, and of freedom of conscience. Thus, the region must follow absolute religious values and establish these freedoms and values in constitutions. This will be an important characteristic in the face of what the area is going through at the moment.

5. The Middle Eastern Christian is the son of this region and he is the son of the earth in this region. And together with all the citizens there, he is part of the social fabric of the Middle East. The experience of the Church proves that the Church is still a pioneer, still plays a very important role in the various facets of the social life of the Middle East. The experience tells us that the Church is a very important part of the social movements and in fact it had a very important role in the Arab Renaissance.

6. What is happening in the area has economic aspects; it has as well a socio-religious dimension. However, it is too early to see where this development is going to take the whole region; but what we hope to see it is a certain progress to establish principles of the equal citizenship of all, the freedom in particular freedom of religion and conscience in the basic line of the spiritual and human values.

7. We see clearly and we have seen for the last few decades that there is a conflict, which varies from region to region. But we are not talking about religious conflicts as much as a cultural conflict. Apart from the different religious categories, we see different categories of people, some who believe in openness, tolerance, and the acceptance of others and another category of persons, which refuses all diversity, pluralism, even within religion itself. Therefore, the initiatives which must be taken in the region, on the European level, and on the international level, have to exhibit the tolerant trends and the tolerance category. And here the Church has a long experience which it can share with others and others can learn from. Thus, it is question of strengthening a life-style, strengthening a certain approach, a certain way of thought. There is a long path which will have to be travelled down, both in the East and the West. But we need this dialogue between the civilisations, this intercultural dialogue, this dialogue on ways of living. This is crucial for all and that has been made very clear by Pope Benedict XVI.

8. Violence will not help to resolve any conflict in the countries. Violence only feeds conflicts and leads society into deeper divisions and instability. There can be no solution without dialogue. There can be no solution unless you have true democracy. The region needs

justice as well as the just and fair development of a society and of the individual; as well as respect for his dignity and intelligence. We have to allow individuals the right to a dignified life. We can see through the media today that the entire world has become not just a village where we are living in at the moment, that is just an instant in time.

9. The Christians in this region are the sons of that land and the sons of the history of the Middle East. These Christians have to be part of society, an integral part of their societies. Christians living there cannot be outside of society. They have to play an important, a protagonist role; They can help to build spaces where people can come together, they can educate people in diversity and unity, they can help to confront the social problems of the region. All people need bread, medical care, and access to good education. The religious aspect should help to resolve social problems, because religion is based on the creed of God who is true love and true love is incarnated in human life.

10. The Synod for the Middle East is inviting Christians to live a spiritual life and to bear witness to God. The Christian's presence in the Middle East involves tackling challenges. These challenges can be positive and constructive. Christians are invited not to show fear, on the contrary, Christians are there in the Middle East to share and spread their values among all their brothers and sisters.

## **CHRISTIANS, ONE YEAR AFTER THE ARAB SPRING**

### **The time after 'Spring'**

With Franciscan optimism, we continue to call this great change taking place in the Middle East countries '*the Arab Spring*'. Initially, in fact, the Arab Spring aroused much enthusiasm: '*the squares*' brought down dictators who had ruled without demur for decades, and finally the people, especially young people, became heroes in the life of their countries and wrote history. Everybody, without distinction of belonging, participated in this important moment.

However that brief moment of euphoria was followed by the current time, less glorious and exciting, but certainly more decisive: the time of verification, so as to identify the path of reconstruction. Some dictators have fallen; others will fall, like in Syria. With them there also collapsed - or will collapse - a system of power, with all its entanglements of various kinds, which we are presently unable to analyse. For over a year, the Middle East and North Africa, or more generally the Arab world, have been almost exclusive protagonists of the international scene. Egypt, Israel and Palestine, Libya, Syria and several other Arab countries are in the middle of a profound change, which is unexpected and presents an unclear outlook.

### **New self-determination**

The sort of stability that for forty years had characterised relations in these countries, seems to have finally ended: new balances emerge, not necessarily negative ones but nevertheless giving cause for concern, especially for the small Christian community. We know full well that self-determination of peoples is a long process, full of events, some contradictory, some painfully necessary, some almost not understandable. The real danger is that the logic of State boundaries will prevail, according to ethnic division and not to a peaceful coexistence among different people.

Each country is now engaged in the arduous process of reassessing

their respective Constitutions. This is not about the mere writing of a text, but also about the decision to self-define themselves, finally and without coercion of any kind, as an evolutionary - though sometimes troubled - process and not as an academic exercise left to the chosen few; it is a process that involves entire populations. This makes everything vastly more complicated and complex but - in my understanding - no less important.

### **Christians endangered**

Many analysts have noted that this period of reconstruction and redefinition has led to a complexity of life in these countries, which instead of flowering for spring, are returning to a cold winter. Evidence of this is in the fact that Christians have become victims of persecution in recent months and that Islamic movements and parties - some very extremist - are strengthening themselves on the public stage. The relationship with the Christian minority has in fact been strongly challenged by forms of persecution and 'instrumentalisation' of various kinds. Whereas initially, without distinction, all found themselves in the streets to protest against the dictator, there is now division and mutual blaming: between Christians and Muslims, religious and non-religious, and so on. All were united in the desire for change, but - unsurprisingly - when the moment came for defining what they concretely meant by 'change', different and sometimes irreconcilable visions arose.

Now, the main concern is precisely focused on the delicate position in which Christian communities are in, on their fear of the rise to power of more or less fundamentalist Islamic parties. The two aspects are linked to each other. An Islamic party in power scares the Christian community and raises several questions: what rights will non-Muslim have? What kind of citizenship will be granted? What participation in public life will be possible? Within the Christian community the tension is visibly growing, and so is the regret for lost guarantees and the temptation to leave. The rise of Islamic regimes is inescapable. For several decades the governments that have collapsed have denied any chance for life and development to the forces of internal opposition.

### **Slow but unpredictable evolution**

In Arab countries a form of Western democracy is unthinkable, at least for the moment. The only forms of aggregation allowed have been the religious ones. Besides, Islam has been a point of reference for all those movements that wanted to express criticism towards the respective regimes. Thus it is now inevitable that Islamic parties will rise to power. The question concerns the model of regime: will they be moderate or fundamentalist Islamic regimes?

We will have to wait for a slow, natural internal evolution, so that these countries truly acquire social dynamics that are open and fully equal. The attitude towards Christians, the weakest part of the social community, as a minority, will be the litmus test for understanding the nature of the regimes and the current instability that is perceived in society. The persecutions against Christians reveal the existence of weak regimes, fear and instability in everyday social relationships, lack of territorial control and abuse on the part of local authorities. One must not deny the increasingly important existence of fundamentalist and closed movements, like the Salafists, who, with their easy answers to complex problems, always attract most of the population, especially in rural areas.

### **Religion – an integral part of social life**

To better understand the nature of the relations between the different religious communities in the Middle East, it is necessary to start from the historical and social context of a region that has always been a melting pot of religious differences, much more so than in Europe. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have their hearts and their roots in the Middle East. Each of these faiths has then known divisions and very vivid internal developments: Sunnis, Shi'ites, Orthodox Christians, Copts, Syrians and many other communities have arisen over the centuries, rendering the Middle East an example, which is unique in the world, of a place of, though not always simple, cohabitation.

Still to this day religious affiliations have a social and cultural character, and faith is not just an individual religious experience, but the definition of a personal and social identity. Religion is a fundamental element for

the communities who live there, in a structural, historical, cultural and human sense; it enters into every aspect of daily life, public and private, and penetrates it deeply. It is rare to find in it traces of lay elements in the Western sense, whereby Church and State are distinct and faith is just a more or less relevant aspect of social reality. The religious component is almost always an essential element in the construction of personal identity and it tends to express itself in some specific, distinctive and recurring traits, including, for example, active participation in ritual prayer and celebrations; the way of dressing; the decision to exhibit and wear objects and symbols of one's confessional faith; the choice of names for children. In addition to this, each individual receives at birth an identity number next to which an acronym defines the faith to which the person belongs.

Thereby, faith becomes an integral part of civil identity: each person is defined and considered Christian, Jew or Muslim regardless of whether he/she is practising or not. Many aspects of village life are ultimately delegated to the religious authority. A significant example is marriage: civil marriages do not exist; marriage is always religious, with significant social consequences. Religious and social affiliation also defines one's relationship with the others on a personal and social level. Two inhabitants of Jerusalem who belong to two different faiths, despite having the same citizenship, will have two completely different attitudes towards common problems and will correspond to two completely different social models. In fact one might even be an atheist, but still be Jewish, Christian or Muslim.

### **Full citizenship instead of 'laicity' (*laïcité*)**

It is therefore clear that concerning the Middle East of the future we cannot speak about 'laicity' or positive laicity, as was suggested during the Synod for the Middle East convened by Pope Benedict XVI. We should rather speak of full citizenship. The challenge these countries have to face, in this delicate phase of construction, revolves precisely around the criterion to define the concept of citizenship. Interreligious dialogue is essential to achieve a common understanding of that definition. By the expression 'interreligious dialogue' I mean the meeting of religious communities and of their leaders, starting from the local ones, to debate common and concrete problems.

### **Dialogue (or the absence of dialogue) between religious people**

It is not possible to have an inter-religious dialogue on faith issues, but it is necessary to have a dialogue among the religious ones on common problems, starting from their common humanity. If the religious affiliation has such an important social function in these countries and is at the basis of the understanding of relationships at all levels, it is then evident that in these regions inter-religious dialogue acquires a key function with immediate practical implications.

From the dialogue (or the absence thereof) between religious Muslims and Christians in Egypt, for example, will be born (or not) an immediate reaction in the relationships and in the respective legislation. If religion is an integral part of social balance, then it must also become an integral part of the solutions to the imbalances. Inter-religious dialogue can be regarded as a pilgrimage, an invitation, indeed, to leave one's own world and certainties and to meet 'the other' and her/his experience of faith, in search of the human and spiritual growth of each. Dialogue is a 'pro-vocation' to the exercise of historical and social responsibility and it is a competence and a tool that must be developed and increased, in order to promote mutual knowledge and understanding, especially in those contexts where different cultures and religions live together.

Therefore, inter-religious dialogue has strategic and practical value, as a means to build an alliance of loyalty and trust, a '*new alliance of hopes*', aimed at achieving together all the things that the individual cannot achieve alone. Today, the commitment to dialogue touches new frontiers and witnesses the rise of further positive opportunities, but must also increasingly compete with more and more numerous and pressing problems, such as those related to the achievements of science and technology; the defence of the sanctity of human life and of its dignity; the assertion of justice, peace, freedom; the protection of human rights; the safeguarding of creation, all questions that involve ethical issues of great complexity.

### **Important issues to discuss**

Dialogue is therefore a process, a real path of consciences in all their diversity towards an ideal and shared point on the issues of utmost

importance, such as: a) the recovery of the prophetic and educative meaning of the religious experience; b) a reflection on the concepts of personal and socio-cultural identity and of cultural and religious affiliation; c) a similar reflection on the concept of citizenship, showing its profile, rich in legal, political, ethical, social and cultural meanings; d) a redefinition of the borderlines in the relationship between religion and politics; e) a deepening of issues regarding the universal dimension of coexistence, which may stimulate work for openness, peace, non-violence, collaborative and constructive encounter among different people, on the basis of the idea that contact between West and East cannot be exhausted at the economic, political, social and cultural levels; f) a reconsideration of the values of openness and interdependence, not only concerning the subjects, the values, the peoples, the States, but also the approach to those problems of our time which are beyond the borders of States (one could quote the use of media or of social networks); g) a rethinking of the categories of history, memory, guilt, justice, forgiveness, which put the religious sphere in direct contact with the moral, social and political dimensions of citizenship.

### **Solutions avoiding both victimisation and irenism**

All this may seem utopian nowadays. A year ago, even the Arab Spring was totally unforeseeable. Yet today the Middle East has radically changed. I am convinced that the current tensions will anyway lead to a positive development. We certainly cannot deny complications, closures and extreme movements, but the fact that these countries have started to debate and struggle to define and organize their future is in itself decidedly positive. The path to an untroubled and reconciled relationship still remains long, but now, more than ever before, it seems possible. We cannot limit ourselves to accusing the extremists. Rather it is necessary to interact with that part of the population and with those movements (which constitute the majority) that nonetheless remain open to discussion and dialogue. This dialogue can in time create an orientation, become common opinion, provided that it does not remain closed in academic circles and that it is reinforced by the different parts of society, by the media, by the institutions. The contemporary situation, and even more the recent events that are

shaking the Middle East, highlight the relevance and urgency of a broad confrontation, related to the changes of meaning and application of the traditional categories of citizenship. The attitude of Christians must remain calm and positive. It is necessary to avoid hysterical victimisation or hypocritical irenisms. At the moment the situation is not peaceful, but it must not cause fear. It is important, despite everything, to try in every way forms of real encounter with the local population, with the institutions and their leaders. The denouncement and the proclamation of the truth must be accompanied by the search for relationships. This is the only way to live the Gospel.





**CHAPTER 3**

**CYPRUS:**

**AT THE CROSSROADS**

**OF CULTURES AND RELIGIONS**

**- 2012**



## **WELCOMING SPEECH**

As previously stated by MEPs Mario Mauro and Konrad Szymanski the purpose of our gathering at the European Parliament today is to assist in the presentation of *The Worldwide Religious Freedom Report 2012* as prepared and compiled by Aid to the Church in Need.

The already-mentioned deputies Mario Mauro and Konrad Szymanski, whose names I must admit are becoming synonymous with the issue of Religious Freedom, certainly don't need any introduction. However, it would be lacking from my side if I do not compliment them for continuing with their good work. So my sincere gratitude to both of you as well as to all your colleagues for your concern and commitment, for your hard work and great achievements. In the context of this occasion, please allow me not only to show my appreciation to you, but perhaps to give you a twofold advice of paramount importance. The words which I will address to you are taken from Luke 9, 26; 62. Yes, it would be unwise of me if I don't grasp this sterling opportunity, borrow the words inscribed in the Gospel and make them my own. Thus, these words are addressed particularly to you, Honourable Members of the European Parliament and to all like-minded colleagues: Be not ashamed of Christ and his teachings; be not afraid of defending the cause of Christians worldwide; once your hands are put to the plough you should not look back. You still have a long way to walk, but never give up even if you get tired. Keep hammering on the issue of Religious Freedom for all people. Keep working to make a better world where fully-fledged citizenship is enjoyed by everyone, by every community everywhere. These sentiments were also echoed, very recently, by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran on the occasion of the inauguration of the centre for interfaith dialogue in Vienna (see: Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, Church backs Saudi interfaith centre in *The Tablet*, 1/12/2012, 32).

I will now turn to speak about Aid to the Church in Need and of COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union). These

two organisations have been working together for the last calendar year. Indeed, we have collaborated together on many initiatives. It would be imprudent of me if I fail to pay special tribute to our former General Secretary Mgr Prof Piotr Mazurkiewicz who wholeheartedly directed his strength and energies to the issue of Religious Freedom for all, with particular attention to Christians. I am positive that his legacy will be cherished by all of us for years to come. During this transition period that COMECE is now going through, we have to hold the fort and be vigilant so as not to lose the pace of our activities on matters related to the issue of Religious Freedom. I am sufficiently confident that the newly-appointed General Secretary Fr Patrick H. Daly, who will take up his new post early in February 2013, will follow in the footsteps of his predecessor and show the same determination concerning the issue of Religious Freedom. For myself, I will do my best to introduce him (Fr Patrick) in order to endorse, cultivate and nourish even further the sustained friendship and collaboration that COMECE has enjoyed with Aid to the Church in Need. In his absence, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Deputy General Secretary Dr Michael Kuhn for his unflinching support and willingness to keep following the agenda of activities on Religious Freedom with continued interest and without interruption.

As to the Report that Aid to the Church in Need is presenting, it certainly deserves our attention and I am sure that its contents will render it as a work of reference and a useful tool in our daily endeavours. By means of such reports which are published on an annual basis, we certainly cannot say that due access to proper knowledge on issues related to Religious Freedom is lacking. Indeed, these reports do not leave any room for a future justification of any kind of assumed inactivity on our part. We cannot speak of invincible ignorance anymore, particularly when requested to address the issue of Religious Freedom. Thanks to Aid to the Church in Need and other agencies, such as the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and Open Doors International, today we can speak of 'vincible ignorance' but not anymore of 'invincible ignorance' when dealing with issues of Religious Freedom.

As rightly stated by His Grace Archbishop Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem in his Foreword to the 2011 Edition of the Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith,

*"It is a travesty of justice to turn a blind eye, as so many do. Yet, in truth, it is hard to motivate people to respond unless they know the story of people in these situations... A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith sets out to faithfully record the details of the suffering they endure... This [Report] bears witness to the courage, the commitment and the Christ-like example of so many people – young and old alike – who carry their cross today. If they still have hope against all odds, it is because of their faith in Christ and because of the many people of good will who endeavour to stand by them..."* (Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians oppressed for their Faith, UK 2011, 4).

Speaking of the so-called: "*people of good will who endeavour to stand by [those who are being persecuted and suffer unjustly because of their faith]*" they are also found in the corridors of the European Institutions. A recent document published by the Secretariat of COMECE entitled *Compilation Report on Religious Freedom at the European Parliament and the European External Action Service (EEAS), January 2010 – September 2012*, clearly shows the commitment by the European Parliament and the EEAS to promote and defend religious freedom in the international arena as a universal non-negotiable value. Indeed, from the retrieved data, one could easily conclude that the European Parliament, within its competences, is definitely contributing to the further enhancement of the concept of 'deep and sustainable democracy' wherein the right to vote should be integrated with other fundamental rights, including religious freedom. It is evident that the European Parliament is regularly exerting its influence on the EEAS in order to take the necessary action for the protection of harassed individuals (victims of hate speech and crime) and religious communities and minorities, mainly Christians, in third countries, such as: North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, China, etc.

To mention one pertinent example where the European Parliament has exerted its influence on the EEAS, I would like to direct your

attention to the draft document of the EU Human Rights Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief. It should be said that it aims to endorse key principles, and to contain clearly defined priorities and tools for the promotion of FoRB. This commitment is based on two Council Conclusions (November 2009 and February 2011) which are the outcome of numerous EP Resolutions. Although the Guidelines will not be legally binding, they will nevertheless represent a strong political signal that the issues of FoRB are priorities for the Union, and consequently are a necessary toolkit to assess certain situations as they emerge and enable the EEAS to engage in the most pragmatic way.

Speaking at a Conference on International Religious Freedom: An Imperative for Peace and the Common Good, and focusing on 'Principles and Reality', Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, stated that *"The age of martyrs is still with us. The struggle for religious liberty endures..."* After referring to the situation of Christians from a wider perspective, the Archbishop then goes on to speak about the prevailing situation of Christians in the West wherein

*"Through a narrow reading of human rights-related provisions, the wording of declarations repeatedly has been reinterpreted in order to fit the political agendas that have changed over time. Education, family law, healthcare are just some of the fields in which narrow reading of religious freedom paved the way to anti-religious policies..."* (ibid., 3).

In a nutshell and to conclude, we have to bear in mind the following elements:

- that Freedom of Religion is the stepchild of human rights;
- that we have to protect the individual's rights versus protecting a religion;
- to be vigilant to increasing phobias;
- to keep 'narrow religious self-interest' out of the equation;
- to consider what is at the heart of the dispute;
- to face religious leaders with their responsibilities;

- to maintain the cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue;
- to eliminate parallel societies;
- to regard Freedom of Religion as a litmus test of a free and tolerant society;
- to hold citizenship first, then religious identity;
- to pay particular attention regarding infringements of Religious Freedom (legal recognition of religions; public manifestation; apostasy and conversion; blasphemy);
- to take immediate actions;
- to see where action is most needed;
- to look ahead;
- to have a special word of encouragement to Europe; and finally
- to practice what we preach.

If we do not strive in the direction of these listed objectives, then the methodical creation of this report in which the editors, particularly Mr Peter Sefton-Williams, project a host of research and other useful material into the public domain will not achieve the desired aims for its publication.

I sincerely hope that such a fount of information and reference will be used by students, scholars, religious leaders, diplomats, technocrats and politicians alike, together with the curious and the interested.

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

*"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." (Article 18, UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights).*

Cyprus possesses a unique history and an ancient civilization that dates back to 9000 BC. Thanks to its geographical location close to the Holy Land, it was one of the earliest countries to embrace Christianity: in 45 AD, when the Apostles Paul, Barnabas and Mark travelled to the island and preached the gospel. It is for this reason that the whole island resembles an open museum of Christian Art, with a huge number of churches and monasteries in urban rural and mountainous areas, frequently decorated with mosaics, murals and icons from every historical period. In Cyprus, the religion of the vast majority of the population – 80% – is Orthodox Christian, while 18% are Muslims and 2% are Maronite Christians, Armenians and Latins.

Throughout history the island's religious communities coexisted and cooperated together without so much as a single religious conflict! On the contrary, the degree of mutual respect and acceptance was such that, in the towns and villages of Cyprus, Christian churches frequently stood next to Muslim mosques. People lived together, side by side, they took part in one another's celebrations and they shared one another's joys and sorrows.

This long tradition of peace and friendship among the island's communities was shattered and mortally wounded by the tragic events of 1974. On July 20th of that year, Turkey invaded Cyprus with a large military force and, since then, has continued to occupy 37% of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, having expelled 170,000 people from their ancestral homes.

In the areas that remain under the control of the government of the Republic of Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriots and other Muslim residents of the island enjoy full religious freedom. The vast majority of the Muslim mosques have been maintained by the responsible authorities of the Republic. It has been discovered during maintenance work that a large number of mosques were once Christian churches, as Byzantine murals have been discovered beneath layers of plaster. Today, several mosques function in conditions of total freedom so as to adequately serve the religious needs of Muslims living in the government-held areas of the island.

Unfortunately, the same situation cannot be said to exist in the areas that are under Turkish military occupation. After the 1974 invasion, some 20,000 people, mainly Greek Cypriots and Maronites, remained in their villages in the Karpas Peninsula and the Maronite villages to the west of Kyrenia respectively. This group of people, known since then as *'the enclaved'*, stayed in their villages in the hope that, following the ceasefire, they would be able to return to their normal lives. Their hopes were quickly dashed. The illegal occupation regime began to implement a policy of oppression, violations of human rights and harassment of the enclaved villagers in a systematic attempt to force them to abandon their homes. Today only around 500 of them still live in the occupied areas.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled in May 2001 that Turkey was responsible for gross violations of the European Convention on Human Rights in Cyprus, in particular concerning the right of the enclaved to freedom of movement, to religious worship and education and to respect for their private and family life.

On Christmas Day 2010, occupation regime forces entered the Church of Saint Synesius in the village of Rizokarpaso during the Divine Liturgy and forced Father Zacharias to remove his liturgical vestments under the threat of arrest while the members of the congregation were obliged to leave the church.

After this incident, the occupation regime sealed the church. At the same time, in the village of Agia Triada, Father Constantinos was not granted permission to celebrate the Christmas Liturgy for the enclaved residents of the village. Following an outcry and the condemnation of these actions by the European Parliament on the 20th of January 2011, the authorities of the pseudo-state issued an announcement on the 21st of February 2011 in which they stated:

- a. The two priests that were holding religious services for the enclaved were free to do so without requiring permission from the Turkish Cypriot authorities but only in villages where enclaved Christians lived.
- b. Other clerics wishing to hold any kind of religious service in a monastery or a church in the occupied areas should submit a request to the so-called authorities for permission to do so ten days in advance. Until February, thirty days' notice was required.

Bishop Christoforos of the occupied Karpas Peninsula submitted an application on the 14th of March 2011 to be allowed to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Village of Agia Triada on the 25th of March 2011, the Feast of the Annunciation. Having the 21st of February 2011 announcement in mind, he hoped that the occupation authorities would keep their word. Unfortunately their response was negative. His Grace had also submitted requests to celebrate the Divine Liturgy: 24th of April 2011, 13th of June 2011 and on the 11th May 2012, on various occasions in different churches in Karpasia Peninsula. Unfortunately his applications were again rejected without any explanation. On the 13th of March 2012 in a new provocative violation of human rights the occupying regime prohibited access to the occupied areas to Bishop of Karpasia Christoforos, without any explanation. The prohibition is still in existence today. It is worth mentioning that the Bishop of Karpasia is the spiritual father of the Greek-Cypriot enclaved people.

I, Bishop Porfyrios of Neapolis, and Father Savvas Hadjionas submitted our applications to celebrate the Divine Liturgy on the 25th of April 2011 in the Church of Saint George at Vatili village, on the 4th of June 2011 in the same church, on the 13th of August in the Church of Saint

Efyimianos in the village of Lysi and on the 13th of March 2012 in the church of Saint Charalampos (Neo Khorio Kythreas). All four responses were negative. In one case, the explanation was that the church was unavailable as it had been allocated to the so-called 'Ministry of Education' to be used as a youth centre!

For propaganda purposes, the occupation regime allows the Divine Liturgy to be celebrated in a very small number of Orthodox churches (around 19) out of a total of 575, and in most cases just once a year (in the Church of Saint Mamas at Morphou and the Church of Saint Prokopios at Sygkrasi).

Copies of the New Testament and prayer books destined for the children of the junior and high schools of the occupied village of Rizokarpaso were confiscated by the occupation regime. On the 17th of March 2011 Archimandrite Gregorios Ioannides, Mr. Michalakis Loizides (a theologian and surveyor) and Mr. Georgios Ilia (a teacher), attempted to donate these books to the enclaved pupils of Rizokarpaso as gifts. Along with the books, they also took with them icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, Saint Barnabas and Saint Spyridon, some simple censers and incense. At the Pergamos checkpoint, the Turkish military authorities discovered the books and refused to allow them through, claiming that special permission had not been obtained. They also promised to return all the confiscated items but this, unfortunately, never happened. The occupation forces later claimed that they would hand them to the Head of the school, which they did not do either.

Several Turkish Cypriot newspapers, particularly Kibris, Volkan and Afrika in their issues of Friday the 18th of March 2011, reported on the latest violation of religious freedom by the authorities. On its front page, Afrika's headline was:

*"Islamic fanaticism: Banning of Jesus. Those who claim that there is freedom to express your religious beliefs ban religious books."*

At the initiative of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, the European Parliamentarians Mr. Arthur Zasada and Mr. Jarosław Walesa from Poland, with Ms Maria Nedelcheva from Bulgaria, were hosted in Cyprus.

On Saturday the 12th of March 2011, a visit to the occupied Christian monuments of Cyprus was scheduled. This was prevented when four members of the group Mr. A Zasada, Mr. J. Valesa, Mr. Giannakis Matsis, and Mr. Loizos Auxentiou were arrested by the occupying military forces in their attempt to visit the temple of Agia Zoni in the fenced-off area of the town of Ammochostos.

On the 10th and 11th of May 2012 a team of four members from the UK Parliament representing the All Party Parliamentary Group for Cyprus (APPG), in a bi-communal initiative organized a visit to Cyprus under the leadership of Mr David Barrows. Despite the threats made by the occupant regime to arresting them, the initiative was completed successfully and the members visited religious monuments in the occupied area in the villages of Peristerona, Pigi, Genagra, Assia, Afania and in the areas under the authority of the Republic of Cyprus, in the villages of Dromolaxia, Kalo Chorio, with the intention of cleaning them.

Churches, which are the most obvious symbols of a place's identity, have undergone the most violent and systematic desecration. According to statistics from the responsible authorities of the Republic, more than 520 Greek Orthodox churches and 17 monasteries in the occupied towns and villages have been looted, purposely vandalized and, in some cases, demolished. Eighty churches have been converted into mosques, 28 are being used by the Turkish army as stores and barracks, and six have been turned into museums while others are being used as cultural centres, theatres, stables, barns, workshops, hotels and, in one instance, as a mortuary.

In March 2011 the desecration of the 15th century Church of the Virgin Mary in the occupied village of Thermia in the Kyrenia diocese was reported in the Turkish Cypriot newspaper "*Kibris*" in its issue of the 26th of March 2011. It had been turned into a cultural centre by the so-called Town Council of Kyrenia.

Many others have been destroyed, including the church at the Monastery of the Virgin Mary (Panagia Avgasida) at Milia in the

Famagusta district which dated from the 15th century and was decorated with murals of the same period. In 2007, the same fate befell the parish church of Saint Catherine in the village of Gerani.

During the afternoon of the 2nd of May 2011, a Turkish bulldozer demolished the Chapel of Saint Thekla, which was built in 1907 on the shore near the village of Vokolida after the miraculous discovery of an icon of the Saint. The small vaulted chapel had arches inside and a narthex on its west side which was added after the main part of the chapel had been built. Frescoes decorated the interior walls. Next to where the Chapel of Saint Thekla had stood, an enormous hotel called Noah's Ark was being built and was due to start operating in June. Despite the announcement made on the 16th of May 2011 by the occupying regime that it will be re-built, nothing has been implemented yet.

The cemeteries of our ancestors have been looted and destroyed. Graves have been opened and crosses and gravestones have been broken. And while all these dramatic events were taking place on the sites of Christian monuments, the occupation regime, funded by Turkey and other Muslim states, erected dozens of mosques in the occupied towns and villages and brought in Turkish Imams to preside over them.

The contents of religious monuments have been stolen and a large number of these have been exported abroad for sale to collectors and auction houses. More than 15,000 icons, iconostases, holy implements, gospels, mosaics and murals dating from the 6th to the 20th century have been removed and have disappeared. Only a very few items have been discovered and repatriated.

A typical example is the case of the mosaics from the church of the Virgin Mary (Panagia Kanakaria) at Lythragkomi. In 1989, the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus took legal action over four mosaics depicting Christ, an Archangel, and the Apostles James and Matthew respectively, which Turkish thieves had removed from the apse of the church sometime after 1979. Having been illegally exported from Cyprus, they were discovered in the possession of Peg Goldberg, an

American art dealer, in Indiana in the United States. After a trial, the court in Indianapolis ruled in 1989 that the mosaics should be returned to their rightful owner, the Church of Cyprus.

Moreover, in 1997, German police raided three apartments in Munich owned by Aydin Dikmen, a Turkish trafficker in antiquities, and uncovered a large number of mosaics, murals and icons. They had been illegally removed from more than fifty churches in the occupied areas of Cyprus and transported to Munich to be sold. In September 2010, the district Court in Munich ordered the repatriation to Cyprus of approximately 300 heirlooms. Most of them belong to the Church of Cyprus while others belong to the Department of Antiquities, the Maronite Church and the Armenian Church of Cyprus.

The Turkish trafficker appealed the decision of the District Court in the Appeals Court in Munich. Unfortunately the court has yet to rule on whether to accept or reject the appeal.

In January 2011 an 18th century post-Byzantine icon of Christ from the iconostasis in the Church of Saint Charalambos in the occupied village of Neo Chorio Kythreas, was handed to us by the well-known pop singer Boy George. According to his statement, he had bought the icon in 1985 from an art dealer in the King's Road in London, unaware of the true origin of the icon. When the Church of Cyprus gathered and showed proof of its origin to Boy George, he agreed to return the icon to its legal owner, the Church of Cyprus.

In April 2009, the Helsinki Commission (an independent US government agency) reported on the threat to religious monuments in occupied Cyprus, noting that:

*"Turkey, during thirty-five years of occupying the northern part of Cyprus, has engaged in acts of destruction, desecration, and pillage of religious and archaeological sites".*

By providing financial support through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Partnership for the Future (PFF), the European Union has preserved two monuments in an

exemplary manner: The Omeriye Baths (or Hamam) in 2005 in the government-held part of Nicosia and the Catholic Church of Saint Nicholas (Bedestan) in 2009 in the occupied part of the capital. Both monuments won the Europa Nostra Award.

Similarly, with assistance from the US government through USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), the 12th century Church of the Virgin Mary (Panagia Pergaminiotissa) has been restored in Akanthou, as have the mosaics of the early Christian basilica of Saint Auxivios at ancient Soli and some restoration work has been carried out on the Church of Saint Mamas at Morphou.

Following an initiative by the Cypriot Members of the European Parliament Mr. Panayiotis Denetriou and Mr. Yiannakis Kasoulides and the German MEP Mr Reimer Böge, the European Commission allocated €800,000 for the recording of religious monuments; and for 2011 and 2012 a further €4 million to be spent on dozens of monuments that are in immediate danger of collapse. Funding is channelled through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Unfortunately the results of the Technical Committee on Culture, set up by the two leaders in the framework of the negotiations, have been extremely poor and limited. The pilot scheme for the restoration of the Church of the Archangel Michael at Lefkoniko and the Arnavut mosque in Limassol, where work has been going on for four years, has yet to be implemented. The restoration of a number of other monuments has already been announced and we hope and wish for a positive outcome. We do not know for how many months or years the talks between the two leaders for a solution to the Cyprus problem will continue. What we can tell you with certainty, however, is that unfortunately most of the religious monuments in occupied Cyprus cannot wait much longer because they are threatened by collapse and destruction.

It is for this reason we ask the European Union to exercise its influence on the Turkish government in order to allow free access to all monuments and to allow the free exercise of religious worshipping services without any limitations regarding the frequency of these services. We also demand that restored monuments should be used

only for the purpose that they were built for, in accordance with the will of their legal owners and never for any other alien use. We have in mind the restoration of the Armenian Church and monastery in Nicosia, funded by USAID through UNDP/ACT. Instead of allowing its use by the legitimate owner, the Armenian Church of Cyprus, EVKAF intends to hand it over to the illegal "Near East University".

If we all join forces with the common goal and vision of religious freedom and the preservation of the cultural heritage of semi-occupied Cyprus, we believe that with God's help we can succeed. We have a duty and an obligation, not only to history and to those who created them, but also to future generations.

## **THE CATHOLIC PRESENCE IN CYPRUS**

Cyprus: At the Crossroads of Cultures and Religions is the topic chosen for this Conference, and for myself, being a Catholic priest, I will be speaking of *"The Catholic presence in Cyprus"*. I was privileged to have as my main source of reference His Grace Mgre Youssef Soueif, himself the only Maronite Catholic Archbishop in Cyprus.

Catholics are a minority in Cyprus, but are by no means a young community or a young Church in this island. The Maronite presence dates back to the eighth century and that of the Latins to the twelfth century. This presence is rooted in history and Catholics have contributed to the development of Cyprus, which considers itself a country with a long multicultural experience.

According to the 1960 constitution, two national communities exist in Cyprus - the Greek and the Turkish - that together make up the country. Furthermore, there are three religious groups who have voted to belong to the Greek community: the Maronites, the Armenians and the Latins. In my presentation I will limit myself to Maronite and Latin Catholics.

The Maronites generally originate from the North; that is to say, their four villages and their lands are in the part occupied by the Turkish army and to make things even more difficult two of these villages are military zones. Currently, few Maronites live there; there are fewer than 200 people in the villages and the rest of the faithful have fled, like all those who left their homes after the war of 1974. In the South, new parishes have been created. After 2004, it became easier to move between the North and the South and vice-versa, and at weekends and on holidays quite a few Maronites go to visit their elderly (mainly in the North) and stay there for a short time. This creates a somewhat limited pastoral movement in the villages, but also creates a hope of returning to the Maronite villages and lands; otherwise their future

will be in jeopardy. Of the four Maronite villages (in the North) two are designated Turkish army military zones. In one of these, Mass is celebrated on Sundays and holidays of obligation. Dispersed all over Cyprus, there are around 6000 Maronite Cypriots and about 4000 Maronites who are not Cypriots. Priests are generally Cypriot, and a few of them are Lebanese; the Maronite Archbishop is the sole Catholic Bishop resident on the island.

The Latins usually live in the South. While they do not have their own villages in the North, yet there is a Latin presence in some cities, particularly in Famagusta. In 1991, there were around 290 officially registered Latins in the island who were citizens of Cyprus, but since then the Representative of the Latin community has come into contact with numerous other Latins and the number of officially registered Latins has increased to 700. Furthermore, following the completion of a survey accomplished with the assistance of the island's Roman Catholic clergy, it appears that there are between 1,700 to 2,000 Roman Catholic citizens of Cyprus and a total Roman Catholic population of 7000 permanently resident on the island, inclusive of aliens. If the overseas workers in Cyprus, who happen to be Roman Catholic, originating mainly from the Philippines and other countries, are added to the above number, a figure of over 13,000 Roman Catholics in Cyprus is attained. Amongst the Latin priests some are Franciscan Fathers and some are diocesan (secular) priests, and they depend on the jurisdiction of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Speaking of identity, like all the citizens of the Republic of Cyprus, the Catholics are Cypriots too; they have the same rights and the same responsibilities. Moreover, the 1960 constitution gave the three religious groups the right to elect their community representative to parliament, with the right of religious and educational observance (as observers in matters related to religion and education) but without the right to vote. A Cypriot Catholic may be elected as a member of parliament or be appointed to high-level and other positions in the public sector, but this is directly linked to social and political obligations.

Catholics who, like thousands of people, became refugees after 1974, still have the same rights as all refugees. Sometimes Catholics hold very significant posts in the public sector but are more successful in the private sector, and this is a well known phenomenon among the minorities. While there is coverage in the media, it is limited, meaning that the Catholic minority does not have so many opportunities to express itself or demonstrate its culture.

With regard to relations with the Orthodox Church, these generally speaking are good and there is mutual respect; this is demonstrated by participation in liturgical and socio-cultural celebrations. But here attention is drawn to a practice in some main towns that falls outside any ecumenical spirit: where there is a requirement for the Catholic partner in a mixed marriage to be re-baptised, or in some cases the certificate of baptism is not given to the Orthodox partner in the procedures for issuing documents. This sort of thing creates a spirit of misunderstanding and tension among people.

As regards religious practice in the North, (that is, where the Turkish troops are based), there are monasteries and churches which cannot organise services of worship without a permit from the local authorities. And, as has already been mentioned, there is one village which is itself a military zone and therefore a place where people cannot go; another village is also a military zone where people are only allowed to go on Sundays and holidays of obligation for about three hours and then only to church. There is also a village which is within the jurisdiction of a military zone where once a year Mass is permitted to be celebrated. It is hoped that this state of affairs will cease and the Catholic community will also be able to operate in accordance with the current situation in Cyprus, at least with regard to freedom of divine worship, which will give hope to people waiting to return to the villages and lands of their forefathers. Without this solution there is a risk of a slow assimilation (absorption) of the Catholic Church, especially the Maronites who, if they lose their lands, will run the real danger of no longer existing in the near future.

Generally speaking, the Catholic minority in Cyprus has a deep historical background. Catholics are facing problems of a political nature in the context of the Cypriot problem that had been lingering on since 1974; nevertheless, this is a minority that contributes to the cultural and social development of the country. The fact that different cultures coexist is a positive element that preserves the multicultural tradition of Cyprus and opens the door to lively dialogue between citizens.

When analysing the Catholic ecclesiastical dimension in Cyprus, note has to be taken of the membership of Cypriot Catholics in the ecclesiastical structure and Catholic realities in Europe on the one hand, and in Middle Eastern Christianity on the other hand; taken together this two-dimensional approach creates a certain dynamic of openness, of connection, and of positive and constructive interest in the country as a whole and in each of its halves. In this sense, Cyprus has a mission as bridge and crossroads between the Middle East and Europe. Alongside its membership in the European Union, Cyprus is also a bridge between the Middle East and Europe and this aspect is lived out not only within the ecclesiastical context but also in the social and political context, and this is where the Catholic minority could make a creative contribution.

In respect of Catholic culture after the Second Vatican Council, the more deeply the Catholic minority is rooted in the spirit of the Council, the more it will discover its mission of offering the universality of its ecclesial experience to the Cypriot religious and civil society. Here one should add the aspect of personal initiatives; indeed, due attention should be given to the positive momentum gained by Catholics in a number of social and personal areas, along with the conscious and mindful attitude of Cypriot citizens whose mission is to build a culture of love and peace.

Since 2004, things have changed for the better, yet it is not good enough! For instance, a Latin priest is being allowed to travel and to celebrate Mass on every Sunday, both in Kirinia and Famagusta. Having said this, I think it would be appropriate to conclude my intervention by reiterating the conclusions of the European Court of Human Rights in

its judgment of 10 May 2001 in the case of *Cyprus v. Turkey*, establishing violations of the human rights of the Greek Cypriot and Christian communities living in the Northern part of Cyprus, which were also endorsed on several occasions by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Indeed, the Turkish Cypriot administration controlling the northern part of Cyprus, as well as Turkey which assumes de facto legal co-responsibility in this part of the island:

- should cease all humiliation of the Greek and Maronite communities and put an end to the climate of intimidation;
- should end the dispossessions affecting members of these communities, by returning to the members of these communities the property and possessions of which they have been arbitrarily dispossessed, individually or collectively or - failing that - offer them right compensation;
- should ensure freedom of education and worship for Orthodox Christians and Maronites;
- should end the restrictions on movement across the demarcation line and immediately grant Greek Cypriots living in the northern part of Cyprus at least the same rights as those already granted to Maronites;
- should grant all inhabitants the right to an effective remedy;
- should ensure equal access to medical care;
- should permit the communities to freely choose their representatives themselves.

To the aforementioned list pronounced by both the European Court of Human Rights and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, one should add the following proposal, that is, that the Turkish Cypriot administration controlling the northern part of Cyprus should consider churches and mosques as places of worship, friendship and forgiveness; they must guarantee to keep these places of worship outside of political tensions in order to safeguard peace, stability and prosperity within the wider society and to avoid the creation of parallel societies;

We urge all the representatives of the civil society of Cyprus, independently of the community to which they belong, to do their

utmost to bring about a climate of mutual understanding, of dialogue and of tolerance between the different social, political, religious, cultural and linguistic constituents present on the island, who, as history has shown, are perfectly capable of living together in peace and harmony.

These values of multiculturalism and open dialogue should be further articulated and enhanced. Despite the prevailing difficulties, one must never tire of opting for openness and dialogue, respecting the particularities and building on love in truth.

## CYPRUS. AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURES AND RELIGIONS

In the second half of 2012, the small Republic of Cyprus took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. An event that has once again brought to the fore a dramatic situation, which too often continues to be ignored or hushed up: the wound of the Turkish occupation of the northern part of the island that has persisted since 1974. The *libro calendario* (calendar-book)<sup>1</sup> for 2013 published by the Christian Russia Foundation<sup>2</sup> is a valuable opportunity to learn about the island and its treasures, to promote its protection and revive the issue of respect for human rights. The authors of this publication are Ioannis Eliades and Charalampos G. Chotzakoglou, both accredited scholars, who administer important cultural institutions in Cyprus and who have been fighting for years to preserve its artistic heritage and national identity.

What I would like to do now - and it is also the purpose of the publication - is to bear witness to the concept of beauty. In fact it is not enough to protest - albeit rightly - against the violation of undeniable human rights, the beauty that was generated must be recognized from a human perspective, as a culture, as faith, and as such can be revived and still revived even now. A witness to beauty is therefore a witness to the truth, to genuine human dignity according to some concepts of beauty.

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1 *Cipro. Al crocevia di due mondi. La pittura VI-XVI secolo*. Libro calendario 2013 Milano 2012, euro 15. (At the crossroads of two worlds. VI-XVI century paintings, Milan 2012.. The publication presents 24 colour tables in large format, two monographic essays and explanatory notes to the reproduced works).

2 Christian Russia Foundation (*Russia Cristiana*) was founded in 1957 by Father Romano Scalfi in order to make known in the West the riches of the spiritual, cultural and liturgical Russian Orthodoxy, to promote ecumenical dialogue through live contact between them and shared experience, to contribute to the Christian presence in Russia, see: <http://www.russiacristiana.org/index.htm>

The Cypriot civilization is a *unicum* where two worlds and two traditions - the Byzantine and Latin - interweave in a dramatic but fruitful cultural synthesis. For centuries Cyprus belonged to the Empire of the East, conquered by Richard the Lionheart in 1191 and later ruled by the Lusignan - former lords of Jerusalem - and by the Venetians, the "happy island of Aphrodite" (as it was called in ancient times). It presents in its monasteries, churches and museums masterpieces of an extraordinary artistic and historical value. Ten whole complexes have been ascribed to the UNESCO World Heritage of humanity.

The *libro calendario*, to which the Christian Russia Foundation has devoted years to the study of common sources of Christian iconography, proposes for 2013 a series of masterpieces of this land - mosaics, frescoes and icons dating from the third to the sixteenth century, which accompany us in the discovery of a world seemingly exotic and distant, but which in reality embraces in many ways the Italian and Western European cultural traditions. In fact the singular and painful political and religious troubles of this land at the crossroads of many routes and interests over the centuries, contributed to the afflicted maturity of a beautiful and original artistic expression, which documents the deep ties and exchanges between the Christian East and the West, the circulation of ideas, languages, styles, albeit through painful events and often even tragic ones, testify to the substantial unity rooted in our common faith in the Saviour.

The coastal towns of Cyprus show traces of Hellenistic, Roman and Proto-Byzantine civilization, through the vestiges of buildings and urban settlements, and in particular through beautiful mosaic floors and walls which show the continuity that exists between the two civilizations, and at the same time, the profound revolution brought about by Christianity. Not forgetting that Christianity was introduced to the island very early, by the apostles Barnabas and Paul: testified by the presence of about 90 early Christian basilicas and references in written sources, already by the end of the fourth century; 15 bishops took part in ecclesiastic synods of a both local and ecumenical character. The conversion of Cypriots to the new faith was accelerated by the proximity of the island to the Holy Land, Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

Within the island, amidst the Troodos Mountains, a massif that reaches to 2000 metres, churches and monasteries bring us back to Byzantium under the Comneni, at the time of the Crusades, the Franks and the Venetians. In fact, these valleys knew Medieval monastic efflorescence, due in particular to the Marian cult (the ancient sources speak of repeated apparitions of the Virgin). In general, only some modest churches in stone remain today of these monasteries, with their characteristic oblique wooden roofs with two slopes that could be used as shelter from the stormy weather, but inside they are real picturesque pearls. Besides the iconostasis, the churches are generally entirely frescoed with an extensive iconographic plan that reflects the fundamental Byzantine modules, however reprocessed according to their individual and original accents. In particular, typical for Cyprus, is the art of co-existence, and sometimes even on the same wall, paintings that have different ages and intentions, echoing both the co-existence of more spirits within the Byzantine culture (classicist spirit, harmonious and solar and ascetic spirit, tormented and suffering), and the dramatic, sometimes bloody, confrontation between the indigenous population and the succession of foreign dominating powers which caused religious and civilization conflicts.

Beautiful examples of Byzantine painting from the beginning of the eleventh and the end of the twelfth century are the frescoes in the churches of St. Nicholas tis Stegis of Panagia Phorviotissa (Asinou), in the hermitage of San Neofito and in Panagia Arakas (Lagoudera), direct emanations of the refined culture of Constantinople. This animus Byzantine remains even in later paintings, in which we observe the resistance of local orthodoxy to the influence of the Latin domination, present in the iconographic elements of the second order. By contrast, there is the art of the dominated population, which affects the production of Latin painters, creating a very special artistic phenomenon that is called "*the art of the Crusaders*". The Latins in fact became contractors for the Greek artists, they actually started to learn in their schools the art of painting icons, the Byzantine iconography and the design which is typical of the Orthodox world, and sometimes worked alongside them in the same painting atelier. This is how an original fusion of Byzantine and Western elements and techniques

named "*maniera cypria*" (Cypriot style) was born and it characterizes the artistic production of the thirteenth century. Besides Cyprus, the existence of the atelier of crusade art is also known in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai and in Jerusalem.

This aspect seems significant. What allowed these struggles, these clashes of civilizations, not to impoverish, but rather to enrich their respective traditions, to produce this extraordinary and fruitful cultural synthesis? I believe the fact that beyond the perspective of power and contradictory economic or ideological interests, there was on both sides a concept of man endowed with a divine dignity, irreducible because it is constituted by the relationship with the Mystery. That is what allowed in this age dramatic and often bloody conflicts not to knock them down, but rather to lay the foundations of a revival and a relaunch of civilization, and this is not that different, from this point of view, from our age. This can be really a guideline even for our age.

Cyprus also played an important role in the religious painting of southern Italy, especially in Puglia, thanks to the overseas contributions coming from the Holy Land and Syria through Cyprus or Corfu. If these eastern models enjoyed great veneration because of their origin, the painters of the twelfth century themselves acquired the art of how to reproduce them *in loco*, with great sensitivity, absorbing and spreading at the same time, the cultural and religious conception that was there implied.

### **Mother of God Hodigitria with angels and donors (1529)**

#### **Byzantine Museum Archbishop Makarios III Foundation, Nicosia**

In this icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria (which supports and indicates the Child Jesus as "*the way, truth and life*"), we can see an unusual element at the foot of the painting, which is the presence of a Romanesque basilica with three naves, with the raised central nave and a high bell tower of the Venetian style which protrudes up to the height of the neck of the Virgin. Beside the church two angels in orange robes support it. In a niche on the north wall of the church is depicted the Mother of God with Child in the style of Eleousa. To the right and left are kneeling the benefactors: husband and wife, with her hands clasped in prayer.

This particular iconography actually has Italian origins: it is an elaboration of the post-Byzantine "*Mother of God of Loreto*," with the angels who miraculously transfer Mary's house from Nazareth to Loreto. To justify this hypothesis, Ioannis Eliades cites works with similar depictions of churches that are present in the same period in Sicily; for example, a painting in the Capuchin monastery in Savoca, from 1487, and a painting that dates back to the beginning of the sixteenth century of Alessandro Padovano and Giovanni Maria Trevisano in the Gallery of Palazzo Bellomo in Syracuse.

### **The Mother of God of Kykkos, from Cyprus to Southern Italy**

The Monastery of Kykkos takes its name from the mountain of the same name, in the Troodos mountain range. Its foundation is linked to the name of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118), and of the monk Isaiah who was also the first igumen (abbot).

The place owes its fame to the icon of the "*Panagia Kykkotissa*", which - according to tradition - was one of the three panels painted by St. Luke and which was venerated first in Egypt, and then in Constantinople where it was brought for safety as a result of the Arab conquest of the country. The icon is celebrated on September 8 (Nativity of Our Lady) and 15 August (Dormition of the Mother of God). It is interesting to observe that even the Turkish inhabitants of the island, although Muslims, take part in this worship.

There are several replicas of this iconographic type, the earliest from the twelfth century (an icon of the monastery of Sinai), it was then widely spread in Athos, in Central Europe, and particularly in Southern Italy, where they are often venerated as miraculous effigies of the Mother of God from Kykkos: in Piazza Armerina, Gela, Palermo, etc. The sudden movement of the Child is characteristic of this type of iconography, which popular tradition sees as an allusion to the passion and death on the cross.

### **The wound of the "*Attila line*"**

Cyprus is still today divided as a result of the painful wound of the Turkish occupation of 1974 of the northern part of the island: the so-

called “Attila line”, which runs through the capital Nicosia through - among others - right next to the Catholic cathedral and the premises of the Nunciature. This resulted in the isolation of approximately one-third of the territory of the island, forcing people to leave (whether they were of Greek origin and orthodox faith, or Muslims, Turkish Cypriot); Christians in particular suffer continuing violence and restrictions, and even ancient sacred buildings and their paintings are falling into complete destruction due to theft, plunder and systematic vandalism.

The giant Turkish flag painted on the hill overlooking Nicosia, vividly illuminated at night, is the ubiquitous context which exposes the life of the capital, a kind of silent but eloquent warning that imposes itself on visitors, from the moment in which they all land at Larnaca airport.

These facts were exposed by Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of New Justiniana and of all Cyprus, on the 20th August last year, during the meeting on religious freedom that took place at Rimini. He said:

*“Turkey has occupied 38% of Cypriot territory and seeks to eliminate systematically every trace of our civil and religious traditions.”*

During these years, Ankara has driven thousands of families from their homes and sent colonists to occupy the lands of Anatolia:

*“We must consider that following the occupation of the Turks, 180,000 Cypriots were expelled”* underlined the prelate. *“In theory, the Turkish Cypriots should number 160,000, but in fact more than half have abandoned the island of Cyprus, while 300,000 Turkish settlers were imported from Anatolia. The Turkish army currently has 35,000 troops at the border and wants to create a Turkish State.”*

### **Thirteenth-century frescoes recently recovered**

A complex of frescoes of the thirteenth century, belonging to the small church of Saint Eufemiano in Lyssi, near Famagusta, was presented for the first time in this publication. Since 1974 they had been completely detached from the vaults of the chapel and sold internationally by Turkish art traffickers. Recently, the frescoes were restored and, in March, brought back in Nicosia, where they are currently on display in the specially adapted museum’s environment. We are speaking about two beautiful paintings: the dome with the Pantocrator Supported by

Angels, the throne of Etimasia and the Mother of God and John the Baptist (on the cover of the *libro calendario* 2013), the Mother of God of the Sign flanked by angels, which was originally located in the apse.

With the proclamation of the Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983, the Turkish State attempted to erase traces of the Christian religion. As well as other actions, it has turned more than five hundred religious buildings into museums and mosques, and sold off a major part of the artistic heritage of the Cypriot Church. Today, the battle of the Cypriot Christians is not simply the claiming of a right, but arises from the awareness that:

*"the true religious freedom is the fruit of love of God and the internal battle in the heart of man, the one who conquered it is free in all other aspects of life." "The current situation causes us pain and suffering - said the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus - because when the lighthouse of Christianity is extinguished so also is a light to the whole universe. Christianity has the gift to enlighten all of humanity."*

Chrysostomos II has pointed out, moreover, that religious freedom is the result of a study of the moral and ethical values inherent in the human heart.

*"Where you do not live this opening - he said - it is replaced by a general stagnation."*

*"The Turkish occupants do not allow us to pray and to celebrate our rites",* denounced the Bishop, demanding that Turkey's application for entry into the European Union is submitted provided there is a real democratisation process, both internal and external. *"The Cyprus issue has religious origins but is simply an attempt to dominate a country by a foreigner" - - said Chrysostomos II in his final remarks, pointing out that the Greek Cypriots have always had close relations with the Turkish Cypriots, and they have always participated in both Christian and Muslim religious feasts.*

The Bishop launched a painful appeal to men of good will:

*"In the occupied Cyprus there is no religious freedom. Christians are under the boot of the settlers and the Turkish army. In Carpasia there remain, almost trapped, 300 elderly Greek-Christians who are there*

*simply to suffer. Similarly the Bishop of Carpasia is impeded from celebrating Mass, to visit his faithful, to get closer to its churches.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> *I accuse - The bishop of Cyprus: the Turks persecute Christians in Europe*, Interview with Chrysostomos II in “*Isussidiario.net*”, 21st August 2012 (*J'accuse / Il vescovo di Cipro: i turchi perseguitano i cristiani in Europa*)



CHAPTER 4

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
WORLDWIDE REPORT  
- 2012**



## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD**

For those of you who don't know Aid to the Church in Need, it was founded at the end of the Second World War by the Dutch priest Fr. Werenfried van Straaten. Its first mission was to help starving Germans. During the Cold War it assisted Christian communities behind the Iron Curtain. Today it gives support to Christian communities, mainly in the developing world. It supported around 6,000 projects this year and its overall income was just over 80 million euros.

The Second Vatican Council's Declaration (made in December 1965) on "*The Dignity of the Human Person*" – often referred to as the "*Declaration on Religious Freedom*" – is the starting point of contemporary Catholic thought on freedoms in a modern society and is also the basis of this report.

It forcefully sets out the case for religious freedom which, said the Bishops of the Council, was rooted in the dignity of the human individual created in the image and likeness of God.

The Declaration said:

*"In all his activity, man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God. ....It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience".*

There is no contradiction, therefore, in a Catholic Charity, such as Aid to the Church in Need, focusing on oppressed Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist or other religious minorities, as we do in this report.

Our approach - in highlighting religious freedom for all rather than emphasizing solely the rights of Christians - is fully supported by Catholic teaching in this area.

### **But what do we mean by religious freedom?**

Let me offer here five clear signposts or tests for religious freedom. These form the basis of the editorial judgments which we exercised in our Report.

First, the right to express or practice a religion is not limited to acts of worship, though they are naturally essential. It also includes the right to express faith through acts of charity, of social service, through health and education. Freedom of religion must include the freedom to '*manifest*' faith.

Second, freedom of religion entails the right of faith communities to set their own rules in, for example, the qualification for religious office, without State or other interference.

Third, religious freedom means the right to convert. The individual conscience must be respected and so everyone should enjoy the right to change their faith or, indeed, to have no faith at all. As the Report details, this right is being widely denied.

Fourth, the right to worship means the right to build churches, mosques, temples, synagogues or other places of assembly. In many cases, this right is being denied or frustrated.

Fifth, religious freedom means not only the right to catechize one's own children, family and community but also the right to evangelise; that is to say the right to attract converts. As this Report documents, in too many cases these rights are deemed illegal.

In practice, of course, these rights sometimes conflict with other rights – in Western democracies, for example, employment rights have been said to be in conflict with the right to select, say, an all-male priesthood. While a hierarchy of rights is always likely to be the pragmatic outcome to such conflicts, the principles on which religious freedom are based must – in our view - be continually re-stated and upheld.

Before turning to some of the key findings of the Report, let me

give you some technical background. It is the third edition of our Worldwide Religious Freedom Report. It covers a 16-month period from January 2011 to April 2012. It covers 196 countries – that is, all the main countries of the world - and it has been translated into six languages – English, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and German. The Editorial Committee, which I chair, involves representatives from six different countries. There were around 14 different authors (plus a similar number of translators and proof readers). The information is drawn from a variety of published sources in many different languages. In short, it is a very substantial undertaking.

Let me turn now to some of the key findings of our Report.

The main question we are asked is whether religious persecution has been getting better or worse in the period under question?

It is extremely difficult to make a general assessment at a global level.

There is certainly a growing awareness in public opinion of the problem of religious freedom, thanks to the increased level of reporting by the media.

In the course of the year this has also resulted in a series of interventions by parliaments and national governments (for example in the Belgian, Italian and German parliaments), and also by international organisations, which have reiterated the importance of defending religious freedom, not least by the European Parliament.

In terms of the legislation on paper, one can observe a generally improving tendency, in the direction proposed by international conventions. Rarely have the constitutional and legislative changes made during the period analysed resulted in less religious freedom, but rather in more freedom (for example in Kyrgyzstan, Hungary, Moldova, and in Norway where State religion has been abolished).

Unfortunately the same cannot be said as far as the actual levels of violence and persecution are concerned.

There are certainly positive events to be reported, such as the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Holy See in Vietnam, for example, and likewise in Malaysia. Or again certain decisions that give hope for a decrease in the repression of religious minorities – for example the almost complete resolution of the contentious issue of the assets confiscated by Communist regimes in European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia – and also in Turkey, where the confiscations date back to the birth of the Turkish Republic after World War I. Then there are the signs of greater openness, such as the permission to hold a public procession on Good Friday in the United Arab Emirates, while another positive fact has been the creation in a number of Islamic countries of mixed interreligious committees to resolve any problems arising between the different religious communities (for example, in Mali, Qatar and Kuwait). Here too we should note the positive responses in Indonesia, on occasions where anti-Christian violence was clearly rejected by associations and individuals of all faiths.

Apart from these few, if significant, positive aspects, it has to be said that in most of the countries where there is anti-religious repression there were no improvements during the period analysed by this report. Indeed, in some cases the overall situation deteriorated, for example in China. In other countries, such as Mali – previously an example of coexistence – the political instability has increased, with consequences for religious freedom, owing to the activities of Islamic extremist groups which do not shrink even from terrorist methods. This situation applies also to Kenya and Nigeria.

**The next most frequent question we are asked is which religious group suffers most persecution.**

Without any doubt, from all the analyses and reports on the subject, including by international organisations, it is clear that Christians of different denominations are the group most exposed to persecution. This remains true whether one considers the number of Christians living in countries where there are different forms of intolerance, or whether one considers the actual number of victims of religious intolerance.

The number of Christians of different confessions in difficulty because of legal or cultural structures around the world is not known for sure. But last year Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, estimated these to be more than 200 million. The next question inevitably arises: Which religious group is most responsible for persecuting other groups?

Analysing the statistics, with all their limitations, one can see that in 131 of the 196 countries analysed, Christianity is the majority religion, in 49 it is Islam in its various schools, and in 16 countries other religions predominate (Buddhism, Hinduism and traditional religions).

With regard to the legislative framework in the 131 countries with a Christian majority, where Christianity's cultural and historical influence is unquestionable – even if, as in many European countries, the majority are no longer churchgoers – there is not a single case of any laws obstructing religious freedom. One should bear in mind that this also applies to continents such as Africa (e.g. Liberia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Angola and Mozambique) and to the few Asian countries of this kind, such as the Philippines, East Timor and South Korea. The handful of negative incidents reported are usually the result of local ethnic-religious conflicts.

Of the 49 countries with a Muslim majority, 17 have Islam as the State religion, with consequences that range from the exclusion of all non-Muslim religious practice – as in Saudi Arabia – to cases in which other faiths are tolerated, though strictly controlled in their activities. In a further four cases, although there is no explicit declaration of Islam as the State religion, Sharia is defined by the Constitution as the sole source of the law.

In 19 other cases, the law theoretically guarantees religious freedom, either because the Constitution establishes the country as a secular State – for example in Turkey (where however the intention has been declared to move away from the secular State) - or else because religious minorities are guaranteed certain rights, as for example in Iran.

Elsewhere, the situation is currently changing, in some cases because of the so-called '*Arab Spring*' – the outcome of which (for example, in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya) does not for the moment look positive for religious minorities – or else due to changes in legislation that are either positive (as in the case of Kirghizstan's new Constitution) or negative (as in Tajikistan, where the new law on religious communities is obliging many Christians to emigrate).

When it comes to the facts on the ground, however, the situation is undoubtedly worse than the legislation seems to indicate. There are numerous cases of arrests and deportations for alleged '*proselytism*' (which almost always means the normal activity of evangelisation), or of violence due to religious intolerance, often with the passive (or even active) complicity of the public authorities.

This brief outline, which aims to be as objective as possible, leads one to conclude that in terms of the threat to religious freedom and the repression of religious minorities, the Islamic area of influence, partly due to its sheer size, stands out strikingly in first place.

**In conclusion, let me now summarise the main findings of the Report.**

- a) The threats to religious freedom are not diminishing. Even if some improvements seem to have emerged at a legislative level, in reality, at ground level, there have been no significant improvements.
- b) Countries that enjoyed relative calm, such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria, are now cause for serious concern. Furthermore, the pressure of Islamic extremism on African countries such as Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and Chad, has increased and threatens to destabilize an entire and important area of Africa.
- c) In countries where religious identity is linked to ethnicity, there are often clashes and even serious violence. This phenomenon occurs regardless of the geographical area or the religions involved. In fact there are reports of this both from European countries, such as Kosovo or Bosnia & Herzegovina, and from Asian ones, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia and India.
- d) In some European countries there are continuing attempts to

impose secularism, above all in opposition to the majority Christian religion (we would cite especially the United Kingdom as an example).

e) So-called 'anti-conversion laws', and the abuses of power that derive from them, now appear to be spreading at a local level, notably in a number of Indian states and despite the fact that the national Constitution acknowledges the right to religious freedom.

f) In Pakistan, the anti-blasphemy laws and the hostility towards Christianity within society continue to cause grave damage, both to the legal process and in terms of outright violence (notably, the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Federal Minister for Minorities and a Catholic).

g) In the period covered by this report, the situation of religious freedom in China has deteriorated, especially as far as Catholics are concerned and there has been an intensification of attempts to subject all communities to State control, with arrests and illegal Episcopal ordinations. Equally, there has been no improvement in the tragic situation of believers in North Korea.

h) In some countries, whose Constitutions formally recognize the right to religious freedom, the authorities in practice oppress it with excessive controls, bans on public activities and Church schools etc. This is the case, for example, in Laos, and also in Myanmar, where the changes at a political level have not however resulted in improvements for the religious minorities, in particular those of certain ethnic groups whom the State regards as '*foreign*'.

Finally let me say that Aid to the Church in Need has decided, in response to the serious situation in some countries regarding religious freedom, that work will begin shortly on the next edition of the Report, which should be ready by Spring 2014.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SOME COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND PAKISTAN

As a Polish priest during the communist era I personally experienced the problem of religious freedom over many years. This experience was further deepened by my many years working in Africa, and more recently by my work in the area of the Middle East. In my mind's eye I still retain an image of the people who suffer there on account of the lack of religious freedom. The memory of those I met on my journeys to Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon and other countries remain unforgettable.

Iraqi Archbishop Bashar Warda summarises the experience of the Christians living there in these words:

*"We are easy targets. I fear for my brothers and sisters in the Christian faith. Again and again, our people are hurt and killed, our churches are damaged and destroyed. The faithful feel they have no option but to leave. Politicians at home and abroad may sympathise with us but in the final analysis the Christian people see no end to their suffering and so they keep asking us: 'Who can we turn to?'"*

Few of us would disagree with the following statement:

*"The human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. (...) This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right."*

These words are taken from the US State Department's Annual Report on Religious Freedom, which continues:

*“It is particularly urgent that we highlight religious freedom, because when we consider the global picture and ask whether religious freedom is expanding or shrinking, the answer is sobering. More than a billion people live under governments that systematically suppress religious freedom.”*

And again:

*“So when it comes to this human right, this key feature of stable, secure, peaceful societies, the world is sliding backwards”*

It is an assessment that is shared by many other agencies, and it is already reflected in a number of civil and religious documents. But can we say, in recent years, that there has been any improvement in understanding and respect for religious freedom?

In reality, the threats to religious freedom in the world are increasing constantly. All the analyses are agreed on this fact. In terms of Christians alone, more than 200 million of them suffer discrimination or even persecution because of their religious affiliation. This fact is documented by many sources.

What are we to say, for example, of the 2.5 million Christians (mainly Filipinos and Indians) who currently live under the severest religious restrictions, and even persecution, on the Arabian Peninsula?

Again, in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa the situation of Christians is particularly acute.

Religious freedom is a very complex issue, including as it does the following aspects:

- a) Freedom to adopt, change or renounce one’s religion;
- b) Freedom from coercion;
- c) The right to manifest one’s religion or belief, which includes the following:
  - Freedom to worship
  - Places of worship
  - Religious symbols

- Observance of holidays and days of rest;
- Appointing clergy;
- Teaching and disseminating materials (including missionary activity);
- The right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children;
- Registration;
- Freedom to communicate with individuals and communities on religious matters at the national and international levels;
- Freedom to establish and maintain charitable and humanitarian institutions, and to solicit and receive funding;
- Conscientious objection;

Certainly, the media are more likely to report on the more sensational examples of the curtailment of religious freedoms, such as the death penalty for apostasy, etc., which are more easily presented to the public at large. However, today's talk is intended above all to highlight those restrictions that believers have to face on a daily basis. I would like to be able to make a far deeper analysis of these problems but, given the time constraints, this will unfortunately not be possible in the context of this talk. Hence I will restrict myself to just a few examples.

## **Egypt**

Egypt is certainly one of the hot spots of the Middle East today. The outcome of the current battle over the new Constitution will have profound repercussions – and not only for the future of Egypt, since the solution that emerges there may well serve as a pattern and model for other Islamic nations as well.

Following the so-called '*Arab Spring*', the situation of Christians in the country has not only not improved but has in fact grown still worse. For many years the bishops have spoken of discrimination against the Christians, but have hesitated to speak of a persecution. But now the language has changed. Father Rafik Greiche, the media spokesman for the Egyptian Catholic Bishops' Conference, recently told ACN:

*"When Islam becomes politicised, it automatically turns into a fascist dictatorship. Then there is a very real threat of the introduction of*

*the Sharia in its most fundamentalist form. And this is something that affects not only us Christians, but all Egyptians who seek freedom and justice"*

Among other things, he criticised the fact that a great many of the Articles of the Constitution are so loosely worded that they can also be interpreted in a fundamentalist sense.

Even in everyday life, things have already changed. Women are now afraid to leave their homes unveiled. There are reports of rape and other violent attacks. The threat has become much greater now.

The radicalisation of the Right has already begun – as witness the article on the Internet about the punishment for blasphemy.

### **The draft of the Constitution**

While the draft is problematic on numerous counts, those articles that pertain to religious freedom and the protection and rights of minorities merit separate concern. The Islamist influence is readily apparent when these articles are compared to the corresponding provisions of the 1971 constitution which governed Egypt under Mubarak:

- Article 1 drops reference to citizenship as the basis of Egypt's political order. The word '*citizenship*' in the Egyptian context has been understood to mean equal rights for both Muslims and non-Muslims. It also adds a further allegiance to which Egypt identifies, that of the Islamic nation.
- A new Article 4 provides for an official role for Al-Azhar (the Sunni university). It states that Al-Azhar is to give its opinion on all matters pertaining to sharia. Since the unchanged language of Article 2 makes "*the principles of sharia*" the main source of legislation, this new article places a non-elected, sectarian religious body above the Egyptian parliament as arbitrator and explainer of state laws.
- Concerning the prohibition on all forms of discrimination in Article 33, it drops the words "*on the basis of sex, origin, religion and creed.*"
- Article 42 drops language prohibiting forced evacuations within the country. This change follows forced evacuations of Coptic Christians in four instances since the revolution.

- Article 43 limits the freedom to practice religion and build houses of worship to “*heavenly religions*” (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism). This means that Egyptian Baha’is and other groups who do not belong to the three religions recognized as “*heavenly*” by the state will not have the right to worship.
- An anti-blasphemy clause was added as Article 44.
- Article 54 drops “*statutory bodies*” from those allowed to petition in the name of a collective. The Church is the target of this change.
- Article 132 drops the protection of national unity from the duties of the president (in the Egyptian context this meant unity between Christians and Muslims within the nation).
- A new provision appears in Article 212, dealing with endowments. Under this article, a new body will be created and given far-reaching powers for regulating and overseeing both public and private endowments. This article affects Christian religious endowments too: It places Church finances under the Islamists’ control, which has been part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party political programme. By taking control of the Church’s finances, the Islamists aim to control the institution, and in turn use it to control Christians, thus creating a national church along the Communist model.
- A new Article 219 purports to define “*the principles of sharia*,” which, according to Article 2, are the main source of legislation. It states that “*the principles of sharia*” include: “*Its total evidence, its fundamental and jurisprudence basis, its accepted sources in the doctrines of Sunnis.*”

While Egypt under Mubarak was no heaven for religious minorities, the proposed constitution is a clear setback for religious freedom. Under its articles the legal framework governing religious minorities and their rights to equality and protection would be undermined beyond salvage.

## **Pakistan**

With regard to Pakistan, there has been much talk of the blasphemy laws, which are indeed a dangerous threat, especially to the religious minorities. Yet the number of instances, at a few hundred a year, is relatively small in comparison to a threat that is anchored at the heart of the school curriculum and consequently affects almost the entire population.

A study by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, which has investigated in detail the issue of discrimination in Pakistani school textbooks, has shown that according to this curriculum, Pakistan is defined by its Islamic identity. The defence of Pakistan is portrayed as synonymous with the defence of Islam. Essay topics are assigned such as: *"Write your friend a letter and invite him to convert to Islam."* Islam is even incorporated into the teaching of mathematics and chemistry. In history lessons, the contributions of non-Muslims to Pakistan are not even mentioned. Moreover, the textbooks often include derogatory remarks about non-Muslims.

Some of the results of the study are alarming. For example, just 60% of teachers in the state schools actually believe that the members of religious minorities are also Pakistani citizens. And even in the case of those who do see them as Pakistani citizens, many do not regard them as equal to Muslim Pakistanis. Indeed, 80% of the teachers in the study agreed with the statement that every non-Muslim is *'an enemy of Islam'*. Almost all of these teachers believed that violent jihad was the duty of every Muslim. Half of the teachers in the state schools expressed the view that a Muslim should not eat together with non-Muslims, while among their pupils this was the view of almost all of them. Islam plays an important role even in non-religious subjects.

In Pakistan, in addition to the state schools, there are also over 1500 registered madrassas or Koran schools, and thousands more that are unregistered. In practice the madrassas are autonomous and can establish their own curriculum. The Koranic sura *"Kill the unbelievers, wherever you find them"*, is often taken out of context, with the result that the pupils are likely to get the idea that it is a commandment of God to kill unbelievers everywhere.

It is nowhere taught that the decision to go to war must be taken by the State. Hence the reader may well think it is his personal responsibility to do battle.

*"In all the textbooks analysed, the student is presented with a world in which such concepts as nation, Constitution, rule of law, standing armies or multilateral organisations simply do not exist –*

*except where prescribed by Islamic teaching or by sharia law”, the study states.*

This means that religious laws and Commandments apply directly to the individual and are to be carried out by him, without any control by legal organs or institutions. In this way the door is opened to a selective interpretation of religious texts.

Not only are there repressive blasphemy laws and discriminatory legislation, but the government has also failed to bring to justice those who persecute or kill Christians and has not taken action against those who incite violence.

One recent case referred to in the report took place in January this year when a group of men attacked a church in Sindh province in response to children singing carols. They hit the children and vandalized the church. Local police did not take action and the Christian community had to apologize to the assailants.

### **Iraq**

Officially, the government helps Christians and encourages them, for example, to reopen old churches. However, in reality Christians are under such great pressure and their numbers have fallen in the past 10 years from 1.5 million to just 200,000.

Between 2003 and the beginning of 2011 no fewer than 63 Christian churches were the target of bomb attacks and other outrages. Christians are increasingly living in ghettos.

In Baghdad Christian women are raped and threatened with death if they refuse to convert to Islam.

### **Jordan**

The problem of religious freedom affects not only people who have always been Christian, but increasingly also those who wish to convert or have already converted to Christianity. Often such people are threatened with death, isolated, robbed of all their rights and forced to emigrate in consequence. Surprisingly, this is also happening in

Jordan, a country which, in comparison to other overwhelmingly Islamic countries, is generally regarded as moderate. Cases of this kind are known to us – for example, that of a Jordanian woman who converted to Christianity and had already emigrated to Italy. She was lured back to Jordan, being tricked by her family, and is now being held prisoner. She is allegedly being forced to marry a Muslim in order to make her return to Islam.

## **Syria**

It is an astonishing fact that the Christians who have fled from Syria are gripped by such fear and horror that they will not accept help from any organisation that tries to register or photograph them. They fear both sides, and fear the revenge of the fundamentalists and the development of a situation like that in Iraq. In the case of Syria it is currently difficult to obtain one hundred per cent reliable information, but the fear that can be seen in the eyes of refugees is not without reason.

Almost all the Christians in the town of Homs – at least 50,000 of them – have already fled. In the village of Rableh, not far from the frontier with Lebanon and normally home to around 7,000 Christians, an additional 5,000 Christians have sought shelter. In September 2012 these 12,000 Christians were surrounded and cut off by the rebels. In Qusayr, some 15 km from Homs, the Christians were given an ultimatum and ordered to leave the town by the rebels. 10,000 Christians have since fled the town.

## **Summary**

- There is too little reporting of the injustice that is being done to Christians. Such abuses of religious freedom should never be simply accepted without protest.
- We should always bear in mind that religious freedom and human rights generally cannot be separated. Religious freedom is never contrary to human rights but forms an integral part of our understanding of such rights. Without question, religious freedom is an extremely important part of any kind of freedom.
- *“The right of conversion and the right not to be forced to convert or*

*reconvert belong to the internal dimension of a person's religious belief... which is unconditionally protected under international human rights law,"* said Mr. Bielefeldt presenting his report to the UN General Assembly.

- The issue of reciprocity in regard to religious freedom in the countries concerned is one that should be broadly discussed in the international forums.

On World Peace Day, on January 1, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the issue of religious freedom. Among other things he said the following:

*"At present, Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith"*

*"Religious freedom expresses what is unique about the human person, for it allows us to direct our personal and social life to God, in whose light the identity, meaning and purpose of the person are fully understood"*

*"I implore all men and women of good will to renew their commitment to building a world where all are free to profess their religion or faith, and to express their love of God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their mind"*

It was an appeal as relevant and topical as any has ever been. Yet sadly, it is one that last year again was neither heeded nor respected.

## CONCLUSION

Having read these conferences proceedings and reports, the reader will by now be fully aware that violations of religious liberty, and even religious persecution, are being perpetrated against religious minorities in many countries in the world. This is especially the case in Asia (Iraq, India, Pakistan, China, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and North Korea) where certain minorities, particularly Christians and Muslims, are suffering a great deal. In other countries, the faithful of the majority religion may themselves be suffering from violations of their religious freedom in the context of a regime that oppresses religion in a general sense (this is the case of Muslims in some countries of Central Asia). In other mainly countries with Muslim majorities, Christians as well as some Muslim minorities (such as Sunni/Shiites) sometimes suffer from violations of their religious freedoms.<sup>1</sup>

Concomitant to the above, it has been recently stated by Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi<sup>2</sup> that,

*“Credible research has reached the shocking conclusion that an estimate of more than 100,000 Christians are violently killed because of some relation to their faith every year. Other Christians and other believers are subjected to forced displacement, to the destruction of their places of worship, to rape and to the abduction of their leaders - as it recently happened in the case of Bishops Yohanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yaziji, in Aleppo (Syria). Several of these acts have been perpetrated in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, the fruit of*

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<sup>1</sup> Religious Freedom: Pillar of the Human Rights Policy in the External Relations of the European Union, a report to the Bishops of COMECE, 2010; B.J. GRIM, R. FINKE, The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century, 2011; Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion, Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012; Christians and the Struggle for Religious Freedom, Aid to the Church in Need, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva during the 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council Interactive Dialogue with High Commissioner, May 27, 2013.

*bigotry, intolerance, terrorism and some exclusionary laws.”<sup>3</sup>*

Because of this prevailing situation, for several decades now, our world has witnessed a constant migratory flow of religious minorities, including Christian minorities. This flow has been witnessed, amongst others, from predominantly Muslim countries in the direction of Europe, North America and Australia. Therefore, an improvement in the respect shown towards religious freedom in, amongst others, countries of the Middle East, should, together with other factors (particularly political and economic factors), contribute to a lessening of the demographic haemorrhage which is dramatically affecting these religious minorities.<sup>4</sup>

It is in this context that, Religious Freedom or Freedom of Religion as a specific discipline is gaining momentum. This is becoming more evident from the increased attention devoted to the topic during the last three years. For too long, the theme of religious freedom was neglected both in the media and at the political level. This does not mean that we do not have to be vigilant anymore. As a matter of fact, in the Joint communication issued on the 8th March 2011 by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy regarding The New Partnership with the Arab World, while offering short and long term policies for the attainment of ‘Democracy’ and ‘Economic Prosperity’, it totally ignores the ‘religious aspect’ – no mention of ‘religious freedom’; no mention of ‘religious minorities’; no room for ‘interreligious diplomacy’! Later on, through the joint efforts of all Churches represented by COMECE and CEC, their own recommendations on religious freedom and religious minorities were inserted in the Neighbourhood Policy of the EU.

In order to place the role of religion in its proper context, it is imperative for us to acknowledge for instance that the reality of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa is completely different from that of the European continent. Here, we are operating within a region in which

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3 S.M. TOMASI, VATICAN TO UN: 100 thousand Christians killed for the faith each year, in Vatican Radio, 28/5/2013.

4 Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2012.

religion occupies a vital, if not determining, space in society. Ask how important religion is in the lives of people in Europe and the answer is around 30-35 per cent. But in the Middle East it is 90-95 per cent. The role of religion or, more accurately, *'interreligious diplomacy'* is as important both for internal and external relations.<sup>5</sup> This could easily apply to other regions in different parts of the world.

This is why the Joint Communication issued by the European Commission was in itself lacking, simply because it did not take the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue into perspective. Other documents of this type, issued and circulated within the European corridors of power speak of the importance of the Alliance of Civilizations and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures, whereas we should start to speak about an Alliance of Faiths. An Alliance of Faiths fully dedicated to building bridges of understanding, friendship and cultural exchange, human and spiritual, with the Middle East and North Africa, between the people of all faiths, in order to sustain the culture of love and peace – *"where the temporal"* as stated by Louis Gardet<sup>6</sup> *"remains charged with religious values"* and to be seen to *"participate in the same humanity"*.<sup>7</sup>

As there can be no security in Europe unless there is also security in the Mediterranean; likewise, there can be no security in the Middle East and North Africa or any other part of the world unless there is (also security and) full respect for religious freedom between Muslim majorities and other religious minorities. It should be stated that this kind of interaction also applies to interactions between other religious majorities and religious minorities. The EU has got to take this on board. Indeed, *"a closer inspection of the obvious can show us a way forward and help shape our approach to a given problem."*

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5 D. MOGAHED, Egypt's Shifting Political Landscape: Democracy Informed by Religious Values, in QANTARA.de, 16/3/2011.

6 Louis Gardet (1904 - 1986) was a French Roman Catholic priest and historian. As an author he was an expert in Islamic culture and sociology who took a sympathetic view of Islam as a religion. He considered himself "a Christian philosopher of cultures".

7 A. O'MAHONY, A vital presence: Crisis in the Middle East – 2, in The Tablet, 5/2/2011.

Getting to grips with this is vital in making progress towards a solution. *“Seriously understanding the religious dimension of the public sphere is vital in many situations.”*<sup>8</sup>

Religious freedom is a sacred, inalienable and universal human fundamental right, recognized by international and European instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention of Human Rights, and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. It is the pinnacle of all other freedoms and closely connected to many other fundamental rights and freedoms.

For the aforementioned reasons, it is imperative to move beyond tolerance to the concept of religious freedom i.e. from a restrictive and negative perspective of religion to a wide and positive one. While religious tolerance creates a gap between a religious majority and minorities, and promotes discrimination against the latter, religious freedom reinforces the rule of law, assures a common standard for all citizens promoting an inclusive citizenship, strengthens the equality of all members of society before the secular state law, and prevents direct and indirect discrimination against religious minorities. As rightly stated by John Paul II, freedom cannot be divided. As already indicated, promoting the religious freedom of minorities expands social freedom for all citizens, and underpins all freedoms and other human and fundamental rights which are closely connected to freedom of religion.<sup>9</sup>

Religious freedom also guarantees diversity and pluralism in society, which is a substantial element of democracy, as the European Court of Human Rights has eminently maintained for many decades.<sup>10</sup> Both extremes - fundamentalism or ideological secularism - are effectively harmful to social freedom and put at high risk the real foundations of democracy.

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8 T. BLAIR, Faith in the Middle East: Religion, respect and revolution, in *The Tablet*, 12/3/2011, 4-5.

9 N. KOSHY, Religious Freedom in a Changing World, 1992; Conscience and Liberty, The Universality of Human Rights, 2012.

10 See: *Handyside vs United Kingdom* [5493/72], a case decided by ECtHR in 1976.

A recent document compiled by the Secretariat of COMECE entitled *Compilation Report on Religious Freedom at the European Parliament and the European External Action Service (January 2010 – September 2012)*, shows the commitment by the European Parliament and the EEAS to promote and defend religious freedom in the international arena, as a universal and non-negotiable value.

Now it is high time for action and for going beyond well-intentioned statements and declarations; concrete actions should be taken in the EU, and particularly in the EEAS, in order to reinforce freedom of religion in its external policies. As stated by Catherine Ashton when speaking at the European Parliament on the report on human rights in the world and the EU's policy on the matter, "*the EU needs to strengthen its policy on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, which is so fundamental to a free society.*"<sup>11</sup>

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11 C. ASHTON, Speech on the report on Human rights in the world and the EU's policy on the matter, Speech/12/270, 17/4/2012.





CHAPTER 5

# APPENDIX



## **PERSECUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN AFRICA: CONTEXTS, CONTENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Let me thank Professor John Cavadini for the honour of the invitation to join you for this most timely discussion on the persecution of the Church around the world. We must acknowledge the wonderful work that the Church In Need has done over the years especially in collaboration with Eternal Word Television Network, EWTN, to highlight the conditions and situations of these persecutions around the world. However, the persecution of Christians must be taken together with other forms of persecution and assault on the dignity of the human person especially in the developing world so as to place the issues in proper context. Therefore, we must also acknowledge the work of other collaborators in the defense of the dignity of the human person such as United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, among many others. The idea behind all this is for us to appreciate that we are living in dangerous times and that this battle cannot be won if we do not unite against what is the gradual devaluation of the essence of our common humanity.

Your Conference background profile poses some very interesting questions as to why the western media and academia has paid so little attention to the issues of the injustice around the persecution of Christians. Why for example, the United States Government and other western governments have paid hardly any attention to the notion of the persecution of Christians as an issue especially in the course of its adventures into developing countries and then the Middle East. In keeping with the objective of the Conference, I will try to explore these questions as they relate, first to Nigeria, and also to other African countries. I must acknowledge the fact that the quality and background of the speakers that you have assembled has made my job much easier. Therefore, my paper will concern itself with four things.

First, I will briefly look at the origins of religious persecution and perhaps the historical circumstances that have predisposed Christians to the violence they now suffer in countries such as Nigeria, Sudan, other North African countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and a host of others. Secondly, I will try to distinguish other forms of persecutions and the context in which they occur. Thirdly, I will try to examine the phenomena and other forces that shape the persecution of Christians and how they are manifested. Finally, I will examine the opportunities that exist for addressing the issues of persecution of Christians in Africa on the one hand and institutionalizing a culture of human dignity on the other.

## **Persecution of Christians and Other Persecutions:**

### **A historical Overview**

What is persecution? My Apple dictionary defines it as: victimization, maltreatment, ill-treatment, mistreatment, abuse, ill-usage, discrimination, tyranny; informal witch hunt. If we take this as a working definition, the next question might be, how do we categorise this persecution or how does it express itself? Clearly, the way it manifests itself in one place may not be the same with the way it does in another place.

When we speak of the persecution of Christians, our minds might quickly go to what Muslims or atheistic countries do to Christians because of their beliefs. This is misleading because indeed, as I will show, persecutions of one group of Christians can occur even in Christian lands. For example, the Pilgrim Fathers who founded America not fleeing from Muslim crusaders, but from perceived persecution by the other Christian denominations with whom they did not agree in Europe. Catholics were severely persecuted in the United Kingdom for many centuries and to date, being Catholic is an obstacle to political ambition in British politics. Today, with the European Union denying its Christian roots, the Churches have come under persecution by virtue of some of policies being adopted in Brussels. There is persecution against Christians that arise from the kind of policies we see in places such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and many countries in the Middle East.

This is different from the persecution of Christians in places like China, the former Soviet Union, or North Korea which is based on the state's atheistic belief and ideology.

The next question is to examine the reasons for the persecution of Christians. Persecutions of Christians in Muslim lands are sometimes based on wrong notions of history but more importantly, the belief by Muslims that Islam is the true religion which has replaced Christianity. In other situations, as in Northern Nigeria or in parts of the Middle East, Christians in areas with predominantly Muslim populations are often seen as settlers, strangers, or traitors who have adopted a foreign religion. In the United States of America and the United Kingdom, along with a few other European countries, Catholics have often been treated with suspicion in public life especially politics. They have suffered discrimination on the grounds of the perceived likelihood of the influence of the Vatican in the internal affairs of these countries. These are forms of persecutions and as such, they have limited the capacity of Catholics to participate in public life in these countries. We could say the same of the Protestants in Catholic Ireland for example. I hope to return to some of the issues I have raised here later in the paper.

In a way, I believe that persecution has always been part of the DNA of our faith as Christians. It is so central to the understanding or appreciation of Christianity that it is part of the what we might call the scandal of our faith. Persecution is what the cross of Jesus symbolizes and represents. However, because in the cross is our salvation, the challenge is for us to come to a proper understanding of the meaning of suffering especially in a world that has become convulsed and sucked into a culture of arrogance, power and hedonism. Indeed, today, in most of the developing world, the growth and popularity of the new sects and Pentecostal churches lie in the fact that they deny the centrality of the cross and believe that suffering is not the portion of any Christian. We are told that a real child of God should receive His blessings, prosper and have nothing to do with suffering. Given the conflation of issues that cause suffering today in many developing nations (misery, poverty, corruption, sickness, wars, violence, tragedies etc) it is understandable

why we Christians are tempted to shun suffering. And what is more, none of us in our right senses can look forward to our personal suffering or that of any loved ones.

However, the discussion about the persecution of the Christians must be properly anchored on the theme of the New Evangelisation . This is important because as we see in the Acts of Apostles especially, the periods of persecution also coincided with the periods of the growth and the strengthening of the Church. There are lessons to be learnt in how the early Christian community coped with persecution through the applications of prayer, encouragement, solidarity and prayer. The new evangelization to which we as Church are called today, particularly in the secularized West but also in many parts of the world where the Christian message of Love and Communion is absent must try to reclaim these ideals. We also need to be honest enough to look back at our history, what others suffered in our hands, the mistakes that we have made through alignment with secular power and its consequences on the real message of Love, the essence of our faith.

For us in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, the history of the persecution of the Church can be located in two phases. First, it will be necessary to refer to the persecution of the early Christians by the traditional community who saw the presence of the faith as a fracture in the community. Here, the communities did not attack or persecute missionaries directly. Their worry was often with the new converts who were perceived betraying the culture and endangering the future of the community. In some parts of Africa where there were existing kingdoms or strong city states, such as what is today Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, South Africa or Zimbabwe, the scars of conquest have left a bitter legacy that still affects relations with Christians.

This is the drama well enacted in some of the novels written by the first generation of African writers. Such titles as *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *The Arrow of God*, *The River Between*, *The White Man of God*, *Mission to Kala*, *One Man, One Matchet*, all tried to present narratives of the experience of early Christianity with the traditional

world. But, somehow, in these stories, we see the triumph of the new way, as being Christian was often referred to. When the missionaries began to open up schools, provide social and medical services and community life began to change dramatically, things began to change in terms of the nature of the relationship.

The second phase of the persecution of Christians would be located within the context of the emergence of the colonial state and the modern African state. Here, the issues relate to access to power public and political life to the attempt by the conquered kingdoms to retain power. I will explore this later on in the paper.

In the late 1980s, with funding from the Arab states, Professor Ali Mazrui, a very respected and influential African academician did a documentary titled *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. The bias of the film was palpable. It portrayed Islam as essentially an African heritage and presented Christianity as an intruding religion into the African space. What was quite misleading about the documentary was the fact that it built on a popular but false reading of history which presented the West as being synonymous with Christianity. In the process, it further deepened the long held view that somehow, since Christian missionaries were from the same countries as the colonialists, and since they were of the same culture, they were by extension Christians and that indeed, the purpose of the colonial project was to supplant Islam and build a Christian empire of sorts. Against the backdrop of the tragic stories of the Crusades, the secular and Socialist readings of African history, the notion of Christianity as a foreign religion was further entrenched. With African history not being part of the Seminary curricula, African church leaders have often not been able to address these issues appropriately.

Western education, and by extension Christianity, became a source of great attraction and liberation because they empowered the lower classes of non-Muslims in areas with predominantly populations who had been subjected to second-class status. Outside these areas, the same stories abound in many communities where discrimination existed against women, caste groups, the weak and slaves. In the

colonial states, it was the products of the missionary education who first began a campaign for human dignity and independence. Thus, when the colonial state found that the first products of missionary education posed a threat to their power and control, they turned to the rump of the caliphate for support. This alliance between the state and feudalism still looms large in African politics till date. Let us now turn our attention to the next challenge and look at the context of persecution of Christians, with a particular reference to Nigeria today.

### **Content, Forms and Context of Persecutions of Christians**

Perhaps, it might be true to say that, like love, persecution may actually be in the eyes of the beholder. To appreciate the context of this theme for the purpose of our reflection, I think it is important to first disaggregate what we might call shades and forms of persecution with a view to examining which of them fits our discussion.

For example, the shades of persecution that the Christians in Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, or Syria and other parts of the Middle East suffer is different from what the Christians in Nigeria or other parts of Africa may be experiencing. What the non-Muslims of Southern Sudan were experiencing for example is different from what the Christians in say Gambia, Senegal and in most parts of Nigeria, experience. In places like Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa or Zimbabwe where Marxism reigned during and immediately after the struggles for freedom, the experiences of Christians were quite different. Their churches were not physically attacked, but their freedoms to practice and propagate the faith were restricted, often through the application of state power and various branches of the bureaucracy.

For example, the liberation struggles cast Christianity in a different mould, almost the same but far more pervasive than what I referred to in the case of Nigeria. In Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe, white settlers had posed a serious problem for the black population over the issues of land and power. Given that these whites were from various parts of Europe and also claimed to be Christians, the scenario of Christians seen as collaborators also emerged. In Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique especially, the Marxist Leninist regimes

that came to power literally wanted to wipe out Christianity, seeing it as a dark force. The battles continued in the first ten or so years after independence. The emergence of some radical clerics such as, Rev. Trevor Huddleston, Archbishop Dennis Hurley, Rev. Canaan Banana, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Frank Chikane, later helped to cast the Church in favourable mould as collaborators in the struggle for a good society. Later, ethnicity would later displace ideology in the struggle for power in some of these countries.

Here the problem was not so much a case of direct hatred for Christianity as such. It was simply a case of whose side Christianity was on. Thus, whenever these regimes found support from some Christian religious leaders, they were often more than ready and willing to soft pedal. For example, while President Mugabe had no problem in appointing President Canaan Banana, a Methodist prelate as a President, he would later resort to blackmail to contain Archbishop Ncube whom he had come to perceive as a threat to his ethnic exploits in Matabeleland. Earlier, even Prime Minister Ian Smith turned to the Church when he picked Rev. Albert Muzorewa as an ally. Today, we can hardly speak of persecution of Christians in these countries.

In the case of Nigeria, the relations between Christians have been a source of serious concern since independence. A pro longed period of military rule, the struggle for power, the effects of a three year civil war, corruption and inequalities have placed the nation on the boil. The result has been a powder keg of frustration which often explodes at the slightest provocation based on anything from arguments over the results of elections by politicians, students, ethnic groups or any other social formation on the landscape.

The outburst of violence in the last one or two years under the aegis of a faceless group of criminal elements, allegedly members of a Salafist movement known as Jama'atu, Ahlis Sunna Ladda'awatih wal-jihad. The group has however come to be called by a default name, Boko Haram, arising from their rejection of what they see as the pervasive and corrupting influences of western values and ideas and the impact on Islam . Over the years, perhaps the thorniest issue that has

continued to cause the greatest tension in relations between Christians and Muslims has been the issue of the status of Islamic law, known as Sharia in Nigeria's public life. Beyond the political mileage and the hypocrisy by Nigerian politicians, a majority of Nigerians simply want to live their lives and practice their religion in peace. Indeed, this may be the reason why Boko Haram continues to hide its criminality by claiming it wishes to establish Sharia law in Nigeria.

They have wrecked havoc across the country and churches have come under the purview of their dastardly acts. Although the attacks on Churches in Nigeria has been going on for over twenty years, Boko Haram's resort to suicide bombings and the targeting of Churches during worship have raised the levels of concern to a different level.

Taken together with other developments around the world, allegations of the persecution of Christians are now rife in Nigeria. Although this issue is quite sensitive among Nigerian Christians, we must nevertheless not subject the matter to emotions. We have to carefully examine the issues so we can rightly call the devil by his proper name so we can cast it out.

I personally have serious reservations as to whether we can classify what is happening in Nigeria as the persecution of Christians in the way and manner that this conference frames the issues. Furthermore, the claims and attribution of martyrdom to the victims seems to be too hasty and does not do justice to the theology of martyrdom as we understand it.

To appreciate the Nigerian situation, it is important to note the nature of the configuration and balkanization of the Nigerian state from colonial times to the present. This is not the place to engage in such an exercise. However, we must appreciate the context of the convulsion and the violence that has become part and parcel of life in Nigeria. We must see it as part of the process of development and growth, avoidable and unacceptable as the violence is.

As I have noted above, much of the nation's problems today are tied to the efforts at unraveling all the distortions created by the colonial

state. In his book, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former National Security Adviser to President Jimmy Carter, made a very interesting observation when he stated: As societies evolve further and literacy increases, more and more participants enter the political dialogue....still, the populace at large remain politically disengaged and dormant, except for periodic outbreaks of violent but largely anarchistic outrage . Against this backdrop, we must see the violence as part of the birth pangs of a nation.

This quotation speaks to the issues surrounding the correlation between what was described in development theories of the late 50s as, the revolution of rising expectations'. This idea applies to our situation because most of the tensions and violence across Africa in general and Nigeria in particular have arisen from higher levels of education and consciousness which naturally increase the feeling of self worth and human capabilities of individuals and communities. It can therefore be argued that indeed, the crisis of religion and power in Nigeria in general has been tied to the post-colonial structure of the Nigerian state. Ahead of independence for example, there were serious agitations among the non-Muslim minorities across the country over claims of domination by the three big ethnic groups in Nigeria. Sadly, colonial state however used these three ethnic blocks to design a tripartite regional structure of power.

In response, the over 400 ethnic minorities spread across the country began to agitate for freedom. However, the protests in the North were based on the non Muslim minorities insisting on difference in culture, religion and territorial space. Ahead of independence, the colonial government responded by setting up what is called the Commission to Enquire into the Fears of Minorities and the Means to Allay Them. The colonial government made some halfhearted efforts at redressing these agitations in the South, but deferred taking any decision regarding the conditions, fears and anxieties of the non-Muslim minorities of Northern Nigeria. These groups had focused their fears on the political, economic and cultural domination by the Hausa-Fulani ruling class which the colonial government had foisted on the

country. By offering the Northern ruling class about two thirds of the land mass and of the population of the entire country, the colonial state gave birth to the incubus, or should I say the virus, that would ensure the volatility of the Nigerian state.

It is this struggle for power that provided the convulsion that spun the country into a civil war (1967-1970). The dominance of Islam as a factor in the monopoly of power after independence made it attractive for the Igbos to peddle an attractive but false notion that the civil war had something to do with the North seeking to exterminate the Igbos because they were Christians. This is the subject of another debate but, for now, all we can say is that at that time, the nation was struggling to find its feet as a united country, a job that the political elite were working very hard and honestly to achieve. It is of course significant that both the leader of the coup of 1966, Major Kaduna Nzeogwu and the leader of the rebellion (Col Odumegwu Ojukwu) had both warmed their way into the hearts of the Northern leaders themselves. So, ethnicity rather than religion played a role in the events leading up to the civil war. What is more, the spectacular decision by a delegation of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, made up of bishops from across the country, was to reject the notion that the country was fighting a war that had anything to do with religion .

In my view, tragic as these issues are, they often do not constitute what I will call the direct persecution of Christians in the way and manner that this happens in some parts of the Middle East. When people claim that these attacks are evidence of the persecution of Christians, we must also ask why the violence has been restricted only to the Northern states. We must also ask why a religious war would not even discriminate in favour of Muslims. I will return to this point at the conclusion. For now, let me identify what I can consider to be discrimination (as opposed to persecution) of Christians in the Northern states of Nigeria for the purpose of our reflections.

### **Persecution of Christians in Nigeria**

The issues that generate violence and can be considered as persecution against Christians in places like Nigeria and most parts of Africa,

have to do with issues around law and order, Constitutionalism and freedom. In many respects, what we may today identify as persecution may in actual fact be the result of the failure to apply the principles of the Constitution or to design the kind of laws that privilege human rights and trump citizenship over any other form of identity. If these issues are framed as rights, then we can take them away from the purview of politics and use the judicial processes to seek remedy when there are infractions whether based on any religion, or gender, ethnic or other identities. Let me cite a few examples of some of the key issues that require resolution in Northern Nigeria.

### **Denial of access to land for the building of Churches**

In many major cities in the Northern states of Nigeria, the state continues to see Christians as strangers, settlers and non-indigenes. Some state governors have openly stated that there are no settlers in their states, but they are still to provide the real framework. To this end, most of the Churches have remained locked in areas that the colonial administration designated as strangers' quarters. These areas first housed a huge non-Muslim population of southern artisans, traders, and civil servants who laid the foundation for the postcolonial bureaucracy in the late 50s and 60s. These areas were considered to be the habitats of non-Muslims whose cultural practices, such as music, consumption of alcohol and other social practices were considered un-Islamic. However, things have changed and urbanization has ensured that people are now living side by side. Despite the huge populations, Christians spread around the cities have no new places of worship. In places like Kano and Kaduna, it is not uncommon to find over 20 churches of different denominations on one street because of the restrictions.

### **Denial of freedom to embrace Christianity**

Under a very strange belief that, somehow, Christianity is a foreign religion, some Muslims continue to tout the notion that it is impossible for a Muslim to convert to Christianity or any other religion. Despite the clear provisions in the Constitution, Muslims wishing to convert to Christianity are occasionally threatened with death on the grounds that it is not possible to abandon the faith. These claims fly in the

face of the much touted Koranic injunction which says that there is no compulsion in Religion . They also fly in the face of the freedom of conscience and the freedom to change religion that are also provided for in the Constitution .

At a second level, there is the issue of marriage between members of the two faiths. Some Muslims continue to believe that whereas Muslim men can marry non-Muslim women (and convert them to Islam), Muslim women cannot marry non-Muslim men again on the grounds that this is contrary to the Religion. It is to be noted however, that these tendencies are by far more common among the Muslims in Northern Nigeria. Muslims who contemplate embracing Christianity have to do so either silently or leave the immediate environment .

### **Denial of the rights of inheritance to Christian women who marry Muslims and remain Christians**

Perhaps more than any social institution, marriage is the greatest glue that holds diverse peoples together whether they are divided by faith, region, or race. In the south west of Nigeria and in many other countries around Africa, such as the Gambia and Senegal among others, marriages between Muslims and Christians happen as a matter of course and are very much celebrated as a means of bringing families and communities together. In South-western Nigeria this is also very common. But in Northern Nigeria, whereas many Christians have married Muslims, it is considered a taboo for a non-Muslim to marry a Muslim woman even with assurances of practicing her faith. This is one of the reasons why the north has remained closed and consequently combustible where people live in ignorance and fear of one another. The few Muslims who have married Christian women and have allowed them to practice their faith (very few, but largely professional women), prefer to keep their head low and not show their action as a best practice.

### **Denial of access to the State Media**

In some states of the Northern part of Nigeria, access to the media by Christians is severely restricted. Occasionally, you might get the usual thirty-minute slot that is offered as a token to the Christians, or some

pastor might buy up some time from the Television station, though this is rare. Whereas it is not uncommon to see offensive programmes that caricature Christianity on State Television, it is almost impossible to find a full one-hour programme on Christianity on television in most of the Northern states. It has been taken as the norm for example that the headship of these media institutions, whether federal or state, will be by Muslims. Even in the case of a place like Kaduna, from the 60s till date, no non-Muslim has ever headed such federal organs like the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) . This creates the wrong impression about the federal ownership of these institutions.

### **Denial of access to state employment**

In many states in the North where Christians are indigenous some individuals often complain that are often denied job placements on the grounds that the States are Muslim states. In most of these states, it is almost impossible to find a Christian holding a senior position such as the Head of a state parastatal, or the position of a Director or Permanent Secretary in the State Civil Service. Christians complain that often when individuals convert to Islam, their social and economic status changes almost immediately.

### **Denial of access to state patronage**

Christian businessmen and women complain that they are also often denied state patronage in the area of the award of Contracts and other forms of government patronage.

### **Non payments of compensation for destroyed Churches and institutions**

From the middle of the 80s when the issue of urban violence and attack against places of worship started, Christians, their churches and businesses have suffered the most. At the beginning, a few state governments such as Kaduna, offered some token compensation, but this is no longer the case. Perhaps this is right since it tended to wrongly encourage dubious claims from individuals while creating a sense of impunity among the criminals. However, since neither federal nor state governments have brought anyone to trial for their involvement

in these crimes, Christians feel bitter and victims of persecution. This has led to the deepening of grievances and the decision by non-Muslims youth to occasionally wage preemptive or reprisal attacks since it is clear that the state governments will not address the issues of compensation of their properties nor go after and punish the culprits.

### **Skewed location of federal presence in the Northern states**

There are concerns among Christians that citing of state and federal projects by way of infrastructure is often skewed in favour of Muslim dominated areas. In States like Adamawa, Bauchi, Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, federal structures such as tertiary institutions (Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education etc), General hospitals which are allocated to states, are never sited anywhere outside the Muslim dominated communities. These facts are verifiable. Non Muslim minorities such as the non Muslim Maguzawa communities complain of lack of schools, health services or roads.

I am not unaware of the fact that these claims can be contested. However, most of what I have noted here is based on facts that I am personally familiar with and the claims are also verifiable. I have often asked the Muslims to also document their areas of persecution or marginalization whether within their communities or elsewhere in Nigeria where they are minorities so that these injustices can be addressed. Without trying to provide any excuses, it is interesting to note that in some states in the southern parts of Nigeria, Christian State Governors, seeking political mileage, have gone out of their way to build Mosques for the Muslim communities in places like Akwa Ibom, Abia, Benue, and Edo States.

### **Kidnapping and forced marriages of non-Muslim girls**

In parts of Northern Nigeria there has on various occasions been stories of the kidnapping of young non-Muslim girls who have been lured and forced into marriages to Muslims in some cities in Northern Nigeria. The vulnerability of the girl child is legendary in the Northern states where they are forced into marriages at early ages. A good number of these cases have been documented. Indeed, one of our Dioceses in the North has had to set up a private accommodation for some of the girls who have been rescued from these forced marriages .

## **Lack of access to Christian Religious Education in schools in the Northern states**

Although guaranteed in our Constitution, most public schools in the Northern states do not allow the teaching of Christian religious knowledge in Primary and Secondary schools. Even in the Tertiary institutions, the issues of Christian Chaplaincies are a serious challenge. Many Vice Chancellors of Universities, Provosts of College of Education or Rectors or Polytechnics are outrightly hostile to the idea of Christian Chaplaincies. In most of these institutions, from inception many years ago, religious worship for the Christians takes place in classrooms. Indeed, in some of the federal institutions, even where provisions have been made for the building of these places of worship in the original plans, the heads of the institutions have remained adamant using different excuses of insecurity.

The issues raised above may sound controversial and of course many Muslims in the Northern states may express surprise. To be sure, what we are dealing with is the accumulation of bad practices and abuse of power which was allowed to gestate for too long. Successive governments have hardly ever attempted to address these issues despite the fact that over the years, the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, at local and national levels have continued to bring up these issues. Clearly, what we require is enough commitment by politicians to adhere to the spirit and letter of the Constitution. It is also conceivable that, like other minority groups who suffer violations of their rights, religious whether as Muslims in the South or Christians in the North should begin to explore the best ways of claiming the rights enshrined in the Constitution of Nigeria.

### **Summary and Conclusion: Opportunities for addressing the issues**

In your briefing note for this conference, you posed five questions. I have tried to answer the first two as to where these persecutions are and how they are manifested, focusing on Nigeria. The last three questions relate to what responses these persecutions demand from us, how we can form partnerships with people of other faiths to resolve these issues, and the most effective response from the Church. By way of summary and conclusion therefore, I will now try to answer these questions broadly.

In this presentation, I have tried to paint a sketch of the situation of the persecution of Christians in Nigeria in particular, making only some sketchy references to other countries largely due to the problem of space. Some of the issues I have raised can be juxtaposed in many African countries such as the Arab states in North Africa. In comparative terms, their conditions are far worse than the situation I have painted regarding Nigeria. However, as we try to round up, we must now ask the question, what next? Here, I will make four points.

First, sad as these times are, we must look forward with confidence and work hard to build strong institutions which can support and energise our Democracy. Democracy and its culture of accommodation and collaboration, consensus building and trust is at its infancy in many African countries. Corruption continues to deepen poverty and misery in the midst of plenty and various forms of violence continue to haunt our people. Despite all this, Democracy offers us the best chance of fully creating a harmonious, just and peaceful society. Political parties, when they project themselves beyond the limits of religion, region or ethnic group, can serve as a rallying point for men and women of good will in a plural society such as ours. We must therefore continue to encourage our politicians to bring the strengths of their religious convictions to the political space and to avoid the constant manipulation of religion for ephemeral political ends.

Second, the Catholic Church, drawing from its history and universal reach, must seek a greater role in the public space through Dialogue. It must encourage its politicians to lead by example while rallying other Christians towards the goals of ecumenical unity. Through the ages, religions have provided the moral foundations for civilisation. As our history shows, unnecessary wrangling between Christians and Muslims have diminished the efficacy and the cutting edge of the Christian faith. The persistence of violence in the name of religion has deepened fear and suspicion between Christians and Muslims, the two universal and dominant religions in Africa. It is important that both religions bring their moral weight to help their countries grow. In a country like Nigeria, the persistence of these conflicts have continue to erode peoples' confidence in both religions. Faced with the increasing and corrosive role of secularism, we must find common ground.

Third, there is the issue of enthroning Constitutionalism, as an expression of the manifestation of the ethos of rule of law, due process and respect for human dignity. We have sunk deeper into crisis and violence, falsely pitching Christians and Muslims when in reality, what we face is the fact of a country living below the radar of Constitutionalism. Our democracies in Africa have been weakened by the corruption in the Judiciary and the lack of the political will to end impunity and enthrone the rule of law rather than the rule of men which was encapsulated in its long history of the oppression of big chiefs and military series of dictatorships. A robust and honest judiciary will punish criminals for their crimes no matter what they claim to be the reasons for their violence against other human beings or their properties. This is the only way to heal the festering wounds that have strained the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria.

Fourth, the Church must pursue more vigorously the culture of dialogue with Islam. As human beings, dialogue between Muslims and Christians has its challenges. However because we Christians have been entrusted with a message whose clarity and urgency are not in doubt, we must never surrender to the temptations of the moment which encourage us to seek revenge or complain of exhaustion with dialogue. We must project the fine principles of our faiths as they relate to Love, Trust, Honesty, and our common humanity. We Christians cannot wait for the response of the Other to determine how we shall behave according to the principles of our faith.

I believe that if we are faithful to Scripture, then we need to re-think our assumptions about seeing the persecution of Christians and Christianity as an evil wind that is blowing over us. At the risk of sounding insensitive, the truth is, as I have pointed out, that persecution is in our DNA as Christians. By virtue of this faith and the logic of the cross, Christianity has given us a new set of eyes to see almost every human event in a way that is sometimes completely different to the ways of the world, since the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom. The crucifixion of Jesus was the zenith and the fullest expression of this given especially that He was like an innocent lamb, led to the slaughter (Is 53: 7). In the face of it all, as He neared the Cross, Jesus submitted himself to the suffering as the will of God (Lk. 22: 42). Ahead of all this,

He warned His apostles, that suffering would befall them because of the nature of their mission. In the story of the Sower, Jesus warns that His followers must have firm roots in the face of suffering. He said: The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the one who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful (Mt 13:22). He had also warned His Apostles not to forget that: No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also (Jn. 15:20). Jesus calls 'blessed' those who are persecuted in the cause of doing His will (Matt 5:10). He encourages the persecuted to rejoice since their persecution is in line with what the prophets went through (Matt 5:12).

The Apostles did take this message seriously right after the death of Jesus. When they faced their first persecution, we are told that the Apostles left their torturers, glad to have suffered for Christ (Acts 5: 41). Whatever may be the nature of these sufferings, St Paul said: I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rom 8: 18). St Paul enjoined the Corinthians: We must carry in our bodies the death of Christ (2 Cor. 4:10). He considered this so important because, as he said: If we endure with Him, we shall reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12). What is more, he said, no matter what they may look like: Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us (Rom 8:18).

The Acts of Apostles is replete with this new phase of the life of the early Christians. We hear for example that: Know that those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews (Acts 11: 19, 13:50, also Acts 8:1, 11:19, 13:50). What does this say to us today? We must repeat the words of St. Paul reminding us: We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body (2 Corinthians 4:7-10).

What all this means is that the United States of America and Europe will have to re-examine their roles with a view to resolving the irony that surrounds the pursuit of its geopolitical and economic interests and how these lead to the sufferings and persecutions of Christians. The Christian community in the United States will have to bring its moral authority to bear and explore the prospects of deepening its concern for the fate of Christians in areas within the purview of its strategic interests. It is quite ironic that while the United States has rallied other European countries to dethrone dictatorships across the Arab world, the new Democracy has exposed Christians to greater danger and threat. These are the consequences of pursuing what former President George Bush referred to as the United States being chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model for the world .

Against this backdrop, the American Bishops Conference must find a way for greater dialogue with the Christians who are suffering persecution in such lands as China, the Arab world and some of the countries we have already mentioned in Africa. They should serve as the channel for helping the American Governments appreciate the ironic suffering that is visited upon Christians by those purported to have been chosen by God. It is worrisome the successive United States Governments have often shown too much concern with feeding the greed of its citizens at great expense to the poor and weak people of the developing and resource endowed countries of the world. National interests are important and governments must defend them. However, I believe the Catholic Bishops Conference of America has a moral duty to speak truth to power about the consequences of these actions which are the best justification for the recruitment into the army of those who seek to destroy the Church and the civilized world.

Finally, while I believe that there is persecution of Christians around the world, I notice that Nigeria ranks as one of the countries where Christians are being persecuted. It is my view that we need to clarify the issues around what we face in Nigeria, some of which I have already mentioned above. We must not confuse the visible manifestations of the severe weakness of a failing state, shown visibly in its incapacity to

restrain and punish the criminal aggressor and then use it to measure the relation between Christians and Muslims as it is often stated in the case of Nigeria. Let us cite a few examples based on the recent outburst of violence in Nigeria in the last two years.

For example, the Christmas day bombing of the Catholic Church in Madalla in Niger State was perhaps the highest expression of the crisis of the relations between Christians and Muslims. The media played out the drama in a way and manner that merely fed the prejudice about an inevitable conflict between Christians and Muslims. This arose from the popular but false notion that the Boko Haram violence was the manifestation of this conflict. But let us look at some of the realities following this incident.

Out of the 44 persons who died from the bombing 26 were members of the parish while 18 were passersby. One of those killed was the Police Officer who had been detailed to guard the Church on that day. He was a Muslim. The international and local media turned the world's attention to this dastardly act and rightly so. However, the very next day, over 100 persons were killed in a midnight attack on a community in Ebonyi State, South Eastern Nigeria. The members of the community were of one clan, spoke the same language and were largely Christian. In a strange way, beyond the mere mention of it in the local media, this story generated almost no interest outside Nigeria.

The bombing of St. Monica's Catholic Church in Kaduna is the latest in the series of atrocities committed by alleged members of Boko Haram. In seeking out his target, the suicide bomber asked to be led to St. Rita's Catholic Church by an innocent motor cyclist who did. The bomb killed 8 people and wounded over one hundred children. Barely two days later, in a village in Kaduna state, armed bandits attacked a village and killed the village head and 14 others as they were coming out of a mosque after their morning prayers. All those murdered were Muslims. The following week, 17 villagers were murdered in a village in Zamfara State. The list, from Kaduna to Potiskum, Maiduguri to Yola is seemingly endless. We must however take these tragedies together and show them as the evidence of a weak state, rather than a conflict

among citizens. Whatever, the case may be, what should worry us is the fact that citizens are dying and not the agents.

The greatest contribution that the international community can make is to genuinely come to the aid of countries that are suffering from unnecessary violence as we have in Africa today. Whether the violence is in the name of a false god such as perpetrated by Boko Haram or the Lord's Resistance Army, or the bandits fighting for diamonds, or the kidnappers in Southern Nigeria, we require the kind of security that others have come to take for granted. Here, the battle against small arms, their manufacture and distribution must be waged relentlessly because our people are vulnerable and powerless.

It is instructive how Nigerians have often reacted to these bombings of Churches. On two occasions, I have been alerted about these bombings by text messages of solidarity and condolences from Muslim friends. Muslim leaders have stood up and condemned these explosions and they have said time and again that these people are not Muslims, but evil men. For example, in reaction to the latest bombing in Kaduna (St. Monica's Catholic Church), the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar, the President of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA), and Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, (CAN), held a meeting with the President under the banner of the Nigerian Inter-religious Council, NIREC. At the end of the meeting, the Secretary of NIREC, Professor Ishaq Oloyede told journalists: We want all the people in this country to know that we are together in this boat and the boat should not be rocked and we should do everything possible to live harmoniously together because, if God had wished, He would have made us a monolithic nation. The plurality of this country is its strength and it should be made so.

With the Nigerian President being a practicing Christian, with some 22 out of 36 Governors being Christians (10 are Catholic), with the Security Chiefs almost all being Christian, it is difficult to speak about the persecution of Christians as if they were merely a vulnerable, defenseless and weak part of the society. As I said, the form of persecution that we have in Northern Nigeria can and will hopefully

be remedied through honest dialogue with both federal and state governments in the country.

In August this year, the Governors of the 19 Northern States which are largely the theatre for the violence setup a Committee of persons drawn from the different states to examine the issues of the crises in the Northern states and to proffer solutions. It is for me instructive that I, a Catholic Bishop, have been appointed by the Governor of Sokoto State, the seat of the Caliphate as the Muslims like to say, to represent Sokoto State at the said Committee.. Through out the entire crisis, all the Catholic Bishops in the affected areas have been unanimous in both condemning the violence but in also stating clearly that the violence is not about religion .

Whatever may be our condition, we Christians, and all people of good will] must stand together and defend our faiths. As St Paul said: Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground (Heb 11: 36-38). These are times of great trials indeed. But we must remember the question posed by St. Paul: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (Rom 8: 35). We must look ahead with confidence and courage. This Conference is timely and its fruits should be spread far and wide so that the world may know that the devil is still very much alive and yet, as the great Rev Martin Luther King said: Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. May the prince of peace and the source of Light be our guide and succour. Amen.

# AUTHORS

## **BAZÁN, José Luis (SPAIN)**

**José Luis Bazán** (Ph.D.) was born in San Sebastián (Spain). He obtained a Ph.D. in International Human Rights Law in the University of Navarre (Spain), where he was Secretary of the Human Rights Institute. His research is focused on international and constitutional protection of human rights. He has lectured in the Institut Catholique de Paris and the University Rey Juan Carlos (Madrid). Several Latin-American academic and professional institutions have invited him to participate in conferences in Santiago de Chile, México D.F., Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. He has published several studies and academic articles on human rights, particularly on religious freedom, rights of children and the right to education.

He has also intervened in litigation cases as counselor in supreme courts in Spain and in the European Court of Human Rights in cases related to parental rights and freedom of conscience and religion.

He is currently lecturer in Fundamental Rights in the International University of La Rioja (Spain) and Legal Adviser to COMECE.

## **COMECE**

**The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community** is an organisation of Roman Catholic bishops in Europe which monitors European Union (EU) policy and legislation from a Catholic perspective. Consisting of bishops delegated by all the Catholic bishops' conferences of the European Union and with a permanent Secretariat in Brussels, COMECE acts as liaison between the national bishops' conferences and the European Community. It was launched in 1980 and was preceded by the European Catholic Pastoral Information Service (SIPECA, 1976–1980). The objectives of COMECE are: to monitor and analyse the political process of the European Union, to inform and raise awareness within the Church of developments in EU policy and legislation, to maintain a regular Dialogue with the EU Institutions through annual Summit meetings of religious leaders, Dialogue Seminars, various Conferences and by taking part in Consultations launched by the European Commission,

to promote reflection, based on the Church's social teaching, on the challenges facing a united Europe.

### **DE PATER, Arie (NETHERLANDS)**

**Arie de Pater** is director of Advocacy *Open Doors International* in the Netherlands. He was Director of the Jubilee Campaign NL, Office Manager at *Friedensstimme*. He studied at Wageningen Universiteit en Researchcentrum, Veenlanden College.

### **OPEN DOORS**

**Open Doors** is an international organisation that exists to strengthen the standing of the church in the most hostile places. In over 50 countries, *Open Doors* supplies Bibles, trains church leaders, delivers Scripture-based literacy programmes and supports Christians who suffer for their faith. In the UK and Ireland *Open Doors* strives to raise awareness of global persecution, mobilising prayer, support and action among Christians.

### **GRIM, Brian J. (USA)**

**Brian J. Grim** (Ph.D.) is director of cross-national data and senior researcher in religion and world affairs at the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life in Washington, D.C. He is also a visiting researcher at the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs at Boston University, where he co-edits the World Religion Database ([http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org/wrd\\_default.asp](http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org/wrd_default.asp)). He is co-author of *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, 2011) and author of the blog *The Weekly Number* (<http://www.theweeklynumber.com/>). He has extensive on-the-ground experience in China, the former USSR, Central Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

### **THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE**

**The Pew Forum** launched in 2001, seeks to promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs. The Pew Forum conducts surveys, demographic analyses and other social science research on important aspects of religion and public life in the U.S. and around the world. It also provides a neutral venue for

discussions of timely issues through Round Tables and briefings. The Pew Forum explores the role religion plays in world affairs through a range of research products, ranging from large public opinion surveys on religion and society to in-depth demographic analyses of the current distribution and future growth trajectory of major religious groups. The Pew Forum also carries out research that documents the extent of government and social restrictions on religion around the world. The Pew Forum is part of the Pew Research Center, a Washington-based nonpartisan, nonadvocacy organisation, a nonpartisan 'fact tank'.

### **HIIBORO KUSSALA, Barani Eduardo (SOUTH SUDAN)**

**Barani Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala, Bishop of Tambura-Yambio** in Southern Sudan. The diocese has some of the worst poverty indicators in Southern Sudan, with only 2% of the population having completed primary school. During the Sudanese civil war he was involved in pastoral services to over 42,000 Sudanese refugees in the Republic of Central Africa, and was head teacher of a secondary school in the refugee camp.

### **HALEMBA, Andrzej (POLAND)**

**Andrzej Halemba** born in Poland, missionary, translator, director of the Centre for Missionary Formation, secretary of the Polish Episcopal Mission, Delegate for the missionaries and CEP, currently serving in an international organisation *Aid to the Church in Need* based in Königstein im Taunus (Germany) and responsible for assisting English and Portuguese-speaking African countries and Projects Officer for Middle East.

### **AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED (ACN)**

**Aid to Church in Need** is a Pontifical Foundation dependent on the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome in conformity with the provisions of Canon Law. Founded in 1947 by Werenfried van Straaten, the Dutch Norbertine priest whom Pope John Paul II named '*an outstanding apostle of charity*', ACN has over 60 years of service to the *Church in Need*. ACN receives no public or official Church funding, relying solely on the generosity of individual benefactors. Despite its varied names from country to country, it is one organisation with one international

head office (ACN-International Head Office) with national fundraising offices in 17 different countries. On average, ACN annually supports more than 5,000 projects in over 130 countries. ACN helps the Church so that the Church can help others.

### **HULSMAN, Cornelius (EGYPT)**

**Cornelius Hulsman** (Ph.D.) Founder and editor-in-chief of the *Arab-West Report*, an Egyptian internet magazine that has reported since 1997 on Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt (<http://www.arabwestreport.info/>). He investigated hundreds of reported tensions and has documented these in the *Arab-West Report*. Expert in development sociology (Leiden University) he directed the Christian Emigration Centre in The Netherlands. His wife is Egyptian Coptic Orthodox and was fully involved in founding the Arab-West Report.

### **ARAB-WEST REPORT**

**Arab-West Report** is an independent weekly digest of Egyptian newspaper translations and editorial analysis, focusing primarily on Arab-West and Muslim-Christian relations. The English language translation of summaries of Egyptian newspaper articles and special reports deal with issues that have either been controversial or misrepresented in various media. 28,000 articles and reports, including (summary) translations, investigative reports and media critique in the electronic archive of the Arab-West Report are used to build an Electronic Documentation Center with advanced search functions, providing a unique insight into contemporary Arab-West and Muslim-Christian relations.

### **JOSEPH, T. M.**

**T M Joseph** (Ph.D.) born in India, lawyer, expert in politics, lecturer at Newman College in Kerala, author and editor of many publications. He is a researcher and an accredited Research Guide, interested in: Local Governance, Comparative Politics (Electoral Systems, Legislatures); Women and Politics (Representation Issues, Access to Public Office); Public Policy (Affirmative Action Policies); Ethnic Politics (Social Movements, Group Dynamics); Media Politics (Content Analysis). T.M. Joseph has been working as General Convener: of the Joint Action

Council for Political Science Fraternity in Kerala and at the Research Fellows Forum, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. He is former General Secretary of the Mahatma Gandhi University Political Science Association and member of professional bodies in India and abroad (Sri Lanka, Japan).

### **KATTAR, Demianos Fares (LEBANON)**

**Demianos Fares Kattar** (Ph.D.) a former Minister of Financial Affairs, is a strategist. After 15 years of consulting and general management work in Lebanon and the Arab world, he entered public life in 2000 as an activist for economic reform and served as a Minister of Finance, Economy and Trade (Lebanon) in 2005. Since 2006, he has worked as strategic advisor to several international groups (industrial groups in Lebanon, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, France, and Switzerland, large Business Group in Qatar, General Motors FB Middle East, Credit Bank-Lebanon). He is founding dean of the business school at the Antonins University, expert in informatics, management, strategy and political economy. He is also active in volunteer work in the Lebanese Red Cross and anti drugs organisations.

### **KSOR, Kok (VIETNAM)**

**Kok Ksor** born in Gia Lai Province, in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. He is a member of the Jarai ethnic group and the President of the Montagnard Foundation, Inc., an organisation, started as an RSO at the University of Chicago, which states that its mission is to preserve the lives, rights and culture of the Montagnard people. He is also a member of the Transnational Radical Party (TRP), a non-government agency that investigates human rights abuses in the world.

### **THE DEGAR FOUNDATION, INC. (MFI)**

**The Degar Foundation, Inc. (MFI)** founded in 1990 is a private, nonprofit corporation based in Spartanburg, USA. *Degar Foundation, Inc.*'s overriding mission is to preserve the lives and the culture of the indigenous, Montagnard (Degar) people of Vietnam's Central Highlands. Its guiding strategy is to restore, safeguard, and monitor the innate and inalienable human rights of the Degar as described in the covenants and declarations of the United Nations. MFI pledges

to accomplish its mission through peaceful, humanitarian, and non-military means in the spirit of international cooperation.

### **KUKAH, Matthew Hassan (NIGERIA)**

**Matthew Hassan Kukah, Bishop of Sokoto** born in Kulu, Nigeria. After ordination he held the following offices: Rector of the Minor Seminary in Zaria; General Secretary of the Episcopal Conference; Consultant to the Pontifical Council for the Inter-religious Dialogue. This priest, a prolific writer, who earned his Ph.D. from the University of London, is a consummate and rigorous scholar with a deep passion for Nigeria. He was a member of the Investigation Commission of Human Rights Violations of the Federal Government in Nigeria; Secretary of the National Political Reform Conference of the Federal Government of Nigeria; Chairman of the Ogoni-Shell Reconciliation of the Federal Government of Nigeria, member of the Committee for electoral reform in the Federal Government of Nigeria. Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah has been a cleric for over three decades earning respect and authority on issues of religion, ethnicity, civil/military relations, and human rights.

### **OLBRYCHT, JAN (POLAND)**

**Jan Olbrycht** (Ph.D.) born in Rybnik, Poland, social scientist and former lecturer, is an expert in the field of European funds; has worked in the Committee for National Spatial Planning, Polish Academy of Sciences. A Polish politician, he has been a member of a number of Polish organisations (Cieszyn Council, Śląskie Provincial Assembly, the Policy Council of the Solidarity Electoral Action - AWS - Social Movement, the Civic Platform - PO - National Council) and international political organisations (the Executive Bureau of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and of the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments).

Member of the European Parliament since 2004 (Civic Platform list, Group of the European People's Party), member of the Bureau of the EPP where he was Vice-Chairman of the Polish delegation to the EPP Group; the Group's Budget and Structural Policies Working Group; the Committee on Regional Development; and a founder member and Chairman of the URBAN Intergroup. Jan Olbrycht also held the post of Chairman of

the European Ideas Network's Values and Freedoms Working Party and was a member of the Board of the EPP Robert Schuman Foundation for closer cooperation between Christian Democrats in Europe.

Devoted to regional development he was involved in the work of: the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the Bureau of the Assembly of European Regions (ARE) and the National Regional Policy Council.

## **EPP**

**EPP - The Group of the European People's Party** brings together centre and centre-right pro-European political forces from the Member States of the EU. It works to advance the goal of a more competitive and democratic Europe, closer to its citizens, and a social market economy. The EPP was the first-ever transnational political party to be formed at European level and the Group is currently the largest political force in the European Parliament.

## **PAPASTYLIANOU, Porfyrios**

**Porfyrios Papastylianou, Bishop of Neapolis** born in Pera Oreinis in the Nicosia district. After his ordination he gave lectures at the Apostle Barnabas Seminary. He has also served as: Deputy Chairman of the Solomon Panayides Foundation, founder member and President of the Cyprus Centre for Environmental Research and Education and Head of the Office for Religious Monuments and Relics of the Holy Bishoprpic of Limassol. He is the Representative of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus to the European Union.

## **PARRAVICINI, Giovanna**

**Giovanna Parravicini** is a researcher for the Christian Russia Foundation and director of the Russian edition of the magazine *New Europe*. She is the editor of numerous publications on the history of the Church in Russia in the twentieth century and the history of Byzantine and Russian art. She lives in Moscow where she works at the Cultural Center Library of the Spirit and co-operates in the cultural field with the Apostolic Nunciature. Among her publications are: *Lithuanian people and Church*, 1984; *Ave Joy of all Creation*, 1988; *Julija Danzas*, 2001; *Life*

of *Mary in icons*, 2001; *Icon: image of faith and art*, 2006. She edited *A History of Icons in Russia* in 5 volumes.

### **PELSTER, Berthold (GERMANY)**

**Berthold Pelster** is responsible for Public Relations and Media at *Aid to Church in Need*, Germany. Expert in economics, human rights (especially religious freedom) and TV journalism (producing own TV magazines). Since 2000 he has been working for the German branch of *Aid to the Church in Need* (German: Kirche in Not).

### **PIZZABALLA, Pierbattista (HOLY LAND, JERUSALEM)**

**Fra Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM** has been the *Custos of the Holy Land* since 2004. The Custos of the Holy Land is the Minister Provincial (i.e. the major superior) of the Friars Minor living throughout the Middle East. He has jurisdiction over the territories of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt (in part), Cyprus and Rhodes without counting the numerous houses or Commissariats in various parts of the world (worth mentioning are those in Rome and Washington). From 2005 to 2008 he was Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrew-speaking Catholics and since 2008 he has been *Consultor* to the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

### **CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND**

**Custody of the Holy Land (Custodia Terræ Sanctæ)** coordinates and directs the reception of pilgrims in the Holy Land. This task was conferred by the Holy See over 600 years ago. The Custody ensures spiritual and economic support for all the Catholic Christian sanctuaries. Another mission is to coordinate information about the Holy Land and instil in the Christians of the world the 'loving care' for these sites by supporting archaeological excavations at the holy places, publication of ancient pilgrimages and, above all, the study of the Bible through geography and history, for this reason the Custody has set up among others the SBF, FAI, FPP. Custody of the Holy Land cares for and sustains, in agreement with the local church, the Christian presence in the Holy Land through various initiatives. This includes ministry to schools and parishes. These initiatives clearly require not only the moral support of Christians throughout the world, but also their economical support.

It is for this reason that '*Commissariats of the Holy Land*' were set up world-wide to foster awareness of the situation in the Holy Land and solicit funds to help sustain the work of the Custody.

### **SAKO, Louis Raphaël I**

**Louis Raphaël I Sako Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Babylon** and the Head of the Chaldean Catholic Church since 2013. Before he was ordained a bishop, the Iraqi Government refused to allow him to teach religious education, but the cleric responded by doing a separate doctorate and, because it had little religious content, the Government gave him his teaching licence, which enabled him to teach the subject. On 1 February 2013, Pope Benedict XVI granted Patriarch Louis Raphaël I Sako *ecclesiastica communio* which the leaders of the Eastern-rite Catholic churches seek as a sign of their unity with the wider Catholic Church. He was awarded the Defensor Fidei prize in 2008 and the International Pax Christi Award in 2010.

### **SEFTON-WILLIAMS, Peter**

**Peter Sefton Williams** is a Londoner who has studied History of Art, Journalism and Urban Regeneration at the universities of Leicester, Cardiff and University College London. His professional experience as a journalist is rooted at the local level and expanded into the international with the news agency Reuters where he worked as a correspondent and a marketing director. He has been a member of Aid to the Church in Need's UK (ACN UK) Board for almost 20 years (Chairman for 7 years). He has also served as a Chairman of the Commissions on Projects and Information (ACN International) and has been a member of the charity's governing Standing Committee (ACN International). For the last six years he has chaired the Editorial Committee of the Worldwide Religious Freedom Report.

### **SWEIF, Youssef (CYPRUS, LEBANON)**

**Youssef Sweif, Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus** succeeded Archbishop Boutros Gemayel in this mission. He has given lectures and published around 50 titles on liturgy, spirituality and pastoral work. Since 1988 he has established relationships and pastoral activities with Italy, Germany, France, England, United States of America, Greece and Cyprus and his service has been focussed on the following: activating the committees and the pastoral movements especially of young people; ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, promulgation of Christian culture, liturgy. Bishop Sweif became a member of the CCEE – the Council of European Catholic Bishops (2009) and a member of COMECE (2010). He participated in the work of such institutions as the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East and the Special Council for the Middle East and R.O.A.C.O. (Reunion of Aid Agencies for the Oriental Churches) in Rome.

### **VELLA GAUCI, Joe (MALTA)**

**Rev. Joe Vella Gauci** (Ph.D.), born in Victoria, Gozo, Malta. After his ordination, he pursued further studies in London and in Birmingham and became an expert in the Oriental and African Religious field, specialising in Islamic Studies. He lectures in Malta and he is a Distance Learning Tutor at the University of Middlesex. He is the author and editor of many publications including MA in *Comparative Philosophy: Islam and the West* and he was a member of the editorial board of *The Future of the Islamic World*. He has held the following offices: Archpriest of the Cathedral and member of the preparatory committee for the Arab-European Forum for Development and Dialogue. Currently he serves as an Adviser in International Relations and Religious Freedom to COMECE in Brussels.







## **POSTERS AND PHOTOS**



# Persecution against Christians

Tue 5th October 2010, 9.00 - 12.30 hrs

Room A5G-2, European Parliament, Brussels

Chaired by Mario Mauro MEP, EPP and Konrad Szymański MEP, ECR

## Welcome speech:

Joseph Daul, EPP Chairman  
Othmar Karas, EPP Vice-Chairman

Michał Kamiński, ECR Chairman  
Konrad Szymański, ECR

## Reports on religious persecution in the world:

Berthold Peister, Kirche in Not  
Arie de Pater, Open Doors International  
Brian J. Grim, PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life

## Witnesses:

Louis Sako, Archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq  
Edward Hilborne Kussala, Bishop of Tombura-Yambio, Sudan  
T. M. Joseph, Principal of the Newman College, India  
Kok Ksor, President of the Montagnard Foundation, Vietnam  
Presentation of the Religious Freedom Report by Piotr Mazurkiewicz, General Secretary of COMECE

## Interpretation available in: EN • FR • IT • DE • ES • PL

Lunch buffet will be provided after the seminar.

To attend please respond to: [konrad.szymanski-office@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:konrad.szymanski-office@europarl.europa.eu)



#### Speakers II:

**Prof. Reinhold Prohler** - Spokesperson for the German branch of the ADF to the Church in Meid (Meid in Meid) in Munich; used to work as the Director of the Meidner branch of the organization for eight years; ADF's ADF and TV programs monitor religious persecution in 100 countries around the world. He has worked for the ADF for over 15 years and has been involved in more than 120 countries around the world. He has worked with persecuted Christians, oppressed or in pastoral need.

**Prof. Peter G. Brown** - Director of Advocacy of Open Doors International; comes from the Netherlands. Open Doors International is a Christian organization that provides pastoral care and Christian ministry by assisting Bible-believing Christians based literacy programmes and support for Christians suffering for their faith through advocacy activities, aiming at full freedom of religion or belief for all.

**Dr. Steven J. Greer** - Senior researcher at the Pew Research Center. From an Religion & Public Life, specializing in international religious demography, measurement of global perceptions on religion and cross-national social regulation of religion. Dr. Greer is also a pastiche, investigator of the international religious demography project at the Pew Research Center. He has published numerous articles on religion and has launched in 2007, seeks to promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs.

#### Session III:

**Prof. Roberto Figuera Frensdorf** - Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Tromsø-Vadsø in South Sweden; used to work as a professor of Medical Ethics and Bioethics in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Tromsø. He has worked in the field of Moral Theology from the Albertus Magnus Academy of the Lutheran University. Bishop Figuera has a broad experience in work with religious, marginalized, disabled and distressed persons.

**Prof. László Márton** - Chairman, Archbishop of Krusik, János, President of the 'Bishop's' Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue in Hungary and a Consultant in the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue in the Roman Curia; together with other bishops, he is in charge of the local Christian community, which counts for about 750 000 believers and belongs to religious minorities in Hungary.

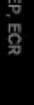
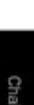
**Dr. T. M. Suman** - Principal of the Newman College in Thiruvananthi in India. Newman College, established in 1964, is a religiously Christian institution governed and managed by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) of the Province of Bombay. It has a long history of mission of all the community through its administration to other social segments.

**Prof. Peter Feyer** - President of the Montagu Foundation, whose mission is to preserve the lives, rights and culture of the Montagu people, the Montagu people in the United Kingdom. The Montagu Foundation is a charitable organization for the Montagu people in the United Kingdom. The Montagu people are one of the ethnic groups that inhabit Vietnam's Central Highlands and belong to religious minority in the area. The guiding strategy of the Foundation is to maintain, safeguard, and promote the culture and maintain human rights of the Montagu people as described in the covenants and declarations of the United Nations.

# Persecution against Christians

Tue 5th October 2010 9.00 - 12.30 hrs  
Room A5G-2, European Parliament, Brussels

Chaired by Mario Mauro MEP, EPP and Konrad Szymański MEP, ECR



Freedom of religion is a pillar of human rights. It has been stated in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Art. 9, 1) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 18).

Persecution on the grounds of religion or belief is still present worldwide. The 75% of the world lived with hate crimes of religious nature concern people of Christian faith. Each year 170,000 Christians suffer because of their faith. In 2008, 100 million Christians were persecuted, with already 100 million. It is being estimated that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th century than in all the prior 1,900 years. It makes Christians the most persecuted religious group. Persecution may include also obstacles to the proclamation of faith, confiscation and destruction of places of worship or prohibition of religious training and education. Restrictions on religion touch over half of the countries and these contain more than 80% of the global population.

Europe cannot remain passive. The European Union must take the co-responsibility for the protection of religious freedom in the world.

## Persecution against Christians

Tue 5th October 2010 9.00 - 12.30 hrs  
Room ASG-2, European Parliament, Brussels

### 9.00 Welcome speech

Mr Joseph Bevil, EPP Chairman  
Mr Othmar Karas, EPP Vice-Chairman

Mr Michał Kamiński, ECR Chairman  
Mr Konrad Szymański, ECR

### 9.10 Session I Presentation of reports on religious persecution

The workshop is moderated by the General Secretaries of COMECE:  
Mr Peter J. Ahern, Director of Advocacy, Open Doors International, Netherlands  
Mr Aleksander Polak, Director of Advocacy, Open Doors International, Netherlands  
Dr Brian J. Grim, Senior Researcher, PEW Forum on Religion & Public Life, USA

### Debate

### 10.45 Session II Testimonies by witnesses of religious persecution

Moderated by Mr Mario Mauro, MEP  
Mr Louis Sako, Archbishop of Kirkuk, Iraq  
Mr Edward Hibron Kawasa, Bishop of Tembura-Yambia, Sudan  
Dr T. M. Joseph, Principal of the Newman College, India  
Mr Rok Kist, President of the Montclair Foundation, Vietnam

### Debate

12.15 Presentation of the Religious Freedom Report by Mr Piotr Mazurkiewicz,  
General Secretary of COMECE

12.30 Lunch buffet



Interpretation available in: EN - FR - IT - DE - ES - PL





Mario Mauro MEP  
and  
Louis Sako





Mario Mauro MEP  
and  
André Pierre Louis Dupuy,  
Apostolic Nuncio





**Members of the European Parliament  
organisers of the conference**

Mario Mauro EPP,  
Konrad Szymański ECR

Piotr Mazurkiewicz,  
General Secretary of the COMECE





**Members  
of the European  
Parliament**

Mario Mauro EPP ,  
Othmar Karas EPP

**Members of the European Parliament**

Mario Mauro EPP,  
Othmar Karas EPP,  
Ryszard Legutko ECR,  
Konrad Szymański ECR





**Members  
of the European Parliament**  
Mario Mauro EPP ,  
Othmar Karas EPP

**Members  
of the European Parliament**  
Mario Mauro EPP,  
Konrad Szymański ECR





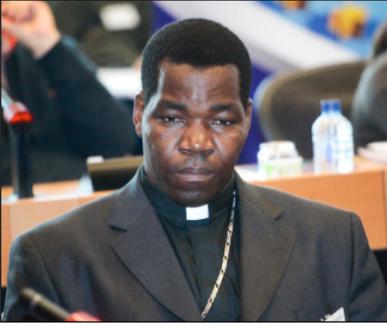
## Panelists

Brian J. Grim



Berthold Pelster,  
Arie de Pater,  
Brian J. Grim





Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala



Kok Ksor



TM Joseph

Louis Sako





Wednesday 9 May 2012 from 16.30 to 19 hrs  
Room ASP3E2 - European Parliament - Brussels

## CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB WORLD: ONE YEAR AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

Hosted by

Jan **Olbrycht** MEP (EPP Group)

Konrad **Szymanski** MEP (ECR Group)

Piotr **Mazurkiewicz**

(General Secretary of the COMECE)

Guest Speakers:

Berthold **Felster** (Germany)

Esther **Kattenberg** (Netherlands)

Brian J. **Grim** (USA)

Dimyano **Kattar** (Lebanon)

Cornelia **Hulsman** (Egypt)

Youssef **Swief** (Cyprus)

Pierbattista **Pizzaballa** (Israel)

Seminar in cooperation with the EP of the EPP Group, the ECR Group and COMECE





Jan Olbrycht MEP



## Organisers of the conference

Piotr Mazurkiewicz,  
General Secretary  
of the COMECE



## Members of the European Parliament

Konrad Szymański ECR,  
Jan Olbrycht EPP,



## Members of the European Parliament

Mario Mauro, EPP



Jaime Mayor Oreja, EPP



Andrzej Grzyb, EPP



Anna Záborská, EPP



Jan Olbrycht, EPP



Konrad Szymański, ECR



Jan Olbrycht MEP (EPP),  
György Hölvényi (EPP),  
Joe Vella Gauci COMECE



Mario Mauro MEP,  
Konrad Szymański MEP,  
Jan Olbrycht MEP,  
Brian J. Grim,  
Joe Vella Gauci COMECE







## Secretariat of the COMECE

Piotr Mazurkiewicz, General Secretary,  
Joe Vella Gauci, Advisor  
for International Relations & Religious Freedom





### **Panelists**

Pierbattista Pizzaballa  
Berthold Pelster  
Dimyanos Kattar  
Youssef Sweif

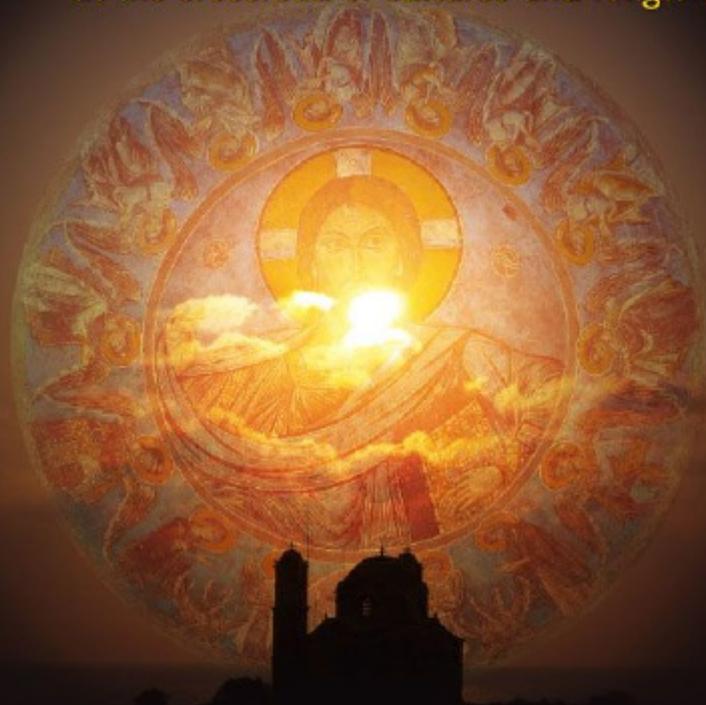




**Mario Mauro** MEP

Head of the Italian PDL Delegation in the EPP Group  
with the support of the EPP Group Intercultural Activities Unit  
Cordially invites you to the conference on

## **Cyprus** at the crossroad of cultures and religions



**EPP Group**  
in the European Parliament

Monday, 26 November 2012, 12.00-14.00 hrs  
Room ASP5H1, European Parliament, Brussels

**Organiser  
of the conference**

**Member  
of the European  
Parliament**  
Mario Mauro, EPP



Paolo Licandro, EPP  
Ioannis Kasoulides,  
Mario Mauro MEP, EPP





Joseph Vella Gauci  
Giannos Ioannu,

Porfyrios Papastyliau,  
Giovanna Parravicini





**Members of the European Parliament**

Mario Mauro EPP,  
Jan Olbrycht EPP







**Mario Mauro MEP & Konrad Szymański MEP  
invite you to a presentation of:**



## REPORT 2012

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

Tue, Dec 18th 2012, 13.30 - 15.00 (buffet lunch from 12.30)

Room ASP A1H1, European Parliament, Brussels

Language: EN



Aid to the  
Church in Need



**EPP Group**  
in the European Parliament



European  
Conservatives  
and Reformists  
Group



Konrad Szymański MEP,  
Joe Vella Gauci COMECE

Mark Riedemann ACN,  
Andrzej Halemba ACN,  
Peter Sefton-Williams ACN,  
Konrad Szymański MEP,  
Joe Vella Gauci COMECE,  
José Luis Bazán COMECE





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José Luis Bazán COMECE,  
José Ramos-Ascensão COMECE





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José Ramos-Ascensão COMECE











# International Perspectives ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

## Proceedings of Conferences on Religious Freedom 2010 - 2012

Freedom of religion is a universal value. The freedom to profess and practice one's faith, to believe, and the freedom of expression and behaviour in public life as believer, is a birth right of every human being. It is ingrained in every human heart. This is what we, Europeans believe. Those rights are justly recognised under international law. The promotion of international religious freedom is one of the priorities of the European People's Party (EPP) Group at the European Parliament. It is a priority for me, as Vice-Chairman of the EPP Group responsible for interreligious dialogue and intercultural activities – Jan Olbrycht MEP

As there can be no security in Europe unless there is also security in the Mediterranean; likewise, there can be no security in the Middle East and North Africa or any other part of the world unless there is (also security and) full respect for religious freedom between Muslim majorities and other religious minorities. It should be stated that this kind of interaction also applies to interactions between other religious majorities and religious minorities. The EU has got to take this on board. Indeed, "a closer inspection of the obvious can show us a way forward and help shape our approach to a given problem." Getting to grips with this is vital in making progress towards a solution. "Seriously understanding the religious dimension of the public sphere is vital in many situations." – Joe Vella Gauci COMECE

