



**Jubilee Campaign Response to Questionnaire for the annual report by the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance**

**1. Can you identify 10 countries in which the situation with regard to the freedom of religion or belief has deteriorated over the last years? Please elaborate and explain;**

**Algeria** – In April 2020, political activist Walid Kechida was arrested for leading a Facebook page that shares satirical memes about the Algerian government; he was charged with “insulting the divine entity” under the nation’s blasphemy laws and sentenced to three years in prison.<sup>1</sup> In February 2021, Police arrested Algerian Christian Hamid Soudad for a Facebook post depicting a cartoon of Muhammad that he shared back in 2018 and was charged with “insulting the Prophet” and sentenced to five years in prison.<sup>2</sup> In April 2021, Islamic expert Said Djabelkheir was charged with blasphemy and sentenced to three years in prison for a variety of Facebook posts he made in January 2020 comparing Eid al-Adha to Berber New Year and referring to some Qur’an texts as myths.<sup>3</sup> In June 2021, Algerian authorities arrested Pastor Rachid Seighir and bookstore Nouh Hamini and charged them with “distributing publications or any other propaganda undermining the faith of a Muslim” for selling Christian books.<sup>4</sup> The Algerian government currently maintains the forced closure of 16 Protestant Churches,<sup>5</sup> 13 originally shuttered in 2019 for allegedly failing to comply with health and safety requirements and three shuttered in July 2021<sup>6</sup>; this is despite that these churches have made necessary renovations and submitted relevant applications.

**China** – In 2021, seven countries have designated the Chinese government’s persecution of Uyghur and Turkic Muslims in China as ‘genocide’, including the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, the Czech Republic,

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<sup>1</sup> End Blasphemy Law, “[Algerian activist faces three years in prison](#)”, 28 January 2021.

<sup>2</sup> International Institute for Religious Freedom, “[Christian sentenced to 5 years](#)”, 12 February 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, “[Algeria: Islamic scholar sentenced to three-years prison term for ‘offending Islam’](#)”, 22 April 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Morning Star News, “[Pastor in Algeria Receives Suspended Sentence and Fine](#)”, 6 June 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Rejoinder from Jubilee Campaign to ‘Response of the Government of Algeria to allegations concerning the closure of Protestant churches and places of worship’](#), 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Evangelical Focus, “[Three More Churches Closed in Algeria, but Christians Are ‘NOT Fearful.’](#)”, 1 September 2021.

and Belgium.<sup>7</sup> In June 2021, Dr. Adrian Zenz released a groundbreaking report detailing the Chinese government's genocidal and coercive population control measures targeting Uyghurs<sup>8</sup>; one year prior, he published a report revealing the forced sterilization, birth control, and IUD implantation of Uyghur women.<sup>9</sup> In its Annual Persecution Report 2020, ChinaAid revealed the following trends of persecution against Christians by the CCP: "stripping church leaders of their clergy status; forcing church leaders to join official churches; interrupting church gatherings in various ways; raiding church venues; summoning, intimidating and pressuring landlords to evict churches; shutting down churches; ordering churches to stop gathering; ransacking and demolishing churches; taking over church property by force and re-purposing it; fabricating criminal charges to detain, arrest, and sentence church leaders and members; facilitating the 'disappearance' of Christians".<sup>10</sup>

**Ethiopia & Eritrea** – In November 2020, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed authorized a military offensive into Tigray against the regional Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF); Eritrean forces quickly joined with the Ethiopian troops and have engaged in human rights atrocities against civilians, including the seizure of the predominantly Ethiopian Orthodox Christian town of Axim and the killing of hundreds of residents.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the entire region of Tigray itself is more than 90% Christian, meaning the victims of violence in the area are predominantly, perhaps exclusively, Christians. In early March 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, raised her concern of "sexual and gender-based violence, extrajudicial killings, widespread destruction and looting of public and private property by all parties" in Tigray.<sup>12</sup>

**India** – In July 2021, the Evangelical Fellowship of India's Religious Liberty Commission identified that 145 incidents of persecution against Christians within the first six months of the year [arrests on false accusations of forced religious conversion (43 cases); physical violence including assault with weapons (21 cases); interruption of church worship (14 cases); vandalism or demolition of churches (8 cases); and murder (3 cases)].<sup>13</sup> In May 2021, local authorities in Uttar Pradesh demolished one of the oldest houses of worship, the 100-year-old Ghareeb Nawaz Al Maroof Mosque.<sup>14</sup> In late 2020, the provinces Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh both passed legislations that allege to combat forced religious conversions but instead restrict legitimate religious conversions and interfaith marriages.<sup>15</sup> The new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) offers expedited citizenship processes to all non-Muslim residents in India – Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi – while excluding Muslims. During the COVID-19 pandemic, radical Hindu nationalist scapegoated Muslims for the spread of the disease, using the term 'Corona Jihad'.<sup>16</sup> In July 2021,

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<sup>7</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[More Nations Formally Recognizing the Genocide Against Uyghurs in China](#)".

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Zenz, [End the Dominance of the Uyghur Ethnic Group: An Analysis of Beijing's Population Optimization Strategy in Southern Xinjiang](#), 8 June 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Zenz, [Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang](#), June 2020.

<sup>10</sup> ChinaAid, [Annual Persecution Report 2020: January – December 2020](#), 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [The Humanitarian Crisis in Tigray, the Arrest of Eritrean Christians, and the Prolonged Detention of Patriarch Abune Antonios](#); Cara Anna, "[Witnesses Recall Church Massacre in Ethiopia's Holy City of Axum](#)", *Christianity Today*, 18 February 2021.

<sup>12</sup> UN OHCHR, "[Ethiopia: Persistent, credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access](#)", 4 March 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The Religious Liberty Commission of The Evangelical Fellowship of India, [Hate and Targeted Violence Against Christians in India: Half Yearly Report 2021](#), July 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Al Jazeera, "[India: Century-old mosque razed in defiance of court order](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 19 May 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Iram Siddique, "[Madhya Pradesh Cabinet gives nod to ordinance on Freedom to Religion Bill](#)", 29 December 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Clement Arockiasamy, "[Covid-19 adds yet another strain to the dire situation of religious minorities in India](#)", *Institute of Development Studies*, 21 May 2020.

notable tribal rights activist and Jesuit priest 84-year-old Stan Swamy died of COVID-19 while in detention on false accusations that he was involved in the Bhima Koregaon case of 2018.<sup>17</sup>

**Myanmar** – In February 2021, the military of Myanmar, the Tatmadaw, seized power and officially ousted the democratically elected National League for Democracy. Since then, the Tatmadaw has engaged in violence and human rights violations against peaceful protesters, ordinary civilians, and religious minorities. Throughout some states, the Tatmadaw has shelled churches, arrested worshippers, killed pastors, and detained members of religious communities on suspicions of colluding with anti-military groups.<sup>18</sup> The predominantly Muslim Rohingya community has reason to fear that they may soon be targets for violence by the Tatmadaw, as it is the same military that in 2017 embarked on a genocidal campaign against the Rohingya which led to thousands of casualties and displacements.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Free Burma Rangers reports that killings and airstrikes by the military in northern Karen State have left 25,000 Karen people displaced, and that “they were attacked before the coup and they are being attacked now after the coup.”<sup>20</sup>

**Nepal** – In March 2020, Kaski District Police arrested Pastor Keshav Acharya without warrant on accusations of spreading false propaganda regarding COVID-19 after a video circulated of Pastor Keshav praying with his congregation for an end to the coronavirus pandemic. Authorities released him on bail but then swiftly re-arrested him on new charges of “outraging religious feeling” and “attempting to convert others to Christianity” and transferred Pastor Keshav to Dolpa in a 72-hour grueling trip. Pastor Keshav has since been granted bail and released in June 2020, but his charges have yet to be dropped.<sup>21</sup>

**Nigeria**- In mid-July 2021, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law published a report highlighting that in the first 200 days of 2021, a total of 3,462 Nigerian Christians were killed in attacks by Islamic jihadists. The number of Nigerian Christian deaths within this short time frame has nearly reached the total 3,530 deaths recorded for the entire year between October 2019 and September 2020.<sup>22</sup> Research Consultancy organization SBM Intelligence in its 2021 Half-Year Kidnap Report on Nigeria records 2,371 Nigerian civilians kidnapped across a total of 281 incidents,<sup>23</sup> since December 2020, there have been over 10 mass abductions from educational institutions, totaling no fewer than 1,000 Nigerian schoolchildren kidnapped.<sup>24</sup> In early July 2021, gunmen ambushed Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna State and abducted 121 Christian students; while some 34 have since been released, it is believed that there are over 80 students who still remain in captivity.<sup>25</sup>

**Pakistan** – the Pakistan National Commission on Minorities, which was officially called for seven years ago in June 2014 in a Supreme Court ruling, was finally approved in May 2020; however, it has numerous faults that prevent it from operating (religious minorities were not consulted during the forming of the commission; the commission

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<sup>17</sup> BBC News, “[Stan Swamy: India outrage over death of jailed activist](#)”, 7 July 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Myanmar: The Situation of Christian Minorities in Kayin, Kayah, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Wa States](#).

<sup>19</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [The Military Coup, Extrajudicial Killings, and the Rohingya Minority at a Crossroads](#).

<sup>20</sup> Free Burma Rangers, “Burma Update”, 7 February 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Arbitrary Detention Cases in Nepal, Algeria, Pakistan](#).

<sup>22</sup> International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, [An International Report: 3,462 Christians Hacked To Death By Nigerian Jihadists In 200 Days, 3000 Abducted, 300 Churches And Ten Priests Attacked](#), 18 July 2021.

<sup>23</sup> SBM Intelligence, [Chart of the week: Nigeria 2021 half-year kidnap report](#), 12 July 2021.

<sup>24</sup> MaryAnne Iwara, “[How Mass Kidnappings of Students Hinder Nigeria’s Future](#)”, United States Institute of Peace, 8 July 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Al Jazeera, “[Kidnappers release another 28 abducted children in Nigeria](#)”, 25 July 2021.

does not include enough Sikh, Parsi, Kailash, Christian members; the commission lacks statutory powers and can only review policies).<sup>26</sup> Only a month after Pakistani Christian prisoners of conscience Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel were acquitted of false blasphemy charges, authorities in Punjab Province arrested an 8-year-old Hindu boy on blasphemy charges; fortunately the young boy's case was dropped in August, though he and his family are in hiding because radical Muslim mobs have been known to attack individuals accused of blasphemy.<sup>27</sup> In March 2019, mentally disabled Pakistani Christian Stephen Masih was falsely charged with blasphemy and transferred to police custody; the Punjab Institute of Mental Health released its evaluation of Masih after a whole year of withholding the results which found that Masih was mentally unfit to stand trial. However, he remains in detention.<sup>28</sup>

**Vietnam** – Some of the most persecuted believers in Vietnam include the Hmong and Montagnard Christians who live in the Central Highlands. Local governments often deny members of these communities household registrations and national identification documentation for belonging to unregistered faiths. The withholding of this documentation places Hmong and Montagnard Christians in even greater vulnerability because these documents are required to apply for employment, education for their children, business licenses, bank accounts, and even healthcare and welfare. Couples that do not have these important documents are also unable to register the births of their children, rendering entire families stateless.<sup>29</sup> Boat People SOS has revealed that following the first annual International Religious Freedom Summit – during which a prominent Montagnard pastor spoke about his experiences with persecution – the Vietnamese government retaliated by arresting upwards of 10 Montagnard Christians.

**Uganda** – In 2021 Islamist extremists and Muslim family members engaged in numerous acts of violence against Christian converts and pastors, including: setting fire to homes; physical and verbal assault; murder; beheading; dismemberment; poisoning; rape and sexual violence; acid attacks; strangulation; physical assault resulting in miscarriage; drowning; abduction; ritual sacrifice; and more.<sup>30</sup>

**2. Can you identify 10 countries in which the situation with regard to the freedom of religion or belief has improved over the last years? Please elaborate and explain;**

**Egypt** - President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi attended the 2020 Christmas Eve mass at the Cathedral of Christ's Nativity; he wished Coptic Christians attendees a merry Christmas.<sup>31</sup> In July 2020, the Cairo Court of Appeal affirmed Christian individuals' right to use Christian inheritance traditions rather than being required to use Islamic inheritance law by which female heirs inherit half of their male counterparts.<sup>32</sup> In November 2019, Egyptian Christian woman Huda Nasrallah won her case by which she hoped to inherit an equal portion of her father's inheritance to that of her brothers'

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<sup>26</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[In Pakistan, Representation for Religious Minorities Meets New Complications](#)".

<sup>27</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[One Step Forward, Two Steps Back in Pakistan](#)".

<sup>28</sup> Pakistan Christian Post, "[Prayer Request for Stephen Masih Blasphemy Case District Sialkot](#)", 7 August 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Council Fortieth Session, [Written statement submitted by Jubilee Campaign – Statelessness as a form of punishment against Hmong and Montagnard Christians in Viet Nam](#), 27 February 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Uganda UPR](#), 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Egypt Today, "[Sisi attends Christmas mass at Cathedral in Administrative Capital](#)", 6 January 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Daily News Egypt, "[Cairo Court of Appeal upholds inheritance equality verdict between Christians](#)", 13 July 2020.



according to Christian equal inheritance tradition; her brothers supported her.<sup>33</sup> In July 2021, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouli announced that 27 churches and 49 relevant worship buildings had been formally legalized, bringing the total number of licensed church buildings to 1,958 since the passage of Law 80/2016 (Church Building Law).<sup>34</sup> There are however, continued concerns with the implementation of these changes in smaller towns and suburbs. Mob violence against Christians, with authorities conceding, at times even supporting them, by closing the churches.<sup>35</sup> Trafficking and forced marriage of Coptic women continues without accountability.

**Kazakhstan** - President Kassym Tokayev's administration has taken steps to improve the nation's religious freedom record, and in February 2019 attended the second US-Kazakhstan Religious Freedom Working Group during which Kazakhstani officials collaborated with US officials to draft a plan for religious freedom improvements. In July 2021, Chairman of Kazakhstan's Committee for Religious Affairs, Yerzhan Nukezhanov, signed a memorandum of understanding which "sets a three-year roadmap that will train local imams, priests, and pastors in dialogue, culminating in the establishment of religious freedom roundtables in nine Kazakh cities."<sup>36</sup>

**Sudan** – Sudan's Interim Constitution of 2019 includes provisions protecting religious freedom. Article 56 states that "every person has the right to freedom of religious belief and worship. They shall have the right to profess or express their religion or belief through worship, education, practice, performance of rituals, or celebrations, in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order. No one shall be compelled to convert to a religion they do not believe in or to practice rites or rituals they do not voluntarily accept."<sup>37</sup> In July 2020, Sudan repealed their apostasy law through the new Miscellaneous Amendments Act which earlier mandated the death penalty for leaving Islam. The apostasy law was used to arbitrary arrest ex-Muslims, Christians, particularly women born to a Muslim father, and Muslims who questioned tenets of sharia and Islam. Sudan's transitional government also agreed with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North upon the establishment of a commission on religious freedom.<sup>38</sup> The Republicans – a sect of Islam – has been allowed to practice openly again. The sect was previously banned and the former regime executed their leader Muhammad Taha for apostasy for asking for rights for women.<sup>39</sup>

**Tunisia** - In 2017, former Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi announced that Tunisian women were finally permitted to marry non-Muslim men; vice versa, non-Muslim Tunisian men would be allowed to marry Muslim women. Under the former legislation, any non-Muslim man who wanted to marry a Tunisian Muslim woman would first need to convert to Islam.<sup>40</sup>

**Uzbekistan** - In August 2020, Uzbekistan terminated a de facto ban on children attending mosque prayers which had been enforced under first president Islam Karimov.<sup>41</sup> The government continues to engage with US officials regarding promoting religious plurality, and in August 2021 President Savkat Mirziyoyev signed the new

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<sup>33</sup> BBC News, "[Egyptian woman 'wins court battle' over unequal inheritance laws](#)", 25 November 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Egypt Today, "[Egypt's Cabinet approves the legalization of 76 churches, service buildings](#)", 26 July 2021. ;

La Croix International, "[Egypt sees an increase in govt approved church buildings](#)", 25 August 2021.

<sup>35</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *USCIRF Annual Report 2019 - Tier 2 - Egypt*, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Jayson Casper & Rafael Balgin, "[Will Central Asia Become 'Stans' Religious Freedom?](#)", *Christianity Today*, 16 July 2021.

<sup>37</sup> *Sudan's Constitution of 2019*, Constitute Project.

<sup>38</sup> Christian Solidarity Worldwide, "[Government agrees to create a national commission for religious freedom](#)", 22 May 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Kamal Fahmi, "[The Apostasy Law: First-Hand Accounts of Suffering](#)", *The St. Charles Institute*, 4 May 2021.

<sup>40</sup> BBC News, "[Tunisian women free to marry non-Muslims](#)", 15 September 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Al Jazeera, "[Uzbekistan lifts 'ban' on minors attending prayers in mosques](#)", 3 August 2020.

Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations which provided a simplified and condense track for the registration of religious communities and “establishes the professional status of religious education”.<sup>42</sup> In July 2020, USCIRF Commissioners Nadine Maenza and Nury Turkel congratulated Uzbekistan on its religious freedom commitments and the fact that Kazakh religious communities who met with USCIRF delegations informed them of an improved situation.<sup>43</sup> In June 2020, speaking on the improvement of religious freedom conditions in Uzbekistan, former Secretary of State Pompeo explained that “we documented no police raids of unregistered religious-group meetings during 2019, compared with 114 such raids in 2018, and 240 the year before that. These are great strides, real progress.”<sup>44</sup>

**3. With regard to the freedom of religion or belief worldwide: what do you consider the most pressing threats and biggest opportunities? How should the European institutions mitigate the threats and pursue the opportunities?**

**Biggest Threats:**

**Apostasy laws** - Apostasy and anti-conversion laws criminalize and pose severe punishments for individuals who renounce or convert away from the majority religion. Currently, there are over 20 nations - in Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia - in which apostasy is penalized. Over 10 of these countries stipulate the death penalty. Though the sentences are rarely carried out officially, they have a chilling effect on the legitimate exercise of human rights. Some countries, such as Yemen and Mauritania, explicitly prohibit apostasy according to national penal provisions. Such is usually the case in nations where Shari’ah Law is supreme. In other nations, such as Jordan and Morocco, apostasy is not criminally codified, but influential leaders and courts have proclaimed its illegality and have prosecuted such cases. Other administrative punishments are also applied on converts or exMuslims such as the removal of the custody of their children, annulment of marriages, amongst others. In other countries, though there exists no national anti-conversion law, regions and provinces have passed relevant legislations. In India, for example, several provinces have passed laws that penalize religious converts for failing to seek permission or inform authorities of their conversions. These laws allegedly seek to outlaw attempts of forcibly converting individuals. However, due to vague and arbitrary provisions, they target individuals for innocent activities such as praying for, delivering aid to, or marrying someone of another faith, under the false allegations that they are attempting to coercively convert another person. Apostasy and anti-conversion laws are in direct contravention of Article 18 and violate other human rights protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**Blasphemy laws** - Criminal blasphemy laws, incitement to religious hatred laws, and anti-extremism laws are used to punish individuals on often-false accusations of making remarks offensive to followers of the majority faith/state religion or making remarks criticizing the Prophet. USCIRF identifies 84 countries worldwide with

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<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Rozanskij, [“Tashkent approves new law on religious freedom”](#), *Asia News*, 7 August 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Nadine Maenza & Nury Turkel, [“Uzbekistan Must Stay on the Path of Religious Freedom Reform”](#), 9 July 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, [“U.S. Hails ‘Real Progress’ On Religious Freedom In Uzbekistan”](#), 10 June 2020.

blasphemy laws; 674 relevant blasphemy cases between 2014 and 2018; and the countries that most frequently enforce blasphemy laws are Pakistan (184 cases), Iran (96), Russia (58), India (51), Egypt (44), Indonesia (39), Yemen (24), Bangladesh (19), Saudi Arabia (16), and Kuwait (15).<sup>45</sup> In countries that enforce blasphemy laws, prolonged imprisonment, physical torture, and other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, violations of due process, and in some cases enforced disappearance are often imposed on individuals charged with blasphemy. Blasphemy laws are in direct contravention of Article 18 and 19 and violate other human rights protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

**China** - Within the past few years, and especially since the implementation of the 2018 Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs, which pose serious threats to religious freedom by (1) taking away self-determination of religious organizations and communities and instead requiring religious activities to be inspected by governmental religious affairs departments; (2) prohibiting and criminalizing religious worship, activities, and education taking place outside of government-approved centers; (4) placing exorbitant restrictions on religious publications and receiving charity donations; (5) proscription of worship and church attendance to minors under the age of 18; (6) requiring government approval for missionary work and religious trips; as well as many more restrictions.<sup>46</sup> Since 2017, China has engaged in a campaign to arbitrarily detain peaceful Uyghurs in internment camps on account of their religious and ethnic background. Among the rights violations Uyghurs face in prison are sinicization of religion, physical abuse, 24/7 surveillance, sleep deprivation, forced abortion and sterilization, sexual abuse, and forced labor. In 2020, the US State Department designated China's persecution of the Uyghurs as genocide.<sup>47</sup>

**Arbitrary detention of religious minorities** - Religious Prisoners of Conscience are defined by USCIRF as “individuals who are imprisoned, detained, under house arrest, or disappeared for their religious beliefs, non-belief, identity, activity and/or advocacy for FoRB related rights, provided that they have not used or advocated violence.”<sup>48</sup> Jubilee Campaign is currently focused on the following prisoners of conscience:

- Hamid Soudad (Algeria): Authorities arrested Hamid Soudad in January 2021 for a Facebook post he shared in 2018 which depicted a cartoon of Muhammad. A court in Arzew charged Soudad with “insulting the Prophet of Islam” and sentenced him to five years in prison under Penal Code 144-2.<sup>49</sup> In March 2021, Oran City Court denied Soudad’s appeal and upheld his original sentencing. Soudad’s attorney, Farid Khemisti, has expressed his belief authorities charged his client with the maximum sentence because he is a Christian, as the penalty deviates from previous practice in which authorities apply milder sentences for sharing alleged blasphemous posts than sentences for authoring them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [USCIRF], [Violating Rights: Enforcing the World's Blasphemy Laws](#), 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Library of Congress, [“China: Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs”](#), 9 September 2017.

<sup>47</sup> United States Department of State, [“Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang”](#), 19 January 2021.

<sup>48</sup> USCIRF, [Religious Prisoners of Conscience](#).

<sup>49</sup> International Institute for Religious Freedom, [“Christian sentenced to 5 years”](#), 12 February 2021.

<sup>50</sup> International Christian Concern, [“Algerian Christian Prison Sentence Upheld”](#), 26 March 2021.

- Stephen Masih (Pakistan): In March 2019, mentally disabled Pakistani Christian convert Stephen Masih was engaged in an argument with family when a neighbor woman came and he used verbally abusive language towards her. She and other neighbors falsely accused Masih of blasphemy and an angry mob visited him in his home and assaulted him.<sup>51</sup> The next day, Punjab authorities filed a First Information Report (FIR) against Masih, and in June 2019 he was charged with blasphemy and transferred to police custody. After four months of advocacy by Masih's family, a medical examination board was convened to review Masih's mental state, and the Punjab Institute of Mental Health published the medical evaluation in July 2021 after a whole year of withholding the results, which found that Masih is "unfit to stand trial". Masih remains in police custody.
- Gao Zhisheng (China) - Gao Zhisheng is one of the most widely-known and respected human rights lawyers in China, notably for his work defending religious minorities and victims of state persecution such as Falun Gong practitioners; he also worked to defend political activists and critics of the Chinese government.<sup>52</sup> Gao spoke out on issues that many people dare not to for fear of retribution and penalization by state authorities. In his work defending those unjustly detained, he himself has been unjustly detained and forcibly disappeared.<sup>53</sup> Gao Zhisheng's most recent disappearance into police custody occurred on 13 August 2017, and his family has not heard from him since.<sup>54</sup>
- Pastor Keshav Acharya (Nepal): In March 2020, authorities arrested Pastor Kehsav from his home without a warrant after a video circulated in which he prayed for an end to the coronavirus pandemic; he was accused of spreading false propaganda about COVID-19. Authorities released Acharya on bail before promptly re-arresting him on new charges "of outraging religious feeling" and "attempting to convert others to Christianity" and transferred Pastor Keshav to Dolpa in a 72-hour grueling trip. Pastor Keshav has since been granted bail and released in June 2020, but his charges have yet to be dropped.

**Mob Violence against Religious Minorities** - In many countries, radical religious fundamentalists will engage in mob violence against religious minorities and converts as a means of exacting revenge or carrying the matters of punishment in their own hands. For example, in India in 2018 truck driver Mohammad Hashim was attacked by a radical Hindu mob who checked to make sure he was not transporting beef and attempted to force him to recite the Jai Shri Ram; his assailants beat him until he fell unconscious.<sup>55</sup> In February 2020, Hindu nationalist mobs viciously attacked peaceful protesters who were demonstrating against the nation's citizenship process which discriminated against Muslims; mobs killed 53 civilians, most of which were Muslim. Not only were police forces complicit in the violence, but BJP leaders even supported the mobs.<sup>56</sup> In July 2020 in Pakistan, an Ahmadi Muslim man Tahir Ahmed Naseem was on trial for blasphemy - he had been claiming he was a prophet since 2018 - when he was shot dead in the courtroom by a man who claimed he was told in a dream to murder Naseem; the killer had a history of attacking judges who hear blasphemy

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<sup>51</sup> USCIRF, [Stephen Masih](#).

<sup>52</sup> Teng Biao, "[The Bravest Lawyer in China' - Gao Zhisheng](#)", Amnesty International, 13 August 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Front Line Defenders, "[China: One-month incommunicado detention of four human rights defenders](#)", 27 January 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [China: Gao Zhisheng's Case and Recent News on Secret Jails](#).

<sup>55</sup> Lauren Frayer, "[This Is It. I'm Going To Die': India's Minorities Are Targeted In Lynchings](#)", NPR, 21 August 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Jayshree Bajoria, "[India's Police Found Complicit in Anti-Muslim Mob Violence](#)", *Human Rights Watch*, 17 July 2020.



cases.<sup>57</sup> In Uganda on seemingly a daily basis, radical Muslim mobs have engaged in violent attacks and murders of individuals who have converted to Christianity or have questioned Islam.<sup>58</sup>

### **How to Pursue Opportunities:**

**US Leadership** - In some cases, the United States will take the lead in raising issues or making official announcements with regards to human rights and religious freedom. For example, directly following the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's designation of the Chinese government's human rights violations as genocide and crimes against humanity in January 2021, six other countries have followed suit and have ensured that the topic of Uyghur genocide has not been swept under the rug. When the United States takes leadership on a certain issue - or when any country takes leadership - European institutions should follow.

**Coordinated Sanctions Regimes** - European institutions and countries should coordinate with each other to level sanctions against known perpetrators of egregious religious freedom violations. For example, in late March, the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, and Canada collaborated to impose sanctions on Chinese government officials for their direct responsibility or complicity in the persecution of the Uyghurs. Similar sanctions should be taken to sanction officials responsible for situations such as: the Tatmadaw violence against and extrajudicial killings of civilians and religious minorities in Myanmar; the Tigray crisis by which Ethiopian and Eritrean armed forces are engaging in human rights atrocities; mob violence against religious minorities in India which has been publicly aided and abetted by BJP officials; etc.

**Transitional Governments** - European institutions should engage with transitional governments (i.e., Sudan) to promote religious freedom and plurality while they are in the stages of defining their country's ideals and drafting documentation.

**Social Media** - European institutions should use social media to release statements in support of faith communities and condemnations of religious freedom and human rights violations. Social media is also a good platform to engage with civil society organizations to assess the support they need and the situation on the ground in certain countries.

#### ***4. How do the European institutions perform when it comes to promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief outside the EU?***

They perform well in their speeches but in practice there are some gaps in application. For example Pakistan has been enjoying its GSP+ status since 2014. The EEAS only called for a review of the status following the April 2021 European Parliament resolution in support of blasphemy victims in Pakistan and urging the EEAS to review its trade agreement with Pakistan. Numerous Pakistani prisoners of conscience have come before Shagufta and Shafqat - such as Asia Bibi who was on death row from 2010 until her release as recently as 2019 - yet all the while Pakistan held GSP+ status despite the world being well aware of its atrocious human rights and religious freedom record.

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<sup>57</sup> Shah Meer Balock, "[Man on trial for blasphemy shot dead in court in Pakistan](#)", *The Guardian*, 29 July 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Uganda UPR](#), July 2021

Jubilee Campaign during a virtual event in 2021 asked a member of EEAS whether Pakistan had GSP+ status; the individual had assumed that Pakistan did not have the status but was incorrect. There are not enough monitoring mechanisms to uphold the already good policies – so the key is implementation. Recent news highlights that the EU is reviewing Pakistan’s GSP+ status to see if they will temporarily revoke it, but one spokesperson explained “a temporary withdrawal of the GSP+ status is believed to be the last resort when all other means of political dialogue and engagement do not produce necessary results.” Evidently, good results of dialogue and engagement are extremely few and extremely far between, meaning Pakistan should absolutely have its GSP+ rescinded.

**5. How would you evaluate the implementation of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (adopted in 2013)?**

The position of EU Special Envoy on FoRB was vacant from December 2019 until May 2021. Commission President Ms. von der Leyen had formerly stated in August 2020 that a special envoy would be soon appointed, and by March 2021, Jan Olbrycht, Gyorgy Holvenyi, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Peter van Dalen, and Miriam Lexmann on behalf of the PPE Group questioned the parliament on why the position still remained vacant.<sup>59</sup> Having a Special Envoy for FoRB would have offered a great voice to religious minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic who had been and continue to be scapegoated.

Paragraph 70 of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of religious or belief states that the Working Party on Human Rights in the Council would evaluate the implementation of the Guidelines (and progress made in FoRB promotion) after a period of three years. However, despite its entry into force in June of 2013, as of January 2019 (nearly six years after the Guidelines were implemented) there was no evaluation of implementation.<sup>60</sup>

**6. What is, in your evaluation, the effect of EU action by the following means?**

**a. The EU Special Envoy for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief**

EU Special Envoy for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief is a necessary position to represent the EU’s stance on various religious persecution issues across the world. Former Special Envoy Jan Figel was present at the first annual International Religious Freedom Summit in Washington D.C., and his remarks highlighted the EU’s commitment to religious freedom or belief. The EU Special Envoy also releases important statements condemning violations of religious freedom, engages with the US Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom as well as counterparts in other nations, conducts necessary country visits to meet with survivors of religious persecution and gather evidence on violations. Former Special

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<sup>59</sup> European Parliament, [Parliamentary Questions - 2 March 2021](#).

<sup>60</sup> Adina Portaru, [“The EU needs to show real commitment to religious freedom”](#), Euractiv, 25 June 2019.

Envoy Figel's advocacy was also instrumental in the release of religious prisoners of conscience Asia Bibi and Petr Jasek.<sup>61</sup> The newly appointed EU Special Envoy, Christos Styliandes, should have a larger staff, financial budget, and the authority to take measures to fully implement the 2013 Guidelines.<sup>62</sup>

### ***b. European Parliament (urgency) resolutions***

European Parliament resolutions have been effective. As mentioned earlier, the April 2021 resolution on blasphemy laws in Pakistan led to the release of Pakistani Christian prisoners of conscience Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel who were detained for seven years on false allegations of blasphemy. The European Parliament resolution of 11 February 2021 on the situation in Myanmar led to sanctions against imported Myanmar timber which funds the Tatmadaw.<sup>63</sup> In December 2020, the European Parliament passed a resolution that would permit the EU to sanction Chinese officials responsible for the genocide against Uyghurs; such sanctions were leveled in March 2021.<sup>64</sup>

### ***c. Trade relations with third countries (including the generalized scheme of preferences, GSP)***

The European Union's continued engagement and establishing of trade relations with nations is important leverage in encouraging human rights and recognizing religious freedom of belief.

## ***7. Which means or channels are most effective and why?***

The channels are most effective when they work in tandem. The European Parliament resolution calling for the review of GSP+ status in Pakistan placed the necessary pressure on the government to free the religious prisoners of conscience Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar.

## ***8. How could the efforts of the European institutions to promote and protect the freedom of religion or belief outside the EU be further improved?***

- Coordination with the different channels and mechanisms. The EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, properly funded and supported, would be a key partner in fulfilling that role.
- Work to address systemic and core reasons for persecution on the grounds of religion or belief – for example the penalization of apostasy and blasphemy. Several EU states drafted an UN Human Rights Council oral statement calling for the repeal of the death penalty for apostasy and

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<sup>61</sup> Evangelical Focus, "[EU ignores calls to renew mandate of Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)", 1 July 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Dr. Ewelina U. Ochab, "[To Address Religious Persecution The Mechanism Of The EU Special Envoy On FoRB Needs More Teeth](#)", *Forbes*, 4 September 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Italy Flouts EU sanctions to trade in Myanmar's illegal timber](#)", 1 September 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Joshua Lipos, "[European Parliament Adopts Resolution on Uyghurs Clearing Path For China Sanctions](#)", *Radio Free Asia*, 18 December 2020. ; Robin Emmott & David Brunnstrom, "[West sanctions China over Xinjiang abuses, Beijing hits back at EU](#)", *Reuters*, 22 March 2021.

blasphemy – this effort should be backed up with a resolution on the EU level.

- Be in touch with civil society to learn what is needed by religious minorities in vulnerable situations and how the EU can help them directly with aid and assistance
- European institutions should encourage EU countries to accept refugees fleeing religious persecution and make sure countries have access to the most updated country conditions. This includes being briefed and knowledgeable about the situation of particularly small religious minorities and communities, such as the Hmong and Montagnard Christians in Vietnam, those who have left Islam whether Christian, humanist but also Muslims who reject sharia laws or members of the Ahmadiyya community and other vulnerable groups. As of now EU countries should welcome current religious refugees facing imminent persecution in Afghanistan, including Christians, Hazara Muslims, Shi'ite Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, etc, with those who have left Islam are particularly vulnerable.

***9. How would you evaluate the role of the European Parliament (including the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance) in promoting and protecting the freedom of religion or belief outside the EU?***

The European Parliament plays a key role as watchdog and accountability partner and reminds the EU countries that these topics and religious freedom matter to their constituents. The European Parliament also passes resolutions relevant to religious freedom, for example the 29 April 2021 resolution on blasphemy laws in Pakistan; such resolutions send a message of the EU's commitment to freedom of religion or belief and that the implementation of such laws is impermissible. As a result of the parliament resolution it alerted the EEAS to review the GSP+ status awarded to Pakistan and helped in the release of the Christian couple Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar who had been arbitrarily detained for over seven years.

***10. How should the European institutions best engage with NGOs and civil society in order to contribute to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU?***

- **Hold regular meetings with representatives of civil society**, including NGOs who cooperate with victims of persecution on the ground, resettled refugees who escaped persecution, human rights and civil rights attorneys/experts.
- **Support ongoing global campaigns that address systemic breaches of religion or belief and listen to survivors within the diaspora communities**, such as survivors of apostasy and blasphemy laws.
- **Establish a mechanism by which EU institutions can receive regular reports** by civil society organizations to help inform the freedom or religion or belief policy and diplomacy with nations where persecution takes place.

***Open question: which message would you especially like to convey to the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance?***

- **Please prioritize the global repeal of apostasy and blasphemy laws** which are in direct contravention of Article 18 and 19 and violate other human rights protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- **Please place pressure on nations to release religious prisoners of conscience** such as Yaroslav Mysyak in Ukraine, Stephen Masih in Pakistan, Hamid Soudad in Algeria, Mubarak Bala and Yahaya Sharif-Aminu in Nigeria, Patriarch Abune Antonios in Eritrea, Ramy Kamel in Egypt, Nguyen Bac Truyen in Vietnam, and more.
- **Apply the newly introduced Magnitsky-style sanctions regime** against state and non-state actors responsible in violations of human rights and religious freedom in countries such as in Afghanistan, China, Eritrea, Myanmar, Nigeria, North Korea.
- **Bolster FoRB advocacy by recognizing its relationship with other human rights**, i.e., due process and rule of law; freedom from arbitrary detention, arbitrary deprivation of life, enforced disappearance; freedoms of expression, association, assembly; right to education; minority rights; etc.
- **Engage in other foreign policy initiatives that are favorable to respect for FoRB** i.e., promoting economic development, democratization, electoral legitimacy, peacebuilding, judicial independence, minority representation, education promoting tolerance