Aid to the Church in Need

ACN IRELAND

Persecution of Christians FACT SHEET

The persecution of Christians worldwide remains a serious issue with widespread discrimination, violence, and human rights abuses.

Global Overview

- **SCALE OF PERSECUTION:** Some 413 million Christians live in countries where religious freedom is severely violated - that's 18%, or about one in five Christians.
- **HOTSPOTS OF PERSECUTION:** The most dangerous places for Christians are typically countries where totalitarian or authoritarian governments restrict religious freedoms, where Islamist extremism is present, or where there are significant nationalist or tribal hostilities toward religious minorities.



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PAKISTAN

Top Countries with High Persecution Levels

1 **NORTH KOREA:** Known for severe restrictions, North Korea enforces heavy punishments, including imprisonment and execution, for Christians caught practicing their faith.

2 **SOMALIA:** Tribal and religious dynamics make it nearly impossible to openly practice Christianity, with Somali Christians facing intense persecution from family, community, and extremist groups.

3 **YEMEN:** Ongoing civil war and the influence of extremist groups make it extremely difficult for Christians to live openly, with a small community in fear of death if discovered.

4 **ERITREA:** Known as *'the North Korea of Africa,'* Eritrea severely restricts religious freedom, imprisoning Christians in inhumane conditions without trial.

5 **NIGERIA:** Violent extremist groups like Boko Haram and militant Fulani herdsmen frequently target Christian communities, particularly in the Middle Belt and northern regions.



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NORTH KOREA



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ERITREA

Types of Persecution Faced

- **GOVERNMENT REPRESSION:** In countries like North Korea, China, and Eritrea, governments strictly control religious expression, banning religious gatherings and heavily monitoring religious materials and online communications.
- **EXTREMIST VIOLENCE:** Islamist extremist groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab specifically target Christians, especially in regions like the Middle East, West Africa, and the Horn of Africa.
- **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PRESSURE:** In many communities, especially in South Asia and the Middle East, conversion to Christianity is seen as a betrayal of cultural or family values, leading to family rejection, job loss, and social ostracism.



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Regional Breakdown

- **MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA:** Once the cradle of Christianity, the number of Christians has drastically declined, particularly in Iraq and Syria, where ISIS and civil wars have devastated Christian communities.
- **AFRICA:** The Sahel region and northern Nigeria have become extremely dangerous for Christians, with violence stemming from Islamist extremist groups.
- **ASIA:** Nationalist movements in countries like India and Myanmar have led to increased violence and discrimination against Christians, with attacks on churches and restrictions on religious conversions.



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SYRIA

Forms of Persecution

- **PHYSICAL VIOLENCE:** Torture, imprisonment, and murder are common, with open attacks on Christians, often resulting in mass killings or displacements.
- **PROPERTY AND CHURCH DESTRUCTION:** In countries like Pakistan and Egypt, churches are frequently attacked, vandalised, or demolished. Often, believers face legal obstacles in constructing new places of worship.
- **LEGAL RESTRICTIONS:** Laws against *'blasphemy,' 'anti-conversion'* laws, or against *'apostasy'* are used to intimidate and criminalise Christians in countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.



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NIGERIA

Statistics and Impacts

- **CHURCH ATTACKS:** Thousands of churches have been attacked or destroyed in countries like Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.
- **MARTYRDOM:** Estimates vary, but thousands of Christians are killed each year due to their faith. More have been martyred in the last 100 years, than the previous 1,900 years of Christian history.
- **IMPRISONMENT AND DETENTION:** Many Christians face arbitrary arrest and detention in places like China, where unregistered house church gatherings are tightly monitored.



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EGYPT

What Aid to the Church in Need is doing…

- Aid to the Church in Need, through our 23 national offices including in Ireland, supports 6,000 vulnerable Christian communities in 140 countries.
- We pray, work and advocate for an end to all religious discrimination and respect for religious liberty wherever it is threatened.

How you can help…

You can support our brothers and sisters who are suffering by your prayers, generosity and becoming a friend of ACN Ireland.

You can find out more on www.acnireland.org

or by calling **00 353 (0)1 837 7516**, by emailing **info@acnireland.org** or writing to us at

ACN Ireland, Castle Building, 426 Clontarf Road, Dollymount, Dublin 3, D03 FP52.

Sources: *Persecuted and Forgotten? (A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2024 published by Aid to the Church In Need, October 22, 2024) and ACN Annual Report (2024).*

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