

# THE WORLDWIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

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MEETING AND HEARING  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,  
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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## THE WORLDWIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2014

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH,  
GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 o'clock a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Christopher H. Smith (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. SMITH. The subcommittee will come to order and good afternoon to everybody. Thank you for being here for this very important hearing on the global persecution of Christians.

I just would note parenthetically that I chaired my first hearing when I became chairman of the subcommittee that monitors human rights back in the mid-1990s when we recognized that there was an explosion of persecution, harassment, and discrimination against Christians occurring worldwide and so from since 1995 and today, almost 20 years, it has gone from bad to extraordinarily worse.

So that's why we're having this hearing. I would also note to my colleagues that we have had many country-specific hearings over the years and even over the last several months including one on Syria, three on the Coptic Christians and some regional hearings.

But this one is to look at the global reach. There is a dangerous and, I would suggest, a frightening phenomenon occurring globally in the persecution of Christians.

Today's focus on anti-Christian persecution is not meant to minimize the suffering of other religious minorities who are imprisoned or killed for their beliefs. As the poet John Donne once wrote, "Any man's death doth diminish me."

We stand for human dignity and respect for life from the womb to the tomb, and this subcommittee has and will continue to highlight the sufferings of religious minorities around the globe, be they Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Baha'i in Iran, Buddhists in occupied Tibet, Yazidis in Iraq, or the Muslim Royhinga people in Burma.

Christians, however, remain the most persecuted religious group in the world over and thus deserve the special attention that today's hearing will provide them.

As one of today's witnesses, the distinguished journalist John Allen, has written, and I quote him, "Christians today indisputably

are the most persecuted religious body on the planet and too often their martyrs suffer in silence.”

Researchers from the Pew Center have documented incidents of harassment of religious groups worldwide, a term defined as including “physical assaults, arrests and detentions, desecration of holy sites and discrimination against religious groups in employment, education, and housing” and it has concluded that Christians are the single most harassed group today.

In the year 2012, Pew reports, Christians were harassed in 110 countries around the world. This is particularly true in the Middle East where one of those we will hear from today, Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, has said, and I quote him, “flagrant and widespread persecutions of Christians rages even as we meet.”

Archbishop Chullikatt was the Papal Nuncio to Iraq, where he has seen repeated violent assaults on Christians, such as the October 31st, 2010 assault upon Our Lady of Deliverance Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad in which 58 people were killed and another 70 were wounded.

Attacks such as this have led the Christian population of Iraq, whose roots date back to the time of the Apostles, to dwindle from 1.4 million in 1987 prior to the first Gulf War to as little as 150,000 today, according to some estimates.

Much of this exodus has occurred during a time in which our country invested heavily in blood and treasure in seeking to help Iraqis build a democracy.

As we witness the black flag of al-Qaeda again flying over cities such as Fallujah, which we had won at the cost of so much American blood, we wonder how it is that for Christians in Iraq life appears to be worse now than it was under the vicious dictator Saddam Hussein.

If we turn to Egypt, we see a Christian population which dates back to the Apostle St. Mark also being oppressed. At a hearing we held on December 10th, Human Rights Day, we heard how churches had been subjected to mob attacks and burned.

For example, in April 2012, St. Mark’s Cathedral, seat of the Coptic Pope, was attacked by 30 to 40 Muslim youths. While dozens of Copts were sheltering inside, security forces joined—didn’t stop—joined the mob.

Rather than dispersing the crowd, they participated in the all-night attack or stood idly by as rocks, gasoline bombs and gas canisters were lobbed into the iconic cathedral.

I call your attention to the photographs of churches in Egypt to illustrate the outrages perpetrated against Christians simply for being Christian. Likewise, last year this subcommittee held a hearing on the persecution of religious minorities in Syria.

Syria had been a place of relative tolerance for religious minorities in the Middle East, including groups like the Mandeans, who trace their roots to the time of St. John the Baptist and whom they still revere.

It is in this connection with the past which has helped bring radical Islamists to Syria, where not only do they seek to overthrow the violent dictator Bashar al-Assad, but also seek to eradicate Christianity from the land.

I would note parenthetically that when asked our panel of NGO witnesses said to a group that what's happening in Iraq constitutes a genocide against Christians.

Last September, members of the al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda linked group, attacked the town of Malula. Why this is significant is because Malula is a living link with the time of Christ, a Christian village in Syria where Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is still spoken.

It is for this reason that Malula has been targeted. In the words of one of those attacking this small village whose way of life had remained largely unchanged over the centuries, the Mujahadeen are seeking to "conquer"—this is their quote—"the capital of the Crusaders." Such is the perspective of one whose vision has been distorted by hatred.

But it is not just in the Middle East where we see the persecution of Christians. I would like to recall one story of one man that I met in September along with Greg Simpkins, our staff director on the subcommittee, when we were in Jos, Nigeria, and then in Washington when we held a hearing on the terror group Boko Haram last November.

It was in the face of this man that I was able to witness the face of the persecuted church once again, which indeed is also the face of Christ. Habila Adamu is a businessman from Yobe State in northern Nigeria.

On the night of November 28, 2012, masked gunmen arrived with AK-47s and entered his home. They told his wife to leave and they were there to do the "work of Allah." The questioning began. "Are you a policeman?" He said, "No." "Are you a Nigerian soldier?" He said, "No." "Are you a Christian?" He said, "Yes."

Then they asked him why he has not accepted Islam, when he has heard the message of Muhammad. He replied, "I am a Christian. We are also preaching the gospel of the true God to you and to other people who do not yet know God."

They then asked Habila, "Are you ready to die as a Christian?" He said, "I am ready to die as a Christian." They asked him again, "Are you ready to die as a Christian?" He replied, "I am ready," and before he had closed his mouth a bullet ripped through him.

You can see the exit point of the wound in the photo before you and he sat right there at our witness table and told his story and you could have heard a pin drop in this hearing room as he related to us what he had been through.

I thought while he was testifying how many of us, whether I would have the courage to stare martyrdom in the face and refuse to renounce Christ and he, amazingly, professed nothing but love and a sense of reconciliation even for those who had so badly mistreated him and his face is still, as you would expect, very badly scarred.

Habila Adamu, by the grace of God—as I said, he did survive and testified—the term hero is one thrown around loosely these days—he is truly a hero, and there are so many more like him, many whose names we don't know and are known only to God.

We will hear today stories from around the world where Christians are under attack again simply because of the beliefs that they

profess. We will hear witnesses discuss persecution in places such as Burma, Vietnam, Eritrea, even in this hemisphere.

According to some estimates, China is on track to become the largest Christian nation in the world, though numbers are hard to pin down because most of these Christians remain underground and cannot worship freely.

As U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Commissioner Elliott Abrams points out in his testimony, independent Protestants and Catholics continue to face persecution for refusing to affiliate with government-approved religious groups.

Protestant house church groups that refuse to join the state-approved Protestant religious organizations are deemed illegal and experience harassment, fines, detentions, imprisonment, and torture.

Approximately 900 Protestants were detained in the past year for conducting public worship activities. Seven Protestant leaders were also imprisoned for terms exceeding a year.

The Chinese Government issued a directive to eradicate unregistered Protestant churches over the next 10 years, including through force.

Police have embraced the plan, raiding meetings, seeking to break up large churches that previously operated openly, and detaining religious leaders. They are on a tear.

It has gotten worse in China. It has not gotten better. I would note again parenthetically Frank Wolf and I, right before the Olympics went to China to meet with a number of house church leaders.

Every one of them were arrested, detained, roughed up and the one that we did meet with after the fact he too was persecuted, simply for meeting with two congressmen, simply for trying to live out their faith as they see fit.

The Chinese Government continues to appoint bishops without Vatican approval and place them in leadership positions, setting back Vatican-Beijing relations. Dozens of Catholic clergy, including three bishops, remain in detention, in home confinement under surveillance or have disappeared.

Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, the Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai, has been missing since he publicly announced his resignation from the state-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association in June 2012.

Bishop Su of Baoding, pictured right over there on the extreme left, I met with him the early 1990s. He had already spent several decades in the Laogai. He was tortured and yet this man had nothing but a sense of love and reconciliation toward his tormenters and a few months later he was rearrested.

A few years later he was arrested and now has disappeared and we don't know where he is. He may even be dead at the hands of his captors.

When he celebrated Mass in a dingy little apartment, there was nothing, not even the slightest hint of malice in Bishop Su's eyes or words. He prayed for his tormenters. I was dumbfounded by that faith. It just totally inspired me.

In Vietnam, to name one of these countries, where churches are forced to register and worship outside of state-authorized churches



is forbidden, Christian ethnic minorities such as the Hmong and Montagnard are allowed to exist in uneasy tension with the governing authorities, knowing that the heavy hand of the state could stop their worship at any time.

Vietnam's Catholics, both clergy and laity, fill Vietnamese jails as prisoners of conscience for calling the government to account to a higher law than that of arbitrary dictates.

The attack on a Catholic funeral procession in the village of Con Dau in 2010 resulted in more than 100 villagers being injured, 62 arrested, five tortured, and at least three deaths. This should remind one of the brutality that Christians face in Vietnam.

As I mentioned Vietnam because now, in secrecy, negotiations are being held over the Trans-Pacific Partnership, to which Vietnam seeks entry, and if we focus on the utility and profits of increased trade without holding Vietnam to account for its human rights record, we miss an opportunity to better the lives of those who are beaten, imprisoned and even killed for their faith.

I met Father Ly when he was under house arrest. Father Ly is now back in custody. We have a picture of him while he was before the magistrate, and secret police are holding his face and this man, this great Christian Catholic leader who wants nothing but democracy and religious freedom for his country, has been beaten and he along with so many others of different faiths in Vietnam continue to languish in the prisons throughout Vietnam.

I would like to thank our witnesses, for most of them traveled here to be with us today from great distances and at their own expense.

It is important to hear from voices from outside the beltway, and we appreciate our witnesses coming here from as far away as India, the United Kingdom, Mexico and from within the United States, from Denver and from New York.

And lest we appear ungrateful, thanks to the incomparable U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and especially its commissioner here today, Elliott Abrams, who I and members of this committee have known for over three decades.

He once walked point as Assistant Secretary for Human Rights in the Reagan administration. I thank him for his extraordinary leadership over these many years.

And one brief word about protocol and procedure—we will first hear from Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, the representative of the Holy See to the United Nations.

As Archbishop Chullikatt holds the equivalent of the rank of Ambassador, he will not be testifying in the pure sense of that word but rather briefing Congress this morning pursuant to our House rules and we will then go to our other witnesses when we reconvene as a hearing.

And I would like to say Frank Wolf is here and the USCIRF was created by the legislation that he wrote back in 1998—landmark legislation called the International Religious Freedom Act.

I want to thank him for his extraordinary leadership over these many years and, again, Elliott Abrams is now here as part of that commission and I thank him again for his leadership.

I'd like to yield to Chairman Rohrabacher for any comments he might have.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, and I would like to thank the chairman for the time and effort that he puts in to try to save the lives of suffering people throughout the world.

We have the opportunity here in America to make a difference with our outrage but we have to express that outrage and we have to make sure that our voices are loud, are clear, and specific in order to save those oppressed people who are perhaps the closest to saints that we have today in that people are suffering for their own religious convictions.

I think America is a little bit hesitant about being as aggressive as we should be and I think that's because in a world that's filled with suffering that we, and we are a country that is a vast majority of our people consider themselves Christians, that we are self-conscious in thinking that if we speak up with a loud voice about the persecution of Christians that this will appear self-serving to our own political ends.

The fact is that Christians are being slaughtered today and we are in an era when that slaughter is being ignored. We today are calling upon our fellow Members of Congress but also on the American people to step forward with a loud voice and stand by our fellow Christians but also people of other faiths but today we're focusing on Christians—to stand beside those who are suffering for their religious convictions.

We need every community who has religious convictions to stand together when any community, whether it's Christians or Jews or Muslims or Buddhists, we need to stand together in unity to send a message because this truly is the issue of righteousness versus evil and we as believers must stand together if evil is to be defeated.

So we went through communism where ideologically we had a group—a large group, millions of people who felt that it was their job to displace the belief in God, period, with an atheist dictatorship because that would restructure the world.

Well, that was an evil that we face and I'm so happy to have stood with many of you and with Elliott and others to help defeat that force when it was an expanding force in the world.

Well, now we face another evil and that is where people who are fanatics in their own faith are committing horrible acts against people of other beliefs and especially today we focus on Christians.

So today we call on all of the good people of the world to join us, speak loudly and aggressively against this evil so that too can be defeated and fall into, as Ronald Reagan said, the ash heap of history.

And hopefully our children will see a world in which they say, you mean people who believed in God in a different way killed each other back then.

We can create that kind of world but we have to commit ourselves to it and I'm so grateful—I'm so grateful, Mr. Chairman, to your leadership and Frank Wolf and others who have spent so much time and effort in their political life to try to make this difference in the world.

Thank you very much.

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Rohrabacher, thank you very much.

Mr. Meadows.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and thank each of you, some of my friends who are here with us today, and I'll be very brief.

It is important that we emphasize this particular story because so many times it does not get reported. Atrocities happen across our world and, quite frankly, they go as a very small headline on a back page of some newspaper somewhere, and for us to highlight that is a critical component.

The priority that it should be for not only this Congress but for the American people is a story that is steeped in freedom and really economic prosperity because when you look at it, when you have freedom you truly have the economic prosperity that goes with that. And so as a priority, I mean, many of us have a number of other conflicting things.

I know I have four hearings today and I've chosen to be here because this is a critical time and where we can make a difference.

So I look forward to hearing your testimony and your briefing and I thank you so much, and I'll yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you so very much.

I'd like to yield to Joe Pitts, the chairman of the Health Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Although I'm not on this committee, thank you for asking us to attend and thank you for holding this very important and timely hearing.

It is disheartening, to say the least, that this committee needs to hold a hearing bearing the title "The Worldwide Persecution of Christians." I've sat on numerous hearings over the last few years focusing on the persecution of specific religious minorities.

But it is evident that there is a global systematic persecution of those around the world that profess the Christian faith and this persecution reaches every region of the world.

It's not deterred by any political structure or strength of the state. Whether Christians find themselves in a country with an authoritarian government or a theistic state or even a popular democracy, Christian minorities are vulnerable to and have been encountering denial of rights by government regimes. They've been encountering communal violence, even specific targetings that result in ransom and terrorism and even murder.

In cases where Christians are facing government restrictions or abuse by the state, our Government holds an obvious venue for addressing these issues through our dialogue with those states. Specifically, states in recent years have increased the enforcement and/or the adopted laws that deter conversion or to deem certain expression of faith as blasphemy.

Whether it be Kazakhstan, its 2011 laws restricting religious activity, or Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws, or the anti-conversion laws in many states in India including the populous state of Gujarat, our Government can and must speak out and elevate policies that address these issues.

Late last year, Keith Ellison and I introduced a resolution calling for the repeal of the anti-conversion laws in India and it calls for religious freedom and related human rights to be included in the United States and India's strategic dialogue.

It's my belief that we need a corresponding escalation of policies with all of our allies and within all of our strategic relationships in order to combat this worldwide and systemic persecution.

So I look forward to hearing the recommendations of our witnesses and thank them for their participation today, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing us to sit in.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Chairman Pitts, and I would also note that Chairman Pitts has been a leader on assisting Christians in Burma.

Other places as well, but Burma he has had a special heart for those suffering the Karen and others. So I thank him for that leadership which he has helped—we have all gotten behind him on those efforts.

Pursuant to the House rules, in order to receive a briefing from a diplomat deployed with the United Nations the hearing stands in brief recess subject to the call of the chair, and then we will go back to the hearing setting. So Archbishop Chullikatt, if you could come and present your remarks.

Archbishop Francis Chullikatt is from the Holy See Mission to the United Nations. He was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to be Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York in July 2010.

He previously served the Holy See as Apostolic Nuncio to Iraq and Jordan where he served from 2006 until 2010. Previously, he served as a priest and as the secretary to an archbishop in his native India.

He has also served as a diplomat in Honduras, southern Africa, and in the Philippines.

Archbishop Chullikatt, the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY, THE MOST REVEREND FRANCIS A. CHULLIKATT, PERMANENT OBSERVER, THE HOLY SEE MISSION AT THE UNITED NATIONS**

Archbishop CHULLIKATT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Smith. I wish to also to recognize other members of this subcommittee, Mr. Rohrabacher, Mr. Wolf, and Mr. Pitts and I wish also to recognize Mr. Elliott Abrams for his presence here and to all other members who are invisibly present on this panel and all of our audience.

I am so happy to be here and so thankful for giving me this opportunity to come and brief all of you about the topic that we are discussing at the hearing.

It is such a vital issue that we have to consider very seriously. As I say, when these things or these symptoms start manifesting we have to nip it in the bud.

Otherwise, it will start as a sign of intolerance and later on it will move to the stage of discrimination and thereafter will definitely come about that final stage of persecution, which we are going to talk about.

So thank you for this opportunity once again to address you and the committee today. Your recognition of the consequential need to consider and respond effectively to existing and emerging threats to religious freedom in the world today is indeed commendable.

Such threats manifest not solely under authoritarian regimes or in traditional societies but even, I regret to say, in the great democracies in the world.

The Constitution of the United States apprehends well what the Holy See consistently affirms, namely, that religious freedom is also the first freedom, a fundamental human right from which other rights necessarily flow and which must always be protected, defended, and promoted.

Pope Benedict XVI identified religious freedom as, and I quote,

“The pinnacle of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right. It includes, on the individual and collective levels, the freedom to follow one’s conscience in religious matters and, at the same time, freedom of worship.

“It includes the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one’s beliefs in public. It must be possible to profess and freely manifest one’s religion and its symbols without endangering one’s life and personal freedom. Religious freedom is rooted in the dignity of the person. It safeguards moral freedom and fosters mutual respect.”

Every government bears the profound responsibility to guarantee in its constitution, as your First Amendment and the entire text secure, religious freedom for its people and must moreover uphold the religious liberty both in principle and in fact.

Today, however, religious persecution, be it overt or discreet, is emerging with an increased frequency worldwide. Even in some of the Western democracies, the longstanding paragons of human rights and freedoms, we find instances of increasingly less subtle signs of persecution including the legal prohibition of the display of Christian symbols and imagery, legitimate expressions of beliefs that for centuries has enriched culture, be they on the person or on public property.

This suggests a profound identity crisis at the heart of these great democracies which owe to their encounter with Christianity both their origin and culture, including their human rights culture.

I personally have witnessed many egregious threats to religious liberty during my service around the globe, especially in Iraq and in Jordan where I served for 4 years as Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See.

My current posting also makes me familiar with the work of the United Nations which your great nation has helped establish when the world society was desperate for an institution whose mission would be to secure and maintain the international peace and security.

The founding charter of the United Nations mandates that it will fill this mission through safeguarding the fundamental and inalienable rights and responsibilities of each member of the human family. The preservation of authentic religious freedom thus stands at the heart of the U.N.’s solemn responsibility.

Having said this, allow me to address the following two points in my brief remarks. I will also be submitting to the committee two more detailed texts for your further consideration.

The first issue on which I wish to focus today concerns challenges to religious freedom in the Middle East, particularly for Christians who, since the beginning of Christianity 2000 years ago, have been continuous inhabitants of that important region of the world.

A second issue I will touch upon briefly concerns the responsibility of the United Nations toward safeguarding this religious freedom.

I also wish to highlight the crucial role the United States of America bears in the work of the U.N. by virtue of its significant influence with this organization as well as its permanent membership in the Security Council.

Regarding my first point, flagrant and widespread persecution of Christians rages in the Middle East even as we meet. No Christian is exempt whether or not he or she is Arab.

Arab Christians, a small but significant community, find themselves the target of constant harassment for no reason other than their religious faith. This tragedy is all the more egregious when one pauses to consider that these men and women of faith are loyal sons and daughters of the countries in which they are full citizens and in which they have been living at peace with their neighbors and fellow citizens for untold generations.

One of the most graphic illustrations of ongoing brutality confronting Arab Christians is the emergence of a so-called "tradition," of bombings, of Catholic and other Christian houses of worship every Christmas Eve, which has been going on now for the past several years.

Will there be no end in sight for this senseless slaughter for those who on that very night proclaim the birth of the Prince of Peace in some of the oldest Christian communities in the world?

As is increasingly obvious, governments are by no means guaranteeing religious freedom consistently among fundamental human rights and, at worst, violations take the form of the outright persecution of religious believers by state actors.

For its part, the Holy See regularly urges the world's attention to serious violations, of the right to religious freedom in general as well as to recent and continuing instances of discrimination or systematic attacks on Christian communities in particular.

In a recent statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva said the following, and I quote,

"Research has indicated that more than 100,000 Christians are violently killed because of some relation to their faith every year.

"While other Christians and believers are subjected to forced displacement, to the destruction of their places of worship, to rape and to the objection of their leaders, several of these acts have been perpetrated in parts of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia and are the result of bigotry, intolerance, terrorism and some exclusionary laws.

"In addition, in some Western countries where historically the Christian presence has been an integral part of the society, a trend emerges that tends to marginalize Christianity in public life, ignore historic and social con-

tributions and even restrict the ability of faith communities to carry out social charitable services.”

Pope Francis himself, in praying recently for all Christians who experience discrimination on the basis of their belief, stated, and I quote,

“Let us remain close to these brothers and sisters who, like the first martyr of the church, St. Stephen, are unjustly accused and made the objects of various kinds of violence.

“Unfortunately, I am sure they are more numerous today than in the early days of the church. There are so many. This occurs especially where religious freedom is still not guaranteed or fully realized.

“However, it also happens in countries and areas where on paper freedom and human rights are protected but where in fact believers and especially Christians face restrictions and discrimination.”

His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, similarly pointed out the same problem in his 2012 address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See. At that time, he stressed the following.

I am quoting here his words,

“In many countries, Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life. In other countries, they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes.

“At times, they are forced to leave the countries they have helped to build because of persistent tensions and policies which frequently relegate them to being second class spectators of national life and in other parts of the world we see policies in that marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society.

“It even happens that believers and Christians in particular are prevented from contributing to the common good by their educational and charitable institutions.”

Mr. Chairman, this past autumn in a message to the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, Pope Francis called to mind the 1,700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan which brought about the end to the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire and drew attention to the many Christians of all the churches and ecclesiastical communities who in many parts of the world experience discrimination and at times pay with their own blood the price of their profession of faith.

The Pope also stressed the urgent need for effective and committed cooperation among Christians in order to safeguard everywhere the right to express publicly one’s faith and to be treated fairly when promoting the contribution which Christianity continues to offer to contemporary society and culture.

Current circumstances make it particularly important that Christians work together to ensure religious freedom for all and to this end it is crucial that every government guarantee religious

freedom for each and every person in its country, not only in its legislation, but also in practice.

Strictly connected to religious freedom is respect for conscientious objection of which everyone should be able to avail himself or herself. Conscientious objection is based on religious, ethical, and moral reasons and under universal demands of human dignity.

As such, it is a pillar of every truly democratic society and precisely for this reason civil law must always and everywhere recognize and protect it. After all, these steps ensure not only human dignity but the dignity of democratic institutions.

Regarding my second point, which concerns the United Nations, the essential importance of religious freedom for each and every person, community and society is confirmed by the foundational international legal instruments and other documents.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states the following. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance. This is from Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Since the summer of 2010, Mr. Chairman, as the Holy See's representative to the United Nations, I have labored alongside many people of good will to bring an end to the suffering in the world. The religious persecution of Christians throughout the Middle East looms large in this theater of suffering.

The United Nations General Assembly addresses the question in certain resolutions which we have a hand in negotiating. However, these noble efforts fail to receive the profile they justly deserve on the world stage.

Only member states especially with leadership profiles like the United States can take decisive steps to ensure that the non-derogatable human right of religious liberty becomes more robustly protected worldwide. The self-evident truths underlying healthy democracy, truth upon which both President Jefferson and the church agree require as much.

The religious freedom which the law is expected to protect and promote abides no mere passive toleration but requires rather that states guarantee the basic preconditions that permit its free exercise by citizens in both their private and public endeavors.

Allow me now to express my gratitude for efforts this committee undertakes in promoting religious liberty and those it will undertake in this issue to bring an end to further suffering and social exclusion of Christians.

As I mentioned, I also leave for your consideration two documents of crucial concern to my briefing today—the Lineamenta or Guidelines for the 2009 Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for the Middle East, which I had a strong role in promoting when I was Nuncio to Iraq and Jordan, and the second document is Pope Benedict XVI's 2011 World Day of Peace message entitled "Religious Freedom: The Path to Peace."

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I express my gratitude to you and to this subcommittee for this important opportunity to express soli-



parity with all Christian believers in the harsh reality of the persecution of their communities and adherents at this present time, and we look to your country to stand true to its own Constitution and to show its leadership in every forum in working to end the erosion of this most fundamental of human rights.

I thank you for the attention.

[The prepared statement of Archbishop Chullikatt follows:]

**Religious Freedom**  
**The First Freedom on Which Democratic Societies are Built**

Archbishop Francis A. Chullikatt

Before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,  
and International Organizations

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for this opportunity to address you and the Committee today. Your recognition of the consequential need to consider and respond effectively to existing and emerging threats to religious freedom in the world today is commendable. Such threats manifest not solely under authoritarian regimes or in traditional societies but even, I regret to say, in the great democracies of the world.

The Constitution of the United States apprehends well what the Holy See consistently affirms, namely: that religious freedom is also the “first freedom”, a fundamental human right from which other rights necessarily flow, and which must always be protected, defended, and promoted. Pope Benedict XVI identified religious freedom as:

the pinnacle of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right. It includes on the individual and collective levels the freedom to follow one’s conscience in religious matters and, at the same time, freedom of worship. It includes the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one’s beliefs in public. It must be possible to profess and freely manifest one’s religion and its symbols without endangering one’s life and personal freedom. Religious freedom is rooted in the dignity of the person; it safeguards moral freedom and fosters mutual respect.<sup>1</sup>

Every government bears the profound responsibility to guarantee in its Constitution, as your First Amendment and the entire text secure, religious freedom for its people and must moreover uphold religious liberty both in principle and in fact.

Today, however, religious persecution, be it overt or discrete, is emerging with an increased frequency worldwide. Even in some of the western democracies, the longstanding paragons of human rights and freedoms, we find instances of increasingly less subtle signs of persecution, including the legal prohibition of the display of Christian symbols and imagery – legitimate expressions of belief that for centuries has enriched culture – be they on the person or on public property. This suggests a profound identity crisis at the heart of these great democracies, which owe to their encounter with Christianity both their origin and culture, including their human rights culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 26 (2012).

I, personally, have witnessed many egregious threats to religious liberty during my service around the globe. My current posting also makes me familiar with the work of the United Nations, which your great nation helped establish when the world society was desperate for an institution whose mission would be to secure and maintain international peace and security. The founding Charter of the United Nations mandates that it fulfill this mission through safeguarding the fundamental and inalienable rights and responsibilities of each member of the human family. The preservation of authentic religious freedom thus stands at the heart of the UN's solemn responsibility.

Having said this, allow me to address the following two points in my brief remarks. I will also be submitting to the committee two more detailed texts for your further consideration.

The first issue on which I wish to focus today concerns challenges to religious freedom in the Middle East, particularly for Christians, who since the beginning of Christianity two thousand years ago have been continuous inhabitants of that important region of the world. A second issue I will touch upon briefly concerns the responsibility of the United Nations towards safeguarding this religious freedom. I also wish to highlight the crucial role the United States of America bears in the work of the UN by virtue of its significant influence within this organization, as well as its permanent membership in the Security Council.

Regarding my first point: flagrant and widespread persecution of Christians rages in the Middle East even as we meet. No Christian is exempt, whether or not he or she is Arab. Arab Christians, a small but significant community, find themselves the target of constant harassment for no reason other than their religious faith. This tragedy is all the more egregious when one pauses to consider that these men and women of faith are loyal sons and daughters of the countries in which they are full citizens and in which they have been living at peace with their neighbors and fellow citizens for untold generations.

One of the most graphic illustrations of ongoing brutality confronting Arab Christians is the emergence of a so-called "tradition" of bombings of Catholic and other Christian houses of worship every Christmas Eve, which has been going on now for the past several years. Will there be no end in sight for this senseless slaughter for those whom that very night proclaim the Prince of Peace in some of the oldest Christian communities in the world?

As is increasingly obvious, governments are by no means guaranteeing religious freedom consistently among fundamental human rights and, at worst, violations take the form of the outright persecution of religious believers by state actors. For its part, the Holy See regularly urges the world's attention to serious violations of the right to religious freedom, in general, as well as to recent and continuing instances of discrimination or systematic attacks on Christian communities, in particular. In a recent statement to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva said that

(r)esearch has indicated that more than 100,000 Christians are violently killed because of some relation to their faith every year, while other Christians and believers are subjected to forced displacement, to the destruction of their places of worship, to rape, and to the abduction of their leaders. Several of these acts have been perpetrated in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and are the result of bigotry, intolerance, terrorism and some exclusionary laws. In addition, some Western countries, where historically the Christian presence has been an integral part of society, a trend emerges that tends to marginalize Christianity in public life, ignore historic and social contributions and even restrict the ability of faith communities to carry out social charitable services.<sup>2</sup>

Pope Francis himself, in praying recently for all Christians who experience discrimination on the basis of their belief stated,

Let us remain close to these brothers and sisters who, like (the first martyr of the Church) St Stephen, are unjustly accused and made the objects of various kinds of violence. Unfortunately, I am sure they are more numerous today than in the early days of the Church. There are so many! This occurs especially where religious freedom is still not guaranteed or fully realized. However, it also happens in countries and areas where on paper freedom and human rights are protected, but where in fact believers, and especially Christians, face restrictions and discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, similarly pointed out the same problem in his 2012 address to the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. He stressed how:

*(i)n many countries Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life; in other countries they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes. At times they are forced to leave the countries they have helped to build because of persistent tensions and policies which frequently relegate them to being second-class spectators of national life. In other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society.<sup>4</sup> It even happens that believers, and Christians in particular, are prevented from contributing to the common good by their educational and charitable institutions.<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Statement of the Holy See at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council on Violence against Christians (May 27, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Angelus Address (Dec. 26, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the members of the Diplomatic Corps (Jan. 9, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the members of the Diplomatic Corps (Jan. 7, 2013).

This past autumn, in a Message to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, Pope Francis called to mind the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Edict of Milan, which brought about the end to the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, and drew attention to "...the many Christians of all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities who in many parts of the world experience discrimination and at times pay with their own blood the price of their profession of faith." The Pope also stressed the "...urgent need for effective and committed cooperation among Christians in order to safeguard everywhere the right to express publicly one's faith and to be treated fairly when promoting the contribution which Christianity continues to offer to contemporary society and culture."<sup>6</sup>

Current circumstances make it particularly important that Christians work together to ensure religious freedom for all, and to this end it is crucial that every government guarantee religious freedom for each and every person in its country not only in its legislation but also in praxis. Strictly connected to freedom of religion is respect for conscientious objection, of which everyone should be able to avail himself or herself. Conscientious objection is based on religious, ethical and moral reasons, and on the universal demands of human dignity. As such it is a pillar of every truly democratic society and, precisely for this reason, civil law must always and everywhere recognize and protect it. After all, these steps ensure not only human dignity but the dignity of democratic institutions.

Regarding my second point, which concerns the United Nations: the essential importance of religious freedom for each and every person, community and society, is confirmed by the foundational international legal instruments and other documents. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that "(e)veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."<sup>7</sup>

Since the summer of 2010, as the Holy See's Representative to the UN, I have labored alongside many people of good will to bring an end to the suffering in the world. The religious persecution of Christians throughout the Middle East looms large in this theatre of suffering. The UN General Assembly addresses the question in certain resolutions, which we have a hand in negotiating.

However, these noble efforts fail to receive the profile they justly deserve on the world stage. Only Member States, especially those with leadership profiles like the United States, can take decisive steps to ensure that the non-derogable human right of religious liberty becomes more robustly protected worldwide. The self-evident truths underlying healthy democracy – truths upon which both President Jefferson and the Church agree – require as much. The religious freedom which the law is expected to protect and promote abides no mere passive toleration but requires, rather, that States guarantee the basic

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Message of Pope Francis to His Holiness Bartolomaios I, Ecumenical Patriarch, for the Feast of Saint Andrew (Nov. 25, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 (1948).

preconditions that permit its free exercise by citizens in both their private and public endeavours.

Allow me now to express my gratitude for efforts this committee undertakes in promoting religious liberty and those it will undertake in this issue to bring an end to further suffering and social exclusion of Christians.

As I mentioned, I also leave for your further consideration two documents of crucial concern to my testimony, namely: (1) The *Lineamenta* (or Guidelines) for the 2009 Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for the Middle East,<sup>8</sup> and (2) Pope Benedict XVI's 2011 World Day of Peace Message entitled "Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace."<sup>9</sup>

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I express my gratitude to you and to the Committee for this important opportunity to express solidarity with all Christian believers in the harsh reality of the persecution of their communities and adherents at this present time. We look to your country to stand true to its own *Constitution* and show its leadership in every forum in working to end the erosion of this most fundamental of human rights.

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20120914\\_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20120914_ecclesia-in-medio-oriente_en.html)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20101208\\_xliv-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace_en.html)

Mr. SMITH. Archbishop Chullikatt, thank you for your very eloquent statement, for your never-ending, indomitable effort on behalf of beleaguered Christians and people of all faiths throughout the world, particularly in your posting at the United Nations.

I know some of the members would just like to make a very brief statement. I'll make a very brief question statement.

As agonizing as it is for adults to endure and mentally process the discrimination that comes in many parts of the world for being a Christian, I've often wondered, and you lived it in Iraq, how the most vulnerable among us, especially children, cope with being attacked, taunted, having their parents beaten, maybe even killed, maybe even brothers and sisters, and maybe themselves simply because they are Christians. How does a young person deal with this?

Archbishop CHULLIKATT. Thank you for raising that question because this is one of the heartbreaking stories that I had witnessed on a daily basis when I was in Iraq, especially as you are mentioning and highlighting with so much of passion that you have always demonstrated, Mr. Chairman, for the suffering of these people around the world, especially those countries in which the Christians, because of their faith, they are undergoing these kind of discrimination, intolerance and persecution.

And when I look at those children, those innocent victims of this kind of persecution where they have to live in fear just because they happen to be Christians, they have not committed any crime.

They are children, and even if they were to follow these kind of atrocious and horrible stories on a daily basis on the TV screen, which I'm sure that will be affecting psychologically these children, and when they go to the schools when they are not even sure where they'll come back safe and sound or alive after the school and sometimes when they see in front of their own eyes when the car bombs explode and the human bodies are torn apart and these kind of horrible scenes, don't you think that will leave a lasting scar in their memory, in their mind and in their life?

And here we are talking about a new generation of Iraqi society that has to be built up and is this kind of a society, a generation that we want to build up and whom are we going to blame later on if some of these children were to end up within the terrorist groups. These are the kind of crimes that they are witnessing on a daily basis and now you need only to turn on the TV screen you can see that on a daily basis car bombs are going off in Iraq and do you think that people don't see it?

Do you think that the children don't see these kind of atrocious acts that are taking place? And is this the kind of formation that we are giving to the young generations that have to become the future leaders of the country?

So it is really a painful thing. It is not only the terrorist acts that are being committed but the impact it will have on the incoming generation that you have, that has to be borne in mind.

So that is where some of the painful feelings that I always used to have and I was seeing this kind of horrible things and these bloody attacks that continuously are being repeated within the Iraqi society.

And I hope that the government will take all the necessary measures so that peace and security can be brought to that land because

that is the most essential thing at this point in time that Iraq society wants, and thank you for that question.

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you for the overview that you've given us today.

I'd just like to ask something that's been perplexing for me on this issue and that is when you look at the Middle East it's my understanding and why I'm asking this is if it's incorrect I'd like you to correct this misperception that I have, that under Saddam Hussein Christians actually were more protected than now that you have a more democratic government and I understand that that may be true with Assad as well in Syria.

Maybe you could give me a little insight into that and should that mean that—what does that mean by how we should approach this problem?

Archbishop CHULLIKATT. With regard to the security that prevailed during those regimes, what happened was because of the policy of the government, of the regime at that time, there was security not only for the minorities but all over the country because under a dictatorship, of course, you know, there is law and order both in place but oftentimes it is what it is.

So not only the minorities but throughout the country, you know, you could also take a walk during midnight and nothing will happen to you because there was law and order which was forcibly imposed on the situation of the country.

So, of course, the minorities benefited from that. But it was not just for the minority but this is all over the country. So anybody who dared to question the regime, of course, we know what happened.

So it is under that threat of the consequences that anybody would go to undergo during those—the time of those regimes that the so-called security and peace prevailed in those societies.

And, of course, the minorities felt protected because they were participants under the benefit that came about from this strict law and order that were imposed by those regimes.

I think that was one of the reasons, although sometimes it is being interpreted that it was a special protection that was offered to the minorities, and the minorities, of course, because of the situation that prevailed, they could exercise all their rights and they were free, the freedom of worship especially, as it happens in Jordan, for example, as it happened in Syria.

Now, in Syria what we see is practically a replay of what happened in Iraq and you can already see now what is happening in Syria is having its own spillover effect both in Iraq and we have seen what happened recently in Fallujah and the same thing also in Lebanon.

So during the time of the intervention in Iraq the spillover effect was in Jordan and Syria, also Lebanon and Turkey, the same thing is being seen also at this time, unfortunately, for what is happening in Syria where also the minorities now, especially the Christians, are also starting to leave the country.

And there's one of the—this is called the silent exodus of Christians from Syria. So it is so sad to see the same thing is being repeated over and over again and I hope this will be the last time

that we are seeing such this conflict that is taking place in those countries and because of this conflict the Christians are caught in the crossfire and they are becoming the most vulnerable group that is paying the highest price. Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much for that answer. That is really helping me to have a understanding of that perplexing analysis, so thank you very much for clearing that up.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Mr. Meadows.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you. It's good to see you again. When we met the last time one of the things that struck me was your heart for people of all faiths. There was not a political agenda there.

One of the things that we struggle with in raising the persecution of Christians or of Jews is that it sometimes gets put in political perspective of trying to take a government and putting a government out of control and that's most often is not the agenda.

So how would we—how would we show heart for the people without a government entity looking at it as an overt threat to their national sovereignty where we're really looking at at protecting those that are being persecuted? What advice would you give us on that?

Archbishop CHULLIKATT. This issue has been brought up also during many sessions of the Security Council. We take all the regime change that oftentimes seems to be the scope of some of the interventions.

But as it is happening now, yesterday started the Geneva 2 conference that has been resumed in Geneva. We have so much of the other possibilities to bring the government accountable for what is happening in there, especially when they are violating the fundamental human rights, and that is why the Holy See has always promoted and supported the diplomatic channel that has to be exhausted first and foremost.

And I'm so happy to see that in the case of Syria that is what is taking place now, although it is a little late but it is better late than never. The Geneva 2 conference is the right process to follow where all sectors of the society join in in deciding the future of that nation because after all we are not going to live in Syria.

The Syrians are going to live in Syria and they have to take ownership of their country and their future, and they are the one to shape how to run their country and the international community is there to support and facilitate this process.

And this is the process that the Holy See has been always promoting and myself as the representative of the Holy See I will also join in wholeheartedly in moving forward this process. It's not only in Syria.

Wherever it happens we should make the people of that nation take the ownership of the destiny of that nation and then we bring in our support and facilitate that process and to hold the governments when they are violators of the fundamental human rights and the democratic principles accountable and we have in the national court of justice, in fact, in the criminal court and we have all the mechanisms set in place and why don't we make use of that?

So immediate military intervention is not the solution and we know what happened in those instances that we decided for the



military intervention. Without having a precise exit strategy, it is very easy to go in and start the conflict and afterwards oftentimes we don't know how to get out of it.

So without any exit strategy we should not go in into any nation and start a policy or project that would not bring us a satisfactory solution. Thank you.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Wolf.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you.

I have a very quick question. Thank you for your testimony. I found it very, very helpful.

Out in the region I've heard people use the expression, "First the Saturday people and then the Sunday people," meaning that they eliminate the Jewish population, then they eliminate the Christian population.

I was also told that in Iraq, and you may have the numbers differently, that in 1950 the Jewish population was roughly 150,000. I was told that it may now be down to maybe four or five individuals. Is that accurate? If you could help me.

But what was the Christian population in Iraq, say, in the year 2000 and what is the Christian population in Iraq now? Thank you.

Archbishop CHULLIKATT. There has not been any official census that was being done in Iraq about even the population at large. So it is still being disputed, the different figures that we see in the news reports and from the church authorities there.

Yesterday, I was reading one of the statements by the Chaldean patriarch, Louis Raphael Sako, who mentioned that in Iraq at this point in time there are ½ million Christians.

So this is the number that he gave. In fact, that seems to correspond to the representation of Christians in the Parliament. There are five representatives of the Christian community in the Parliament, which is based on the 100,000 Christians would represent one parliamentary representatives so they have five.

So I think that number goes together with the quota system that has been introduced in the Iraqi Parliament. But my guess is that it should be between 300,000 and 350,000 Christians because of the ongoing exodus of Christians from Iraq. And you know that if you go to Detroit or California you can see the number of Iraqis that have settled in the United States and the same thing also, you know.

Regarding the Jewish exodus, I think they were also, because they were a minority there, they had to go through the same fate, you know, because once the fight between the Sunnis and Shi'as started the minorities were the targets also.

The Christians, for example, in a place in Baghdad called Dura it used to be practically a Christian town there but now there is nobody left over there—there are only a few families there.

Because of the threat of security that they have, the insecurity that they are experiencing they all moved out to the northern part of Iraq. In the case of Jews, the same thing or the Mandeans or the Shabaks or the Turkmens they are all victims of this sectarian violence that is going on in Iraq.

So nobody has been exempt from it including the Jews. The only people who are now protecting themselves in a stable manner are

the Kurdish people because they have a semi-autonomous region in the northern part of Iraq where they can exercise quasi-independence.

So all of the minorities they are being targeted and they are the victims of the sectarian violence that is happening in Iraq.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Chairman Pitts.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Archbishop, for your testimony.

We're all familiar with the Soviet model of imposing registration of churches that some of the emerging republics have adopted like Kazakhstan that has resulted in a crackdown on minority Christian groups.

We're familiar with the anti-blasphemy laws like in Pakistan that has resulted in the strong in society taking advantage of the weak with false charges on blasphemy.

I'm interested in your view of the anti-conversion laws in some of the states in India and the impact on minorities. Could you elaborate on that, please?

Archbishop CHULLIKATT. Thank you for asking that, especially because I am from India originally. So we are really worried about this anti-conversion law because India is expected to be one of the great democracies in the world and India has thrived so far so well it is because of that multi-religious and multicultural democratic system that you have put in place.

But as we know, there will always be some radical elements within the Indian society and this is the re-emergence and emergence of the radical groups in India that are making such a lot of noise around the world. And unfortunately, there are some political parties in India who are indirectly supporting these radical groups.

And so they feel emboldened because of this indirect support that they get from certain political parties within the Indian political system and they take that kind of liberty in going after the minorities, especially the Christians, and you mentioned about Orissa is one of those states where this anti-conversion will be put in place which is important because if the religious freedom is being respected this is totally against and there's no way you can—you can justify such a law.

How could you possibly imagine that in order to convert to other religion or to renounce your own religion you need a piece of paper from the state government? This is absurd and the bishops in India have been complaining about it.

They have presented to the national government. They have protested. They expressed many times but it seems that because of these certain parties, political parties, who are supporting these radical groups within the society they have a free hand in exercising these kind of discriminatory actions against the minorities—religious minorities, especially the Christians.

And I think the United States can do a lot in putting pressure on the Indian Government to put in place the laws they would respect. The laws are already there. It's only a matter of implementing that law at the state level so that these minorities are protected also in India because once the sectarian violence starts in India that will bring in eventually the fragmentation of the Indian society.

We don't want that to happen. So we are still early to do that kind of legal system to be put in place so that India can truly and really enjoy the fruits of the true democracy and to show to the world that it can really show to the world that India is indeed a democratic country where everybody enjoys his or her rights to the fullest manner and the Indian Government will be there to protect, especially the minorities in the country.

Thank you.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Pitts.

Thank you very much, Archbishop Chullikatt. We deeply appreciate your testimony and your leadership.

This official briefing is now concluded. We will now reconvene a hearing of the subcommittee.

I'd like to now welcome to the witness table our first panel of the official hearing, beginning with Mr. Elliott Abrams, who is a senior fellow from Middle Eastern Studies at the Council of Foreign Relations in Washington. He served as Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor in the administration of George Bush where he supervised U.S. policy in the Middle East for the White House.

Mr. Abrams was educated at Harvard College, the London School of Economics and Harvard Law School. After serving on the staffs of Senators Jackson and Moynihan, he was an Assistant Secretary of State in the Reagan administration and received the Secretary of State's distinguished service award from Secretary George P. Schultz.

Mr. Abrams was president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington from 1996 until joining the White House staff. He was a member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, in 1999 to 2001 and chairman of the commission in the latter year, and is serving an additional term as member now 2012 to 2014.

Mr. Abrams is also a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council which directs the activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and a member of the board of the National Endowment for Democracy.

He teaches U.S. foreign policy at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

Secretary Abrams.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ELLIOTT ABRAMS, COMMISSIONER, U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee.

Thanks for inviting me to testify on behalf of the commission and for holding the hearing. The persecution of Christians is a growing and searing affront to our consciences and beliefs.

For Christians struggling worldwide for the freedom to practice their faith, you're demonstrating concern and solidarity here that I think will lift their spirits and, we hope, put their governments on notice that you care about this issue and will continue to shine a spotlight on their misdeeds.

Because of these efforts, yours and others, people know about persecution of people like Pastor Saeed Abedini—I'll just hold up his picture—in Iran, Asia Bibi in Pakistan, a young Catholic woman, and Father Ly, who's been mentioned, in Vietnam.

Their persecution reflects a disturbing reality for many Christians around the world. There are about 2 billion Christians worldwide, and in many of those countries, persecution is widespread partly because in many of the countries in which they reside, they're members of small minorities—ethnic minorities, language minorities or they're viewed as linked to the West, to the United States, and to Europe. Of course, in many cases, Christianity represents an alternative source of authority, and for tyrannical governments and extremist nonstate actors, this is viewed as a threat to their own power.

So Christians and other religious minorities find themselves in the crosshairs often of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes on the one hand, and theocracies on the other.

Both of these kinds of dictatorships violate the religious freedom of Christians and others because they seek to exclude or limit these dissenters' ability to communicate with each other, practice their faith and, of course, they resent Christians' loyalty to their faith.

In the case of terrorist groups and other nonstate actors, the problem is the presence of these private individuals or groups who commit violence against Christians and very often governments tolerate these actions and later fail to bring the perpetrators to justice.

In my written testimony, I talk about 18 countries and governments which are among the world's worst violators and I talk about some of the individuals who've been imprisoned in many of these countries for their Christian faith.

These names come from the Defending Freedom Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. You have to mention these names.

We have to shine a light on them and others until they are free, and raise the issue of religious freedom until the countries that imprisoned those prisoners of conscience comply with the international legal documents and treaties that they have signed and protect this fundamental human right.

Let me just say a word about Egypt and Vietnam. In Egypt, there has been a good deal of sectarian violence against the Copts for years and especially during the Muslim Brotherhood government period of President Morsi.

Conservative clerics and extremists often use incendiary sectarian rhetoric and incitement without any accountability, and unfortunately, the post-Morsi era has gotten off to a similarly bad start.

Violent religious extremists and thugs in August launched attacks against churches throughout the country, as the archbishop mentioned. At least seven Copts were killed and more than 200 churches and other Christian religious structures, homes, businesses assaulted.

Just last October, four Copts were killed including two sisters aged 8 and 12, when gunmen on motorcycles opened fire at a wedding party outside a church near Cairo.

While the government, before, during, and after the Morsi period, has failed to bring to justice the perpetrators of these sectarian attacks, the courts have continued to convict and imprison Egyptians charged with blasphemy, with a disproportionate number, of course, being Christian.

There's been some renewed hope among Christians in Egypt in the Christian community following the ouster of President Morsi and some changes to the new constitution that potentially could mean more religious freedom for Copts. However, their situation and their future today are precarious.

In Vietnam, religious conditions are poor. The Vietnamese Government imprisons individuals for religious activity or religious freedom advocacy and seeks to stop the growth of ethnic minority Protestantism and Catholicism.

Ethnic minority Protestants and Catholics, particular in the Central Highlands, have been arrested, beaten, and face forced renunciations of their faith for practising outside the approved government religious organizations.

Hmong and Montagnard Protestants continue to experience government sanctioned efforts to force their renunciations of faith. The government has sanctioned violence against and arrested Catholics for peacefully advocating for religious freedom.

Let me just mention again Father Ly, who's been in prison on and off for the crime of advocating religious freedom in Vietnam. He has spent more than 20 years in prison and was last returned to prison after a March 2007 show trial in which, as that pictures shows, he was muzzled. One other thing I would mention just at the end, which is that in the act, the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the post of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom was created. It's vacant and it really needs to be filled. The President, last week at the National Prayer Breakfast, suggested a nomination would be coming quickly.

I hope so, because this is the key official within the U.S. Government executive branch coordinating and developing U.S. policy for international religious freedom, and if there is a long vacancy, it weakens the attention of the executive branch, it weakens the efforts in the executive branch, and it sends a message to countries around the world of inattention and lack of concern. So I think we all hope that a nomination comes forward very quickly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

TESTIMONY OF

ELLIOTT ABRAMS

U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN  
RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

OF THE

HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

ON

THE WORLDWIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

FEBRUARY 11, 2014

I want to thank the Members of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations for holding this hearing today and inviting me to testify on behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on *The Worldwide Persecution of Christians*. With your approval, I would like to submit my written testimony for the record.

### **Supporting Religious Freedom**

Religious freedom is enshrined with other rights in international treaties and understandings, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Freedom of religion or belief also encompasses other freedoms, including expression, association, and assembly. As it often is the first right taken away, religious freedom serves as the proverbial canary in the coal mine, warning us that denial of other liberties almost surely will follow.

Supporting religious freedom abroad is not just a legal or moral duty, but a practical necessity that affects the security of the United States because it builds a foundation for progress and stability. Research confirms that religious freedom in countries that honor and protect this right is associated with vibrant political democracy, rising economic and social well-being, and diminished tension and violence. By contrast, nations that trample on religious freedom are more likely to be mired in poverty and insecurity, war and terror, and violent, radical extremism. Simply put, violations of religious freedom often lead to violent religious extremism. Unfortunately, all too many governments either perpetrate or tolerate religious freedom abuses.

The U.S. signaled its intent to strengthen its championing of religious freedom overseas with the passage in 1998 of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), which created the commission on which I serve. IRFA mandated the promotion and protection of religious freedom around the world as a central element of American foreign policy. The Act was a response to the growing concern about religious persecution worldwide and the perception that religious freedom was an orphan human right on which the U.S. government was inadequately focused.

IRFA put into place several mechanisms to counter religious persecution abroad, including an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State and the bipartisan and independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The Ambassador-at-Large position at State is now vacant. USCIRF urges the Administration to offer a nomination speedily, as the President suggested he would in his remarks last week at the National Prayer Breakfast. And we urge Congress to take up the nomination equally fast. The Ambassador-at-Large is supposed to be the key official inside the U.S. government for coordinating and developing U.S. international religious freedom policy. However, according to a report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) dramatically reduced the rank of the Ambassador-at-Large. This reduction in rank constitutes a major change in the structure IRFA established and a thwarting of congressional intent. USCIRF also recommends that the Obama Administration fulfill IRFA's intent that the Ambassador-at-Large be a "principal adviser to the

President and the Secretary of State regarding matters affecting religious freedom abroad” by ensuring he or she has direct access to the President and the Secretary of State when it is truly needed

USCIRF repeatedly has raised the importance of annually designating “countries of particular concern” (CPCs). Unfortunately, neither Republican nor Democratic Administrations have fully utilized the CPC mechanism as the key foreign policy tool it was intended to be. Neither have designated CPCs in a timely manner nor issued specific Presidential actions based on these designations. For instance, the Obama Administration issued CPC designations only once during its first term, and while the Bush Administration issued several designations, it also allowed the annual designation process to fall off track. However, IRFA requires a CPC designation annually. Such designations enable the United States to raise concerns about systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom at the highest levels with foreign governments and seek improvements in human rights conditions.

USCIRF was created by IRFA as an entity separate and distinct from the State Department -- an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body to monitor religious freedom worldwide and make policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF bases its recommendations on the standards found in the UDHR and other international documents. USCIRF’s work is accomplished through the leadership of its Commissioners, who serve in a voluntary capacity without pay, and the engagement of its professional staff. Far from duplicating the work of the State Department and its Office of International Religious Freedom, USCIRF’s independence gives it a unique freedom to speak publicly about violations of this fundamental right and propose ways the United States can engage positively. To perform this function, USCIRF undertakes research and issues reports, works with Congress, engages with the Executive Branch, meets with high-ranking officials from foreign governments and international organizations, participates in U.S. delegations to international meetings, and helps provide training to Foreign Service Officers and other U.S. officials.

### **Overview**

USCIRF undertakes these activities with the goal of helping promote international religious freedom as a foreign policy priority, as IRFA mandated. A key aspect of our work is to raise awareness of and make recommendations that would address egregious religious freedom violations. One such violation is the worldwide persecution of Christians.

I commend this subcommittee highlighting the gravity of this persecution. Because of your efforts and those of others both within government and beyond, millions of Americans are aware of the egregious mistreatment of individual Christians such as Pastor Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-born American citizen imprisoned in Iran. Pastor Abedini was sentenced to eight years in prison for daring to live out the full dimensions of his faith under a theocratic dictatorship which seeks monopoly status in the public square for its own beliefs. USCIRF has highlighted his case and continues to urge our government to press the Iranian government to release him immediately.

Unfortunately, the Iranian government’s mistreatment of Pastor Abedini reflects the stark and disturbing reality for many Christians seeking to live out their beliefs in country after country



across the globe. There are more than two billion Christians in the world -- which is nearly one-third of the world's population, and in one-third of all nations, containing 75 percent of the world's population, governments either perpetrate or permit serious violations of the religious freedom rights of their citizens. A recent report of a 6-year study from the Pew Research Center found that Christians were harassed in 151 countries, the largest number of any group surveyed, and in many of these countries the conditions for religious freedom are awful. In other words, given their large numbers and wide dispersion across countries, and given the poor status of religious freedom in many of these states, it is unfortunately no surprise that Christians so often fall victim to persecution.

In addition to these factors, there are other elements that explain not just the fact of Christians being persecuted, but the reasons for their persecution. To a disproportionate extent, Christians in many of these nations signify the "other." They often are members of ethnic or language minorities, or are viewed as linked to the West and Western interests. In many of these nations, Christianity also represents an alternative source of authority, thereby posing a direct threat both to tyrannical governments and extremist private actors.

In the case of governments, Christians and others find themselves in the crosshairs of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes on the one hand and theocracies on the other. Concerning the former, the problem is government's refusal to allow Christianity and other religions to operate freely, if at all, in the public square. Often, such governments allow religions to operate only at the price of a nearly complete surrender of autonomy-- the result being that religious organizations often become little more than appendages of the state. While those religious communities or sects that agree with this arrangement may be left alone, those that refuse often face severe persecution. China is an obvious example of this authoritarian model, while North Korea is an example of an even more draconian, totalitarian version.

In Russia, where the state favors Russian Orthodox Christianity, that status results from the government's decision that it is in its interest to promote Orthodoxy, and the Moscow Patriarchate in particular. In other words, the Kremlin sees religion as ultimately a creature of the state. As in Soviet days, the government views as problematic those forms of religion like Pentecostal Christianity that resist the state's efforts to co-opt it in any way.

Concerning theocracies, the problem is governments' allowing one, and only one, religious view to operate freely in public life. In Iran, for example, the dominant view is the regime's own interpretation of Shi'a Islam. As in the case of authoritarian or totalitarian governments, theocracies tolerate only those religious groups or communities which agree to their stringent rules and regulations, which effectively inhibit these groups' ability to act as truly independent entities.

In these countries, the governments typically have and enforce criminal laws to punish perceived religious offenses, particularly blasphemy. These laws often result in egregious human rights abuses against adherents of minority religions and non-conforming members of the favored religion. For example, Pakistan's criminal blasphemy laws include the death penalty for defiling the name of the Prophet Muhammad and life imprisonment for desecrating the Quran. Blasphemy allegations -- which are often false and used to settle personal scores -- result in

lengthy detentions and violence, particularly against Christians and Ahmadis. Currently, USCIRF is aware of 17 individuals on death row in Pakistan on blasphemy convictions and 21 serving life sentences. Countless others have been murdered in Pakistan in vigilante violence associated with blasphemy allegations. In Egypt, charges under the country's blasphemy provision have increased since the ouster of the Mubarak regime in 2011, particularly against Coptic Christians, but also against Muslim dissidents and atheists.

In practice, there is often little difference between how these two forms of dictatorship violate the religious freedom of Christians and others. In each case, the government's view, be it secular or religious, dominates the public square and excludes or limits dissenters' ability to communicate and practice their faith.

While in China and Iran governments are the prime persecutors of Christians, in a number of countries the problem is the presence of private individuals or groups who commit violence against Christians with impunity. In Pakistan and Iraq, the perpetrators are violent religious extremists who commit acts of terror against Christians and other religious minorities. In Nigeria these private groups and individuals are not limited to ideological actors, but include groups locked in longtime cycles of violence and retribution. In both instances, the common element is governments tolerating violence against Christians and other victims and failing to protect them and their religious freedom, and failing as well to end impunity and bring the perpetrators to justice.

In my testimony today, I will focus on countries and governments which, by perpetrating or allowing these abuses, continue to rank among the world's worst violators of the religious freedom and related human rights of Christians. I also will highlight prisoners of conscience who have been unjustly imprisoned for their Christian faith. These prisoners from the Defending Freedoms Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission are profiled more fully in the Appendix -- which I also request be submitted for the record. They have been unjustly incarcerated in violation of fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments and standards. We must shine a light on these prisoners of conscience until they are free, and raise the issue of religious freedom until the countries that imprisoned them comply with the documents they have signed and protect this fundamental human right.

Before turning to a review of the worst perpetrators of violations of religious freedom, I would like again to thank this Committee for holding a hearing on this subject. The persecution of Christians around the world is a growing and searing affront to our consciences and beliefs in freedom of conscience. This examination of what is happening and what our government might do about it is timely and, in our view, of great significance. For Christians struggling around the world for the freedom to practice their faith, you are demonstrating a concern and solidarity that will lift their spirits—and, we hope, notify their governments of how much you care about this subject. Thank you.

### **The Persecution of Christians by Country**

The countries in which Christians are persecuted span the globe and range from nations that many consider relatively stable and prosperous to those that are extremely poor and unstable. The persecutors are state or non-state actors, and in some cases, both. The countries highlighted in this testimony represent this range, and are countries that top USCIRF's agenda.

#### **Burma**

While much of the world focuses on notable political reforms in Burma, anti-Muslim activity -- especially the violence, discrimination and trafficking directed against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority -- ethnic minority Christians also face serious religious freedom abuses. These abuses reflect the presence of serious religious and ethnic tensions which threaten to undermine Burma's democratic progress.

Christian groups in ethnic minority regions, where low-intensity conflicts have gone on for decades, have faced particularly severe and ongoing abuses. During recent military incursions, ethnic minority Kachin faced restrictions on building places of worship, destructions of religious venues and artifacts, and prohibitions on religious ceremonies. As many as 60 Protestant churches were damaged by indiscriminate shelling during these incursions. Military forces have beaten and arrested religious leaders and kidnapped church members for forced labor. Military commanders in Kachin state issued edicts requiring religious groups to obtain permission one month in advance for reading the Bible, fasting, prayer, and saying the rosary.

The Chin Human Rights Organization continues to compile evidence that government officials encourage conversion to Buddhism through promises of economic assistance or denial of government services, although reportedly such incidents have decreased in recent years. Chin families who agree to convert to Buddhism were offered monetary and material incentives, as well as exemption from forced labor. Burmese Buddhist soldiers are also offered financial and career incentives to marry and convert Chin Christian women.

Burmese Christians living outside of conflict zones reported that conditions recently have improved, with more regular and open contact with the new government and the Religious Affairs Ministry. However, they continue to experience difficulty in obtaining permission to build new churches, hold public ceremonies or festivals, and import religious literature. In some areas around Rangoon, police restrict how often Burmese Christians can gather to worship or conduct religious training, despite a new law guaranteeing the right of assembly.

A government regulation promulgated in early 2008 bans religious meetings in unregistered venues, such as homes, hotels, or restaurants. It has not been strictly enforced in recent years. Limits on charitable and humanitarian activities have existed since 2009 and the government occasionally prohibits Protestants from proselytizing in some areas, particularly among rural Buddhist populations.

The best way the U.S. government can help Burmese Christians is by taking a leadership role to ensure Burma's full transition to democratic rule, holding it accountable for ending human rights violations and advancing religious freedom and the rule of law. The U.S. government

should target ethnic minority areas for political and economic development assistance and provide clear benchmarks for the Burmese government to meet or face re-imposition of some of the U.S sanctions already lifted. Such benchmarks should include: the unconditional release of all religious and political prisoners; an immediate nationwide ceasefire with religious and ethnic minorities; a durable citizenship solution for Rohingya Muslims; accountability for state or non-state actors who engage in violence against religious and ethnic minorities; the reform of laws limiting religious freedom and other human rights; an end to discriminatory policies that result in the closure of religious minority places of worship, inability to repair structures, and censorship of religious materials; and the holding of free and fair elections in 2015.

The U.S. government also should provide technical assistance to support Burmese civil society groups in organizing humanitarian aid, providing refugee protections, conducting human rights documentation efforts (particularly of religious freedom abuses faced by the Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities), and offering public advocacy, leadership, and legal training to Burmese in and outside of Burma. Finally, the United States should consider creating a pilot program as an Asian counterpart to the Supporting Eastern European Democracy (SEED) program. This program, Promoting Universal Rights and Rule of Law (PURRL), would support the development of nascent political parties and democratic institutions and render technical assistance to civilian government agencies, legal entities, courts, and the parliament to help support democracy and revise laws that restrict religious freedom, discriminate against ethnic and religious minorities, and limit the freedoms of expression and association.

#### **Central African Republic**

A political coup in the Central African Republic in March 2013 has led to a sectarian war and anarchy in this poor African nation. Following the coup, the Séléka, an alliance of largely Muslim fighters from at least four armed rebel groups in CAR's northeast and foreign fighters from Chad and Sudan, freely roamed the country, committing egregious human rights and religious freedom abuses. Séléka soldiers attacked priests, pastors, nuns, church buildings, and other Christian institutions. They targeted predominantly Christian neighborhoods, attacking churches, killing or raping Christian residents, and destroying and looting their properties while protecting Muslim residents and businesses.

In response to the Séléka attacks and fears that Séléka leader and former CAR interim president Michel Djotodia would turn CAR into an Islamic state, a number of self-defense militias known as the anti-balaka were formed in Christian areas in September 2013. The formation of the anti-balaka signaled that fighting in the CAR has devolved dramatically into a religious conflict. Religious tensions in the country have skyrocketed and cities and towns have segregated themselves along religious lines. Both the Séléka and the anti-balaka have engaged in severe human rights and religious freedom violations with routine Muslim-Christian fighting between the militias, as well as targeted killings of Christians and Muslims.

The Parliament's election on January 20th of Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president ten days after the resignation of Michel Djotodia could help end the violence, especially the sectarian strife, a recent phenomenon that most Muslim and Christian leaders find horrifying. Courageous religious leaders working tirelessly for reconciliation require the help of a more

robust international force that can stop the bloodshed. Such reconciliation must be based on respect for all religious communities and include an end to discrimination and the full establishment of rule of law and democratic governance. Once the fighting ceases, religious freedom must be upheld for all, Muslims and Christians alike. Séléka and anti-balaka perpetrators must answer for their crimes, and the government must move ahead toward new elections and a new constitution.

### China

As the Chinese government uses its power to curb dissent and harass groups viewed as potential political challenges, religious freedom conditions remain acute. While conditions for Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims are worse now than at any time in the past decade, independent Catholic and Protestant groups face arrests, fines, and the shuttering of their places of worship in a government drive to contain their growth. Practitioners of Falun Gong, as well as those of other groups deemed “evil cults,” face long jail terms, forced renunciations of faith, and torture in detention, including reports of psychiatric experiments and organ harvesting.

Independent Protestants and Catholics continue to face persecution for refusing to affiliate with government-approved religious groups. Protestant “house church” groups that refuse to join the state-approved Protestant religious organization are deemed illegal and experience harassment, fines, detentions, and imprisonment. Approximately 900 Protestants were detained in the past year for conducting public worship activities. Seven Protestant leaders also were imprisoned for terms exceeding one year. The Chinese government issued a directive to “eradicate” unregistered Protestant churches over the next ten years, including through force. Police have embraced the plan, raiding meetings, seeking to break up large churches that previously operated openly, and detaining religious leaders.

The Chinese government continued to appoint Bishops without Vatican approval and place them in leadership positions, setting back Vatican-Beijing relations. Dozens of Catholic clergy, including three Bishops, remain in detention, in home confinement, under surveillance, or disappeared. Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin, the Auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai, has been missing since he publicly announced his resignation from the state-approved Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (CPCA) in June 2012.

Religious freedom is directly related to expanding the rule of law, developing civil society, aiding stability and trust-building in ethnic minority areas, expanding the freedom of expression, and bringing China firmly within the international system through assisted implementation of universal human rights obligations. Advancing religious freedom is in China’s domestic and international interests.

For China to take seriously U.S. interest in human rights and religious freedom, these concerns must be woven throughout the architecture of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship and not left only to a U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue. As part of designating China as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), marking it as among the world’s worst religious freedom violators, the U.S. State Department should impose appropriate sanctions specifically targeting officials who perpetrate religious freedom abuses or provinces where religious freedom conditions are

most egregious, through travel bans, asset freezes, or other appropriate means. USCIRF also recommends that the U.S. government raise religious freedom concerns in multilateral fora where the United States and China are members, and develop and distribute proven technologies to counter Internet censorship and protect Chinese activists from arrest and harassment.

Prisoner of Conscience Gao Zhisheng, whom Representative Frank Wolf has adopted as part of the Defending Freedoms Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, is one of the most respected human rights lawyers in China who has defended religious minorities. He has been subjected to forced disappearance, torture, illegal house arrest and detention as a result of his work. He is currently imprisoned in Shaya county prison in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwest China, after being sent to prison in December 2011 for apparently violating the conditions of his suspended three-year sentence. Prior to this, his whereabouts had been unknown for almost 20 months. He has been repeatedly tortured since 2006, and continues to be at high risk of further abuse. This award-winning human rights lawyer has handled a number of high-profile human rights cases, including of Christians in Kashgar.

Other prisoners of conscience in China (who have yet to be adopted as part of the Defending Freedoms Project) include:

- Liu Xianbin, a long-time political dissident, organizer of the China Democracy Party and member of an “illegal” Protestant house church. On March 15, 2011, he was convicted of “inciting subversion of state power” and sentenced to a ten-year prison term, with deprivation of political rights for two years and four months.
- Alimujiang Yimiti, a Uighur Christian, began serving a fifteen-year prison term in 2008 for the crime of “leaking state secrets to foreigners.”
- Pastor Yang Rongli, who has been serving a seven-and-a-half-year prison term since 2009 for leading the 50,000-member Linfen Church in Shaanxi province.
- Bishop James Su Zhimin, who was arrested in 1996 for unregistered religious activity. He has not been heard from since, despite repeated international inquiries, though he was believed to have been seen in 2003 in a Baoding hospital. He served as an unregistered Bishop in the city of Baoding in the Chinese province of Hebei. Chinese religious authorities select Bishops over the authority of the Vatican, but Bishop Su recognized only the Catholic Church’s authority in this matter.

#### Egypt

Among the recent convulsions in Egypt, few shocked the conscience more or were more emblematic of the derailment of the January 2011 revolution than Egyptian security forces’ killing of more than 1,000 demonstrators in August 2013 and the subsequent horrific attacks by extremists and Muslim Brotherhood supporters against the country’s Coptic Christian population, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the Middle East.

As USCIRF reporting has long documented, sectarian violence targeting Copts has occurred with impunity for years. However, during former president Morsi's year in power, sectarian rhetoric and incitement accelerated. Conservative clerics and extremists often used incendiary, sectarian rhetoric and incitement without consequence or accountability. Among the most vilified groups are Christians, Shi'a, and Baha'is, all religious minority communities. Moreover, as evidenced by the violence unleashed against Copts since August and the interim government's increased stifling of dissent, the post-Morsi era has gotten off to a similarly bad start. Despite the revolution's early promise of progress, hopes have been dashed repeatedly for a peaceful and inclusive democracy that upholds the rule of law and adheres fully to international human rights standards, including those pertaining to freedom of religion or belief, for every Egyptian.

Since August 14, the day the Egyptian military and security forces dispersed pro-Morsi protesters, violent religious extremists and thugs launched a coordinated and unprecedented series of attacks against churches throughout the country. In August, at least seven Copts were killed and more than 200 churches and other Christian religious structures, homes, and businesses assaulted. In October, four Copts were killed, including two sisters aged eight and 12, when gunmen on motorcycles opened fire at a wedding party outside a church near Cairo.

While the government, before, during, and after Morsi, has failed to bring to justice the perpetrators of sectarian attacks, the courts have continued to convict and imprison Egyptian citizens charged with blasphemy under Article 98(f) of its penal code which prohibits "contempt" or "defamation" of religions. Since Egypt's January 2011 revolution, USCIRF has observed a significant increase in contempt-of-religion cases. While most of those targeted are disfavored Muslims, Christians are disproportionately affected. According to a leading Egyptian human rights organization, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), 63 individuals have been tried for defamation of religion since the January 2011 revolution, and 41 percent of the defendants were Christians, a high percentage when compared to the larger population.

While there has been some renewed hope and optimism within the Christian community following Morsi's ouster and some positive changes to the new constitution that potentially bode well for religious freedom and particularly for the rights of Copts, their situation remains precarious.

Due to Egypt's failure to protect the religious freedom of Copts and other religious minorities, its continued domestic and international support for blasphemy and religious defamation laws, its pursuit of blasphemy cases against its own citizens, from Copts to disfavored Muslims, and its repeated failure to bring their sectarian attackers to justice, USCIRF recommended for three consecutive years (2011-2013) that the United States designate Egypt a country of particular concern, or CPC. USCIRF currently is evaluating recent developments in advance of its 2014 determinations.

Washington should urge repeal of Egypt's contempt-of-religion and related laws in the penal code, as well as discriminatory decrees against religious minorities. It also should urge the lifting of bans on Baha'is and Jehovah's Witnesses, the removal of religion from official identity documents, and the passage of a unified law for the construction and repair of places of worship.

In response to the continued violence against Copts and other religious minorities, the United States should press Egypt to prosecute government-funded clerics, government officials, and others who incite violence, while disciplining government-funded clerics who preach hatred. Washington also should urge Cairo to counter the violence by bringing the violent to justice, thus weakening the climate of impunity.

### Eritrea

President Isaias Afwerki and the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) have ruled Eritrea since the country gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993. After an initially promising start toward democratization, the Isaias regime has become increasingly insular and repressive as the ailing President has become exceedingly fearful about losing control. The Eritrean government officially recognizes only four religious communities: the (Coptic) Orthodox Church of Eritrea; Sunni Islam; the Roman Catholic Church; and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea, a Lutheran-affiliated denomination. The government imposes a number of invasive controls over the four recognized religious groups that blocks their ability to operate freely. Without registration, religious communities lack a legal basis on which to practice their faiths publicly. Unrecognized groups' places of worship have been closed and public religious activities prohibited.

The government's campaign against unregistered religious activities frequently targets Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Government officials have criticized "non-traditional" Christian denominations for engaging in evangelism, which they allege is socially divisive and alien to Eritrea's cultural traditions. The regime also fears that co-religionists in the United States could encourage these religious communities to take actions against the government's undemocratic rule. Refugees told USCIRF that government officials often refer to Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians as CIA agents, and that they frequently are discriminated against in employment and housing. Eritrean security forces conduct mass arrests of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, including at prayer meetings.

The State Department, non-governmental human rights organizations, and Christian advocacy groups estimate that 2,000 to 3,000 persons are imprisoned on religious grounds in Eritrea. The vast majority are Evangelical or Pentecostal Christians. Religious prisoners reportedly have been beaten and tortured, and are prohibited from praying aloud, singing, or preaching, and no religious books are allowed. Released religious prisoners USCIRF interviewed report having been confined in cramped conditions, such as 20-foot metal shipping containers or underground barracks, some located in areas with extreme temperature fluctuations. The refugees also told USCIRF that security forces beat detainees and coerce them to renounce their faith, at times as a precondition of release. Persons detained for religious activities, serving both short- and long-term sentences, often are not formally charged, permitted access to legal counsel, accorded due process, or allowed access to their families. Reports continue of deaths of religious prisoners who refused to recant their beliefs, were denied medical care, or were subjected to other ill treatment.

The Eritrean government also targets Jehovah's Witnesses. President Asaias issued a decree in October 1994 specifically barring Jehovah's Witnesses from obtaining government jobs,



business licenses, and government-issued identity and travel documents. He reportedly viewed them as rejecting the duties of Eritrean citizenship, due to their refusal on religious grounds to participate in the 1993 independence referendum or perform mandatory national military service. Without Eritrean identity cards, Jehovah's Witnesses cannot obtain legal recognition of their marriages or land purchases.

The Eritrean government deposed Patriarch Abune Antonios in 2006 and placed him under house arrest after he protested the Eritrean Department of Religious Affairs' interference in his church's affairs. On May 27, 2007, the government installed Bishop Dioscoros of Mendefera as the new Patriarch. That same day, Abune Antonios was forcibly removed from his residence and transported to an undisclosed location. Since then, he has been prevented from communicating with the outside world and reportedly denied medical care.

Along with unconditionally releasing Patriarch Antonios and other religious prisoners, USCIRF recommends, in addition to designating Eritrea again as a CPC, continuing the existing presidential action of an arms embargo against Eritrea. In addition, the U.S. government should utilize the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose targeted sanctions against individuals and institutions identified as responsible for, or complicit in, serious religious freedom and human rights abuses. USCIRF further recommends that the U.S. government work to limit the Eritrean government's ability to levy and forcibly collect a "diaspora tax" on Eritreans living in the United States; work with international partners to draw attention to religious freedom abuses in Eritrea; engage in vigorous advocacy of religious freedom at all levels of involvement with the Eritrean government; and condition any resumption of assistance to Eritrea on measurable improvements in religious freedom and human rights conditions.

### **India**

In the past year, USCIRF has received reports that communal violence and attacks against religious minority communities have increased in India, despite its status as a pluralistic, secular democracy. NGOs and religious leaders, including from the Muslim, Christian, and Sikh communities, attribute the increase to India's upcoming 2014 general election and politicians' use of religiously divisive language, and they fear that incidents will become even more frequent as the general election nears and immediately thereafter. Christian NGOs and leaders also report that Christians experience more harassment and violence in states that have anti-conversion laws. In addition, India's record in investigating and prosecuting religiously-motivated crimes remained mixed.

The special structures established for investigating and prosecuting past communal violence in Gujarat (2002) and Odisha (2007-2008), during which Christians were killed and injured and churches destroyed, continue to operate, although at a glacial pace. The country's police force and judicial system are overburdened and have systemic problems reaching beyond the treatment of religious minorities. Nevertheless, lack of political will, political corruption and religious bias also exist within the judicial system and the police force, hampering their ability to protect vulnerable minority communities or provide justice when crimes occur.

Since 2004, the U.S. and India have pursued a strategic relationship based on shared concerns about energy, security, and the growing threat of terrorism, as well as shared values of democracy and the rule of law. The U.S. government should integrate concern for religious freedom into all bilateral contacts with India. It should urge and assist India to increase training on human rights and religious freedom standards and practices for police and the judiciary, particularly in areas with a history or likelihood of communal violence. It also should encourage India to establish an impartial body of interfaith religious leaders, human rights advocates, legal experts, and government officials to discuss and recommend actions to promote religious tolerance and understanding. Finally, it should urge all political parties and religious and social organizations to denounce publicly violence against and harassment of religious minorities, women, and low-caste members, and to communicate to all members and affiliates that acts of violence or harassment will not be tolerated.

### **Indonesia**

While Indonesia has demonstrated progress in advancing both democracy and human rights overall, serious religious freedom challenges remain, undermining Indonesia's reputation for religious tolerance and pluralism. Religious minorities face troubling levels of intolerance and violence from extremist groups who are able to act with few restrictions. The government also enforces a blasphemy law against religious groups and individuals considered "deviant."

The majority of Indonesia's diverse religious communities operate openly and with few restrictions. Christians make up an estimated 10%, or 28 million, of Indonesia's population. Growing societal tensions have led to harassment, intimidation, and violence perpetuated by groups espousing intolerance and extremism under the banner of Islamic orthodoxy, such as the Islamic Defenders Front. Extremist groups use violence to intimidate Christians and other religious minorities and forcibly close churches. Police and government officials are often passive and sometimes even complicit in the face of violence against religious minorities. In the past year, extremist groups have forcibly closed or destroyed places of worship belonging to Christian, Hindu, Ahmadiyya, and Shi'a religious minorities, sometimes with the acquiescence of local or provincial officials.

There are also problematic laws that contradict the Indonesian constitution's protections for religious freedom—including the imprisonment of individuals for "blasphemy" or "deviancy."

Indonesia's president has said that religious tolerance and pluralism are cornerstones of its democracy. Those foundations are being challenged by terrorist groups and extremist organizations targeting the rights and freedom of Christians and other religious minorities.

The United States must speak clearly that continued religious freedom abuses in Indonesia threaten stability and the rule of law. The U.S. government should publicly assist Indonesia's fight against sectarian and societal violence and religious intolerance and build the capacity of Indonesian institutions, including the police, to protect and promote human rights. The U.S.-Indonesia "Comprehensive Partnership" should have a regular human rights mechanism to discuss ongoing legal restrictions and societal violence targeting religious minorities. U.S. economic assistance programs should prioritize government offices and civil society

organizations working to promote religious freedom, counter extremism, teach tolerance and human rights, pursue legal reform, and build interfaith alliances to deal with pressing social, political, and economic concerns.

### Iran

Since President Hassan Rouhani assumed power six months ago, the number of Christian prisoners jailed for practicing their faith has increased, with a renewed crackdown on Protestant Christians that has resulted in numerous arrests.

Besides its severe mistreatment of Baha'is, Iran's government continues to discriminate against and repress Christians, both ethnic Christians and Evangelicals and other Protestants, in a sustained and systematic fashion. Estimates of the number of Iranian Christians, including Protestants, vary widely, but none allege that they constitute more than a fraction of one percent of Iran's population of nearly 75 million.

While ethnic Christians, mostly Armenians and Assyrians, are allowed to conduct their own religious services, they are barred from holding them in Persian. In addition, many of their churches have been subject to close surveillance and compelled to report their activities to the government. Tehran also imposes onerous restrictions on renewal of their licenses, and on renovating, buying, or selling their churches or property. In fact, since the 1979 Revolution, the government has refused to allow a single new church in the country to be constructed. Ethnic Christians frequently face legal discrimination such as harsher penalties than Muslims in criminal cases, restrictions on marriages with Muslims, the favoring of Muslim family members in inheritance rights, and the setting aside of certain political or judicial leadership positions for Muslims.

While all of Iran's Christians face a regime that restricts their rights, Tehran reserves particularly harsh treatment for Protestant Christians. Over the past generation, and particularly in recent years, Iran's Protestants have experienced significant growth in numbers and house churches have proliferated. Despite their still small numbers, authorities view the Protestant church community as the most serious competitor of the theocratic government for the hearts and minds of Iranians. Unlike Iran's ethnic Christian population, the vast majority of Iran's Protestants are converts from Islam. While not formally a part of Iran's criminal code, Iranian courts typically treat apostasy as a capital crime, drawing upon Iran's constitution which allows them to invoke Islamic jurisprudence.

While Christians often have been charged with either apostasy or blasphemy as a result of conversion from Islam, the Revolutionary Court also can charge them with political crimes such as acting against national security or contact with a foreign enemy. Such baseless charges may be triggered by a number of innocent religious activities ranging from meetings with Christians from other countries, to associating with Christian organizations that are based abroad, to attending Christian seminars outside of Iran. In recent years, hundreds of Christians, mostly Protestants, have been arbitrarily arrested and detained throughout the country. In cases involving offenses based on religious belief, Iranian authorities typically release prisoners, but leave in place the charges against them or their convictions in order to be able to threaten them with re-imprisonment at any future time.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, found in an October report that since 2010 more than 300 Christians have been arrested and detained arbitrarily and as of July, at least 20 Christians were detained or in prison. In a particularly outrageous miscarriage of justice, Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-born American pastor, was sentenced on January 27, 2013 by Judge Pir-Abassi, a jurist notorious for perpetrating religious freedom violations, to eight years in prison for “threatening the national security of Iran.” His “crimes” apparently included his participation since 2000 in Iran’s house church movement and his more recent efforts to raise money for an orphanage. Human rights groups have stated that his trial was unfair and the whole legal process deeply flawed. While in Evin prison, he spent many weeks in solitary confinement and suffered mental and physical abuse. In November, Pastor Abedini was transferred to the notorious Gohardasht prison outside Tehran which is known for its harsh and unsanitary conditions. Representatives Bill Cassidy, Trent Franks, Raul Labrador, and Henry Waxman have adopted Pastor Abedini as part of the Defending Freedoms Project.

Another prisoner of conscience the Iranian government has imprisoned is Farshid Fathi, a Christian pastor who ran a network of house churches in Tehran. Pastor Fathi currently is serving a six-year sentence in Iran’s notorious Evin prison. Though his crime is being a Christian and spreading his faith, Iranian authorities have cast his Christian activity as “political offenses,” arguing that such activities were equivalent to “actions against national security.” He also was charged with possessing religious propaganda.

In response to these systematic, ongoing, egregious violations, the U.S. government should continue to designate Iran as a CPC and continue to work closely with allies to apply pressure on the Iranian government through a combination of advocacy, diplomacy, and targeted sanctions with the aim of halting the government’s human rights and religious freedom violations. The United States should call on the Iranian government to release all prisoners who have been jailed on account of their religion or belief, and drop all charges against those who have cases pending against them. These prisoners range from a Shi’a cleric and his followers, to a number of Sufi activists, Baha’i and Christian leaders whose sole crime is exercising their internationally guaranteed right to freedom of religion or belief. The United States also should continue to bar from entry into the United States and freeze the assets of Iranian government officials identified as having engaged in particularly severe religious freedom violations and, where appropriate, their immediate family members. Finally, Congress should reauthorize for multiple years, and the President sign into law, the Lautenberg Amendment, a lifeline for religious minorities in Iran. The Amendment establishes a presumption of eligibility and allows fast track processing to prevent undue backlogs in countries that host their processing.

### **Iraq**

Over the past few years, the Iraqi government has taken positive steps to improve security for religious sites and worshippers and address some concerns of the country’s smallest religious minorities, including Christians. Nevertheless, the government has failed to stem non-state actors’ egregious and increasing violence against Iraqi civilians, including attacks targeting religious worshippers, sites, and leaders, as well as individuals for their actual or assumed

religious identity. The Syrian crisis has emboldened extremist groups in the country that are linked to al-Qaeda and heightened Sunni-Shi'a tensions, but the Shi'a-led Iraqi government often has exacerbated the situation by acting in a seemingly sectarian manner.

The primary victims of violence in the past year were members of the Shi'a majority, including pilgrims celebrating important holidays, but all Iraqis were at risk. Members of the smallest minority communities, including Christians, Mandaeans, and Yazidis, continue to experience violence, intimidation, and discrimination, particularly in areas disputed between the central government and the Kurdistan regional government. Although they reported fewer violent incidents than in past years, these groups continue to report that they feel a perpetual sense of fear. These ancient communities' numbers in recent years have been reduced due to their fleeing the country; their flight has threatened their continued viability in Iraq.

The Christian community, once estimated to number between 800,000 and 1.4 million, is now said to stand at 500,000 or less. Christians in Iraq include Chaldean Catholics, Assyrian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East members, Syriac Orthodox, Armenians (Catholic and Orthodox), Protestants, and Evangelicals. The worst single attack on Iraqi Christians in recent years was the October 31, 2010 hostage siege at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Baghdad, during a mass, which left more than 50 people dead, including two priests, and more than 60 injured.

Some Christians have hailed the Iraqi cabinet's January 2014 announcement supporting in principle the creation of three new provinces, including one in the largely Christian Nineveh Plains, as having the potential to stop the emigration of Christians, though the details of the plan and its implementation remain to be seen. Many members of the smallest minorities also have urged reforms to provisions in Article 2 of the Iraqi Constitution that give Islam a preferred status. They argue this favoritism towards Islam provides a potential justification for discrimination against non-Muslims.

The United States government needs to encourage and help the Iraqi government be a government for all Iraqis, regardless of their religion, sect, or belief. All U.S. military or security assistance should be accompanied by training for the recipient units on universal human rights standards and how to treat civilians, particularly minorities. The U.S. government also should ensure that religious freedom and minority rights are part of the negotiations between the Kurdistan regional government (KRG) and the Iraqi government on disputed territories, and should press the KRG to address alleged abuses against minorities by Kurdish officials in these areas. U.S. programs should focus on promoting religious freedom and tolerance, fostering human rights compliance and the rule of law, and improving minorities' ability to organize and effectively convey their concerns to the government. Development assistance should prioritize areas where marginalized communities are concentrated. USCIRF currently is evaluating recent developments in advance of its 2014 determinations. The Commission recommended in 2013 that Iraq be designated a CPC.

#### **Kazakhstan**

Christianity is the second most practiced religion after Islam in Kazakhstan. Orthodox Christians constitute about 25% of the population. Other groups constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Mennonites, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jews, Buddhists, Hare Krishnas, Bahais, Christian Scientists, Scientologists, and members of Grace Church, New Life Church, and the Unification Church.

The government of Kazakhstan controls all religious groups through its restrictive 2011 religion law. The law sets complex registration requirements for religious organizations, bans all unregistered religious activity, restricts the activities of registered groups, and provides penalties for violations, including monetary fines, suspensions, or liquidations. Religious groups have described the re-registration process as burdensome and arbitrary. It was reported that in the city of Almaty, of the 666 registered Protestant religious associations, 462 were re-registered and the remaining 204 "will be liquidated." Before the October 2012 registration deadline, the government conducted raids on registered and unregistered communities, including Baptist and Protestant communities. The Kazakh government also supports "anti-sect centers" which promote intolerance against certain religious communities, particularly some Protestant groups.

A Presbyterian Pastor, Bakhytzhn Kashkumbayev, of the Grace Church in the Kazakh capital, Astana, was arrested and detained in May 2013. He is 67 years old and in poor health. The pastor's arrest is seen as part of government efforts to penalize any Muslim who becomes a Christian.

In October 2013, then-USCIRF Chair Katrina Lantos Swett met with Pastor Kashkumbayev's family in Astana. Three days later, after nearly five months' detention – including one month in a psychiatric hospital where he was injected with the psychotropic drug haloperidol – an Astana court ordered him transferred to house arrest. Just minutes after he was freed from prison, however, the pastor was re-arrested and faced additional charges of "extremism." His trial began on January 22, 2014. By the end of the first court session, the two extremism-linked charges were dropped. His trial remains ongoing, and he denies all wrongdoing.

USCIRF wrote letters to the Kazakh President and Committee on Religious Affairs advocating for the pastor's release, but never received responses. Yet, on January 24, 2014, "Kazakhstanskaya Pravda," which is in effect the government newspaper, referred to the Commission's letters, among other advocacy on the pastor's behalf. The hostile article concluded: "It makes one wonder – why all this concern for a lowly pastor convicted of a criminal offense? Is it because his sentence could become a verdict of guilt for all the different pseudo-religious associations with foreign sponsors who are taking away the health and wealth of our citizens? Or could it be because more unseemly methods that these organizations use to brainwash acolytes will emerge?"

In order to promote freedom of religion or belief in Kazakhstan, the U.S. government should press the Kazakh government to allow religious groups to operate freely without registration and to amend the religion law to bring it into compliance with international norms. It also should urge the Kazakh government to cease police raids of religious meetings, as well as the issuance of fines, property confiscation, detentions and imprisonment of participants and religious leaders,

and to release and drop the charges against Pastor Kashkumbayev. In addition, the United States should urge the Kazakh government to agree to visits by UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Independence of the Judiciary, and Torture, set specific visit dates, and provide the full and necessary conditions for such a visit.

### **Nigeria**

For more than a decade, USCIRF has reported on the continuing violations of religious freedom and religion-related violence taking place in Nigeria. In 2009, USCIRF recommended for the first time that the U.S. government designate Nigeria a CPC for the government's failure to address at both state and federal levels ongoing, egregious and systemic religious freedom violations that have resulted in more than 16,000 deaths from sectarian violence since 1999. Almost universally, individuals identified as perpetrators have not been prosecuted and the Nigerian government, at the state and federal levels, has proven unable or unwilling to address the violence and its underlying causes. Sectarian violence continues today with reports of Fulani Muslims attacking Christian villages in the middle of the night in Plateau and Kaduna states, killing and wounding hundreds. Human Rights Watch estimates that these killings and retaliatory attacks have killed 2,000 to 3,000 in the past several years. USCIRF believes that the majority of those killed were Christian.

In the past three years, Boko Haram has become the primary perpetrator of religiously-related violence and gross religious freedom violations. The rise of Boko Haram has exacerbated Muslim-Christian relations throughout Nigeria. Boko Haram rejects the secular state and seeks the universal implementation of what it considers "pure" Shari'ah law to resolve the ills facing northern Nigerian Muslims. The terrorist organization's targets include churches, individual Christians, Muslim critics, and persons engaged in behavior deemed "un-Islamic," as well as northern elders, schools, police stations, government buildings, newspapers, and banks. Since January 1, 2012, Boko Haram's religiously-motivated attacks have included more than 50 church attacks that often have taken place during services to maximize the casualties. Hundreds of Christians have been killed either during church attacks or in individual targeting. The January 2014 attack on a St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church in Adamawa State is a stark reminder that Boko Haram continues to target Christians.

USCIRF recommended in 2013 that Nigeria be designated as a CPC. USCIRF has recommended this status since 2009. USCIRF also urges the U.S. government to address the religious elements of both the ongoing sectarian violence in the Middle Belt and the Boko Haram violence to better engage with the Nigerian government at all levels and with key religious leaders. USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government enter into a binding agreement with the Nigerian government, as defined in section 405(c) of the International Religious Freedom Act, which would set forth commitments the government would undertake to address policies leading to violations of religious freedom. These commitment should include, but not be limited to: vigorously investigating, prosecuting, and bringing to justice perpetrators of all past and future incidents of sectarian violence; developing effective conflict-prevention and early-warning mechanisms at the local, state, and federal levels; developing the capability to deploy specialized police and army units rapidly to prevent and combat sectarian violence; and taking steps to professionalize its police and military forces' investigative, community policing, crowd control,

and conflict prevention capacities. USCIRF also recommends that the U.S. government encourage and support Nigerian government efforts to provide additional security personnel to protect northern Christian minorities and clerics and Muslim traditional rulers who denounce Boko Haram attacks, and consider creating a witness-protection-like program.

### **North Korea**

The North Korean government tightly controls all religious activity and perpetuates an extreme cult of personality venerating the ruling Kim family. Individuals engaged in clandestine Protestant activity or “fortune telling” are arrested, tortured, and even executed. Thousands of religious believers remain imprisoned in North Korea’s notorious penal labor camps, including refugees repatriated from China. The political transition to Kim Jong-un has increased pressure on those engaging in clandestine religious activities or possessing illegal religious materials and on asylum-seekers in China. Though nuclear security or “basketball diplomacy” issues dominate the headlines, the North Korean government remains both a serious regional threat and a threat to North Korean citizens who fail to sufficiently honor the Kim family’s personality cult.

In North Korea, all unapproved religious activity is brutally repressed as a direct challenge to the Kim family. The growth of Protestantism spread from China is viewed as a particular security threat. Individuals caught transporting Bibles or those engaged in missionary activity face imprisonment, torture, and execution. USCIRF has received information that there have been recent executions of individuals caught transporting Bibles. North Korean police infiltrated Protestant churches in China and set up fake prayer meetings to catch worshippers.

North Korean refugees, particularly those who convert to Christianity in China, remain in severe danger if forcibly returned from China. Returned refugees are subject to interrogation about their religious belief and affiliations by special police and border guards trained to uncover religious belief or connections with South Korean religious groups. Most of those returned will be punished, and those viewed as security threats will be severely punished. Punishment has included beatings, torture, detention, forced labor, sexual violence, and in the case of women suspected of becoming pregnant in China, forced abortions or infanticide.

Negotiations with North Korea on nuclear non-proliferation should be rooted in a broader security framework that includes human rights and humanitarian concerns. The U.S. government should clearly signal that future political, diplomatic, or economic inducements will require improvements in both human rights and nuclear security issues and work with democratic allies in the region to put such a plan into action. The U.S. government also should fully implement the North Korean Human Rights Act and use funds from the Act to: expand access to information and new media to counter government propaganda within North Korea; remove any obstacles that hinder additional resettlement of North Koreans in the United States; and build a cadre of experts and potential leaders among North Korean refugee populations through scholarship, leadership, educational, and other programs in the United States.

In addition, the U.S. government should give priority to raising the forced repatriation of North Koreans with Chinese officials, urging them to stop deporting North Koreans until China’s laws



are brought into line with international standards. The United States should support South Korea's efforts to bring refugee issues before international human rights fora and call for China, by name, to fulfill its obligations to protect refugees.

### **Pakistan**

Pakistan represents the worst situation in the world for religious freedom for countries not currently designated as "countries of particular concern" by the U.S. government.

The government of Pakistan continues to engage in and tolerate systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief. In addition to government repression, sectarian and religiously-motivated violence is chronic and the government has failed to protect members of religious minority communities, as well as the majority faith. Christians often bear the brunt of the twin pincers of governmental and societal persecution, but other communities suffer as well, especially Shi'as, Ahmadis, and Hindus.

For these reasons, USCIRF has recommended annually since 2002 that Pakistan be designated a "country of particular concern," or CPC. A quick read of the State Department's own reports on Pakistan can lead to no other conclusion.

Christians repeatedly have been targeted for violence. In September, splinter groups from the Pakistani Taliban executed twin suicide bombings on the All Saints Church in Peshawar as Sunday services were ending. More than 80 Christians were killed, marking it as the worst attack on Christians in the nation's violent history. Entire Christian villages were destroyed in 2009 and in 2013, with no one held to account. The Pakistani Taliban brazenly took credit for the 2011 murder of Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, leaving flyers at the crime scene in an upscale part of Islamabad. The murderers now are on trial, but the Pakistani Taliban is threatening retribution. Overall, Pakistani authorities have inconsistently brought perpetrators to justice or taken action against societal actors who incite violence.

Pakistan's repressive blasphemy laws and other religiously discriminatory legislation, such as the anti-Ahmadi laws, foster an atmosphere of violent extremism and vigilantism. The country's blasphemy law -- used predominantly in Punjab province but also nationwide -- targets Christians, members of religious minority communities, and dissenting Muslims. USCIRF is aware of at least 17 individuals on death row and 20 more serving life sentences, statistics unmatched anywhere else in the world. The blasphemy law, along with anti-Ahmadi laws that effectively criminalize various practices of their faith, have created a climate of vigilante violence. Hindus have suffered from the climate of violence and hundreds have fled Pakistan for India. Other chronic conditions remain, including the poor social and legal status of Christians and other non-Muslim religious minorities.

Given these laws, the climate of violence, and other factors, promoting respect for freedom of religion or belief must be an integral part of U.S. policy towards Pakistan, and designating Pakistan as a CPC would enable the United States to press Islamabad to undertake needed reforms.

The forces that threaten Pakistani and U.S. security interests largely are motivated by a violent extremist ideology that rejects international human rights standards, including freedom of religion or belief. To make religious freedom a key element in the bilateral relationship, the U.S. government should include discussions on religious freedom and religious tolerance in U.S.-Pakistan strategic dialogues. The U.S. government also should urge Pakistan to protect Christians and other religious minorities from violence and actively prosecute those committing acts of violence; unconditionally release individuals currently jailed for blasphemy; repeal or reform the blasphemy law; and repeal anti-Ahmadi laws.

One of the most potent living symbols of Pakistan's egregious religious freedom abuses is Prisoner of Conscience Aasia Bibi, a Catholic mother of five who was a farmhand from a village in Punjab province. In June 2009, an argument arose with her fellow laborers over whether the water she brought was "unclean" because she was Christian and they Muslim. Later coworkers complained to a cleric that Bibi made derogatory comments about Prophet Muhammad. Police investigated her remarks, resulting in her arrest and prosecution under Section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code for blasphemy. On November 8, 2010, a district court in Nankana Sahib, Punjab, sentenced her to death, the first such sentence for blasphemy handed down against a woman. Bibi remains in custody while she waits for the Lahore High Court to hear her appeal. Representative Joseph Pitts has adopted Aasia Bibi as part of the Defending Freedoms Project.

### **Russia**

Religious freedom conditions in Russia continued to deteriorate over the past year. There are increasing signs of an official policy that favors the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church over other religious communities. Government officials obstruct the construction or rental of buildings for worship, particularly for allegedly "non-traditional" groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostal congregations, the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union, Orthodox groups not part of the Moscow Patriarchate, and Old Believer communities.

During a September 2012 trip to Russia, USCIRF heard reports of Ministry of Justice officials requiring certain Protestant churches and new religious groups to submit extra registration data or refusing to register such groups. Officials can bring court cases to ban religious groups found in violation of Russian law. While the Salvation Army was re-registered in Moscow in 2009, it had to litigate to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to obtain that result. Its re-registration was the first Russian remedial action in response to an ECtHR ruling, but the Jehovah's Witnesses were not re-registered after a similar 2010 ruling. Despite a 2009 ECtHR finding that the 15-year-existence rule for registration violated the European Convention on Human Rights, the Church of Scientology continues to be denied registration, and that rule was cited in a 2010 refusal to register an Armenian Catholic parish in Moscow.

Lack of registration can have dire consequences. In September 2012, police presided over the demolition of the unregistered Holy Trinity Pentecostal Church near Moscow. According to Forum 18, the Pentecostal community had tried to register this church unsuccessfully for over 15 years. A Moscow city spokesperson defended the destruction as due to a court order.

The Russian government has used a 2012 law on unauthorized public meetings against religious communities. For example, a Pentecostal pastor was fined for holding a religious service.

The application of Russia's anti-extremism law also threatens religious freedom. The law defines extremism in a religious context, as "propaganda of the exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of citizens according to their attitude towards religion or religious affiliation," and does not require the use or threat of violence. A Russian court at any level may rule material extremist, which results in it being banned throughout Russia. Under the Extremism Law, the mass distribution, preparation or storage with the aim of mass distribution of texts ruled extremist could result in a four-year prison term. As of December 2013, 2,173 items (mostly Muslim texts) were on the banned list. Sixty-eight Jehovah's Witnesses texts also have been deemed extremist, and Jehovah's Witnesses face prosecution for possessing this literature.

A recently-enacted blasphemy law also opens the door to criminal prosecution of disfavored Christians and other groups. The new law, which was enacted in July 2013, punishes public actions that disrespect or insult religious beliefs. Such actions undertaken in a place of worship are subject to fines of up to USD 15,000 and up to three years of imprisonment. Doing so elsewhere carries up to one year of imprisonment and fines of up to \$9,000 USD.

The U.S. government should make freedom of religion or belief a key human rights and security concern in the U.S.-Russia relationship by, for example, creating in the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission a working group composed of legal experts on international norms on freedom of religion or belief. It should press the Russian government to reform the extremism law to ensure that it is not applied to peaceful religious communities and amend the process for banning books. It also should re-program funding from the now-defunct USAID Russia program to other programs benefitting Russian civil society, including practical programs on tolerance and on freedom of religion or belief.

### **Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi government continues to ban most forms of public religious expression other than that of the government's own interpretation of one school of Sunni Islam; prohibits any public non-Muslim places of worship; and periodically interferes with the private religious practice of non-Muslim expatriate workers in the country. Non-Muslims are not allowed to acquire Saudi nationality and no non-Muslim places of worship are permitted in the country.

In March 2012, Saudi Grand Mufti Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh was quoted in the Arabic press as saying it is "necessary to destroy all the churches of the region" in response to a visiting Kuwaiti delegation who asked him if churches should be banned in Kuwait. For years, Saudi government officials have argued that places of worship other than mosques cannot exist in the Kingdom because Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's two holiest sites: Mecca and Medina. In addition, government officials pointed to a hadith (oral tradition) from the Prophet Muhammad which says that only Islam can exist on the Arabian Peninsula, although other Islamic experts contend that this hadith can be interpreted differently.

In 2012 and 2013, Saudi officials reiterated the government position that non-Muslim expatriate workers are permitted to worship in private. However, what constitutes “private” worship remains unclear. The Saudi government has said that as long as non-Muslims practice their religion in small groups in private homes, no security entity would interfere, since no law prohibits non-Muslims from practicing in this manner. During a USCIRF visit last year, some non-Muslim interlocutors, including expatriate Christians, said they are able to worship in rented compounds with as many as 300 or more participants. In one case, the congregation voluntarily affirmed to Saudi authorities that they do not proselytize and do not permit any Saudi citizens to attend their gatherings.

Saudi officials also stated to USCIRF during its 2013 visit that no one is arrested for private worship, but some gatherings are raided because foreign workers’ residency permits have expired. Some expatriate workers dispute this assertion. Saudi authorities continue to subject expatriate workers from South Asia and several African countries to surveillance and raids. Outside the compounds populated by foreign workers, where private worship is allowed, expatriate workers continue to fear government interference with their private worship. This interference can occur for many reasons, such as a worship service being too loud, having too many attendees, including too many vehicles in front of a compound, or occurring too often at the same place.

During the year, there continued to be public reports of incidents in which Saudi authorities entered and raided private homes where non-Muslim expatriate workers were worshipping in private. Several other cases were not publicized in order to secure releases.

USCIRF has concluded that the Saudi government’s full implementation of policies it confirmed in July 2006 in U.S.-Saudi bilateral discussions would diminish significantly the government’s institutionalized practices that negatively affect freedom of religion and belief. Religious freedom in Saudi Arabia has not been a U.S. priority in the bilateral relationship and, as a consequence, the U.S. government has inadequately held to account the Saudi government on its implementation of these reforms to advance freedom of religion and belief in the Kingdom. The U.S. government should continue to designate Saudi Arabia as a CPC and should replace the indefinite waiver of action with a limited 180-day waiver, during which time the Saudi government should advance and complete reforms, including those confirmed in July 2006 in U.S.-Saudi bilateral discussions. The U.S. government should call, at the highest levels, for the release of prisoners convicted and imprisoned on charges of apostasy, blasphemy, or sorcery. In addition, Congress should require the State Department to issue a public report on the Saudi government’s efforts and results achieved in implementing reforms related to freedom of religion or belief.

### **Sudan**

Sudan continues to be governed by an amended version of the Interim National Constitution (INC) while members of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) draft a new constitution. President Omar al-Bashir and several NCP leaders continue to promise that the new constitution will be based on the government’s interpretation of Shari’ah, despite calls for separation of religion and state and full recognition of religious freedom. Currently, all Sudanese, including Christians and followers of traditional African religions, are subject to the government’s

interpretation of Shari'ah (Islamic law), including criminal provisions in the 1991 Criminal Act making apostasy from Islam punishable by death and prohibitions on "offences of honor, reputation and public morality," including undefined "indecent or immoral acts," which can carry corporal punishments such as flogging.

Christians routinely face discrimination. Local mobs have attacked several churches and the government has demolished or threatened to close several since South Sudan seceded in 2011, on the grounds that these churches were Southern, not Sudanese. In 2013, several human rights organizations reported that South Sudanese humanitarian workers employed at Christian organizations were arrested and deported to South Sudan for alleged proselytizing. While Christian groups are allowed to engage in humanitarian activities and promote Muslim-Christian cooperation, they are not permitted to share their beliefs with others. In contrast, government policies promote conversion to Islam, such as by allowing the use of humanitarian assistance to induce conversion and providing early release to prison inmates who memorize the Qur'an.

USCIRF recommended in 2013 that Sudan be designated a CPC for its systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom and currently is evaluating its recommendation for 2014. The Commission believes that religious freedom must be an integral part of U.S.-Sudan policy. Resolving the debates over ethnic and religious identities and beliefs are central to ending the fighting throughout Sudan and ensuring lasting peace. USCIRF recommends that, before normalizing relations or lifting existing sanctions, the U.S. government require that the government of Sudan abide by international standards of freedom of religion or belief, including by repealing the apostasy law, Shari'ah-based morality laws, and laws and practices which discriminate against non-Muslim minorities. The United States also should urge the government of Sudan to hold a transparent, inclusive national drafting process with civil society leaders and representatives of all relevant political parties to ensure that Sudan's new constitution includes protections for freedom of religion or belief, respect for international commitments to human rights, recognition of Sudan as a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural nation, and support for indigenous efforts to influence the process positively.

### Syria

In Syria, the plight of Christians, as well as other religious minorities like the Alawites, is acute. Christians are caught between the persecution of terrorist organizations affiliated with al-Qaeda and the brutal repression of the Assad regime, which will never be a true protector of their rights.

Since the civil war started, more than 90 Christian churches, monasteries, shrines and buildings have been destroyed or severely damaged. During the conflict, the Assad regime and terrorist organizations have targeted religious leaders, including Christian religious leaders and laity, as well as Sunni Clerics who support the opposition or have left the ruling Baath Party. Two senior Christian clerics, Greek Archbishop Boulous Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Bishop Yuhanna Ibrahim, have been missing after being kidnapped more than six months ago, reportedly by rebels. Nothing certain is known about their current status nor is there any information about the identity of those responsible for their disappearance. Twelve nuns kidnapped in December still are being held by the rebels.

USCIRF urged the U.S. government to highlight the plight of religious minorities and stress the need for protection of religious freedom for all Syrians during the recent Geneva II peace conference and include Christians and other religious minorities in these discussions in order to help ensure the survival of Christianity and Syria's religious diversity. Christian and Alawite communities, who are not aligned with either side of the conflict, are inadequately represented by the opposition coalition and the Assad regime does not represent their concerns.

### **Uzbekistan**

Since Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, its government has systematically and egregiously violated freedom of religion or belief and other human rights. The Uzbek government harshly penalizes individuals for independent religious activity regardless of their religious affiliation. A restrictive religion law facilitates state control over all religious communities. The government arrests mostly Muslims, but sometimes Christians, and represses individuals and groups that do not conform to officially-prescribed practices or that it claims are associated with extremist political programs. Thousands remain imprisoned as alleged extremists, including many who reportedly are denied due process and subjected to torture. While Uzbekistan does face security threats from groups that advocate or perpetrate violence in the name of religion, vague anti-extremism laws are applied against those who pose no credible threat to security.

Uzbek police and security forces continue to raid and detain members of unregistered, and sometimes registered, religious groups, including Christians, for their peaceful religious activity. In November 2012, the Tashkent region Justice Ministry summoned leaders of some registered Protestant churches, warning them to eliminate from their statutes provisions on missionary activity and instructing them to re-register within one month. Written warnings of this nature place congregations and their leadership in a vulnerable position for future prosecution of "illegal" activity.

Uzbek police in December 2012 raided a group of about 80 Protestants on holiday in the Tashkent region; four were charged under the Administrative code for discussing their faith and singing Christian songs. Local police also confiscated three Bibles and 100 Christian songbooks, insulted the group, and took fingerprints. In June 2012, police officers with a warrant told Yelena Kim at her Baptist church in Fergana that criminal charges were lodged against her; in July 2011 she had been tried and fined for the private teaching of religion.

In some regions of Uzbekistan, almost all churches have been closed and evangelical Protestant students have been expelled from university. In other regions, no non-Muslim and non-Orthodox religious communities are registered, making "illegal" the activity of Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses congregations.

The state-controlled media has encouraged intolerant views of certain minority religious groups, particularly Protestants, Baha'is, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Further, journalists have accused missionaries of posing a danger to society and equated them with religious extremists. Government officials have held meetings at universities and schools around the country warning students about the "negative consequences of missionaries and religious extremism."

Over the past decade, the Uzbek government reportedly has sentenced or imprisoned, sometimes in psychiatric hospitals, as many as 10,000 individuals for terms of up to 20 years for their non-violent Islamic religious affiliations or beliefs in trials that fall far short of international standards. The Uzbek government frequently brands Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses "extremists" for their practice of religion outside state-sanctioned structures. These groups face ongoing harassment, detention, and arrest for "illegal religious activity," such as holding private prayer meetings or possessing "illegal" religious literature.

Pentecostal pastor Dmitri Shestakov served a four-year term in a labor colony from 2007 to 2011 for organizing an illegal religious group, inciting religious hatred, and distributing extremist religious literature. After his release, he remained under police surveillance. In January 2013, Pastor Shestakov and his family fled to Ukraine, where they were given political asylum by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The U.S. government has designated Uzbekistan as a CPC since 2006, but since 2009 has placed a waiver on taking any action as a consequence of this designation. USCIRF recommended CPC status for Uzbekistan in 2013 (and has done so since 2005) and that the waiver be dropped, and currently is evaluating this recommendation for 2014.

USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government should engage Uzbekistan in intensive negotiations about concrete progress that would address religious freedom abuses. If these talks fail after 180 days, the U.S. government should lift the waiver and impose sanctions, such as a ban on visits to the United States by high-level and mid-level Uzbek officials, including President Islam Karimov. U.S. policy toward Uzbekistan should be coordinated across agencies to ensure that human rights concerns are reflected in all dealings with the Uzbek government. U.S. security materiel and other assistance should not be given to Uzbekistan without concrete improvements in religious freedom, and if assistance is given, Uzbek agencies or units known to be responsible for severe violations should be excluded. The United States also should press the Uzbek government to revise its religion law so that it accords with international standards and establish a mechanism to review the cases of persons detained under suspicion of or charged with religion-related offenses.

### **Vietnam**

Religious freedom conditions remain poor in Vietnam despite some positive changes in response to international attention and that nation's designation as a CPC.

The Vietnamese government continues to imprison individuals for religious activity or religious freedom advocacy. It uses a religious police force (*công an tôn giáo*) and vague national security laws to suppress independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai activities. The government also seeks to stop the growth of ethnic minority Protestantism and Catholicism via discrimination, violence and forced renunciations of their faith.

There are ongoing and egregious religious freedom abuses in Vietnam in the past year. Ethnic minority Protestants and Catholics in the Central Highlands have been arrested, beaten, and face forced renunciations of faith efforts for practicing outside of government approved religious organizations. Over a dozen were arrested in the past year. Hmong and Montagnard Protestants

continue to experience government sanctioned efforts of forced renunciations of faith, despite a ban on this practice established in 2005. The government has sanctioned violence against Catholics, particularly those associated with the Redemptorist Orders, by “contract thugs” and arrests for peacefully advocating for religious freedom and the return of confiscated property. The government also continues to actively suppress independent religious activity among Buddhists and Protestants, and Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam leaders are detained in house arrest, their worshippers harassed, ceremonies disrupted, and youth organizations banned.

The Government’s new decree on religion (Decree 92) that went into effect in January 2013 continues government oversight and control of all religious activity and demonstrates the government’s continued suspicion of religious individuals and groups. This decree also does not improve the ill-defined and intrusive process of legal registration for religious entities, and may make it worse by making it unfeasible for any group not currently legally recognized from gaining that status.

The U.S. designated Vietnam as a CPC from 2004-2006. This designation spurred productive diplomatic discussions on religious freedom that brought some tangible improvements and did not disrupt progress on other issues in the U.S.-Vietnam relationship. USCIRF had recommended that Vietnam be designated a CPC in 2013 because individuals are imprisoned for their religious activities and religious freedom advocacy; a religious police force represses independent religious activity; and new ethnic minority converts to Christianity face pressure to renounce their faith through discrimination, violence, and detention. USCIRF currently is evaluating recent developments in advance of its 2014 determinations.

Given an expanding U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relationship, the U.S. government should: Continue to link an expanded “strategic relationship” on human rights improvements as did former Cabinet Secretaries Clinton and Panetta; initiate a “whole of government” human rights action plan that is implemented across all U.S. government agencies and entities, including developing targeted talking points and prisoner lists, and providing staffing and support for all U.S. delegations visiting Vietnam; make strong, consistent, and clear public statements directly to the Vietnamese people in support of religious freedom and related human rights; issue travel restrictions and/or financial penalties for Vietnamese authorities who engage in human rights abuses, officials from provinces with the worst religious freedom conditions, and those working for state agencies shown to perpetuate religious freedom and related rights abuses; and ensure that economic assistance programs reflect U.S. interest in human rights. Any increase in economic or security cooperation programs should be met by increases in human rights and religious freedom programming and non-commercial rule of law and civil society development initiatives.

USCIRF’s concerns about the state of religious freedom in Vietnam can be summed up by the life of Fr. Nguyen Van Ly, who is a Prisoner of Conscience that Representative Chris Smith has adopted as part of the Defending Freedoms Project. Father Ly has spent more than 20 years in prison for the causes of religious freedom, democracy, and human rights. He is one of the founders of Bloc 8406 and past editor of an underground publication. Initially arrested in September 1977 and sentenced to 20 years in a labor camp near Hue, he was later released but prohibited from engaging in religious activities. He was returned to jail in 2001 when he



submitted testimony to the U.S. Congress and USCIRF opposing a U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Act. On March 30, 2007, in a broadcasted show trial, authorities muzzled him while he tried to defend himself.

The Vietnamese government also has detained for their Christian faith other prisoners of conscience including:

- Nguyen Trung Ton, the leader of a Pentecostal house church; and
- Duong Kim Khai Duong, a pastor of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, a long-time democracy activist, advocate for aggrieved farmers, and member of Viet Tan, an organization advocating for democracy.

**APPENDIX: Selected Christian Prisoners of Conscience by Country****CHINA**

**Liu Xianbin** is a long-time political dissident, organizer of the China Democracy Party and member of an “illegal” Protestant house church. He is also a blogger using the pen name Wan Xianming. He is originally from Suining, in China’s southwest Sichuan province. Liu was also one of the original signers of the Charter 08 document that called for constitutional reforms, democracy and human rights, including the freedom of religion and belief. Liu was an active participant in the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement. After the protests were suppressed, Liu continued to call for democracy and was arrested by Beijing police on April 15, 1991 and held in Beijing’s infamous Qincheng prison. On December 28, 1992, he was convicted by the Beijing Intermediate People’s Court for “counter-revolutionary incitement” and sentenced to prison for two-and-a-half years with a one-year deprivation of political rights. Released in October 1993 after serving his full term, Liu was sentenced again by the Suining Intermediate People’s Court to a thirteen-year prison term for “inciting subversion of state power,” with a three-year deprivation of political rights. He was released on November 6, 2008. From April 2010 to February 2010, Liu submitted to overseas websites and magazines a number of articles critical of the Chinese Communist authorities on issues ranging from corruption, abuses of power and human rights violations. On June 28, 2010, Liu was detained and on March 15, 2011, the Suining Intermediate People’s Court convicted Liu of “inciting subversion of state power” and sentenced him to a ten-year prison term, with deprivation of political rights for two years and four months. He remains in jail.



**Alimujiang Yimiti** is a Uyghur Christian from Xinjiang Province now serving a fifteen-year prison term. His home is in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang and he and his wife have two young sons. While working at a British agro-food company, Alimujiang was the leader of a house church in the city of Kashgar. On September 13, 2007, the Kashgar Religious Affairs Bureau ruled that “Alimujiang Yimiti since 2002 has illegally engaged in religious infiltration under the guise of work, spreading Christianity among the Uyghur people, distributing Christian propaganda and growing [the number of] Christian believers.” On January 12, 2008, the Kashgar police criminally detained Alimujiang on “suspicion of inciting subversion of state power” and “leaking state secrets overseas.” He was formally arrested on those charges on February 28, 2008. On September 12, 2008, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled in its No. 28 document that Alimujiang’s arrest and detention had been arbitrary. In a secret trial on August 6, the Kashgar Intermediate People’s Court sentenced Alimujiang to fifteen years in prison for the crime of “leaking state secrets to foreigners.” On March 16, 2010, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Higher People’s Court, without holding a hearing and barring lawyers from court, upheld the Intermediate Court’s sentence and added a five-year sentence of deprivation of political rights.



**Pastor Yang Rongli** has been serving a seven-and-a-half-year prison term since 2009 for leading the 50,000-member Linfen Church in Shaanxi province. Yang is a 1982 graduate of the Linfen Normal College's Chinese department. Because of her excellent academic record, she was retained by the college to teach. She also worked as an editor and reporter. She and her husband, Wang Xiaoguang, were the leaders of the Jindengtai (Golden Lampstand) Church, a house church in Linfen, Shaanxi province. In 1998, they became the church's full-time clergy and in the following two decades, the church grew to 50,000 members. On September 13, 2009 at 3 a.m., the local Fushan county government dispatched more than 400 police officers and plainclothes police, led by government officials, to the meeting site of the Fushan Christians and the Gospel Shoe Factory, where they brutally beat Christians staying in a dormitory. More than 100 people were seriously injured. On September 23, armed police surrounded the main Jindengtai church building, and on September 25, Yang and six other church leaders were arrested while traveling to the provincial capital of Taiyuan to petition the government. On November 25, the Yaodu District Court convicted Yang and her husband of "illegal occupation of farmland" and "gathering a mob to create a traffic disturbance." Yang was sentenced to a seven-year prison term and fined 30,000 yuan (US\$4,755); her husband was sentenced to a three-year term and fined 10,000 yuan (US\$1,585).



**Bishop James Su Zhimin** was arrested in 1996 for unregistered religious activity. He has not been heard from since, despite repeated international inquiries, though he was believed to have been seen in 2003 in a Baoding Hospital. He served as an unregistered Bishop in the city of Baoding in the Chinese province of Hebei. Chinese religious authorities select Bishops over the authority of the Vatican, but Bishop Su recognized only the Catholic Church's authority in this matter. Chinese authorities took him during a religious procession in 1996. Attempts at identifying or memorializing him or holding public events in his honor have met with hostile police action.



**Gao Zhisheng** is one of the most respected human rights lawyers in China, and has been subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, illegal house arrest and detention. He currently is imprisoned in Shaya county prison in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwest China, after being sent to prison in December 2011 for apparently violating the conditions of his suspended three-year sentence. Prior to this, his whereabouts had been unknown for almost 20 months. He has been repeatedly tortured since 2006, and continues to be at high risk of further torture.

This award-winning human rights lawyer has handled a number of high-profile human rights cases, including a dispute over government-seized oil fields case in Shaanxi province, Christians in Kashgar in the far western region of Xinjiang, and Falun Gong practitioners. In November 2005, the Beijing Judicial Bureau ordered his Shengzhi Law Office shut down. On December 22,

2006, Gao was convicted of “inciting subversion of state power,” sentenced to a three-year prison term, with a five-year probation and one-year deprivation of political rights, and released home.

On Sept. 21, 2007, Gao was taken into official custody again. When he was released 50 days later, he wrote “Dark Night, Dark Hood, Kidnapping by Dark Mafia,” in which he recounted how he had been tortured, including having toothpicks inserted into his penis. On Jan. 9, 2009, his wife, daughter and son left Beijing and fled to the United States. On Feb. 4, 2009, Gao was taken by Chinese authorities and disappeared into official custody. He suddenly re-appeared on March 27, 2010, under the surveillance of Domestic Security Protection Agents, then disappeared again on April 20.

On Jan. 10, 2011, Charles Hutzler of the Associated Press reported in a piece entitled “Missing Chinese lawyer told of abuse” that nearly a year earlier, on April 7, 2010, he had met Gao in a Beijing teahouse for an extended interview during which Gao revealed that during his disappearance he had been held variously in Beijing, Shaanxi province and the far western region of Xinjiang, and described in detail the brutal torture that had been inflicted on him. On December 16, 2011, the official Xinhua News Agency reported in a short English-only dispatch that because Gao had violated the terms of his parole, he was being sent back to jail to serve his three-year prison term. He is currently incarcerated in a prison in remote Shaya County in far western Xinjiang.

#### ERITREA



**Eritrean Patriarch Abune Antonios** was deposed by the government in 2006 and placed under house arrest after he protested the Eritrean Department of Religious Affairs’ interference in his church’s affairs. In January 2005, the Patriarch’s annual Nativity message was not broadcast or televised and the Eritrean Holy Synod met in August 2005 with the main purpose of removing all executive authority from the Patriarch. He was allowed to officiate at church services but prohibited from having any administrative role in church affairs. Among the accusations brought against the Patriarch, were his reluctance to excommunicate 3,000 members of the Medhane Alem, an Orthodox Sunday School movement and his demands that the government release imprisoned Christians accused of treason. In January 2006, he was officially removed from his position as head of the Eritrean Orthodox Church and spiritual leader of more than two million persons and placed under house arrest. On May 27, 2007, the government installed Bishop Dioscoros of Mendefera as the new Patriarch. That same day, Abune Antonios was forcibly removed from his residence and transported to an undisclosed location. Since then, he has been prevented from communicating with the outside world and reportedly denied medical care.

IRAN

**Saeed Abedini** is a 33-year-old father and husband from Idaho who currently is incarcerated in Evin Prison. Saeed is a dual national of the United States (via naturalization) and Iran (by birth). He has broken no codified Iranian law, but has been sentenced to eight years in prison for practicing his Christian faith. In the last year, he has been arrested, given a sham trial before a notoriously biased judge, threatened with death, beaten, and denied life-saving medical treatment.



**Farshid Fathi** is a Christian pastor who ran a network of house churches in Tehran. Iranian officials arrested him on December 26, 2010. Pastor Fathi currently is serving a six-year sentence in Iran's notorious Evin prison. Farshid left Iran to attend seminary in Turkey and then pursued additional training in London with his wife before returning to Iran. Farshid reportedly is imprisoned alongside Saeed Abedini (see above). Though his crime is being a Christian and spreading his faith, Iranian authorities have cast his Christian activity as "political offenses," arguing that his Christian activities were equivalent to "actions against national security." He also was charged with possessing religious propaganda. At trial, the regime offered as evidence that Pastor Fathi had Bibles printed in Farsi, unlawfully distributed them, and possessed Christian literature. The regime also made it difficult for his lawyers to present a defense by denying them full access to the case until just a few days before trial.

KAZAKHSTAN

**Bakhytzhan Kashkumbayev** led the Presbyterian Grace Church in Astana. He has been jailed since May 2013. For a period of time he was detained in a psychiatric hospital where he was forcibly administered psychotropic drugs, a notorious Soviet form of punishment. While he was released from the psychiatric hospital, he was rearrested on charges of extremism. These serious charges carry a possible prison term of three to seven years, with obviously grave implications for both Pastor Kashkumbayev and the Grace Church. The Pastor was arrested on May 17, 2013 on charges of "intentional infliction of serious harm to health" to parishioner Lyazzat Almenova, but the complainant's mother, called for the case against the pastor to be dropped. The pastor's pre-trial detention was extended on October 7 until November 17 and he was then supposed to be transferred from prison to house arrest. Finally, after the Pastor's very brief reunion in prison with his family he was re-arrested and charged with acts of "propaganda of terrorism or extremism or public calls to commit an act of terrorism or extremism as well as the distribution of material of the content indicated." He

remains detained today and is not receiving adequate care for a serious heart condition. Police in Astana also have stepped up their intimidation of members of the Grace Church.

#### PAKISTAN



**Asia Bibi (f)** is a Catholic mother of five and was a farmhand from the village of Ittan Wali in Sheikhpura District of Punjab province. In June 2009, an argument arose with her fellow laborers over whether the water she brought was “unclean” because she was Christian and they Muslim. Later coworkers complained to a cleric that Bibi made derogatory comments about Prophet Muhammad. Police investigated her remarks, which resulted in her arrest and prosecution under Section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code for blasphemy. She spent more than a year in jail. On November 8, 2010, a district court in Nankana Sahib, Punjab, sentenced her to death for blasphemy, the first such sentence for blasphemy handed down against a woman. The death penalty is permissible under Pakistani law. According to the State Department, Bibi is waiting for her appeal to be heard at the Lahore High Court; she remains in custody. (USCIRF)

#### VIETNAM



**Nguyen Trung Ton** is a leader of a Pentecostal house church. Due to his evangelical work and advocacy for dispossessed farmers, Pastor Nguyen Trung Ton has often been harassed and beaten by security police. He is a signatory of the Bloc 8406 Democracy Movement manifesto. On December 29, 2011, he was sentenced to a two-year prison term to be followed by a two-year period of house arrest. The charge was “propaganda against the socialist state.”



**Pastor Duong Kim Khai Duong** is a pastor for the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, a long-time advocate for aggrieved farmers, a democracy activist and member of Viet Tan, an organization advocating for democracy. Since the early 1990’s, he has been detained or arrested thirteen times, often while trying to organize prayer sessions. He was jailed in 2004 for starting an “illegal” religious group. Upon his release in 2006, he founded the Mennonite Cattle Shed Congregation in order to advocate for religious freedom and social justice, particularly to provide assistance to farmers so they could petition the government for redress in land disputes or corruption cases in Ben Tre and Dong Thap provinces. He also joined Viet Tan during this period. Pastor Duong Kim Khai was arrested on August 10, 2010 on the charge of “attempting to overthrow the government.” The condition of his health and place of detention were kept from his family by authorities until October 12, 2010, when it received written confirmation of his arrest. On May 30, 2011, he was sentenced to a six-year prison term (later reduced to five years) followed by five-year term of house arrest. In 2011, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that the Hanoi

government's detention and conviction of Pastor Duong Kim Khai and six other land activists were in violation of international law.



**Father Nguyen Van Ly** has spent over 15 years in prison for the causes of religious freedom, democracy, and human rights. Initially arrested in September 1977 and sentenced to 20 years in a labor camp near Hue, he was later released but prohibited from engaging in religious activities. He was returned to jail in 2001 when he submitted testimony to the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom opposing a U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Act. On March 30, 2007, in a broadcasted show trial, authorities muzzled him while he tried to defend himself. He is one of the founders of Bloc 8406 and past editor of an underground publication. (USCIRF)

Mr. SMITH. Secretary Abrams, thank you very much, and without objection your full very extensive testimony which goes country by country by country will be made a part of the record and I do hope members—I know members who are here will read it because they're all so very interested, will read it and I respectfully hope that the press will look at it as well because it really gives insights as to what's truly happening on a country by country basis.

And I remind everyone that when your commission was established by Frank Wolf's bill the whole idea was to provide an appraisal of the situation on the ground accurately, to be independent, to be comprehensive, because we know so often human rights are an irritant to much of—many of those who do statecraft and religious freedom even more so, and one of the things that Mr. Wolf put in his bill was to train Foreign Service Officers to be much more knowledgeable about all things pertaining to religious freedom and religious organizations and individuals.

You perhaps might want to touch on whether or not you think that's happening but I'm glad you brought up the Ambassador-at-Large and I do hope the President follows through on his Prayer Breakfast promise.

We've had an administration where 2½ years there was an Ambassador-at-Large, but for the rest of this administration's time, there has been no Ambassador-at-Large and that is the point person and so that's a missed opportunity that is huge and hope that is filled soon.

Just one general question, if I could. Do you find when the commission makes its recommendations like which countries ought to be designated Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), as you have done repeatedly with Vietnam, for example, do you find that the administration is receptive or do they push back?

You know, we push too. You know, we've been trying to get the administration and every time, a high official appears, whether it be on Vietnam or others—and others do raise the issue—what is the delay in promulgating those designations?

And then, just as important, ensuring that step two, the other shoe, that real sanctions—and there are 18 of them prescribed in the act—are followed up on? And some of those sanctions are very significant and would definitely get the attention of an offending country.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you for the question.

The system is not working. It's not working properly. It's not working the way it was established in the act. It hasn't under several administrations, I have to say.

It's not just the Obama administration. The Obama administration made CPC designations only once in the first 4 years and the act requires them every year.

And actually, Mr. Pitts, Mr. Wolf and you, Mr. Chairman, wrote a letter about this, of course, last May which I'd like to submit for the record because I think it's—

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. A useful reminder of this. The problem is in part that it sends a message to other governments that we don't care, and there are a lot of things that can be done.



On the sanctions angle, all too often there are no sanctions or there's a double hatting. That is, you have a country that's under some other sanction and so you say oh, that's for religious freedom too.

But the act provides for a lot of flexibility. It provides an opportunity to go to a country, to a foreign government and say we care about this—something needs to be done.

Just as an example, you can take action—the U.S. Government can take action against individual members of a foreign government who are involved in religious persecution, officials of that government, officials of provinces, officials of units of that government to name names and say that those people, for example, will never be admitted to the United States.

There's lots of flexibility and I'm afraid we're not using it. And so the message that comes across is one of inattention and the CPC's system, I would say, is broken.

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.

And Elliott, again, thank you over the years for all you've done to make sure—we get a lot out of focus too. We start focusing just on some of the problems—daily problems that we have and sometimes free people can forget the big picture and the big picture, of course, are these moral trends that are permeating the world and that United States should be an influence in the right direction.

The question I have to ask is this and , again, a more perplexing question. Our business community insists that if they do business in dictatorships like China and like Vietnam now—we have a business community rushing into Vietnam to take advantage of their labor—they insist that by being there and doing business that that will help reform and protect the rights of people like religious believers. What is the record there in terms of China and Vietnam?

Has the presence of an American business community been a positive element toward the securing of certain rights or has it been just the opposite or just what has the effect been?

Mr. ABRAMS. My impression is that it has had no positive impact on international religious freedom. I mean, we did a lot of business with Nazi Germany too in the 30s and that didn't have much of an impact on religious freedom.

What has had an impact is when the U.S. Government puts pressure on and we see this in the case of Vietnam. Religious freedom has risen and fallen. The amount of persecution by the government has not stayed level.

It rises and falls, and one of the bases on which it rises and falls is the Vietnamese Government's impression of what it needs to do to get U.S. Government approval for that commerce to increase.

So I don't blame the businessmen. That's their business. But it's up to the U.S. Government, I think, to set the rules and to keep the pressure on.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Would it be right for us to expect that if a businessman invests like in Vietnam or China and to be able to at least enforce on their own grounds the right of these people to have a Bible in their possession, et cetera?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think it would be a great thing for businesses to try to do. It's hard. We see this in the case of American universities

which are active in China where the amount of free speech, free thought, academic freedom that is available is quite limited and universities are having to figure out are they going to stay in China under those conditions.

But I would think that businesses should at least try this. I don't know if we're going to see many profiles in courage but it would be very nice to see a few.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would hope that businessmen that consider themselves Christians—I can't speak for other faiths here but if they consider themselves to be Christians they should be willing to commit that at least in their own operations that they would promote and protect people of faith and—

Mr. ABRAMS. I think that's a great idea.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. Well, thank you very much, Elliott.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Meadows.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you.

It's good to see you again. Thank you for your service. The students at Georgetown have a real jewel. I've found you to be someone who is unrelenting but analytical and looking at the facts and I think that your written testimony today is an example of that.

My question for you is, really, you've highlighted it a little bit in terms of this is not just this administration's problem. It's a problem that has persisted, and yet here in just a few minutes I'll be meeting with business leaders representing business leaders from Egypt.

And yet most of the time when discussions happen they're either purely human rights or religious freedom discussions or purely economic and business, and it seems like that we have a tough time coupling the two together.

So what would you say are the major impediments to doing that in terms of either with the State Department or with us as Congress? How can we do a better job of coupling those two together?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, it is hard, particularly because businessmen are interested in serving their shareholders and making a profit.

So I think we need to arm them with the ability to say to the Egyptians in the case you mentioned commerce is not going to be possible, it's not going to thrive, it's not going to grow under conditions of religious persecution and disorder.

The bitterness and violence that creates in Egypt will be communicated to American businessmen and they won't want to go to Egypt.

You know, there are many other places to invest in the world. So I think the way to bring it together is try to make an argument for their self-interest, that if the American impression of Egypt is a place that is being torn by violence and sectarian hatred and persecution of Christians, they're not going to get the investment they want.

Mr. MEADOWS. And one follow-up to that, if you don't mind. So you mentioned about filling this particular position. What else can be done in terms of work with the State Department to help make this part of the dialogue when negotiations are going on?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, when you have hearings and have State Department officials up here, ask them about it and press them on

the record, their own record or the record of their own part of the State Department.

Some Embassies are much better at this than others and I think that's something worth asking about as well. Urge the administration to name their Countries of Particular Concern.

I think it's very important also to talk about specific political prisoners in public and also with members of the administration—what has been said.

It really is important. If you go back to the Soviet days, people in the Gulag told us the mentioning of names was critically important when they heard it from a President, the Secretary of State, Members of Congress.

I think you can do it when you visit as part of CODELs and you can ask high officials of the executive branch to do it when they come up here for testimony and when they visit.

And then I think this question of adopting political prisoners, which about 20 Members of Congress have done, is a great idea and can really motivate communities back home too.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you very much. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Chairman Wolf.

Mr. WOLF. Thank you, Secretary Abrams. We welcome you.

When Mr. Smith was reading your bio, something just popped out at me. You have worked for the two biggest giants on this issue—President Reagan and Senator Jackson—and I guess what I wanted, and maybe this is not the time but what—I think they were great men so we just put that out there. One was a Democrat and one was a Republican.

But what creates the Jacksons and the Reagans? Is it that they lead the nation? Because President Reagan gave the speech the evil empire, tear down the wall—Secretary Shultz wore the bracelet, went to Moscow.

Scoop Jackson did what he did. But did that come from the people to the Congress and the executive branch or did President Reagan who is, I think, the leader and Scoop Jackson the leader did they then mobilize it whereby the people then—am I making myself clear? Where did that come from?

Mr. ABRAMS. Let me say at the beginning that I unfortunately never worked for the third giant on this issue, which is you, Mr. Wolf.

I think it came from within them. I think they had a belief that these values that we're talking about are the values of the American people and that therefore our foreign policy had to reflect those values, that you couldn't have a foreign policy that was what was then known as based on realpolitik, that you had to have a foreign policy that represented the moral values of the American people and that if you tried to do that the American people would support that effort.

So I think it came from within them but it was based on a view of the nation and the American people that led them to say this—our foreign policy has got to reflect our moral values.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Chairman Wolf.

Mr. Marino.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Chairman. I apologize for being late. I'm trying to juggle, like everyone else is, four or five things.

Mr. Secretary, it's a privilege and an honor to see you again. Welcome. I always enjoy our exchanges, and if I am asking a question that has already been asked just give me the high sign and I'll read the Cliff's Notes on it.

But we know what persecution is taking place. We know with reasonable certainty where it is taking place. What can the United States do or what should we do concerning sanctions with these countries?

Mr. ABRAMS. The International Religious Freedom Act mentions a wide variety of possible sanctions, some of which can be individual sanctions on officials who've engaged in persecution and some of which, of course, are what we usually think of economic sanctions.

I think that what we need to convey to the governments that are engaging in persecution or permitting it with impunity is we care and this will affect our relations. Sanctions are not always the right formula.

I think you begin by showing that you care about this and the sanctions are actually just a way of sending the message. There are many ways of sending the message.

Secretary Shultz, who Mr. Wolf mentioned, did it by making sure that he raised human rights issues at the beginning of meetings with the Russians under the view that, you know, if it's the last thing you mention when the clock is running out they know that. They see that.

So he wanted to make sure they realized that for him this came first. I think there are going to be cases where we will find talking with them about it doesn't work. Engagement fails.

Going after individual officials may fail, and you may want to try to impose some form of economic sanction to just get the message home that this will cost you in your relations with the United States. We will not have normal relations if this kind of persecution goes on. So I don't think it should be taken off the table.

There will be cases where it's perhaps the last resort but it's the right thing to do. I think it's got to be part of the spectrum of possible moves by the United States Government.

Mr. MARINO. From an economic standpoint and from a trade perspective, are we in a position to deal with this? Is this something that we are looking at the lesser of the two evils and saying if we do talk about, and I'm going to focus in on sanctions—monetary sanctions or trade sanctions—how much of an impact—how much of a negative impact is that going to have on our economy?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, it will vary, of course, Mr. Marino, from case to case. In the case of our sanctions on Iran, for example, or our sanctions a few decades ago on Iraq, I think it's hard to make an argument that it's very damaging to the United States.

It's usually more damaging for the other country because we have this fantastically rich market and they want to be able to access it and they want to be able to get American investment.

So I think usually we can be the beneficiary of this. That is, we will not suffer very much. They'll be the ones who are suffering. There will be cases.

I mean, China, obviously, is a gigantic market and American businesses want to access that market and it's also true that it's very hard in the case of a government like that, a communist regime, to speak to them persuasively on the subject of religious freedom.

I know President Bush tried, constantly, to talk to the Chinese leaders about their misunderstanding of the nature of religious freedom and of the role of religion in society. I think it's fair to say he got nowhere.

So there are going to be cases where economic sanctions may actually hurt the United States and will not advance the cause of religious freedom. I think it has to be a case by case analysis.

But there are so many—if you look at the list of countries there are so many of them that are under developed or middle income or poor and they're desperate for American investment and access to the U.S. market and in those many cases, economic and financial sanctions can have an impact.

Mr. MARINO. Particularly in the—on the continent of Africa we have a tremendous capability there if we, as we say back in Pennsylvania, play our cards right. I've been to China. I met with the officials.

They're very polite, give real good lip service and even when they're here visiting. But, again, we can tell that just from the tenor of the conversation it's we will listen but nothing will change. So I think we need to ask State to take a very serious look at these matters.

I thank you again. It's a pleasure. I yield back.

Mr. SMITH. Just to conclude and just one final question, if I could, Mr. Secretary, and again, your testimony speaks to one country after the other and I appreciated you highlighting the Central African Republic.

We had a hearing on November 19th here in this room and we heard from Bishop Nongo who told us how escalating the outsiders especially where on the radical Islamic side, you know, he said moderate Muslims are no problem but the radicalized ones, just like in Nigeria with the Boko Haram and yesterday there was a very heartbreaking story in the Washington Post about a man whose throat was slit, was Christian and his family wheeling him off in a wheelbarrow.

I mean, these are sorrowful situations that are beyond words. One of the things that Greg Simpkins and I took away from our trip to Jos, Nigeria, we met with the evangelicals, the Christians. We went to firebombed churches.

We heard at great length from individuals who had lost loved ones, who were tortured themselves, who had, sadly, scars from the flames and in one case the man, as I mentioned earlier, who was literally shot in the face with an AK-47.

But one of the biggest takeaways, however, was that the Catholic bishop was working very closely with the imams in Jos and I mean very close to try to put up a united front against this extremism by Boko Haram, and one of the clerics said that if we speak out against Boko Haram on a Friday we will be dead as Muslims on Saturday.

So I think the more our Government does to get around all those who wish peace and reconciliation and tolerance the better and, again, if you'd like to comment, that would be great.

But Bishop Nongo couldn't have been more clear and he also fought the international community to some extent as have others with this idea that well, both sides are doing it. No, there is an aggressor. We saw it in Bosnia.

Remember when people would say oh, well, the Croats first in Croatia, then in Bosnia and Mr. Wolf and I were in Vukovar right before it fell, met with Slobodan Milosevic who said he had nothing to do with the MiGs flying over dropping bombs that we saw ourselves and yet the international community says well, both are at fault.

No, one was the aggressor. One was defending themselves and I think the same thing is happening but I think the ally that gets overlooked is that there are a lot of moderate Muslims as we saw, Greg and I, in Jos who are saying we want to pursue our faith—we do not want this violence.

And secondly, your comments on China were excellent about not staying within the confines of the human rights dialogue. To me, that is a dead end, a cul-de-sac.

It is a hermetically sealed kind of conversation that has such limited impact and as you know yourself during the Bush administration even with some of the other countries like Vietnam we would suspend them because they were a venting—you know, it was an X in the box for State Department people to come to that table and say oh, but we're having a human rights dialogue.

It needs to be integrated with all things related to that country and, as you pointed out, all the sanctions prescribed by Mr. Wolf's bill vis-à-vis China, and you said it earlier, why aren't they being adhered to—why aren't we making a huge point of holding torturers of Christians and all faiths so they don't get visas.

It means making a list. It means some due diligence on the part of State and I would say parenthetically I also did a bill in 2000, the Admiral James W. Nance and Meg Donovan Foreign Relations Authorization Act—it was my law—we put a provision there that said on a related human rights abuse, forced abortion, that anyone involved with that heinous crime is inadmissible to the U.S.

We asked the Congressional Research Service how often it's been implemented—less than 30 times, and that was, you know, on a crime against women that has been without parallel. So, Secretary, if you want to make any concluding remarks, but thank you.

Mr. ABRAMS. Just very briefly, Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing.

I think that something was said at the very beginning that we as a country have been reluctant to weigh in on the question of persecution of Christians in particular and we shouldn't be.

It's not a form of colonialism or imperialism. It's a defense of human rights. It's a defense of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All these countries have pledged to protect religious freedom and they're violating their own pledges.

So we should not be at all restrained or hesitant in raising this and pressing this cause, and I thank you for doing it today.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary.

I'd like to now welcome our second panel, beginning first with Mr. John Allen who is an American journalist who specializes in news about the Catholic Church and is considered one of the foremost experts on the Vatican.

He recently became an associate editor with the Boston Globe. Prior to that, he was a senior correspondent for the National Catholic Reporter where he worked from 1998 until this year and has served as an analyst of Vatican affairs for CNN and NPR.

Mr. Allen is also author of several books about the Catholic Church and has written two biographies of Pope Benedict XVI. He is also the author of "The Global War on Christians: Dispatches From the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution."

We will then hear from Ms. Tehmina Arora, who is an attorney with the Alliance Defending Freedom in India, a position she has held since January 2012. Her work focusing on protecting minority rights and religious freedom includes litigating cases and conducting legal training.

Previously, she worked as the advocacy director at the Evangelical Fellowship of India where she managed a team of attorneys and advocates who worked for the rights of Christians.

We'll then hear from Mr. Benedict Rogers, who is East Asian team leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide where he specializes in Burma, Indonesia, and North Korea. He's the author of five books and several major reports.

Mr. Rogers travels widely in the region including making more than 40 visits to Burma and its borderland, several visits to Indonesia and a trip to North Korea.

He is a regular contributor to international media including several major newspapers and television networks.

And then we'll hear from Mr. Jorge Lee Galindo, who's the director of Impulso 18, a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and defending liberty of belief in religion in Mexico. He has helped establish many religious organizations in Mexico and acts as the legal representative for many of them.

He has given presentations at various fora, seminars, workshops, and roundtables and given many interviews on radio programs on things related to ecclesiastical law in Mexico.

In addition, Mr. Galindo was president of the Latin American Network of Christian Lawyers from 2006 to 2010 and currently acts as legal counsel to that network.

And finally, we'll hear from Dr. Khataza Gondwe, who is currently team leader for Africa and the Middle East at Christian Solidarity Worldwide. She researches religious liberties issues and promotes awareness through interviews and articles in international media and elsewhere.

She's worked extensively on religious-related violence in Nigeria and the dire human rights and religious freedom situation in Eritrea, the rise of sectarian violence in Egypt, and the harassment of the house church in Iran.

I thank you again for being here and providing the subcommittee the benefits of your wisdom and counsel.

**STATEMENT OF MR. JOHN ALLEN, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, THE  
BOSTON GLOBE**

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing on what I have come to see as the premier human rights issue of the early 21st century as well as the greatest story never told about Christianity in our time. I'll begin very quickly with an overview of the global situation.

There are an estimated 2.3 billion Christians in the world today, which makes Christianity the largest single religious tradition on the planet, representing about one third of the human population.

Christianity's greatest growth in the early 21st century is occurring in Africa—sub-Saharan Africa—and parts of Asia.

The Christian population in Latin America has remained relatively constant but there has been tremendous movement from the majority Catholic tradition to expanding Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

Despite the dire decline in the indigenous Arab Christian population of the Middle East, there is actually a burgeoning pocket of Christianity in the Middle East and the Gulf States composed not of natives but of expats drawn to work in the domestic service and oil industries.

Interesting tidbit—there are 1.5 million Catholics alone in Saudi Arabia today, 1.3 million of whom are Filipinos. It's the largest Filipino diaspora in that part of the world.

Bottom line is that Christianity's most dramatic growth today is coming in neighborhoods that are not always distinguished by a robust respect for religious freedom, which is one factor feeling what I've described as a global war on Christians.

The high end estimate for the number of Christians killed for their faith every year today is 100,000. That's a number that comes from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

There are others who would put the number lower. Thomas Schirrmacher of the World Evangelical Alliance pegs the number at 20 new martyrs per day, which adds up to about 7,300 a year.

American scholar Rodney Stark goes lower still. He thinks the number is a few hundred per year. Of course, all this hinges on how you define religious persecution.

Bottom line, however, is that the high end estimate would put the number of Christians killed for their faith every year at one per hour. The low end estimate puts it at one per day.

Wherever the truth lies, this is a global scourge that commands our attention, and there are other indices. The Pew Forum finds that Christians suffer some form of harassment either de jure or de facto in a staggering total of 139 countries. That's two-thirds of all societies on Earth.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom—we've already heard from Secretary Abrams—finds that Christians are the only religious tradition discriminated against in all 16 of the top 16 offenders. That's from their 2010 report.

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism found that between 2003 and 2011 terroristic attacks on Christians around the world shot up by 139 percent and the evangelical advocacy and relief organization Open Doors esti-



mates that roughly 100 million Christians a day are subject to some form of physical coercion, arrest, torture and so on.

A few brief snapshots of what's happening—we already heard mention of the attack on the Syria Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation in downtown Baghdad on October 31st, 2010.

In itself the fact the church was bombed that day is no novelty. Of the 63 Christian churches in Baghdad, 40 of them have been bombed at least once since 2003. What followed was unusual. A band of the Islamic fundamentalist gunmen stormed the church, they shot the priest saying Mass, they shot the two deacons assisting him.

They left more than 50 people dead. I had the opportunity to interview one of the survivors, a young Chaldean woman by the name of Fatima who now lives in Rome and who dedicates every waking moment of her life to helping her fellow Christians get out of Iraq. She survived that day. She was singing in the choir.

She survived that day by pulling bodies over her and playing dead for the agonizing 4 hours it took for someone to come and liberate the church. One hopes she is wrong in her prognosis that Christianity has no future in Iraq but it is impossible to fault either the personal experience or the reasoning that has led her to that conclusion.

But it would be mistaken to think that anti-Christian persecution is entirely an artifact of radical Islam. The most violent anti-Christian pogrom of the early 21st century actually occurred in the northeastern Indian state of Orissa in 2008 when machete-wielding Hindu radicals attacked a series of Christian targets, left as many as 500 Christians killed, at least 50,000 homeless, many of them taking refuge in a nearby forest for weeks. An estimated 5,000 Christian homes, hundreds of churches and schools and so on were destroyed.

In Burma, members of the Chin and Karen ethnic groups who are strongly Christian are considered dissidents by the regime, subject to various forms of imprisonment, torture, forced labor.

Their communities have actually even been targeted by helicopter strikes. A Burmese air force official confirmed in talking to foreign press that these zones of majority Christian population are considered free fire zones and they basically have a fire on sight warrant.

Mr. Chairman, you've already talked about the mayhem currently being unleashed in Nigeria by the militant Boko Haram movement. North Korea, of course, is widely considered the single most dangerous place on the planet to be a Christian.

Roughly a quarter of the country's 200,000 to 400,000 Christians are believed to be living in forced labor camps. The anti-Christian animus is so strong that people with Christian grandparents are frozen out of senior government jobs, senior positions in the military, senior levels of economic life and so on.

The estimate is that some 300,000 Christians in North Korea have disappeared since the armistice in the 1950s. And these, by the way, are illustrative examples. This is by no means the whole story.

To conclude, a brief thought about why this global war on Christians is so often wrapped in silence. Frankly, Mr. Chairman, I believe we have a problem with narrative.

In the West, we are conditioned to think of Christianity as an all-powerful, all-controlling, wealthy, vastly influential social institution, which makes it very difficult for ordinary Americans to get their minds around the idea that Christians can actually be the victims of persecution.

Say religious persecution to most Americans, the images that come to mind are the Crusades, the Inquisition, the wars of religion and so on—chapters of history in which Christianity was, of course, the villain.

This narrative is badly out of date but it's done little to weaken its hold on our imagination. The truth, the demographic and practical truth, is that the typical Christian in this world is not an affluent American male pulling up to church in a Lincoln Continental.

The typical Christian in the early 21st century is a poor woman of color and mother of four in Botswana or a poor Dalit grandmother in Orissa. The reality is this. Projections are that the share of the Christian population that's living outside the West and in the developing world is going to reach three-quarters by the middle of this century. These Christians often carry a double or triple stigma representing not only their faith but also often an oppressed ethnic group or a social class and they are perhaps—this is the most fundamental fact—they are targets of convenience for anyone who is angry with the West.

It is very difficult for ordinary people, obviously not impossible but difficult, to strike against an American Embassy or the headquarters of the European Union.

It is very easy to walk down the block and attack the Christian church that is on that corner even though the irony is often the Christians in that society have deeper historical and cultural roots than their assailants do.

The point is this. I think as a Christian we have perhaps special cause to be concerned with this rising tide of anti-Christian violence but I think it requires no religious faith whatsoever to see this as a towering human rights concern.

You did not have to be Jewish in the 60s and 70s to be concerned about dissident Jews in the Soviet Union, you did not have to be black in the 80s to be concerned about apartheid in South Africa and you do not have to be Christian today to see our ability to defend Christians at risk as the key test, “the canary in the coal mine” for our ability to mobilize any human rights concern at all.

And to the extent, Mr. Chairman, you can change the narrative, thank you for your effort in doing so.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Allen follows:]

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

Testimony of John L. Allen Jr.  
Author, *The Global War on Christians:*  
*Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution*  
February 11, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on what I regard as the premier human rights issue of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the most untold story about global Christianity in our time. I speak today as a journalist, not an advocate or a victim of persecution, and my primary concern is making sure the story of anti-Christian persecution is accurately presented and understood.

Let's begin with an overview of the global situation.

There are an estimated 2.3 billion Christians in the world today, some two-thirds of whom live outside the West. That makes Christianity the largest religious tradition on the planet, representing one-third of the human population. The zones of Christianity's greatest expansion are in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. While the overall Christian population of Latin America has remained fairly constant, there has been tremendous movement from the majority Catholic tradition to Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Although the traditional Arab Christian population of the Middle East is in decline, there has been striking Christian growth in the Gulf States among expatriates drawn to work in the oil and domestic service industries. Note that Christianity's expansion is thus occurring primarily in neighborhoods not always distinguished by a robust respect for religious freedom, which is one factor fueling what I've described as the "global war" on Christians.

The high-end estimate for the number of Christians killed for their faith every year in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is 100,000, a number that comes from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, a Protestant institution with its main campus in Hamilton, Massachusetts. Thomas Schirrmacher of the World Evangelical Alliance considers an estimate of 20 fatalities per day more realistic, which adds up to 7,300 a year. American scholar Rodney Stark offers a lower estimate still, suggesting that pegging the total at a few hundred such deaths a year is probably the most realistic figure. The truth of the matter is that because motives for violence are often complex, and because it's difficult to get independent observers on the ground in the most intense killing zones, the exact body count is impossible to establish. Note well, however, that the low-end estimate pegs the number of victims at one per day, while the high-end puts it at one per hour. Note, too, that the threats are not confined to any one region or any one protagonist, but are global in scope and complex in origin.

There are other several indices of the threats facing Christians. The Pew Forum found that Christians suffered some form of harassment, either *de jure* or *de facto*, in 139 countries between 2006 and 2010, the largest total for any religious group. The finding means that Christians are at-risk in two-thirds of all nations on earth. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has found that of the sixteen worst offender states in terms of violations of religious freedom, Christians are the only religious community at risk in all sixteen. The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism found that between 2003 and 2011, terroristic attacks on Christians around the world jumped by 139 percent. The Evangelical advocacy and relief organization "Open Doors" that roughly 100 million Christians today suffer interrogation, arrest, and even death for their faith, with the bulk located in Asia and the Middle East.

Consider these snapshots of what's happening around the world:

- In Baghdad, Iraq, Islamic militants stormed the Syriac Catholic cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation on Oct. 31, 2010, killing the two priests celebrating Mass and leaving a total of 58 people dead. Though shocking, the assault was far from unprecedented; of the 65 Christian churches in Baghdad, 40 have been bombed at least once since the beginning of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. The effect of this campaign of violence and intimidation has been devastating for Christianity in the country. At the time of the first Gulf War in 1991, Iraq boasted a flourishing Christian population of at least 1.5 million. Today the high-end estimate for the number of Christians left is around 500,000, and realistically many believe it could be as low as 150,000.
- India's northeastern state of Orissa was the scene of the most violent anti-Christian pogrom of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2008, a series of riots ended with as many as 500 Christians killed, many hacked to death by machete-wielding Hindu radicals, and thousands more injured and at least 50,000 left homeless. Many Christians fled to hastily prepared displacement camps, where some languished for two years or more. An estimated 5,000 Christian homes, along with 350 churches and schools, were destroyed. A Catholic nun, Sr. Meena Barwa, was raped during the mayhem, then marched naked and beaten. Police sympathetic to the radicals discouraged the nun from filing a report, and declined to arrest her attackers. The Orissa pogrom is merely the most spectacular instance of widespread anti-Christian violence. An investigation by a high court judge in Karnataka state in March 2010 found that Christians had faced more than 1,000 attacks in the past 500 days, meaning an average of two per day.

- In Burma, members of the Chin and Karen ethnic groups, who are strongly Christian, are considered dissidents by the regime and subjected to imprisonment, torture, forced labor, and murder. In October 2010, the Burmese military launched helicopter strikes in territories where Christians are concentrated. A Burmese Air Force source told reporters that the junta had declared these areas “black zones,” where military personnel were authorized to attack and kill Christian targets on sight. Though there are no precise counts, thousands of Burmese Christians are believed to have been killed in the offensive.
- In Nigeria, the militant Islamic movement “Boko Haram” is held responsible for almost 3,000 deaths since 2009. The movement has made a specialty out of targeting Christians and their churches, and has tried to drive Christians out altogether from parts of the country. In December 2011, Boko Haram spokespersons announced that all Christians in the northern Yobe and Borno states had three days to get out, and followed up with a spate of church bombings on January 5-6, 2012, which left at least 26 Christians dead, as well as two shooting sprees in which eight more Christians died. In the aftermath, hundreds of Christians fled and many are still displaced. Over Christmas 2012, at least fifteen Christians had their throats cut by Boko Haram assailants.
- North Korea is widely considered the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian, where roughly a quarter of the country’s 200,000 to 400,000 Christians are believed to be living in forced labor camps for their refusal to join the national cult around founder Kim Il Sung. The anti-Christian animus is so strong that even people with Christian grandparents are frozen out of the most important jobs. Since the armistice in 1953 that stabilized the division of the peninsula, some 300,000 Christians in North Korea have simply disappeared and are presumed to be dead.

To conclude, I'd like briefly to ponder the question of why this global war on Christians is often wrapped in a blanket of silence, not only by the secular media but even within Christian churches themselves. In a word, I believe we have a problem of narrative.

Ordinary people in the West are conditioned to see Christianity as the agent of repression, not its victim. Say "religious persecution" to most Westerners, and the images that come to mind are the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Wars of Religion, Bruno and Savonarola, the Salem witch trials – chapters of history in which Christianity is cast as the villain. The fact that this narrative is badly out of date has done little to reduce its hold on the Western imagination. The truth is that the typical Christian in today's world is not an affluent American male pulling up to church in a Lincoln Continental; it's a poor black woman and mother of four in Botswana, or a poor Dalit grandmother in Orissa.

Here's the reality of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Projections are that the share of the Christian population living in the developing world will reach three-quarters by mid-century. These Christians often carry a double or triple stigma, representing not only a faith that arouses suspicion but also an oppressed ethnic group (like the Karen or Chin in Burma) or social class (such as Dalit converts in India, who may be as much as 60 percent of the country's Christian population). They're also targets of convenience for anyone with a grievance against the West, who often perceive these Christians as beachheads of Western influence despite the fact in many instances that Christianity actually has deep indigenous roots in that society. Christians may feel a special concern for these suffering coreligionists, but it requires no religious faith at all to recognize this as a menace to human rights that ought to concern everyone.

To the extent that today's hearing can help change the narrative, Mr. Chairman, we are all in your debt.

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Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Allen, for your very comprehensive look and for your leadership.

Ms. Arora.

**STATEMENT OF MS. TEHMINA ARORA, ATTORNEY, ALLIANCE  
DEFENDING FREEDOM-INDIA**

Ms. ARORA. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for holding this important hearing and inviting me to testify today.

India, in spite of its long tradition of religious tolerance, finds itself struggling with violence against religious minorities. While the Muslim community bears the brunt of this violence, over the recent years the tiny Christian community which stands at a mere 2.3 percent of the population has faced increased hostility.

Reports by faith-based rights agencies show that Christians suffer an average of 150 violent attacks annually with many more going unreported. These attacks include physical and sexual assault, brutal murders, and desecration of places of worship and graveyards.

My written submission contains more details. With the exception of the state of Orissa in 2007 and 2008, the attacks are scattered and are primarily concentrated in the states where Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, or the BJP, is in power.

The states of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh have recorded the most number of attacks in the past 2 years.

Perpetrated on the pretext of preventing forcible conversion, the attacks are often carried out by Hindu extremists who see India as a Hindu nation with a common fatherland, language, religion, and culture. This ideology leaves little space for religious minorities.

The agencies involved in such attacks include the Bajrang Dal, the Dharmasena, the Hindu Vahini, the Ram Sena, all offshoots of the umbrella Hindu nationalist group, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or the RSS. Recent media reports suggest the involvement of members of similar groups also in terror attacks including the bombing of trains, mosques, and churches.

One cannot forget that the RSS has been banned on previous occasions for fomenting violence against religious minorities. It is deeply disconcerting to see the BJP prime minister candidate and present chief minister of Gujarat, Mr. Modi, openly align himself with this ideology as a member of the RSS and call himself a Hindu nationalist.

Christian persecution, however, is not just about violence. It is compounded by the impunity enjoyed by the violent mobs which is also a cause for concern. Many victims of violence complain of the lack of police action including hostility toward Christians.

The impunity was most evident in Orissa and in 2008 violent mobs killed over 75 people, mostly Christians, burned over 5,000 homes and over 260 churches and prayer halls. Though approximately 2,500 complaints were registered of mob violence, only 828 were ever registered by the police. Charges were framed against the accused in only 512 cases, most of which ended in acquittals. Only nine people have ever been convicted of killing two Christians.



The police also failed to record statements of key witnesses, conduct test identification periods, and collect and send forensic evidence which resulted in acquittals for lack of evidence.

According to the government's own records, only 15 appeals were filed by the state in over 180 cases in which more than 2,700 people were acquitted. Apart from the violence, I would also like to draw your attention to two discriminatory laws which greatly restrict the freedom of religion in India.

Six Indian states have enacted laws titled Freedom of Religion Acts, or anti-conversion laws as they are more commonly known.

These laws require the person converting to give details of his or her conversion to the district administrative head either prior to the conversion ceremony or subsequent to it. The law in Gujarat requires you to take prior permission before a conversion.

The laws penalize any failure to report a religious conversion with jail terms up to 1 year and fines. The laws also penalize conversion by force, fraud or inducement or allurement with jail terms up to 5 years or fines up to \$1,500.

Repeatedly, these vague laws have been used to target and harass Christians. Hindu extremists have frequently worked the anti-conversion laws to incite mob violence and having Christians arrested without evidence. The acts are weak and do not carry the required checks and balances to ensure protection against their misuse.

They violate the freedom of association and conscience and the right to privacy. They make every religious conversion suspect and liable for scrutiny and remove the agency of the convert, allowing the state to determine if the conversion is valid or not.

In September 2012, the High Court of Himachal Pradesh declared a section of the Himachal Pradesh law as unconstitutional which required the person to give a 30-day prior notice to the district administration.

The court held that the procedure was violative of the Indian constitution. However, similar provisions remain in other state laws. The second law I would like to talk about is the 1950 Presidential order which states that no person who professes a religion different from the Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of the Schedule Caste.

As you may know, that due to the oppressive caste system in India there are policies and laws that allow affirmative action and special protection for the Dalit or Schedule Caste communities. However, Dalits who accept Christianity are denied protections and benefits available to other Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist Dalits merely on account of their religious beliefs.

This is despite the fact that the disadvantages and discriminations faced by Dalit Christians are well documented by several agencies including those of the government. A petition is pending before the Supreme Court of India since 2004 but the government hasn't filed its reply to date.

In closing, I would like to make a few recommendations. I would urge you to support the resolution for protecting religious freedom in India. I would urge you to follow up on the recommendation of the Government of the United States to the Government of India to ensure that laws are fully and consistently enforced to provide

adequate protection for members of religious minorities in the recent Universal Periodic Review.

I would urge you to send delegations to meet with victims of violence and visit sites of community violence. This has been hugely helpful, especially in this case of Orissa, to see whether the recommendations are being met and to better understand the complexities of the issues involved, to use appropriate forms of dialogue to raise concerns about the status of religious minorities and the impunity enjoyed by Hindutva forces and continue to find ways to fund civil society efforts to combat human rights abuses and promote religious tolerance.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Arora follows:]

**Testimony before the Committee on Foreign Affairs U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for holding this important hearing and for inviting me to testify today.

**VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS**

India, in spite of its long tradition for religious tolerance, finds itself in the throes of religious fundamentalism and violence against religious minorities for the past few decades. Reports by faith-based rights agencies show that Christians in India have suffered about 150 violent attacks on an average in the past few years<sup>1</sup>. These attacks include physical and sexual assaults, murder and desecration of places of worship and graveyards.

Over the past five years, attacks have been reported across the country, though primarily concentrated in the states where the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been in power and where groups associated with his party have been active. Violence is fuelled primarily by non-state actors who are guided by the Hindutva ideology, which sees India as a Hindu nation, where religious minorities are second class citizens.<sup>2</sup>

To give you a recent example of violence, on January 10 (2014), a Christian pastor, Orucanti Sanjeevi, was brutally beaten in his home in Vikarabad near Hyderabad in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. According to media reports, Hindu extremists knocked on the door of the pastor's house at about 8:30 p.m., claiming they wanted to pray with him. When his wife, Pramila, opened the door, they hit her with an iron rod and then stormed into the house. They stabbed the pastor, beat him with clubs and hit him on the head with the iron rod. His wife managed to run out and call for help. The pastor sustained severe injuries in the liver, intestines and spleen. He was rushed to a hospital but finally succumbed to his injuries on Jan. 13. The police later arrested some members of the Hindu Vahini group on charges of killing the pastor.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jaisinghani, Bella (2013, Jan. 29) Christian body brings out 'persecution' report for 2012, The Times of India. Retrieved from [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-29/mumbai/36615346\\_1\\_christian-body-incidents-police-apatly](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-29/mumbai/36615346_1_christian-body-incidents-police-apatly)

<sup>2</sup> Puniyani, Ram (2008, Sep 22) Are minorities safe in BJP-ruled states? The Economic Times Retrieved from [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2008-09-22/news/27734625\\_1\\_bjp-ruled-states-hindutva-anti-christian-violence](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2008-09-22/news/27734625_1_bjp-ruled-states-hindutva-anti-christian-violence)

<sup>3</sup> New Delhi Correspondent (2014, Jan. 30) Hindu Extremists Accused of Killing Pastor in Andhra Pradesh, India Morning Star News <http://morningstarnews.org/2014/01/hindu-extremists-accused-of-killing-pastor-in-andhra-pradesh-india/>

The accused were allegedly unhappy with the Christian growth in the area. Members from the same Hindu extremist group have previously been accused of targeting and murdering other Christians and members of other minority communities in the state.

India witnessed its worst ever series of violence against Christians in Kandhamal district of the eastern state of Orissa [now officially known as Odisha] in 2008. Between 75 and 123 people were killed in the violence – though the government has confirmed only 54 deaths in all. The majority of those killed were Christian *dalits* (Dalits, or formerly “untouchables”) or *adivasi* (tribals or aboriginals). Many more were injured, close to 5,000 houses belonging to Christians were destroyed partially or fully, and at least 264 churches and prayer halls were desecrated and demolished.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Police Inaction**

However, the violence in itself fails to reveal the full extent of Christian persecution. The impunity enjoyed by violent mobs is also a cause for concern. Many victims of violence complain about the lack of police action, including hostility towards Christians. Police resist filing criminal complaints and have on several instances allegedly threatened to falsely incriminate victims in some cases.<sup>5</sup>

For example, in the central state of Chhattisgarh, police allegedly threatened Pastor Arun Toppo on October 9, 2013 when he reported that Hindu extremists beat a Bible student unconscious. According to his attorneys, when Pastor Toppo went to the Manandra Garh police station seeking help, Inspector M.S. Khan and other police verbally abused him, threatened to register a case against him and ordered him to stop leading worship if Hindu villagers did not like it. The police on duty made Pastor Toppo sign a paper saying he would not file a police complaint against the attackers.<sup>6</sup>

The hostility of the state machinery towards the victims of communal and targeted violence was most evident in the aftermath of the violence in Orissa. The National People’s Tribunal on Kandhamal, a private inquiry titled “Waiting for Justice,”<sup>7</sup> clearly outlined the apathy of the state administration towards the victims and their families. The report also highlighted the fear faced by victims and survivors as well as the refusal of police to register complaints. Extracts of some of the testimonies from Page No. 135 of the Report are reproduced below:

<sup>4</sup>Uma, Saumya (2010) Kandhamal: The Law Must Change Its Course. Retrieved from <http://www.ngo-marg.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Kandhamal-Book-Final.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Howell, Richard. Yearly Persecution Report 2011. Delhi, Evangelical Fellowship of India

<sup>6</sup> Howell, Richard, (October, 13) Delhi, EFINEWS

<sup>7</sup> Uma, Saumya (2011) Waiting for Justice. Retrieved from <http://works.bepress.com/saumyauma/36>  
<http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=saumyauma>

*"I had sent the FIR [first information report or formal complaint] to OIC [officer in-charge] Sarangada Police station with copy to SDPO [sub-divisional police officer], Baliguda, S.P. and Collector, Kandhamal and DIG [Deputy Inspector General], Berhampur by registered post on 26 September 2008. But my FIR is not yet been registered by the Police station at Sarangada. The kingpins and the culprits are moving freely and no stringent action is taken against the accused persons as yet and still there is danger to my life."(Paul Pradhan)*

*"I was attacked during the 2008 riot and my house was burnt. I lodged FIR in the local police station, Tikabali, which was not registered against the accused persons...I have repeatedly sought help from the local police station for my protection but no action was taken inspite of my petition dated 19 May 2010 against the criminals with specific names like Dahia Mallick, Sudhira Pradhan, Ajiban Mallick, Mantu Gauda and Biranchi Behera. My petition was not registered and no action was taken against the accused persons."(Gajana Digal)*

*"I complained to police, giving names of leaders of those who attacked us. But no criminal cases have been filed against them and that many of them are freely moving about in the village and they continue to threaten us."(Pratap Chandra Digal)*

It took orders from the High Court in Orissa<sup>8</sup> before first information reports were filed against members of the mobs.

Like in other states, the state government of Orissa has failed to effectively prosecute those accused of carrying out violent attacks against the Christian community. Though the Orissa government claims it took strict action against the accused, statistics available<sup>9</sup> show that out of the 827 FIRs filed, charges against the accused were framed in only 512. And only 75 cases ended in convictions, in which only 477 persons were convicted but primarily for smaller or "petty" offences such as burning of houses and damaging property. Only nine people have been convicted for their role in killing of the Christians. Human right activists claim that as many as 84,000 people were accused by the victims in the over 2,500 complaints sent to the police.<sup>10</sup>

The acquittals have been due to shoddy investigation and lack of judicial oversight.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Hon'ble High Court of Orissa vide its Order dated 01.10.2008 passed in WP (C) 12575/2008 in the matter of *Utkal Christian Council vs. State of Orissa & Others*

<sup>9</sup> Counter affidavit filed by the Government of Orissa before the Supreme Court of India in Criminal Writ Petition No. 126 of 2012 in the matter of *Initiative of Peace, Justice and Human Rights v. State of Orissa and others*

<sup>10</sup> All India Christian Council (2013, 03 - 09 February) Flaws in Kandhamal Probe. Indian Currents. Retrieved from <http://www.indiancurrents.org/indiancrmv/upload/5129Page%2021.22.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> In a case of setting fire to the house of Butia Digal, the court questioned the credibility of Butia's and seven other witnesses' testimonies, who had identified Manoj Pradhan among the attackers, on the ground that the incident took place "during the dark night in an area without electricity", disregarding the fact that the homes were being burnt

In several of the murder cases, police failed to gather key forensic evidence such as bone fragments after the body was set ablaze by the mob, conduct test identification parades and produce key witnesses in the trial. Police also failed to provide adequate protection to witnesses, many of whom later retracted their statements made to the police allegedly due to fear and intimidations.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of large-scale acquittals by the trial courts, the state failed to file appeals before the High Court in Orissa. According to the government records, in over 184 cases in which more than 2,743 people were acquitted, only 15 appeals were filed by the state.<sup>13</sup>

Even years after the violence, Christians in Kandhamal, Orissa continue to live in fear, unable in many parts to return to their homes and fields. They have been threatened and coerced to convert to Hinduism.<sup>14</sup> The National Commission for Minorities stated in a report<sup>15</sup>

*“In every camp I visited the main feeling was one of despair and hopelessness at the cruel turn of events. Practically everyone complained of the threats they had received that their return to their homes was predicated on their acceptance of the Hindu religion. I was even shown a letter addressed by name to one woman stating that the only way she could return to her home and property again was if she returned to the village as Hindu.”*

This large scale impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of mob violence across the country has fuelled violence against religious minorities in India.

#### **Lack of Compensation for Victims**

Apart from failing to ensure justice and security to the Christian victims of communal violence, the Orissa government has failed to provide adequate compensation to the victims. In a report

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down and the witnesses could see the faces of the attackers because of the flames. Further, the judge found that the investigating officer (IO) at Raikia police station noted Butia’s age as 35 years whereas he was actually 60 years old, and had failed to mark the exact location of the bush behind which the witnesses hid and watched their homes being burnt down. The accused were acquitted on these grounds. Notably, there was no detailed examination and cross-examination of the IO, and the court failed to seek any explanation from the IO or direct any actions against him for failure to investigate in a diligent manner. <http://www.ngo-marg.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Kandhamal-Book-Final.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Dayal, John ( 19 July, 2013) Five Years Later, The Loud Silence In Kandhamal, Countercurrents.org retrieved from <http://www.countercurrents.org/dayal190713.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Counter affidavit filed by the Government of Orissa before the Supreme Court of India in Criminal Writ Petition no. 126 of 2012 in the matter of *Initiative of Peace, Justice and Human Rights v. State of Orissa and others*

<sup>14</sup> Griffith, David (2012, 28 September) The Widows of Kandhamal, The Huffington Post. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/david-griffiths/the-widows-of-kandhamal\\_b\\_1923001.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/david-griffiths/the-widows-of-kandhamal_b_1923001.html)

<sup>15</sup> Report On The Visit Of The Vice Chairperson, National Commission Of Minorities To Orissa – 11th To 13th September, 2008 Retrieved from <http://ncm.nic.in/doc/Tour%20Report%20VC%20Orissa%20Sep.%2008.doc>

titled “Unjust Compensation: An Assessment of Damage and Loss of Private Property during the Anti-Christian Violence in Kandhamal, India,” it was estimated that the total value of property and livelihood loss, as calculated in this impact assessment of the 122 families surveyed in three villages, amounted to approximately U.S. \$457,529 while the average loss suffered per family was approximately U.S. \$3,750 at the time.<sup>16</sup> The compensation offered by the government was less than U.S. \$2,000 as *ex gratia* to the next of kin of the deceased, and between U.S. \$500 and U.S. \$1,000 for each damaged house, depending on whether the house was partially or fully damaged. Affected institutions were given about U.S. \$4,000 each.

Details of any compensation paid to Christian victims in other states are not available.

### **GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS**

Apart from violence, minority Christians and others also face restrictions on the freedom of religion by way of draconian and unjust legislations.

#### **‘Freedom of Religion Acts’**

Several states of India have enacted laws titled “Freedom of Religion Acts,” or anti-conversion laws, as they are more commonly known. These laws claim to merely purge the use of force, fraud and inducement from religious persuasion in the interest of public order. But they clearly violate some key components of religious freedom and are used as a pretext for serious human rights violations against religious minorities.

These laws<sup>17</sup> - enacted in the states of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh - give the district administration wide and sweeping powers to inquire into religious conversions, but carry no provisions for protection against discriminatory action by the authorities. As per the Rules, the District Magistrate shall get the matter enquired into but no timeframe is prescribed for the conduct of such an enquiry and nor have its modalities been defined.

The Acts cast an onerous burden on the converted person and the persons seeking to propagate their faith, without providing the required checks and balances to ensure protection against their misuse.

The Acts require the converting person to give details of his or her conversion to the district magistrate [administrative head], either prior to the conversion “ceremony” or subsequent to it. The law in Gujarat state requires that the person seeking to convert to another religion must take

<sup>16</sup> Centre For Sustainable Use of Natural And Social Resources. (2013) *Unjust Compensation: An Assessment of Damage and Loss of Private Property during the Anti Christian Violence in Kandhamal, India*

<sup>17</sup> Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967, Madhya Pradesh *Dharma Swatantraya* Act 1968, Chhattisgarh *Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam* 1968, Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 1978, Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act 2003 and Himachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 2006.

prior permission from the district magistrate before any conversion “ceremony” is performed. The Acts, therefore, greatly impinge on the freedom of conscience of a prospective convert, and also on their right to privacy. The law renders the person incapable of taking the final decision with regard to his or her faith, and instead requires approval of the district authority.

This is an invasion of the privacy and violation of both international law and the Constitution of India. This is violation of the right to freedom of association, the right to privacy and the freedom of conscience. The laws undermine the agency of the convert and make every religious conversion suspect and liable for scrutiny.

Repeatedly, these laws have been used to target and harass Christians. Asma Jahangir, the then Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, noted in her report<sup>18</sup> after a visit to India that:

*“Even in the Indian states which have adopted laws on religious conversion there seem to be only few – if any – convictions for conversion by the use of force, inducement or fraudulent means. In Orissa, for example, not a single infringement over the past ten years of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act 1967 could be cited or adduced by district officials and senior officials in the State Secretariat... However, such laws or even draft legislation have had adverse consequences for religious minorities and have reportedly fostered mob violence against them.”*

The report went on to state that:

*“There is a risk that Freedom of Religion Acts may become a tool in the hands of those who wish to use religion for vested interests or to persecute individuals on the grounds of their religion or belief. While persecution, violence or discrimination based on religion or belief need to be sanctioned by law, the Special Rapporteur would like to caution against excessive or vague legislation on religious issues which could create tensions and problems instead of solving them.”*

A fact-finding team of the National Commission for Minorities visited the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh between June 13 and 18, 2007, and noted in its report that Hindu extremists frequently invoked the anti-conversion law in Madhya Pradesh as a means of inciting mobs against Christians or having them arrested without evidence.<sup>19</sup>

They noted in their report:

<sup>18</sup> Jahangir, Asma (26 January 2009) Mission to India, Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Addendum, Retrieved from <http://www.wghr.org/pdf/3.%20Special%20Rapporteurs.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> (July 25, 2006) State in India tightens controls on conversions, Compass News Direct. Retrieved from [http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2006/07-July/newsarticle\\_4463.html/](http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2006/07-July/newsarticle_4463.html/)



*“Obviously, the life of Christians has become miserable at the hands of miscreants in connivance with the police. There are allegations that when atrocities were committed on Christians by the miscreants, police remained mere spectators and in certain cases they did not even register FIRs [First Information Reports].”*

However, in September 2012, the High Court of Himachal Pradesh<sup>20</sup> struck down Section 4 of the Himachal Pradesh Act which made it obligatory for a person to give a 30-day prior notice to the district magistrate about his or her intention to convert. The Court held that the procedure is oppressive as it will deter a person from changing his or her religion due to unnecessary revelation of an individual’s personal choice and belief to the public at large along with the stigma of having a police inquiry in matters relating to one’s belief and conscience. However similar provisions remain in the other state laws.

#### **1950 PRESIDENTIAL ORDER**

I would also like to draw your attention to Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950, which states that: “No person who professes a religion different from the Hindu, the Sikh and the Buddhist religion shall be deemed to be a member of a Schedule Caste [from the Dalit community].”

Approximately 70% of the Christian population in India is from the Schedule Caste backgrounds and is economically poor and engaged in menial occupations. In spite of their conversion to Christianity, they continue to suffer the same disadvantages and disabilities arising out of the traditional practice of untouchability.

The Government of India set up several commissions to investigate the conditions of socially, economically and educationally backward classes in India, which have repeatedly recognized that Dalit Christians continue to face oppressive and hostile situations due to their caste.

The Mandal Commission in its report<sup>21</sup> noted that:

*“There is no doubt that social and educational backwardness among non-Hindu communities is more or less of the same order as among Hindu communities. Though caste system is peculiar to Hindu society yet, in actual practice, it also pervades the non-Hindu communities in India in varying degrees. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon: first, caste system is a great conditioner of the mind and leaves an indelible mark on the person’s social consciousness and cultural mores. Consequently, even after conversion, the ex-Hindus carried with them their deeply ingrained ideas of social hierarchy and stratification. This resulted in the Hindu converts inadvertently acting as Trojan horses of caste system among highly equalitarian religions such as Islam,*

<sup>20</sup> Writ Petition No. 438 of 2011 in the matter of Evangelical Fellowship of India and Anr. v. State of Himachal Pradesh

<sup>21</sup> Mandal Commission Report of the Backward Classes Commission. 1980 (at Page 60)

*Christianity, Sikhism, etc. Secondly, non-Hindu minorities living in pre-dominantly Hindu India could not escape from its dominant social and cultural influences. Thus, both from within and without, caste amongst non-Hindu communities received continuous sustenance and stimulus...*

*Similar is the situation among Indian Christians. "... Christian in Kerala are divided into various denominations on the basis of beliefs and rituals and into various ethnic groups on the basis of their caste background ... even after conversion, the lower caste converts were continued to be treated as Harijans [Dalits] by all sections of the society including the Syrian Christians, even though with conversion the former ceased to be Harijans and untouchables ...*

*In the presence of rich Syrian Christian the Harijan Christians had to remove their head-dress while speaking with their Syrian Christian masters. They had to keep their mouth closed with a hand ... It was found that the Syrian and Pulaya members of the same Church conduct religious rituals separately in separate building ... Thus lower caste converts to a very egalitarian religion like Christianity, ever anxious to expand its membership, even after generations were not able to efface the effect of their caste background."*

The High Power Panel on Minorities, SCs, STs and other weaker sections<sup>22</sup> noted that:

*"The Christians and the Neo-Buddhist need the same kind of concessions for their converts from the scheduled castes as are offered to Hindu and Sikhs. And their plea, we have recommended, should be fulfilled with utmost sympathy. They too suffer from the same economic handicaps and social neglect and isolation as the Hindu Scheduled Castes, as is amply illustrated by us in our report elsewhere."*

Similarly, the National Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, (more commonly known as the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission) in 2007 recommended that:

*"Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 which originally restricted the Scheduled Caste only to Hindus and later opened it to Sikhs and Buddhists, thus still excluding from its purview the Muslims, Christians, Jains and Parsis, etc. should be wholly deleted by appropriate action so as to completely de-link Scheduled Caste status from religion and make the Scheduled Castes net fully religion-neutral like that of the Scheduled Tribes."*

<sup>22</sup> Report on Minorities, Volume (I), 14th June 1983, Page No: 8, Point No: 12. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

In spite of the recommendations of several commission both nationally and internationally, the Government of India has failed to move for amendments to Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950 making it religion neutral.

Furthermore, the Government of India has failed to file any reply in a case<sup>23</sup> pending before the Supreme Court of India challenging the constitutionality of the Para 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950. The case has been pending since 2004.

Para 3 is violative of fundamental rights safeguarded in the Constitution of India as the entire premise for denying benefits and extending reservations in government jobs and educational institutions to members of the Schedule Caste origin is their religious affiliations. Furthermore, it gravely restricts the freedom of conscience of members of the Scheduled Caste community by limiting the benefits and protections available to them provided they continue to practise the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religion.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Support the resolution on protecting religious freedom in India (H.Res.417);
2. Follow up on recommendation of the government of the United States to the Government of India – to “ensure that laws are fully and consistently enforced to provide adequate protections for members of religious minorities, scheduled castes, and adivasi groups” – in the recent universal periodic review of India (2012); and if possible send a delegation to meet with victims and visit sites of communal violence in the aftermath, to assess whether the recommendation is being met and to better understand the complexity of the issues involved;
3. Use appropriate forms of dialogue to raise concerns about the status of religious minorities and the impunity enjoyed by Hindutva forces;
4. Continue to find ways to fund civil society efforts to combat human rights abuses and promote religious tolerance.

Statement of:

Tehmina Arora  
Attorney  
New Delhi, India

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<sup>23</sup> Writ Petition (Civil) No. 180/2004 before the Supreme Court of India in the matter of centre for public interest litigation and another vs. Union of India

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Arora, thank you very much for your testimony. Without objection, your full statement, which was very heavily documented and footnoted, will be made a part of the record and all of your full statements as well. But thank you so much.

Ms. ARORA. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Rogers.

**STATEMENT OF MR. BENEDICT ROGERS, TEAM LEADER FOR EAST ASIA, CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE**

Mr. ROGERS. Mr. Chairman, distinguished members, may I first of all thank you very much indeed for holding this hearing on this critically important subject, for giving me the opportunity to testify and may I also pay tribute to your many years of leadership and activism on this and other human rights issues.

In the limited time available today I intend to concentrate my remarks on just two areas of focus—Indonesia and Burma. But I have provided written testimony on Vietnam and Laos as well.

And I'd like to just begin by echoing very strongly your remarks made at the beginning by saying that in Christian Solidarity Worldwide we work very much for freedom of religion or belief for all. Freedom of religion is indivisible and is a basic right to which all people of all beliefs in every country are entitled.

And in that context, whilst I talk about Indonesia and Burma, it's important to note that other religious groups face severe persecution, particularly the Ahmadiyya and Shi'a Muslims in Indonesia and the Rohingyas and other Muslims in Burma.

Nevertheless, I would absolutely agree that Christianity is the most widely persecuted religion in the world today, facing threats from a wide range of sources in almost every corner of the globe.

And so I turn now to two parts of the globe starting with Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim majority nation, a nation that has made a remarkable transition from authoritarianism to democracy, a nation that has a tremendous tradition of religious pluralism, harmony and freedom, and yet that tradition of religious pluralism in Indonesia is increasingly under threat. Two weeks today CSW will launch in London a major new report, and I just hold it up—I believe it has been sent to your office this morning because it has just gone to print today—"Indonesia Pluralism in Peril: The Rise of Religious Intolerance Across the Archipelago."

For Christians in Indonesia, there are two major threats—regulatory restrictions and vigilante intimidation and violence. According to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, at least 430 churches have been attacked, closed down or burnt down since 2004.

According to the Jakarta Christian Communication Forum, the number of attacks against Christian churches reached a total of 75 in 2012, which marks a steady rise from 10 in 2009 to 47 in 2010 and 64 in 2011.

The situation is most severe in Aceh, where in May 2012 17 churches were closed down. Christians in Aceh live in fear and worship in secret. However, the persecution of Christians in Indonesia is by no means confined to Aceh.

In West Java, for example, there have been several cases where churches which are legally licensed have been forced by local may-

ors to close and in at least two cases those churches have challenged the mayor's ruling to close them in the courts.

In both those cases, the courts have ruled in favor of the churches including all the way up to the Supreme Court and yet the mayor refuses still to permit the churches to open in defiance of the Indonesian Supreme Court.

I visited both those churches. I've stood with congregations outside their locked church building as they attempted to hold a Sunday service in the street outside because they were not permitted to use their building.

And in both instances we were surrounded by a mob of angry Islamists shouting things like, "Christians, get out. Kill the Christians."

The pastor of one of those churches, the Reverend Palti Panjaitan, whom I've interviewed four times, has received death threats, false criminal charges and constant abuse.

Last year I interviewed Pastor Bernhard Maukar of a Pentecostal church in West Java. His church has been attacked several times. On one occasion, a mob climbed over the gates during a Sunday service and he told me, and I quote,

"They pulled me by my tie, taking me to the gate. They took other church members, pulling them by their clothes. They were shouting, 'Go out, Reverend. We will kill you.' Our church members ran away. Some of them were teenagers and children and they were traumatized by the experience."

On the 27th of January, 2013, his church was attacked again and he was beaten. Two days later, Pastor Bernhard, not his attackers, was sentenced to 3 months in prison for running an unregistered church.

This year, Indonesia will hold both parliamentary and Presidential elections. I have more detailed recommendations in my written submission but the key recommendation I would highlight is that it's essential that these concerns are raised with all the Indonesian Presidential candidates and the new President, once he's elected, is encouraged by the international community to address these concerns.

I turn now to Burma. In many respects, in the past 2 years there have been some extraordinary changes in Burma and I wholeheartedly welcome the progress.

However, there is still a very long way to go and in relation to freedom of religion there have been serious setbacks with a severe and dramatic rise in anti-Muslim hatred and violence, which I've been involved in trying to address.

Christians have not so far been widely targeted by this rise in what I can only describe as militant Burman Buddhist nationalism, although there are reasonable concerns that that movement currently focused on the Muslim community could affect Christians in the future.

But on the whole, whilst Christians have not been targeted by Buddhists in society, decades of discrimination by successive military regimes have left a legacy of policies of discrimination which continue.

In 2007, CSW published a report called, “Carrying the Cross: The Military Regime’s Campaign of Restriction, Discrimination and Persecution Against Christians in Burma,” and although that report is now 7 years old much of the evidence is still valid today.

More recently, the Chin human rights organization with whom we work very closely has published two excellent reports.

Both CSW and CHRO have documented serious violations of freedom of religion affecting Christians in Burma, notably the destruction of crosses in ethnic Chin and Kachin states, and the military’s role enforcing Chin Christians to build Buddhist pagodas in place of crosses.

There’s also been cases of forcible and coerced conversion of Chin Christians to Buddhism often through the provision of education in military-run schools and discrimination in public service.

As I draw to a close, I just want to share one story. In March 2013, I visited Kachin State in northern Burma and documented attacks on Kachin Christians.

I interviewed the wife of one Kachin political prisoner who had visited her husband just a month after his arrest in 2012 and she told me this, and I quote,

“When I visited my husband he was covered in blood. His nose was broken. An iron bar had been rubbed along his legs.

“He was forced, and I emphasize forced, against his will in prison to engage in homosexual sex with other male prisoners. He was told that as he was a Christian he should kneel on very sharp stones with his arms outstretched like Christ on the cross and then other prisoners were forced to dance the traditional Kachin dance around him. He was beaten on his hands and arms and they were hit in the head with guns.”

Mr. Chairman, we urge the United States to encourage the Government of Burma to end policies of discrimination along religious lines and to issue an invitation to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to travel to Burma, to visit all parts of the country to investigate these violations.

The persecution of Christians in the Middle East has drawn particular attention in recent months and very understandably so. But while the persecution of Christians in the Middle East is perhaps the most acute form of persecution, it is important to remember that the persecution of Christians is indeed a worldwide phenomenon today.

In Southeast Asia, as I have tried to outline, Christians in Indonesia and Burma but also in countries like Vietnam, Laos, and Malaysia, which I have not had time to speak about, continue to face discrimination, restrictions and persecution which amount to serious violations which require international attention.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rogers follows:]

February 2014  
For Public Use

**Written Statement**  
by Mr Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader, Christian Solidarity Worldwide  
to the United States House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International  
Organisations

**Hearing on the Worldwide Persecution of Christians**  
Tuesday, February 11, 2014

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, Distinguished Members: may I firstly thank you very much for holding this hearing on this critically important subject, and pay tribute to your many years of leadership and activism, both on behalf of persecuted Christians around the world and for freedom of religion or belief for all.

My areas of expertise are Burma, Indonesia and North Korea, and I oversee the work of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) in China, Vietnam and Laos. In the limited time available today, I intend to concentrate on Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam and Laos.

The first point I wish to emphasise is that in Christian Solidarity Worldwide, we work for freedom of religion or belief, as set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for people of all faiths and none. Freedom of religion is indivisible and is a basic right to which all people, of all beliefs, in every country are entitled.

Secondly, it is important to note, in the context of the specific subject we are focusing on today, that other religious groups face severe persecution, including the Ahmadiyya and Shi'a Muslims in Indonesia, and the Rohingyas and wider Muslim community in Burma.

Nevertheless, it is absolutely the case that Christianity is the most widely persecuted religion in the world today, facing threats from a wide range of sources in almost every corner of the globe.

*Indonesia*

Let me turn first to Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, a nation that has made a remarkable transition from authoritarianism to democracy, and a nation that has a tremendous tradition of religious pluralism, harmony and freedom. Indeed, the state ideology, known as Pancasila, protects religious pluralism, although such protection is limited to the six officially recognised religions of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism and therefore there is room for the principle of pluralism enshrined in Pancasila to be built upon and expanded to protect all Indonesian citizens.

However, that tradition of pluralism in Indonesia is increasingly under threat. Next week, CSW will publish a major new report, which I have authored, called *Indonesia: Pluralism in Peril – The rise of religious intolerance across the archipelago*.<sup>1</sup> The report, including the appendices, is almost 60,000 words and more than one hundred pages in length, and contains dozens of first-hand case studies of Christians, as well as Ahmadis, Shi'as, Sufis, Buddhists, Baha'is, Confucianists, adherents of indigenous traditional beliefs and an atheist, Alexander Aan, who was imprisoned for two and a half years for

<sup>1</sup> CSW, *Indonesia: Pluralism In Peril: The Rise of Religious Intolerance Across the Archipelago*, February 2014 – [www.csw.org.uk/2014-indonesia-report](http://www.csw.org.uk/2014-indonesia-report)

declaring himself an atheist on Facebook. I went to visit Mr Aan in prison twice, and I am pleased to say that he was granted early release, subject to certain restrictions, last month.

For Christians in Indonesia, there are two major threats: regulatory restrictions and vigilante intimidation and violence. According to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, at least 430 churches have been attacked, closed down or burned down since 2004. According to the Jakarta Christian Communication Forum, the number of attacks against Christian churches reached a total of 75 in 2012. This marks a steady rise from just ten in 2009 to 47 in 2010 and 64 in 2011.

The situation is most severe in Aceh, where in May 2012 seventeen churches were closed down, and in October 2012 a further nine churches were closed. Christians in Aceh live in fear. "People worship in secret," one church leader told CSW.

However, the persecution of Christians in Indonesia is by no means confined to Aceh.

In West Java, for example, there have been several high-profile cases. In particular the cases of HKBP Filadelfia Church in Bekasi and GKI Yasmin Church in Bogor. Both churches received permission to open, have all the appropriate licenses, have support from their local community, and yet the local Mayors, under pressure from the radical Islamists, have forcibly closed the church buildings. In both cases the churches brought the case to court, and in both cases the courts at every level – up to and including the Supreme Court – ruled that the churches were legal, licensed and should be allowed to open. In both cases, the Mayor, in defiance of the court rulings, has refused to allow them to open. The cases are detailed in more depth in my report, but let me tell you what I have seen first-hand. I have visited both churches. I have stood with the congregation of HKBP Filadelfia outside their church building, as they attempted to hold a Sunday service in the street, because they were not permitted to use their building. We were surrounded by a mob of angry Islamists, shouting "Christians get out, kill the Christians". When I was with GKI Yasmin church, I witnessed a similar scene. The congregation was trying to hold a peaceful Sunday service in the street outside their church, because their church is locked and sealed. Again, an angry mob surrounded the congregation shouting abuse.

The pastor of HKBP Filadelfia, the Reverend Palti Panjaitan, whom I have interviewed four times, has received death threats, false criminal charges, and constant abuse. "Sometimes they threatened to kill me," he said. "They would sit outside my house. I do not feel safe."

Last year, I interviewed Pastor Bernhard Maukar, of GPDI Church in Rancaekek, Jatinangor, West Java. His church has been attacked several times by members of the notorious Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). On one occasion, a mob climbed over the gate during a Sunday service. He told me: "They pulled me by my tie, taking me to the gate. They took other church members, pulling them by their clothes. Then they destroyed my property, taking chairs and other equipment, putting it all into trucks. They were shouting, 'Go out, Reverend, we will kill you. You are a devil church.' They destroyed the gate. Our church members ran away. Some of them were teenagers and children, and they were traumatised by the experience." On 27 January, 2013 his church was attacked again, and he was beaten. Two days later, following a trial where the FPI intimidated the judge, Pastor Bernhard was sentenced to three months in prison for running an unregistered church, even though he had offered to pay the fine. He said: "The church has been here 27 years, and we had no problems until 2011. We had a good relationship with our neighbours and they accepted us. Now, 27 churches have been closed in our area. Most Christians do not want to come to church here now, because they are too afraid."

The forthcoming report also includes the story of Dr Rebekka Zakaria, who was imprisoned for running a Sunday school. During her trial, radical Islamists built a coffin and shouted "Kill Rebekka, Kill Rebekka". It also includes the case of the Reverend Lusvida, who was attacked along with her congregation on 12 September 2010. And it includes the recent case of HKBP Setu Church in Bekasi,



West Java, and the words of one member of this congregation, Mega Eenta Sihite, who said: "This is my right to worship, my basic human right. Why can't I have this right? I feel like a guest in this nation. Please give attention to this and support our government to manage our diversity here. ... This country was colonised by the Dutch with tanks and bombs. Now my brothers are the colonisers, coming with equipment to kill my rights by destroying the church."

There are two myths about Indonesia. The first is that religious intolerance is confined to certain areas, and amounts to occasional incidents. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has referred to "pockets of intolerance" and has suggested that "communal conflicts occasionally flare up". Such language is profoundly misleading and underestimates the severity of the situation. It is a nationwide phenomenon and incidents are regular and continuous. The second myth is that the President and his Government are a force of moderation, but are at worst weak and constrained by societal factors. My research shows that this is untrue. They are neither a force, nor particularly moderate. As Andreas Harsono from Human Rights Watch told CSW, President Yudhoyono is "the President who laid down the most sectarian regulatory infrastructure in Indonesia."

The President and his Government has been an active participant in the escalation of religious intolerance in Indonesia, in three ways: by statements made by the President and Government ministers; by regulations introduced by this Government; and by consistent and repeated inaction. As Dr Ahmad Suaedy, Director of the Abdurrahman Wahid Centre for Inter-Faith Dialogue and former Director of The Wahid Institute, told CSW, "Religious intolerance is not only because of political balances. It is because of actual policy." He added: "We are seeing the mainstreaming of intolerance."

On 26 July 2005, less than a year after he was first elected, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono delivered a speech to the National Congress of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), the highest body of Islamic clerics and legal scholars in the country, promising them a "central role in matters regarding the Islamic faith". He said: "We open our hearts and minds to receiving the thoughts, recommendations and *fatwas* [religious rulings] from the MUI at any time." Within days, the MUI issued a series of *fatwas* which have underpinned the ensuing deterioration in religious freedom, including *fatwas* against pluralism. Two years later, the president went further in another address to the MUI, saying: "After a *fatwa* is issued, the tools of the state can do their duty ... We must all take strict measures against deviant beliefs."

Other Government Ministers have made inflammatory statements, which are detailed in the forthcoming report. In particular, it is worth noting that in July 2013 the Minister of Religious Affairs, Suryadharma Ali, described inter-faith conflict as "a normal part of human nature", and he repeated those remarks in November 2013, saying that "conflict is normal". Earlier in 2013 he blamed Christians for politicising the issue, and bringing persecution upon themselves.

The introduction of the 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs, detailing the procedures required for permission to construct places of worship, has restricted freedom of religion for Christians in Indonesia. The Decree was drafted by a committee led by Ma'ruf Amin, the head of the MUI's Fatwa Committee. To construct a church building in Indonesia, a church has to provide the names and identity cards of at least 90 members of the congregation, approved by the local authority; support from at least 60 other members of the local community, endorsed by the village head; written recommendation from the local Ministry of Religious Affairs; and written recommendation from the district or city Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB).

These criteria are difficult enough to meet: but even when churches meet these requirements and are approved, they are still insecure, as the cases of HKBP Filadefia and GKI Yasmin show.

Reverend Luspida told CSW: "I hope you are not only here to hear our stories, but to do something, to make something change. The government is ignorant about our situation. There is no religious

freedom here any more. The government does not want to hear our cries .... We need to give a message to the president. We must remind him that our situation is very critical and we should do something for the future of Indonesia. Support from outside Indonesia is very important, to pressure the president to do something.”

There are some in the Indonesian Government who recognise the severity of the problem and recognise some of the possible solutions. The senior adviser to the Vice-President of Indonesia, Dr Dewi Fortuna Anwar, is one such person, and her proposed recommendations are detailed in my report. She told CSW: “The international community should continue to play an important role in encouraging and reminding Indonesia what it stands for, and not to betray all that of which it is justly proud.” The international community should look carefully at the recommendations she makes, and the recommendations in CSW’s report, and prioritise religious freedom in Indonesia.

This year, Indonesia will hold both parliamentary and presidential elections. It is essential that these concerns are raised with all the presidential candidates, and that the new President is encouraged by the international community to address these concerns. In particular, I urge the United States to encourage the Indonesian government to provide proper protection for religious minorities vulnerable to attack and intimidation; to urge the Indonesian authorities to respect and protect freedom of religion or belief and to permit the construction of places of worship which have received licences through the approved process; to provide support for human rights, civil society, inter-faith dialogue and cooperation initiatives and counter-extremism work, and to engage proactively with the efforts of Muslim, other faith-based and secular civil society organisations working to promote pluralism, harmony and religious freedom, and to counter radicalism and extremism; to continue to monitor the situation in Indonesia, noting the recommendation of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to categorise Indonesia as a country on the “Watch List”; to press the government of Indonesia to invite the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom to visit the country; to urge the government of Indonesia to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to visit the country; and to ensure that the recommendations which were accepted by the government of Indonesia during the UN’s Universal Periodic Review in 2012 are implemented.

#### **Burma**

I turn now to Burma. In many respects, in the past two years or more there have been some extraordinary changes in Burma, for the better, and I wholeheartedly welcome the progress. Nevertheless, there is still a very long way to go, and in relation to freedom of religion, there have in fact been setbacks, with a severe and dramatic rise in anti-Muslim hatred and violence, affecting firstly the Rohingya Muslim people, and then the wider Burmese Muslim community. I have been actively involved in trying to address these very serious concerns.

Christians have not, so far, been widely targeted by the rise in militant Burman Buddhist nationalism, as presented in the form of the movement known as “969”, although there are reasonable concerns that this movement, which is currently focused on the Muslim community, could become a wider movement affecting all non-Buddhist religious minorities. However, on the whole, Christians have not been targeted by militant Buddhists in society, but decades of discrimination by successive military regimes have left a legacy and policies of discrimination continue.

In 2007, CSW published a report which I wrote, called *Carrying the Cross: The military regime’s campaign of restriction, discrimination and persecution against Christians in Burma*.<sup>2</sup> Although now almost seven years old, much of the evidence, conclusions and recommendations in that report is still valid today.

<sup>2</sup> CSW, *Carrying the Cross: The military regime’s campaign of restriction, discrimination and persecution against Christians in Burma, 2007* - <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?r=report&id=36>

More recently, the Chin Human Rights Organisation, with whom we work very closely, has published two excellent pieces of research: a report, in 2012, *Threats to Our Existence: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma*<sup>3</sup> and, in January 2014, *The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief for Chin in Burma/Myanmar 2013*.<sup>4</sup>

Burma's Constitution, introduced in 2008, notes the "special position" of Buddhism, whereas it notes simply the existence of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism. Yet for the Chin and Kachin ethnic nationalities in particular, and for a significant proportion of the Karenni and Karen ethnic nationalities, Christianity is their religion and is interwoven with their cultural identity. Both CSW and CHRO have documented serious violations of freedom of religion or belief affecting Christians in Burma, notably: the destruction of crosses in Chin and Kachin states, and the military's role in forcing Chin Christians to build Buddhist pagodas in place of crosses; forcible or coerced conversion of Chin Christians to Buddhism within military-run schools known as *Na Ta La*, as detailed by CHRO; and discrimination in public services, detailed in both CSW and CHRO's reports.

In March 2013, CSW visited Kachin State and documented attacks on Kachin Christians. While the conflict in Kachin State is primarily ethnic and political, there is a religious dimension, because Christianity is interwoven with Kachin identity. CSW interviewed the wife of one Kachin political prisoner, who had visited her husband just under a month after his arrest, in 2012. She said:

"When I visited my husband, his whole face was wounded. He was covered in blood, and his nose was broken. He had faced so many different kinds of torture during interrogation. An iron bar was rubbed along his legs. He was forced to engage in homosexual sex, and forced to dance the traditional Kachin Manau dance. He was told that as he was a Christian, he should kneel on very sharp stones with his arms outstretched like Christ on the cross, and then the others were forced to dance the Manau dance around him. He was beaten on his hands and arms. Police took off his clothes, and asked the men to have sex with each other. When they refused, they were beaten and forced to do it. One of them was tied up with ice and beaten severely.... They were hit in the head with guns."<sup>5</sup>

We urge the United States and the international community to encourage the Government of Burma to adopt legislation that prohibits direct or indirect discrimination against persons from religious minority backgrounds; to abolish the *Na Ta La* (Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training) schools and institute a single education system under the Ministry of Education where all students are treated equally and without discrimination; replace the Ministry of Religious Affairs with an independent and impartial commission on religious freedom, with a mandate to address deep-rooted discrimination on the basis of religious identity; and issue an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief to travel to all parts of the country to investigate reports of violations of freedom of religion or belief.

### **Laos**

Laos has seen some improvement in religious freedom in recent years. Over the past decade, for example, there has been a reduction in the number of long-term Christian prisoners of conscience and in the average length of sentence. In 2013, the government also took steps to consult Protestant, Buddhist, Catholic, Baha'i and Muslim leaders on the revision of the Prime Minister's Decree on Management and Protection of Religious Activities (Decree 92). Furthermore, some sources believe

<sup>3</sup> CHRO, *Threats to Our Existence: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma*, 2012 - <http://www.chro.ca/index.php/publications/73-special-reports/411-threats-to-our-existence>

<sup>4</sup> CHRO, *The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief for Chin in Burma/Myanmar 2013* - [http://chro.ca/images/CHRO\\_News/2013/CHRO-FoRB-2013.pdf](http://chro.ca/images/CHRO_News/2013/CHRO-FoRB-2013.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> CSW, Burma: Visit Report, April, 2013 - <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?r=report&id=175>

that higher authorities have intervened in cases where church leaders had been arrested and detained without sufficient evidence.

At the same time, however, there are continuing reports of religious freedom violations by both state and non-state actors. In 2013, CSW collected information about violations against Protestant Christians which included arrest and detention, eviction and fines in connection with their religious beliefs. Other common violations include disruption of religious meetings and services; restricted freedom of movement; discrimination in the distribution of food and school supplies; blocking of access to education; withdrawal of utilities; destruction of livestock and other property; forced participation in animist ceremonies; and threats, including death threats.

Sources agree that any improvements in religious freedom are most keenly felt in urban areas, in particular in Vientiane. One of the reasons for the discrepancy between urban and rural areas is the sensitivity around ethnic minorities, and specifically the perception by some local officials that the growth of Protestant Christianity among ethnic minorities is part of a US conspiracy to destroy social cohesion and challenge the authority of the Communist Party. Crucially, the key document on religious activities and organisations, Decree 22, is itself open to abuse by local officials, since it uses vague terms prohibiting religious believers from "dividing ethnic groups or religions in order to cause social disorder" (Article 13) and charging religious organisations with the preservation of "fine Lao national culture, customs and traditions" (Article 15).

Both conversion to Protestant Christianity and attempting to convert others ("spreading religion") can result in restrictions. For example, in January 2013 in Attapeu Province, a couple received a written eviction order from the chief of the village which cited their conversion to Christianity as the reason for the eviction. The couple was warned that their village "does not welcome or allow followers of the Christian faith". Also in 2013, three pastors from Savannakhet Province were arrested while making copies of a Christian DVD. Two were later charged with "spreading the Christian religion". At least one was beaten, kicked and tortured in order to force him to confess.

In early 2013 Laos expressed an ambition to join the UN Human Rights Council in 2016. In response, human rights groups have been quick to point out that there is much more the government could be doing to improve its own human rights record. In addition, the disappearance of civil society leader Sombath Somphone in December 2012, and the government's failure to conduct a proper investigation, has drawn attention to broader concerns about the lack of respect for basic rights.

Freedom of religion or belief is a touchstone for human rights standards: many aspects are inseparable from the right to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement and other fundamental rights and freedoms. It is therefore essential that the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as a potential Human Rights Council candidate and a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ensures that international standards on the right to freedom of religion or belief are upheld in law and in practice.

#### *Vietnam*

In July 2013, President Truong Tan Sang met with President Barack Obama in Washington DC and assured the President that Vietnam would invite the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit the country in 2014. Later that year, on 7 November, Vietnam signed United Nations Convention against Torture, and on 12 November was elected to the UN Human Rights Council.

These events are welcome signs that Vietnam is keen to engage with human rights issues as part of developing relationships within the international community. However, public declarations of commitment to human rights mean little unless they result in genuine and consistent efforts to address violations at the ground level, through changes to legislation and effective implementation of the law.

Religious activities in Vietnam must be registered with the relevant authorities. The specific requirements are outlined in 'Decree No. 92/2012/ND-CP: Specific provisions and measures for the implementation of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion' which came into effect on 1 January 2013, and replaces 'Decree 22', issued in 2005. As the title suggests, Decree 92 provides instructions for the implementation of the Ordinance on Belief and Religion, adopted in 2004. The Decree has drawn criticism from Christian and Buddhist leaders, lawyers and activists in Vietnam.

While the new Decree contains measures which, if properly implemented, will create a more transparent registration process, the Decree as a whole is aimed at control or management rather than the protection of religious freedom. For example, Article 5 adds a new level of activity, *sinh hoạt tôn giáo*, requiring registration/permission and in doing so simultaneously adds an extra stage to the process of applying for full registration/permission as an organisation conducting religious activities.

One potential consequence of the Decree is that religious groups could be pressured to join organisations which are already registered. A second potential outcome is that organisations could be forced to operate illegally while they wait for registration/permission. This would be detrimental not only to religious adherents, but also to Vietnamese society as a whole, because it would mean that this Decree has turned law-abiding citizens into criminals simply because of their religious beliefs. Far from protecting citizens' right to religious freedom, Decree 92 risks making peaceful religious observance into a criminal activity.

In reality, some religious organisations and individuals are already treated as criminals for engaging in religious activities outside of state-approved associations such as the Caodai Governance Council. Independent Caodai groups who have refused to transfer the ownership of their temple to the local office of the Governance Council have been harassed and assaulted by local Council officials, Public Security Police and hired "thugs".

Ethnic minority Protestants continue to experience some of the harshest treatment by local authorities. Common violations include forced eviction, destruction of property and livestock, confiscation of property, blocking of access to public goods and services, discrimination in education and employment, and in some cases arrest, detention, torture and even death. In March and April 2013 CSW reported the case of Hoang Van Ngai, a Hmong Christian from Northeast Vietnam who migrated to Dak Nong Province in the Central Highlands. He was an elder of Bui Tre Church, which belongs to the legally recognised denomination, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South).

According to his relatives, some government officials hated Ngai because he struggled to preserve the church when the authorities forbid them to meet. On 15 March police arrested Hoang Van Ngai and his brother. No clear reason was given for the arrests, although some reports claim that the police accused the two brothers of "destroying the forest". The two brothers were detained in adjacent cells. At about 3pm on 17 March, Ngai's brother heard the sound of violent beating coming from his brother's cell. The following day, the police announced that he was dead.

Vietnamese Catholics have not only been one of the most restricted groups, but also one of the boldest in standing up for their rights, and the rights of others. In September 2013, for example, Catholics in My Yen parish gathered to peacefully protest the arrest of Nguyen Van Hai, 43, and Ngo Van Khoi, 53, also from My Yen, who were detained allegedly as "scapegoats" after being involved in arguments with plainclothes police officers searching Catholics on their way to a shrine. Several hundred members of the community arrived to protest against the continued detention of the two men, at which point that the military arrived to dispel the crowd, armed with guns, batons, tear gas, and guard dogs. Between 21 and 40 people were injured.

Many of the bloggers detained in 2013 in connection with their posts and articles on social justice and corruption were members of the Catholic Redemptorist order. In addition, Catholics have joined Protestants, Buddhists, Hoa Hao Buddhists, Cao Dai representatives to issue statements on

the 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and Decree 92, as well as the treatment of young prisoners of conscience. Religious leaders and communities in Vietnam have become a voice for the voiceless, speaking out for the rights of society's most vulnerable: those who have been evicted from their homes, marginalised, and imprisoned.

CSW welcomes the Vietnamese Government's efforts to engage with international human rights mechanisms. Furthermore, the confirmation of a visit by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief would be an important step towards demonstrating a genuine commitment to protecting religious freedom, rather than claiming that the problem lies with local level police and officials acting in ignorance of the law. The government has a responsibility to protect all Vietnamese citizens' right to freedom of religion or belief as defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam acceded in 1982. The Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam therefore needs to take urgent action to address its failure to protect this right, and thereby to fulfil its obligations under international law.

#### *Conclusions*

The persecution of Christians in the Middle East has drawn particular attention in recent months, and very understandably so. But while the persecution of Christians in the Middle East is perhaps the most acute form of persecution, it is important to remember that the persecution of Christians is indeed a worldwide phenomenon today. In South-East Asia, Christians in Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, Laos and Vietnam continue to face discrimination, restrictions and persecution, which amount to serious violations of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and which require urgent international attention.

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Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much for your testimony.  
Mr. Galindo.

**STATEMENT OF MR. JORGE LEE GALINDO, DIRECTOR,  
IMPULSO 18**

Mr. GALINDO. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

Latin America is often overlooked in discussions of international religious freedom, yet serious violations of religious freedom regularly take place in the region, most notably in my own country, Mexico, but also in countries like Cuba and Colombia.

In Mexico, the most severe violations of religious freedom take place in regions under the jurisdiction of traditional indigenous law referred to as “uses and customs,” which takes precedence over civil law.

Religious intolerance is most prevalent in the southwest of Mexico. Individuals who wish to practice a religion that is not of the majority are persecuted by those who disagree with their choice to change their religion and beliefs.

These authorities believe that their culture is being damaged and they do not accept that the freedom of the individual can take precedence over their traditions.

Violence is frequently used against the victims and in some cases this has escalated to murder. Unfortunately, the government almost never chooses to prosecute those responsible for these criminal acts and a culture of impunity in regard to violations of religious freedom becomes further entrenched.

There have been attempts in Mexico to address this problem through the law. However, the conflicts continue. One of the reasons from my point of view is that no government up until the present day has taken the matter as seriously as it merits.

The situation is exemplified in the case of the forcibly displaced community of Los Llanos in late April 2009. A traditionalist mob attacked the Protestant Church in Tzotil village during a prayer service, beating the pastor.

One month later, the same church was attacked again and completely destroyed. In September of the same year, local authorities sent a letter to the Governor of Chiapas State, explicitly declaring that they have given the Protestants a deadline to leave the village and if they did not do so they would use force to expel them.

In January 2010, the local authorities informed the Protestants that they were no longer permitted to attend village assemblies and that they were prohibited from cultivating their crops.

Finally, 13 homes belonging to the members of the Protestant Church were completely destroyed, leaving 31 people homeless, and finally forcibly displacing the community.

The group filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission, CNDH, in late January 2010. Its conclusions and recommendations on November 30 of the same year found that the fundamental rights of the Protestants had been violated by the local and state authorities in Chiapas and recommended that they be allowed to return to their homes for protection by the government and that their right to their religious freedom be upheld.

In April 2011, the CNDH visited San Cristobal de las Casas to follow up the progress of the implementation of their recommendations. No option has been taken by the state or Federal authorities.

In June 2013, in the face of government inaction the group of 31 attempted to return to their homes accompanied by supporters and journalists. One mile outside of Los Llanos they were surrounded by traditionalists who proceeded to stone them.

Two pastors were taken hostage and separated from the larger group by the traditionalists. The two were tied up, stripped of their clothing, beaten and had gasoline poured on them.

They were forced to walk one mile with their hands and feet shackled to the village center of Los Llanos where the traditionalists threatened to burn them alive.

The entire group was held up until state officials arrived and freed the group. They negotiated an agreement in which the local authorities agreed not to beat or mistreat the prisoners or to force them to pay a fee for their liberations and the Protestants agreed not to press charges.

Of course, as in so many other cases, no charges were filed. No one was prosecuted and the community remains displaced.

This case may seem extreme but it is unfortunately typical both in terms of the level of intolerance and violence and the state and Federal Government's failure to respond in any meaningful way to protect the rights of the victims and to uphold the rule of law.

If I may, I will now address another serious and growing threat to religious freedom in Mexico today—the rise of narco-criminal groups. Extortion aimed at houses of worship has become normal in the north of our country.

Criminal groups see churches as attractive targets for money laundering. Pastors and priests who refuse to cooperate with criminal activities are threatened and kidnapped, in some cases in the middle of religious service.

In December 2013, two priests in the State of Veracruz were murdered and in the State of Tamaulipas two priests were forcibly disappeared. A fourth was beaten to death and a fifth was attacked with a baseball bat and admitted to the hospital in critical condition.

In addition, many of the criminal groups have adopted a kind of pseudo-religiosity, some other through the cult of Santa Meurte or St. Death. Others, like the Knights Templar in Michoacan, have cultivated their own kind of theology mandating that all places of worship in village they control must place a bust of their leader, El Chayo, inside the temples to be venerated and worshipped.

There are severe penalties for refusing. One of those priests murdered in December is believed to have been targeted because he refused to bow to a narco's group demand to hold a Mass dedicated to St. Death.

I'm aware of at least one Catholic parish in the State of Michoacan which has been effectively shut down because the Knights Templar have vowed to kill any priest the Catholic Church sends there.

This concludes my presentation. I am grateful for the opportunity to address you all, to highlight the serious threats to religious freedom in my country and the larger region in Latin America, and I



sincerely hope this will begin a discussion that will lead to protection of religious freedom for all in Mexico.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Galindo follows:]

February 2014  
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**Written Statement  
by Mr Jorge Lee Galindo, Director, Impulso 18  
to the United States House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International  
Organisations**

**Hearing on the Worldwide Persecution of Christians  
Tuesday, February 11, 2014**

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

Latin America is often overlooked in discussions of international religious freedom, yet serious violations of religious freedom regularly take place in the region, most notably in my own country, Mexico, but also in countries like Cuba and Colombia.

To understand the situation in Mexico, one must first understand the history of the country.

Mexico was conquered by Spain in 1521. The different cultures which comprised what is known today as Mexico were made up of indigenous groups who practiced polytheistic religions. The Spanish, for their part, were Catholic and believed in one God. Aside from the physical conquest, this was also a religious conquest. The conquistadors attempted to turn the indigenous people to Catholicism, however many of the indigenous peoples held onto their beliefs and customs, fusing them with the Catholic religion that was imposed upon them.

This is why, in many communities in Mexico, the people are governed by what is termed 'uses and customs', taking precedence over civil law.

As protestant Christianity began to spread in the twentieth century, many people began to change, rejecting the festivals and pagan celebrations. This left the village authorities disgruntled because the spreading conversions brought with them a reduction in economic profits generated by the festivals.

Religious intolerance is most prevalent in the south-west of Mexico – particularly in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca – but some central states including Michoacán, Hidalgo, Puebla and Guerrero also suffer these kinds of conflicts. Christians in these regions are threatened and persecuted by those who disagree with their choice to change their religion and beliefs. These authorities believe that their culture is being damaged and they do not accept that the freedom of the individual can take precedence over their traditions.

The central conflict often arises around the financial contribution requested by local authorities and traditional religious leaders to be used for the 'patron saint' religious festival. Protestant Christians refuse to pay these fees. At that point the situation deteriorates to the extent that, because of a lack of wisdom on both sides, we see all kinds of violations including, in some cases, the forced expulsion or displacement of these people from their lands. Violence is frequently used against the victims, and in some cases this has escalated to murder. Unfortunately, the

government almost never chooses to prosecute those responsible for these criminal acts and a culture of impunity in regard to violations of religious freedom becomes further entrenched.

There have been attempts in Mexico to address this problem through the law, however, the conflicts continue. One of the reasons, in my point of view, is that no government up until the present day has taken the matter as seriously as it merits.

Although the Mexican Constitution recognises the right of all individuals to freedom of religion and conscience and although the law, in respect to religious affairs, establishes clear parameters – for example that the Mexican State guarantee individual rights and freedoms including the right to maintain or adopt the religious belief of one's own choosing or no belief and against discrimination, coercion or hostility because of one's religious beliefs – the issue has never been a priority in the political agenda of the Mexican government.

The situation is exemplified in the case of the forcibly displaced community of Los Llanos. In late April 2009, a traditionalist mob attacked the Protestant church in the Tzotzil village during a prayer service, beating the pastor. One month later, the same church was attacked again and completely destroyed. In September of the same year, local authorities sent a letter to the governor of Chiapas State explicitly declaring that they had given the Protestants a deadline to leave the village and if they did not do so before the beginning of October, they would use force to expel them. In January 2010 the local authorities informed the Protestants that they were no longer permitted to attend village assemblies, and that they were prohibited from cultivating their crops. In addition, thirteen homes belonging to members of the Protestant church were completely destroyed, leaving 31 people homeless and finally forcibly displacing the community.

The group filed a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in late January 2010. In its conclusions and recommendations, issued on 30 November 2010, the CNDH found that the fundamental rights of the Protestants had been violated by the local and state authorities in Chiapas and recommended that they be allowed to return to their homes, afforded protection by the government, and that their right to religious freedom be upheld.

In April 2011, the CNDH visited San Cristóbal de las Casas to follow up on progress on the implementation of the recommendations. No action had been taken by the state or federal authorities.

In June 2013, in the face of government inaction, the group of 31 attempted to return to their homes on their own. They were accompanied by supporters and journalists. Their attempt to return was met with violence, when a mile outside of Los Llanos, the group found the road blocked. They were surrounded by traditionalists who proceeded to stone them. Two pastors, supporters of the displaced, were reportedly taken hostage and separated from the larger group by the traditionalists. The two men were tied up, stripped of their clothing, beaten, and had gasoline poured on them. They were forced to walk one mile, with their hands and feet shackled, to the village centre of Los Llanos where the traditionalists threatened to burn them alive. The entire group was held until state officials arrived and freed the group. They negotiated an agreement in which the local authorities agreed not to beat or mistreat the prisoners or to force them to pay a fee for their liberation, and the Protestants agreed not to press charges.

Of course, as in so many other cases, no charges were filed, no one was prosecuted and the community remains displaced.

This case may seem extreme – but it is unfortunately typical, both in terms of the level of intolerance and violence and the state and federal governments' failure to respond in any meaningful way to protect the rights of the victims and to uphold the rule of law.

If I may, I will now switch to another serious and growing threat to religious freedom in Mexico today. As I am sure you are aware, over the past six years, the government has attempted to confront narco-trafficking criminal networks with the full force of the law. Extortion aimed at houses of worship has become 'normal' in the north of the country and criminal groups see churches as attractive targets for money laundering. Pastors and priests who refuse to cooperate with criminal activities are threatened and kidnapped – in some cases in the middle of religious services. In 2011, the Catholic Bishop's Conference announced that more than 1000 priests had reported receiving threats. In December of 2013, two priests in the state of Veracruz were murdered and in the state of Tamaulipas, three priests were forcibly disappeared, a fourth was beaten to death and a fifth was attacked with a baseball bat and admitted to the hospital in critical condition. All of these are separate cases.

In addition, many of the criminal groups have adopted a kind of pseudo-religiosity. Some adhere to the cult of Santa Muerte or Saint Death. Others, like the Knights Templar in Michoacán have cultivated their own kind of theology – mandating that all places of worship in villages they control, must place a bust of their leader "El Chayo" inside the temples, to be venerated and worshipped. There are severe penalties for refusing. One of those priests murdered in December is believed to have been targeted because he refused to bow to a narco-group's demand to hold a mass dedicated to Saint Death in the Catholic Church. I am aware of at least one Catholic parish in the state of Michoacán which has been effectively shut down because the Knights Templar have vowed to kill any priest the Catholic church sends there.

Religious freedom violations in Mexico, while severe, are not completely unique in Latin America. Recently, we have seen the adoption of 'anti-sect' laws, targeting religious minorities, on the regional level in Argentina. Colombia has a very similar situation to Mexico in terms of the impact of illegal criminal groups on religious freedom. Similarly, Colombia also has a parallel legal system for indigenous communities which allows for the promotion of collective cultural rights over individual rights, and this has led to severe violations of religious freedom. It is worth pointing out, that in contrast to Mexico, where the National Commission for Human Rights has found traditional authorities to be in violation of the Mexican Constitution in attempting to enforce religious conformity, the Colombian Constitutional Court found in a split decision in 2007 that the religious rights of individual members of Colombia's indigenous communities are trumped by the 'right' of the traditional authorities to protect their traditions.

Religious freedom violations are also widespread in Cuba. In recent years, religious freedom groups like Christian Solidarity Worldwide have documented a steady rise in these violations – from 40 documented religious freedom violations in 2011, to 120 in 2012 and 185 in 2013. Unlike Mexico and Colombia, these violations are, in their entirety, perpetrated by the government which seeks onerous control over religious groups. Most of the more recent violations have centered

around the resistance by religious leaders to government's attempts to dictate who may or may not attend church or participate in the activities of a religious group. The Cuban government is very aware of the positive role religious organisations have played in toppling repressive regimes over the course of history and is doing all it can to prevent a similar scenario in Cuba.

This concludes my presentation. I am grateful for the opportunity to address you all, to highlight the serious threats to religious freedom in my country and in the larger region, and I sincerely hope this will begin a discussion that will lead to the protection of religious freedom for all in Mexico.

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Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Galindo.  
Dr. Gondwe.

**STATEMENT OF KHATAZA GONDWE, PH.D., TEAM LEADER FOR  
AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST, CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY  
WORLDWIDE**

Ms. GONDWE. Thank you, Chairman Smith, and distinguished members for the opportunity to speak at this very important hearing.

We believe in miracles so miraculously I will give a run down on Africa in 5 minutes.

Broadly speaking, the majority of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa experience hostility, harassment, repression, restrictions or violence from two main sources—firstly, from militant Islamist ideology and resulting insurgencies that have taken advantage of pre-existing local issues, weak application of the rule of law or power vacuums occasioned by the chronic failure of state structures.

The Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram and its offshoot, Ansaru, perhaps provide the clearest examples of this trend today. From its inception in 2002, Boko Haram made it clear that Christians and symbols of the Federal system were its primary targets.

It was also made clear that the group's aim was to be accomplished by violence. During Boko Haram's abortive uprisings during 2003 and 2004, violence was directed at Christian and Federal targets in Yobe State.

Following the destruction of Maiduguri headquarters and extrajudicial killing of its leader in 2009, the group went underground, reemerging to launch attacks that indicated a degree of specialist training. Purported spokesmen for the group have since stated that it is variously affiliated with other Islamist groups in Africa such as al-Shabaab and AQIM.

As the increasingly religious dimension to Boko Haram's actions became clearer and the group itself articulated its aims of religious cleansing or, in the case of Ansaru, the creation of a caliphate, this became evident to all.

However, realization of the extent of this campaign of cleansing is currently being to some extent obscured by the oft repeated phrase that more Muslims and Christians have died at Boko Haram's hands.

This ignores a dramatic rise in religious cleansing, particularly in Borno State last year. During 2013, over 46 villages were destroyed.

Around 14,000 Christian villages were displaced in the Gwoza area of Borno State close to the Cameroonian border and an unknown number of Christians were murdered with women and girls kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery.

Hostages taken by Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria are often held in neighboring Cameroon. This cross border element underlines the transnational nature of Boko Haram/Ansaru and their ties with jihadi movements on the continent.

One of the leaders of Ansaru is said to be a Cameroonian national. Nigerians potentially from Boko Haram or Ansaru were reportedly sighted in northern Mali where al-Qaeda affiliated Islamist groups sought to take advantage of a political vacuum and

preexisting tensions between the political center and marginalized or under-developed periphery.

Even more recently, according to a senior U.N. staff member, Boko Haram has already created some kind of presence in the Central African Republic where similar chronic and preexisting power vacuums have been exploited to transform what was essentially a struggle for resources and political power into an increasingly religious one, raising very real fears of the partitioning of the country along religious lines.

Pre-existing issues facilitated the rise of religious extremism in northern Nigeria also. Temporarily obscured by the current terrorism is the long-term comprehensive and systematic marginalization of non-Muslim communities, which has been facilitated tacitly or deliberately by successive state governments and non-state actors over decades, and this has always been undergirded by violence.

There are areas where religion is the determining factor in all sectors. Access to education, employment, opportunities, graveyards, land for houses of worship, social amenities, and even vaccination initiatives are predicated on belonging to the right or appropriate religion, and the religion-ruling community has become the de facto state religion.

This underlying and systematic modulization which predates the ending of military rule will need to be addressed whenever the Boko Haram crisis comes to an end in order to ensure such groups no longer enjoy conditions in which they can flourish.

These violations have occurred despite the fact that Nigeria's constitution contains provisions promoting freedom of religion and forbidding discrimination against any citizen.

Events in Tanzania appear to be mirroring those in Nigeria. Societal discrimination based on religious affiliation is increasingly reported from the predominantly Muslim areas and in the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago which is 98 percent Muslim.

Uamsho or Awakening, a separatist religious movement founded in 2001, has benefited from local dissatisfaction with the terms of political union and is alleged to be behind an increase in violence targeting local Christians and particularly pastors, and an extreme interpretation of the religion of the majority community has taken precedence over civil law and constitutional provisions for religious freedom.

On the Tanzanian mainland where Christians and followers of traditional beliefs are thought to constitute a majority, there are also reports of increasing discrimination, of a rise in religion-related violence and of a lack of justice in the aftermath of such violence.

There is, as well, the looming threat of international terrorism here. The arrests in early October 2013 of 11 al-Shabaab suspects allegedly undergoing military training in Tanzania's Mtwara region provided a fresh indication of the group's determination to advance its influence and aims by exploiting local grievances.

According to a veteran journalist, and I quote him here, "Al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda are now using Zanzibar as a stepping stone. Their target is the whole country of Tanzania and the African con-

tinient at large. This is the biggest threat ever. Training on our land proves that they are here.”

Turning to the second trend, Christians in sub-Saharan Africa experience hostility, harassment, repression and even violence due to authoritarian regimes where political considerations or the governing religious ideology mitigates against all pluralism.

As a former Marxist Liberation Movement, the Eritrean regime has a long-held ideological antipathy toward religion of any sort, appearing to have deemed religious adherence as a competing and dangerous allegiance and a source of national division.

2002 saw the harsh enactment of a law—a 1995 law, with the Ministry of Information issuing a decree obliging all religious groups to register or cease all activities.

The decree also obliged all groups except the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and Lutheran Church and followers of Sunni Islam to officially register and function under the surveillance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

None of those who have met these requirements have received registration to date. The 2002 decree marked the acceleration of open repression with the initiation of a campaign of arrests particularly targeting Evangelical or Charismatic Pentecostal Christians, and this has continued until today with varying degrees of intensity.

The repression was accompanied by inflammatory statements from officials with religious believers equated with Islamist extremists and vilified as non-indigenous, unpatriotic agents of foreign interests who were seeking to undermine public morality and divide and destabilize the country.

Between 2,000 and 3,000 Christians are thought to be detained indefinitely in Eritrea without charge or trial and pending a denial of faith. Torture is rife in these detention centers with prisoners being held in such inhumane conditions as metal shipping containers, underground cells, and in the open air in desert areas surrounded by barbed wire or thorns.

Authorized denominations also suffer repression, most significantly in a series of government-initiated punitive measures from 2005 to 2006. The legitimate patriarch of the Orthodox Church who had resisted government interference in church affairs was forced from office and placed under house arrest where he remains to date.

His supporters were jailed or conscripted, and we’re talking about priests. Similar pressures regarding conscription were also exerted on the Roman Catholic Church. In Sudan, the religion of the majority as interpreted by the current regime is treated preferentially.

Following the secession of South Sudan, religious freedom violations increased. The state made assessments of churches and then claimed and demolished places of worship after April 2012.

In addition, northern-based church leaders began to receive threats and at least two instances experienced direct attacks. Between December 2012 and April 2013, we noted an increase in harassments, arrests, and detentions of Christians.

Foreign Christians were deported at short notice and their property confiscated by the state. I'd just like to conclude with two very broad recommendations.

The first one is with regard to the Islamist uprisings and insurgencies. To echo what was said by the first speaker, early warning signs must be heeded and when intolerance manifests itself actions should be taken decisively.

In the case of Nigeria, academic debate delayed action unnecessarily. In the case of the Central African Republic, slowness in sending adequate troops to enforce security is going to allow problems to fester and get even worse than they are.

Once a decision has been taken to act, action must be decisive. And secondly, in the case of Eritrea, voices in the U.S. have been speaking of normalizing relations with this country.

We're all for normalization. However, integrated into any discussions should be, as a primary benchmark, access to long-term political and religious detainees for the Red Cross and for the families of these detainees and also for any other relevant body.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Gondwe follows:]



**House Committee on Foreign Affairs;**  
**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International**  
**Organizations;**  
 Subcommittee Hearing: *The Worldwide Persecution of Christians;*

**11 February 2014**

Witness Statement: Khataza Gondwe, Ph.D.  
 Team Leader for Africa and the Middle East  
 Christian Solidarity Worldwide

The majority of Christians in sub Saharan Africa experience hostility, harassment, repression, restrictions or violence on account of their faith suffer as a result of two main sources. Firstly, there is a seeming proliferation of militant Islamist insurgencies that have taken advantage of pre-existing local issues, weak application of the rule of law, or vacuums caused by the chronic failure of state structures to establish strongholds. They temporarily appear to offer a dysfunctional form of stability, a religiosity underlined by violence to those in occupied areas who adhere to the vagaries of their restrictive interpretation of faith. Secondly, Christians suffer in countries led by authoritarian regimes whose governing political ideology or religious dogma includes an underlying hostility to pluralism in any form. An atmosphere where the slightest divergence from the official orthodoxy is interpreted as a challenge, and encourages the abuse of human rights in general and freedom of religion in particular.

The Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram and its off shoot Ansaru, provide the clearest example of the former trend. From its inception in 2002 when it was known locally as "the Taliban" or Yusufiyya after leader, Mohammed Yusuf, the group made it clear that Christians and symbols of the federal system were its primary targets. It was also made clear that the group's aims were to be accomplished by violence. During 2003 and 2004, Boko Haram's abortive uprisings directed violence at Christian and federal targets in Yobe State.<sup>1</sup>

By the time the group made headlines again, it had a headquarters in the Borno State capital, Maiduguri and mosques in several northern states. Discourse on the group's targeted attacks on Christians was lost in the controversy surrounding the extra-judicial execution of the group's leader following its 2009 uprising. While Boko Haram and its apologists insisted the 2009 violence was aimed at the authorities and was prompted by the persistent and severe abuse of the rights of its members, the head of the Nigerian Brethren Church retorted, "In the middle of everything the attacks were geared to bombing Christian places of worship and individual church members were attacked at their places of business and residence." As the group retreated to its stronghold in the Railway Suburb of the Borno State capital, Maiduguri, it murdered three pastors, torched over twenty churches, destroyed numerous Christian-owned businesses and abducted over 100 Christian men women and children for use as human shields. Surviving hostages informed CSW that following

<sup>1</sup> In late 2003, the group began an armed uprising in Yobe State by issuing pamphlets declaring it would make Nigeria an Islamic State under Mohammed Yusuf's interpretation of the Sharia. Its members invaded Kanamma and Geidam Local Government Areas (LGAs), destroying Kanamma police station, killing a policeman and carting off weapons while chanting *Allah u Akbar*. Next, they marched to the town centre, took over a primary school, renamed it "Afghanistan", hoisted their flag and declared a *jihad* against Christians and the Federal Government. They caused havoc in several towns and villages, including the Yobe state capital, causing the displacement of around 10,000 people. Federal forces eventually overcame them, arresting several members, four of whom were killed while allegedly trying to escape prison. In September 2004, the group rose up again, murdering over a dozen Christians during raids on Bama and Gwoza in Borno State. Around 60 members also attacked police stations in the area, killing four policemen. As a joint force confronted them, the group forced seven locals to act as their porters as they retreated over the Madara hills into Cameroon. Two were murdered, while one managed to escape. In an interview with CSW, he recounted the efforts that were made to elicit his conversion.

intensive indoctrination sessions; male hostages were given the choice of conversion or beheading, while women were to be subjected to what was termed "hard labour" upon refusing. Some male converts died anyway, as Mohammed Yusuf, the group's leader arbitrarily decided who lived or died.

Following the destruction of the Maiduguri headquarters and extra-judicial killing of its leader, the group went underground, re-emerging to launch uncharacteristically sophisticated attacks that indicated a degree of specialist training. Purported spokesmen for the group have since claimed that the group is variously affiliated with other Islamist groups Somalia's al Shabaab or AQIM. As the increasingly religious dimension to Boko Haram's actions became clearer, and the group itself articulated its aim of religious cleansing, or in the case of Ansaru, the creation of a caliphate, academic debates regarding the group's origins and motivations became superfluous, however the time taken to engage in these debates had delayed an effective international response to this transnational threat.

Today, recognition of the extent of Boko Haram's campaign of religious cleansing is once again being obscured, this time by the oft repeated phrase that "more Muslims than Christians" have died in Boko Haram attacks. Given the religious demography of the areas most affected, and the fact that bombs do not discriminate between victims, this may indeed be the case. However, it ignores the dramatic rise in religious cleansing, particularly in Borno State. During 2013, 46 villages were destroyed, around 14,000 Christians displaced in the Gwoza area of Borno State, close to the Cameroon border.<sup>2</sup> An unknown number of Christians were murdered, with women and girls captured and forced into sexual slavery.<sup>3</sup> On 26 January at least 138 people are now known to have died in attacks by members of the Islamist terror group Boko Haram on a Catholic Church and village in Adamawa and a farmer's market Borno States in north east Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> However the Christian death toll is likely to be far higher than this. According to a Muslim eyewitness interviewed by local media, prior to attacking the church in Adamawa, the gunmen mounted a roadblock in a nearby area and killed many Christians. This tactic of blocking highways and screening, murdering or kidnapping of travellers is being employed increasingly by the insurgents.

As violence continued unabated throughout January, causing further large scale population displacement, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that approximately 5500 Nigerians fled into Cameroon and Niger within a ten day period.<sup>5</sup> This is tragically ironic, as Boko Haram militants also cross into Cameroon when placed under pressure by the Nigerian armed forces and have done so since 2003. Moreover, hostages kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria are often held in Cameroon.

The cross border element underlines the transnational aspect of Boko Haram and Ansaru, and their stated ties with jihadi movements on the continent. For example prior to its reemergence with fresh tactics in 2010, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb had offered its assistance to Nigerian Muslims. One of the leaders of Ansaru is said to be a Cameroonian national. Nigerians potentially from Boko Haram/Ansaru were reportedly sighted in northern Mali, where al-Qaida-affiliated Islamist groups stepped in to take advantage of a political vacuum and pre-existing tensions between the political centre and marginalised or under-developed periphery. Even more recently, according to Edmond Mulet, assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping operations at the United Nations in New York, Boko Haram already has some kind of presence in the Central African Republic (CAR), similar chronic and pre-existing power vacuums have been exploited to transform what was essentially a

<sup>2</sup> <http://saharareporters.com/news-page/orno-indigenous-christians-accuses-governor-shettima-negligence-says-boko-haram-sacked-46>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Peace/2013/11/17/Boko-Haram-Kidnaps-Christian-Women-Forces-Them-to-be-Slave-Brides>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.christianpost.com/news/islamic-extremists-in-nigeria-attack-christians-at-sunday-worship-every-week-in-january-113147/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/52e256fa9.html>

struggle for resources and political power into an increasingly religious one, raising very real fears of the partitioning of the country along religious lines.

Pre-existing issues facilitated the rise of extremism in northern Nigeria also. A prevailing international human rights narrative focusing primarily on the outworking in Plateau State only of the constitutional issue of indigeneship, and more recently on a heavy-handed governmental response to Boko Haram, has failed to identify and address chronic underlying realities that have contributed towards creating an environment in which violent groups that deny freedom of religion to indigenous and non-indigenous Christians, and indeed, to Muslims who do not share their extreme vision of Islam, regularly emerge. Temporarily obscured by the current terrorism is the long-term, comprehensive and systematic marginalization of non-Muslim communities in terms of their – civil, political, economic, social, cultural and developmental rights – which has been facilitated tacitly or deliberately by successive state and non-state actors over decades, and has often been undergirded by violence. There are areas in the north and centre States where religion is the determining factor in all sectors, access to education, employment opportunities, graveyards, land for houses of worship, social amenities and even vaccination initiatives are predicated on belonging to the “appropriate” religion, and where the religion of the ruling community has become the de facto state religion to such an extent that an indigenous Christian in Kebbi State protesting at the unconstitutionality of being brought forcibly before a shari’a court can be informed by the judge that “his constitution” may work elsewhere but does not work in Kebbi . This underlying and systemic marginalisation, which predates the ending of military rule, will need to be tackled whenever the Boko Haram crisis has ends in order to ensure such groups no longer enjoy conditions in which to flourish. Earlier examples of this religion-based inequality, discrimination and violence include the rise of the similarly violent Islamist groups, Maitatsine and Zakzaky’s Izala in the 1980s; the beheading of an Igbo trader following unproven accusations of defamation in Kano the 1990s, the appalling lynching by students and towns folk in Gombe of a female Christian teacher following similar accusations in 2007, collective punishment of non-Muslim communities for unproven religious infractions from the 1990’s onwards, and more recently, the lynching of an Assemblies of God (AoG) pastor in Katsina state and the burning of his and other Christian properties following the unfounded accusation that he had kidnapped and mutilated a six year old girl. The persistent lack of justice in these and many other instances fostered decades of impunity, emboldening perpetrators and eventually engendering retributive violence.

Violations occur despite the fact that Nigeria’s constitution contains provisions promoting freedom of religion and forbidding discrimination against any citizen. In many cases, authorities at individual state level appear to be complicit in these violations, either deliberately or through negligence. For example, despite the clear dangers posed to his administration by the Boko Haram insurgency, which is suspected to have a headquarters in Gwoza’s Madara Hills, the current Governor of Borno State is said to have taken inadequate measures to prevent the actions of the group and his administration has allegedly failed to adequately address the ongoing security crisis in the area. After his country home and church in Gwoza were destroyed on 8 January 2014 by insurgents, Peter Biye, the only Christian member of the Federal House of Representatives from Borno State, complained of the “non-chalant attitude” of security operatives with regard to the enforcement of security. “What is happening in my constituency is very unfortunate, people are being killed by terrorists on daily basis, churches are being burnt, and if people like my honourable self, who is also a member House Committee on Army will alert military authorities that based on intelligent report my village will be under attack by terrorists, and nothing was done to secure the area, then it is unfortunate, because an ordinary citizen of this country, especially those from volatile areas are no longer safe or protected by our security outfit.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/lawmaker-alleges-plot-to-wipe-out-christians-in-borno/168653/>

Events in Tanzania appear to provide early warning signs of freedom of religion violations similar to those that occur in Nigeria. Societal discrimination based on religious affiliation is increasingly being reported from predominantly Muslim areas and the semi-autonomous Zanzibar archipelago, which is 98% Muslim. *Uamsho* ('Awakening'), a separatist religious movement founded in 2001, has benefitted from local dissatisfaction with the terms of political union and campaigned for Zanzibari independence during the last elections. The group and its supporters are alleged to be behind an increase in violence targeting local Christians, and an extreme interpretation of the religion of the majority community takes precedence over civil law and constitutional religious freedom provisions.

The Christian community, which constitutes around 2% of Zanzibar's population, experiences repression, discrimination and violence. Christians struggle to access employment in government sectors; anyone with a non-Muslim name applying for work in the army or other government services are regularly removed from the list; non-Muslim female students attending public schools are obliged to wear head scarves; Islam and Arabic are compulsory subjects in the curriculum; refuse is regularly deposited in the Christian graveyard on Unguja Island. During Ramadan 2013, Christians were obliged to fast following an official announcement that anyone found eating outside the prescribed hours would be jailed until Ramadan 2014. Christian leaders find it difficult to rent accommodation, and CSW has received credible evidence of Christians experiencing difficulties in receiving appropriate medical treatment, and in two cases, of receiving treatment that further endangered their health, necessitating evacuation to medical facilities on the Mainland.

In an arbitrary and extra-legal requirement, erecting a church building is dependent on permission from the local community, which is rarely if ever given. Many churches, including several that have obtained all necessary permissions, are embroiled in endless court cases, with hearings repeatedly postponed in a seeming attempt to deplete meagre resources through the indefinite retaining of lawyers from the mainland, since local practitioners either refuse or fear to take on such cases. Stones are often hurled at churches during services and faeces left in the grounds or buildings. In addition, churches regularly suffer arson attacks or are demolished in mob action. At least 20 have been looted, then burnt or demolished, allegedly by supporters *Uamsho*, who often attack during services, assaulting all present. Perpetrators are never brought to trial even when identified or caught in the act, with police investigations generally being extended indefinitely.

Of particular concern are regular threats issued via text message or leaflets naming Christian leaders targeted for assassination. In August Father Anselm Mwang'amba, an elderly Catholic priest, was attacked as he left an internet café in the historic Stone Town area of the Zanzibar capital, and was left with severe burns to the face, neck, chest and hands. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) was informed that Father Mwang'amba received a call from an unknown number while inside the café and was doused with acid as he exited to answer his telephone.

The attack on Father Mwang'amba was the latest in a series of increasingly frequent assaults on churches and church leaders. In 2012, Catholic priest Father Ambrose Mkenda was shot and injured by unknown assailants. In February 2013, a Protestant pastor Mathew Kachira and Catholic priest, Father Evarist Mushi, were shot dead on 10 and 21 February respectively. No one has been apprehended for these murders, neither have local authorities taken measures to ensure the safety of key leaders, several of whom received threatening text messages from a group calling itself "Muslim Renewal", which claimed responsibility for the murders, added that the killers were "trained in Somalia", and promised "disaster" during the 2013 Easter season. During a CSW visit in August 2013, several leaders reported continuing threats naming specific church leaders targeted for assassination. The threats came via text messages in leaflets left around the town; they were received verbally from strangers while leaders were out in public, and two occasions, a leader narrowly escaped an ambush. So far the Zanzibar authorities have failed to offer protection to pastors who have been threatened in this manner.

Weeks earlier, two English teenagers who worked at the St Monica nursery school, linked to the Anglican Church were severely injured when two men threw acid on them, and were flown to Britain for treatment. The glare of international publicity that followed this attack appeared to galvanise the Tanzanian authorities into action and also shed light on the activities of Uamsho, which in the preceding weeks, had distributed anti-Christian leaflets telling Muslims to prepare for "a call" to action. One of Uamsho's key supporters is the Muslim cleric Sheikh Ponda Issa Ponda, who had spent two weeks in Zanzibar issuing inciting sectarian statements with no official intervention, who was eventually arrested in Dar es Salaam after a brief period on the run.

On the Tanzanian mainland, where Christians and followers of traditional beliefs are thought to constitute a majority, there are also reports of increasing discrimination, of a rise in religion-related violence and of a lack of justice in the aftermath of such violence.

In an emblematic case, the family of a Pentecostal pastor beheaded in March 2013, when violence erupted in Buseresere Town in the Geita Region, is still awaiting justice. Pastor Mathayo Kachili of the Tanzania Assemblies of God (TAG) Church was murdered as he sought to intervene to end violence that had erupted after the local Muslim community objected to the opening of a Christian-owned butchery. The weak, or rather uneven, enforcement of the rule of law was also evident in this case. Instead of arresting the culprits, Christians were told to stop slaughtering animals.

There is also a looming threat of international terrorism in the country. In fact the Tanzanian president described the bombing of the inaugural service of Arusha's new Roman Catholic Cathedral in May 2013 as "an act of terrorism", and there is evidence that the Somali Islamist group al Shabaab has been actively seeking to create loosely affiliated networks in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, using its connections and social media. Moreover, investigations by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Eritrea and Somalia uncovered the fact that al Shabaab has developed extensive funding, recruiting and training networks in Kenya, centring on the Muslim Youth Center (MYC), now known as al Hijra, and the Pumwani Riyadhha Mosque Committee, although the latter denies this publicly. Amongst other things al Hijra was reported to be strengthening its links with the Tanzania-based Ansar Muslim Youth Centre, and with al Shabaab affiliates in Rwanda and Burundi.<sup>7</sup>

The arrest in early October of 11 al Shabaab suspects who were undergoing military training in Tanzania's Mtwara region provided a fresh indication of the group's determination to advance its influence and aims by exploiting local grievances. According to veteran journalist and owner of G&S Media Consultants Gideon Shoo, as well as targeting Zanzibar, al-Shabaab is specifically focusing on Mtwara, one of the least developed areas in the country where in May, a protest by against the construction of a gas pipeline to Dar es Salaam turned violent.<sup>8</sup> "It is no secret that al-Shabaab is planning to use the discontent in those two areas as an entry point into Tanzania."<sup>9</sup> The 11 suspects, who were aged between 18 and 39, were found with found firearms, machetes and 25 DVDs. One called *Zinduka Zanzibar* (Wake up Zanzibar) provides training on how to kill effectively and train militia. The other DVDs were reported to be al Shabaab training manuals. "Al Shabaab and al Qaeda are now using Zanzibar as a stepping stone. Their target is the whole country of Tanzania and the African continent at large. This is the biggest threat ever. Training on our land proves they are here."<sup>10</sup> In mid October police announced they had arrested two more suspects in connection with the Mtwara incident.<sup>11</sup>

Turning to the second reason why Christians in sub Saharan Africa experience hostility, harassment, repression, restrictions or violence on account of their faith, a nation's political considerations or governing ideology can often engender violations of religious freedom. This is the case in Eritrea, a

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.somaliareport.com/downloads/UN\\_REPORT\\_2012.pdf](http://www.somaliareport.com/downloads/UN_REPORT_2012.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [http://sabahonline.com/en\\_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/05/23/feature-02](http://sabahonline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/05/23/feature-02)

<sup>9</sup> [http://sabahonline.com/en\\_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/10/17/feature-01](http://sabahonline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/10/17/feature-01)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201310210337.html>

state governed by a former Maoist liberation movement often referred to as an equal opportunities oppressor where meetings of more than seven people requires official permission, and where the country's network of prisons, the main growth industry in the country, as a refugee wryly observed.

The Eritrean ruling party successfully harnessed all sectors of society to attain freedom, at times using brutality to enforce the tight discipline necessary for success against overwhelming odds. Unfortunately, this requirement for total and unquestioning allegiance underlined by force was carried into the independence era, creating an obsessive determination for excessive control of the population, and assisted in transforming the nation into one where, in the words of one victim, there are more new prisons than schools and hospitals.

The Eritrean regime has a long-held ideological antipathy towards religion of any sort, appearing to have deemed religious adherence as a competing and dangerous allegiance and a source of national division. This attitude was evident during the 1970s, when the ruling party drew up policy documents vowing, inter alia, to punish anyone it felt was using religion to sow discord and undermine the progress of the Eritrean people both during and after the armed conflict. The document included an undertaking to vigorously oppose all 'imperialist-created new counter-revolutionary faiths', such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, and to punish anyone attempting to use religion to sow discord or undermine the progress of the Eritrean people during or after the conclusion of the armed conflict. Consequently, the liberation movement discouraged religious activities in areas under its control, arresting recruits that were involved in any such activity.

The 1990s marked the beginnings of a government campaign against elements of Christianity, with the 1995 "Proclamation to legally standardize and articulate religious institutions and activities", which amongst other things limited the activities of religious institutions in development work, and obliged them to register all assets, including bank accounts with the Department of Religious Affairs. While some church leaders held meetings with the authorities to debate this, others felt the move may not be right, but that the government should be allowed to learn from its mistakes.

In 2001 open persecution slowly emerged, as the government began to close facilities owned by Charismatic and Evangelical churches. May 2002 saw the harsh enactment of the 1995 law, when the Minister of Information issued a decree obliging all religious groups must register or cease all religious activities. The decree also obliged all religious groups, except Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran Christians and followers of Sunni Islam, to officially register and to function under the surveillance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, registration requirements were discriminatory, in that they did not apply to sanctioned groups, and were also excessively stringent and intrusive, including demands for intimate details of the lives of church members that made many churches hesitant to comply. It soon became clear, however, that groups without a significant historical presence in the country would never be licensed to operate. Years after having complied fully and satisfied all requirements, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Bahai movement still await official accreditation.

The 2002 decree marked the acceleration of open repression, with the initiation of a campaign of arrests particularly targeting evangelical and Charismatic or Pentecostal Christianity that has continued since that year with varying waves of intensity. The repression was also accompanied by inflammatory statements from officials, with adherents equated with Islamist extremists and vilified as non-indigenous, unpatriotic agents of foreign interests who were seeking to undermine public morality and divide and destabilise the country.

Between 2000 to 3,000 Christians are detained indefinitely at any given time in Eritrea. As with the tens of thousands of other prisoners of conscience, none have been formally charged or brought to trial and all are held pending a denial of faith. Torture is rife in Eritrea's detention centres, with prisoners being held in such inhumane conditions as metal shipping containers, underground cells, and in the open air in desert areas surrounded by barbed wire or thorns. Reports persist of

prisoners dying following torture, privations or after being denied life-saving medication or treatment after falling ill because they refused to deny their faith in order to access it. CSW has also received credible reports of female Christian prisoners being regularly beaten on the soles of their feet and their wombs, ostensibly to render them barren. In her autobiography, Helen Berhane, a well known singer and evangelist from one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Eritrea, vividly described the condition of a lady beaten so severely that her uterus prolapsed and hung from her body. Ms. Berhane herself was imprisoned in Mai Serwa Military Camp for 32 months where she endured numerous beatings, the last of which was of such ferocity that it caused severe nerve damage, impairing her mobility.<sup>12</sup> This extensive forceful, systematic attempt by Eritrea to eliminate non-sanctioned denominations, the severe mistreatment of detainees in deliberately life threatening conditions, the extensive use of torture and the deaths that are attributable to deliberate privations amounting to extra-judicial killings, may constitute a crime against humanity in the international legal sense.

Authorised denominations also suffer repression. Most significantly, in a series of government-initiated punitive measures from 2005-6, the legitimate patriarch of the Orthodox Church Abune Antonios, who had resisted government interference in church affairs, was forced from office, replaced by a government-approved priest in violation of canon law, and placed under house arrest, where he remains to date. The pontiff is an insulin-dependent diabetic and according to recent reports is in declining health. The government is now in effective control of the Church's finances, and Priests seen as sympathizing with the Patriarch have been detained, harassed, forced out of the church or conscripted following a 2005 revocation of clerical exemption. A 2011 report indicated that the Patriarch's removal, around 1700 Orthodox clergy of all ranks have been forced out of the church; 1350 have been forcibly conscripted, 23 are known to be detained, fourteen have been banned from entering the compound of any church, seven are not allowed to leave the confines of the capital city Asmara and a significant number have fled the country, including 49 lay workers, 32 monks and five nuns.<sup>10</sup> In addition the government has confiscated the Church's historical artefacts, and around 1500 churches are reportedly slated for closure in the near future.<sup>13</sup>

Similar pressure regarding conscription that was exerted on the Roman Catholic Church in late 2005 necessitated an intervention by Pope Benedict, who requested that "the right to exemption from military service be respected," by the government. In June 2006, the country's three Catholic bishops are said to have informed the government that the bearing of arms was "not in accordance" with the role of clergy, and in March 2007, it was reported that the Church had not only refused to supply the government with a comprehensive list of clergy and their whereabouts, but was also resisting a request to either reduce their number or send them to the military. Five months later the government issued an ultimatum, ordering that control of Catholic-run schools, clinics, orphanages and women's vocational training centres be handed over to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour. In November 2007, 13 foreign Catholic charity workers were effectively expelled. Today, although Eritrean Catholic clergy have been allowed to visit Rome in limited numbers for religious purposes and training, according to a recent report by Catholic NGO Aid to the Church in Need, the conscription of seminarians and other church workers is occasioning a personnel shortage.

Clearly in its vigorous quest for total allegiance and obedience, the government has come to view religious groupings as rivals. The government's harassment of authorised groups serves as a clear indication that in reality, it seeks to either curtail or control every major social activity in the country, comprehensively violating the right to freedom of religion or belief by seeking to dictate both the private beliefs or forum internum and the external expression of beliefs or forum externum of its citizens.

<sup>12</sup> *Song of the Nightingale: One Woman's True Story of Faith and Persecution in Eritrea*, 2009

<sup>13</sup> 'The EPLF and Religious Policy in Eritrea', 17 December 2004, **Release Eritrea**; 'Current Situation of Orthodox Churches', 17 December 2004, **Release Eritrea**; 'Full Blown Assault on Religion in Eritrea', Fr. Halleyesus Oqbai, 23 February 2003, **Asmarino**

A consequence of this wider state repression is the fuelling of a mass exodus, with Eritreans constituting the largest population of refugees per capita in the world. Despite recognition of their plight by the UNHCR, Eritreans continue to experience difficulties in countries where they have fled. As one refugee in hiding in Libya where refugees and migrants face racial and religious mistreatment, said: "We flee lawlessness to find there is no law anywhere". State repression has also fuelled human trafficking through the Sinai, where to date thousands from the Horn of Africa are estimated to have been abducted, tortured, killed, or have had organs forcibly harvested by extortion rackets. Many are, or were, recognized refugees seeking an environment where they could freely practice their beliefs.

Sudan is another country where religious freedom violations are part of a wider human rights crisis. Here, the religion of the majority – as interpreted by the current regime – is treated preferentially. Following the secession of South Sudan, such violations increased in the north, where the state made assessments of church buildings at the beginning of the year, then claimed and demolished places of worship after April 2012, using the justification that churches were derelict after the forced expulsion of South Sudanese nationals. In addition, northern-based church leaders began to receive threats and in at least two instances experienced direct attacks. Between December 2012 and April 2013 the government embarked on a systematic campaign of repression against Christians. CSW noted an increase in harassments, arrests, and detentions of Christians during this period. Foreign Christians were deported at short notice and their property confiscated by the state. Of particular concern is the policy of deporting Sudanese Christians of African ethnicity to South Sudan, on the disputable premise that Sudan has no indigenous Christian community.

#### ***Conclusions and Recommendations***

Each of the countries mentioned in this report illustrate one of the identified trends of persecution, albeit with differing degrees of severity and at different points of evolution. However, there are several recommendations applicable across the board, while others are applicable to specific nations. On a general note, countries that have failed to enforce constitutional and legal provisions providing for freedom of religion and belief and to ensure rule of law must be persuaded to do so in order to combat impunity that surrounds religion-related discrimination and violence.

- Nigeria is a strategic African nation and must be given every logistical assistance to combat what is ultimately a threat to the peace and security of the region. The increasing sophistication on insurgency weaponry must be matched by the Nigerian forces with the assistance of the international community. Africa and general and Nigeria in particular, are fast becoming the new frontline of the war on terror
- Nigeria's neighbours must be persuaded to make greater measures to identify and neutralise in terrorist hideouts in their land. It could be argued that this may make these states a greater target also. However, sooner or later, these insurgencies will pose a direct danger to their unwitting hosts, given their ideology. Any unstated truce is merely a temporary one.
- With regard to the CAR, sufficient international contingent must be sent to the country to disarm all armed groups as soon as possible and to enforce peace and security for suffering civilians in the towns and countryside. Justice and reconciliation efforts must also be prioritised.
- With regard to Tanzania, the authorities must be encouraged move decisively to tackle rising extremism and prevent the entrenchment of impunity from taking hold in any part of the country. It is vital that all incidences of religious violence and incitement to violence are swiftly and thoroughly addressed and planners and perpetrators are prosecuted regardless of religion or social standing.
- With regard to Eritrea, the government must be encouraged to implement its commendable constitutions, which include provisions for freedom of religion or belief, release all prisoners



of conscience, and to end the practice of jailing members of faith communities indefinitely without charge or trial.

- Finally, the government of Sudan must be encouraged to draft an inclusive constitution that takes into account the rich religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the nation.
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Mr. SMITH. Dr. Gondwe, thank you very much. You did pack a lot in, as did all of you. As Mr. Allen said, there is a global war on Christians and your testimonies and that of our previous witnesses have made that absolutely clear, and I do hope members of the press and especially policy makers in free countries realize that this is surging in a way that is unprecedented, I think, in human history.

Your testimonies with great detail and accuracy have laid out what is happening and I'm so deeply appreciative. Would you like me to yield to you?

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your courtesy.

I've got to run to another meeting but I wanted just to say thank you to each one of you for not only your testimony but the detailed nature of that testimony and assure you that what we will do—we have a staff member that is committed to this particular issue.

As the chairman knows, it is—it's an honor to serve with him and fight for this particular cause and we'll be going through your written testimony in detail and perhaps we'll be following up with you with some questions and some plans of action.

But I wanted to thank you for the sacrifice of time and certainly the well thought-out testimony, and I'll yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you so very much.

I know, Mr. Allen, you do have to leave and I just want to ask you one question, although I have many. You make a very disturbing point about how ordinary people in the West are conditioned to see Christianity as an agent of repression and not a victim.

As has been pointed out here and you've said it as well, you know, very often the real face of Christianity is an African woman with four children or, as I think you also said, a Dalit.

You know, the false sense of somebody in a limo, that may be on some of the TV shows but it is not the everyday experience and that would include here as well.

What do you think accounts for such negative conditioning and is any of that because the church as a teacher, as an exhorter, as an admonisher does play the role of spiritual teacher and guide, you know, and people rebel against that? Or is it just this false sense?

You know, this may not fit as an analogy but I'll never forget my first trip the Soviet Union in 1982 on behalf of Soviet Jews and Pentecostals, the number of people, and we heard this throughout the 1980s especially, who thought that "Dallas" was somehow America.

It wasn't yet there. They weren't showing American movies or sitcoms or anything else yet, but that was creeping into the populace and they all thought we were—you know, the streets were paved with gold in the United States. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. What accounts for that?

Mr. ALLEN. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think it's a complex situation but I will speak now as a media professional. One thing I have learned from more than 20 years in the media business narratives do not have to be accurate to be shockingly durable.

I mean, once something is sort of cemented in the popular consciousness, and that can happen very quickly, it can take a much

longer period of time to move it out and I think the practical reality is, first of all, perceptions tend to be framed by local reality.

So, you know, Americans look around at what is visible about Christianity in their own back yard and there are often fairly expensive looking Catholic cathedrals or, you know, lavish Pentecostal mega-churches and they sort of draw the conclusion that "Christianity Incorporated" is a multinational with some pretty deep pockets.

I think part of the reality too is that Christianity is associated with some controversial stands on the wars of culture in the West which shapes some elements of our culture to have a sort of negative predisposition.

But however you explain it, these amount to explanations and not excuses. Again, I insist that the practical reality of the early 21st century is that two-thirds of the Christians on this planet live outside the West.

More than 50 percent of them live in poverty. That share is going to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  by mid-century. That's the reality of who Christians are on the ground today and many of them live in dramatically at-risk situations, as we have heard chronicled by this panel.

So however you explain the inadequate narrative that we have there's no way of justifying it.

It's time for that narrative to be punctured and be replaced with a more accurate impression of who Christians are and the risks they face and, again, on behalf of all of us I thank you for your efforts to do that.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Allen. Thank you. I know you do have to leave but we appreciate it.

Let me ask some questions of our other distinguished panelists, if I could. Mr. Rogers, you pointed out that Christians in Aceh live in fear, people worship in secret. One church leader told CSW we do have a comprehensive partnership here in this country between the State Department and the leadership of Indonesia and I'm wondering if you have any sense that there is a robust component of human rights and religious freedom as a part of that.

Parenthetically, I actually visited Banda Aceh after the tsunami and I can tell you had it not been for the sailors aboard the USS *Abraham Lincoln* and the helicopters that they dubbed the "Gray Angels," many Muslims and Christians alike would have died because they were the tourniquet on what was a very, very serious situation of hunger and sickness as a result of the tsunami.

All of that good will gleaned from that are the Indonesians listening to us or are they moving in the wrong direction, and what about that comprehensive partnership? Is it working?

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you very much.

One of the things that I always try to emphasize talking about the situation in Indonesia is that Indonesia does have this great tradition of religious pluralism. Its constitution, its founding state ideology known as Pancasila is a pluralistic ideology.

It gives protection for the six recognized religions in Indonesia and that's a tremendous credit to the world's largest Muslim majority nation. And so when I'm talking to people in Indonesia and in the Indonesian Government I try to frame the argument very much in terms of their own achievements and their own tradition being

in peril, and similarly they've made this great transition from the Suharto era dictatorship to a thriving democracy that I think too is in peril by these violations of religious freedom and also violations of the rule of law.

When I gave the example of the two churches where the Supreme Court had upheld their right to exist and the local mayor was defying the Supreme Court and nobody has taken action to ensure that the Supreme Court's rulings are implemented, the churches remained locked and the mayor is free to defy the court. So it then becomes rule of law issues.

But if I may just add a third point, I think that there is a myth out there in the world about the current Indonesian Government led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

He is often seen as a force of moderation and the Government of Indonesia is seen as being largely sympathetic to our concerns but being weak and unable to take action. And my research in this report that we're about to publish shows that that is completely untrue.

I have to conclude very sadly that President Yudhoyono is neither a force nor particularly moderate. When you look at his 10-year presidency he has introduced the most sectarian and discriminatory legislation of any Indonesian President.

He's introduced legislation that has had a direct impact on churches as well as on other communities. He's actually made, himself, very inflammatory remarks, particularly in a speech to the Council of Indonesian Ulema, where he basically gave them a green light to issue discriminatory fatwas—religious rulings, and some of his own ministers have made very inflammatory remarks.

So I think we're actually dealing with a government that is more complicit with this than perhaps we like to admit or they like to admit, and my hope in this close relationship that the United States has with Indonesia, particularly looking ahead to Indonesia's Presidential elections this year when the current President will leave office, I hope the United States will really put pressure on the incoming President to tackle these issues.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you about Burma. You really had very specific information about the repression against Christians and, frankly, very often there is one major step forward in one area and all is seen as well, everything is fine there and we say let's move on and look elsewhere.

And when Aung San Suu Kyi came here and spoke she was eloquent as she always has been and very brave and, of course, and she absolutely deserved the Nobel Peace Prize. But for a lot of Americans and policy makers it's like Burma is off the list of anything that we need to be looking at and yet you give some very compelling insights as to ongoing repression against Christians. Could you elaborate?

Mr. ROGERS. Absolutely. I think, of course, there have been some tremendous openings in Burma. I've experienced them myself.

It's possible to do things in Burma that would have been inconceivable just a couple of years ago. I was in Burma most recently in October–November and I was able to give trainings and workshops in human rights and religious freedom that just would have

been impossible a short time ago. So those positive steps are welcome.

But you're absolutely right, there is this tendency to think that just because Aung San Suu Kyi is released and is now sitting in Parliament and because many political prisoners have been released that our job is done and Burma is a normal country.

My conclusion on Burma is, if I may, just two brief points. Firstly, I think there has been a change of atmosphere but not yet a change of system. So there has been a relaxation in some respects and an increase in freedom in space for civil society, to some degree freedom of expression.

But at the same time, an increase in religious intolerance directed both—most starkly, actually, against the Muslim community in Burma but also this long legacy that I described of violence against and persecution of Christians.

And I wrote a piece recently in the Wall Street Journal where my concluding line was the beginning of the beginning may have just begun, and by that I mean yes, there are some positive changes but there's a very, very long way to go and we must not think that by any means that our job is done, as the evidence I've given today shows.

Mr. SMITH. Ms. Arora, you, again, spent a great deal of time delineating the problems in India and you also talked about the anti-conversion laws.

Could you tell us what accounts for the Gujarat's extreme law, what the role of the BJP is, and what happens, what are the consequences potentially in terms of religious liberty, if the BJP wins the upcoming elections in May?

Ms. ARORA. Well, the Gujarat law, to start with, was enacted by a BJP government. Mr. Narendra Modi as chief minister enacted that law. It is perhaps the most severe—

Mr. SMITH. Could you come closer, please?

Ms. ARORA. It is perhaps the most severe law of all the anti-conversion laws and actually requires permission to be sought before any religious conversion.

An enquiry will be conducted into every religious conversion and there are high penalties levied if that procedure is not followed.

The law itself is very vague and allows for Christians and Muslims in fact to be targeted under this. There have been several instances of Christians and Muslims being prosecuted under the law.

Thankfully, there have been no convictions as of date. The BJP has called for a national anti-conversion law so we see that as the most immediate something coming through if they were to come to power and we have also seen the impunity that is enjoyed by the Hindutva forces, as I outlined in my testimony, in Orissa.

But we have seen that across the states in the state of Karnataka, in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, I have spoken to police officials on several occasions who have informed me well, you know, the pastor is converting.

I mean, even conversion has become an issue, let alone conversion by force, fraud or inducement and we see that rising as the BJP comes to power. Already there is a sense of euphoria among the ranks, almost agree that they will be coming to pass. So that is something that as minorities that is deeply feared.

Mr. SMITH. Is the United States doing enough to raise these issues, for example, our Ambassador to India, the State Department, in your view?

Ms. ARORA. I think more can be done. India is very receptive to agencies, organizations, governments speaking to us. I think more can be done.

I think some has been done. Especially when you look at Orissa there has been some focus that was put on the state of Orissa. But across the country there just needs consistent dialogue with the Indian Government on these issues. So I would urge the Government of the U.S. to do that. Thank you.

Mr. SMITH. Dr. Gondwe, you've touched on country after country with great detail. One of the narratives here is that somehow al-Shabaab is on the wane, especially since they have not fared as well as they would have hoped in Somalia.

But then they struck very hard in Nairobi and that was one wake-up call. Then you go on to talk about the target of al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda using Zanzibar as a stepping stone. Their target is the whole country of Tanzania.

And I think a lot of people forget that when Nairobi got hit in 1998 so did Dar es Salaam, and I actually chaired the hearings when Admiral Crowe who headed up the accountability review boards talked about how we didn't think they could hit there.

That was not one of the targets that we thought extremist Muslims would focus on and a matter of fact I actually wrote the Embassy Security Act to further protect at least U.S. interests there with the more diplomatic security.

But the point being I think we are naive to some extent thinking that somehow there's a decline or they're on the wane when we—when you come forward with evidence about just how they are multiplying and growing more lethal and dangerous every day. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. GONDWE. Yes. From the research I have done it shows that al-Shabaab has actually actively gone forward to recruit nationals from, you know, the different countries, particularly along the coast and also inland.

Quite a few of the people who have been arrested in Kenya recently are actually Kenyan nationals, not necessarily Somali nationals of Somali ethnicity, and the same thing has also been happening in Tanzania and elsewhere.

I think it's very easy to say they're on the wane because military actions in Somalia itself appear to be being quite effective and there have been a few strikes that have taken out leaders, et cetera, et cetera.

However, what has not been factored into the equation is that they have been pretty effective in taking advantage of youth who feel that they have no stake in society and giving them a reason to live, so to speak, and also a religion. You know, with religion on top of it it gives them some kind of *raison d'être* and it's those people that people should be worried about more than anything else.

And I think, for example, in the UK we had the killing of Lee Rigby in broad daylight in London. That was a wake-up call that there are youths there too who feel they have no stake in society and are actually being actively targeted in different ways.

In the UK we're hearing about targeting within the prison system and these are the people that we should be worried about. I don't know if that's a thing that the U.S. has been looking at but the targeting of disaffected unemployed youths in Africa is a very worrying thing.

While we were in Tanzania we heard anecdotal evidence of people being trained and then sent back even to my country Malawi and other places where they are sort of sleeper cells almost and are being prepared to move when there's a time to move.

I don't have hard evidence of that but considering what has been happening elsewhere I wouldn't doubt what we heard.

Mr. SMITH. If I could ask you as well, you point out that between—and testifying between 2,000 to 3,000 Christians are detained indefinitely at any given time in Eritrea.

You point out that as with tens of thousands of other prisoners of conscience none have been formally charged or brought to trial and all are held pending a denial of faith.

Torture is rife in Eritrea's detention centers with prisoners being held in such inhumane conditions as metal shipping containers, underground cells and in the open air desert surrounded by barbed wire or thorns, and you go on to further detail that horrific mistreatment.

My question is in your view has the American Government, has the African Union, has the Human Rights Council weighed in effectively on behalf of these persecuted Christians and other prisoners of conscience in Eritrea?

Ms. GONDWE. I would say the American Government has weighted in probably the most effectively and I commend the American Government for that.

Mr. SMITH. Could you come closer, please? Thank you.

Ms. GONDWE. They have weighted in possibly the most effectively and I commend the American Government for that. The others have fallen in line slowly.

But initially the concern about Eritrea was that it was a destabilizing influence in the Horn of Africa siding with al-Shabaab and facilitating things for al-Shabaab so the initial U.N. sanctions against Eritrea focused on security issues, forgetting that the people of Eritrea are probably its biggest victims.

The Human Rights Council has now weighted in far more effectively with the creation a Special Rapporteur on human rights in Eritrea. However, Eritrea refuses to engage with the Special Rapporteur so that's slightly problematic. But at least Eritrea is now being challenged at the international level for its treatment of its citizens.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Galindo, you went into great detail about the group that filed the complaint with the National Human Rights Commission in 2010 and people living in Chiapas.

The question is from what I gleaned from your statement here is that the local police, local governing authority were in solidarity with traditionalists and were part of the problem.

Did the Federal Government send in Federal troops, Federal police to intervene and under the new Presidency of Mexico has there been any change, any focus on trying to ensure a robust religious freedom there?

Mr. GALINDO. Yes. Let me answer it this way.

As I told in my speech, no government until the present day has taken the matter as seriously as—

Mr. SMITH. So the present day has taken it more seriously?

Mr. GALINDO. Yes. I think the old President, not in this administration before also they only said in their campaigns about this issue but in their practice we do not have any support of this important theme.

Let me explain it to you in this way. In 1992, our constitution was modified—1992. It was the first time after 70 years that the churches were going to be recognized. I mean, 70 years no churches in Mexico. 1992 they said okay, we understand they are—we have to register them. The authority in that year thought that it was—one of every 100 churches registering all of them.

Now almost we have 8,000. So if you can travel in 1992 our law now is limited. I mean, is not—is not enough. Now I think that the time is correct in this moment. Why? Because a few year—months ago the international treaties and our constitution are equal.

So just to—I'm speaking of 1 year ago the human rights are considered very, very, very important in Mexico. So we are expecting that in this administration we can have good results.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Galindo, if I could ask you, you've pointed out that there's another serious and growing threat to religious freedom in Mexico and you said over the last 6 years the government has attempted to confront narco-trafficking and criminal networks with the full force of the law.

However, extortion aimed at houses of worship have become normal and you pointed out that in 2011 the Catholic bishops conference announced more than 1,000 priests have received threats.

And then you went on to talk about in 2013 two priests in the State of Veracruz were murdered and you go on to talk about some of the others who have been mistreated or murdered.

The question is—two questions. One, is it narco-trafficking and human trafficking? Are they doing both? And what is the government doing to try to—I mean, we have gangs here in the U.S., as you know so well, and one of the most disturbing evolutions of those gangs is that they're not just doing drugs. They're also selling women. They have commodified women and it's becoming a very serious, obviously, horrible exploitation of young girls and women but it makes an enormous amount of money for these gangs. Is that something that's happening in Mexico as well?

Mr. GALINDO. Well, exactly I don't know and exactly the way but the thing is that we have a very, very big problem with narco-traffickers, yes. I mean, they are working I don't know how and they have a lot of strength to do the thing that they are doing.

The thing is that the churches—that is my issue—they are afraid to continue working, I mean, because of the evil that they have. We have—the problem is in the north of our republic more than the center or the south—in the north of the republic near the States—I mean, Chihuahua and Sinaloa and all the north.

So what we are trying to do is by the churches just to work as they used to and the—to pray, to be very intelligent how can they affront that problem. But maybe—I think maybe we have those things of treatment of persons.



Mr. SMITH. You have pointed out that with the Cuban Government—very often it's a matter of indifference or lack of enforcement of law in some governments—but in Cuba's case it's the government.

Perhaps you might want to elaborate on that. We've had several human rights hearings in this subcommittee on Cuba and one of the only, besides some of the political prisoners and those who have set up so boldly the churches are one of the last remaining bulwarks against tyranny by Fidel Castro.

Mr. GALINDO. Yes. The thing is that they want to control everything.

Mr. SMITH. Right.

Mr. GALINDO. That's a problem. They want to control everything and religious also. So that's the big problem.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Rogers, should the Congress and the President move forward with TPP toward Vietnam without conditionality on human rights?

Mr. ROGERS. Just to clarify exactly—

Mr. SMITH. The Trans—

Mr. ROGERS. TPP?

Mr. SMITH. Yes. Yes. The new trade agreement that—

Mr. ROGERS. Yes.

Mr. SMITH [continuing]. That the President is seeking fast track authority for.

Mr. ROGERS. I certainly don't believe it should be without conditions. I think the very serious human rights issues and particularly religious freedom affecting Christians and affecting other religious communities in Vietnam should absolutely be looked at by the United States and the Vietnamese Government should be pressed to address those concerns before the agreement is signed.

Mr. SMITH. I would just point out for the record that in April and June I chaired two hearings on Vietnam and human rights with the focus on religious freedom and my hope is that both parties here in the Congress will listen very carefully to what's happening on the ground in Vietnam.

Before the bilateral agreement occurred, there was all of this hope and expectation that religious freedom and other human rights would break out of their bloc where they've—and there would be a change.

Nothing even close to that happened. It went in the opposite direction and Vietnam now has deteriorated. Bloc 8406, you know, the folks that signed that wonderful human rights charter, systematically have been arrested and hunted down, and I made a trip to Vietnam some years ago right before the bilateral agreement and visited dissidents in Hue, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City and most of those individuals have been arrested, rearrested.

Father Ly was under house arrest when I met him. He is now back in prison. It would be unconscionable and I think it's unconscionable for the Obama administration not to be insisting on human rights conditionality with a country that has already shown that they want economic benefits sans linkage to human rights conditions. Is there anything else the distinguished—yes?

Mr. GALINDO. Yes, sorry. I forgot to tell you something. In this administration with this President we are hopefully that this is

going to be arranged, I mean. But we are thinking—we are seeing that they are afraid of our new groups—not Christian groups, new groups.

They are afraid and they are putting some limits not in the law and they are trying to see how they can limit them to grow. I mean, that's also a problem.

We are not talking only of Christians but we are talking about new groups that they are trying to associate and they're having a little bit of problems like Scientology or a lot of them that they are trying to get in in the law.

But the government says I don't—I don't like them and I want to stay back a little bit. So that's also a problem of religious liberty for the new groups.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

I want to thank you again for your extraordinary testimony, your leadership. I want you to know that your testimony as the hearing record will be very widely disseminated.

We hope that the State Department takes note and reads carefully what you have conveyed to the subcommittee and I would like to enter into the record a statement by Dr. Brian J. Grim, president of the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, entitled "Persecution of Christians: Getting the Numbers Straight."

Hearing no objections, it is so entered. And again, I thank you so very much.

The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:02 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

# A P P E N D I X

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE BRIEFING & HEARING NOTICE**  
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations  
Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Chairman

February 10, 2014

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN briefing and hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at [www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)):

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 11, 2014

**TIME:** 10:00 a.m.

**SUBJECT:** The Worldwide Persecution of Christians

**BRIEFER:** His Excellency, the Most Reverend Francis A. Chullikatt  
Permanent Observer  
The Holy See Mission at the United Nations

**WITNESSES:** Panel I  
The Honorable Elliott Abrams  
Commissioner  
U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Panel II  
Mr. John Allen  
Associate Editor  
*The Boston Globe*

Ms. Tehmina Arora  
Attorney  
Alliance Defending Freedom-India

Mr. Benedict Rogers  
Team Leader for East Asia  
Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Mr. Jorge Lee Galindo  
Director  
Impulso 18

Khataza Gondwe, Ph.D.  
Team Leader for Africa and the Middle East  
Christian Solidarity Worldwide

**By Direction of the Chairman**

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5921 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations* HEARING

Day Tuesday Date February 11, 2014 Room 2172 Rayburn HOB

Starting Time 10:07 a.m. Ending Time 1:02 p.m.

Recesses 1 (10:45 to 11:12) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to )

Presiding Member(s)

*Rep. Chris Smith*

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session  Electronically Recorded (taped)   
Executive (closed) Session  Stenographic Record   
Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

*The Worldwide Persecution of Christians*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*Rep. Tom Marino, Rep. Mark Meadows*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

*Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, Rep. Joe Pitts\*, Rep. Frank Wolf\**

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No   
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*Incantations for the 2009 Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for the Middle East, submitted by Archbishop Chullikatt*  
*Message from Pope Benedict XVI for the World Day of Peace Day, submitted by Archbishop Chullikatt*  
*Letter from Members to Secretary Kerry, submitted by Mr. Abrams*  
*Questions for the record from Rep. Cicilline*  
*Statement from Brian Grim, submitted by Chairman Smith*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or  
TIME ADJOURNED 1:02 p.m.

*Gregory B. Sisk*  
Subcommittee Staff Director

**QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD OF THE HONORABLE DAVID N. CICILLINE****AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

“THE WORLDWIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS”  
February 11, 2014

These questions are directed to Ms. Tehmina Arora:

- 1) According to a recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), “Belize is... a hotbed of anti-gay hatred in a region where a dozen other countries have similar anti-sodomy statutes on the books. Violence aimed at LGBT people is prevalent, and hatred for the LGBT community is apparent. Graffiti on a major structure in downtown Belize City, for example, says, ‘Kill the Faggots.’ The country’s immigration code bars [lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender] LGBT people, along with the disabled or mentally ill.” Several organizations support upholding Section 53 of Belize’s criminal code, which prescribes a ten year sentence for LGBT people. Has your organization been involved in assisting Belizean activists, lawyers, or legislators in their quest to uphold Section 53? If yes, please describe your involvement.
- 2) Please describe your professional relationship with the organization “Belize Action.” Have your two organizations ever worked together? If so, please describe that work.
- 3) Your organization, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), describes itself as an “alliance-building legal ministry that advocates for the right of people to freely live out their faith.” How does your work in Belize directly support your organization’s work?
- 4) Your 2011 Form 990 notes that Alliance Defending Freedom spent \$65,000 on “human rights legal work” in Central America and the Caribbean (see page 26). Was that money used to defend current efforts in Belize to uphold the constitutionality of Section 53 or to support any work to defend laws that have an adverse effect on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender Belizeans?
- 5) The European Court of Human Rights is currently considering whether Italy violated its citizen’s rights under the European Convention by refusing to recognize their marriage. (The case is *Orlandi and others v. Italy*). ADF was granted permission to intervene as a third party, entitling the organization to file pleadings and take part in public hearings. On February 17, 2014, ADF submitted a brief to the court, defending Italy’s prohibition against same sex marriage. Why is your organization taking such an active role in an international court to uphold discriminatory measures toward gays and lesbians? Are you exporting the fight to other countries now that it is clear that full marriage equality across the United States will soon be an inexorable reality?

Response of Ms. Arora:

I live in India and my work is focused on region of South Asia. The questions posed are beyond the scope of my personal knowledge.

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY HIS EXCELLENCY, THE MOST REVEREND  
FRANCIS A. CHULLIKATT, PERMANENT OBSERVER, THE HOLY SEE MISSION AT THE  
UNITED NATIONS

SYNOD OF BISHOPS

SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE EAST:  
COMMUNION AND WITNESS.**

*"Now the company of those who believed  
were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4: 32)*

LINEAMENTA

VATICAN CITY  
2009

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**PREFACE**

*The Acts of the Apostles, highlighting the communion and witness of Christians as followers of Jesus Christ, speaks in two passages of the sharing of goods. The first states: "and they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2: 42). Their way of life resulted from an intense unity: "and all who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2: 44). The topic for the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, to take place from 10 to 24 October 2010, is taken from the second passage: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32). St. Luke gives two examples to illustrate this statement. The first is positive: Joseph called Barnabas, who sold a field he possessed "and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37). The other, a negative one, is an account of a couple, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who agree to give only a portion of the proceeds of the sale of land and keep the rest for themselves. Their deceit was discovered and the dramatic punishment caused "great fear" in the ecclesial community (cf. Acts 5:1-11). These instances call upon Christians to live the ideal of communion and witness in a concrete manner, urging them to fulfill their task not half-heartedly but completely, to the point of being truly "one heart and soul" (Acts 4:32).*

*The great history of evangelization recounted in the Acts of the Apostles begins with the Christian community in the Holy Land. All Christians and people of good will look to this land made holy by the presence of the Lord Jesus, particularly at this time of preparation for the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops, which the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI convoked on 19 September 2009, during his meeting with the patriarchs and major archbishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches. At the same time, the Supreme Pontiff announced the topic of the synodal assembly: "The Catholic Church in the Middle East: Communion and Witness. 'Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul'" (Acts 4:32). The Holy Father, who visited the Holy Land from 8 to 15 May 2009, readily acceded to the requests of many of his brothers in the episcopate to convoke a synodal assembly for the Middle East, whose purpose is to examine thoroughly the teachings in the Acts of the Apostles, to relive the experience of the early Church community in a more mature fashion and to render testimony in word and, above all, in deed, as the fruits of an authentically Christian life, for the glory of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the complex present-day situation in the countries of the Middle East. This faith is to nourish Christian hope, believing "against every hope" (Rm 4:18), because it rests not on human ability but a divine power. Consequently, faith and hope must lead to charity towards one's neighbour, which has been particularly seen in the Catholic Church in the Middle East by the continual presence of Christians in this, their homeland, from the time of Jesus. Clearly, this love of neighbour is also manifested in the many valuable apostolic works with which the members of the Catholic Church bear witness to their faith and, at the same time, make a notable contribution to the integral development of society as a whole.*

*So as to exercise this vocation fully, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has requested the accustomed process be followed in preparing for this synodal assembly. Consequently, the Supreme Pontiff has asked the Pre-Synodal Council for the Middle East, made up of 7 patriarchs, representing the 6 patriarchal Churches and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, 2*

*presidents from episcopal conferences and 4 heads of dicasteries of the Roman Curia, to compose the text of the Lineamenta, which is presently being published in 4 languages: Arabic, French, English and Italian. Each chapter of the document is followed by questions, whose purpose is to generate discussion throughout the Church of the Middle East. The responses to these questions are to be submitted to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops by Easter, which all Christians will celebrate on a common date this year: 4 April 2010. As noted, the contents of these responses will serve as the basis for the Instrumentum laboris, the work-document for the synodal assembly, which the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI will present to the distinguished representatives of the Catholic episcopate of the Middle East, during his Apostolic Visitation to Cyprus in June, 2010.*

*We entrust the preparations for the Special Assembly for the Middle East to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Most Pure Flower of the Holy Land. In Bethlehem, she gave Jesus to the world; in Nazareth, she raised him, and then followed him through the streets of Galilee and Judea to Jerusalem, a city sacred to Christians, Jews and Muslims. As a result of the witness of Christians, the celebration of this synodal assembly can also become a propitious occasion for greater dialogue with the Jews and Muslims and a deepening of communion with all people of good will in the Middle East.*

**Nikola ETEROVIĆ**  
*Titular Archbishop of Cibale*  
*General Secretary*

*Vatican City, 8 December 2009*

The complete version of this document can be accessed at:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20091208\\_lineamenta-mo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091208_lineamenta-mo_en.html)

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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS  
**POPE BENEDICT XVI**  
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE  
**WORLD DAY OF PEACE**

1 JANUARY 2011

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, THE PATH TO PEACE**

1. At the beginning of the new year I offer good wishes to each and all for serenity and prosperity, but especially for peace. Sadly, the year now ending has again been marked by persecution, discrimination, terrible acts of violence and religious intolerance.

My thoughts turn in a special way to the beloved country of Iraq, which continues to be a theatre of violence and strife as it makes its way towards a future of stability and reconciliation. I think of the recent sufferings of the Christian community, and in particular the reprehensible attack on the Syro-Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Baghdad, where on 31 October two priests and over fifty faithful were killed as they gathered for the celebration of Holy Mass. In the days that followed, other attacks ensued, even on private homes, spreading fear within the Christian community and a desire on the part of many to emigrate in search of a better life. I assure them of my own closeness and that of the entire Church, a closeness which found concrete expression in the recent Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. The Synod encouraged the Catholic communities in Iraq and throughout the Middle East to live in communion and to continue to offer a courageous witness of faith in those lands.

I offer heartfelt thanks to those Governments which are working to alleviate the sufferings of these, our brothers and sisters in the human family, and I ask all Catholics for their prayers and support for their brethren in the faith who are victims of violence and intolerance. In this context, I have felt it particularly appropriate to share some reflections on religious freedom as the path to peace. It is painful to think that in some areas of the world it is impossible to profess one's religion freely except at the risk of life and personal liberty. In other areas we see more subtle and sophisticated forms of prejudice and hostility towards believers and religious symbols. At present, Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith. Many Christians experience daily affronts and often live in fear because of their pursuit of truth, their faith in Jesus Christ and their heartfelt plea for respect for religious freedom. This situation is unacceptable, since it represents an insult to God and to human dignity; furthermore, it is a threat to security and peace, and an obstacle to the achievement of authentic and integral human development.

The complete version of this document can be accessed at:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20101208\\_xliv-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace_en.html)



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELLIOTT ABRAMS,  
COMMISSIONER, U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 20, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We respectfully request that the State Department promptly designate “Countries of Particular Concern” (CPCs) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), thereby identifying the world’s worst violators of freedom of religion or belief and putting them on notice that they may be sanctioned for their religious freedom abuses. The United States can play an important role in pressing for religious freedom protections and the CPC designation has proven to be an effective tool to that end.

IRFA requires the United States to annually designate as CPCs governments that “engage in or tolerate” systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. As religious freedom conditions continue to deteriorate globally, it is more important than ever that the State Department use this vital tool to press governments to end abuses, protect their citizens, and respect this fundamental human right.

We are concerned that the State Department failed to designate CPCs in 2012. We are also concerned that current sanctions on previously designated CPCs will expire in August 2013. To permit previous sanctions to expire without issuing new sanctions would send the wrong message to oppressive governments and struggling religious minorities—namely that the United States does not prioritize the protection of religious freedom in its foreign policy.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recently released its 2013 Annual Report, as required by Congress in IRFA, to advise both the Congress and the State Department on religious freedom conditions and CPC designations. In its report, USCIRF documents that the persecution of people of faith or no faith is increasing around the world. In its report USCIRF also recommends that you re-designate the following eight countries as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan. USCIRF also found that seven other countries meet the CPC threshold and should be so designated: Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam. We agree with their recommendations and highlight specific concerns with several of these countries below.

Two years after the Arab Spring, the Government of Egypt continues to create a climate of impunity for those who commit violence, extortion, rape, kidnappings, and forced conversions against Coptic Christians, including Coptic women and girls who are kidnapped, forced to marry their abductors, forced to convert to Islam, and refused rescue or assistance by the government. Rather than prosecute perpetrators, Egyptian courts are being used to “prosecute, convict, and imprison Egyptian citizens charged with ‘contempt’ or ‘defamation’ of religion. In some instances, disfavored Muslims faced harassment, detention, and imprisonment by government authorities,” according to USCIRF. The United States has had a window of opportunity to influence progress on religious freedom in Egypt; we must use it more effectively by designating Egypt as a CPC.

As the United States has acknowledged Iraq’s full responsibility for its territory since December 2011, the United States must also hold the Government of Iraq accountable for its failures to adequately protect religious minorities. As documented in the USCIRF report, “Iraq continued to tolerate systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, including violent religiously-motivated attacks.” Moreover, the USCIRF report notes that the Iraqi government took action in 2012 that inflamed Sunni-Shi’i and Arab-Kurdish tensions, making an already difficult religious freedom environment even more violent. These failures must not be ignored.

The Government of Nigeria has failed for several years to stem the tide of sectarian violence sweeping the country. More than 14,000 Muslims and Christians have been killed since 1999, while the government fails to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice. USCIRF notes that Boko Haram, “a militant group that espouses an extreme and violent interpretation of Islam,” has been able to exploit the climate of impunity and is destabilizing the state. The Government of Nigeria’s failure to address religious freedom violations creates the climate for extremism to flourish. Until the government’s policy changes, Nigeria should be designated a CPC.

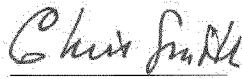
The Government of Pakistan continues to directly oppress and enable the oppression of religious minorities through blasphemy laws, other religiously discriminatory laws, and its failure to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. Religious minorities, their homes, their places of worship, and their businesses are consistently subject to violence and arson by vigilante mobs that have been whipped into a frenzy by allegations of blasphemy. Ahmadis are prevented from voting or otherwise exercising their rights as citizens. Reports indicate that Hindu and Christian women and girls are suffering from the crimes of abduction, forced conversion, forced marriage, sometimes with the complicity of local officials. Impoverished Hindus are often victims of bonded labor and subjected to a lifetime of indentured servitude. Hindu families continue to flee Pakistan due to persecution. The United States should designate Pakistan a CPC—thus standing with the persecuted rather than with the persecutors.


The Government of Vietnam began addressing its systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom after it was designated as a CPC in 2004, 2005, and early 2006—but progress slowed after its designation was officially removed by the State Department in late 2006 because of “enormous progress.” Currently, the Government of Vietnam forces adherents to religious groups not officially registered with the government to renounce their faith

and perpetrates their arrest and harassment, the confiscation and destruction of their property, severe beatings, and reported murders. The Government of Vietnam has responded with violence to Catholic prayer vigils for the return of Government-confiscated church properties. In addition, the Government of Vietnam restricts the contacts and movements of monks, nuns, and youth leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, threatening and harassing them and the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao Buddhists who also lack official recognition. CPC designation of Vietnam has encouraged progress in the past and can do so again. The State Department should use this vital tool.

Consequently, we respectfully request that the State Department move quickly and decisively to expand the list of CPC countries as USCIRF recommends, and apply sanctions as appropriate under IRFA. Freedom of religion or belief is a core human right and an American value, recognized both by the U.S. Constitution and international law. This time next year, we hope for reports from both the State Department and USCIRF showing that respect for religious freedom has improved.

Sincerely,

  
CHRISTOPHER SMITH  
Member of Congress

  
FRANK R. WOLF  
Member of Congress

  
JOSEPH R. PITTS  
Member of Congress

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

### Persecution of Christians: Getting the Numbers Straight

Brian J. Grim, Ph.D.  
 President  
 Religious Freedom & Business Foundation  
<http://ReligiousFreedomAndBusiness.org/>

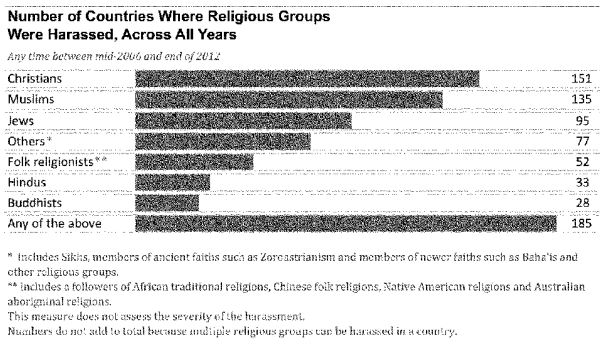
Testimony to the  
 House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
 Subcommittee Hearing: The Persecution of Christians as a Worldwide Phenomenon  
 United States Congress  
 House Rayburn Office Building  
 February 11, 2014

Since 2006, the Pew Research Center has been counting and categorizing restrictions on religious freedom coming from two sources: government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion. As part of this research, the Center has monitored reports from nearly 20 major international human rights and conflict agencies of the harassment of religious groups.

Between 2006 and 2012, the latest year studied, Christians faced harassment from governments or groups in more than three-in-four countries worldwide (151 of 198 countries or territories studied). While Christians were harassed in more countries than any other religious group, the fact that Christians face problems in the largest number of countries is partly due to Christians being the most numerous faith group, accounting for approximately one-in-three people alive today.

Similarly, the second most populous religious group, Muslims, who account for less than a quarter of the world's people, faced harassment in the second largest number of countries (135) during the same time period. By contrast, Jews make up a relatively small share of the world's population (0.2%) but were harassed in nearly half of the world's countries (95).

These data point to the important fact that harassment or persecution of Christians is part of a global problem



## 2 Persecution of Christians: Getting the Numbers Straight, Brian J. Grim

affecting all faiths that requires multi-faith, concerted and innovative efforts to solve.

Harassment takes many forms, ranging from verbal abuse and discrimination to physical abuse and in some cases displacement from homes and death.

There are different patterns in harassment of Christians than in the harassment of Muslims. Christians tend to be harassed in a larger share of countries where they are a minority. Muslims, by contrast, are harassed in a larger share of countries where they are in the majority. Indeed, in many Muslim-majority countries, the driver of clashes within the Muslim community is often the clash over the degree to which Islam should control society and politics. (For more, see Chapter 6 of *The Price of Freedom Denied*, 2011, Grim and Finke, Cambridge University Press.)

One concerning trend in the harassment of Christians is that 2012 saw a six year high in social harassment. During that year, individuals or groups in society in 83 countries harassed Christians, up from 74 countries just five years earlier.

### Number of Countries Where Religious Group Were Harassed, by Type of Harassment

	Government harassment in the year ending ...						Social harassment in the year ending ...						
	JUN 2007	JUN 2008	JUN 2009	JUN 2010	DEC 2011	DEC 2012	JUN 2007	JUN 2008	JUN 2009	JUN 2010	DEC 2011	DEC 2012	
Muslims	77	74	58	74	78	83	Muslims	64	53	58	64	82	88
Christians	79	80	71	95	78	81	Christians	74	72	70	77	81	83
Jews	11	16	14	21	28	28	Jews	46	48	60	64	63	66
Others*	25	28	29	40	39	35	Others*	15	13	19	28	18	21
Folk religionists**	13	10	9	10	5	11	Folk religionists**	16	13	19	20	21	18
Hindus	12	11	9	13	9	13	Hindus	12	9	8	10	6	9
Buddhists	7	7	6	11	5	9	Buddhists	4	4	4	7	5	7
Any of the above	118	112	103	124	125	131	Any of the above	127	110	124	135	147	147

\* Includes Sikhs, members of ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism and members of newer faiths such as Baha'is and other religious groups.

\*\* Includes a followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.

This measure does not assess the severity of the harassment.

Numbers do not add to total because multiple religious groups can be harassed in a country.

Data: Pew Research Center, Jan. 2014

It is important to note that the Pew Research study, which I developed and led until last month when I became the founding president of the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, intentionally steered clear of attempting to quantify the numbers of Christians or believers of any faith who are violently persecuted or killed specifically for their faith. Instead, the study noted all cases reported by its sources of harassment or violence in which the religious identity of the victims played at least some part. This decision was made for two important reasons:

- **Under-reporting.** Not all instances of harassment are reported, and even those that are reported may withhold names and specific details for the protection of those in sensitive situations. And detailed information is lacking



from some countries where persecution may be the most severe, such as North Korea.

- **Multiple Causes.** Violent attacks on religious groups by groups in society or by government forces may have multiple causes, the religious identity of those attacked being one among several factors. Perhaps most importantly on this point, deaths related to religious conflict inflate the numbers of people killed for actions that are traditionally thought of as martyrdom, that is being killed for actions specifically tied to religious practices such as preaching, worshipping or choosing to change one's faith to a different religion.

But, perhaps most importantly, it is time to change the tenor of the discussion on persecution – away from naming and shaming and towards finding solutions. Indeed, the flip side of the story is where solutions lie.

The Pew Research study documented government and social initiatives in more than three-quarters of countries attempting to address these concerning trends. For instance, in Brazil – a country now experiencing what is arguably the most dramatic peaceful religious change in world history (mass conversion from Catholicism largely to other Protestant faiths) – is emerging as a global innovator in rolling back the rising tide of global religious restrictions and hostilities that has swept the globe. Just last week, planning began for a bold new global awards initiative to recognize businesses with successful initiatives to advance respect for religious freedom and diversity in their companies, societies and the world at large. Those expressing enthusiastic support include Brazil's Vice President Michel Temer, Senator Magno Malta and Brazil's National Secretary for Human Rights, Biel Rocha, in addition to business leaders, human rights and interfaith organizations, as well as leading clergy, including Rio de Janeiro's Archbishop Orani João Tempesta.

In fact, equal attention should be paid to innovative and positive initiatives aiming at solutions as is paid to documenting the problem. Indeed, both are needed if solutions are to be found.