



Jubilee Campaign Contribution to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Call for Inputs on combating intolerance based on religion or belief

Global Religious Freedom Conditions which Require Further Follow-Up Measures and Engagement by United Nations Mechanisms

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise existing religious freedom concerns that endanger the global implementation and success of HRC resolution 52/38, from which excerpts are listed in the blue boxes below.

7. Notes the speech given by the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference at the fifteenth session of the Human Rights Council, and draws upon his call on States to take the following actions to foster a domestic environment of religious tolerance, peace and respect by:”

(b) Creating an appropriate mechanism within Governments to, inter alia, identify and address potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities, and assisting with conflict prevention and mediation;

In **Egypt** between 1863 and 2008, religious conversions were required to be held during “advisory sessions” with the converts-to-be and their families to ensure that faith conversions were neither coerced nor fraudulent. This procedure was suspended in 2008 and remains defunct despite that each year there are approximately fifty cases in which Coptic Christian women and girls are abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, and married against their will to Muslim men. Notwithstanding evidence of coercion, deception, and violence involved in these cases, governments and state actors formalize all conversions to Islam as it is considered a progressive step in expanding Muslim population. Police have refused to arrest those men responsible for the abductions and forced conversions, even when the perpetrators themselves have confessed either their direct commission of the crime or otherwise their secondary involvement thereof.¹

(e) Speaking out against intolerance, including advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence;

(f) Adopting measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence on the basis of religion or belief;

In **India**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has drawn international censure for repeatedly failing to condemn public remarks by Hindu nationalists and even politicians calling for violence against faith minorities including Christians and Muslims. In a December 2021 gathering in Uttarakhand state - in

¹ Coptic Solidarity, [‘Jihad of the Womb’: Trafficking of Coptic Women & Girls in Egypt](#), September 2020.

which at least one member of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was present - Hindu nationalist leaders urged attendees to “kill two million of them [Muslims]” and “pick up weapons and do this cleansing”.² BJP politicians also attended and participated in an anti-Christian gathering in Chhattisgarh where they galvanized action by stating “let us drag people from the church and stop conversions at any cost” and “we will frighten Christians who are involved in conversion work in the region.”³ In August 2023, the India National Inclusive Development Alliance, comprising 26 opposition political parties, submitted a no-confidence motion imploring PM Modi to make a public condemnation of the months-long violence against Christians in Manipur about which he had previously declined to acknowledge.⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the persecution faced by Indian faith minorities as they have been falsely scapegoated as super spreaders of the virus or are excluded from humanitarian assistance. Hindu extremists have made baseless accusations that Muslims are “coronavirus terrorists” and are “deliberately attempting to spread coronavirus to wage a holy war or jihad against the majority Hindus”.⁵ Numerous trending hashtags on Twitter included content falsely blaming Indian Muslims for “deliberately” spreading COVID-19, including #CoronaJihad, #BioJihad, #CrushTablighiSpitters, and #MuslimMeaningTerrorist.⁶

The **Nicaraguan** presidency and vice presidency have deplorably castigated the Catholic Church and its leaders over the past few years. In early October 2021, President Ortega referred to Nicaragua’s council of bishops who submitted a pro-democracy plan as “terrorists”.⁷ Ortega has also called Catholic bishops “coup mongers” and falsely accused them of using their churches and houses of worship to store weapons and to meet and plan attacks against the government.⁸ In August 2021, Vice President Murillo referred to bishops and priests as “sons of the devil” and “fake shepherds”; specifically in regards to the Catholic Church’s involvement in pro-democracy rhetoric, she claimed that bishops were engaging in “satanic rites” and performing “witchcraft” to oust the government.⁹

(g) Understanding the need to combat denigration and negative religious stereotyping of persons and incitement to religious hatred by strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through inter alia, education and awareness-building;

Contrary to the duty to prevent religious stereotyping and denigration, 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.¹⁰ Uttar Pradesh’s and Madhya Pradesh’s anti-conversion legislations, the Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance and the Freedom of Religion Act , respectively, were both enacted in response to the fraudulent ‘love jihad’ conspiracy theory which falsely posits that Muslim men are seducing and marrying Hindu women with the purpose of converting them to Islam. Anti-conversion laws and ‘love jihad’ laws have led to endless false arrests and incidents of persecution in the first half of 2021.¹¹

² Al Jazeera, [“India: Hindu event calling for genocide of Muslims sparks outrage”](#), 24 December 2021.

³ International Christian Concern, [“Hindu Nationalists Hold Rally in India Advocating for Anti-Christian Violence”](#), 5 August 2021.

⁴ Priya Sharma, [“Narendra Modi has ignored religious violence for too long. Now he must face the music”](#), *The Guardian*, 9 August 2023.

⁵ Sameer Yasir, [“India Is Scapegoating Muslims for the Spread of the Coronavirus”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 22 April 2020.

⁶ Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), [“The COVID Pandemic: A Report on the Scapegoating of Minorities in India”](#), April 2021.

⁷ Associated Press, [“Nicaragua’s President Ortega calls bishops ‘terrorists’”](#), 4 October 2021.

⁸ Deutsche Welle, [“Ortega slams bishops as allies of ‘coup plotters’”](#), 20 July 2018.

⁹ Inés San Martín, [“Nicaragua’s vice president calls priests and bishops ‘devils’”](#), *Crux Now*, 17 August 2021.

¹⁰ Meghan G. Fischer, [“Anti-Conversion Laws and the International Response”](#), Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs, June 2018.

¹¹ Maulshree Seth, [“Explained: Uttar Pradesh’s ‘love jihad’ law, and why it could be implemented vigorously”](#), *The Indian Express*, 5 December 2020. ; Roli Srivastava, [“‘Love jihad’ law seen trampling women’s hard-earned freedoms in India”](#), *Reuters*, 15 January 2021.

In **South Korea** during the pandemic, state actors and national media outlets scapegoated the Christian community for the spread of COVID-19. Under the guise of promoting health and safety guidelines during the epidemic, President Moon has condemned Sarang Jeil Church members for their attendance at anti-government protests and demonstrations, which he deemed “a clear challenge to the national disease control and prevention system, and an unforgiveable act that threatens the lives of the people.” President Moon, however, has made no critical statements towards the other individuals and organizations that participated in the 10,000-person protests, thus revealing his prioritization of stifling the church’s political activism rather than promoting health and safety to the general masses.

8. Calls upon all States:

(a) To take effective measures to ensure that public functionaries, in the conduct of their public duties, do not discriminate against individuals on the basis of religion or belief;

(d) To make a strong effort to counter religious profiling, which is understood to be the invidious use of religion as a criterion in conducting questionings, searches and other law enforcement investigative procedures.

In **Algeria**, churches belonging to the Evangelical Protestant Church (EPA) have repeatedly applied for operation licenses, but the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups – which is tasked with reviewing and approving permits in a timely manner – has not issued a single license since its inception. Therefore, churches have been relegated to operating illegally due to inaction by the Commission rather than lack of effort on the churches’ part. In February 2021, the Government of Algeria announced that it permitted all mosques to reopen contingent upon pandemic mitigation efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19.¹² The EPA inquired the Algerian Ministry of Religious Affairs whether churches affiliated would be allowed to open, but the Ministry stated that the new permissions did not extend to churches because the operation of churches was considered a “political issue”.¹³ Approximately 43 Protestant churches remain closed - or actively threatened with closure - in Algeria.

In December 2022, **Azerbaijani** authorities from multiple state institutions – including the State Security Service (SSS), SCWR, and Religious Affairs Commissions – conducted raids on non-authorized religious worship of various faith communities as well as raids on the homes of religious leaders who lead these gatherings. Specifically, numerous Muslims in north-east Azerbaijan had been fined for conducting home worship; in many cases, authorities raid such gatherings and confiscate religious materials.¹⁴ In September 2020, Azerbaijani and Turkish troops launched a joint 44-day military operation in Nagorno Karabakh against Armenian troops and, therefore, against innocent civilians, the vast majority of which are Armenian Christians. In addition to displacing at least 40,000 civilians, the violence caused 173 casualties, and troops destroyed myriad religious heritage sites and civilian infrastructure.¹⁵ Just days ago, Azerbaijan initiated its most recent incursion into Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁶

In **China** throughout 2022 authorities have either raided or issued closure orders for the following churches and faith-based associations: Ahnsahng Hong Church, Hokou County Jiayang Church, Aideyuan Fellowship, Christian Professionals Fellowship, Xi’an Church of Abundance, Berea Church, Sunshine

¹² International Christian Concern, “[Algerian Churches Remain Closed Amidst Pandemic](#)”, 18 February 2021.

¹³ Middle East Concern, “Algeria: Violations of the Religious Freedom of Christians”, 26 March 2021.

¹⁴ Felix Corley, “[AZERBAIJAN: Multiple fines for Muslims meeting for prayer in homes](#)”, *Forum 18*, 9 December 2022.

¹⁵ Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust [HART], [Grief and Courage in Nagorno Karabakh](#), November 2020. ; HART, [Continuing Impunity: Azerbaijani/Turkish offensives against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh](#), 24 April 2021. ; HART, [HART Visit to Armenia: Ten months after the NagornoKarabakh ceasefire](#), 20 September 2021.

¹⁶ Matthew Mpoke Bigg & Ivan Nechepurenko, “[Understanding the Dispute Between Armenia and Azerbaijan](#)”, *The New York Times*, 21 September 2023.

Reformed Church, and Canaan Theological Seminary. Coinciding with many of these church closures are the arrests of Christian leaders, including Pastor Wang Yi, Elder Zhang Chunlei, Pastor Hao Zhiwei, Pastor Geng Zejun, and Pastor Chen Lijun.¹⁷ Meanwhile, China has engaged in a campaign to predictively police and arbitrarily detain upwards of one million Uyghur Muslims in internment camps located throughout the Uyghur region on account of their ethnic and religious background. Uyghurs who are found engaging in behaviors perceived as potentially ‘extremist’ – but in reality are just manifestations of their religion and culture (i.e., growing beards, wearing hijabs, reading the Qur’an, and attending worship at mosques) – are rounded up and interned in what China claims are “vocational training centers” where they supposedly receive education and job training.¹⁸ In reality, Uyghurs experience “prison-like conditions”, physical and sexual abuse, 24/7 surveillance, sleep deprivation, forced abortion and sterilization.¹⁹

Similarly, in **Egypt**, the 2016 Church Construction Law requires that Christian communities submit applications and obtain approval for any “building, expanding, enhancement, reinforcement, destruction, or external detailing of a church, church annex, services building, or retreat house”.²⁰ The Sunni Muslim community is not subject to the same requirements for building new mosques or expanding pre-existing ones.²¹

Eritrean authorities have maintained a concerning and confusing pattern by which they both arrest groups of Christian believers and also release groups of Christian prisoners. In March 2021, Eritrea released 21 Christian prisoners of conscience – all of them young mothers – renewing the total to 171 Eritrean Christians that had been released from their unjust detention within seven months.²² Then, just over a month later in April 2021, another 35 Christians were arrested in a single day – 23 were holding a prayer gathering in Asmara, while the other 12 were holding a prayer meeting in Assab.²³ In one week in March 2023, Eritrean authorities detained en masse 30 Christians who were attending a worship gathering in the town of Keren, and fourteen other Christian prisoners were released from Mai Serwa prison and another detention center in Assab.²⁴

In 2019, the **Indian** Lok Sabha (lower house in Parliament) passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (the “CAA”). The CAA makes eligible for citizenship Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian immigrants fleeing religious persecution from neighboring countries. However, the CAA does not include Muslims—nor Jews, Bahá’ís, or atheists—despite the fact that many minority Muslim groups in surrounding countries, including Rohingya and Ahmadis, face serious discrimination within their home countries. The establishment of a religious test for citizenship, and particularly when used in a sweeping and discriminatory manner, violates both the Indian Constitution and international law.²⁵ In December 2019, a National Register of Citizens (the “NRC”) was created in Assam, where the Muslim population is significantly higher than the remaining areas of India. The NRC excluded 1.9 million individuals from citizenship, many of them Muslim.²⁶

Having staged a coup in **Myanmar** in February 2021, the nation’s military junta - the Taatmadaw - has undertaken to govern the country through its governing body the State Administration Council under General Min Aung Hliang. While we note that the SAC’s de facto leadership of Burma is illegitimate, we

¹⁷ ChinaAid, [Annual Persecution Report 2022](#), 13 February 2023.

¹⁸ Isobel Cockerell, [“China’s oppression of Xinjiang’s Uyghurs: a visual history”](#), *Coda*, 11 March 2020.

¹⁹ Lindsay Maizland, [“China’s Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang”](#), *Council on Foreign Relations*, 30 June 2020.

²⁰ The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, [“TIMEP Brief: Church Construction Law”](#), 29 July 2019.

²¹ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, [“Government legalises 125 churches and places of worship”](#), 29 November 2022.

²² International Christian Concern, [“21 Christians Released From Prison in Eritrea”](#), 4 March 2021.

²³ Keep the Faith, [“Freedom hopes dashed in Eritrea as more Christians arrested”](#), 21 April 2021.

²⁴ Release International, [“Eritrea - More Arrests, Some Christians Freed”](#), 22 March 2023.

²⁵ BBC News, [“Citizenship Amendment Bill: India’s new ‘anti-Muslim’ law explained”](#), 11 December 2019.

²⁶ Angana P. Chatterji, Mihir Desai, Harsh Mander, & Abdul Kalam Azad, [“Detention, Criminalisation, Statelessness: The Aftermath of Assam’s NRC”](#), *The Wire*, 9 September 2021.

raise human rights violations committed by its public functionaries. The Tatmadaw has specifically targeted numerous Christian houses of worship for partial damage and/or total destruction, including: Johnson Memorial Baptist Church; Thantlang Baptist Church; Matthew Catholic Church; Church of Our Lady of the Assumption; Church on the Rock; Thantlang Presbyterian Church; St. Nicholas Catholic Church; Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church; United Pentecostal Church; Thantlang Assembly of God Church; Gospel Baptist Church; Holiness Church; St. John Catholic Church; Grace Baptist Church; Taal Baptist Church; Thlanrawn Village Christian Church; Thlanrawn Baptist Church; Ramthlo Baptist Church; Ramthlo Assembly of God Church; Sang Fen Memorial Church; Chungcung Baptist Church; Toungphila Baptist Church. Additionally, numerous religious leaders have been targeted by the Tatmadaw: Reverend Thian Lian Sang (sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment for alleged rebellion in December 2022); Pastor Cung Biak Hum (shot and killed, body desecrated and looted of jewelry September 2021); Reverend Ngai Kung (arrested and killed September 2021); Pastor Om Kui (detained, tortured, killed, body discarded on the road December 2021); Reverend Van Cem (interrogated for support for Civil Disobedience Movement protest, escaped from military detention October 2021); Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson (detained at Mandalay International Airport traveling to receive medical treatment in Thailand).²⁷

In August 2022, it was reported that **Nicaraguan** authorities ordered the closure of six radio stations operated by the Catholic Church; in some of these closures, authorities would confiscate technological equipment and fire tear gas and gunshots into the air to disperse any Catholic congregants or leaders who attempted to interfere with the closures. The forcibly shuttered radio stations of early August include Our Lady of Lourdes Radio (La Dalia), Our Lady of Fatima Radio (Rancho Grande), Radio Alliens (San Dionisio), Mount Carmel Radio (Río Blanco), Radio Hermanos (Sébaco), and Radio Dario (León). The Nicaraguan government ordered the Nicaraguan Institute of Telecommunications and Postal Services (TELCOR) to issue notices of closure to the above radio stations, all of which were known for their affiliations to the Catholic Church and for their open critiques of the government.²⁸

Twelve out of **Nigeria's** 36 states [Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara] have enacted penal codes based on Sharia law, with punishments ranging from amputation to death by stoning. With the exception of three states [Kaduna, Niger, Gombe], all of the aforementioned twelve Nigerian states enforcing Sharia law are Muslim-majority. Where Sharia penal codes are applied, the death penalty can be a sanction for blasphemy, and such laws have caused the imprisonment and barbaric sentencing of citizens simply for practicing their right to expression.²⁹ Islamic gospel singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death in August 2020 after a series of audio recordings circulated in which he allegedly “praised an imam to the extent that it elevated him above the Prophet Muhammed”.³⁰ Human rights attorney Kola Alapinni took up Yahaya's case and his death sentence was repealed; however, he noted that the High Court of Kano State committed double jeopardy by ordering a retrial in the very same court that initially sanctioned capital punishment against Yahaya.³¹ Mubarak Bala, an ex-Muslim humanist, was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to 24 years' imprisonment in April 2022 for allegedly making blasphemous posts online.³² The existence of blasphemy laws themselves embolden non-state actors to take matters into their own hands to punish individuals who are accused of blasphemy. In May 2022, a mob of incensed Muslim students stoned to

²⁷ Chin Association of Maryland, Inc. (CAM), *Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma*, January 2023. ; CAM, *Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region*, June 2022.

²⁸ Catholic News Agency, “Ortega [redacted] in Nicaragua violently shuts down Catholic radio stations”, 2 August 2022. ; Reuters, “Nicaragua's government shuts one of last opposition radio stations”, 12 August 2022.

²⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [USCIRF], *Shari'ah Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria: Implementation of Expanded Shari'ah Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes in Kano, Sokoto, and Zamfara States, 2017-2019*, December 2019.

³⁰ Eoin McSweeney & Stephanie Busari, “The WhatsApp voice note that led to a death sentence”, *CNN*, 29 September 2020.

³¹ Adeyemi Adesomoju, “Blasphemy: Kano musician freed of death penalty appeals against retrial”, *Premium Times Nigeria*, 25 January 2021.

³² Rachel Deitch, “Fighting for Mubarak Bala's Rights”, *The Humanist*, 12 May 2020. ; Humanists International, ““Day of shame for Nigerian authorities”: Mubarak Bala sentenced to 24 years in prison”, 5 April 2022.

death and burned the body of Christian classmate Deborah Yakubu after she had made an allegedly blasphemous voice note in her class' group chat.³³

According to **Pakistan's** penal provisions criminalizing blasphemy, authorities have routinely targeted faith minorities, predominantly Christians and Ahmadi Muslims, as well as Sunni Muslims presenting dissenting views, for prolonged imprisonment. Some individuals - Seventh Day Adventist man Sajjad Masih Gill³⁴ (in hiding following November 2021 acquittal on insufficient evidence); Christian man Zafar Bhatti³⁵ (sentenced to death); Christian couple Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel³⁶ (acquitted in August 2021 on insufficient evidence and relocated to a safe third country); Christian man Asif Pervaiz³⁷ (sentenced to death) - were convicted of blasphemy without any evidence on accusations that they had sent blasphemous text messages. Others - university lecturer Junaid Hafeez³⁸ (sentenced to death); Christian brothers Qaiser Ayub and Amoon Ayub³⁹ (on death row); Christian man Noman Masih⁴⁰ (sentenced to death); Muslim woman Aneeqa Ateeq⁴¹ (sentenced to death); Christian man Nadeem Samson⁴² (released on bail, awaiting formal sentencing) - were convicted of blasphemy for posting allegedly blasphemous content on social media websites and applications. Many of these cases contain details implying that the defendants were framed or baselessly accused as an act of revenge by individuals with whom they had prior faith-unrelated disputes. Even individuals with mental conditions have been imprisoned for blasphemy. Christian man Stephen Masih who was charged with blasphemy after engaging in a verbal argument with a Muslim neighbor was evaluated as mentally unfit by a medical board and subsequently released on bail, though his charges were not dropped.⁴³ Another individual, school headmaster Salma Tanveer, was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death on accusations that she had denied the finality of Prophethood. The Lahore judge disregarded the Punjab Institute of Mental Health's evaluations diagnosing Salma with Schizoaffective Disorder and deeming her unfit to stand trial, a designation which would under law disqualify her from capital punishment.⁴⁴ The longest detained blasphemy convict is Christian man Anwar Kenneth who has been detained for 22 years. Kenneth had received a letter from Muslim cleric Haji Mehmood Zafar in which the latter inquired about Christianity and shared his disbelief in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection; in a response letter, Kenneth shared his rejection of Muhammad's Prophethood and welcomed Zafar to convert to Christianity. Kenneth's response was deemed blasphemous and he has since been detained for 22 years on such charges.⁴⁵

Throughout 2021 and 2022, **Russian** authorities arrested and charged hundreds of Christians with illegal missionary activity and heavily fined for such simple practices as: recruiting believers on the Internet; posting religious-based audiovisual material online; distributing religious literature; leading sermons; displaying not-for-sale religious literature in stores; and more. Russian authorities have even targeted Christian churches and institutions, including the Church of the Unification of Perm (motion to liquidate

³³ Magdalene Kahiu, "[Christian Entity Calls for More Arrests, 'murder charge' for Killers of Nigerian Student](#)", *Association for Catholic Information in Africa*, 18 May 2022.

³⁴ Jubilee Campaign, [Sajjad Masih Gill](#).

³⁵ Church in Chains, [Zafar Bhatti](#), 11 March 2022. ; Release International, [Prisoner Profile: Zafar Bhatti – Pakistan](#). ; Voice of the Martyrs, "[PAKISTAN: Zafar Bhatti Recovers from Heart Attack in Prison](#)", 24 September 2020. ; British Asian Christian Association, "[Pakistan's longest serving blasphemy convict has been given death sentence](#)", 4 January 2022.

³⁶ Jubilee Campaign, [Shagufta and Shafqat](#). ; Church in Chains, [Shagufta & Shafqat](#).

³⁷ Asad Hashim, "[Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for 'blasphemous texts'](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 8 September 2020. ; Church in Chains, [Asif Pervaiz](#), 10 February 2022.

³⁸ BBC News, "[Junaid Hafeez: Academic sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan](#)", 21 December 2019.

³⁹ The Hindu, "[Pakistan court upholds death sentence of Christian brothers in blasphemy case](#)", 10 June 2022.

⁴⁰ Massimo Introvigne, "[Pakistan, Young Christian Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy](#)", *Bitter Winter*, 7 June 2023.

⁴¹ Haroon Janjua, "[Pakistan: 'WhatsApp blasphemy' death sentence reinforces dangerous trend](#)", *DW*, 21 January 2022. ; Shah Meer Baloch & Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "[Woman sentenced to death in Pakistan over 'blasphemous' WhatsApp activity](#)", *The Guardian*, 19 January 2022.

⁴² Jubilee Campaign, [Nadeem Samson](#).

⁴³ Jubilee Campaign, [Stephen Masih](#).

⁴⁴ Ross Ibbetson, "[School principal is sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan after she was accused of distributing material deemed insulting to Prophet Muhammad](#)", *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2021.

⁴⁵ Jubilee Campaign, "[Anwar Kenneth, a Christian Man on Death Row on Blasphemy Charges, Files Final Appeal Against the Death Sentence in Supreme Court of Pakistan](#)".

filed), Good News Presbyterian Church in Mekhzavod (demolished), and the Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (operation license suspended).⁴⁶ Russia's persecution of people of faith extended to Ukraine following the February 2022 incursion. Only one month after the start of the offensive, an estimated 60 houses of worship and religious heritage sites had been targeted by Russian shelling and left completely destroyed. The State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience, which releases reports periodically regarding Russian troops' attacks on religious sites, found that, as of January 2023, 307 sites had been partially damaged or wholly destroyed. This includes churches, mosques, synagogues, theological institutions. The vast majority of attacked sites were Christian (297 sites, 97%), followed by Muslim sites (5 total, 1.5%) and Jewish sites (5 total, 1.5%). The Christian sites affected were affiliated with: Protestantism, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses.⁴⁷

In **South Korea** during the COVID-19 pandemic, authorities specifically targeted religious gatherings for restrictions and simultaneously disregarded other activities and secular events that drew large crowds of civilians. In June 2020, the Seoul government dispatched some 50 to 100 private individuals, not believed to be government officials, to demolish a local church and punish individuals gathered there to protest the government's attempts to dismantle religious freedom. In a separate incident, worship at a Seoul Church was interrupted when the Prime Minister sent over 500 officials, including clinic workers, police officers, and local district authorities, to dissolve the gathering.⁴⁸

Between 18 May and 29 May 2020, **Ugandan** authorities arbitrarily arrested six Muslim civilians; five of the detained individuals had leadership roles in their mosques, including being Imams or Muezzins. The first arrest was of Umaru Nsubuga of Namaseenene village, who was shot in the leg while attempting to flee his home and who has not been heard from by his mother since his arrest. Police then arrested 53-year-old Lamulah Nakyeeyune and her son in Butego village, 61-year-old Imam Twaha Kayondo of Kijjabwemi mosque, and two men Noordin Ssali and Bashir; police confiscated personal items, documents, and Kayondos' motorcycle. Prior to the 2020 arrests, Nsubuga and Nakyeeyune were arrested in 2017 for their alleged links to the murder of a former police spokesperson, but they were released over a year later due to lack of evidence.⁴⁹

In **Vietnam**, household registration is perhaps the most important documentation an individual or family can possess; with such documentation, one can apply for employment and education, open a business, gain access to government-funded public services, and open a bank account. Hmong and Montagnard Christians in the Central Highlands have routinely been denied household registration, rendering them stateless. Couples that do not have household registration are unable to register the birth of their children and obtain birth certificates, forcing the entire family to statelessness.⁵⁰

(b) To foster religious freedom and pluralism by promoting the ability of members of all religious communities to manifest their religion and to contribute openly and on an equal footing to society;

In mid-September 2023, the **Algerian** government convicted Reverent Youssef Ourahmane, Vice President of the EPA, of holding religious worship activities in an unapproved building, which is prohibited in two articles of the 2006 Ordinance to Regulate non-Muslim Worship. Rev. Ourahmane was

⁴⁶ Stetson University, [Russia Religion News](#), Updated 22 August 2022.

⁴⁷ State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience, ["11 months of Russia's full-scale attack: 307 religious sites ruined in Ukraine"](#), 27 January 2023.

⁴⁸ Kang Hyun-kyung, ["Mr. Mayor, don't cross the line"](#), *The Korea Times*, 6 June 2020.

⁴⁹ Davis Buyondo, ["Arrest of Six Muslims in Masaka Sparks Protests"](#), *Uganda Radio Network*, 1 June 2020.

⁵⁰ Boat People SOS [BPSOS], [Statelessness as form of punishment against H'Mong and Montagnard Christians in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam](#), 6 March 2019.

sentenced in absentia to two years' imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 Algerian Dinars.⁵¹ Previously, in 2022, EPA Pastor Salaheddine Chalah was convicted of “practicing worship without the prior (approval) of the National Commission for Non-Muslim Worship” and sentenced to 1.5 years' imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 Dinars.⁵² Numerous Christian converts and minority Ahmadiyya Muslims - including Foudhil Bahloul⁵³, Hamid Soudad⁵⁴ (released July 2023), Abdelghani Mameri⁵⁵, Mohamed Derrab, and Said Djabelkheir⁵⁶ - have been convicted on blasphemy and apostasy charges simply for expressing their beliefs about certain religions and sharing their faith with others.

In June 2021, **Azerbaijani** President Ilham passed amendments to the 1992 law on freedom of religion that have been criticized by domestic civilians and international rights defenders for their restrictive nature. The amendments require the pre-approval of non-Muslim religious leaders by the State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations (SCWR) which consists of the Sheikh of the Muslim Board, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the President of Azerbaijan. Additionally, the new amendments required the closure of mosques and Islamic institutions during periods when the Muslim Board leader position is unfilled. Faith-based communities without a “religious centre” (headquarters) are prohibited from assigning titles to and outlining ranks of clergy; establishing theological schools and organizing pilgrimages; and holding “mass events” without prior approval from the State Committee. Azerbaijani human rights activist Elshan Hasanov said of the amendments: “The result: pilgrimages – only with permission; mass religious rituals – only with permission; religious education – only with permission; literature – only with permission”.⁵⁷

In **China**, the 2017 Revised Regulations on Religious delineate a myriad of controls that local branches of the government's administrative entity on religion maintain over faith groups, including: approving requests for religious activities; reviewing and approving clergy and theological instructors' credentials and curricula; periodically inspecting religious sites; approving all religious publications to be distributed among faith communities; overseeing religious communities' online activities; shutting down ‘illegally operating’ or unauthorized religious sites; and more.⁵⁸ In more recent years China has ratified, implemented, or introduced numerous other legislations which grant more power to state actors and entities' to control all aspects of religion: the 2020 Administrative Measures for Religious Groups⁵⁹, the (Draft) 2020 Detailed Implementation Measures on the Administration of Foreigners' Group Religious Activities in the Mainland Territory of the P.R.C.⁶⁰; 2021 Measures on the Management of Religious Personnel⁶¹; 2021 Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services⁶²; and the (Draft) 2021 Measures for the Administration of Religious Schools.⁶³

In **Iran** in December 2021 and January 2022, a group of nine Christians was finally acquitted and released after spending approximately three years in prison for “promoting Zionist Christianity” and “acting against national security”.⁶⁴ In late 2020, a Christian couple - Sara Ahmadi and Homayoun

⁵¹ Middle East Concern, [“Algeria: Church leader convicted”](#), 15 September 2023.

⁵² United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), [2023 Annual Report](#), May 2023.

⁵³ Jubilee Campaign, [Foudhil Bahloul](#).

⁵⁴ USCIRF, [Hamid Soudad](#).

⁵⁵ Kamel Abderrahmani, [“The Algerian state, Sunni Islam and violations of religious freedom”](#), *Asia News*, 18 December 2020. ; International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), [“Two Kabyl Christians sentenced to heavy prison terms”](#), 8 January 2021.

⁵⁶ Amnesty International, [“Algeria: Islamic scholar sentenced to three-year prison term for ‘offending Islam’”](#), 22 April 2021.

⁵⁷ Felix Corley, [“AZERBAIJAN: Religion Law amendments ‘more controlling mechanisms’”](#), *Forum 18*, 17 June 2021.

⁵⁸ China Law Translate, [Religious Affairs Regulations 2017](#), 7 September 2017.

⁵⁹ China Law Translate, [Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups](#), 1 February 2020.

⁶⁰ China Law Translate, [Detailed Implementation Measures on the Administration of Foreigners' Group Religious Activities in the Mainland Territory of the P.R.C. \(Draft Revisions for the Solicitation of Comments\)](#), 18 November 2020.

⁶¹ [China] State Administration of Religious Affairs, [State Administration of Religious Affairs Order No. 15: Measures for the Administration of Religious Personnel](#), 18 January 2021.

⁶² China Law Translate, [Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services](#), 20 December 2021.

⁶³ China Law Translate, [Measures for the Administration of Religious Schools \(Draft for Comment\)](#), 9 February 2021.

⁶⁴ Church in Chains, [“IRAN: Nine Christian converts acquitted”](#), updated 8 March 2023.

Zhaveh - was sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment for establishing a house church and two years for membership in such a congregation, respectively. In April 2023, the couple was informed that their third appeal for a retrial of their case had finally been approved after their prior two requests were rejected in mid- and late-2021; Sara and Homayoun were finally acquitted and released on 9 May 2023.⁶⁵ Similar to non-historic Christian communities, the Bahá'í faith is not formally recognized as a legal religion, and they remain heavily persecuted within the social and educational sectors as well. Iranian laws restrict Bahá'ís from forming their own religious schools, and they are even expelled from school and prevented from attending college if their religious affiliation is disclosed. In the political sector, as they are not recognized as legal entities by the state, they are barred from holding public office including military and security professions.⁶⁶

In March 2020, **Nepali** authorities arrested Christian Pastor Keshav in his home after a video circulated online in which he was praying for an end to COVID-19 in Jesus' name. Authorities alleged that Pastor Keshav shared false information and allegedly spread rumors, which is prohibited by Section 70 of the national Penal Code. Pastor Keshav, with the assistance of his wife, was able to pay fines for his release on bail, though he was rearrested a second time on new and separate charges of proselytism. Once again, Pastor Keshav was released after paying a much higher bail than for his previous release; however, he was arrested a third time and transferred to a distant detention center in Dolpa. Pastor Keshav was convicted and initially sentenced to two years' imprisonment, a term which was later commuted to one year in prison accompanied by a fine. Currently, Pastor Keshav is released on bail as the Supreme Court is reviewing the admissibility of his appeal.⁶⁷

In 2016, **Russia** passed the Yarovaya Law which introduced multiple legal amendments, including one which characterized sharing one's faith, distributing religious literature, and inviting people to worship services as illegal missionary activities. Additionally, "all printed, audio and video content distributed by a religious association must have proper marking and bear the association's full name"; however, sharing information about the faith to nonmembers via the Internet and print is prohibited and criminalized.⁶⁸ In early 2017, the Russian Supreme Court banned the association of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds of "extremist" identity and activity, though there was no further clarification regarding what activities caused their proscription and new illegal status.⁶⁹

In **Vietnam**, the process of applying for registration of a religious group is both extremely lengthy and complicated; in order to register, a religious group must submit complicated applications requiring information on gathering locations, leaders, history of the group, and bylaws. Only after five years of continuous religious activity following registration can a religious organization apply for state recognition, for which they submit a dossier including information regarding "the group's structure, membership, geographical scope of operation and headquarters location; summary of history, dogmas, canon laws and rites; list and resumes, judicial records, and summary of religious activities of the organization's representative and tentative leaders" and more.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Church in Chains, [Sara & Homayoun](#), updated 10 May 2023.

⁶⁶ The Iran Primer, "[U.N. Report on Discrimination Against Baha'is](#)", 17 March 2022.

⁶⁷ Church in Chains, [Keshav Raj Acharya](#).

⁶⁸ [Russia] [Federal Law No. 114/FZ of 25 July 2002 – On Countering Extremist Activity](#) (O protivodeystvii ekstremistskoy deyateli'nosti).

⁶⁹ Patrick Reeve, "[Russia's mysterious campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses](#)", *ABC News*, 18 July 2021.

⁷⁰ Boat People SOS [BPSOS], [Statelessness as form of punishment against H'Mong and Montagnard Christians in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam](#), 6 March 2019.