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"Much Effort, Much Prosperity"

- Euripides

Jubilee Campaign has been incredibly blessed in the first four months of 2022. After spending a couple of years adjusting to conducting online advocacy during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have carved out our own niche. As a result, we have been able to form strategic partnerships with countries and collaborations with other advocacy organizations, expand our engagement with the United Nations, and even take on new initiatives in congressional outreach. In March alone, Jubilee Campaign either organized or participated in seven virtual events for the UN Human Rights Council, UN Commission on the Status of Women, the United States Congress, and the Indian American Muslim Council. Meanwhile, we published two stand-alone reports and submitted six country reports to the Universal Periodic Review.

If the first four months of 2022 are any indication of what is in store, this year is emerging as one of Jubilee Campaign's most successful. We are so excited to continue our work.

Pictured Above (from left): Ms. Chiara Porro (Australian Ambassador to the Holy See). Mr. Jos Douma (Special Envoy for Religion or Belief, the Netherlands), Dr. Ahmed Shaheed (United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief), Mr. Dan Nadel (Director, US State Department Office of International Religious Freedom)

Events

March 8 - "Protecting Life: Repealing the Death Penalty for Apostasy & Blasphemy"
A UN Human Rights Council Side Event

March 29 - "Advocating to Eliminate the Death Penalty for Blasphemy & Apostasy"
A UN Human Rights Council Parallel Event

The UN Secretary General in his annual report on the question of the death penalty made clear that the death penalty, "must never be imposed as a sanction for specific forms of nonviolent conduct such as apostasy, blasphemy, adultery, and consensual same-sex relations. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief also made an early call for the repeal of laws which restrict religious choice and expression of belief. Despite this, at least 12 nations continue to maintain the death penalty for the right to exercise one's religion or belief, and at least one of these countries has carried out state-sanctioned killings on the grounds of apostasy, blasphemy, or religious identity within the past ten years.

Jubilee Campaign held two successful virtual events in March 2022 regarding the above problem, in which we bridged the world of activism and expertise on two separate yet interconnected issues: the abolition of the death penalty, and the advancement of religious freedom. On 8 March, we were honored to host a plethora of noteworthy speakers, including Ms. Chiara Porro (Ambassador of Australia to the Holy See), Dr. Ahmed Shaheed (UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief), Mr. Jos Douma (Netherlands Special Envoy for Religion or Belief), Mr. Dan Nadel (Director, US Office of International Religious Freedom), Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz (UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions), Ms. Fiona Bruce (United Kingdom Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief), Ms. Nadine Maenza (Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom), Dr. Mai Sato (Director, Eleos Justice; Author, "Killing in the Name of God"), Dr. Khalid Masud (Judge, Pakistan Supreme Court), Mr. Kola Alpinni (Nigerian defense attorney), and Dr. Ibrahim Salama (Chief, Human Rights Treaties Branch, UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights

Our 29 March event was targeted towards a different audience - congressional offices - though the topic was the same. We welcomed speakers including Mr. Rashad Hussain (US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom), Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham (Director of Global Advocacy, World Evangelical Alliance), Mr. Cheikh Mkhaitir (Mauritanian survivor of apostasy laws), Congressman Jamie Raskin, and our very own Executive Director Ann Buwald.



Ms. Chiara Porro



Dr. Ahmed Shaheed



Mr. Jos Douma



Mr. Dan Nadel



Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz



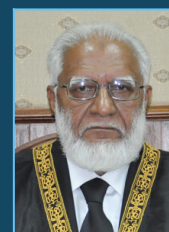
Ms. Fiona Bruce



Ms. Nadine Maenza



Dr. Mai Sato



Dr. Khalid Masud



Mr. Kola Alpinni



Dr. Ibrahim Salama



Mr. Rashad Hussain



Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham



Mr. Cheikh Mkhaitir



Mr. Jamie Raskin

In both of these events, we issued a call to action, best illustrated by quoting Jubilee Campaign Executive Director Ann Buwalda: "we must follow up with even greater action. Currently, there are four resolutions up for vote again at the United Nations General Assembly that we can engage with meaningfully in our capacity as advocates for fundamental human rights and religious freedom. Both the resolution on extrajudicial executions and the resolution on a moratorium on the use of the death penalty briefly note that religious minorities have been targeted for killings and death sentences on the grounds of their manifestation of faith, and therefore it would be timely and relevant to insert paragraphs that expound on this observation and condemn this intersection of religious persecution and arbitrary deprivation of life. Meanwhile, while the resolution on religious-based intolerance and the resolution on freedom of religion or belief denounce violence against faith minorities, they should include more specific language that emphasizes that the imposition of death – either by extrajudicial killings or the implementation of capital punishment – is the most egregious manifestation of faith-based intolerance and therefore must be eradicated."

March 14 - "Free to Convert, Practice, & Profess"

*A UN Human Rights Council
Parallel Event*

On 14 March, Jubilee Campaign, alongside Set My People Free, World Evangelical Alliance, The St. Charles Institute, Religious Liberty

Partnership, and Christian Freedom International hosted numerous religious freedom advocates from Algeria, India, and Nepal to discuss the blasphemy and apostasy legislation that are wreaking havoc on Christian and faith minority communities. In Algeria, for example, certain articles of the national penal code and a 2006 ordinance legally criminalize any acts or speech that is perceived as offensive to Islam, and even acts of peaceful evangelism are prohibited. Algeria will be discussed more in this newsletter's section titled "Country Spotlights".

In India, 10 out of the nation's 28 states have enacted legislations that counter allegedly "forced", "coercive", and "fraudulent" religious conversions. In reality, these laws have been used by extremist Hindu nationalists to prevent legitimate conversions away from Hinduism by falsely accusing faith minority leaders of forcefully converting individuals. Hindu nationalists baselessly claim that providing charitable assistance to or praying for individuals amounts to attempts at fraudulent conversion. India will be discussed more comprehensively in this newsletter's section titled "Country Spotlights".

In Nepal, blasphemy and apostasy laws are encoded in legislation as well; penal code articles 156 and 158 criminalize "outraging religious feelings" and acts of proselytism. In March 2020, Pastor Keshav Acharya was arrested and charged with allegedly spreading disinformation about the pandemic after a video circulated online showing him praying for an end to COVID-19. Authorities eventually released Pastor Keshav as they found no grounds that he had misled his church about the COVID-19 pandemic; while he encouraged his congregation to pray for health and healing of those afflicted, he had never discouraged them from seeking medical treatment. After Pastor Keshav's release, however, police swiftly re-detained him on new charges of blasphemy and attempted proselytism, and transported him in a 72-hour grueling journey to an isolated detention center in Dolpa. Pastor Keshav was released on bail in December 2022, though his charges have yet to be formally dropped.



March 17 - "Repressive Turn in Algeria: Crushing Religious Freedom"

A Congressional Briefing

On 17 March, Jubilee Campaign, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Open Doors, International Christian Concern, Set My People Free, ADF International, and Middle East Concern (MEC) held a virtual congressional briefing regarding the worsening situation of religious freedom in Algeria, which will be discussed at greater length in this newsletter's section titled "Country Spotlights". Moderated by Isaac Six of Open Doors, our noteworthy speakers included USCIRF Chair Ms. Nadine Maenza, MEC Executive Director Mr. Daniel Hoffman, CIHRS' Maghreb Researcher Ms. Nadège Lahmar, Vice President of the Protestant Church of Algeria Mr. Youssef Ourahmane, and Jubilee Campaign Executive Director Ann Buwalda.

Additionally, we were provided a video by the Protestant Church of Algeria displaying Algerian authorities forcing their way into churches, dragging out worshippers, and then sealing the building doors. Currently, over 20 churches in Algeria have been arbitrarily closed, leaving thousands of Christians without a house of worship and forcing them to conduct religious activities illegally in unregistered buildings.



Full Gospel church, closed on October 2019



Church of Boudjima, closed on May 2019



Tafat church, closed on October 2019



March 24 - "Overcoming Legal Hurdles to Women's Economic Empowerment in a Climate of Insecurity"

A UN Commission on the Status of Women Parallel Event

24 March was a big day for us at Jubilee Campaign, as we hosted two separate events to coincide with the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The first event, "Overcoming Legal Hurdles to Women's Economic Empowerment in a Climate of Insecurity", highlighted the obstacles that girls and women in Nigeria, Sudan, and Pakistan face in achieving economic equality. Certain commonalities were drawn between these three countries, most notably how legislation and patriarchy in particular threaten women's advancement in society and the economy.

In Nigeria, for example, the Sexual Harassment Bill, which would protect Nigerian women from all forms of sexual violence and harassment, was passed but only applies to tertiary educational institutions, despite that Nigerian women have reported numerous instances of sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, Nigeria's Labor Act prohibited women from night-time agricultural and industrial work, and the nation's Police Act relegates women in the police force to secretarial

positions and prohibits them from marrying and getting pregnant in their first few years of service.

In Sudan, one of the largest legal obstacles to women's economic empowerment is the 1991 Muslim Personal Status Law, which has a plethora of gender-discriminatory provisions, including: that the age of marital consent for a girl is puberty; that a woman needs a male guardian to support a marriage; that a girl under the age of 18 can be married against her will if a male guardian approves of the union; that the husband can legally prohibit his wife [and a male relative can prohibit a woman in his family] from obtaining work outside of the home; that a daughter inherits only half the proportion of inheritance as her brother, and more. As mentioned, a man is permitted to prevent his female relatives from having a job, and one Sudanese woman in Madani reported that despite having a college degree from Khartoum University and receiving numerous job offers and successful interviews, she has remained unable to start a career as her brother refused to grant permission, stating that she should remain in the home.

In Pakistan, meanwhile, legislation plays a smaller role in economically subjugating women, whereas patriarchal views of women – enforced by Islamic nationalism – perpetuates ideas that women are to remain in the home as mothers and as housekeepers rather than pursuing education and/or employment outside of the home. One notable legal hurdle for Pakistani women took place in November 2021 when the Senate Standing Committee quashed a bill which would grant women equal inheritance rights; restrictions on equitable land ownership and inheritance rights for women directly hinder their ability to open bank accounts, apply for loans, make financial investments, and therefore become economically independent.

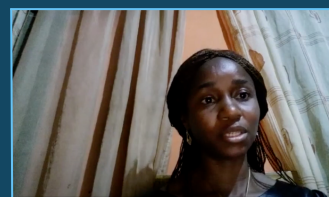
One unfortunate reality that ties Nigeria, Sudan, and Pakistan together with regards to obstacles to women's economic empowerment is the prevalence of child marriage in each of these countries. In Nigeria, 11 Muslim states have refused to implement the Child Rights Act which prohibits child marriage; uncoincidentally, these states display the highest percentages of child marriage. It is a great concern that Islamic jihadist groups Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province have kidnapped hundreds of girls over the past years and have retained a large portion in their custody to this day. In Sudan, Islamic law permits the marriage of girls as young as ten years old if they have reached puberty, and many families in extreme poverty will sell their young daughters into marriages with much older man in order to alleviate financial strain on the family. Finally, in Pakistan, a disgusting trend persists in which Muslim men kidnap Christian, Hindu, and Dalit girls, convert them to Islam, and then marry them against their will. Child marriage has a devastating impact on girls, as it prevents them from completing their education, forces them into premature motherhood, and thus prevents them from engaging in the workforce and economy, rendering them financially dependent on their husbands.



Ms. Hélène Fisher, Global Gender Persecution Specialist, Open Doors



Ms. Mariam Ibraheem, Sudanese Survivor of Apostasy Laws



Ms. Fatima Njoku, Advocacy Director, Stefanos Foundation



Mr. Yakubu Bawa, Chairman, Jos Branch, Nigeria Bar Association



Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham, Director of Global Advocacy, World Evangelical Alliance



Mr. Joseph Jansen, Founder, Voice for Justice

March 24 - "Unshackle the Women of North Korea"

A UN Commission on the Status of Women Parallel Event

Songmi Han



"It was not an easy time. Every day, for years, I waited for my mom to return to me. When I heard the sounds of trains arriving at the station near my aunt's home, I felt like my mom was calling me. I would run to the train station. Finally, one of my aunts told me that my mom was no longer in North Korea. I felt like I was to blame.

Many North Korean children hope that their mothers will come back some day. Their mothers live their lives blaming themselves for leaving their children behind. They feel so guilty that they bury memories of their children in their hearts. How much longer must these children and mothers live with such emotional scars in their hearts?

Each year in March, Jubilee Campaign teams up with the North Korea Freedom Coalition and Defense Forum Foundation to host a parallel event to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. This year, with the help of Freedom Speakers International, we welcomed two wonderful North Korean defector women, Ms. Songmi Han and Ms. Minhee Na, to share their stories of survival in and escape from the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.

Ms. Songmi Han was born in 1993 about 150 miles from the capital of North Korea, Pyongyang. Despite living relatively close to the affluent city, Songmi grew up in poverty and starvation. Her situation only worsened when her mother divorced her physically abusive father; Songmi and her mother only had each other. But when Songmi was twelve years old, her mother defected to China where she worked to earn money to bring Songmi across the border to her. At the time, however, Songmi had believed that her mother abandoned her. Meanwhile, she engaged in manual labor for many years while her mother was in China, and she was only able to attend school for one year. A few years later, her mother had successfully helped Songmi escape, and they were reunited at last. But nine years after resettling in South Korea, she had contemplated suicide; she was not sure what her purpose in life was, and she faced tremendous trauma from her time alone in North Korea. Group counseling sessions had helped Songmi come to terms with her past and understand what her mother went through to help her escape. Now, Songmi is living happily in South Korea and is studying social welfare.

Ms. Minhee Na was born in Pyongyang to a government employee father and a middle school teacher mother, and though they were loyal to the government they were unable to escape poverty. While working as a chef, Minhee learned that a North Korean textiles factory in Malta was recruiting workers, and she spent ten months learning how to sew before arriving in Malta. Minhee had thought that she would be able to experience freedom in a European country; rather, she and other North Korean workers were cheated out of their promised salaries, forced to work 13 hours per day, and were forbidden from speaking negatively about their home country. Minhee reflected that it was not until the factory started receiving a negative reputation for their atrocious working conditions that she realized that weekends off work were normal, and she was 25 years old when she first learned about universal human rights.

Minhee Na



"I was forbidden to speak with any non-North Koreans. I would only be ridiculed if a European man talked kindly to me. The only place I was allowed to stay was my tiny bedroom and dusty workspace in the factory, monitored and brainwashed.

I was like a hen living only to hatch eggs, locked in a tiny cage. What's worse is that everything I told you is not in the past tense. Even at this moment, there are many North Korean workers who are living this kind of life. [...] Female workers dispatched abroad had better situations than those in North Korea, but still we were cheated, exploited and controlled as we were living in a free country.

Country Spotlights

Algeria

Regrettably, no improvements have been made in regards to the situation of religious freedom in Algeria. Since December 2021, when we estimated that sixteen churches associated with the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) had been arbitrarily shut down by authorities, the official number has raised to 21 churches forcibly shuttered and an additional three receiving orders to cease their activities.

Currently, there are many Algerian Christians and Ahmadiyya Muslims imprisoned under the nation's laws prohibiting alleged 'blasphemy' and evangelism. In December 2020, a court in Amizour sentenced two Coptic Christian converts [Abdelghani Mameri](#) and [Mabrouk](#) to six months and three months in prison, respectively, for promoting the Orthodox Church. [Pastor Rachid Seighir](#) of the now-closed Oratoire Church, and his Christian bookstore salesman [Nouh Hamini](#) were charged with proselytism and sentenced to one-year prison terms in June 2021. Algerian Christian [Foudhil Bahloul](#) was arrested in April 2021 and charged with "spread[ing] poisonous ideas to the unemployed youth" for distributing bibles; he was sentenced to six months in prison. In April 2021, Islamic expert [Saïd Djabelkhir](#) was arrested and sentenced to three years' imprisonment for making online posts about Islamic texts and rites. Also in April 2021, Christian man [Hamid Soudad](#) was sentenced to five years' imprisonment on blasphemy charges relating to a cartoon of Muhammad that he had shared on his Facebook page back in 2018. In August 2021, Algerian Christian man [Suleiman Bouhafs](#) was repatriated from Tunisia to Algiers and is facing multiple charges, including blasphemy; he had previously been imprisoned in 2016 for criticizing Islam on social media. In February 2022, Christian man [Mohamed Derrab](#) was sentenced to 18 months in prison for distributing bibles outside of his church.

Remarks by Vice President of the Protestant Church of Algeria, Pastor Youssef Ourahmane, regarding the persecution of Christians:

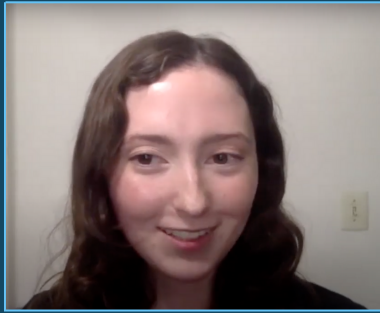


*"I came to faith back in 1980. I was born and grew up in a very conservative Muslim home and over then maybe 20 times, I have been interrogated and questioned by the police, and I was also sentenced [to] three years in prison. But because of a lot of pressure from overseas, I have been acquitted [...] All our churches and all our pastors and businesses, they were all Muslims, they were converts from Islam. So for them [the Algerian government] it is a big shame to have these converts from Islam being very vocal, very active and also they have been trying so much to stop [the persecution]. But unfortunately back in 2006 [...] ordinances were put in place mainly to persecute the Algerian Christians. One of the articles says we cannot "shake the faith of a Muslim"; [this] means that if you witness someone handing out [religious texts], [...] feeding someone,, [...] or buying someone medicine, [they] can be accused of shaking the faith of a Muslim; [they] would be in trouble [...] This is what we are facing with this law and actually we have been battling so much [through] advocacy, **but this time it looks that the Algerian government is really in a way firm that one of their goals [...] is to shut down all the churches in Algeria.**"*



Graphics used during Jubilee Campaign's social media advocacy urging the Algerian government to reopen the churches in time for Christmas 2021

Remarks by Jubilee Campaign Government Relations & Special Projects Coordinator Sydney Kochan regarding the plight of Indian Christian women, presented during Indian American Muslim Council's virtual event "Impact of Religious Persecution on Women in India":



"With regards to Indian Christian women specifically, violence against them has increased remarkably over the past couple of years. In July 2020 in Jharkhand's Khunti district, the body of 25-year-old Christian woman Suman Munda was found outside of her home; it is believed her murder was motivated by her religion.

In other incidents, Christian women have been targeted by state anti-conversion laws, as Rev. Dr. Evangeline noted; these laws, while they attempt to crack down on allegedly 'fraudulent' religious conversions, have been misused to falsely accuse faith minorities of coercive conversion. In February 2021, a group of Hindu extremists ambushed a Christian prayer meeting and began assaulting participants, including two women Sonari and Suroma; afterwards, the perpetrators dragged the two women to a local police station and baselessly accused them of conducting forceful religious conversions.

A dangerous combination of factors makes it both very easy for crimes to be committed against Indian faith minority women with impunity and very difficult for survivors of such crimes to seek justice. In a culture where misogyny persists and victim-blaming is commonplace, women survivors of sexual violence on account of their gender and faith are discouraged from seeking accountability, and even when they do, it is likely to be met with unfavorable results. In a similar way, faith minorities are often blamed for transgressions upon them on account that they are following a faith that does not align with the Hindu majority."

Country Spotlights

India

India has unfortunately displayed a downward trend in religious freedom in recent years, and 2021 was no exception.

In its Yearly Report 2021, the Evangelical Fellowship of India's Religious Liberty Commission reported 505 total incidents of religious persecution between January and December 2021, including threats/harassment (137 incidents), acts of physical violence (84 incidents), false accusations/arrests (81 incidents), interruption of church worship (65 incidents), social opposition/boycotts (36 incidents), hate campaigns (34 incidents), acts of vandalism (18 incidents), church demolitions (5 incidents), and murder (3 incidents).

Ten of India's 28 states (36%) have enacted legislations that counter allegedly "forced", "coercive", and "fraudulent" religious conversions. In reality, these laws have been used by extremist Hindu nationalists to prevent conversion away from Hinduism by falsely accusing faith minority leaders of forcefully converting individuals. Hindu nationalists baselessly claim that providing charitable assistance to or praying for individuals amounts to attempts at fraudulent conversion.

Uttar Pradesh's and Madhya Pradesh's anti-conversion legislations were both enacted in response to the 'love jihad' conspiracy theory. This baseless theory posits that Muslim men are seducing and marrying Hindu women with the purpose of converting them to Islam. As such, Uttar Pradesh's and Madhya Pradesh's laws crack down on such marriages and they embolden radical Hindus to falsely accuse Muslim men of engaging in such actions. Numerous arrests have ensued in direct response to the love jihad laws, and in September 24-year-old Arbaaz Mullah was killed on accusations of love jihad after he began a consensual relationship with a Hindu woman.

Country Spotlights

Indonesia

Over the past few years, Jubilee has maintained a close eye on the deteriorating situation of religious freedom in Indonesia. For example, despite that the 1959 Constitution guarantees citizens the right to freedom of religion or belief, the nation only formally recognizes six official religions. Moreover, the 1965 Blasphemy Law criminalizes perceived "deviations" from these official religions. As recently as September 2019, the Indonesian parliament drafted amendments to the Blasphemy Law which would expand the perceived crimes of blasphemy to include "defaming religious artifacts". According to the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI), during the COVID-19 pandemic but no later than June 2020 there were 38 cases of alleged blasphemy reported to law enforcement. Some of these were regarding a district leader distributing Friday prayer gathering flyers; an unproven mass religious conversion of children; deviating from traditional religious teachings; insulting a religious symbol; claiming to be an Islamic prophet; etc. The accused ranged from people in their early 20s and as young as 14. In the year following this June 2020 report, there have been numerous additional blasphemy cases. In August 2020, 70-year-old Catholic man Apollinaris Darmawan was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for blasphemy after he tweeted criticisms of Islam. In October 2020, Kenneth Saputra was arrested and charged with blasphemy after making a joke in a TikTok video that a mosque was playing dance music. A year later in September 2021, Indonesian YouTuber and Christian convert Muhammad Kace was physically tortured and humiliated in detention by his inmates for allegedly committing blasphemy. Also in September, Muslim imam Yahya Waloni was arrested for blasphemy after stating in a sermon that he believed the bible was fake.* One major incident occurred in May 2021 when Chinese Christian man Jozeph Paul Zhang posted a video criticizing the Indonesian government's harsh treatment of individuals who commit alleged blasphemy against Islam but lenience towards individuals from the major religion who criticize minority faiths.* Shortly after he uploaded the video, Indonesian Muslim clerics called for his murder and government officials threatened to enlist the assistance of Interpol to track him down.

*Jubilee Campaign calls for the repeal of blasphemy laws and believes that efforts to apply these laws non-discriminatorily do not detract from the innate illegality of these laws, which penalize individuals for expressing their beliefs.



Morocco

Morocco similarly shares an unfortunate track record with regards to religious freedom. National legislation criminalizes acts of evangelism, and as recently as 2016 the Moroccan government has expanded the definition of the crime of blasphemy to include any activity that "offends" the Islamic faith, for which an individual can be sentenced to five years in prison. In May 2020, famous actor Rafik Boubker was arrested and charged with blasphemy after he posted a video of himself, intoxicated, saying "we are at the mosque since bars are closed because of the lockdown. Make [your] ablution with wine and perform prayers with whiskey". Boubker, a Muslim himself, has since publicly apologized for his remarks and was released from custody on bail. Ordinary Moroccan citizens charged with blasphemy do not have the benefit of fame or an established reputation. In May 2020, Moroccan authorities arrested, charged with blasphemy, and sentenced to six months' imprisonment Mohammad Awatif Kachach after he posted a satirical cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad on social media. One year later, in June 2021, police in Casablanca arrested a 23-year-old Moroccan-Italian woman at the airport when she returned from studying law in France. 9

woman, who had shared a Facebook post in which Quranic verse were used "in a parodic praise of the consumption of alcohol", was charged with blasphemy, sentenced to three and a half years in prison, and fined 55,000 dirhams (~ USD \$6000). The woman's father has defended her by explaining that she is not fluent in Arabic and could not understand the nature of the post she shared. In addition, after visiting her in prison, the father stated that she is mentally struggling and that her future in law has been detrimentally affected by her case.

While in 2017 Moroccan religious leaders decided that apostasy should not be punishable by death, faith converts still face imprisonment. In mid-2020, Christian converts were being arrested on a weekly basis for religious conversion; one man in Al Hajeb city received death threats from his employer for his conversion to Christianity and was later arrested and sentenced to six months in prison



Country Spotlights

Philippines

Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte has a reprehensible track record of unfairly denigrating the Catholic Church. In November 2018, Duterte mocked Catholics for honoring saints, calling saints "gago" (fools) and "lasenggo" (drunkards). More recently, in January 2020 at the celebration of the 120th anniversary of the Baptist Church in the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte disparaged the Catholic Church, stating "You'd notice that they're no longer complaining even if I said the bishops are [expletive] ... they don't respond anymore. That is how to win the war against the Catholic Church. All you have to say is 'you sons of a [expletive], and you win.'"

President Duterte's vitriol surely has emboldened state and non-state actors who have engaged in persecution and violence towards Church members and leaders. In October 2021, Uniting Church in Australia and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) reported that between 2017 and 2020, at least 16 church members and leaders had been murdered for false allegations that they were involved in the New People's Army, a militant movement. Many more have been targeted for attempted murders and death threats but have survived, including bishops, priests, ministers, and laypeople, notably from the UCCP, the Roman Catholic Church, the Iglesia Filipino Independiente (IFI) church, and the United Methodist Church.

In addition to the prevalent violations of religious freedom taking place in the Philippines, Jubilee Campaign is monitoring another horrifying trend: violence against children (VAC) and child sexual abuse (CSA). Cameleon Association reveals that more than 70% of sexually abused children in the Philippines are between the ages of 10 and 18; another 20% are under the age of 6. In May 2020, the International Justice Mission (IJM), in partnership with the US Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (TIP), and the Philippine Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) published a report in which they revealed that between 2014 and 2017: (1) "the estimated number/prevalence rate of IP addresses used for CSE [child sexual abuse] each month grew more than 12-fold"; (2) the average age of victims of OSEC whose cases are referred for investigation was just 11 years old, the youngest victim being under one year old; and (3) in the vast majority (89%) of OSEC cases, the perpetrators and facilitators were related to the child victims. The Philippines' Department of Justice recorded a three-fold increase in the number of OSEC cases beginning in March 2020 after the first set of pandemic lockdown regulations.

Prisoner of Conscience Updates

Iran

In November 2020, Iranian intelligence authorities raided the homes of three Christian converts, [Amin Khaki](#), [Milad Gourdazi](#), and [Alireza Nourmohammadi](#), confiscating Bibles and other personal property including cellphones and computers. The men were not arrested but were subsequently summoned to the police station and warned not to continue their religious activities.

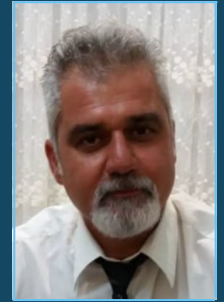
The Penal Code of Iran was recently amended in January 2021, including Article 500 which was revised to criminalize "any deviant education or propaganda that contradicts or interferes with the sacred Sharia". Following the amendment, religious freedom and human rights activists alike expressed public concerns that the new law would be applied to crack down on faith minorities.

These anxieties came to fruition when, six months later, Khaki, Gourdazi, and Nourmohammadi were each sentenced to the maximum penalty - five years' imprisonment - for disseminating "propaganda that educates in a deviant way contrary to the holy religion of Islam", and were additionally fined 40 million tomans (\approx USD \$1,600) each.

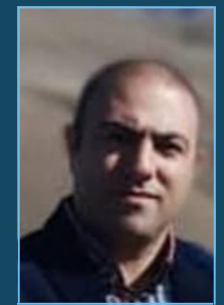
In August 2021, an Iranian court rejected the three mens' appeal request, though their sentences were reduced to three years' imprisonment and a lesser fine. By September, Khaki, Gourdazi, and Nourmohammadi received notice that they must turn themselves in to start their prison terms in November 2021.



Amin Khaki



**Alireza
Nourmohammadi**



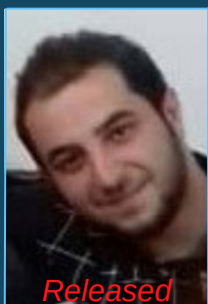
Milad Gourdazi

Throughout February 2019, Iranian authorities of the Revolutionary Guard arrested and summoned to the police station nine Christian converts - [Behnam Akhlaghi](#), [Mehdi Khatibi](#), [Babak Hosseinzadeh](#), [Abdolreza Haghnejad](#), [Shahrooz Eslamdoust](#), [Khalil Dehghanpour](#), [Hossein Kadivar](#), [Kamal Naamanian](#), and [Mohammed Vafadar](#) - for their religious activities. In late July 2019, all nine men were charged with "acting against national security" and "promoting Zionism" and were sentenced to five years' imprisonment each. During their court hearing, Judge Mohammed Moghiseh rejected the attorney who was enlisted to represent five of the nine men; in response, the group of nine defendants rejected the court-provided attorney, thus angering the judge who ordered the immediate transfer of four of the men to prison.

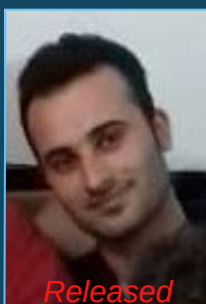
In March 2020, the nine men had lost their appeal requests, and a lawyer representing the group said of the court's decision that Iran is attempting to "expedite its judicial processes due to a backlog of cases relating to recent protests and a general breakdown as a result of the coronavirus outbreak". Also in March, four of the nine men - Vafadar, Naamanian, Dehghanpour, Kadivar - were released during Iran's mass exodus of 85,000 prisoners to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in detention centers.

Over a year and a half later in November 2021, in a surprising turn of events, the Iranian Supreme Court reviewed the sentences of the nine Christian converts and found that participation in house churches does not legally constitute "a crime against national security"; subsequently, the Supreme Court ordered the release of the nine men, and in late February 2022 we received great news that Branch 34 of Tehran's Appeal Court overturned their convictions. This acquittal was decided on the grounds that "the defendants, according to the teachings of Christianity, worshiped and praised in the house-church, and there was no positive evidence to validate the crime of acting against the security of the country in the case".

Behnam Akhlaghi



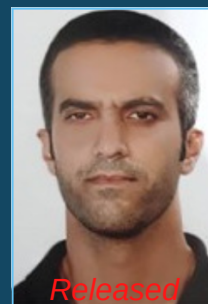
Mehdi Khatibi



Babak Hosseinzadeh



Shahrooz Eslamdoust



Mohammed Vafadar



Kamal Naamanian



Khalil Dehghanpour



Hossein Kadivar



One of the nine men, [Abdolreza Haghnejad](#), was acquitted and released alongside his eight peers; unfortunately, however, in January 2022 he was rearrested to serve in prison for a sentence that had been previously overturned eight years ago. In 2014, Haghnejad was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for "acting against the security of the country by forming and propagating Christianity outside the church and in the house church and giving information to the enemies of Islam", though these charges were officially dropped in the same year. Now, the Karaj Revolutionary Court has overturned Haghnejad's 2014 acquittal, declaring him an 'enemy of the state' and summoning him to serve his sentence in full. A close friend expressed concern for Haghnejad's and his family's mental state as he has been summoned to prison again after such a brief reunion in freedom.

While the acquittal of Akhlaghi, Khatibi, Hosseinzadeh, Eslamdoust, Vafadar, Naamanian, Dehghanpour, Kadivar, and Haghnejad have rekindled hope that the Iranian judicial system will protect individuals' rights to religious freedom as is guaranteed in the nation's constitution and that the government may release from detention larger groups of religious prisoners of conscience, Haghnejad's re-arrest and subsequent summons to serve prison time for a charge that was acquitted of nearly a decade ago have stifled hopes for a positive change.



Abdolreza Haghnejad

Prisoner of Conscience Updates

Pakistan

In April 2021, two Roman Catholic nurses employed at Civil Hospital in Faisalabad, [Mariyum Lal](#) and [Newsh Arooj](#), were instructed by a senior nurse named Rukhsana to remove some decorations on the hospital walls as part of maintenance and cleaning. While Lal and Arooj were following their orders, Rukhsana told her Muslim colleagues and subordinates that the two women were removing Quranic signage in an effort to provoke them. One Muslim employee of the hospital, Waqas, was angered by this news and attacked Lal with a knife while she was tending to a patient. Waqas stated of the attack: "I could not remain silent over blasphemy of our holy prophet, so I attacked Maryum. The prophet's respect is more precious than my life or yours". The following day, a mob of angry Muslim hospital workers demanded "death to blasphemers" by hanging. Authorities, rather than detaining members of the mob who were threatening Lal and Arooj, arrested the two nurses and filed charges against them for committing blasphemy.



**Mariyum Lal &
Newsh Arooj**

In the months following Lal's and Arooj's arrest, numerous organizations and activists have called for their acquittal and release. Sister Genevieve Lal, director of the Catholic Women's Organization, noted that allegations of blasphemy threaten nurses' careers and livelihoods. The UK Parliament adopted a motion to call on the Punjabi police and the government of Pakistan to "protect those nurses and further to drop the erroneous allegations".

Finally, in late November 2021, Morning Star News reported that two months earlier, Faisalabad Additional Sessions Court Judge Shahzad Ahmad granted Lal and Arooj bail, but that the news was withheld until the two nurses were in a safe location. Judge Ahmad stated in his decision that "charging someone [with] blasphemy for simply holding [or removing] a religiously-inscribed sticker is not sufficient evidence".

Jubilee Campaign has been closely monitoring the case of Pakistani Christian man [Zafar Bhatti](#) who, prior to his arrest nearly a decade ago in Rawalpindi sold medicine, engaged in door-to-door evangelism, and established the NGO Jesus World Mission to assist those in poverty. In July 2012, local Islamic leader Ibrar Ahmed Khan filed a complaint at the New Town Police Station that he had been receiving blasphemous text messages from an unregistered phone number. Police then registered a case against Zafar Bhatti despite that he had zero connections to the incident, and they charged him with blasphemy.



Zafar Bhatti

Bhatti spent five years in pre-trial detention, during which he was physically tortured in attempts to acquire a coerced confession, though Bhatti maintained his innocence. In May 2017, Additional District and Session Judge Mohammad Yar sentenced Bhatti to life imprisonment for blasphemy. In prison, Bhatti had been pressured by Muslim inmates to convert to Islam, but he repeatedly refused to abandon Christianity. regrettably, during his prison term Bhatti developed both heart disease and diabetes. Since his original court hearing in 2017, Bhatti's appeal hearing has been postponed nearly 30 times and on 21 June 2021 his life imprisonment sentence was upheld.

After Bhatti's defense attorneys filed another appeal, Lahore High Court Justice Raja Shahid Mahmood Abasi refused to hear Bhatti's case and referred it to a lower court. In December 2021, a positive turn in Bhatti's case occurred when Rawalpindi Sessions Court Judge Sahibzada Naqeeb Shehzad allowed the British Asian Christian Association's (BACA) arguments for Bhatti's acquittal and release. BACA presented numerous viable points, such as that (1) there existed no forensic report of the blasphemous texts in question; that (2) no blasphemous messages were found on Bhatti's recovered phone; and that (3) the case has no witnesses.

However, all hopes were dashed when, on 3 January 2022, Judge Shehzad announced his decision to sentence Bhatti to death for blasphemy. Bhatti's wife Nawab has been inconsolably fearful that the sentence will be carried out, saying "I was broken by yesterday's court decision. I could not stop crying and praying; it was hard to take." One of Bhatti's lawyers, Mr. Naseem Anjum, stated "I have met Zafar Bhatti in jail and have explained the current situation of his case. [He] has confided in me and has said he is willing to face the worst. He knows he is innocent and God will have the final judgement."

Juliet Chowdhry of BACA criticized the decision, stating "Pakistani courts continue to free murderers and rapists from jail especially those who pay a compromise payment. However, they have repeatedly refused Zafar [Bhatti] bail or an acquittal when no evidence exists of a crime. [...] The courts, the police [and] the Government all seem hell-bent on killing an innocent Christian to appease Muslims [...]."

Over four years ago in November 2017, Pakistani Christian man [Nadeem Samson](#) was arrested after two men - Abdul Huq and Sakhawat Dogar - accused him of posting blasphemous remarks on his Facebook page. Samson's family, however, has raised their belief that Huq and Dogar fabricated the claims as an act of revenge against Samson with whom they had previously had a property dispute. Samson's family believes that Huq had used Samson's public phone number to create the a Facebook account and post the blasphemous remarks in question before reporting Samson to the police.



In detention at Lahore District Jail, Samson was subjected to physical torture to extract a false confession, and despite that his health had deteriorated - he had developed kidney stones and insomnia - he was denied medical treatment. In June 2021, Samson's bail request was denied, and it wasn't until December 2021 that Pakistan's Supreme Court had announced a date for Samson's appeal hearing.

On 6 January 2022, Jubilee Campaign received news from Samson's lawyer Saiful Malook that Samson has finally been granted bail. Malook attributes this success to the argument he presented to the court that Pakistan has been repeatedly violating the defendant's right to a free, fair, and timely trial, and that he was being unlawfully held in prolonged pre-trial detention. Malook also gave credit to Supreme Court Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah for providing an unbiased judgement and properly looking into the valid arguments in Samson's favor. Regarding whether Malook sees an acquittal in Samson's future, however, he admitted that "that is a different story", as his case is still pending in the District Lahore Court and could take years to be finalized. Malook also shared that he worries for Samson's safety, as radical Muslim mobs have been known to viciously attack faith minorities who are facing blasphemy charges as an act of 'carrying out justice' by their own hands. Regardless, Jubilee Campaign welcomes the court's overdue decision and echoes Malook's sentiment that this bail decision could bring hope to other faith minorities accused of blasphemy in Pakistan.



[Stephan Masih](#) (also Stephen Masih) is a 40-year-old mentally disabled Pakistani Christian convert from Sialkot District who has spent nearly three years in prison on blasphemy charges. In March 2019, while engaged in an argument with his family, Masih made some verbally abusive remarks towards a Muslim neighbor woman who left and returned with her husband. Her husband, local Muslim cleric Hafiz Muhammad Mudassar warned Masih that he would return the following day with a mob of local Muslim residents to 'teach Masih a lesson'.

True to his word, the next day, Mudassar and a mob of neighbors returned to Masih's home where they then accused Masih of committing blasphemy and physically assaulted him. However, upon the police's arrival, rather than arresting the violent assailants, authorities detained Masih and filed a case against him for blasphemy under Pakistani Penal Code Section 295-C. Masih's sister has asserted that, despite that Masih made some verbally abusive remarks during the previous argument, he had not engaged in blasphemy. Regardless, on 3 June 2019, Masih was officially charged and transferred to detention where he has remained since.

Throughout 2019, 2020, and 2021, Masih's family has campaigned to get him released on account that he is mentally disabled. In March 2020, a medical examination board was convened to review Masih's mental health, four months after his family made such a request. In late July 2021, after withholding the examination results for a year, the Punjab Institute of Mental Health released their findings that Masih suffers from Bipolar Affective Disorder, which interferes with his "judgement, behaviour and the ability to think clearly" and makes him unfit to stand trial.

Despite the Punjab Institute of Mental Health's findings, two months later in September we learned that Masih was transferred to Sialkot Jail and that he was not being treated for his mental disabilities. In November during a court hearing, in a hopeful turn of events, Judge Tariq Saleem Sheikh requested Masih's lawyers to bring all documents relevant to Masih's diagnosis to the court the following month. This was done so, and in January 2022 we were pleased to learn that the Lahore High Court set aside the previous bail denial and ordered a new decision to be made in February.

In February, during Masih's trial, Medical Board Dr. Aneel Shafi revealed that, while Masih does suffer from some mental disability, it is likely that he was incorrectly diagnosed. Despite this setback, Masih's legal counsel filed a bail application in hopes that Masih would be granted on the grounds of his confirmed disability. However, much like in other recent cases in Pakistan mentioned in this letter, on 25 March the Lahore High Court Judge Mian Khadim Hussain rejected Masih's bail request after the prosecution arbitrarily introduced two 'witnesses' who testified against Masih despite not having been present at his arrest in March 2019.

Prisoner of Conscience Updates

Nigeria

In April 2020, [Mubarak Bala](#), President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was accused by a Kano State law firm of making blasphemous posts on the internet denigrating the Prophet Muhammad and thus causing "public disturbance". The alleged post that Bala made stated "fact is, you have no life after this one. You have been dead before, long



before you were born, billions of years of death". The day following the accusation, Kano State authorities arrested Bala in his home in neighboring Kaduna State, transferring him to police custody in which he remained for over a year without a trial or formal charges.

In December 2020, a federal court in Abuja, the nation's capital, found Bala's detention to be unconstitutional and ordered authorities to either release Bala or formally charge him. In August 2021, a Nigerian court charged Bala with causing a public disturbance through his allegedly blasphemous Facebook posts, but one month later in September 2021 four noteworthy Nigerian human rights lawyers – Kola Alpinni, A. A. Muhammad, Ebuka Ikeorah, and Rouf Gazali – wrote a letter to the government explaining that multiple personal rights have been violated in Bala's case, such as that he has been denied medical care despite suffering from hypertension and that he was held in pre-trial detention for fourteen months, surpassing the legal one-week limit.

In early April 2022, Humanists International released the unfortunate news that Kano State High Court had sentenced Bala to an unconscionable 24 years in prison. Dr. Leo Igwe, a board member of Humanists International, stated of the case:

"The Humanist community in Nigeria is utterly shocked by the sentencing of Mubarak Bala for 'blasphemy'. It is utterly disgraceful that a court could convict an individual for making innocuous posts on Facebook. Today is a sad day for humanism, human rights and freedom in Nigeria. The sentencing of Mubarak Bala is a stark violation of the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief. We urge the authorities in Nigeria to ensure that this judicial charade does not stand".

Sudan

Sudanese Christian couple [Nada Hamad Koko](#) (wife) and [Hamouda Teya Keffi](#) (husband) are currently facing 100 lashes if they are formally convicted of adultery.

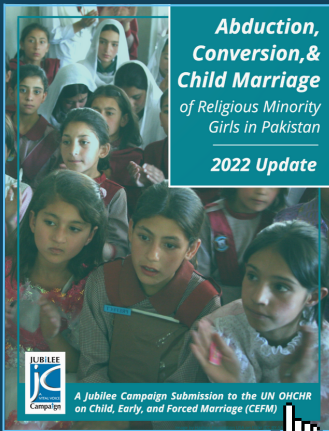
In 2018, Hamouda Keffi – then already married to Nada Koko since 2016 – converted to Christianity, and because Sudanese law prohibits marriages between Muslim women and Christian men, the couple was under pressure from Nada's Muslim family to initiate a divorce to prevent them from being punished.

In 2021, while separated from her husband and living again with her family, Nada too became a follower of Christ; she revealed that the nation's recent decision to decriminalize apostasy (faith conversion) encouraged her to freely choose her new faith. In August 2021, Nada and Hamouda reunited, as her conversion to Christianity allowed her to be married to a Christian man. In response, Nada's Muslim family filed a criminal case against the couple, alleging that Nada's conversion to Christianity was illegitimate and therefore the couple's marriage is invalid. Prior to Nada's return to Hamouda, her brother had threatened that he would take action to punish her and her husband for their actions. Nada and Hamouda are currently facing charges of adultery for their 'invalid' marriage, and the punishment stipulated for such a crime is 100 lashes and Hamouda's possible exile for a year's time.

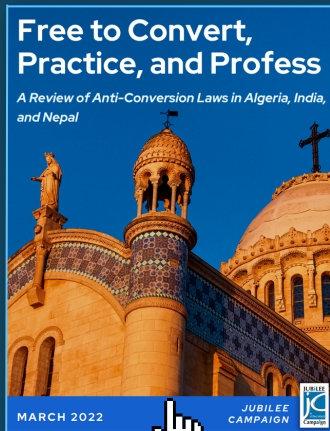


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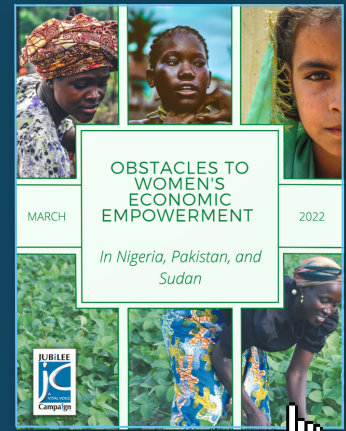
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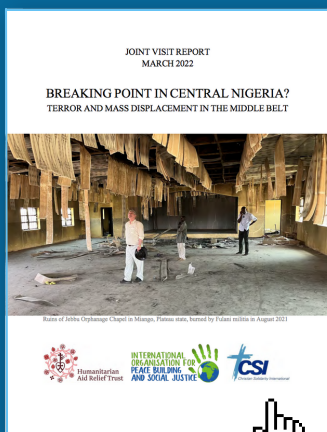


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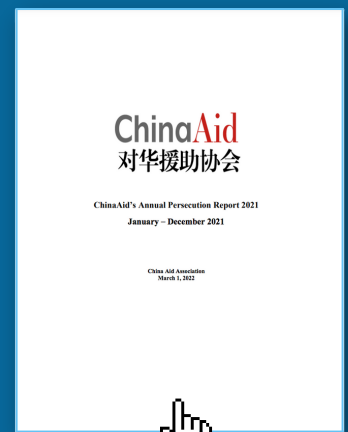
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