



Commentary on the current state of Freedom of Religion or Belief 2019

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Foreword

Dr Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief

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On 21 April 2019, almost 300 people were killed in a series of bombings in Sri Lanka, many of which were targeted at churches.¹ On 23 April 2019, the Saudi Arabian Government announced the mass execution of 37 men, at least 33 of whom are from the Shia Muslim minority.² In the Netherlands in 2017, the authorities recorded 432 incidents of hate crime against Jewish people.³ On 15 March 2019, 51 people were killed as they attended mosque for Friday prayers in Christchurch, New Zealand.⁴

These horrific examples demonstrate that from Sri Lanka to Saudi Arabia, from the Netherlands to New Zealand, violations of the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) are a truly global and growing phenomenon. Indeed, data suggests that 83% of the world's population live in countries with severe Governmental and/or societal restrictions on the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief.⁵

Studies that have monitored global trends over the past decade note that the number of countries that violate FoRB rights has been rising significantly. While Christians in 143 countries and Muslims in 140 countries were reportedly harassed in 2017, nearly all religious groups experienced sharp increases in the number of countries where they faced harassment over the preceding decade. For Buddhists and Jews the number rose by an alarming 90% and 71% respectively, while the comparable trend for Muslims between 2007 and 2017 was 46% and for Christians 35%.⁶ Violence resulting from contestation over religious beliefs targeting minorities and dissenters rose by 76% in this period.⁷ According to the 2018 Freedom of Thought Report, in 2017, there were 85 countries in which the non-religious experienced "Grave Violations" or "Severe Discrimination".⁸

Even some countries which have traditionally offered significant protection for FoRB are at present seeing sharp increases in FoRB violations, mostly driven by far-right nationalism. UN Special Rapporteur Shaheed's own report on antisemitism found that in France, reports of antisemitic acts

¹ BBC, *Sri Lanka attacks: Death toll soars to 290 after bombings hit churches and hotels*, 22 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-48008073>

² Human Rights Watch, *Saudi Arabia: Mass Execution of 37 Men*, 24 April 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/24/saudi-arabia-mass-execution-37-men>

³ OSCE, *Netherlands, Hate Crime Reporting*, <http://hatecrime.osce.org/netherlands>

⁴ Julia Hollingsworth, *Christchurch terror attack death toll increases to 51*, CNN, 2 May 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/02/asia/nz-christchurch-attack-death-toll-intl/index.html>

⁵ Pew Research Center, *Global Uptick in Government Restrictions on Religion in 2016*, 21 June 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/21/global-uptick-in-government-restrictions-on-religion-in-2016/>

⁶ Pew Research Center, *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World*, 15 July 2019, page 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 51

⁸ 'Editorial Introduction in *Freedom of Thought Report 2018*, Humanists International, 2018, <https://fot.humanists.international/editorial-introduction/>

had increased by 74% from 2017 to 2018, with such acts constituting half of all documented hate crimes and nearly 15% of the incidents involving physical violence.⁹

What we learn is that all of humanity has to face the challenge of increasing violations of FoRB, that there is not one type of victim or perpetrator, and that the scale and frequency of these attacks highlight the terrible danger that intolerance towards others and their beliefs poses to societies everywhere. The attacks suffered by victims in these contexts go far beyond violations to FoRB and stretch to violations of a wide range of human rights including the rights to life, liberty and security of person.

Despite the scale and severity of the problem, thus far political responses have been muted. There have, however, recently been positive moves which indicate that Governments are starting to take this issue more seriously, such as the US Ministerial on Religious Freedom, the growth in the number of dedicated ambassadors or special envoys for FoRB, the observance of 27 October as international FoRB day, and the designation by the United Nations General Assembly of 22 August as the international day to commemorate the victims of acts of violence based on their religion or belief.

We welcome these moves and advise that one of the most important ways of enhancing the efficacy of FoRB interventions is to ensure that they are inclusive. It is implausible that a legal and social framework of respect for the rights of any one religious or belief group can be cultivated in countries with high levels of FoRB violations without developing frameworks that support the rights of all.

Moreover, a focus on promoting FoRB on a selective basis can be counter-productive. This is because it can ostracise communities and feed into xenophobic narratives that question the loyalty of minority religious communities and provide populist Governments with a pretext to align themselves with specific religious groups and discriminate against others. Such favouritism is one of the major causes of FoRB violations in many countries that repress religious minorities. It can also undermine the legitimacy of international solidarity by giving the impression that such advocacy amounts to special pleading rather than a commitment to a universal human right. Therefore, as we wrote in our joint letter to the Sunday Telegraph on 10 February 2019:

"Seeking to protect some from persecution necessarily requires seeking to protect all from persecution. Upholding full enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief (which includes the freedom of worship) would enhance its enjoyment by all, whether believer, non-believer or ambivalent. Britain can rightly draw attention to the inclusive nature of its diplomacy in advancing this freedom over many years. This is an opportunity for redoubling and reinforcing these efforts in the light of increasingly abhorrent violations."¹⁰

The report you are reading now has been designed to support the UK, and other actors, to contribute effectively to the growing international engagement to address FoRB violations. It was compiled by a range of prominent organisations from different religious and non-religious backgrounds and provides detailed analysis of the FoRB situation in 26 countries, the majority of

⁹ Dr Ahmed Shaheed, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (Focus: Combatting Antisemitism to Eliminate Discrimination and Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief)*, United Nations, 2019, <https://undocs.org/A/74/358>

¹⁰ Malcolm Evans, Nazila Ghanea and Ahmed Shaheed, *Letter to the Editor: Freedom of religion*, Sunday Telegraph, 10 February 2019, <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-sunday-telegraph/20190210/281960314006362>

which the FCO includes in its *'Human Rights and Democracy Report 2018'*. All the countries covered have been chosen in the light of the significant denials of FoRB that occur within their borders. As such, this report supports both Her Majesty's Government's prioritisation of FoRB and the FCO's desire to hone policy and action to ameliorate negative human rights situations in FCO 'Human Rights Priority Countries' (HRPCs).

As reliable, detailed information is vital to developing and implementing effective policies to promote FoRB, we encourage the UK Government to make use of this report. We also encourage the UK to adopt the recommendations the report outlines regarding making more use of the FCO's own excellent FoRB toolkit, as there is a significant lack of engagement with the toolkit across the FCO network. Making use of the toolkit and this excellent report will significantly support the UK Government's efforts to promote FoRB.

We commend this report to all those who serve in the UK government and elsewhere in defence of human rights.

Introduction

Reliable, detailed, evidence-based monitoring and analysis of FoRB violations is essential for formulating, implementing and evaluating realistic policies and actions to address FoRB and interlinked human rights violations. The FCO's FoRB Toolkit recognises that the primary action that Posts can take is to 'assess the situation regarding FoRB'.¹¹ This report has been provided, alongside other publicly available information, to support both Posts and country desks to assess actual and potential FoRB violations and to formulate, implement and evaluate appropriate responses.

Expertise in both FoRB and country contexts is necessary to accurately monitor and analyse FoRB violations. Expertise is also required to navigate some actors' minimisation or denial of FoRB violations. With limited resources, the FCO can struggle to internally find the expertise essential for accurate assessments. The FCO FoRB Toolkit requires internal assessments to use non-FCO sources including 'the reports of civil society and other organisations,' which includes this APPG.¹² The APPG and its stakeholder organisations would strongly welcome a partnership in the accurate monitoring and analysis of FoRB violations that the Toolkit requires of posts. Such a partnership could enhance HMG and Parliament's knowledge about vulnerable groups who are at risk or who may require urgent assistance. It could also warn when these groups might be harmed by public comment on their situation.

Thirty countries were listed as Human Rights Priority Countries (HRPCs) in the FCO Human Rights & Democracy report 2018, released in June 2019. The HRPC criteria is stated as:

1. The human rights situation in the country;
2. The country's human rights trajectory and
3. The UK's ability to influence change.

¹¹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office FoRB Toolkit, Para 37, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/561516/Freedom_of_Religion_or_Belief_Toolkit_-_2016.pdf

¹² Ibid. Para 37 and Annex 3

The 2014 FCO Human Rights and Democracy Report noted that “the first of these criteria” - gravity of the situation – “is the most important assessment that we make and is not affected by levels of UK interest or influence.”

It is on the basis of these criteria that the APPG, through its 25 stakeholder organisations, provides in the following pages 26 profiles of countries with significant FoRB violations. 21 countries marked as current FCO HRPCs have been chosen for this report. These countries are: **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Central African Republic, China, Colombia, North Korea, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.** The APPG notes that the evidence strongly supports all these countries being designated as HRPCs.

Current non-HRPC countries included in this report, as they meet the HRPC criteria, are: **India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Turkey.** Countries which also meet the HRPC criteria but have not been included in this report due to lack of space include: **Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Nepal and Vietnam.**

The profiles included in this report complement the FCO Human Rights and Democracy Reports but do not imply that serious FoRB violations do not take place elsewhere. The list of countries chosen is not exhaustive. The country profiles also highlight information and cases that have been brought to the attention of the authors at the time of writing and, again, are not exhaustive.

In the Toolkit’s spirit of partnership, the APPG and its stakeholders provide this FoRB resource using accurate evidence-based monitoring and analysis of FoRB violations. We very much hope that a partnership allowing regular sharing of such information can flourish.

Recommendations

The APPG recommends:

1. That FCO posts further implement the FCO FoRB toolkit as a normal part of their work.
2. That the FCO in London continues to encourage, support and monitor posts’ implementation of the FCO FoRB toolkit’s recommendations.
3. That, building on the welcome appointment of a Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief by two successive Prime Ministers, this post be made a permanent role.
4. That the commitment that the International Roving Ambassador for Human Rights will work with the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief is expressed in visible public activity at the United Nations, including the Human Rights Council, as well as elsewhere including with FCO posts worldwide.
5. That FCO posts actively engage with the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief by proactively seeking ways that they can concretely advance freedom of religion and belief in country, as well as monitoring the Special Envoy's work on social media.

Methodology

This report provides an overview of violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) between November 2018 and November 2019. It uses secondary reporting based on primary field research by international civil society organisations and NGOs, reputable journalists and publications, as well as the reports of international institutions such as the United Nations, European Union and United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. The report does not aim to list each and every violation, but instead aims to give readers a sense of the most significant FoRB violations in the countries under study within the reporting period. At times, incidents outside of the reporting period are referenced so as to give wider context to the situation for religious and non-religious minorities residing in the country. The authors of this resource work for organisations focusing on FoRB issues in relevant countries and are in close contact with those working to promote FoRB in the field within their own organisations and in others.

Accuracy is of the utmost importance when monitoring and analysing FoRB and other human rights violations. The organisations quoted in this shadow report have many years of experience of confirming the accuracy or inaccuracy of claims of human rights violations. Their reputations have been built on ensuring the accuracy of the information they provide, thereby providing confidence that each of the country profiles in this shadow report is accurate.

A technical difficulty which should be noted when reading this report is that the nature of the subject means that it is often difficult to achieve regular reporting of violations in-country. Groups undergoing or at risk of FoRB violations often attempt to keep a low profile to avoid further targeting. This lack of reporting can often give the impression that violations against particular groups are non-existent. There is, however, a key difference between 'non-existent' and 'non-reportable'. Where reporting is difficult for security reasons, affecting victims and/or those working with them, this report seeks to shed light on the situation nevertheless. Often this will involve dealing with small and, at times, invisible religious communities. Because of these difficulties, a number of the profiles outline flaws in the legal and constitutional systems of the countries under study. From this outline, it can be deduced what the risks are for individuals practicing religions or beliefs that are illegal within a state and/or are not accepted by wider society. The information in the country profiles and the FoRB violations might also apply to communities which have not been named for security reasons.

Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan is alarming. There is growing fear among religious minorities about their future safety and livelihood post-American withdrawal. 2018 was a very difficult year for the people of Afghanistan. Minorities – including Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians – had to flee from the country. 80% of Afghanistan’s population is Sunni Muslim, with a sizeable Shia (Imami and Ismaili) minority (10-19%).¹³ There are also small Christian, Sikh and Hindu communities. The indigenous Christian community mostly endeavours to remain hidden due to fears of persecution. The Sikh and Hindu community are more visible but are still at risk of extreme discrimination. The Taliban has continued to attack Afghan forces and civilians, including religious minorities. The most dangerous threat to religious communities has been the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP)¹⁴.

ISKP attacked civilians generally, but it undoubtedly targeted Shias disproportionately. In the last decade, attacks against Shia Hazaras have significantly increased and intensified. One estimate suggests that there were more than 12 attacks in 2018 alone which killed more than 300 people. On 9 March 2019, at least seven Shias were killed in a suicide attack near a Shia mosque.¹⁵ A recent attack at a wedding ceremony in Kabul on 18 August killed more than 80 Shia Hazaras and injured over 160 people.¹⁶

As one report states, there is an ongoing process of ‘dehumanization of Shias’.¹⁷ There has been a rise in public hate speech against Shias which is intended to dehumanize the whole community. This is partially a form of revenge for the defeat which ISIS faced in Iraq and Syria. It is also a response to the fact that many Shias from Afghanistan and Pakistan went to Iraq and Syria to fight against ISIS.¹⁸

Other religious communities, i.e. Hindus and Sikhs, are continuously fleeing from Afghanistan. Before the fall of the Afghan government in 1992, there were nearly 200,000 Hindus and Sikhs. The figure has now reduced to between 3,000 and 7,000 due to continuous attacks on the community.¹⁹ Since the Afghan government were unable to protect them, Hindus and Sikhs fled to India where they were given right to residency. The remaining Sikhs are still living in fear. In July 2018 a suicide attack targeted the Sikh community in Jalalabad, leaving at least 17 Sikhs dead including Awtar Singh Khalsa, the only Sikh candidate expected to contest the 2018 parliamentary elections.²⁰

It is not only militant organisations but also local authorities that discriminate against Sikhs and Hindus. One report states that both of these religious minorities are facing bureaucratic hurdles to

¹³ Dorjee, T., et al, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 29 April 2019, page 3, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_AFGHANISTAN_2019.pdf

¹⁴ Seldin, J., *Islamic State in Afghanistan Growing Bigger, More Dangerous*, VOA News, 21 May 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/islamic-state-afghanistan-growing-bigger-more-dangerous>

¹⁵ *Afghanistan: Blast in Kabul’s Shia area kills at least seven*, Al Jazeera: News, 9 March 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/afghanistan-blast-kabul-shia-area-kills-180309075046373.html>

¹⁶ *Death toll in Afghanistan wedding blast rises to 80*, Al Jazeera: News, 21 August 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/death-toll-afghanistan-wedding-blast-rises-80-190821070634770.html>

¹⁷ Dorjee, T., et al, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 29 April 2019, page 3, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_AFGHANISTAN_2019.pdf

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Dorjee, T., et al, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 29 April 2019, page 142, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²⁰ *Afghanistan blast: Sikhs among 19 dead in Jalalabad suicide attack*, BBC News, 1 July 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44677823>

hold funeral and cremation ceremonies.²¹ It is also reported that Sikhs are being discriminated against as a whole group as many Afghans refuse to conduct business with them.²²

While specific violations against Christians are rarely reported because of security issues, and Afghanistan's Christian population tend to keep as low a profile as possible, killings of converts do continue. This lack of reporting has tended to give the impression that violence against Christians is not taking place in Afghanistan, at times leading to a misunderstanding that it is safe to return Christian converts to the country. Amnesty International's 2017 report underscored this issue by highlighting the story of a Christian convert called Farid. Although he had been attacked by family members when he had attempted to move back to Afghanistan 10 years previously, he was told that it was safe for him to return.²³

Non-religious people are also systematically targeted in Afghanistan. The authorities' interpretation of Shari'a sanctions capital punishment for the atheist or 'nonbeliever'. There is a little data available on the status of Baha'is in Afghanistan. The group was declared 'blasphemous' in a 2007 Supreme Court ruling.²⁴

²¹ Dorjee, T., et al, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 29 April 2019, page 4, https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_AFGHANISTAN_2019.pdf

²² *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous peoples- Afghanistan*, UNHRC, July 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce5ec.html>

²³ Shea, A., They fled Afghanistan fearing for their lives but Europe forced them back, Amnesty International, 4 June 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/06/they-fled-afghanistan-fearing-for-their-lives-but-europe-forced-them-back/>

²⁴ Dorjee, T., et al, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 29 April 2019, page 4 https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_AFGHANISTAN_2019.pdf

Bangladesh

Although the constitution of Bangladesh is secular, and in 2010 the Supreme Court restored secularism as the fundamental component of the constitution,²⁵ Islam remains the official state religion.²⁶

Minorities are concerned about the government's affiliation with extremist Islamic parties, as they continue to give in to the demands of ultra-religious groups. According to Tasneem Khalil, an atheist blogger living in exile in Sweden, Hefazat-e-Islam Movement asked the government to remove 17 stories and poems from school textbooks and to move a female statue representing justice from the Supreme court and the Government has agreed.²⁷ The fact that candidates of Islamic Andolon Bangladesh²⁸— a party which aims to establish a Caliphate — are taking part in the elections, holding rallies against the government and growing in popularity demonstrates the power of extremist religious parties in Bangladesh.²⁹

Atheists continue to fear persecution as the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has vowed that those who offend Islam, or the Prophet, will be taken to court under 'Section 295A' of the penal code.³⁰ This provision states that any person who has 'deliberate or malicious' intent to 'hurt religious sentiments' can be imprisoned. It has been used in practice to prosecute and imprison atheist and secularist activists".³¹

This de-facto blasphemy law has also given rise and justification to targeted vigilante violence against non-religious and minority religious groups. For example, the Christian community has faced violence as a result of false accusations of blasphemy from extremist Islamist groups. The victims of this violence receive no justice as none of the cases have been taken seriously or been properly investigated nor has any perpetrator of violence has been brought to justice.³²

The 11th general election in Bangladesh in December 2018 was called 'farcical' or a 'debacle' by the opposition and independent media, as they were held while opposition political candidates were being detained and while there was a huge crackdown against media, activists, students and anyone

²⁵ *Bangladesh's court restores 'secularism' in Constitution*, Zee news, 29 July 2010, https://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/bangladeshs-court-restores-secularism-in-constitution_644258.html

²⁶ Ganguly, S., *The World Should Be Watching Bangladesh's Election Debacle*, Foreign policy Website, 7 January 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/07/the-world-should-be-watching-bangladeshs-election-debacle-sheikh-hasina/>

²⁷ *Transcript: Gowher Rizvi on the state of politics in Bangladesh*, Al Jazeera: Head to Head, 20 March 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/headtohead/2019/03/transcript-gowher-rizvi-state-politics-bangladesh-190319085444403.html>

²⁸ Raju, Fazlur. Rahman., *Islami Andolon Bangladesh: Who are they and what do they stand for?*, Dhaka Tribune, 23 June 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/politics/2018/06/23/islami-andolon-bangladesh-who-are-they-and-what-do-they-stand-for>

²⁹ *2018 polls a black chapter in history: Islami Andolon Bangladesh*, The Daily Star, 30 December 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh-national-election-2018/2018-general-election-black-chapter-in-history-bangladesh-islami-andolon-1680811>

³⁰ Marcus Jones, *Bangladesh PM: 'Anyone who offends Islam will be prosecuted'*, Premier News, 9 November 2018, <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Bangladesh-PM-Anyone-who-offends-Islam-will-be-prosecuted?fbclid=IwAR1rmlqwpwJvRLH1lkNL7iKuQW0aDrLF2pGuTF1XqRsWLxqWfyfyOzZ9FdI>

³¹ *Bangladesh*, End Blasphemy Laws Website, 2019, <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/asia-central-southern-and-south-eastern/bangladesh/>

³² See: *World Watch List: Bangladesh*, Open Doors USA, 2018, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/bangladesh/>

else critical of the government.³³ The elections turned the country into an authoritarian regime inclined towards extremist Islamic parties.

Anti-conversion laws remain a point of concern. In December 2018, the US Commission for International Religious Freedom published a special report on anti-conversion laws in South Asia in which it examined laws in Bangladesh, along with other countries in the region.³⁴ According to the USCIRF Commissioner, these anti-conversion laws support extremists who seek to prevent anyone from leaving the majority religion.³⁵

The controversial Information and Communication (ICT) Act that was passed in September 2018 has been criticised as being a significant threat to freedom of expression and those vocal about atrocities committed by the State. It could also be used to further intimidate and harass persecuted religious and non-religious minority groups. This is because Section 57 of the ICT outlines criminal penalties for anyone who “causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief”, thereby creating a de-facto online blasphemy law.³⁶

³³ See: Associated Press, *The latest: Bangladesh opposition calls election ‘farcical’*, Business Insider, 30 December 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ap-the-latest-bangladesh-opposition-calls-election-farcical-2018-12?r=US&IR=>; and Ganguly, S., *The World Should Be Watching Bangladesh’s Election Debacle*, Foreign Policy Website, 7 January 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/07/the-world-should-be-watching-bangladeshs-election-debacle-sheikh-hasina/>; and *Bangladesh Elections 2018*, Al Jazeera, 2018, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2018/bangladesh-elections-2018/index.html>

³⁴ Dorjee, T., et al., *Limitations on Minorities’ Religious Freedom in South Asia: USCIRF Special Report*, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, November 2018, page 7, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Limitations%20on%20Minorities%20Religious%20Freedom%20in%20South%20Asia.pdf>

³⁵ ‘*About USCIRF: Nadine Maenza*’, USCIRF Website, 2019, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/about-uscirtf/nadine-maenza-commissioner>

³⁶ *Open Letter: Proposed Digital Security Bill Bangladesh*, Asian Human Rights Commission, 24 April 2018, <https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2018/04/Open-Letter-Digital-Security-Bill-Bangladesh.pdf>

Burma (Myanmar)

Burma's population is 87.9% Buddhist, with the country also home to significant minorities of Christians (6.2%) and Muslims (4.3%) as well as small Animist and Hindu communities. Around 0.1% or less identify as having no faith.³⁷

Burma has a long history of FoRB violations stemming from the rule of the military junta which controlled the country for over 50 years from 1962. The current government continues to contribute to religious intolerance, discriminating against religious and ethnic minorities. At the core of its governance lies a determination to preserve and protect a Buddhist identity. The military, and its affiliated political party, has fuelled a movement of Burmese Buddhist nationalism, encouraging groups such as the ultranationalist *Buddha Dhamma Paahita Foundation*, formerly known as *Ma Ba Tha*³⁸, leading to a dramatic rise in religious intolerance throughout the country.³⁹

Activist Khin Zaw Win, speaking in March 2019, exhibited serious concern about the Burmese military's continued encouragement of religious nationalism in an effort to maintain its grip on power.⁴⁰ Moreover, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Yanghee Lee, reiterated her view in March 2019 that "the pervasive nature of hate speech [in Burma] is alarming".⁴¹

The principle violation of FoRB during the reporting period has been perpetrated against the country's Rohingya Muslim community. These violations began with a military offensive on the 25 August 2017 leading to home burnings, mass rape, torture and execution without trial of substantial proportions of the Rohingya population.⁴² This offensive has resulted in approximately 745,000 stateless refugees now residing in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.⁴³ The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has deemed these incidents as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing"⁴⁴, while both

³⁷ Dorjee, T., et al, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019*, US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 29 April 2019, page 21, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³⁸ Win, Khin Zaw., *Un Holy Alliance: Monks and the Military in Myanmar*, Aljazeera Media Network, 18 March 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2019/03/unholy-alliance-monks-military-myanmar-190309083316608.html>

³⁹ For an example of how the Myanmar Army has contributed to an environment of hate towards the Rohingya Muslim minority, see: Fullerton, Jamie., *Myanmar army chief's Twitter account suspended over anti-Rohingya hate speech*, The Guardian, 16 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/16/myanmar-army-chiefs-twitter-account-suspended-over-anti-rohingya-hate-speech>

⁴⁰ Win, Khin Zaw, *Un Holy Alliance: Monks and the Military in Myanmar*, Aljazeera Media Network, 18 March 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2019/03/unholy-alliance-monks-military-myanmar-190309083316608.html>

⁴¹ *Burma's Identity crisis*, CSW, 21 May 2019, page 86, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/05/21/report/4339/article.htm>

⁴² In 2017, Médecins Sans Frontières conservatively estimated that 6,700 Rohingya, including at least 730 children under the age of five, were killed in the first month of the violence. See: *MSF surveys estimate that at least 6,700 Rohingya were killed during the attacks in Myanmar*, Medecins Sans Frontieres Website, 12 Dec 2017, <https://www.msf.org/myanmarbangladesh-msf-surveys-estimate-least-6700-rohingya-were-killed-during-attacks-myanmar>

⁴³ *Rohingya Refugee Crisis*, OCHA: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 29 August 2018, <https://www.unocha.org/rohingya-refugee-crisis>

⁴⁴ *UN human rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar*, UN News Website, 11 September 2017, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/09/564622-un-human-rights-chief-points-textbook-example-ethnic-cleansing-myanmar>

the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma and the 2018 UNHCR independent international fact-finding mission has uncovered alarming evidence of genocide.⁴⁵

There has been little progress towards the negotiation of a “safe and dignified”⁴⁶ repatriation of the Rohingya who believe they will face extreme violence upon returning to the Burma⁴⁷, with one refugee telling Human Rights Watch: “they will kill us if we go back”.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Burmese leadership has, to this point, repeatedly refused to grant the Rohingya equal access to citizenship.⁴⁹ The government’s National Verification Card system for repatriated Rohingya has been described by activists as designating the Rohingya as foreigners in their own country.⁵⁰

Christians have also continued to face threats from the Burmese military. Christians are threatened and intimidated on the basis that their presence threatens an ultra-nationalistic conception of Burmese identity.⁵¹ Clashes between the Burmese army and the Kachin people, the majority of whom are Christian, has been ongoing for many years since the ceasefire agreement between state forces and the Kachin Independence Army collapsed in 2011. As of April 2018, an estimated 120,000 people had been displaced by fighting across Kachin and Shan state.⁵² There was a major escalation in fighting in early April 2018.⁵³ As a result, more than 30 churches have been destroyed in Kachin State in recent years – predominantly by bomb attacks.⁵⁴

There is also evidence that women in the Kachin region are victims of sexual violence. Many of the ethnic Kachin women and girls displaced by the conflict have subsequently faced the threat of being trafficked to China as “brides”⁵⁵ Kachin activist Francis Zau Tu outlined in November 2018 how

⁴⁵ *Report of the detailed findings of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar* A/HRC/39/CRP.2, United Nations Human Rights Council, 17 September 2018, <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/International-Fact-Finding-Report-on-Myanmar.pdf>

⁴⁶ Zaw, John., *Religion can play a role in Myanmar's development*, UCA News Website, 23 May 2019, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/religion-can-play-a-role-in-myanmars-development/85211>

⁴⁷ In November 2018 the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma implored a stoppage to the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh in the face of the continued “high risk of persecution”. See: Ganguly, M. and Adams, B., *For Rohingya Refugees, There's No Return in Sight*, Human Rights Watch, 5 June 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/05/rohingya-refugees-theres-no-return-sight>

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Zaw, John., *Religion can play a role in Myanmar's development*, UCA News Website, 23 May 2019 <https://www.ucanews.com/news/religion-can-play-a-role-in-myanmars-development/85211>

⁵¹ *Burma's Identity crisis: How ethno-religious nationalism has led to religious intolerance, crimes against humanity and genocide*, CSW, 21 May 2019, page 43, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/05/21/report/4339/article.htm>

⁵² *Myanmar violence: Thousands flee fresh fighting in Kachin state*, BBC News Website, 28 April 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-43933332>

⁵³ *Myanmar: Appalling punishment for three peaceful anti-war protesters must be overturned*, Amnesty International, 7 December 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/myanmar-appalling-punishment-three-peaceful-anti-war-protesters-overturned/>

⁵⁴ Dorjee, T., et al, *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 24, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf> and The Burmese military fighter jet bombing on the 12 May 2018 of Kachin Baptist Mission School in Bawmwang village, northern Kachin State, can be seen as a prime exemplification of this targeted religious violence. See: *Burma's Identity Crisis: How ethno-religious nationalism has led to religious intolerance, crimes against humanity and genocide*, CSW, 21 May 2019, page 70, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/05/21/report/4339/article.htm>

⁵⁵ See: *Myanmar: Women, Girls Trafficked as 'Brides' to China*, Human Rights Watch Website, 21 March 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/21/myanmar-women-girls-trafficked-brides-china>; *Myanmar/China: The*

“rape, sexual violence, torture, and arbitrary arrest are just some of the human-rights abuses that have been meted out” against his people.⁵⁶

In June 2019, more than 220 people in Shan state (including 130 women and children) fled their homes as a result of military tensions between the Burmese Army and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army.⁵⁷ Shan state also saw the forcible detainment of 41 Bible students in October 2018 by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) (the army connected to the de facto ruling party of Wa state). Twenty female students remain in captivity as of July 2019.⁵⁸ During this time, the UWSA has continued to ban prayer in churches, religious teaching in schools, and the construction of new churches.⁵⁹

In March 2019, the UNHCR too acknowledged the “worsening security situation” in Chin state⁶⁰ identifying “ongoing international protection needs”.⁶¹ There is also continued evidence of escalating violence between the Arakan Army and the Burmese Army within Chin state in 2019, of which Christians have been caught in the crossfire.⁶² Moreover, two Chin Christians found themselves injured as a result of a religiously-motivated mob attack on 24 December 2018 while preparing for Christmas celebrations.⁶³

plight of Christian minority girls, Open Doors Analytical, 10 April 2019

<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/myanmar-china-the-plight-of-christian-minority-girls/>

⁵⁶Becket, Adam., *Myanmar seeks to wipe us out, activist tells UK*, Church Times Website, 30 November 2018, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/30-november/news/world/myanmar-seeks-to-wipe-us-out-activist-tells-uk>

⁵⁷Pwint, Nan Lwin Hnin., *More than 220 Flee Homes in Shan State*, The Irrawaddy Website, 19 June 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/220-flee-homes-shan-state.html>

⁵⁸*Lahu Bible Students Still in UWSP Detention*, BNI Multimedia Group, 21 December 2018, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/lahu-bible-students-still-uwsp-detention>

⁵⁹*Myanmar: More Bible students escape, but 20 women still held*, World Watch Monitor Website, 3 December 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/myanmar-more-bible-students-escape-but-20-women-still-held/>

⁶⁰*UNHCR says ethnic Chin refugees may require continued international protection as security situation worsens in Myanmar*, UNHCR UK Website, 14 March 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2019/3/5c8a31984/unhcr-says-ethnic-chin-refugees-require-continued-international-protection.html>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² On the 8 March 2019, more than a dozen Burmese Army soldiers were killed in a clash with the AA in the Paletwa Township. Later, on the 12 June, over 750 civilians fled the Township for fear of increasing violence. See: Pwint, Nan Lwin Hnin., *AA-Military Clashes Force Hundreds to Flee Southern Chin*, The Irrawaddy Website, 12 June 2019, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/aa-military-clashes-force-hundreds-flee-southern-chin.html>

⁶³Myint, Moe., *Christians, Buddhists Brawl in Southern Rakhine on Christmas Eve*, The Irrawaddy Website, 26 December 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/christians-buddhists-brawl-northern-rakhine-christmas-eve.html>

CAR (Central African Republic)

According to the last census in 2003, 80% of the Central African Republic's (CAR) population is Christian and 15% is Muslim. Animism is also practiced by a significant percentage of the population.⁶⁴ The US's CIA World Factbook gives lower figures for Christians (50%), classifying 35% of the population as "indigenous beliefs".⁶⁵ While widely cited, these figures, which recategorise part of the Christian population as "indigenous beliefs", have been criticised by some Church sources for failing to understand the presence of certain tribal practices among converts to Christianity. In terms of FoRB violations, some of the most vulnerable people are those who have exercised the right to change their belief. Because to the religious overtones to the intense and ongoing violence, both Christian and Muslim civilians have been victims of the violence perpetrated by militia groups.⁶⁶

Until recently, CAR's multi-religious society had not experienced substantial tension, despite intermittent political violence and attempted coups. The government coup in March 2013, however, had a religious dimension.⁶⁷ The Séléka (a majority Muslim coalition) overthrew the then Christian President Francois Bozize, replacing him with Michael Djotodia, the country's first Muslim leader.⁶⁸ In response to intense bouts of violence, both during and after the coup, anti-Balaka groups began to form.⁶⁹ Although often described as "Christian militias", anti-Balaka groups were predominantly constituted of pre-existing village defence groups, and also attracted former soldiers who remain loyal to deposed President Bozize, former Séléka fighters, disaffected youths seeking revenge for Séléka violations, and criminals.⁷⁰

Shortly after Michel Djotodia was declared president, he dissolved Séléka, but various members of the militia formed new factions and made bids to seize power at a local level. In areas controlled by former members of Séléka in the north of CAR, such as Kaka Bango, informal and ad hoc taxes are imposed, as well as restrictions on the free movement of people and goods.⁷¹ Christians and animists who are mostly subsistence farmers do not produce a surplus and are less likely to be able to pay the taxes. Where they are prevented from travelling to their farms, food insecurity and vulnerability increases. CSW noted, "The difference between the Muslim community's ability to respond to Seleka's demands compared to Christians and animists creates an atmosphere in which

⁶⁴ "Central African Republic Population 2019", World Population Review,

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/central-african-republic-population/>

⁶⁵ *The World Factbook: Central African Republic*, Central Intelligence Agency, 21 August 2019,

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>; Dorjee, Tenzin., et al., 2019 *Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 29, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁶⁶ *WWR Country Dossier: Central Africa Republic*, Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit, January 2019, page 8, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Central-African-Republic-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁶⁷ *WWR Country Dossier: Central Africa Republic*, Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit, January 2019, page 6, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Central-African-Republic-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁶⁸ *Anxiety high as rebels take over Central African Republic*, World Watch Monitor, 25 March 2013, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/03/anxiety-high-as-rebels-take-over-central-african-republic/>

⁶⁹ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., 2019 *Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 30, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁷⁰ *Central African Republic (CAR): Stakeholder submission to the universal periodic review*, CSW Website, 5 April 2018, page 1, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/04/05/report/3901/article.htm>

⁷¹ Ibid.

religious tensions can build”.⁷² According to Church sources, minority Christian communities have not been allowed to meet together to carry out their religious practices⁷³, with some even forced to flee from their villages.⁷⁴

Many Anti-Balaka militias have also sought power for themselves, like former Séléka mercenaries they have also tried to gain control of the country’s mineral wealth. According to Bishop Nestor Nongo-Aziagba of Bossangoa, president of CAR’s bishops’ conference, 80% of the country is currently under rebel control.⁷⁵ In the anti-Balaka-held regions in the south-west of the country, most religious groups, including Christians, are generally free to worship and express their faith in public and in private, but those Muslims who remain in these areas face far more restrictions.⁷⁶ Anti-Balaka groups have also targeted Christian religious leaders who advocate for Muslims, attacking those involved in peacebuilding and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians.⁷⁷ The Church is positioned precariously between the two groups, with the anti-Balakas seeing the Church as traitorous for protecting Muslims while the “Séléka see the Church as complicit with the anti-Balakas.”⁷⁸

Crucially, in spite of the positive work of Christian and Muslim leaders through the ‘Plateforme des Confessions Religieuses de Centrafrique’⁷⁹, CAR experienced a deterioration in FoRB in late 2018 and early 2019.⁸⁰ Significant waves of violence in late 2018 stoked fears of an ‘all-out war’.⁸¹ On 15 November 2018, a group of ex-Séléka fighters calling themselves Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC)⁸² attacked, burned, and ransacked a camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) located in the grounds of the Catholic Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Alindao. It has been reported that 112 people – including two priests—were killed in the massacre with 18,000 civilians displaced.⁸³ On 4

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *WWR Country Dossier: Central Africa Republic*, Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit, January 2019, page 8, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Central-African-Republic-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁷⁵ John Newton, *Crisis in the Central African Republic*, Aid to the Church in Need, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *Central African Republic (CAR): Stakeholder submission to the universal periodic review*, CSW Website, 5 April 2018, page 1, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/04/05/report/3901/article.htm>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ O Flaherty, Murcadha., *CAR: UN troops ignoring warnings that Muslim IDPs could be slaughtered*, Aid to the Church in Need Website, 30 January 2018, <https://acnuk.org/news/car-un-troops-ignoring-warnings-that-muslim-idps-could-be-slaughtered/>

⁷⁹ The ‘Plateforme des Confessions Religieuses de Centrafrique’ was created to contain and then reconcile the deeply divisive religious and civil forces tearing at the CAR.

⁸⁰ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 28, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁸¹ Ratcliffe, Rebecca., *‘Killing, abuse, sexual violence beyond belief’: fears grow of all-out war in CAR*, The Guardian Website, 16 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/nov/16/killing-abuse-sexual-violence-beyond-belief-fears-grow-of-all-out-war-in-central-african-republic>

⁸² A Séléka off-shoot that are a militia of mainly Muslim and Fulani fighters.

⁸³ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 28, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

December, another IDP camp run by the Catholic church in Ippy was attacked by the UPC, resulting in the deaths of two children.⁸⁴ According to the UN, by the end of 2018 there were 640,969 IDPs.⁸⁵

Anti-Balaka groups engaged in severe violence throughout 2018. Most notably, CAR officials transferred anti-Balaka militia leader, Alfred Yekatom, over to the International Criminal Court in November 2018 after a UN commission of inquiry found that anti-Balaka groups under his guidance had ‘carried out war crimes and crimes against humanity by targeting Muslims’.⁸⁶

In response to the escalating violence in CAR, a new peace deal was agreed between the government and the 14 armed group leaders in February 2019 – the eighth agreement in two years.⁸⁷ The deal included a commitment to religious freedom and human rights, giving rise to a new optimism surrounding the future of FoRB in CAR.⁸⁸ However, despite this initial optimism, the peace deal has faltered and violence resurfaced in May and June of 2019 – with the UN reporting in June that between 50 and 70 violations of the peace accord were taking place every week.⁸⁹ For instance, on 21 May, gunmen from the ex-Séléka group ‘Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation’ (3R) attacked and shot an estimated 39 civilians in Ndjondjom, Koundjili and Bohong village, in the north-west of CAR – with some 12,000 people displaced from their homes.⁹⁰ The day before this attack, a 77-year-old Spanish nun was found beheaded in the village of Nola.⁹¹ This renewed violence has magnified prior disagreements over representation in the CAR cabinet, and the peace agreement has once more come under significant strain.⁹²

⁸⁴ CAR: Up to 100 civilians shot and burnt alive as UN peacekeepers leave posts in Alindao, Amnesty International Website, 14 December 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/car-up-to-100-civilians-shot-and-burnt-alive-as-peacekeepers-leave-posts-in-alindao/>

⁸⁵ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 28, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁸⁶ Sterling, Toby., and van den Berg, Stephanie., *Central African war crimes suspect ‘Rambo’ handed to global court*, Reuters World News Website, 17 November 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-war-crimes-central-african-republic/central-african-war-crimes-suspect-rambo-handed-to-global-court-idUSKCN1NM0M4>

⁸⁷ Africa/Central Africa - "An agreement imposed from outside on behalf of rebel groups, who are often foreigners" says a Bishop, Agenzia Fides Website, 15 February 2019, http://www.fides.org/en/news/65568-AFRICA_CENTRAL_AFRICA_An_agreement_imposed_from_outside_on_behalf_of_rebel_groups_who_are_of_en_foreigners_says_a_Bishophttp://

⁸⁸ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 28, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁸⁹ *Despite peace deal, Central African Republic’s population faces daily acts of violence, UN envoy warns*, UN News Website, 20 June 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040961>

⁹⁰ See: *Armed group kills 34 in Central African Republic*, Reuters World News Website, 22 May 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-security/armed-group-kills-34-civilians-in-central-african-republic-idUSKCN1SS2HN>; *Despite peace deal, Central African Republic’s population faces daily acts of violence, UN envoy warns*, UN News Website, 20 June 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1040961>

⁹¹ Vatican Media, *Central African Republic: Spanish nun killed*, Independent Catholic News Website, 22 May 2019, <https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/37150>

⁹² *Armed group kills 34 in Central African Republic*, Reuters World News Website, 22 May 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-centralafrica-security/armed-group-kills-34-civilians-in-central-african-republic-idUSKCN1SS2HN>

China

Over 52% of China's population identify as having no religion, with those practicing folk religion and Buddhism making up approximately 22% and 18% of China's population respectively. Christians make up 5% of the population with Muslims representing 2% of the population. There are also a small number of Hindus, Jews and Taoists resident in China.⁹³

Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution protects all 'normal' religious activities within the five officially recognised religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, in order to secure official legal status, these religious groups must also register with state-sanctioned 'patriotic' associations – such as the 'Three Self Patriotic Movement' or the 'Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association'. These associations experience high levels of state control.⁹⁵ Many religious groups remain unregistered with the state.

The most obvious area of deterioration for FoRB in the reporting period has been in relation to the treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang province.⁹⁶ The Chinese government has accelerated its process of detaining and 're-educating' the community in so-called 'vocational camps'.⁹⁷ As of March 2019, it was estimated that 1.5 million Uighurs and other Muslims had been detained in total.⁹⁸ The Australian Strategic Policy Institute reported in November 2018 that the size of the 28 camps in Xinjiang that they monitor had grown by 465%.⁹⁹

Ethnic Uighurs, predominantly of the Muslim faith, are commonly detained with no explanation or judicial process.¹⁰⁰ Simple expressions of faith¹⁰¹ are punished and detainees are forced to denounce Islam and pledge allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹⁰² The children of those who have been detained are frequently enrolled into high-security boarding schools¹⁰³ which ban the use

⁹³ Dorjee, Tenzin, et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 35,

<https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁹⁴ *People's Republic of China: Stakeholder submission to the Universal Periodic Review, 31st session submitted by CSW*, CSW website, April 2018, page 1, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/04/06/report/3902/article.htm>

⁹⁵ *Religious Freedom Report: China*, Aid to the Church in Need Website, June 2018, <https://religious-freedom-report.org/report/?report=177>

⁹⁶ Kuo, Lily., 'If you enter a camp, you never come out': inside China's war on Islam, The Guardian Website, 11 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/11/if-you-enter-a-camp-you-never-come-out-inside-chinas-war-on-islam>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Reuters, *Xinjiang crackdown must continue, top China leader says*, The Guardian Website, 26 March 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/26/xinjiang-crackdown-must-continue-top-china-leader-says>

⁹⁹ *Mapping Xinjiang's 're-education' camps*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute Website, 1 November 2019, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/mapping-xinjiangs-re-education-camps>

¹⁰⁰ *China denies Muslim separation campaign in Xinjiang*, BBC News Website, 7th July 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-48899475>

¹⁰¹ *The extraordinary ways in which China humiliates Muslims*, The Economist Website, 4 May 2017, <https://www.economist.com/china/2017/05/04/the-extraordinary-ways-in-which-china-humiliates-muslims>

¹⁰² Lais, Hasnet., *China's brutal crackdown on Uighurs shows no sign of slowing down – so why aren't Muslim leaders stepping in?*, Independent Website, 6 January 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/china-muslims-camps-uighur-human-rights-religion-islam-religious-leaders-a8713961.html>

¹⁰³ Zenz, Adrian., *Break Their Roots: Evidence for China's Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang*, The Journal of Political Risk, 4 July 2019, <http://www.jpolarisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/>

of the traditional Uighur language and cut off children from their ethnic roots.¹⁰⁴ In one township, more than 400 children had lost both parents to some form of internment – in camps or prison – as of July 2019.¹⁰⁵ The government’s crackdown on religious minorities in Xinjiang has been characterized as a “systematic campaign of social re-engineering and cultural genocide”.¹⁰⁶

Hui Muslims have also faced increased restrictions. Three mosques in Yunnan Province were closed for conducting “illegal religious education”, with police physically attacking any protesting worshippers.¹⁰⁷ Later, in April 2019, the dome, star and crescent were removed from the roof of a mosque for women on Motianyuan Road in Baoji city in Shannxi, as was the case for Beiguan Mosque in Xi’an.¹⁰⁸

Christianity has experienced increasing oppression in the reporting period, predominantly under the framework of the document entitled, “Principle for promoting the Chinese Christianity in China for the Next Five Years (2018-2022)”.¹⁰⁹ From April 2018, churches have faced the removal of crosses, Bibles and other religious items¹¹⁰. Furthermore, it has even been reported that a government-approved Three-Self Church was forced to remove the first of the Ten Commandments after an inspection by local authorities in November 2018.¹¹¹ Churches and their leaders have also faced physical detainment. More than 5,000 Christians and 1,000 church leaders were arrested in 2018 because of their religious practices.¹¹² This included Past Wang Yi who was arrested along with more than 100 of his congregants at Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province. He was charged with inciting “subversion of state power” in December 2018.¹¹³ Four underground congregations have also been shut down by the CCP since September 2018, including the Shouwang

¹⁰⁴ Withnall, Adam., ‘Cultural genocide’: China separating thousands of Muslim children from parents for ‘thought education’, The Independent Website, 5 July 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-muslim-children-ughur-family-separation-thought-education-a8989296.html>

¹⁰⁵ Sudworth, J., *China Muslims: Xinjiang schools used to separate children from families*, BBC News Website, 4 July 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-48825090>

¹⁰⁶ Zenz, A., *Break Their Roots: Evidence for China’s Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang*, The Journal of Political Risk, 4 July 2019, <http://www.jpolarisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/>

¹⁰⁷ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 37, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Xiagu, Ma., *Campaign to Deface Mosques in Western China Heightens Hui Muslims’ Anxiety*, Bitter Winter Website, 8 July 2019, <https://bitterwinter.org/campaign-to-deface-mosques-in-western-china/>

¹⁰⁹ *439 Chinese Christian Leaders—and Counting—Sign Joint Statement Affirming Religious Freedom*, The St. Charles Institute Website, 5 September 2018, <http://www.stcharlesinstitute.org/voices/2018/9/4/198-chinese-christian-leadersand-countingsign-public-joint-statement>

¹¹⁰ *Church crackdown intensifies in China’s Henan province*, UCA News Website, 20 April 2018, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/church-crackdown-intensifies-in-chinas-henan-province/82111>

¹¹¹ Tao, Jiang., *In China, Moses Delivers Only Nine Commandments*, Bitter Winter Website, 28 December 2018 <https://bitterwinter.org/moses-delivers-only-nine-commandments/>

¹¹² Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 39, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

¹¹³ *China: Repression of Christian Church Intensifies*, Human Rights Watch Website, 13 December 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/13/china-repression-christian-church-intensifies>

Church in Beijing which was formally banned on 23 March 2019.¹¹⁴ The Chinese government has also arrested many members of ‘xie jiao’ groups, which refer to religious or spiritual movements that the Government has designated as ‘cults’, such as practitioners of Falun Gong.¹¹⁵

The intense harassment of those practising Falun Gong continued during the reporting period. Two attorneys had their law licenses suspended for six months in Hunan Province in November 2018 for defending Falun Gong practitioners.¹¹⁶ Human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang was also sentenced to four years in prison in January 2019 for his defence of political activists and members of the Falun Gong group.¹¹⁷ The systematic persecution of the group was also highlighted during the reporting period by the London-based Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting in China. On 17 June 2019, the Tribunal found, unanimously, and beyond any reasonable doubt, that the Chinese Government has been complicit in the forced and deadly organ harvesting of individuals of the Falun Gong group.¹¹⁸

Buddhists have also experienced continued harassment, with Tibetan Buddhists continuing to face regular service disruptions, intrusive monitoring, and property confiscation.¹¹⁹ The Chinese authorities have also exerted increased control over monastic education, limiting access to Tibetan religion, language and culture.¹²⁰ May and June 2019 saw another wave of monks and nuns forced from Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Centre in western China’s Sichuan province,¹²¹ as part of a strategy to control the influence and growth of Tibetan Buddhist study and practice.¹²²

¹¹⁴ Lowry, Linda., *Fourth Large House Church in China Shut Down, Banned*, Open Doors USA Website, 28 March 2019, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/fourth-large-house-church-in-china-shut-down-banned/>

¹¹⁵ A word used by the Chinese authorities which is translated as ‘cult’ in English. See: Introvigne, Massimo., *If Your Religion is a Xie Jiao, You Go to Jail – But What Is A Xie Jiao?*, Bitter Winter Website, 9 August 2018, <https://bitterwinter.org/what-is-a-xie-jiao/>

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Kuo, Lily., *Wang Quanzhang: China sentences human rights lawyer to four years in prison*, The Guardian Website, 28 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/28/wang-quanzhang-china-sentences-human-rights-lawyer-to-four-years-in-prison>

¹¹⁸ Forrest, Adam., *China harvesting organs from Falun Gong detainees, tribunal claims*, The Independent Website, 17 June 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-organ-harvesting-prisoners-falun-gong-deaths-tribunal-a8962661.html>

¹¹⁹ *“Illegal Organisations”: China’s Crackdown on Tibetan Social Groups*, Human Rights Watch Website, 30 July 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/30/illegal-organizations/chinas-crackdown-tibetan-social-groups>

¹²⁰ Kuo, Lily., *Activist sentenced to five years in prison for promoting Tibetan language*, The Guardian Website, 22 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/22/activist-sentenced-to-five-years-in-prison-for-promoting-tibetan-language>

¹²¹ *China Resumes Expulsion From Sichuan’s Yachen Gar Buddhist Centre*, Radio Free Asia Website, 7 June 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/expulsions-06072019144934.html>

¹²² *Ibid.*

Colombia

The main religion in Colombia is Christianity, with 79% of the population professing Catholicism and a further 14% estimated to be Protestants. Approximately 5% of the population do not specify that they have a religion.¹²³ Indigenous religions and Afro-Colombian religions are also present in Colombia.¹²⁴

Particular conflict zones throughout the country are the background to the majority of FoRB violations in Colombia with illegal armed groups exercising significant autonomy to the detriment of the Christian population.¹²⁵ Substantial numbers of Colombian church leaders face the persistent threat of assassination,¹²⁶ with the Bogotá mayor's office reporting in 2018 that as many as 12.6% of all religious leaders in the area had received death threats. In addition, 4.1% had faced extortion and 3.9% had been threatened with kidnapping. Targeted leaders are usually those who challenge the presence of organised crime and illegal activities or those helping victims of the internal armed conflict.¹²⁷ Families of religious leaders are often targeted as a means of coercing acts of compliance. On 9 February 2019, it was reported that Pastor Leider Molina was killed as he left his church in the Cauca region in the northwest of the country.¹²⁸

Armed groups have perceived the conversion of young Christian girls, through forced marriages, as a way of stemming the influence and reach of Christianity in indigenous communities.¹²⁹ Once married to indigenous members, the girls must renounce their faith. In addition, they must obey the will and ruling of their husbands, being simultaneously prevented from communicating with Christian family members.¹³⁰ Rejection of such arrangements can often result in displacement, abuse and isolation. It was reported in April 2019 that a 17-year-old girl was exiled to the mountains for refusing to denounce her faith under pressure from local authorities.¹³¹

In some areas, freedom of assembly has been prohibited or severely restricted. In others, strict curfews have been put in place.¹³² Roadblocks restrict freedom of movement for church members who are subject to a persistent policy of stop-and-search, even if they are known members of the community.¹³³ Church leaders are forced by armed groups to give refuge to guerrillas in their homes,

¹²³ *The World Factbook: Colombia*, Central Intelligence Agency Website, 3 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>

¹²⁴ *Colombia*, Minority Rights Group International: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2019, <https://minorityrights.org/country/colombia/>

¹²⁵ *World Watch List: Colombia*, Open Doors Website, 2019 <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/colombia/>

¹²⁶ Zaimov, Stoyan., *Colombia: Pastors facing death threats, assassination attempts by extortionists, kidnappers*, The Christian Post Website, 5 December 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/colombia-pastors-facing-death-threats-assassination-attempts-on-the-rise.html>

¹²⁷ *Colombia: Visit Report*, CSW Website, 27 November 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/11/27/report/4164/article.htm>

¹²⁸ *Another Colombian pastor killed, leaving the church 'terrified'*, World Watch Monitor Website, 14 February 2019, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/02/another-colombian-pastor-killed-leaving-the-church-terrified/>

¹²⁹ Dimaculangan, Joyce., *Christian Girls in Colombia Forced into Marriage*, 1 Christian Voice Website, 14 April 2019, <https://onechristianvoice.com/christian-girls-in-colombia-forced-into-marriage/>

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² *Colombia: Visit Report*, CSW Website, 27 November 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/11/27/report/4164/article.htm>

¹³³ Ibid.

allowing them to reside, sleep and be fed. In the event of government inspections, church leaders must lie and protect the guerrillas – allowing them to pose as family members.¹³⁴ Church leaders and their families face extreme violence, such as kidnapping or assassination, if they fail to protect the residing guerrillas. They must then choose between compromising on their beliefs and losing their standing, or even their lives.¹³⁵ In extreme cases, such as in parts of Córdoba in the north of the country, church leaders have reported collusion between the armed groups and the police. In such instances, local church leaders have been unable to relay criminal activities or human rights violations to the authorities in fear of the information being passed on to the armed groups.¹³⁶

While there has been a decline in the number of murders in certain areas of Colombia in 2018, this is often due to a diversifying of strategy (i.e. an adoption of economic suffocation rather than physical targeting) rather than greater stability.¹³⁷ Some armed groups have introduced the tactic of forcibly co-opting church funding by extorting churches and their leaders,¹³⁸ rather than using violence.

Indigenous rights and the international right to freedom of religion or belief regularly intersect and can conflict with each other. Local indigenous leaders who oppose Christianity and other non-traditional religions on the grounds that they threaten their communities' identity and culture¹³⁹ also target individuals of an indigenous background who choose to convert to Christianity. Converts typically face forcible displacement and the removal of certain indigenous benefits.¹⁴⁰ In some instances, communities have even attempted to reconvert Christian believers back to traditional beliefs, punishing those who refuse to do so.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ *Colombia: Visit Report*, CSW Website, 27 November 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/11/27/report/4164/article.htm>

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *Colombia Fact Sheet*, Open Doors: World Watch List, 2018, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/World-Watch-Fact-Sheets-2018-49.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ *Colombia: Visit Report*, CSW Website, 27 November 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/11/27/report/4164/article.htm>

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

The closed nature of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) means that it is difficult to obtain and confirm estimates of the religious demography. Nevertheless, despite being officially an atheist country, it is estimated that more than 1% of the DPRK population are Christian, roughly equating to as many as 400,000 people.¹⁴² The country is also home to adherents of Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism and a local religious movement known as Chondoism.¹⁴³

The DPRK remains the world's most brutally repressive state, exhibiting a disregard for human rights standards unparalleled in the contemporary world.¹⁴⁴ The country is heavily isolationist and totalitarian in nature. The system is predicated on the notion that the Party leader is the supreme authority. Subsequently, any religious practice that undermines this authority is perceived as a significant threat to the perpetuation of the regime. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, is suffocated to the point of silence and invisibility, with any attempt to exercise independent thought and belief met with unprecedented state retaliation. In demanding that all citizens must participate in an all-pervading idol-worship of Kim Jong-Un, the state forces many believers to abandon their religious doctrines or lose their lives.¹⁴⁵

The DPRK's class system of "Songbun", based on citizens' political, economic and social background, places Christians in the lowest of three groupings: the hostile class.¹⁴⁶ They are categorised with spies and political dissidents and face persistent and extreme persecution. The DPRK regime is incredibly wary of foreign infiltration and religion is seen as the prime medium through which such a destabilizing influence might be dispersed. Christianity is particularly associated with the western world, particularly the USA. Through such a lens, the religion is identified as a national security threat capable of disrupting the state's social order.¹⁴⁷ While there is evidence of a handful of state-run religious institutions, it is apparent that these fulfil merely illusory and propaganda purposes.¹⁴⁸

In recent years, increased technological surveillance has functioned hand in hand with the community monitoring program of 'inminban'. Under this program, trusted appointees conduct

¹⁴² *World Watch List: North Korea*, Open Doors, 2019,

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/north-korea/>

¹⁴³ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 67,

<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, 7 February 2014, A/HRC/25/CRP.1, page 15,

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/530314234.html>

¹⁴⁵ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 67,

<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ World Watch Research Unit, *North Korea: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, page 6,

<https://www.opendoors.org.za/app/uploads/2019/01/North-Korea-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

¹⁴⁷ *Total Denial: North Korea Report 2019*, CSW Website, 22 September 2016, pp. 6-7,

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2016/09/22/report/3263/article.htm>

¹⁴⁸ World Watch Research Unit, *North Korea: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, page

10, <https://www.opendoors.org.za/app/uploads/2019/01/North-Korea-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

unannounced inspections, monitor household budgets and report suspicious activities of local inhabitants.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, all forms of religion have been driven almost totally underground.

As a direct influence of this surveillance, it is estimated that there are currently between 80,000 and 120,000 political prisoners in the DPRK, many of whom are imprisoned on the basis of their faith. As many as 50,000 of these prisoners are Christians.¹⁵⁰ Religious prisoners typically reside in harsh labour camps undergoing “unspeakable atrocities” including torture, rape, starvation, forced abortion and extra-judicial killing.¹⁵¹ Christians have also been hung on crosses over fire, crushed under a steamroller and herded off bridges.¹⁵²

Persistent intrusion, and the potential for severe brutality and torture, has led many DPRK believers and non-believers to flee into neighbouring China. In North Korea, defecting is a criminal offence and the possible punishments are extensive. Despite this, China has continually ignored the international principle of refoulement, cooperating with the DPRK regime to arrest and repatriate those refugees who had previously fled the regime. On their return, Christians and converts are vigorously questioned and prosecuted, where any apparent connection with missionaries in China warrants consequences of extreme severity.¹⁵³ More recently, both DPRK and China have intensified their efforts to prevent defectors. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of Christians who are able to successfully defect from the country in the hope of escaping the regime’s religious persecution.¹⁵⁴

While reporting of violations against other religions or beliefs in the DPRK is rarely forthcoming, it is fair to assume that any other practise beyond Christianity would also be egregiously suppressed. For instance, some reporting has emerged that the DPRK authorities are threatening Chinese trade workers who are allegedly spreading Falun Gong practices with harsh punishment, as Pyongyang has reportedly seen a sharp increase in Falun Gong practices.¹⁵⁵ This trend is yet to be widely verified.

¹⁴⁹ Wussow, Travis., *What it’s like to follow Jesus in North Korea*, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 11 July 2019, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-its-like-to-follow-jesus-in-north-korea>

¹⁵⁰ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 68, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

¹⁵¹ *Total Denial: North Korea report 2016*, CSW Website, 22 September 2016, pp. 3; 16, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2016/09/22/report/3263/article.htm>

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ World Watch Research Unit, *North Korea: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, page 18, <https://www.opendoors.org.za/app/uploads/2019/01/North-Korea-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Whyong, Eugene., *North Korea Begins Crackdown on Falun Gong*, Radio Free Asia, 17 May 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/nk-falun-gong-05172019164536.html>

Egypt

Approximately 90% of the Egyptian population is Sunni, with a large proportion of these following Sufism.¹⁵⁶ Salafi Muslims number approximately 6 million, with Ahmadis, Shi'ites and Mu'tazilis making up the remaining number of the Muslim population. Coptic Christians (c.8-9%) are the bulk of the non-Muslim population, along with other Christian denominations (1%),¹⁵⁷ Baha'is (0.003%), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.002%) and Jews and other groups.¹⁵⁸

There remains a high level of societal hostility towards different religious groups. Mobs regularly attack churches; Shia Muslims experience active discrimination¹⁵⁹ and Copts have been harassed for drinking water during Ramadan fasting hours.¹⁶⁰

Egypt has long been divided along sectarian lines, with short-lived Muslim Brotherhood rule and the influence of Daesh¹⁶¹ exacerbating tensions. President Sisi has spoken about the need for greater tolerance and has taken some symbolic action, including becoming the first Egyptian leader to attend a Christmas Eve Mass.¹⁶² However, the government is largely unable to protect Christian places of worship from bomb attacks or Christians themselves from kidnap and extortion.¹⁶³

In 2018, Coptic Christians were attacked multiple times and in several places during the Muslim celebration of Eid al-Adha. A week earlier, a suicide attack on a Coptic church in north Cairo was thwarted.¹⁶⁴ In November 2018, three buses carrying Christian pilgrims on their way to a remote desert monastery south of Cairo were ambushed, killing seven people and wounding 19 with the local Daesh affiliate claiming responsibility.¹⁶⁵ While in this case police killed 19 terrorist suspects,¹⁶⁶ in general the authorities have failed to prosecute those who attack Christians and have instead

¹⁵⁶ *The World Factbook: Egypt*, Central Intelligence Agency, 21 August 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>

¹⁵⁷ Delhaye, G., 'Contemporary Muslim-Christian Relations in Egypt: Local Dynamics and Foreign Influences', in Longva, Anh Nga; Roald, Anne (eds.), *Religious Minorities in the Middle East: Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p.71.

¹⁵⁸ Mark, D., et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2018, page 155, http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_EGYPT.pdf

¹⁵⁹ *Egypt: Shi'a of Egypt*, Minority Rights Group International, October 2017, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/shia-of-egypt/>

¹⁶⁰ *Coptic Christians harassed for drinking water during Ramadan fasting hours*, World Watch Monitor, 13 June 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/06/coptic-christians-harassed-for-drinking-water-during-ramadan-fasting-hours/>

¹⁶¹ *ISIS 'the greatest preacher for Christianity in the world'*, World Watch Monitor, 21 November 2017, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/isis-the-greatest-preacher-for-christianity-in-the-world/>

¹⁶² Mark, D., et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2018, page 154, http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_EGYPT.pdf

¹⁶³ Lipka, M., *Religious restrictions vary significantly in the world's most populous countries*, Pew Research Centre, 13 April 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/13/religious-restrictions-vary-significantly-in-the-worlds-most-populous-countries/>

¹⁶⁴ One News Now, *Christians Pay the Cost During Islamic Holiday*, 30 August 2018, <https://onenewsnow.com/persecution/2018/08/30/christians-pay-the-cost-during-islamic-holiday>

¹⁶⁵ Associated Press, *Egypt attack: Gunmen kill seven Coptic Christians in bus ambush*, The Guardian, 3 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/03/egypt-attack-gunmen-kill-coptic-christians-bus-ambush> and Mark, D., et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2018, page 7, http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_EGYPT.pdf

¹⁶⁶ BBC News, *Coptic Christian attack: Egypt police 'kill 19 attackers'*, 4 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-46090104>

enforced state-sponsored reconciliation agreements which provide impunity for the perpetrators and leave Christians vulnerable to future attacks.¹⁶⁷

It remains difficult to open places of worship for recognised faiths, though the Egyptian government has prioritised the reconstruction of several significant non-Muslim places of worship. In October 2018, it was reported that only 340 out of 3,730 applications for legal status and building permits for unlicensed churches had been granted under the 2016 Church Construction Law, which was meant to provide an avenue for Christians to legally build and renovate churches.¹⁶⁸ Many unregistered churches have waited around 15-20 years to be registered by the state. In the meantime, they remain vulnerable to being shut down or attacked. For instance, the church in Ezbet Sultan Pasha village, Minya, faced mob attacks with police complicity when seeking legalisation in July 2018.¹⁶⁹

In January 2018, the Head of the Egyptian Parliament's Committee on Religion put forward legislation to outlaw atheism. This was debated in Parliament and considered by the President.¹⁷⁰ This highlights the environment that those with no religious beliefs experience in Egypt. It is illegal to register as humanist, atheist or as a secularist and those who have attempted to do so have faced harassment from the authorities.¹⁷¹

Blasphemy cases are increasing in Egypt.¹⁷² Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Penal code criminalises contempt of religion, thereby acting as a blasphemy law. In December 2017 a 29 year-old man was accused of 'contempt of religion' for running a Facebook page called 'Atheism'.¹⁷³ In July 2018, a mob attacked several Coptic Christian homes in Minbal village, Minya, following the publication of a Facebook post deemed offensive to Islam.¹⁷⁴ Atheists and adherents of non-recognised religions are barred from registering their chosen belief on ID cards.¹⁷⁵ Thanks to a 2008 court ruling, official recognition of conversion from Islam is impossible, and those who do so in practice face significant social and governmental hostilities.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁷ *Egypt: Government must protect Coptic Christians targeted in string of deadly attacks in North Sinai*, Amnesty International, 1 March 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/egypt-government-must-protect-coptic-christians-targeted-in-string-of-deadly-attacks-in-north-sinai/>

¹⁶⁸ Smith, S., *Over 3,000 Egyptian Churches Still Waiting for Licenses 2 Years After Landmark Law*, The Christian Post, 5 November 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-3000-egyptian-churches-still-waiting-licenses-2-years-after-landmark-law-228357/>

¹⁶⁹ *Egypt: Mob attacks prevent Coptic church's recognition for 'security' reasons*, World Watch Monitor, 31 August 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/08/egypt-mob-attacks-prevent-coptic-churchs-recognition-for-security-reasons/>

¹⁷⁰ *Egyptian parliament considers outlawing atheism*, Religion News Service, 4 January 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/01/04/egyptian-parliament-considers-outlawing-atheism/>

¹⁷¹ 'Egypt' in *Freedom of Thought Report 2018*, Humanists International, 2018, <https://freethoughtreport.com/countries/africa-northern-africa/egypt/>

¹⁷² Mark, D., et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2018, page 154, http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_EGYPT.pdf

¹⁷³ *Humanists denounce proposed law to criminalize atheism in Egypt*, Humanists International, 24 January 2018, <http://iheu.org/humanists-denounce-proposed-law-criminalize-atheism-egypt/>

¹⁷⁴ *Coptic Community Attacked Following Facebook post*, CSW, 17 July 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/07/17/press/4045/article.htm>

¹⁷⁵ 'Egypt' in *Freedom of Thought Report 2018*, Humanists International, 2018, page 144, <https://freethoughtreport.com/countries/africa-northern-africa/egypt/>

¹⁷⁶ *Egypt: World Watch List*, Open Doors UK, 2018, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/World-Watch-Fact-Sheets-2018-17.pdf>

Eritrea

Eritrea has a population of approximately 6 million people, split roughly evenly between Muslims and Christians.¹⁷⁷ The one-party political system is dominated by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), led by President Isais Afwerky. No other political parties are allowed and the government violently suppresses dissent and human rights.¹⁷⁸

The government refuses to recognise all but four religious groups – the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea.¹⁷⁹ FoRB is severely limited for any outside of these faith communities and even they experience harassment.¹⁸⁰

Members of approved religions are regularly arrested for protesting government interference in their activities. Hajji Ibrahim Younus was arrested in October 2017, along with dozens of others, for opposing Government interference in the operation of the Al Diaa Islamic School.¹⁸¹ On 30 January 2019, he died in Mai Serwa prison. Said Mohamed Ali, also arrested for the same reason, died on 13th June 2019, due to lack of medical care and harsh prison conditions.¹⁸² In June 2019, twenty health centres and hospitals that were run by the Catholic church were shut, by direct order of the Eritrean government.¹⁸³

The government also interferes with the leadership of approved religions, appointing individuals to specific positions and closely monitoring their actions: it appointed the Mufti of the Eritrean Muslim community and the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea.¹⁸⁴ The former Patriarch, Abune Antonios, has been under house arrest for the past 14 years for refusing to cooperate with the government. He was replaced as leader of the church by a government selection and the church, in July, announced the excommunication of Antonios for heresy. The Patriarch defended his innocence in several leaked audio and video interviews.¹⁸⁵

In June 2019, five Orthodox monks were arrested from Debre Bizen monastery, and they are still in prison. The reason for their arrest is believed to be for supporting Abune Anotonios and demanding that the church be independent from the interference of the Eritrean government.¹⁸⁶ An unknown

¹⁷⁷ *The World Factbook: Eritrea*, Central Intelligence Agency, 1 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html>

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Eritrea: Events of 2018*, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/eritrea>

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Tenzin Doorje et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2019, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_ERITREA_2019.pdf

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Concern Eritrea, *Eritrea: Hajji Ibrahim Younus dies in Custody*, 6 February 2019, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/eritrea-hajji-ibrahim-younus-dies-in-custody/>

¹⁸² Human Rights Concern Eritrea, *Ongoing Human Rights Violations in Eritrea*, 28 June 2019, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/ongoing-human-rights-violations-in-eritrea>

¹⁸³ Flynn, Bethann, *Crackdown against Christians in Eritrea continues*, Mission Network News, 14 June 2019, <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/crackdown-against-christians-in-eritrea-continues/>; and Becket, Adam., *Fears of crackdown on Christians in Eritrea*, Church Times, 5 July 2019,

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/5-july/news/world/fears-of-crackdown-on-christians-in-eritrea>

¹⁸⁴ Tenzin Doorje et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2019, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_ERITREA_2019.pdf

¹⁸⁵ *Eritrea Orthodox Church ex-leader expelled for 'heresy'*, BBC News, 19 July 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49043953>

¹⁸⁶ CSW, *Concern at seizure of Catholic properties and arrests of Orthodox Priests*, 19 June 2019, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/06/19/press/4371/article.htm>

number of Muslims and Christians remain in detention for protesting the government appropriation of their institutions.¹⁸⁷

The government also continues to routinely arrest people for simply exercising their right to FoRB. In January 2019, fifteen Christians were arrested while meeting in a private house in Setanta Otto district, Asmara. Six were released within a week of their arrest; all of them were women with children. The rest were also released after two weeks.¹⁸⁸

On 10 May, 141 people were arrested while meeting in a housing courtyard in Mai Temenay district Asmara. Out of these, 104 were women, 23 were men and 14 were children. Half of the prisoners were released within the first two weeks; the rest are still in prison. A week later, 17 May, 30 Christians were arrested from Godaif district in Asmara.¹⁸⁹ Eighteen of them were released after two weeks; again, the rest are still in prison.¹⁹⁰

On 22 June, 60 people from the Methodist church in the town of Keren were arrested. They were taken to a place called Hashkeray in the Keren region and all are still in prison.¹⁹¹ In this group are women with children, the elderly and one pregnant woman.¹⁹² The following week the Eritrean security forces continued to arrest Christians from Keren who belonged to different Evangelical churches.¹⁹³

On Saturday 17 August, Eritrean security raided a home church in Godaif district, Asmara, and arrested 80 Christians.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁷ Tenzin Doorje et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2019, https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_ERITREA_2019.pdf

¹⁸⁸ Habte, Asmara, personal conversation with one of Eritrean Christians, Jan 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Smith, Samuel., *Over 30 Pentecostal Christians arrested in Eritrea as crackdown continues*: report, Christian Post, 6 June 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-30-pentecostal-christians-arrested-in-eritrea-as-crackdown-continues-report.html>; and Flynn, Bethann., *Crackdown against Christians in Eritrea continues*, Mission Network News, 14 June 2019, <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/crackdown-against-christians-in-eritrea-continues/>

¹⁹⁰ Habte, Asmara, personal correspondence with one of the Eritrean Christians, May 2019

¹⁹¹ *Crackdown on Christians in Eritrea continues with pregnant women, children arrested in church raid*, Barnabas Fund, 28 June 2019, <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/crackdown-on-christians-in-eritrea-continues-with-pregnant-women-children-arrested-in-church>

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Habte, Personal telephone conversation with an Eritrean Christian, July 2019.

¹⁹⁴ Habte, Telephone conversation with an Eritrean Christian, 22 August 2019

India

FoRB has come heavily under attack in India in recent years. With the rise of Hindutva¹⁹⁵ (Ultra-Hindu Nationalism) and extremist narratives, incidents of violence, and particularly mob violence, against religious minorities have grown worse. It has affected non-Hindus, Dalits and Adivasi particularly badly. Hindutva espouses the idea that ‘if you are not Hindu, you are not Indian’.¹⁹⁶

The narrative of Hindutva is publicly promoted by Hindu extremists and some government representatives, leading to Indian Christians and Muslims being labelled ‘foreigners’ and making them vulnerable to attack by these extremists.¹⁹⁷ Though religious discrimination has existed for years in India, hatred against Christians, Hindu Dalits and Muslim minorities has increased recently. In Gujarat, the residents of a colony were asked not to sell properties to Dalits and Muslims.¹⁹⁸ In another incident, in Tamil Nadu, Dalits were not allowed to bury their dead in the same area as Brahmins (upper-caste Hindus).¹⁹⁹

More worryingly, Indian society is witnessing a new dangerous trend of mob violence by right-wing Hindutva nationalists who target anyone they disagree with, not just Muslims or Christians. As Human Rights Watch South Asia director Meenakshi Ganguly puts it, “[the] culture of mob violence” has grown.²⁰⁰

According to an audit of hate-crime incidents covered in the media by IndiaSpend, between 2009-2019, around 281 incidents were published in which, collectively, more than 100 people have been killed and 691 injured. 73% of these hate incidents were against Muslims and other minorities for reasons relating to ‘cow protection’, interfaith marriages and conversions.²⁰¹

During 2018, 477 hate incidents against Christians were recorded by the Indian NGO Persecution Relief.²⁰² Recording attacks against the faith, the New-Delhi base Alliance Defending Freedom noted 292 attacks on Christians in 2018, and 218 to the end of August 2019.²⁰³ This included murder²⁰⁴ and

¹⁹⁵ Blank, J., *How Hinduism Became a Political Weapon in India*, The Atlantic, 24 May 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/05/hindu-nationalism-narendra-modi-india-election/590053/>

¹⁹⁶ Lowry, L., *‘If you’re not Hindu, you’re not Indian’- The rising storm against Christians in India*, Open Doors USA, 12 August 2019, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/if-youre-not-hindu-youre-not-indian-the-rising-storm-against-christians-in-india/>

¹⁹⁷ Eliza Griswold, *The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India*, The New Yorker, 5 March 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-violent-toll-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>

¹⁹⁸ *Gujarat: Housing Society Asks Members Not to Sell Property to Dalits, Muslims*, The Wire, 31 August 2019, <https://thewire.in/rights/gujarat-housing-society-property-dalits-muslims>

¹⁹⁹ Marx, K., *Denied access to crematorium, Dalits ‘airdrop’ dead in Tamil Nadu*, The Times of India, 22 August 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/denied-access-to-crematorium-dalits-airdrop-dead-in-tamil-nadu/articleshow/70779016.cms>

²⁰⁰ Regan, H., Khan, O., and Gupta, S., *Modi says India’s minorities are living in world of imaginary fear. Muslims disagree*, Koam News Now, 30 May 2019, <https://www.koamnewsnow.com/news/world-news/modi-says-indias-minorities-are-living-in-world-of-imaginary-fear-muslims-disagree/1082102209>

²⁰¹ Basu, Soma., *Manufacturing Islamophobia on WhatsApp in India*, The Diplomat, 10 May 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/manufacturing-islamophobia-on-whatsapp-in-india/>

²⁰² Persecution Relief, Report 2018, p. 22.

²⁰³ “More Than 200 Cases of Violence Against Christians in India in 2019”, 2 October 2019, <https://zenit.org/articles/more-than-200-cases-of-violence-against-christians-in-india-in-2019/>

²⁰⁴ “Two Christians Killed in Separate States in India”, *Morning Star News*, 26 February 2019, <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/02/two-christians-killed-in-separate-states-in-india/>

sexual violence.²⁰⁵ According to one report, more than 100 churches were closed either because of attacks by extremists or because of state intervention.²⁰⁶

In 2019, the US Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) listed India as a Tier 2 Country of Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for “tolerating religious freedom violations.” It should be noted that the Indian government has refused to grant USCIRF access to India on several occasions²⁰⁷ and that hate incidents have risen significantly since the BJP government came to power.²⁰⁸ Many Indians believe that Prime Minister Modi has created an atmosphere of fear that has inspired and accelerated violence.²⁰⁹

During the second term of Modi’s presidency, there has also been a rise in incidents of communal violence. On 22 June 2019, a young Muslim man, 24-year-old Tabrez Ansari, was lynched by a violent Hindu mob who forced him to chant ‘Jai Shri Ram’ (Glory to Lord Ram).²¹⁰ The perpetrators made a video where Tabrez can be seen begging for life. This led to country-wide protests. Due to public pressure, police arrested 11 people who were later released. In another incident, a Hindu mob chanted ‘Jai Shri Ram’ and pushed a 26-year-old Muslim teacher out of a train.²¹¹ The same week, a 25-year-old Muslim cab driver was beaten by some men who asked him to chant ‘Jai Shri Ram’.²¹²

There have been 10 incidents of cow-related violence so far in 2019.²¹³ Lynching has continued to happen frequently in BJP governed states including Assam in April 2019, Bihar in July 2019 and Uttar Pradesh in May 2019.

Such violence is also suffered by other minority groups: Christians endured violence throughout 2019. On 3 February, a 40-strong mob attacked a church in Karkeli village, near Raipur, the state capital of Chhattisgarh. 15 worshippers were hospitalised after church members were beaten with sticks. This was part of a pattern of discrimination against the Christian community. Local Hindus have also refused to employ Christians who will not participate in Hindu rituals, cutting Christians villagers off from the water supply, and preventing them from burying their dead.²¹⁴ Some of the

²⁰⁵ Byarshadr Zargar, “5 female activists gang-raped at gunpoint, Indian police say”, CBS, 22 June 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/india-activists-gang-rape-gunpoint-sexual-attack-human-trafficking-jharkhand/>

²⁰⁶ Abbie Llewelyn, “Christianity Crackdown: Hindu extremists Attack Indian believers - 100 churches Shut Down”, Daily Express, 27 March 2019, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1105848/india-news-Christian-persecution-hindu-shut-church-violence-christianity-crackdown>

²⁰⁷ India: Tier 2, USCIRF, April 2019, page 1, https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_INDIA_2019.pdf

²⁰⁸ Annie Gowen and Manas Sharma, Rising Hate in India, The Washington Post, 31 October 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/world/reports-of-hate-crime-cases-have-spiked-in-india/>

²⁰⁹ Gettleman, Schultz, Raj and Kumar., *Under Modi, a Hindu nationalist Surge Has Further Divided India*, The New York Times, 11 April 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/asia/modi-india-elections.html>

²¹⁰ Krishnan, M., *Indian religious minorities face increased violence under Modi- report*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/indian-religious-minorities-face-increased-violence-under-modi-report/a-49346394>

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² See: Dalvi, Vinay., *Cabbie beaten up in Diva, forced to chant Jai Shri Ram*, Mumbai Mirror, 27 June 2019, <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/crime/cabbie-beaten-up-in-diva-forced-to-chant-jai-shri-ram/articleshow/69968844.cms>, and; Verma, Gargi., *Thane cab driver beaten, ‘forced to chant Jai Shri Ram’*, MSN news, 28 June 2019, <https://www.msn.com/en-ae/news/world/thane-cab-driver-beaten-forced-to-chant-jai-shri-ram/ar-AADyT8k>

²¹³ *Violent Cow Protection in India*, Human Rights Watch, 18 February 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/18/violent-cow-protection-india/vigilante-groups-attack-minorities>

²¹⁴ “House Church in India’s Chhattisgarh State Attacked by Mob of Hindu Radicals”, *International Christian Concern*, 23 February 2019, <https://www.persecution.org/2019/02/23/house-church-indias-chhattisgarh-state-attacked-mob-hindu-radicals/>

problems encountered by Christians have been caused by the state. In May 2019, local authorities sent 50 workers to demolish a church-run school and hostel for tribal children near Lichapeta village, Odisha State, beating school staff who protested. The local Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh group had alleged the school was covertly evangelising children, which school authorities strongly denied.²¹⁵

The US State Department has noted concerns over the lack of an adequate response to the incidents of violence against minorities.²¹⁶ In a recent report, the State Department noted that, “Authorities often failed to prosecute perpetrators of ‘cow vigilante’ attacks, which included killings, mob violence, and intimidation.”²¹⁷ The families of the victims also fear violence as they try to seek justice.²¹⁸ Authorities not only fail to provide justice to the victims of mob violence, but Indian legislators have been seen chanting ‘Jai Shri Ram’ in the presence of Prime Minister Modi when Muslim members of parliament were taking their oath to serve the people of India.²¹⁹

In February 2019, just before India’s elections, the Pulwama attack provoked hate speech and violence against Kashmiris. Around 700 Kashmiri students, traders and workers returned to Kashmir to escape this violence.²²⁰ Violence against Kashmiris and Muslims was recorded and shared widely on social media, while right-wing groups and some news channels also encouraged such incidents.²²¹

In Kashmir, in an act considered illegal under the constitution of India, Prime Minister Modi ended the special autonomous status of the valley on 5 August by revoking articles 370 and 35 A of the constitution.²²² There has been a rise in state violence since a military curfew was imposed and mobile services, internet and television connections have been shut blocking all communication with the outside world. Thousands of Kashmiri Muslims have been detained or imprisoned.²²³ Muharram processions remain forbidden and this communication blockade prevents Shia Muslims commemorating according to their religious beliefs.²²⁴

The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was created in 1951 to determine who was born in Assam State, and is therefore Indian, and who might be a migrant from neighbouring Bangladesh. The

²¹⁵ “Officials Destroy Christian School, Hostel – and Founder’s Home – in Eastern India: Demolition crew beats director and his parents”, Morning Star News, 6th June 2019, <https://morningstarnews.org/2019/06/officials-destroy-christian-school-hostel-and-founders-home-in-eastern-india/>

²¹⁶ ‘Violent extremist Hindu groups’ continued attacks on minorities in India in 2018, says US report, Scroll.in: National News, 22 June 2019, <https://scroll.in/latest/927938/violent-extremist-hindu-groups-continued-attacks-on-minorities-in-2018-says-us-report>

²¹⁷ Ibid

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ayyub, R., *What a Rising Tide of Violence Against Muslims in India Says About Modi’s Second Term*, Time Website, 28 June 2019, <https://time.com/5617161/india-religious-hate-crimes-modi/>

²²⁰ *Indian SC orders protection for Kashmiris in wake of Pulwama attack*, Dawn Website, 22 February 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1465387/indian-sc-orders-protection-for-kashmiris-in-wake-of-pulwama-attack?fbclid=IwAR0uogU0-EiK8m8V8WaWbnG-eFsNhUZZJ06LYn3OZFdnZNDRC8hgkd-RNE>

²²¹ Basu, Soma., *Manufacturing Islamophobia on WhatsApp in India*, The Diplomat, 10 May 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/manufacturing-islamophobia-on-whatsapp-in-india/>

²²² Habibullah, W., *Revocation of Article 370 could trigger a sense of betrayal in Kashmir*, Hindustan Times, 8 August 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/revocation-of-article-370-could-trigger-a-sense-of-betrayal-in-kashmir/story-NQYFM6xWEq023upE37S4WN.html>

²²³ Hussain, A., *Kashmir police say thousands detained in status-change sweep*, Insider, 2019, <https://www.insider.com/kashmir-police-say-thousands-detained-in-status-change-sweep-2019-8>

²²⁴ Peerzada Ashiq, *Muharram processions banned in Kashmir Valley*, The Hindu, 7 September 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/muharram-processions-banned-in-valley/article29362910.ece>

register was updated for the first time in August 2019 and made around 1.9 million people who could not prove they were resident in Assam before the 70s stateless.²²⁵ Although the NRC does not exclusively target Muslims, it does have a huge impact on them and could lead to the deportation of thousands of minority Muslims.²²⁶ In August 2019, USCIRF Chair Tony Perkins and Commissioner Anurima Bhargava expressed deep concerns over the misuse of the registration.²²⁷ According to Bhargava, it could lead to a hostile atmosphere for the Muslim community in north-eastern India. Assam also has a long history of politically motivated violence against ‘outsiders’ and Muslims have experienced massacres in 1983, 2012 and 2014.²²⁸

Anti-conversion laws in India restrict the freedom of individuals to convert. In December 2018, USCIRF published a report on anti-conversion laws in South Asia and it puts India in the list of countries of concern.²²⁹

²²⁵ *Assam NRC: What next for 1.9 million ‘stateless’ Indians?*, BBC News, 31 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-49520593>

²²⁶ Saaliq, S., *Citizenship list in Indian state leaves out almost 2 million*, The Star, 31 August 2019, <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/asia/2019/08/31/citizenship-list-in-indian-state-leaves-out-almost-2-million.html>

²²⁷ *USCIRF Statement on Indian Government’s “Religious Test” for Muslims in Assam*, USCIRF, 27 August 2019, <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscifr-statement-indian-government-s-religious-test-muslims-in>

²²⁸ *Muslims in India’s Assam facing NRC terror*, World Bulletin, 21 July 2018, <https://www.worldbulletin.net/news-analysis/muslims-in-indias-assam-facing-nrc-terror-h204247.html>; Green, L., *Suicides follow India’s anti-immigrant drive targeting Muslims*, 19 December 2018, <https://www.nronline.org/news/world/suicides-follow-indias-anti-immigrant-drive-targeting-muslims>

²²⁹ Dorjee, T., *Limitations on Minorities’ Religious Freedom in South Asia: USCIRF Special Report*, USCIRF, November 2018, page 4, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Limitations%20on%20Minorities%20Religious%20Freedom%20in%20South%20Asia.pdf>

Indonesia

Indonesia's population of 263 million is 87.2% Muslim, 12.9% of the world's Muslim population.²³⁰ Around 7% of the remaining population are Protestant, 2.9% are Catholic, 1.7% are Hindu and the remaining 0.9% are Buddhist, Confucian or follow another belief.²³¹

Indonesia has a long tradition of religious pluralism, with the government historically promoting a tolerant ideology of Pancasila comprised of five principles: monotheism, civilized humanity, national unity, deliberative democracy, and social justice.²³² However, in recent years, this tradition of tolerance has come under threat. While Article 29 of the Indonesian constitution 'guarantees the independence of each resident to embrace religion and worship according to their respective religions and beliefs,'²³³ the government only recognises six official religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. For unauthorised religions, it remains difficult to gain access to a range of government services. Their adherents must first register with one of the six official religions in order to obtain the necessary national identification cards. This forces many to renounce their faith in favour of such access.²³⁴

Articles 156 and 156(a) of Indonesia's penal code criminalise blasphemy. The government rejected recommendations made during its last United Nations Universal Periodic Review to repeal the blasphemy law²³⁵ and ignored a petition brought by nine Ahmadis in July 2018 relating to the same issue.²³⁶ The Indonesian government argue that many of its policies that violate FoRB are fundamental in the prevention of religious conflict. There is evidence however to suggest that such policies have led to interreligious tensions in recent years.²³⁷ For instance, Grace Natalie, the Christian chairwoman of the Indonesian Solidarity Party, was accused of blasphemy for opposing Sharia-based laws in Tangerang, near Jakarta, in November 2018,²³⁸ while an ethnic Chinese Indonesian woman spent almost a year in prison on a similar charge after alleged comments were made on the volume of the speakers at a Mosque in Tanjung Balai.²³⁹ Worryingly, in November 2018,

²³⁰ *Interactive Data Table: World Muslim Population by Country*, Pew Research Centre: Religion and Public Life, 17 November 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/chart/interactive-data-table-world-muslim-population-by-country/>

²³¹ 'Indonesia' in *The World Fact Book: East Asia/Southeast Asia*, Central Intelligence Agency, 21 August 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html>

²³² Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 183, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Harsono, Andreas., *Indonesia's Ahmadiyah Push Back Against Discriminatory Laws*, Human Rights Watch, 23 June 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/23/indonesias-ahmadiyah-push-back-against-discriminatory-laws>

²³⁵ Kine, Phelim., *Why Indonesia's Christian Diaspora Fears Going Home*, Human Rights Watch, 1 March 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/01/why-indonesias-christian-diaspora-fears-going-home>

²³⁶ Winowatan, Michelle., *Indonesia's Blasphemy Law Survives Court Challenge*, Human Rights Watch, 26 July 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/26/indonesias-blasphemy-law-survives-court-challenge>

²³⁷ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 183, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²³⁸ World Watch Monitor, *Indonesia: Christian politician accused of blasphemy for opposing Sharia-based bylaws*, 22 November 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/indonesia-christian-politician-accused-of-blasphemy-for-comments-hostile-to-islam/>

²³⁹ She was released on parole in May 2019. See: Llewellyn, Aisyah., *Indonesia frees ethnic Chinese woman jailed for blasphemy*, Aljazeera News Website, 23 May 2019,

Bakor Pakem, a body that oversees religious affairs in the Indonesian Attorney General's office, introduced an app with the purpose of providing citizens with the capacity to report cases of suspected "religious heresy" on their mobile devices.²⁴⁰

Despite an overarching commitment to religious pluralism, the Indonesian political sphere has been increasingly infiltrated by hard-line and intolerant Islamist groups. These groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front and the Indonesian Council of Ulema, subscribe to an uncompromising and conservative interpretation of Islam which continues to attack the stability of the Pancasila ideology.²⁴¹ These groups have frequently targeted religious minorities such as Christians and Ahmadis.²⁴²

The Indonesian General Election in April 2019 deepened religious unrest. Despite an eventual win for the moderate incumbent Joko Widodo, the election was marred by exploitative religious-nationalist rhetoric, predominantly from radical Islamic opportunists.²⁴³

Nevertheless, the actions of Widodo himself have exemplified the influence of the rising sentiment of intolerance in his choosing of Ma'ruf Amin as his Vice-Presidential running mate. Amin is a powerful cleric known for his drafting and vocal support of fatwas which have detrimentally affected the rights of religious minorities.²⁴⁴ Commentators have suggested that a significant legacy point for Widodo during this current term of government will be the effectiveness with which he can quell the rise of hard-line Islamic radicalism – both within government and amongst the wider public.²⁴⁵

Local authorities in Muslim-majority provinces have also tended to succumb to pressure from radical Muslim groups. This was the case in Indonesia's Yogyakarta's Special Region, where a newly-issued religious permit received by a Christian church was revoked in the aftermath of protests and threats on 26 July 2019.²⁴⁶ This example mirrored an earlier revocation in the Cengkareng district of West

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/indonesia-frees-ethnic-chinese-woman-jailed-blasphemy-190523020705974.html>

²⁴⁰ Harsono, Andreas., *Indonesia Launches 'Snitch' App Targeting Religious Minorities*, Human Rights Watch, 30 November 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/30/indonesia-launches-snitch-app-targeting-religious-minorities>

²⁴¹ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 183, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²⁴² WWR, *Indonesia: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Indonesia-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

²⁴³ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 183, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²⁴⁴ *Indonesia: Vice Presidential Candidate Has Anti-Rights Record*, Human Rights Watch, 10 August 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/10/indonesia-vice-presidential-candidate-has-anti-rights-record>

²⁴⁵ Kapoor, Kanupriya., *Exclusive: After bruising election, Indonesia to vet public servants to identify Islamists*, Reuters: World News, 21 June 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-indonesia-politics-islamism-exclusive/exclusive-after-bruising-election-indonesia-to-vet-public-servants-to-identify-islamists-idUKKCN1TM0SV>

²⁴⁶ Dagur, Ryan., *Indonesian Christians cry foul after church permit pulled*, UCA News, 2 August 2019, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-christians-cry-foul-after-church-permit-pulled/85791>

Jakarta on the grounds that the church was in too close a proximity to a mosque, an Islamic boarding school, and houses owned by clerics.²⁴⁷

Indonesia has also been the subject of increasing external pressures which have in turn influenced the underlying religious sentiments of the country. Most profoundly, Saudi Arabia has continued to increase its economic stake in the country with the intention of infusing its ideological interpretation of Islam. The most obvious example of this is the Saudi-funded *Institute for the Study of Islam and Arabic*, which teaches the fundamentalist Wahhabi theology and segregates classes on gender-lines.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Epa, Konradus., *Muslim hardliners in Indonesia threaten Christian church*, UCA News, 25 July 2019, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/muslim-hardliners-in-indonesia-threaten-christian-church/85721>

²⁴⁸ Beech, Hannah., *Faith Politics on the Rise as Indonesian Islam Takes a Hard-Line Path*, The New York Times, 15 April 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/15/world/asia/indonesia-election-islam.html?searchResultPosition=16>

Iran

Iran's human rights and freedom of religious belief record has been a matter of concern for many years and continues to be so today. 2019 is a significant year for Iran in terms of human rights as it will undergo its third round of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the Human Rights Council.

Over 99% of Iran's population are Muslim (c.90% Shia, c.9% Sunni) with the remaining (<1%) comprising of Christians, Baha'i, Jews, Zoroastrians, Sufi-Dervishes, Mandaeans and others.²⁴⁹ The Iranian Constitution declares Twelver Ja'fari Shi'ism the official religion.²⁵⁰ It also declares Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians as the 'only recognised religious minorities', thereby condemning other minority groups as 'non-citizens'. The 'Revolutionary Courts' established post-1979 to try so-called 'political crimes' have the power to try individuals, including 'apostates', on vague charges of being 'un-Islamic' and threatening 'national security'. Article 260 of the Penal Code codifies the death penalty for blasphemy, which includes 'insulting the Prophet', 'other Prophets' or "the sacred values of Islam."²⁵¹

Scheherzade Faramarzi, in a brief for the Atlantic Council, estimates the Sunni population of Iran as high as 15 million people.²⁵² The 2019 Annual Report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) notes that the Sunni population "...is concentrated in underdeveloped areas and experiences discrimination in employment."²⁵³ The report asserts that in 2018, repeated requests by Tehran's Sunni Muslim community to build an official mosque have been refused, and they only possess the facilities for "prayer houses" which do not have an Imam.²⁵⁴ More serious abuses have been reported, notably the assassination of a Sunni cleric in South-Eastern Iran in July 2018, and another Sunni cleric who was shot four times in November on his way home from his mosque.²⁵⁵ On December 2018, 38 representatives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly proposed two supplementary articles to the Islamic Penal Code to criminalise "sects" and "made up religions". There are concerns that if such proposals were made law, these could further marginalise some elements of the Sunni community as well as members of the Bahá'í Faith.²⁵⁶ Sufi Muslims also face harassment. Nematollah Riahi, a leader of a Gonabadi Dervish order, was detained, leading to clashes in Tehran in February 2018.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁹ *The World Factbook: Middle East: Iran*, Central Intelligence Agency, 11 September 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>

²⁵⁰ Islamic Republic of Iran, supra n.60, Article.12...

https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/ngo/Iran_HR_Rebuttal_HRC100.pdf

²⁵¹ *Iran*, End Blasphemy Laws, 2019, <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/>

²⁵² Sunnis In Iran: An Alternate View; Peyman Asadzade; The Atlantic Council; 24 April 2018;

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/sunnis-in-iran-an-alternate-view/> (this source estimates the Sunni population as high as 15% of the Iranian population, substantially higher than, for example, the CIA World Factbook, which estimates 5-10%)

²⁵³ CIA World Factbook and US Department of State, cited in US Commission on International Religious Freedom 2019 Annual Report. See: Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., 2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 51, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Baha'i International Community. See *Bahá'í International Community*, 2019, <https://www.bic.org/>

²⁵⁷ "Iran's Gonabadi Dervish: A Long History of Persecution"; Loes Witschge, Al Jazeera, 27 February 2018; <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/iran-gonabadi-dervishes-long-history-persecution-180227193000395.html>

Iranian citizens expressing non-religious views have faced persecution and even severe punishment where their written or spoken views are perceived to insult Islam. Whilst Iran may lack a formal organisation or community for secular, humanist and atheists, the International Humanist and Ethical Union have made a number of statements in defence of Iranian academics and free thinkers who face repression. One example of this that may characterise broader problems for free expression in Iran is the Humanist International press release in support of Iranian academic Ahmadreza Djalali, who was sentenced to death in October 2017 for “acting against national security.”²⁵⁸

Estimates of the number of Christians in Iran vary, but the 2018 USCIRF report suggests there are “nearly 300,000.”²⁵⁹ It is helpful to note that Iran’s Christians comprise historic Armenian, Chaldean and Assyrian communities but also “newer Protestant and evangelical churches.”²⁶⁰ On 1 July 2019, Article18 reported on the arrest of eight converts to Christianity in the southwestern city of Bushehr. The arresting officers introduced themselves as agents from the Ministry of Intelligence. They stormed the Christians’ homes in a coordinated operation at around 9am, confiscating Bibles, Christian literature, wooden crosses and pictures carrying Christian symbols, along with laptops, phones, all forms of identity cards, bank cards and other personal belongings.²⁶¹

The FCO notes the continuing persecution of the Bahá’í community, highlighting the economic pressures on them that are exerted by policies of shop closures and denial of access to higher education.²⁶² Sources from the Bahá’í International Community report that the Revolutionary Courts are making greater use of Tazir laws that enable judges to sentence Bahá’ís to entirely arbitrary punishments. In September 2018, five Bahá’ís were sentenced to one year’s imprisonment and one year of exile to remote regions for “propaganda against the regime in support of the enemies” by the Branch 1 court in Shiraz.²⁶³

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom notes that despite his promise to end religious discrimination in 2013, President Rouhani’s term of office to date has seen “...an estimated 26,000 pieces of anti-Baha’i media run on official or semi-official channels. Over the past 10 years, more than 1,000 Baha’is have been arbitrarily arrested.”²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ *Academic sentenced to death as “Mossad agent” by Iran following torture and unfair trial*, Humanists International, 25 October 2017, <https://humanists.international/2017/10/academic-sentenced-death-mossad-agent-iran-following-torture-unfair-trial/>

²⁵⁹ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 54, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²⁶⁰ Ibid

²⁶¹ Article 18, Christians in Iran: <https://articleeighteen.com/news/860/>

²⁶² Op cit

²⁶³ A confidential briefing note on this is available from the UK Bahá’í community of the UK on request.

²⁶⁴ Op cit

Iraq

Iraq is a country of over 40 million people comprising of Shia Muslims (64-69%), Sunni Muslim (29-34%), Christians 1% (includes Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Assyrian Church of the East) and other smaller groups such as Yazidis (1-4%).²⁶⁵ Christians in Iraq have complained that their numbers are decreasing due to mass migration and forced demographic change due to persecution. According to Christian leaders, there are fewer than 250,000 Christians in Iraq, compared with the pre-2003 figure of roughly 1.5 million.²⁶⁶ Similarly, Yazidis also claim that their numbers have decreased to somewhere between 400,000-500,000.²⁶⁷ It is estimated that “300,000 Yazidis currently live in displacement camps or informal settlements scattered across Iraq’s northern Kurdistan region” and many more have travelled further afield.²⁶⁸

Iraq’s future is uncertain. With the fall of Daesh and an emerging democratic culture, things appear to be improving. However, there are still political conflicts which are erupting into sectarian violence and discrimination based on religion. In October 2019, a wave of political unrest left over 100 people dead and thousands more injured. Protesters complained that government appointments are made on the basis of sectarian or ethnic quotas (a system known as muhassasa), rather than on merit. Aggrieved Iraqis say this has allowed Shia, Kurdish, Sunni and other leaders to abuse public funds, enrich themselves and their followers and effectively pillage the country of its wealth.²⁶⁹

An August 2019 proposal to change voting rights in the Federal Supreme Court’s 13-member judiciary, by including four Islamic clerics among their number was seen as moving the country in an Islamist direction. Opponents of the move feared it would effectively end attempts to overturn legislation seen as discriminating against non-Muslim religious groups.²⁷⁰

Although Iraqi forces have reclaimed Daesh’s physical territory and defeated the bulk of its forces, it seems that dispersed cells are still active. Recently, these cells launched different attacks on Iraqi soldiers, police and those tribes who oppose them²⁷¹. Although the primary target has been security forces, these cells still show motivation to carry out violent attacks against Shia Muslims, Yazidis, Christians and others. For example, on 15 July, twin blasts targeted a Shia mosque and killed at least five people.²⁷²

By November 2018, around 202 mass burial sites had been uncovered, of which 95 were in Nineveh province, by government and humanitarian organisations. These included mass graves of Yazidis and

²⁶⁵ *The World Factbook: Middle East: Iran*, Central Intelligence Agency, 18 October 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

²⁶⁶ Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 188, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, page 191.

²⁶⁸ Jesuit Refugee Service, *Five years after the genocide, Yazidis share their forgotten stories and demand justice*, Relief Web International Website, 1 August 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/five-years-after-genocide-yazidis-share-their-forgotten-stories-and-demand-justice>

²⁶⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-49960677>

²⁷⁰ Xavier Bisits and John Newton, *Christians fear attempt to Islamise Supreme Court*, ACN UK News, 9 August 2019, <https://acnuk.org/news/iraq-christians-fear-attempt-to-islamise-supreme-court/>

²⁷¹ Eric Schmitt, Alissa Rubin and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, *ISIS Is Regaining Strength in Iraq and Syria*, The New York Times, 19 August 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/us/politics/isis-iraq-syria.html>

²⁷² *At least five dead in suicide blasts near Baghdad mosque*, Middle East Eye, 16 July 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/least-five-dead-suicide-blasts-near-baghdad-mosque>

Shias, and Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) soldiers.²⁷³ Conversely, some factions within the PMF have been accused of torturing and illegally detaining Sunnis who were either formerly associated with Daesh, or who allegedly have someone from their family or tribe connected with the terror group.²⁷⁴ Indeed other groups have complained about the activities of members of the PMF. Christians have accused them of several offences including the sexual harassment of Christian women.²⁷⁵

During the reporting period, there were incidents of harassment and abuse of Yazidis and Christians by KRG Peshmerga. One report suggests that Asayish, a Kurdish security force, has greatly affected the movement of Yazidis to and from the Sinjar area.²⁷⁶ Christians from Nineveh also witnessed restrictions on free movement and there have been numerous reports of abuses being carried out by Shabak armed groups against Christians in Bakhda²⁷⁷ and Bartella where there was an armed attack on the 2019 Palm Sunday procession.²⁷⁸

Minorities are still unrepresented in KRG region. Yazidis do not have a reserved seat in the KRG. Kakais have one reserved seat. However, it is empty since the KRG is unable to decide on a suitable candidate that would be able to represent all Kakais, considering the identity split within the Kakai community. There is an issue of political bias in Iraq, as minorities have complained that the existing systems favour Muslims and exclude non-Muslims. For example, the government does not recognise Yarsani Kakais as a separate religious group.²⁷⁹

One of the most important issues affecting intercommunal relations in Iraq is land disputes. Shia Turkmen have complained that their lands are still in the possession of Arab Sunnis who occupied them during Saddam Hussein's time. Shabak-Christian tensions have also been on the rise due to the perception of Shabak mass-migration into Christian areas in pursuit of employment.²⁸⁰

Outside of the problems in the Nineveh region there have also been issues with central government. There is the continuing problem that the only certain religions that may be listed on national identity cards, viz. Christian, Sabean-Mandean, Yazidi, and Muslim. Members of other faiths and those identifying as agnostics, atheists, humanists are not able to record their faith identity on national ID cards.²⁸¹

²⁷³ "Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL", UNAMI/OHCHR, 6 November 2018, page 6, https://ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_Report_on_Mass_Graves4Nov2018_EN.pdf

²⁷⁴ Lapcha, H, Unpublished report produced for Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development, 2019.

²⁷⁵ Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians: Final Report and Recommendations, <https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/report/>

²⁷⁶ Iraq: KRG Restrictions Harm Yazidi Recovery, Human Rights Watch, 4 December 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/04/iraq-krg-restrictions-harm-yezidi-recovery>

²⁷⁷ After ISIS, Nineveh's Christians now face new threat from Shabak Shiite militias, Asia News, 14 February 2019, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/After-ISIS,-Nineveh%E2%80%99s-Christians-now-face-new-threat-from-Shabak-Shiite-militias-46250.html>

²⁷⁸ Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten?: A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2017-19*, p. 29.

²⁷⁹ Lapcha, H. 2019, unpublished report produced for Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development.

²⁸⁰ Ibid

²⁸¹ Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 188, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

Concerns about the presentation of Islamic customs as the societal norm in the Ministry of Education's new curriculum were raised by non-Muslim religious leaders. Textbooks for children aged 6-11 described unveiled woman as "sick." Chaldean Catholic Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako said: "I read inaccurate, inappropriate and offensives statements that incite hatred and division".²⁸²

²⁸² Claire Evans, "Iraqi Curriculum Issues Veiled Threat Against Christian Women", *International Christian Concern*, 15 January 2019, <https://www.persecution.org/2019/01/15/iraqi-curriculum-issues-veiled-threat-christian-women/>

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has over 18 million people. Two-thirds are ethnic Kazakhs and Uzbeks (seen as having a Muslim background) with the rest including ethnic Slavs (mainly Russians, seen as having a Christian background)²⁸³. Serious systemic violations of many human rights take place in the country²⁸⁴. All exercise of freedom of religion and belief without state permission is illegal, all mosques outside state control are banned, and all forms of Islam apart from Sunni Hanafi Islam are banned. There is strict censorship of all religious books such as the Bible and Koran, as well as objects such as Russian Orthodox icons - including strict limits on where they can be bought or given away, which are enforced with police raids. Religious communities of under 50 people are illegal. All discussion of faith by people without state permission, or not using state-approved texts, or outside state-approved locations, is banned²⁸⁵.

People who give their names as founders of religious organisations applying for legal status can face harassment. For example, after Aktau's Hare Krishna community lodged a registration application in November 2018, officials tried to force them to complete detailed questionnaires requiring, among other information, "the reason for supporting the Krishna religion". In the most recent known case, police in Oskemen suddenly began harassing the founders of the city's New Life Protestant Church in May 2019, as it was seeking re-registration under a new name. Officers visited several founders late at night, threatening one woman in her late 70s to try to make her open the door. If officials succeed in reducing the number of founders to below 50, communities are blocked from obtaining legal status²⁸⁶.

From January to December 2018, at least 171 individuals, religious communities, charities and companies were prosecuted for exercising freedom of religion and belief. The offences prosecuted included sharing faith with others without state permission, meeting for worship without state permission, offering religious literature, icons or other items without state permission, Muslims praying in mosques in banned ways such as saying the word Amen aloud, allowing children to be present at or conducting religious rites against the wishes of one parent, and allegedly inadequate security measures at a place of worship. Fines normally accompany raids on meetings by police and other officials, with all the participants being questioned and some being fined between three weeks to four months' average wages²⁸⁷.

Prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion and belief are primarily alleged to be adherents of the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat²⁸⁸. Independent observers in the country state that its activities peacefully encourage greater Muslim religious observance. The regime has repeatedly refused to explain what, if any, crime the alleged Tabligh Jamaat adherents

²⁸³ Forum 18, *Reports on freedom of religion and belief violations in Kazakhstan*, <http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=29> and Forum 18, *Kazakhstan religious freedom survey*, September 2018, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2409

²⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Kazakhstan – Human Rights Watch World Report*, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/kazakhstan>

²⁸⁵ Forum 18, *Kazakhstan religious freedom survey*, September 2018, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2409

²⁸⁶ Forum 18, *KAZAKHSTAN: Officials try to force registration signature withdrawals*, 13 August 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2500

²⁸⁷ Forum 18, *KAZAKHSTAN: 171 administrative prosecutions in 2018*, 31 January 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2447

²⁸⁸ Forum 18, *KAZAKHSTAN: Five more Sunni Muslim "missionaries" imprisoned*, 9 January 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2245

have committed, with one verdict claiming that it is “intolerant” towards Shia Islam – even though the regime itself has banned all Shia mosques and literature²⁸⁹. In the most recent case, eight Muslims were jailed on 5 August for between five and a half and eight years for participating in a WhatsApp religious discussion group monitored by the KNB secret police²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁹ Forum 18, *KAZAKHSTAN: Now 30 Sunni Muslims convicted since December 2014, KNB secret police spy*, 22 April 2016, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2170

²⁹⁰ Forum 18, *KAZAKHSTAN: Eight jailed for up to eight years*, 5 August 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2498

Nigeria

Nigeria is a country of 203 million people split almost evenly between Muslims (51.6% - predominantly mainstream Sunni but also including Sufi and Shia sects) and Christians (46.9% - including Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other denominations). The remaining population is made up of small communities of Jews, Baha'is, atheists, and holders of indigenous beliefs.²⁹¹

Nigeria's federal constitution guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief to all citizens.²⁹² However, despite positive rhetoric, the President Muhammadu Buhari-led government was unable to notably improve the FoRB situation in Nigeria during the reporting period. Although the government has claimed victory against Boko Haram, the organisation remains a significant threat to both Christians and Muslims. For example, in June 2018, twin suicide bomb attacks during a Muslim religious celebration in Damboa, Borno State, killed at least 31 people and injured more than 48 people.²⁹³

Despite the findings of the commission which declared the Nigerian security forces responsible for the horrific mass killing of 347 Shias in Zaria in 2015,²⁹⁴ Shias of Nigeria still wait for justice. Instead of accountability, the Nigerian military has accelerated its crackdown on the group. Despite the court order to release Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, the leader of the Shia Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Nigeria's Department of Security Services (DSS) did not only refuse, but it intensified its clampdown.²⁹⁵ In April 2018, around 115 Shia IMN members were arrested in Abuja during a protest for the release of Sheikh Zakzaky.²⁹⁶ Later that year in October, Nigerian soldiers killed at least 42 unarmed civilians when they were holding a peaceful demonstration with the military using machine guns at point-blank range on protestors.²⁹⁷ At both federal and provincial levels, activities of IMN, which is a non-violent organisation which advocates for the establishment of Nigeria as an Islamic State,²⁹⁸ are banned, including religious processions on Ashura and Arbaen which are commemorations central to the Shia Muslim faith.²⁹⁹ States like Kano, Katsina, Plateau, and Sokoto have either denied or restricted Shia religious gatherings.

²⁹¹ Tenzin Doorje et al., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2018 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2019, https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_NIGERIA_2019.pdf

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ *Dozens killed in suspected Boko Haram attack in Nigeria*, Al Jazeera, 17 June 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/dozens-killed-suspected-boko-haram-attack-nigeria-180617105120520.html>

²⁹⁴ *Nigeria: 'Army killed 347 Shia followers of el-Zakzaky'*, Al Jazeera, 2 August 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/nigeria-army-killed-347-shia-followers-zakzaky-160802071409995.html>

²⁹⁵ *Nigeria: Events of 2018*, Human Rights Watch, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/nigeria>

²⁹⁶ *115 Shia protesters arrested in Nigerian capital: police*, The New Arab, 17 April 2018, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/4/17/115-shia-protesters-arrested-in-nigerian-capital-police>

²⁹⁷ Searcey, D., and Akinwotu, E., *Nigeria Says Soldiers Who Killed Marchers Were Provoked. Video Shows Otherwise*, The New York Times, 17 December 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/17/world/africa/nigeria-military-abuses.html>

²⁹⁸ Haruna Shehu Tangaza, "Islamic Movement in Nigeria: The Iranian-inspired Shia group", BBC Africa, 5 August 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-49175639>

²⁹⁹ Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 62, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

Communal violence between predominantly Christian farmers and predominantly Muslim nomadic herder communities in Nigeria is a matter of grave concern. A process of worsening drought and desertification – a result of climate change – which have been ongoing for several decades have forced large numbers of these herders to migrate south in search of water and land for grazing. This migration has led to clashes between herders and farmers over land. What were once spontaneous clashes have become planned and well-armed attacks – including nocturnal attacks – particularly in Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states.³⁰⁰

Across the country, at least 2,000 people died in this violence in 2018.³⁰¹ For example, in April 2018, in Benue State, Fulani herders attacked a church, killing 19 people including priests, and destroyed nearly 50 homes.³⁰² In response, an angry mob attacked two different mosques and killed 11 Muslims.³⁰³

While the roots of the conflict lie in resource competition and other related issues, religion seems to be a factor in more recent violence. According to the Christian Association of Nigeria, 500 churches have been destroyed since 2011.³⁰⁴ The precise motivating factors, and ultimate intentions, of the herders will continue to be debated by commentators, but Church attacks do seem to illustrate that there is a religious dimension to the violence which must be taken in to account.

Discrimination based on one's faith is still a regular feature of life in Nigeria, particularly in the States which have adopted Shari'a where Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reports that non-Muslims have been denied employment, education and been ridiculed 'on the basis of their religion'.³⁰⁵ In those same states, there has also been restriction on construction of churches simply by denying Christians the right to buy land or by creating significant bureaucratic hurdles.

³⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, 'Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence', 26 July 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/262-stopping-nigerias-spiralling-farmer-herder-violence>

³⁰¹ Al-Jazeera News, *Amnesty: Farmer-herder clashes kill 3,600 in Nigeria*, 17 December 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/amnesty-farmer-herder-clashes-kill-3600-nigeria-181217101114812.html>

³⁰² Adebayo, B., *Nigeria church attack leaves 19 dead, including two priests*, CNN, 25 April 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/24/africa/nigeria-church-attack/index.html>

³⁰³ Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 61, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³⁰⁴ Madeleine Davies, "Attacks on Nigerian Christians escalate", Church Times, 6 July 2018, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/6-july/news/world/attacks-on-nigerian-christians-escalate>

³⁰⁵ *Nigeria: Freedom of religion or belief*, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, June 2018, page 1, <https://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/dc3e323f-351c-4172-800e-4e02848abf80/2018-05-nigeria.pdf>

Pakistan

96.28% of Pakistan’s population consists of Muslims. Christians are 1.59% of the population whereas Hindus make up 1.60%. Ahmadis, like other religious minorities, claim underrepresentation in official figures which currently suggest they make up 0.22% of the entire population. Pakistan’s official census does not provide any figures of Muslims sects, although unofficial figures suggest that Muslims are further sub-divided into the Sunni majority (consisting of approximately 80%) and Shia minority (representing 15%–20% of the total population).³⁰⁶

There are substantial issues for Pakistan’s religious minorities, including the misuse of blasphemy laws, the forced conversion and forced marriage of non-Muslim girls and the discrimination and marginalisation of Christian, Hindu and Ahmadi minority groups. There are additional worrying issues, such as the inability of successive Pakistani administrations to fully implement in letter and in spirit the Pakistan Supreme Court judgment of 19 June 2014, which ordered, among other things, the application of an employment quota system for minorities and the establishment of a National Council for Minorities.³⁰⁷

The new government led by Imran Khan seems to have improved control over extremist groups and there have been some positive developments in the reporting period. Asia Bibi was finally acquitted of blasphemy charges and left the country.³⁰⁸ There were violent protests in response but the State stood firm. Khadim Hussain Rizvi, leader of the Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan – a group of anti-Ahmadiyya hardliners – was arrested under terrorism charges for leading protests against Bibi’s acquittal.³⁰⁹ Pakistani authorities also granted 3,500 visas to Indian Sikhs to visit the holy site of Gurdwara in Pakistan³¹⁰. In early 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that Christian marriages will now be officially registered with marriage certificates.³¹¹

However, one of the government’s positive moves, appointing Atif Mian, a world-leading Ahmadi economist as an economic advisor, was immediately reversed due to pressure from extremist, anti-Ahmadi elements.³¹² During the 2018 election campaign, political parties also used anti-minority speech to gain support from hardliners. Political leaders, including Imran Khan, showed support for blasphemy laws and appeased anti-Ahmadiyya groups.³¹³

Anti-blasphemy laws are still used as a tool to persecute the non-religious and religious minorities. According to one report, there are at least 40 individuals currently sentenced to death or serving a

³⁰⁶ Javaid Rehman, Morris Johns and Amro Hussain, *Religious Minorities of Pakistan: Report of a Parliamentary Visit*, September 2019, <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/190918-Full-Report-Religious-Minorities-of-Pakistan-Report-of-a-Parliamentary-Visit.pdf>

³⁰⁷ Ibid

³⁰⁸ Shahid, K., *The release of Asia Bibi is a small step towards a more open Pakistan*, The Guardian, 1 November 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/01/release-asia-bibi-pakistan-blasphemy-laws>

³⁰⁹ Khadim Hussain Rizvi booked under treason and terrorism charges, National Courier, 1 December 2018, <https://www.natcour.com/news/2018/12/khadim-hussain-rizvi-booked-under/>

³¹⁰ Page 3 https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_PAKISTAN_2019.pdf

³¹¹ Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 72, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³¹² Chaudhry, F., *Under pressure govt backtracks on Atif Mian’s appointment; removes economist from advisory council*, Dawn, 7 September 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1431495>

³¹³ Sayeed, S., *Pakistan’s Ahmadi community faces growing discrimination, report says*, Reuters, 6 May 2019, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-pakistan-ahmadis/pakistans-ahmadi-community-faces-growing-discrimination-report-says-idUKKCN1SC0RJ>

life sentence for blasphemy.³¹⁴ This includes two Christians, Qaiser and Amoon Ayub, and a Shia activist, Taimoor Raza.³¹⁵

Often accusations of blasphemy alone are enough to initiate mob action. A large mob stormed a Hindu temple in Ghotki city of Sindh province and vandalised it. The event happened when a Hindu school principal was accused of committing blasphemy by a student.³¹⁶ In February 2019, around 200 Christian families in the Farooq-e-Azam neighbourhood of Karachi fled after a mob made their way to the area. The mob attacked several Christian houses and a church and killed livestock. It formed after Muslim woman Samina Riaz accused four Christian women of desecrating the Quran. One local resident said: “She claimed they stole a copy of the Quran and ruined it by submerging it into a basin of dirty water”. The incident followed Samina Riaz and her husband being asked to vacate the place they lived by their Christian landlord.³¹⁷

The combined actions of the Pakistan Government and extremist Islamic groups has created an environment where the non-religious are being targeted for violence and abuse. The most egregious recent example of this is the treatment of Gulalai Ismail, a human rights defender and member of the Board of Humanists International. Gulalai was first arrested in October 2018, after flying back from the UK after speaking at a Humanists UK fringe at the Conservative Party Conference.³¹⁸ Gulalai was charged with sedition under terrorism laws after being caught attending protests in Pakistan calling for justice for the murder of an 11-year-old girl.³¹⁹ In June, Humanists UK supported calls coordinated by Humanists International for charges against Gulalai to be dropped.³²⁰

After her arrest she was subsequently released on bail, but then a further, much more serious arrest warrant was issued, leading her to fear for her life, so she went into hiding from Pakistani authorities who had been trying to arrest her for her human rights activism. Given the threat to both her freedom and her safety, Gulalai has had to flee Pakistan and in September 2019 arrived in the US where she intends to seek asylum.³²¹

Pakistan’s Ahmadi community continue to face hate speech and discrimination. Ahmadis are prohibited by law from referring to themselves as Muslims, which the faith group see as highly offensive and a major violation of their right to self-expression.³²² On 19 July 2019, an anti-Ahmadiyya hashtag (#قادیانی_دنیاکا بدترین_کافر – *Qadiani*—a derogatory word for Ahmadis—*is the worst*

³¹⁴ Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 72, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ *Pakistan blasphemy riots: Dozens arrested after Hindu teacher accused*, BBC News, 16 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-49714196>

³¹⁷ “*Mob attacks 200 Christian families in Pakistan after 4 women falsely accused of blasphemy*”, Christian Post, 27 February 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/mob-displaces-200-christian-families-in-pakistan-after-4-women-falsely-accused-of-blasphemy.html>

³¹⁸ Humanists UK, *Humanist activist Gulalai Ismail safe in US after escaping Pakistani authorities*, September 19 2019, <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/09/19/humanist-activist-gulalai-ismail-safe-in-us-after-escaping-pakistani-authorities/>

³¹⁹ Ibid

³²⁰ Ibid

³²¹ Ibid

³²² Brookes L, “*Shunned for saying they're Muslims: life for Ahmadis after Asad Shah's murder*”, The Guardian, 9 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/09/shunned-for-saying-theyre-muslims-life-for-ahmadis-after-asad-shahs>

infidel in the world) was trending on Twitter.³²³ Also, last year in May, a mob of nearly 100 people, which included the local leader of the ruling party, destroyed a 100-year old Ahmadi mosque in Punjab.³²⁴

Violent attacks against Shias continued in different parts of Pakistan. In April 2019, a suicide attack in a vegetable market killed at least 24 Shia Hazaras in Quetta.³²⁵ According to the National Commission for Human Rights, more than 509 Shia Hazaras have been killed since 2012.³²⁶ In a hearing on Shia Hazara killings, the Chief Justice of Pakistan termed these killings as “equivalent to wiping out an entire generation”.³²⁷

A new trend of ‘Shia Missing Persons’ has emerged in recent years. The BBC covered this story, reporting that 140 Shias are said to have been disappeared by security forces.³²⁸ Earlier this year, families of Shia missing persons protested outside the President of Pakistan’s residency in Karachi and were successful in recovering four Shias who were in the illegal custody of security forces without any charge.³²⁹ It is estimated that hundreds are still missing across Pakistan.

Christians also face discrimination and violence. In late May 2019, 35-year old Christian rickshaw driver Sagheer Masih was robbed at knifepoint before being forced to drink poisoned by four Muslims. He died several days later. Mr Masih had experienced ongoing prejudice and verbal abuse as the only Christian rickshaw driver in the town.³³⁰ At the end of July an armed mob attacked a church in Bhiki village in Punjab’s Sheikhpura district. Members of the mob entered the church during a service and proceeded to beat several members of the church.³³¹

Non-Muslims, especially Hindus and Christians, continue to face forced conversions. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, there are around 1,000 young women who are forcibly converted to Islam each year - ‘many are kidnapped, forcibly married and raped’.³³² In late June 2019 an FIR (First Incident Report) was registered in which the father of Christian girl Saima (aged around

³²³ Twitter, July 2019,

<https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1?src=hash>

³²⁴ Sayeed, S., *Pakistani mob destroys 100-year-old minority Ahmadi mosque*, Reuters: World News, 24 May 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-ahmadis-idUSKCN1IP20H>

³²⁵ *Pakistan Hazara minority protests after bombing in Quetta*, BBC News, 13 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-47921535>

³²⁶ Shah, Syed Ali., *509 Hazaras killed in terror-related incidents during last five years in Quetta: NCHR report*, Dawn, 20 March 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1396273>

³²⁷ Shah, Syed Ali., *Hazara killings tantamount to wiping out an entire generation, says chief justice*, Dawn, 11 May 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407011>

³²⁸ Kermani, Secunder., *The story of Pakistan’s ‘disappeared’ Shias*, BBC News, Karachi, 31 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44280552>

³²⁹ Ali, Imtiaz., *4 ‘missing persons’ return after more than two years: committee*, Dawn, 10 May 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1481436>

³³⁰ *“Pakistani Christian Driver Killed in Attack”*, International Christian Concern, 20 June 2019, <https://www.persecution.org/2019/06/20/pakistani-christian-driver-killed-attack/>

³³¹ *“Christian Prayer Service in Pakistan Attacked by Mob”*, International Christian Concern, 30 July 2019, <https://www.persecution.org/2019/07/30/christian-prayer-service-pakistan-attacked-mob/>

³³² Dorjee, T., *2019 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2019, page 78, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>



14-15 years) claimed that his daughter had been raped twice while working as a domestic in the household of Muslim politician Mian Tahir Jamil in Faisalabad.³³³

³³³ "A new case of rape and torture against a Christian minor girl", Pakistan Christian Post, 1 July 2019
<https://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7153>

Russia

Russia's³³⁴ population is about 142 million people.³³⁵ Many Russians describe themselves as Orthodox but the percentage attending services is at most about 3 per cent.³³⁶ There are also centuries-old communities of Buddhists, non-Orthodox Christians, Jews, indigenous pagans and Muslims, as well as atheists and followers of many other beliefs.³³⁷ Serious systemic violations of many human rights take place.³³⁸

Long-running “anti-extremism” campaigns against Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslim readers of works by theologian Said Nursi have led to, among other things, nationwide literature bans with the possessors of such texts being liable to criminal prosecution.³³⁹ The most high-profile escalation was the April 2017 total ban on the Jehovah’s Witnesses, making any Jehovah’s Witnesses who exercises freedom of religion and belief liable to criminal prosecution.³⁴⁰ Jehovah’s Witnesses are increasingly being detained for long periods of a year or more. As of the end of May 2019, 200 Jehovah’s Witnesses (aged between 19 and 84) are known to have been charged or named as suspects for “extremism”-related “crimes” such as meeting together to study their beliefs. Of these, 30 were in detention, 28 under house arrest and 76 under travel restrictions.³⁴¹ On 23 May the appeal of one, Dennis Christensen, was rejected and he began a six-year jail sentence³⁴².

In what appears to be a first for Russia, Muslim Yevgeny Kim was, after his April 2019 release from a labour camp (where he had been jailed for meeting with other Muslims to study his faith³⁴³) deprived of his Russian citizenship. The excuse given by the court which made him stateless, fined him, and ordered him to be deported was that he did not have a Russian internal passport. He did not have this as officials confiscated it the day before.³⁴⁴

There can also be impunity for torturers in Russia. Contrary to the country’s international legal obligations, no official responsible for the torture of either Muslim prisoner of conscience Yevgeny

³³⁴ Forum 18, *Reports on particular freedom of religion and belief violations in Russia*, <http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=10>, Forum 18, *Russia religious freedom survey*, January 2017, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246, and Forum 18, “Extremism” *Russia religious freedom survey*, September 2016, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215

³³⁵ US Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Russia chapter*, 2019 Annual Report https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_RUSSIA_2019.pdf

³³⁶ Geraldine Fagan, *Believing in Russia*, Routledge 2013, pp 24-25

³³⁷ Forum 18, *Russia religious freedom survey*, January 2017, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246

³³⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Russia – Human Rights Watch World Report*, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/russia>

³³⁹ Forum 18, “Extremism” *Russia religious freedom survey*, September 2016, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215

³⁴⁰ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witnesses banned, property confiscated*, 20 April 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2247

³⁴¹ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witness criminal cases – list*, 31 May 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2482

³⁴² Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witness appeal fails, appeal to Strasbourg*, 24 May 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2479

³⁴³ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Prison, trials, investigations for religious meetings*, 23 June 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2290

³⁴⁴ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Imprisonment completed, citizenship stripped, awaiting deportation*, 22 May 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2478

Kim following his 2015 arrest,³⁴⁵ or seven Jehovah's Witnesses in 2019, has been arrested or put on criminal trial. One of the victims was re-arrested after reporting the torture, and two of the officials implicated have been given awards.³⁴⁶

In July 2016, “anti-terrorism” restrictions were introduced for, among other things, sharing beliefs. Only people with permission from state-registered belief organisations can now share beliefs, and the restrictions also: restrict the beliefs that can be shared; restrict the places where beliefs may be shared; and ban any beliefs from being shared in residential buildings. Converting residential property to religious use – something which very many belief groups do across Russia – is also banned.³⁴⁷ In 2018, at least 56 organisations and 103 individuals were prosecuted under these restrictions. Lawyer Mikhail Frolov told Forum 18 that “believers don't understand what they can and can't do, and because of heavy fines they don't want to take the risk and therefore significantly reduce their activity, especially in public”.³⁴⁸ Complex, contradictory, and often inconsistently applied laws can also result in religious communities losing places of worship.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Muslim prisoner of conscience tortured*, 7 November 2017

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2332

³⁴⁶ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Tortured for beliefs, suspect torturers rewarded*, 28 June 2019

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2489

³⁴⁷ Forum 18, *Russia religious freedom survey*, January 2017,

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246

³⁴⁸ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: 159 known "anti-missionary" prosecutions in 2018*, 6 May 2019

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2474

³⁴⁹ Forum 18, *RUSSIA: Losing places of worship*, 6 September 2019

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2505

Saudi Arabia

While Saudi Arabia is known for its Wahhabi brand of Sunni Islam, it is estimated that its adherents only make up approximately 20% of Saudi Arabia's population. Most of Saudi Arabia's 85-90% Sunni population follow the Hanbali School of jurisprudence, with adherents of the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Sufi groups also present. Additionally, between 10-15% of the population adhere to Shia Islam, mainly of the Twelver or Ithna'ashari grouping, with some Isma'ilis (approximately 700,000) and Zaydis also present in the country. Other groups, including Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh groups are also present.³⁵⁰

Shia Muslims experience significant religious persecution in Saudi Arabia. The group faces daily discrimination in areas such as education, employment, and the judiciary, as well as being prevented from accessing senior positions in the government and military.³⁵¹ The building of Shia mosques and the use of the Shia call to prayer is severely restricted outside of majority-Shia areas in the Eastern Province. Permits are necessary for Shia religious gatherings in private homes.³⁵² Existing persecution has intensified in the aftermath of Shia protests in the Eastern Province in 2011. The Saudi government responded with an extreme crackdown, systematically arresting and sentencing Shia citizens with any connection to such protests.³⁵³ This crackdown has continued in 2019. On the 23rd of April, the government announced the mass execution of 37 men, with at least 33 of these being members of the minority Shia community.³⁵⁴ Moreover, in May 2019, a second case was heard for Shia cleric Sheikh Mohammad bin Hassan al-Habib, as Saudi authorities sought to extend his existing seven-year prison sentence as a result of his support for Shia protestors.³⁵⁵

Non-Muslim religious minorities and atheists are forbidden from practicing or expressing their beliefs in Saudi Arabia in public. While there remains a supposed allowance for the private practice of faith for non-Muslims who are not converts from Islam, this is uncodified and offers little real protection to religious minorities who fall under such a categorisation.³⁵⁶ The view of the Saudi Arabian government regarding religious minorities is evident in the language it uses to refer to them. Government-appointed religious scholars refer to religious minorities in derogatory terms in official documents and religious rulings which have an influence on government decisions,³⁵⁷ while in the Education Ministry's school textbook, minority religious communities are referred to as 'kuffar' or

³⁵⁰ *The World Factbook: Saudi Arabia*, Central Intelligence Agency, 21 August 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>

³⁵¹ *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 92, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Saudi Arabia*, Minority Rights Group International, March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/saudi-arabia/>

³⁵⁴ The mass execution was the largest since January 2016, when Saudi Arabia executed 47 men for terrorism offenses. See: *Saudi Arabia: Mass Execution of 37 Men*, Human Rights Watch, 24 April 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/24/saudi-arabia-mass-execution-37-men>

³⁵⁵ *Saudi Arabia: Second Case Against Jailed Shia Cleric*, Human Rights Watch, 3 May 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/03/saudi-arabia-second-case-against-jailed-shia-cleric>

³⁵⁶ *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 93, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³⁵⁷ Whitson, S. L., *Briefing on Religious Freedom and Human Rights for Shia Communities in Sunni Countries*, Human Rights Watch, 26 June 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/26/briefing-religious-freedom-and-human-rights-shia-communities-sunni-countries>

‘unbelievers’.³⁵⁸ To confound this, the cleric Saad bin Ateeq al-Ateeq, notorious for sectarian hate speech against Shias, Alawites, Christians and Jews, serves as a supervisor for Islamic awareness at the Ministry of Education.³⁵⁹ Moreover, Christian celebrations such as Easter and Christmas are banned, while the holy month of Ramadan must be strictly obeyed by Saudi citizens.³⁶⁰ Criticism of Islam is severely punished in Saudi Arabia with ‘blasphemy’ treated as ‘apostasy’, making it punishable by death. The blogger, Raif Badawi, who was arrested in 2012 for insulting Islam, remains in prison.³⁶¹

In March 2014, the Government approved new anti-terrorism legislation. Article 1 of the new law defines one form of terrorism as: ‘Calling for atheist thought in any form or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based.’³⁶² Since the Saudi political system is grounded in Wahhabi interpretations of Islam, non-believers are assumed to be enemies of the Saudi state. This legislation not only frames non-believers as terrorists but creates a legal framework that outlaws as terrorism nearly all thought or expression critical of the government and its understanding of Islam.

Apostasy is also criminalised and mandates a death penalty.³⁶³ The criminal accusation of ‘apostasy’ is sometimes deployed against people (including writers, activists, artists, or lawyers) who show any serious sign of pushing at the outer boundaries of freedom of expression, or who are critical of the religious authorities, and whose views (rightly or wrongly) are termed ‘atheist’ or as ‘insulting to religion’.³⁶⁴

Despite restrictions of FoRB, it is reported that the Christian faith has increasingly been shared over the internet and through Christian smartphone apps and satellite TV channels.³⁶⁵ In rare cases, believers who live in gated compound facilities feel secure enough to practice their faith, hanging up paintings of Christ and religious quotes and crucifixes.³⁶⁶ On 6 December 2018, Saudi Arabia hosted

³⁵⁸ Coogle, A., *Shining a Spotlight on Hate Speech in Saudi Textbooks*, Human Rights Watch, 23 January 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/23/shining-spotlight-hate-speech-saudi-textbooks>

³⁵⁹ *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Saudi Arabia*, Minority Rights Group International, March 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/saudi-arabia/>

³⁶⁰ Eltigani, N., *The Land of One Faith: Christians Living in Saudi Arabia, the Home of Islam*, Egyptian Streets, 21 March 2019, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/03/21/the-land-of-one-faith-christians-living-in-saudi-arabia-the-home-of-islam/>

³⁶¹ Wroughton, L., Brunnstrom, D., *Pence calls on Saudi Arabia to release critic of Islam*, Reuters World News, 18 July 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-religion-pence/pence-calls-on-saudi-arabia-to-release-critic-of-islam-idUSKCN1UD2BN>

³⁶² Humanists International, *Saudi Arabia’s new law defines atheism as “terrorism”, bans all criticism of government*, 2 April 2014, <https://humanists.international/2014/04/saudi-arabias-new-law-defines-atheism-as-terrorism-bans-all-criticism-of-government/>

³⁶³ *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 92, <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³⁶⁴ Ibid

³⁶⁵ World Watch Research, *Saudi Arabia: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, page 11, <https://www.opendoors.org.za/app/uploads/2019/01/Saudi-Arabia-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

³⁶⁶ Eltigani, N., *The Land of One Faith: Christians Living in Saudi Arabia, the Home of Islam*, Egyptian Streets, 21 March 2019, <https://egyptianstreets.com/2019/03/21/the-land-of-one-faith-christians-living-in-saudi-arabia-the-home-of-islam/>

its first ever mass by the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church in Riyadh.³⁶⁷ Other positive acts such a change in the law regarding women wearing the abaya have also taken place.³⁶⁸

Non-Muslim migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, many of whom are from India, the Philippines and the African continent, are often Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or Sikh and experience persecution based on ethnicity, class and religion. Low-paid foreign Christian workers are continually under pressure to convert to Islam,³⁶⁹ while Christian maids living in Saudi Arabian households have been reported to experience high levels of physical and sexual abuse.³⁷⁰ Likewise, the case of Gurwinder Singh in 2018 highlights that Sikh migrants are being forced to cut their hair and eat halal meat when in Saudi Arabian prisons.³⁷¹ In January 2019, two Rohingya Muslim refugees were forcibly returned to Bangladesh, despite the suggestion that they would be jailed upon arrival in the country.³⁷²

³⁶⁷ The Arab Weekly, *First Christian mass held in Saudi Arabia*, 9 Dec 2018, <https://thearabweekly.com/first-christian-mass-held-saudi-arabia>

³⁶⁸ *Religious Freedom in the World Report 2018: Saudi Arabia*, Aid to the Church in Need, July 2018, <http://religious-freedom-report.org/report/?report=814>

³⁶⁹ World Watch Research, *Saudi Arabia: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, page 11, <https://www.opendoors.org.za/app/uploads/2019/01/Saudi-Arabia-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

³⁷⁰ Ibid, page 19.

³⁷¹ Uppal, Jas., *Modern Slavery – Persecution of Migrant Workers Under ‘Kafala’*, Justice Upheld, 8 April 2018, <http://justiceupheld.org.uk/modern-slavery-persecution-migrant-workers-kafala/>

³⁷² *Saudi Arabia to deport 250 Rohingya to Bangladesh: Activist group*, Aljazeera News, 21 January 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/saudi-arabia-deport-250-rohingya-bangladesh-activist-group-190120155247369.html>

Somalia

As a result of years of war in Somalia, there are currently no reliable figures for the country's population or minority groups.³⁷³ Even so, it has been reported that up to 99% of the population are Sunni Muslims.³⁷⁴ Those of local religious beliefs and traditions, Islamic groups such as Sufis,³⁷⁵ and the Ashraf and Shekhal groups are also known to reside in the country.³⁷⁶ It has been estimated that "hundreds" of Christians remain in Somalia.³⁷⁷

The country's provisional constitution, adopted in August 2012, undermines the international right to freedom of religion or belief in several ways. Article 2 forbids the propagation of any religion other than Islam, as well as categorically declaring the supremacy of Sharia.³⁷⁸ The judicial system also relies on Islamic, traditional and customary law.³⁷⁹ Non-Muslims are therefore at risk of being criminalised for failing to adhere to Islamic law and tradition. 'Apostasy' is also prohibited in the constitution and, as a result, religious minorities live in a constantly hostile environment with very high levels of violence.³⁸⁰

Beyond the state, both society at large and terrorist organisations are the biggest threat to religious minority communities. Large parts of rural Somalia remain in the hands of the radical Islamic group, al-Shabaab.³⁸¹ Al-Shabaab, which endorses the Saudi-inspired Wahhabi version of Islam, has played a key role in radicalising Somali society.³⁸² Human rights violations such as the death of women by stoning, and the amputation of the hands of thieves have taken place in areas under the groups' pseudo-jurisdiction.³⁸³

Al-Shabaab has also claimed responsibility for persistent violent attacks which have taken place throughout the reporting period. The group want to topple the Somali government and impose a strict version of Islamic law.³⁸⁴ Somalia's capital city, Mogadishu, has experienced a high concentration of violence during late 2018 and throughout 2019. The group is at its core, a clan-

³⁷³ *Somalia*, Minority Rights Group International: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, May 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/somalia/>

³⁷⁴ World Watch Research, *Somalia: Country Dossier*, January 2019, page 4, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SOMALIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018-revised.pdf>

³⁷⁵ Mohamed, H., *Somalia's sufi revival*, Al Jazeera, 29 March 2016,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/03/somalia-sufi-revival-160329085331665.html>

³⁷⁶ *Somalia*, Minority Rights Group International: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, May 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/somalia/>

³⁷⁷ World Watch Research, *Somalia: Country Dossier*, January 2019, page 4, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SOMALIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018-revised.pdf>

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Reese, J. Thomas., *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2017 Annual Report*, USCIRF, April 2017, page 208, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

³⁸⁰ World Watch Research, *Somalia: Country Dossier*, January 2019, page 12,

<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SOMALIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018-revised.pdf>

³⁸¹ Ibid, page 4.

³⁸² *Who are Somalia's al-Shabab?*, BBC News, 22 December 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15336689>

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ *Somalia: Deadly blasts rock Mogadishu near presidential palace*, Al Jazeera News: Africa, 23 December 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/somalia-deadly-blasts-rock-capital-mogadishu-181222072011626.html>

based Islamic militant group. Without ignoring political factors, it is religious motivation that forms the basis of the groups' violence.³⁸⁵

Al-Shabaab continues to identify the Sufi community as non-believers and, therefore, legitimate targets.³⁸⁶ The Sufi community, once relatively large, has dwindled since the civil war in the 1990s, although there has been evidence that the community has increased somewhat in recent years.³⁸⁷ In November 2018, two Al-Shabaab suicide bombers detonated explosives in front of a Sufi shrine in Galkayo, killing a prominent Somali Sufi imam and 17 worshippers. The imam had been criticised after publishing videos showing him and his followers chanting religious poems with music.³⁸⁸

The organisation is also active along the Somalia-Kenya border, where a more visible Christian community resides. In August 2019 an al-Shabaab attack against Christian workers at a building site in Mandera County on the Somalia-Kenyan border was fortunately foiled thanks to local Muslims who evacuated the Christian workers to safety.³⁸⁹

Likewise, the Ashraf community and Shekhal community often experience discrimination based on their differing religious practices.³⁹⁰ In August 2019, the defence lawyers of a long-standing Ashraf Somali asylum seeker argued that, if deported from Britain, he would face significant violence upon his repatriation.³⁹¹

The Somali system enables a type of vigilante justice against Christians.³⁹² The Christian community in Somalia experiences persecution from families, wider society and terrorist organisations, and converts face the threat of on-the-spot execution.³⁹³ As a result, the existing "hundreds"³⁹⁴ of Somali Christians are forced to worship in small secretive groups in fear of such an attack from extremists.³⁹⁵ Most notably, Al-Shabaab participates in a consistent propagation of anti-Christian

³⁸⁵ World Watch Research, *Somalia: Country Dossier*, January 2019, page 4, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SOMALIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018-revised.pdf>

³⁸⁶ Mohamed, H., *Somalia's sufi revival*, Al Jazeera: Africa, 29 March 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/03/somalia-sufi-revival-160329085331665.html>

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ See: Cockburn, H., *Somalia terrorists kill leading imam and 17 worshippers for playing music during religious ceremonies*, The Independent, 26 November 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/somalia-terror-attack-galkayo-suicide-bomb-al-shabaab-mudug-imam-killed-a8651901.html>; and *Somalia: Sufi scholar, followers killed in al-Shabab attack*, Al Jazeera News: Africa, 26 November 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/somalia-sufi-scholar-followers-killed-al-shabab-attack-181126053348923.html>

³⁸⁹ *Muslims Save 20 Christians From Deadly Attack in Kenya*, Open Doors HK, 7 August 2017, <https://www.opendoors.org.hk/en/2019/08/30549/>

³⁹⁰ *Somalia*, Minority Rights Group International: World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, May 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/country/somalia/>

³⁹¹ Ames, J., and Verkaik, R., *Asylum seeker with 18 convictions gets another chance to stay in the UK*, The Times, 6 August 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/asylum-seeker-with-18-convictions-gets-another-chance-to-stay-in-uk-6xhfjftqv>

³⁹² Hearth, K., *Somalia unrest fuels humanitarian crisis, Christian persecution*, Mission Network News, 1 April 2019, <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/somalia-unrest-fuels-humanitarian-crisis-christian-persecution/>

³⁹³ World Watch Research, *Somalia: Country Dossier*, January 2019, page 5, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SOMALIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018-revised.pdf>

³⁹⁴ Ibid, page 4.

³⁹⁵ Onyulo, T., *Christian workers in Somalia worship in secret, fear al-Shabab*, Religion News Service, 7 January 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/01/07/christian-workers-in-somalia-worship-in-secret-fear-al-shabab/>

ideology.³⁹⁶ The group labels all foreign forces in Somalia as “Christian forces that have come to Somalia to spoil Islam”, drawing parallels between Christianity and foreign forces based in the country.³⁹⁷

In July 2017, a Catholic church, which was officially re-opened after three decades, was closed again after a week due to public pressure in the government influenced area of Hargeisa.³⁹⁸ Moreover, in February 2018, Fr. Steffano Tollu, Military Chaplain of the Italian contingent of the European Union training mission in Somalia³⁹⁹, relayed information from Mogadishu which suggested that Somali Christians had experienced hostility from their own grandchildren, with some being murdered by their own family members.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed the Somali generation born in the 1990s have been heavily influenced by Somalia’s move towards more radical Islam since the fall of the government system in 1991.

³⁹⁶ World Watch Research, *Somalia: Country Dossier*, January 2019, page 4, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SOMALIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018-revised.pdf>

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ *Somaliland closes only Catholic church due to public pressure- it re-opened a week ago after 30 years*, World Watch Monitor, 4 August 2017, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/somaliland-closes-catholic-church-due-public-pressure-re-opened-week-ago-30-years/>

³⁹⁹ *AFRICA/SOMALIA- A small community of Somali Christians lives their faith in hiding*, Agenzia fides, 28 February 2018, http://www.fides.org/en/news/63823-AFRICA_SOMALIA_A_small_community_of_Somali_Christians_lives_their_faith_in_hiding

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a majority Buddhist nation, with 70.2% of the population adhering to the Buddhist faith. There are also significant Hindu (12.6%), Muslim (9.7%) and Christian (6.1% Roman Catholic and 1.3% other Christian) minorities in Sri Lanka.⁴⁰¹

In 2015, Maithripala Sirisena became President of the country. While it was hoped that the new government would begin to tackle the legacy of the country's civil war, thereby helping to reconcile and protect ethnic and religious minorities, such hopes were premature.⁴⁰² Instead, radical groups and strong nationalism, centred on preserving Sri Lankan Buddhism, have continued to be influential.⁴⁰³

The persecution of Christians by Sinhala Buddhist nationalists has been on the increase for many years, particularly since 2009.⁴⁰⁴ Widespread incidents of discrimination, threats and violence against Christians were evident in the reporting period⁴⁰⁵ with Christian institutions and places of worship targeted.⁴⁰⁶ For instance, the "Aadara Sevana" Methodist centre was subject to a mob attack on 14 April 2019. The mob issued death threats and threw stones and fire crackers, essentially holding the congregation hostage before they were rescued by the police.⁴⁰⁷ A fortnight earlier, the same centre had been attacked by another mob demanding that prayer services and worship should not be conducted.⁴⁰⁸

While not able to be positioned within the wider trend of increasing Buddhist nationalist violence within Sri Lanka, nine suicide bombers, holding presumed allegiances to Daesh, killed more than 250 people and injured over 500 more in targeted attacks on three churches⁴⁰⁹ and three high-end hotels in April 2019.⁴¹⁰ It has been reported that at least 176 children lost either one or both of their parents in the bombings.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰¹ *The World Factbook: Sri Lanka*, Central Intelligence Agency Library, 22nd August 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ce.html>

⁴⁰² World Watch Research, *Sri Lanka: Country Dossier*, Open Doors International, January 2019, page 6, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Sri-Lanka-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*, page 5.

⁴⁰⁴ Arulthas, M., *The Sri Lanka attacks: New front, old wounds*, Al Jazeera, 22nd April 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/sri-lanka-attacks-front-wounds-190422110652434.html>

⁴⁰⁵ See <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/05/sri-lankan-christians-grapple-with-aftermath-of-easter-bombings-amid-fears-of-fresh-attacks/> and <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/sri-lanka-attacks-front-wounds-190422110652434.html>

⁴⁰⁶ Jeyaraj, D. B. S., *Palm Sunday Mob Attack on "Aadara Sevana" Methodist Centre in Anuradhapura and Its Aftermath*, DBSJeyaraj.com, 24th April 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/63675>

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid*; Rajithajagodaarachchi., *Palm Sunday violence against Anuradhapura Methodist Church*, Sunday Observer, 21st April 2019, <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2019/04/21/news-features/palm-sunday-violence-against-anuradhapura-methodist-church>

⁴⁰⁸ Jeyaraj, D. B. S., *Palm Sunday Mob Attack on "Aadara Sevana" Methodist Centre in Anuradhapura and Its Aftermath*, DBSJeyaraj.com, 24th April 2019, <http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/63675>

⁴⁰⁹ St. Sebastian's in Negombo (outside Colombo, close to the international airport) and the evangelical Zion Church in the city of Batticaloa in the Eastern Province, several hundred miles from the capital.

⁴¹⁰ Ganguly, M., *Fear Returns to Sri Lanka After Bombings*, Human Rights Watch, 10th May 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/10/fear-returns-sri-lanka-after-bombings>

⁴¹¹ *176 children lost one or both parents in Sri Lanka Easter bombings*, World Watch Monitor, 12th August, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/08/176-children-lost-one-or-both-parents-in-sri-lanka-easter-bombings/>

In recent years, there has been a continuation of anti-Muslim violence in Sri Lanka at the hands of ultra-nationalistic Sinhalese Buddhist groups.⁴¹² In particular, anti-Islamic sentiment, and suspicion of Muslims, has escalated in the form of significant retaliatory violence in the weeks and months subsequent to the Easter Bombings discussed above. The Sri Lankan Muslim community has faced misplaced backlash after it became public that home-grown Islamic militants, with ties to Daesh, conducted the attacks.⁴¹³ Specifically, Muslim refugees and asylum-seekers have faced retaliatory persecution, with as many as 1,500 forced from their homes by violent mobs in the aftermath of the bombings.⁴¹⁴ It was reported that in the days following the attacks, mobs of young men began door-to-door evictions of Muslim refugees and asylum-seekers residing in the Negombo area.⁴¹⁵ The Prevention of Terrorism Act, which has been used to detain Tamils suspected of holding links to the LTTE,⁴¹⁶ has, since the Easter bombings, been used to arbitrarily arrest and detain hundreds of Sri Lankan Muslims.⁴¹⁷ Some have been arrested for little more than possessing the Quran or other Arabic literature.⁴¹⁸

Emergency regulations implemented in April have disproportionately affected Muslim women. The government implemented a ban on face coverings including the niqab and hijab, with women who disobey such regulations facing exclusion from public places, harassment, and even arrest in some instances.⁴¹⁹ Women have faced significant persecution from suspicious employers and neighbours.⁴²⁰ More specifically, on 15 May 2019, a 17-year-old girl was arrested under the emergency regulations after she momentarily covered her face with a handkerchief when being overcome by nausea.⁴²¹

Additionally, mosques and Muslim-owned businesses have also become prime targets of communal violence. In May 2019, it was reported that a 45-year-old Muslim man in the Puttalam district had been killed by a mob armed with swords as he worked in his carpentry workshop.⁴²² More widely, in the North Western Province, dozens of Muslim-owned shops, homes and mosques have been torched or vandalised.⁴²³

⁴¹² Roth, K., *Sri Lanka: Events of 2018*, Human Rights Watch, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/sri-lanka>

⁴¹³ Ganguly, M., *Fear Returns to Sri Lanka After Bombings*, Human Rights Watch, 10th May 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/10/fear-returns-sri-lanka-after-bombings>

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ *Sri Lanka: Refugees living in fear following Easter Sunday attacks*, Amnesty International UK, 16th May 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/sri-lanka-refugees-living-fear-following-easter-sunday-attacks>

⁴¹⁶ *Sri Lanka 2017/2018*, Amnesty International UK, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/sri-lanka/report-sri-lanka/>

⁴¹⁷ *Sri Lanka: Muslims Face Threats, Attacks*, Human Rights Watch, 3rd July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/04/sri-lanka-muslims-face-threats-attacks>

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ *Fear in Sri Lanka as monk calls for stoning of Muslims*, Al Jazeera News, 22nd June 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/fear-sri-lanka-monk-calls-stoning-muslims-190621152817814.html>

⁴²⁰ Ganguly, M., *Fear Returns to Sri Lanka After Bombings*, Human Rights Watch, 10th May 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/10/fear-returns-sri-lanka-after-bombings>

⁴²¹ *Sri Lanka: Muslims Face Threats, Attacks*, Human Rights Watch, 3rd July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/04/sri-lanka-muslims-face-threats-attacks>

⁴²² *Sri Lanka: UN Statement expresses concern about religious intolerance and retaliatory attacks*, CSW Website, 15th May 2019, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/05/15/press/4336/article.htm>

⁴²³ *Sri Lanka orders nationwide curfew amid anti-Muslim riots*, Al Jazeera News, 14th May 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/sri-lanka-nationwide-curfew-crowds-attack-mosques-190513144625670.html>

The physical violence has been accompanied by extremist rhetoric. On 15 May 2019, one of Sri Lanka's most senior Buddhist monks called for the stoning to death of Muslims, as well as propagating the myth that Muslim-owned restaurants were putting "sterilization medicine" in their food in order to suppress the Sinhalese Buddhist birth-rate.⁴²⁴

While reporting of violations against Hindus is less forthcoming, the community has also faced FoRB violations. This was highlighted in the acquittal of 12 members of Sri Lanka's Special Taskforce Police and one policeman in July 2019 for the execution of five ethnic Tamil students (known as the "Trinco Five") in January 2006.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ *Fear in Sri Lanka as monk calls for stoning of Muslims*, Al Jazeera News, 22nd June 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/fear-sri-lanka-monk-calls-stoning-muslims-190621152817814.html>

⁴²⁵ *Sri Lanka: No Justice for 'Trinco 5'*, Human Rights Watch, 8th July 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/08/sri-lanka-no-justice-trinco-5>

Sudan

Sudan has a poor human rights record, with FoRB as well as freedom of expression and association severely limited. The majority of Sudan's 97% Muslim population is Sunni, but Sufi orders are strong, and some Muslims of the Salafi movement also reside in the country.⁴²⁶ Sudan's largest minority religious community is Christian, but they only account for 3% of its population. Within this community, Christians of the Coptic, Greek, Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Church as well as Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and a range of other Pentecostal and Evangelical churches are found.⁴²⁷

After more than 30 years in power, Omar al-Bashir was ousted as head of state on 11 April 2019, being replaced by the Transitional Military Council. While the protests that removed him were predominantly driven by an economic crisis, they were also fuelled by popular discontent with his repressive government – including its severe restrictions on religious freedom and other human rights.⁴²⁸ While the protests gave many in Sudan new hope, it is apparent that violations of human rights continue to take place.⁴²⁹ Most notably, on 3 June 2019, members of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), formerly known as the Janjaweed militia, massacred at least 128 unarmed civilians, participating in the rape of many more.⁴³⁰

On 4 August 2019, the Transitional Military Council and Forces for Freedom and Change agreed on a constitutional declaration. This declaration, however, did not include many new guarantees for rights and failed to mention religious freedom.⁴³¹ Without new protections for FoRB, and the subsequent removal of Sharia, religious minorities are still at risk.⁴³² There are fears that the transition has been hijacked by radical Islamists, which will in turn damage the prospects for inclusivity.⁴³³

Violations against Christians manifest itself through anti-Christian preaching, the criminalization of apostasy, the enactment of blasphemy laws, as well as the destruction of churches and property in Sudan.⁴³⁴ Christian converts often face the most intense persecution, facing additional pressure from family and neighbours in their community, family and private life.⁴³⁵ Over the past three decades, the Sudanese government has been accused of supporting radical Islamic militants. Most obviously,

⁴²⁶ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 99,

<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, pp99-103.

⁴³⁰ See: Burke, J.; Salih, Zeinab Mohammed., *Sudanese protesters demand justice following mass killings*, The Guardian, 13 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/13/sudanese-protesters-demand-justice-after-mass-killings>; *Sudan crisis: 40 bodies pulled from Nile, opposition says*, BBC News, 5 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-48512413>

⁴³¹ *Sudan Military and Civilian Protesters Sign Constitution; No mention of Religious Freedom*, Persecution.org. 8 May 2019, <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/05/sudan-military-civilian-protesters-sign-constitution-no-mention-religious-freedom/>

⁴³² Chandler, D., *Sudan Christians May Benefit From New Accord*, Word&Way, 22 July 2019, <https://wordandway.org/2019/07/22/sudan-christians-may-benefit-from-new-accord/>

⁴³³ <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/sudan-arrested-christians-receive-beating/> (password freedom)

⁴³⁴ World Watch Research, *SUDAN: Country Dossier*, Open Doors, April 2018, page 9, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SUDAN-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-April-2018.pdf>

⁴³⁵ Ibid, page 11.

the state attempted an Islamisation⁴³⁶ of the Christian community living in the Nuba mountain region.⁴³⁷ Religious groups must register with the government as non-profit NGOs and face extreme surveillance of their activities and personnel.⁴³⁸ Female Christians are targeted, with instances of arrest for crimes such as “indecent dressing” reported.⁴³⁹

The government previously rejected church permits, closing, seizing and even demolishing buildings in the process.⁴⁴⁰ In 2016, the government created a list of 27 churches it intended to demolish,⁴⁴¹ a practice that was widely condemned within the international community.⁴⁴² There was continued state interference with church buildings and congregations throughout 2018 – from a church demolition in February⁴⁴³ to government interference with denominational committees (committees elected by those attending the church/churches), and detaining and fining church leaders objecting to this interference in November,⁴⁴⁴ April⁴⁴⁵ and October.⁴⁴⁶ Sudanese security officials arrested 13 Christians in the western region of Darfur on 13 October 2018.⁴⁴⁷

Sudan’s small Shia community and those of local religious beliefs and traditions have also experienced persecution.⁴⁴⁸ The National Congress Party government implemented a strict theological interpretation of Islam, imposing Sharia on all citizens and establishing a harsh criminal

⁴³⁶ In Christian villages in the Nuba Mountains which are in the south of the country, hospitals and schools have encountered frequent aerial bombardment, in what church leaders see as government attempts to eradicate Christianity from the region. See: *As Sudanese protesters demand democracy, Catholic bishop pushes for freedom of worship*, Religion News Service, 24 April 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/04/24/as-sudanese-protesters-demand-democracy-catholic-bishop-pushes-for-freedom-of-worship/>

⁴³⁷ For Christians see: *Sudan: Nuba*, Minority Rights Group International, June 2018, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/nuba/>

⁴³⁸ *AFRICA/SUDAN- “Now a civilian government” asks the population; the Church: “stop discrimination against Christians”*, Agenzia fides, 26 April 2019, http://www.fides.org/en/news/65937-AFRICA_SUDAN_Now_a_civilian_government_asks_the_population_the_Church_stop_discrimination_against_Christians

⁴³⁹ *As Sudanese protesters demand democracy, Catholic bishop pushes for freedom of worship*, Religion News Service, 24 April 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/04/24/as-sudanese-protesters-demand-democracy-catholic-bishop-pushes-for-freedom-of-worship/>

⁴⁴⁰ See <https://www.uscirf.gov/countries/sudan> for reports on Sudan from 2006 to present.

⁴⁴¹ *Second church in 10 days torn down in Sudan*, World Watch Monitor, 23 May 2017, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/05/second-church-10-days-torn-sudan/>

⁴⁴² Rees, M., *World Watch List report 2018*, Open Doors UK, January 2018, p.10, https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/resources/world_watch_list_report_2018_final.pdf

⁴⁴³ *Sudanese church leader back in court*, World Watch Monitor, 7 February 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/sudanese-church-leaders-back-court/>

⁴⁴⁴ *Sudanese religious leaders unjustly convicted*, CSW, 6 November 2017, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2017/11/06/news/3773/article.htm>

⁴⁴⁵ *Sudan: Four Christians charged, 36 others to stand trial*, World Watch Monitor, 19 April 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/04/sudan-four-christians-charged-36-others-to-stand-trial/>

⁴⁴⁶ *Sudan: 13 Christians arrested in Darfur, another church told to hand over property*, World Watch Monitor, 17 October 2018, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/10/sudan-13-christians-arrested-in-darfur-another-church-told-to-hand-over-property/>

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid; Criminal case against religious leaders reopened*, CSW, 25 July 2019, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/07/25/press/4420/article.htm>

⁴⁴⁸ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World’s Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 99, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

code.⁴⁴⁹ Members of minority Muslim communities have, subsequently, been charged with apostasy for expressing theological views that differ from the government's preferred interpretation.⁴⁵⁰ They have been dismissed from jobs, as well as facing ill treatment, such as beating and torture, as a result of their differing beliefs.⁴⁵¹ In particular, government officials viewed Shia communities through a geopolitical lens as enmeshed with Iran.⁴⁵² The government has also repressed members of the Quranist community⁴⁵³ and Republic Brothers and Sisters,⁴⁵⁴ in addition to harassing students to follow certain Islamic practices.⁴⁵⁵ The government also attempted to forcibly prevent adherence to atheism or secularism.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁴⁹ Mark, D. et al., *2018 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2018, page 93, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2018USCIRFAR.pdf>

⁴⁵⁰ Dorjee, Tenzin, et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 100, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Muslims who believe solely in the teaching and authority of the Qur'an.

⁴⁵⁴ A movement focused on Islamic reform in Sudan.

⁴⁵⁵ Dorjee, Tenzin. et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 100, <https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

Syria

Sunni Muslims are the majority faith community in Syria, making up approximately 74% of the population.⁴⁵⁷ There are significant Shia, Alawite, Christian and Druze communities,⁴⁵⁸ as well as Yazidis⁴⁵⁹ and adherents of other diverse religious communities. Prior to the civil war, Syria was renowned for its religious diversity and tolerance. However, both sides of the war have used tactics that have significantly increased sectarian tensions in the country.

The Syrian Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and Islamic Jurisprudence to be a main source of legislation.⁴⁶⁰ The constitution 'respects all religions' and guarantees the manifestation of religion that does 'not prejudice public order'.⁴⁶¹ The constitution further permits different religious communities to legislate their own personal and family matters.⁴⁶² Conversions from one faith community to another⁴⁶³ and interreligious marriage⁴⁶⁴ are rare and discouraged by the state to prevent social disorder.⁴⁶⁵ Converts from Islam can face pressure from family members.⁴⁶⁶

Relations between the Alawites and the Sunni majority have deteriorated significantly as a result of mutual fears and suspicions.⁴⁶⁷ In a number of ways, President Assad has accentuated these divisions with the leader reportedly encouraging the portrayal of uprising protesters as Sunni extremists and armed terrorists; saturating the protest movement with radical Jihadists in order to weaken its secular-democratic element, as well as staging provocations of Alawites in order to instil fear amongst them with the hope of increasing their loyalty to the regime as 'protector'.⁴⁶⁸

This predominance of Alawites in the army units and militias dispatched to the frontlines has, in the eyes of many Sunni Syrians, tainted the group.⁴⁶⁹ Alawites are perceived by Sunnis as a corrupt, privileged and rich group, which participate in war-profiteering.⁴⁷⁰ Despite this, Alawites commonly

⁴⁵⁷ *The World Factbook, Middle East: Syria*, Central Intelligence Agency, 21 August 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sy.html>

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Armstrong, K., *The Yazidi People: who are they and why are they on the run?*, SBS, 22 August 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/explainer/yazidi-people-who-are-they-and-why-are-they-run>

⁴⁶⁰ Constitution of Syria, Article 3. See: *Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic*, iol, 2012, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_125885.pdf

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Saliba, I. M., *Report for the US Department of Justice, Syria: Treatment of Religious Minorities*, The Law Library of Congress, August 2016, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/882901/download>

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ *Syria*, Humanists International: The Freedom of Thought Report, 4 July 2016, <https://freethoughtreport.com/countries/asia-western-asia/syria/>

⁴⁶⁵ *SYRIA: Country Dossier*, World Watch Research, Open Doors International, May 2018, page 8, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/SYRIA-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-May-2018.pdf>

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Tsurkov, E., *Between Regime and Rebels: A Survey of Syria's Alawi Sect*, The New York Review of Books: NYR Daily, 2014, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/22/between-regime-and-rebels-a-survey-of-syrias-alawi-sect/>

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

face circumstances of general deprivation. Most of the community live in underdeveloped villages in territory favourable to the regime.⁴⁷¹

On the other hand, Daesh continues to commit atrocities against non-Muslims and Muslims who do not adhere to their version of Islam. Daesh has committed mass executions and targeted arrests of Christians, also attacking Shias and Yazidis.⁴⁷² The Druze community has faced notable persecution from both Daesh and the Assad regime. While Daesh has lost its physical territory, it still mobilizes 18,000 remaining fighters in Iraq and Syria.⁴⁷³ While the pace of their operations in Syria has dropped significantly, in July 2018 Daesh killed 300 Druze in a series of suicide bombings and door-to-door killings.⁴⁷⁴ On 8 November 2018, Daesh released 17 remaining Druze hostages who were abducted from Suwayda in southern Syria earlier that year.⁴⁷⁵

There also remains the presence of the Arab-Kurdish conflict. The Turkish military and their allies perceive Yazidis and other non-Muslims as both infidels and Kurds, which makes them doubly vulnerable within the conflict.⁴⁷⁶ The Christian Syriac Military Council warned of a possible Turkish attack on the eastern Euphrates River region in Syria, resulting in the potential displacement of thousands of Christians residing in villages and towns along the Syrian-Turkish border.⁴⁷⁷ It has been reported that Turkey has been amassing troops at Ras al-Ayn.⁴⁷⁸ In late 2018 and early 2019, Turkey increased its military hardware in the region.⁴⁷⁹ The US decision to pull out 2,000 American troops from Syria in December 2018 increased anxieties in the area as Kurdish and Christian minorities had been somewhat reliant on their presence and protection.⁴⁸⁰ However, Kurdish authorities have reportedly conducted raids of Christian schools, interfering with activities and confiscating property.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷¹ Tsurkov, E., *Between Regime and Rebels: A Survey of Syria's Alawi Sect*, The New York Review of Books, 22 July 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/22/between-regime-and-rebels-a-survey-of-syrias-alawi-sect/>

⁴⁷² Mark, D. et al., *2018 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, April 2018, pp. 98-99, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2018USCIRFAR.pdf>

⁴⁷³ *ISIS is regaining strength in Iraq and Syria*, The New York Times, 9 August 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/us/politics/isis-iraq-syria.html>

⁴⁷⁴ *Syrian Druze hostage killed*, CSW, 6 Aug 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/08/06/press/4055/article.htm>

⁴⁷⁵ *CSW welcomes release of remaining Druze hostages*, CSW, 14 November 2018, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/11/14/press/4161/article.htm>

⁴⁷⁶ Cockburn, P., 'Yazidis who suffered under Isis face forced conversion to Islam amid fresh persecution in Afrin', The Independent, 18 April 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-yazidis-daesh-islam-conversion-afirin-persecution-kurdish-a8310696.html>

⁴⁷⁷ Gavlak, D., *Syriac Christians living near border fear Turkey military incursion*, CRUX, 18 July 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-middle-east/2019/07/18/syriac-christians-living-near-border-fear-turkey-military-incursion/>

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Tanks, howitzers and armoured personnel carriers.

⁴⁸⁰ Gavlak, D., *Christians concerned about religious freedom if Turkey enters Syria*, CRUX, 8 January 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-asia-oceania/2019/01/08/christians-concerned-about-religious-freedom-if-turkey-enters-syria/>

⁴⁸¹ Dorjee, Tenzin, et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators of Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 108, <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

Religious freedom has deteriorated significantly in the area of Afrin, a once diverse and tolerant region.⁴⁸² Throughout 2018, pro-Turkish militias and the Turkish army allowed Islamist militants free reign in Afrin, installing Sharia and targeting Christians, Yazidis and other non-Muslims for forced eviction, displacement, and conversion.⁴⁸³ The killing of Christians has been glorified,⁴⁸⁴ while Yazidi places of worship in the area have been destroyed, with their towns re-named and homes given to Islamist fighters.⁴⁸⁵

The area of Idlib, which borders Turkey, has become a significant battleground for both government forces and armed groups. The region had been controlled by several rival factions, but in January 2019 was violently taken by the jihadist alliance Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). It remains one of the last Jihadist strongholds, with a United Nations committee member citing that some 20,000 HTS fighters reside in the region.⁴⁸⁶ More widely, HTS has reportedly sought to expropriate Christian homes, shops and land. It was understood that, in November 2018, forceful notices were circulated to numerous Christian families with the implication that property would subsequently be seized from them.⁴⁸⁷ Moreover, in a village in Idlib, a Syrian Christian woman was discovered dead on 9 July 2019 after being repeatedly raped, tortured and stoned.⁴⁸⁸

Fear amongst the Christian community has been high in the last years, as it has faced threats, intimidation and kidnappings from multiple radical Islamic groups.⁴⁸⁹ The Christian community has experienced significant upheaval since 2011 as a result of the Syrian civil war. While Christianity had once comprised up to 10% of the population prior to 2011, it was reported that, as of 2017, eight out of every ten Christians previously residing in the country had fled due to the conflict.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸² Dorjee, Tenzin, et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 108,

<https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁴⁸³ *Syria: Christians and Yazidis among 250,000 displaced in Afrin*, World Watch Monitor, 19 June 2018,

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/coe/syria-christians-and-yazidis-among-250000-displaced-in-afrin/>

⁴⁸⁴ Gavlak, D., *Christian activists say militias target religious minorities in Syria*, Crux, 16 March 2018,

<https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2018/03/16/christian-activists-say-militias-target-religious-minorities-in-syria/>

⁴⁸⁵ Cockburn, P., *Yazidis who suffered under Isis face forced conversion to Islam amid fresh persecution in Afrin*,

The Independent, 18 April 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-yazidis-daesh-islam-conversion-afrin-persecution-kurdish-a8310696.html>

⁴⁸⁶ *Syria war: Why does the battle for Idlib matter?*, BBC News, 4 June 2019,

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-45403334>

⁴⁸⁷ Dorjee, Tenzin, et al., *2019 Annual Report and Recommendations for World's Most Egregious Violators or Religious Freedom*, USCIRF, 29 April 2019, page 108,

<https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

⁴⁸⁸ *Christian woman killed in Idlib*, CSW, 23 July 2019,

<https://www.csw.org.uk/2019/7/23/press/4417/privacy.htm>

⁴⁸⁹ Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), the Ansar Brigade or the al-Farouq Battalions who consider Christians to be

infidels. See: *WWR Country Dossier: Syria*, Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit, January

2019, page 6, <https://www.opendoors.org.za/app/uploads/2019/01/Syria-WWR-COUNTRY-DOSSIER-January-2019-update.pdf>

⁴⁹⁰ *Christians face uncertain future as Syria enters possible last year of civil war*, World Watch Monitor, 16

March 2019, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2019/03/christians-face-uncertain-future-as-syria-enters-possible-last-year-of-civil-war/>

Turkey

Turkey's population of over 80 million people is predominantly made up of Sunni Muslims, with only 0.2% of the country professing a non-Islamic religion – mainly Christianity and Judaism.⁴⁹¹ Turkey has long-standing freedom of religion or belief problems impacting groups and individuals from diverse religious or belief backgrounds as well as atheists and agnostics.⁴⁹² However, the deterioration of human rights protection in recent years, “as restrictive government and judicial actions have progressively affected large strata of society,”⁴⁹³ have not only resulted in no steps being taken to rectify the situation, but also increased vulnerability of religious or belief groups.

In Turkey, no religious or belief community has legal personality.⁴⁹⁴ This remains a vital issue affecting all religious or belief communities in the exercise of their right to freedom of religion or belief collectively.⁴⁹⁵ The minority non-Muslim community foundations' right to elect new board members has been obstructed since 2013, causing these communities' rights to association to be essentially suspended.⁴⁹⁶

Turkey's Armenian Apostolic community has not been able to elect a new Patriarch for the last ten years. Following the passing of the 84th Patriarch Mesrob Mutafyan in 2019, and the Turkish Constitutional Court's ruling⁴⁹⁷ that the government has violated Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution protecting freedom of religion and conscience by interfering in the internal affairs of the Armenian community, it is hoped that the latter will now be able to elect their Patriarch without interference.

Turkey is yet to both effectively enforce numerous European Court of Human Rights judgments and ensure general measures are taken to prevent similar violations from occurring. These judgements require Turkey to ensure that the education system respects the right of parents to raise their children in line with their religious or philosophical views (this problem impacts, among others, Alevis, atheist and agnostics, Sunni Muslims critical of school teaching in the area of religion). The right to conscientious objection to military service also must be recognized. Places of worship must be able to acquire legal status without discrimination (among others, Alevi *cem* houses, Protestant churches and Jehovah's Witnesses' Kingdom Halls). The ECHR also requires that the 'religion' section

⁴⁹¹ *The World Factbook, Middle East: Turkey*, Central Intelligence Agency, 04 November 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>

⁴⁹² *Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey (July 2014-June 2015)*, Norwegian Helsinki Committee Freedom of Belief Initiative Report, 23 November 2015, <http://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/monitoring-report-on-the-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-turkey-2015-is-published/>

⁴⁹³ Euronews, *Human rights in Turkey- the urgent need for a new beginning*, Statement by Human Right Commissioner of the Council of Europe, 10 March 2017, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/human-rights-in-turkey-the-urgent-need-for-a-new-beginning>

⁴⁹⁴ *Opinion on the Legal Status of Religious Communities in Turkey and the Right of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul*, Council of Europe: Venice Commission, 15 March 2010, <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD%282010%29005-e>

⁴⁹⁵ Yıldırım, Mine., *The Collective Dimension of Freedom of Religion – the Case of Turkey*, Routledge, 2017.

⁴⁹⁶ *Pursuing Rights and Equality: Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey*, Norwegian Helsinki Committee Freedom of Belief Initiative, 30 August 2019, <https://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/2019-report-pursuing-rights-and-equality-monitoring-report-on-the-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-turkey/>

⁴⁹⁷ Turkish Constitutional Court (Plenary), *Levon Berç Kuzukoğlu and Ohannes Garbis Balmumciyan*, Application No. 2014/17354, 22 May 2019.

in national identity cards must be removed, and discrimination against the Alevi community in the provision of religious services needs to be corrected.⁴⁹⁸

Religious and ethnic groups – in particular Jews, Armenians, Christians and Greeks – continue to be targeted with hate speech in the media.⁴⁹⁹

In the aftermath of the 2015-2016-armed conflict in Southeast Turkey, numerous places of worship, have been damaged. The government has taken measures – albeit late – to restore places of worship, including Armenian Surp Giragos Church.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ Zengin group of cases v. Turkey, Sinan Işık v. Turkey, Buldu and Others v. Turkey, Jehovah’s Witnesses Association v. Turkey, and Izzettin Dogan and Others v. Turkey.

⁴⁹⁹ See weekly monitoring reports of the Hrant Dink Foundation. See: Asulis, <https://hrantdink.org/en/asulis-en/activities/projects/media-watch-on-hate-speech>

⁵⁰⁰ *Pursuing Rights and Equality: Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey*, Norwegian Helsinki Committee Freedom of Belief Initiative, 30 August 2019, <https://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/2019-report-pursuing-rights-and-equality-monitoring-report-on-the-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-turkey/>

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has a population of over 5 million people, around 85 per cent being ethnic Turkmen and 5 per cent ethnic Uzbeks (seen as of Muslim background), with the rest being made up of smaller percentages of Slavs (mainly Russians and Ukrainians, seen as of Christian background) and others.⁵⁰¹ Serious systemic violations of many human rights take place in the country.⁵⁰² All exercise of freedom of religion or belief with others without state permission is illegal, as there is compulsory registration of all religious or belief groups and severe restrictions on their activity.⁵⁰³

Muslims increasingly fear being branded “extremists” if they visibly fast or mark Ramadan. Turkmenistan has jailed numerous Muslims on vague “extremism” accusations, including pinishing them for meetings to study their faith. One Muslim stopped going to mosque after police stopped him to ask, “Who is more important, Allah or the President?”⁵⁰⁴

The regime has repeatedly jailed Muslims who meet together to study their faith. Prison administrations must regularly inform higher authorities, such as the Prosecutor’s Office and the Interior Ministry, of the number of jailed “adherents of banned religious organisations” (as all exercise of freedom of religion and belief by groups of people without state permission is banned, this category could be very wide). They must also inform authorities of the number alleged “Wahhabis”, “Jehovists”, and “Suleimanists” (an apparent reference to followers of Turkish-influenced Islam). Alleged “Wahhabis” include a large group of Hanafi Sunni Muslims who met in Turkmenabad in 2013 to study Islam and were subsequently arrested and jailed. It is unknown whether their leader Bahram Saparov and others from this group of prisoners of conscience are still alive.⁵⁰⁵ Alleged “Suleimanists” include five Muslim prisoners of conscience who, in 2017, met in Balkan Region with others to pray and study their faith, using the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi and were jailed for 12 years each in labour camps. Four of the five are in the top-security prison at Ovadan-Depe, where prisoners have suffered torture and death.⁵⁰⁶ Among other prisoners of conscience are Muslim prisoner Annamurad Atdaev, given a 15-year strict regime prison term in 2016; apparently for refusing to become an informer for the MSS secret police.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰¹ Forum 18, *Reports on particular freedom of religion and belief violations in Turkmenistan*, <http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=32> and Forum 18, *Turkmenistan religious freedom survey*, January 2017, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2244

⁵⁰² Human Rights Watch, *Turkmenistan - Human Rights Watch World Report, 2019*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkmenistan>

⁵⁰³ Forum 18, *Turkmenistan religious freedom survey*, January 2017, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2244

⁵⁰⁴ Forum 18, *TURKMENISTAN: In Ramadan, Muslims fear “extremism” accusations*, 28 May 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2481

⁵⁰⁵ Forum 18, *Turkmenistan religious freedom survey*, January 2017, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2244

⁵⁰⁶ Forum 18, *TURKMENISTAN: Appeals against 12-year jail terms fail*, 27 July 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2399

⁵⁰⁷ Forum 18, *TURKMENISTAN: Another disappeared prisoner dies of torture*, 27 September 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2318

As of September 2019, seven Jehovah’s Witness conscientious objectors to compulsory military service are known to be currently serving labour camp terms of between one and four years. Four have been jailed in 2019. Three are currently serving one-year terms, three are serving two-year terms, and one (Bahtiyar Atahanov jailed on 5 July 2019⁵⁰⁸) is serving a four year sentence. Atahanov was forcibly conscripted first and so was punished as a soldier.⁵⁰⁹ In the latest known jailing, on 31 July, 20-year-old Jehovah’s Witness Azat Ashirov was jailed for two years. His offer to perform alternative civilian service – which Turkmenistan refuses to offer – was refused. Instead, he was prosecuted for refusal to serve in the armed forces “by means of inflicting injury to oneself, or by simulation of illness, by means of forgery of documents, or other fraudulent ways”.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ Forum 18, *TURKMENISTAN: Conscientious objector jailed for four years*, 23 July 2019
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2495

⁵⁰⁹ Forum 18, *TURKMENISTAN: Conscientious objector jailed for four years*, 23 July 2019
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2495

⁵¹⁰ Forum 18, *TURKMENISTAN: Fourth known 2019 conscientious objector jailing*, 5 September 2019
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2504

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan⁵¹¹ has over 32 million people, with over 80 per cent being ethnic Uzbeks (seen as having a Sunni Muslim background). Other ethnic groups, except Slavs, are also seen as mainly having a Sunni Muslim background.⁵¹² Systemic violations of many human rights continue to take place.⁵¹³ Despite regime promises, there has not been systemic protection of freedom of religion and belief for all and other human rights.⁵¹⁴ Some improvements include, in 2018, freeing some but not all Muslims jailed for exercising freedom of religion and belief,⁵¹⁵ and not imposing long jail terms on three Muslims found with Islamic texts on mobile phones.⁵¹⁶

All exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission remains illegal, and all sharing of any beliefs is banned.⁵¹⁷ In May 2018, the regime added new restrictive requirements for religious seeking state permission and refused to explain why, instead of abolishing restrictions, the regime has increased them.⁵¹⁸

In 2019 there has been less targeting of smaller vulnerable communities, but Muslims continue to be routinely targeted. A 33-year-old Tashkent Imam, Fazliddin Parpiyev, had to flee Uzbekistan in December 2018, two months after he appealed to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev about violations of freedom of religion or belief for the country's Muslims. The Religious Affairs Committee, SSS secret police, ordinary police, Prosecutor's Office and Muftiate officials immediately pressured and threatened him and his father after he issued a 7 September video appeal to President Mirziyoyev "[because] Muslims still suffer injustice and cannot have full freedom of religion and belief". The same day, eight Religious Affairs Committee and SSS secret police officials visited him. Imam Parpiyev repeated his appeal at Friday prayers in his Tashkent mosque, and that evening he was visited and threatened by Religious Affairs Committee officials. The next day he was questioned, fired from his post and his father was forced to record a video appeal against his son. After more threats and a state-run TV programme attacking him, "I had to leave the country because I was afraid for my safety" he told Forum 18.⁵¹⁹

"Muslims on black lists ... are periodically summoned to police stations and mahalla [district administration] committees for talks and warnings", one human rights defender told Forum 18. One source used to identify Muslims for surveillance and warnings has been state-run competitions to

⁵¹¹ Forum 18, *Reports on particular freedom of religion and belief violations in Uzbekistan*, <http://forum18.org/archive.php?country=33> and Forum 18, *Uzbekistan religious freedom survey*, September 2017, http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314

⁵¹² Forum 18, *Uzbekistan religious freedom survey*, September 2017, http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314

⁵¹³ Human Rights Watch, *Uzbekistan – Human Rights Watch World Report, 2019*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/uzbekistan>

⁵¹⁴ Forum 18, *Reports on particular freedom of religion and belief violations in Uzbekistan*, <http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=33&results=200>

⁵¹⁵ Forum 18, *UZBEKISTAN: Prisoners of conscience freed, others not*, 13 April 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2369

⁵¹⁶ Forum 18, *UZBEKISTAN: Freed from punishment, but property ordered destroyed*, 26 June 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2390

⁵¹⁷ Forum 18, *Uzbekistan religious freedom survey*, September 2017, http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314

⁵¹⁸ Forum 18, *UZBEKISTAN: More legal personality restrictions imposed*, 18 July 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2396

⁵¹⁹ Forum 18, *UZBEKISTAN: Imam forced to flee after freedom appeal*, 11 February 2019 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2451

find Koran Hafizes, people who have memorised the Koran. The SSS secret police then questioned winners. Imams have also told Forum 18 that some of the competition winners were fined recently but declined to give details for fear of state reprisals. Human rights defenders, who asked not to be named for similar reasons, have told Forum 18 that the regime in August 2018 began rotating Imams, to break their influence over their mosque communities.⁵²⁰

Torture continues to be frequent with impunity for torturers including those officials who on 17 April 2019 tortured Muslim prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov for six hours in the Labour Camp in which he is detained.⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ Forum 18, *UZBEKISTAN: Imam forced to flee after freedom appeal*, 11 February 2019
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2451

⁵²¹ Forum18, *UZBEKISTAN: Torture, no pardon, for prisoner of conscience*, 21 May 2019
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2477

Yemen

In the last 12 months, the freedom of religion or belief and wider human rights situation in Yemen appears to have declined due to the political entropy related to the lack of progress with security. The UN led peace process has not progressed substantially and there are continuing hostilities between the Yemeni government based in Aden and the Houthi movement who control Sana'a and much of the north of the country.

According to the FCO: "2018 saw attacks on freedom of religion or belief, attacks on freedom of speech, the violations of women's human rights, the recruitment of child soldiers, and arbitrary detentions. Multiple parties across the country committed a wide range of human rights abuses and violations."⁵²²

The 2019 Open Doors World Watch List entry on Yemen describes the plight of the country's Christians in the context of the humanitarian crisis. It says the crisis is "...making an already difficult nation, for Christians, even harder. The chaos of war has enabled radical groups to take control over some regions of Yemen, and they have increased persecution against Christians."⁵²³

There are believed to be only four officially recognised church buildings in the entire country, all located in Aden, and all have been damaged in the ongoing conflict. Neither the FCO nor USCIRF⁵²⁴ have reported any changes to the overall treatment of Christians. However, their community are believed to number several thousands, and are facing an extremely precarious existence.⁵²⁵

Previous reporting has highlighted the additional vulnerability of Christian converts during the ongoing humanitarian crisis, as much relief aid is distributed through mosques and organizations that prioritise those who identify as pious Muslims.

The FCO human rights report observes that "the right to freedom of religion or belief was widely denied in Yemen."⁵²⁶ The report highlights the persecution and imprisonment of members of the Bahá'í community, and cites the case of Hamed bin Haydara, a Yemeni Bahá'í who remains under sentence of death since January 2018.⁵²⁷ Within the same reporting period, Andy Khawaja of USCIRF has adopted Mr bin Haydara as a prisoner of conscience.⁵²⁸ Other press releases from USCIRF in this

⁵²² *Human Rights & Democracy: The 2018 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, June 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806851/human-rights-democracy-2018-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report.pdf

⁵²³ *World Watch List 2019*, Open Doors UK & Ireland, January 2018, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/resources/>

⁵²⁴ US Commission on International Religious Freedom: <https://www.uscifr.gov/>

⁵²⁵ See: *Yemen: The Persecution That Christians Face is "extreme"*, The persecution of Christians, 3 February 2019, <https://www.christianpersecution.com/yemen/yemen-the-persecution-that-christians-face-is-extreme/>

⁵²⁶ *Human Rights & Democracy: The 2018 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, June 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806851/human-rights-democracy-2018-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report.pdf

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ See: *USCIRF Calls on Houthi Court in Yemen to overturn Death Sentence for Religious Prisoner of Conscience Hamid bin Haydara*, USCIRF, 1 July 2019, <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscifr-calls-houthi-court-in-yemen-overturn-death-sentence>

period note that there other Bahá'ís imprisoned for their faith, and a further 22 individuals facing warrants for arrest on charges of "apostasy and espionage."⁵²⁹

The FCO report also notes that UK support was provided for resolutions on Yemen at the UN Human Rights Council.⁵³⁰ This multilateral scrutiny of human rights in general, and freedom of religion or belief in Yemen is welcome, but the challenge remains that the majority of the cases of persecution of Yemenis on the basis of freedom of religion or belief that have been documented by the FCO and USCIRF are occurring in the north of the country. This is in areas such as Sana'a and Hodeida, in territory that is under the control of the Houthi movement. The Houthis retain de facto control in much of the country but are not recognised as a legitimate government by the UN system and wider international community.

⁵²⁹ USCIRF Calls on Yemen to Release Persecuted Baha'is, USCIRF, 29 October 2018,

<https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscifr-calls-yemen-release-persecuted-baha>

⁵³⁰ *Human Rights & Democracy: The 2018 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, June 2019,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806851/human-rights-democracy-2018-foreign-and-commonwealth-office-report.pdf

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