



A REVIEW OF OUR 2023

Jubilee Campaign



JEREMIAH 29:10-12

*For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, **thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil**, to give you hope in your final outcome. Then you will call upon me, and you will come and pray to me, and I will hear and heed you.*

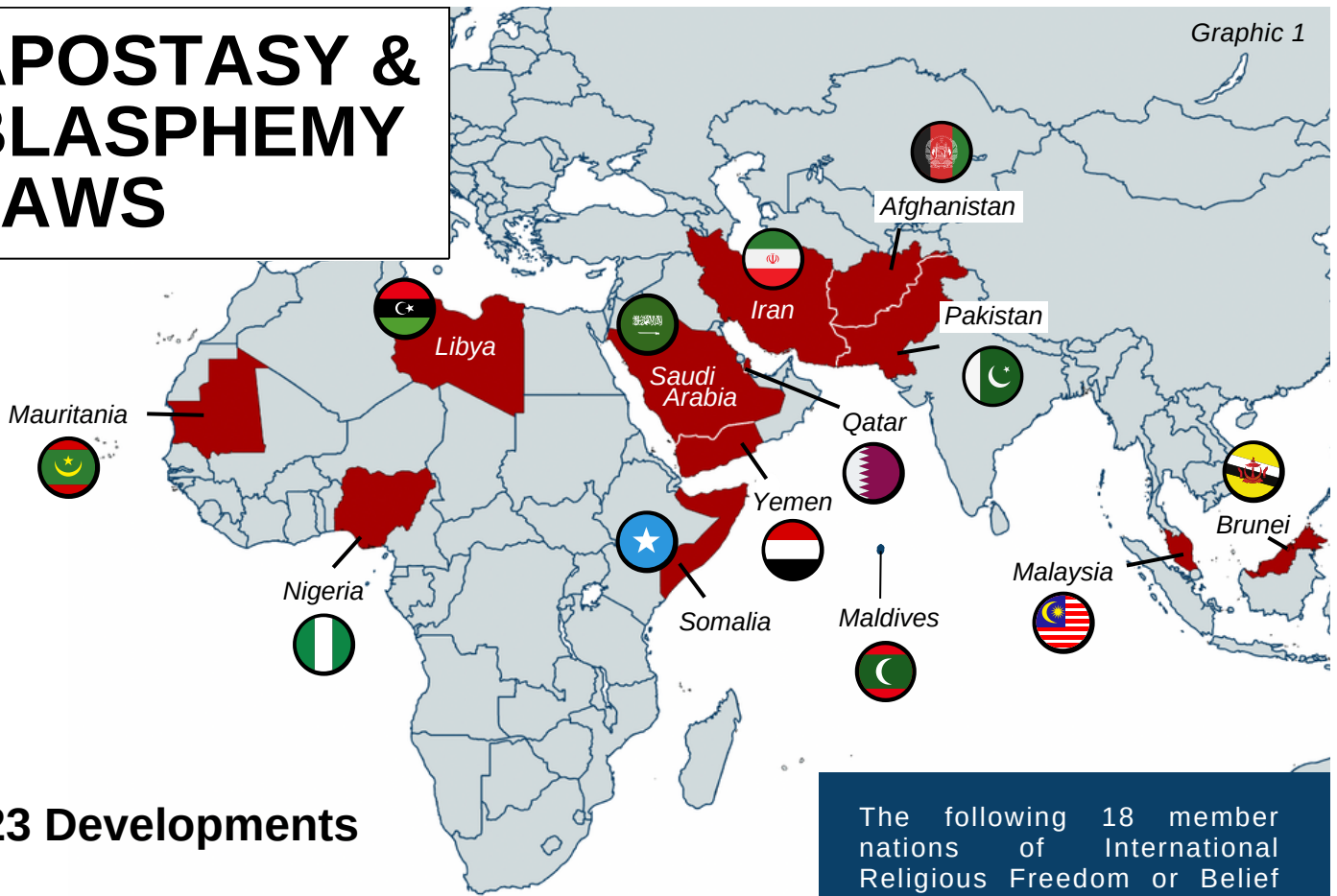


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APOSTASY & BLASPHEMY LAWS

Graphic 1



2023 Developments

In Pakistan in January, the parliament voted to expand the nation's blasphemy laws to include a term of imprisonment between ten years and life for any individual convicted of allegedly insulting any person connected to the Prophet, such as his companions, wives, and relatives. The sentence additionally imposes a fine of one million Pakistani Rupees and "makes the charge of blasphemy an offense for which bail is not possible". Numerous Pakistani Christians and Ahmadi Muslims have been detained or convicted and sentenced for blasphemy throughout 2023. This includes 23-year-old Catholic man Sunny Waqas who had been originally arrested in 2019 and charged with blasphemy for possessing printed photos of the Prophet. Waqas identified his younger cousin, 22-year-old Noman Masih, as the distributor of the images, and Masih was convicted and sentenced to death in June.

In Yemen in May 2023, Houthi militants stormed a peaceful gathering of Baha'i practitioners, arresting no fewer than 17 participants, including five women and a toddler. Days later during a sermon, Houthi Grand Mufti Shamseddin Sharafeddin accused the detained of being apostates, declaring that anyone who renounces Islam should be killed.

The following 18 member nations of International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance (IRFBA) have called for the global repeal of the death penalty as a sanction "for any activity categorized as blasphemy, apostasy, or speech that might 'defame' or 'insult' religious sentiments".

-  Australia
-  Costa Rica
-  Croatia
-  Cyprus
-  Estonia
-  Greece
-  Hungary
-  Israel
-  Latvia
-  Lithuania
-  Malta
-  Norway
-  Netherlands
-  Poland
-  Romania
-  Slovakia
-  Sweden
-  United Kingdom

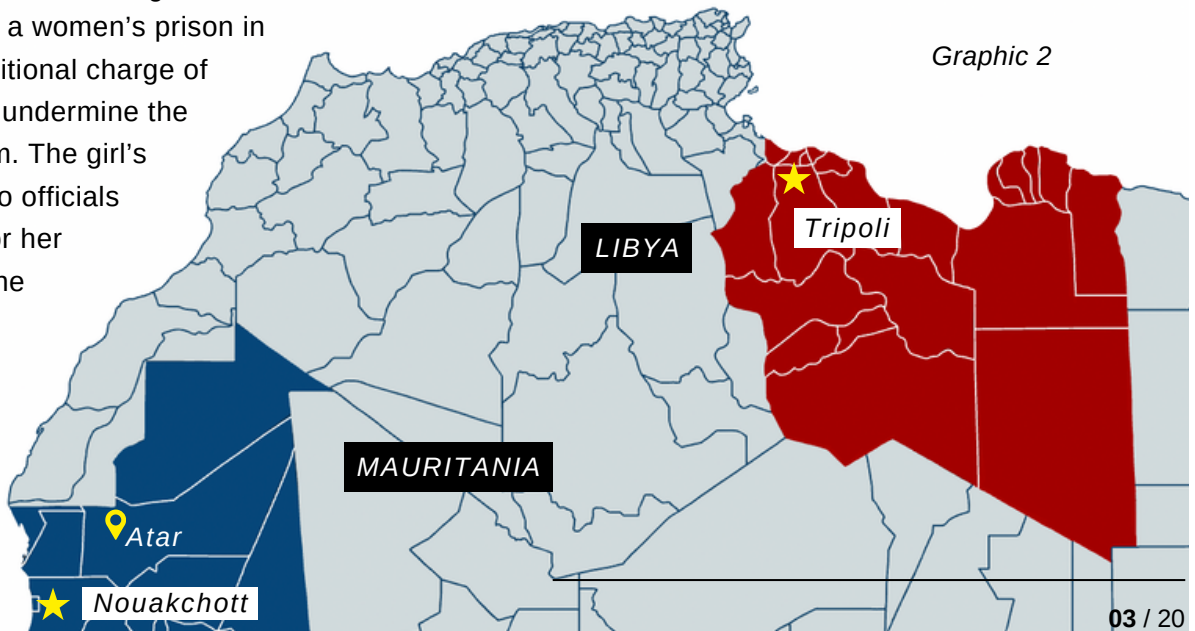


Image by [Taymaz Valley](#) on Flickr (CC BY 2.0 Deed).

In Iran, two men, Yousef Mehrdad and Seyyed Sadrollah Fazeli-Zare, were executed in accordance with the death sentence for blasphemy issued to them two years earlier for their creation of a social media group called “Critique of Superstition and Religion”. The Iranian government claims that Mehrdad and Fazeli-Zare, who operated 15 and 20 messaging groups “dedicated to atheism and desecration of the sanctities”, respectively, confessed to their charges, though this is a dubious assertion considering Iran’s notorious track record of inflicting physical abuse to extract admissions of guilt. Mehrdad’s and Fazeli-Zare’s executions came after being denied legal counsel and family visits, as well as spending time in solitary confinement and subsequently on death row. This incident is a “shocking new low” according to Amnesty International, as it terminates the decade-long suspension of capital punishment for all criminal conduct other than egregious drug-related offenses or murder.

In Libya, authorities from the International Security Agency detained a group of Christians, including two American citizens, on apostasy charges for their evangelist missionary work at the Gateway International School in Tripoli. The two detained Americans, accused of proselytizing in order to “seduce the sons of our Muslim people”, were later released and deported to neighboring Tunisia.

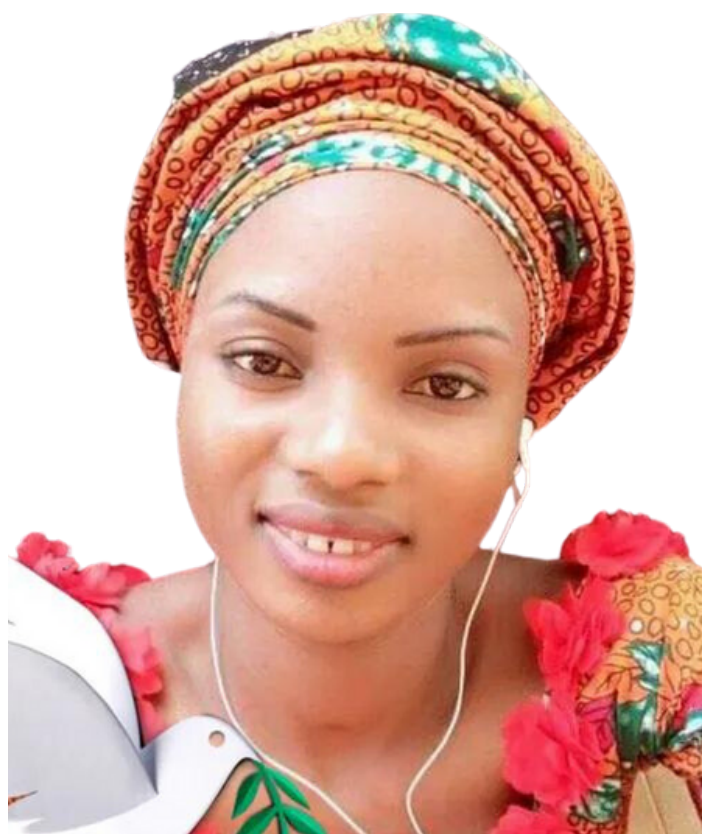
In Mauritania, Atar authorities arrested and charged a 19-year-old female high school student with blasphemy for allegedly writing derogatory remarks about the Prophet on a practice exam paper. The Nouakchott prosecutor’s office has reported that the girl has been placed in detention at a women’s prison in the capital on the additional charge of using social media to undermine the sacred values of Islam. The girl’s family has appealed to officials for forgiveness and for her release, noting that she suffers from mental health issues. The Association of Ulamas has issued a fatwa calling for her execution if her guilt is ‘proven’.



In Nigeria, butcher Usman Buda was viciously stoned to death after encouraging a local beggar to seek alms in the name of Allah rather than the Prophet. Usman's colleagues condemned him for allegedly committing blasphemy and descended upon him with stones and sticks when Usman refused to retract his statement. Local authorities arrived on the scene late, only after Usman sustained fatal injuries and the perpetrators had retreated. Declared dead on arrival at hospital, Usman is survived by his wife and six young children, leaving them to survive without "the pillar [of] our lives". Only a handful of mourners visited Usman's family following his lynching, as being associated with the family of an accused blasphemer can endanger their security within the community. Simultaneously, Sokoto officials made a controversial public response, noting that, while civilians should not have savagely murdered Usman, "Sokoto people have so much respect and regard for the Prophet Muhammad...hence the need for all the residents to respect [and] protect his dignity and personality".



DEBORAH
SAMUEL
YAKUBU



Usman Buda's inhumane killing occurred just over a year after a similar murder, also in Sokoto. Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a Christian student of economics at Shehu Shagari College of Education, on WhatsApp criticized that one of her class' messaging groups was being used to discuss matters of faith rather than school issues. In response to Deborah's remarks, Muslim classmates accused her of blasphemy and ambushed her while she was on campus, pelting her to death with stones and subsequently setting fire to her body. Despite videographic evidence which clearly showed many perpetrators proudly boasting that they killed Deborah, only two suspects - Bilyaminu Aliyu and Aminu Hakunchi - were arraigned. In an even more egregious miscarriage of justice, the two detainees were presented with grossly inadequate charges of "criminal conspiracy and disturbing the peace", both of which are bailable offenses and unconscionably trivialize the barbarity of Deborah's murder. On ridiculous claims that there was no corroboration of the defendants' participation in the crime, Court Guiwa Sokoto Chief Magistrate Shuaibu Ahmad disposed of their charges.

ADVOCACY ON NIGERIA

In the year since Deborah's untimely and barbaric killing, Jubilee Campaign has taken up advocacy for one Christian woman and mother of five, Rhoda Jatau, whom authorities arrested and detained simply for a post she shared condemning Deborah's death. The Nigerian government indefensibly charged Rhoda with "inciting public disturbance, exciting contempt of creed, and cyber-stalking". Rhoda's defense team had repeatedly been denied access to any supposed 'criminal evidence' gathered by the prosecutors, and her trial proceedings have been delayed on numerous occasions. The principal absurdity regarding Rhoda's case is that she has incurred the same charges of 'inciting public disturbance' as the perpetrators of Deborah's savage lynching, implying the Nigerian state's repugnant standpoint that expression of 'derogatory' opinions and criminal homicide are transgressions of comparable distinction.

Jubilee Campaign raised Rhoda's case in multiple initiatives, most notably written contributions to the UN Universal Periodic Review and Human Rights Council, as well as in oral statements and parallel events. Collaborating with the European Centre for Law & Justice and the American Center for Law & Justice, we hosted an event "Persecution of Christians & Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan and Nigeria". Human rights attorney Kola Alapinni attended our panel and shared how he and his legal team were able to achieve an overturn of Islamic gospel singer Yahaya Sharif Aminu's death sentence for blasphemy; unfortunately, though, this was merely on procedural grounds and the case has been remanded to the very same Sharia court for retrial, where Sharif-Aminu could again face the death penalty for simply singing remarks which allegedly praised an imam to the point it elevated him above the Prophet. Dr. Nazila Ghanea, the current UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, shared remarks virtually as she was unable to attend in person:

"The question of anti-blasphemy and anti-apostasy laws have consistently been among the most worrying issues



[...] representing an affront to the core of freedom of religion and belief and raised regularly by each and every one of the mandate holders.” Pakistan and Nigeria both have “serious obstacles to overcome to make freedom of religion or belief a lived reality for those in its jurisdiction.”

Just one month after our Human Rights Council parallel event in July and a couple months after our written submission on Nigeria to the Human Rights Council, Special Rapporteur Dr. Ghanea, alongside UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues Mr. Fernand de Varennes, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression Ms. Irene Khan, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention sent a letter to the Nigerian government raising concern about (1) Deborah Yakubu’s killers who remain at large, (2) a violent mob attack upon Rhoda Jatau’s Christian neighborhood following her arrest which injured thirteen residents, and (3) Bauchi state’s blasphemy laws which violate freedom of expression, conscience, and religion.

Regrettably, in November, Bauchi State High Court rejected Rhoda’s lawyers’ no case submission, an argument made for her acquittal and the termination of the criminal case on the grounds of insufficient evidence. After intense advocacy from many NGOs around the world including Jubilee, Rhoda was finally released on bail in December. We praise God for her release, although the case against her has not been dismissed and her charges remain.

In October, Jubilee Campaign welcomed the UN Human Rights Council’s passage of its annual Resolution on the Question of the Death Penalty which, for the first time since 2017, specifically called upon Member States to take “active steps” to reduce the types of conduct punishable by execution and limit its imposition only for the “most serious crimes”, which blasphemy and apostasy do not fall under. Jubilee Campaign joined the informal consultations [discussions on the language of the resolution] led by the core group of Switzerland, Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica, France, Mexico, Mongolia and the Republic of Moldova. We were also pleased to note that the 2023 resolution includes important language for the first time in its preambular paragraphs stressing that, “convictions resulting in the death penalty based in information obtained through torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of interrogated persons violate article 15 of the Convention against Torture...” Jubilee Campaign recently provided information to the Special Rapporteur on Torture regarding imprisoned faith minorities who are subjected to mental and physical torture to extract false confessions of blasphemy, most notably in China, Iran, and Pakistan.



ADVOCACY ON YEMEN

In April, Jubilee Campaign, as well as Lawyers without Borders France, was invited to present a testimony regarding human rights concerns in Nigeria in front of the Canadian Parliament's House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights and International Development. We noted:

- The UNHCR in November 2021 recorded at least 3 million internally displaced Nigerians, the majority of whom are in parts of North-East Nigeria and the country's Middle Belt, areas where Fulani Islamist and criminal gang violence against Christians and non-Muslims is concentrated. The number of IDPs in this region has increased by 100,000 in the two years since.
- UNICEF reports that over 1 million children are afraid of returning to school due to the violence and kidnappings by these criminal gangs.
- From 2001 to 2020, no fewer than 60,000 citizens have perished as a result of militant violence in Nigeria.
- The Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa reported last year that between October 2019 and September 2021, jihadist assailants – including Fulani militants, Boko Haram, and ISWAP – had killed 8,560 Nigerian Christians and 2,417 Muslims.

Violence in Yemen in 2023 has seen an uptick, including an increase in targeted attacks and violent speech towards religious minorities. On 25 May, Islamist Houthi militants stormed a peaceful meeting of Baha'is in Sana'a and arrested 17, including five women, and continue to detain 11 of them incommunicado.

During a parallel event to the Human Rights Council 52nd Session in March and a UN General Assembly 78th Session parallel event in September, we hosted two Yemeni Christian converts to share their testimonies of persecution. Pastor Musheer Khulaidi recalled being detained by Houthi troops for his faith and tortured alongside multiple other Christians before escaping the country. "Our problem as minorities in Yemen is that the state does not recognize our existence as a religious group...and considers that any religion other than Islam is an intruder into society and a plot targeting the state, religion and sovereignty, and must be confronted with force, even if bloodshed is required". Pastor Musheer established a National Council for Minorities comprising Christians, Baha'is, Jews, and black citizens to leverage solidarity "to find a package of constitutional and legal amendments that guarantee freedom of religion and belief, equal citizenship, [and] coexistence..."

Another Christian convert and member of the Council, Ms. Huda Obaid, was in her home when Houthi militants accosted her, tied her up in their vehicle, and transported her to an undisclosed location for interrogation. Solely on account of her faith, her captors treated her "as if I were a terrorist who threatened the security of the country". Huda was only released after spending more than a year in detention, some of which was in solitary confinement. Following her release, Huda fled to Egypt after she received threats that the militants would sell her 14-year-old daughter into marriage with a commander. In Egypt, however, the Yemeni government learned about Huda's Christian faith and excluded her name from the list of Houthi violence survivors eligible for aid.



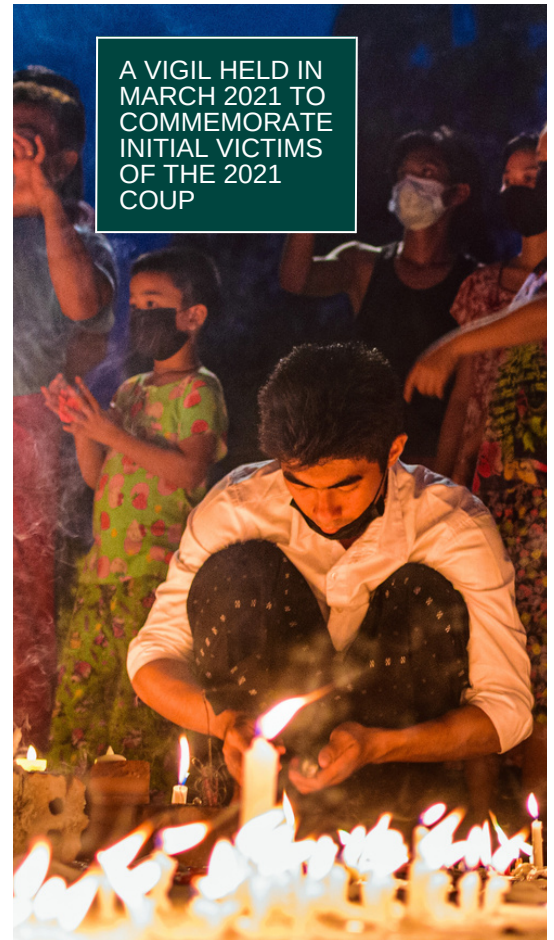
COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: MYANMAR

On 1 February 2021, the military of Myanmar, the Tatmadaw, seized power and officially ousted the duly and democratically-elected government of President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and their National League for Democracy (NLD) party. In the following days and weeks, the Tatmadaw detained government officials, announced a state of emergency, and cut internet services in numerous locations throughout the country. In response to the massive protests by civilians who condemned the coup d'état, the military launched and continues to engage in violence against peaceful demonstrators as well as minorities.

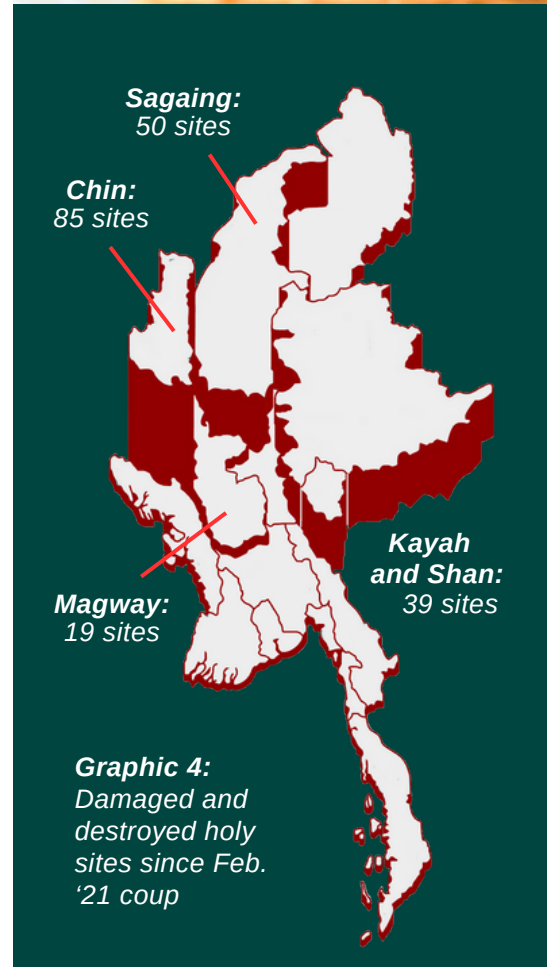
Jubilee Campaign has routinely partnered with Chin Association of Maryland to record the number and variety of houses of worship which have been targeted by the Tatmadaw for occupation, looting, desecration, arson, and destruction. Notably, Chin State's Thantlang Township has seen nearly every denomination of church coming under the Tatmadaw's barbarity: Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Pentecostal, Methodist, and Protestant. In some cases, militants return to scenes of previous crimes to complete their plans. Eight months after the Tatmadaw unleashed bullets on the Johnson Memorial Baptist Church, causing near-total damage to the building and forcibly displacing some ten thousand local residents, the militants revisited the site to set the church on fire and reduce it to ashes.

Nearly three years after the February 2021 coup, there has been no pacification of the Tatmadaw's onslaught upon churches nor a shrinkage of its geographical sphere of activity. In Mindat in August 2021, the Tatmadaw occupied and destroyed St. John Catholic Church in Chat Village, damaging and desecrating holy objects in the process. On 13 October 2021 in coordinated attacks, military forces destroyed Thlanrawn Village Christian Church and Thlanrawn Baptist Church after rainfall disrupted their original plans to set the latter ablaze.

In early November 2022, junta troops launched three coordinated attacks upon a Theological Seminary associated with Kachin Baptist Convention, in Shan State, injuring four individuals. Later that month, Tatmadaw militants set fire to hundreds of homes and three buildings in Mon Hla, a Catholic village in Sagaing Region's Khin-U Township, including a church and a school, both of which were funded by donations raised by local Cardinal Charles Bo Yangon. The widespread arson resulted in the deaths of three civilians - a 7-year-old child, as well as an adult man and adult woman.



A VIGIL HELD IN MARCH 2021 TO COMMEMORATE INITIAL VICTIMS OF THE 2021 COUP



Graphic 4:
Damaged and destroyed holy sites since Feb. '21 coup

COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: PAKISTAN

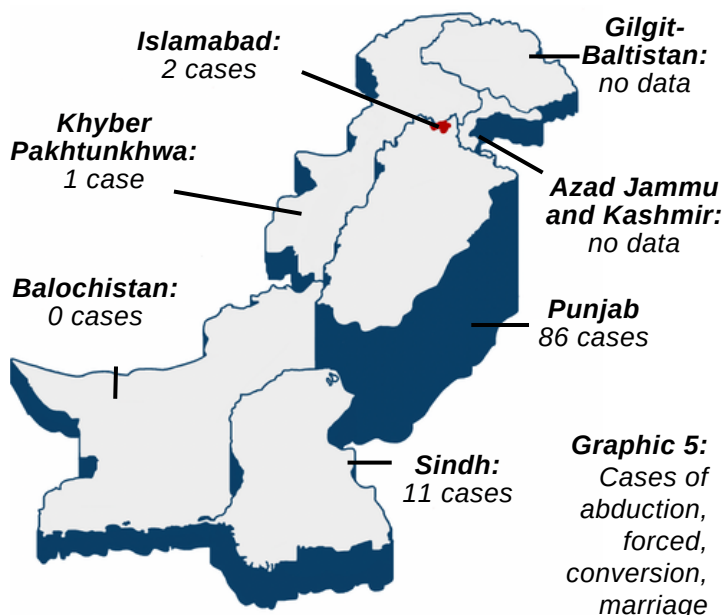


Jaranwala, Pakistan August 2023

One of the most concerning developments that transpired in 2023 in Pakistan was the onslaught of mob activity in Faisalabad's city of Jaranwala over the course of a few days in August. Thousands of Muslim citizens had convened to exact revenge on local Christian residents following allegations that two Christian brothers had written their names and blasphemous remarks on torn pages of the Quran which they subsequently disposed of. The accused individuals asserted their innocence, and numerous individuals expressed skepticism on the details of the claims, noting that it would be absurd for an individual to engage in allegedly blasphemous conduct and thereafter incriminate themselves by listing their identities, especially considering the litany of blasphemy-related lynchings and violent incidents.



Videos circulating on social media depicted mob participants scaling church walls, removing crosses, and setting fire to various buildings; in all, no fewer than 25 churches and nearly 100 Christian homes were destroyed. The criminality was exacerbated by inconsistent remarks by local Muslim leaders, some of whom joined officials in dispelling the mob, and some of whom summoned irate Muslims to mosques and provoked them to participate in the frenzied activities. In Pakistan, violent and collective responses to perceived blasphemy escalate in the absence of sufficient intervention by authorities. Notwithstanding police officers' prompt deployment to Jaranwala, much of the aforementioned destruction was well underway. Witnesses recalled that forces who responded to the incident neglected their duties by failing to intervene on the poor excuse that doing so would further escalate tensions.



Graphic 5:
Cases of abduction, forced, conversion, marriage

The sinister trend persists in which Pakistani Muslim men kidnap Christian and Hindu girls (and women), forcibly convert them to Islam, and contract illegal child marriages with them. Jubilee Campaign and Voice for Justice in November 2022 reviewed a sample of 100 such cases between January 2019 and October 2022, noting the geographic dimensions thereof (see graphic 6). One of the most recent and ghastly cases is that of 13-year-old Christian student Zarvia Parvaiz who had been kidnapped from Rawalpindi, Punjab, by a much older Muslim man named Imran Shahzad. Zarvia’s mother appealed to authorities to rescue her daughter, who had additionally been forced to accept Islam and marry Shahzad; however, the court refused to do so, citing a testimony Zarvia provided under duress in which she claimed that the aforementioned actions were according to her own will. After a phone call was recorded between Zarvia and her mother in which the girl disclosed the truth and that she wished to return to her family, authorities rescued Zarvia in November 2022. Following her release from captivity, Zarvia recalled the extent to which she was abused and exploited by Shahzad and his wife, including the following atrocities: forced ingestion of drugs and alcohol; vaginal and anal rape; starvation; forced physical and domestic labor; cigarette burns; physical assault with/without weapons; and electrocution. Approximately 1,000 Pakistani Christian and Hindu women and girls are kidnapped each year for the purpose of forcible conversion to Islam and child marriages. The graphic and chart to the left display the regional distribution of cases and list some recent incidents.

In Faisalabad in December 2022, 12-year-old Christian girl Hoorab Masih was kidnapped by a local Muslim shopkeeper.	In Punjab January 2023, 13-year-old Christian girl Naina Ashraf was kidnapped by a Muslim neighbor while she was playing outside of her home.
15-year-old Christian girl Sitara Arif was kidnapped by a 60-year-old Muslim man in Faisalabad in February 2023.	13-year-old Catholic girl Sehar was abducted at gunpoint by a Muslim man in Punjab in May 2023 while she was working in a brick kiln.
In June 2023 in Sindh, 14-year-old Hindu girl Sohana Kumari was abducted from her home by her Muslim tutor.	In June 2023, 13-year-old Christian girl Angel Roben was kidnapped and gang raped by four Muslim men in Faisalabad.



ADVOCACY ON WOMEN & GIRLS



In October, Jubilee Campaign joined forces with Set My People Free, Voice for Justice, Coptic Solidarity, and Christian Freedom International to hold a panel on the sidelines of the 78th UN General Assembly Third Committee to shed light on the plight of victims of forced marriage and coerced conversions, with a focus on religious and indigenous minority women and girls in Pakistan, Nigeria, and Egypt. UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Professor Tomoya Obokata, who we have been honored to work with over the past few years, set the tone of the meeting, stating “child and forced marriage constitute a clear violation of fundamental human rights norms and principles”. He additionally outlined the various factors which exacerbate women and girls’ vulnerability to abduction and forced marriages, including: gender inequality, systemic and societal views about women and girls, poverty, lack of or limited access to education, and faith minority status, among others. In Muslim-majority nations such as Pakistan, the conversion of an individual of a minority faith to Islam is largely welcomed as a furthering of the majority religion; such a pervasive belief allows kidnapers to kidnap forcibly convert young Christian and Hindu girls with impunity. Special Rapporteur Obokata expressed concerns about this inhumane practice in his joint letter to the government of Pakistan alongside Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children Ms. Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls Ms. Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Ms. Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on minority issues Mr. Fernand de Varennes, and Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons Ms. Siobhán Mullally. Maryam Oyiza, a human rights defender from Nigeria, shed light on

the obstacles to preventing abductions and forced marriages as well as justice and accountability for such crimes. Ms. Oyiza noted that even some public servants derelict from their duties by endangering and violating the very citizens they are obliged to protect, and cases have been reported in which legislators themselves married girl children. Special Rapporteur Obokata in response highlighted the necessity of working with “local and religious leaders



and groups to be able to influence believers to change their mindsets regarding the unacceptability of these practices”. Joseph Janssen of Voice for Justice and Jubilee Campaign Netherlands additionally spoke at the European Parliament the following month. In mid-July, the UN Human Rights Council adopted its sixth resolution on the topic of child, early and forced marriages. Jubilee Campaign joined ADF International's initiative to call for additional language in the resolution specifically addressing the concerning pattern of coerced conversions and forced marriages as a form of religiously sanctioned slavery/trafficking by non-state actors. While not all of the suggested language was adopted, we welcomed the clause that the Council is “deeply concerned also by reports of forced religious conversion and by forced marriage imposed by armed groups, strongly condemning attacks on and abductions of women and girls, including terrorist attacks, urging States to protect them from attacks, and recognizing that forced marriage may result in situations that meet the international legal definition of slavery”. Indeed, Pakistani Christian and Hindu girls kidnapped and forcibly married are often subjected to sexual and domestic servitude to their ‘husbands’. A similar pattern is perpetuated by Islamic jihadist militants in Nigeria who confine kidnapped girls and women to the barracks where they undertake domestic duties by day and are subjected to sexual violence by night. The Council resolution additionally calls on Member States to eliminate “any [domestic legal] provisions that may enable perpetrators of rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, abduction, trafficking in persons or slavery-like practices to escape prosecution and punishment by marrying their victims, and urges States to engage traditional and religious leaders and actors, among others, to eliminate the misuse of traditional practices to resolve sexual and gender-based violence incidents through marriage.”



In July, Executive Director Ann Buwalda participated in a panel on international advocacy at Coptic Solidarity's 11th Annual Conference. Joined by two of our close partners, Trent Martin of 21Wilberforce and Sean Nelson of ADF International, Ann encouraged activists of interdisciplinary backgrounds to cooperate, align their goals, and amplify their voices when appealing to countries to achieve positive developments in the realms of human rights and religious freedom. Leveraging partnership not only with organizations representing the same faith, but also other faiths or no faith at all, establishes credibility and interfaith solidarity which forges a more robust avenue for our concerns to be discussed at high-level consultations such as the UN and the European Union. Coptic Solidarity's Lindsay Rodriguez additionally bestowed upon Ann the Atef Jacob Annual Leadership Award for her mentorship in Coptic Solidarity's process of applying for UN consultative status, and for Jubilee Campaign's collaboration in holding events raising the plight of Coptic Christian girls in Egypt.





"The OHCHR's (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) recent report on Promoting accountability in North Korea highlighted heartbreaking cases of female victims of transnational trafficking, forced labor and marriage, sexual violence, and forcible repatriation. Women face gender-based discrimination and violence. As a woman myself, I empathize with the suffering and pain endured by North Korean women and girls, and I am dedicated to actively exploring ways to protect their basic rights".

Hon. Lee Shinhwa, Ambassador of South Korea for North Korean Human Rights

During the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Jubilee Campaign worked with North Korea Freedom Coalition, Defense Forum Foundation, Isabella Foundation, Esther Prayer Movement, and Freedom Speakers International to host four North Korean defector women to share stories of life in their home country, the perilous defection process, and their realization of freedom in third countries. Ms. Han Songmi, born in 1993 in the midst of the national famine in North Korea, recalled how witnessing her father beating her mother daily led her to believe that domestic violence was normal and acceptable conduct. Following her divorce from her husband, Songmi's

mother defected to China in order to find a job and make money to rescue and reunite with Songmi. "My mom was the center of my universe; then, when I was 12 years old, she suddenly disappeared. I felt that my universe had collapsed", Songmi tearfully remembered. Upon her own escape in 2011, Songmi suffered multiple "terrible moments": coming to the decision to commit suicide if she was captured; falling into ice while crossing the Tumen River and experiencing agonizing pain all over her body; being kidnapped by brokers; and having to separate from a close friend she made in China with whom she shared similar experiences and empathized. Finally, after escaping through China, Thailand, and Laos, Songmi reunited with her mother in South Korea. "I would like to thank my mom from the bottom of my heart for giving me two different lives: one where she gave birth to me, and one where she rescued me from North Korea". Myriad North Korean children to this day remain in the DPRK, separated from their parents, unaware that they were not abandoned but that their parents are working abroad in hopes of extricating them and bringing them to safety.





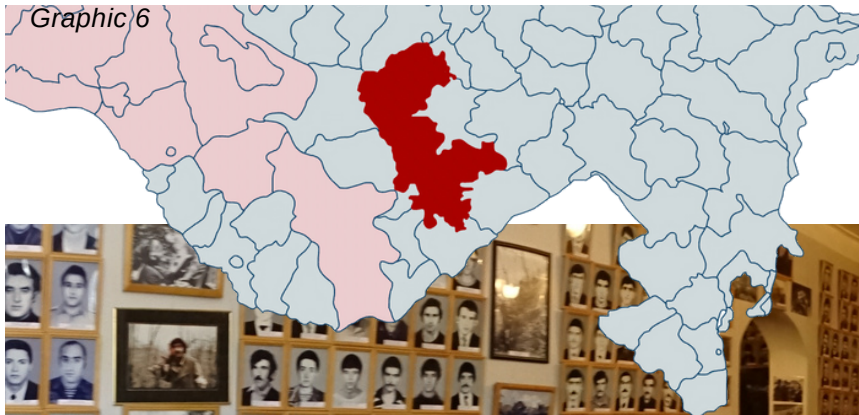
The most recent defector who escaped North Korea in 2019, Lee Haeun, had previously been detained in the DPRK in 2015 after she was apprehended for engaging in illicit trading activity in the border regions near China to earn a sustainable income. "At that time, I had an eleven-year-old daughter, and for her, I had to survive and live." Haeun witnessed and experienced horrific treatment in detention, being viciously interrogated, forced into stress positions, and made to engage in strenuous physical activity to the extent of falling unconscious. "I had to bear the pain and shed tears while biting my lips. I got comforted remembering my daughter's sweet appearance. However, my suffering was far less than other women in my cell." Those who tried to escape prison would be brutally beaten with birch tree bats, leaving their skin swollen and discolored and their legs temporarily immobilized; soon afterwards, they were executed for their insubordination. As a result of trauma she endured living in and escaping North Korea, Haeun has suffered migraines, depression, insomnia, and panic disorder, afflictions which her daughter similarly experiences. "After I settled in South Korea, I came to realize that women can enjoy freedom and God-given human rights."

Lee Seohyun, who accompanied her family to escape North Korea in 2014, experienced a different story to other panelists. Born in Pyongyang, Seohyun was impressed upon by propaganda that the nation was successful and its people satisfied. When she studied abroad in China, however, Seohyun learned about the starvation, poverty, and gender inequality plaguing her home country. Seohyun tried to remain hopeful for a reformation that would guarantee civil rights and freedoms, however her optimism vanished when her friend, a fellow North Korean student, was abducted from China by DPRK authorities and sent to a political prison with her entire family for her father's association with an allegedly treasonous member of the North Korean government.



Ji Hannah, who resettled in South Korea in 2016, lived in North Korea during the Arduous March and, following her husband's passing, was forced to take up work in the illicit and dangerous black market sector. Without financial stability to raise her sons, Hannah made her first attempt to escape and secure a job in China to fund her sons' defections. Hannah was detained following two separate defection attempts, and she spent months in prison being subjected to physical torture and inhumane living conditions. Hannah's third attempt to escape North Korea was fortunately successful, and she rescued her children. Reflecting on her second escape attempt in which she was apprehended by Chinese authorities and abruptly sent back to her home country, Hannah urges: "I beg you to diplomatically pressure the Chinese government so that its inhumane act of forcefully repatriating defectors will stop."

Graphic 6



REGION SPOTLIGHT: NAGORNO-KARABAKH



Museum of the Fallen Soldiers, Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh

Image by Ella Mahony on Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

MAP KEY:

Azerbaijani Territory

Armenian Territory

Nagorno-Karabakh

PRAY THAT:

- Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh wishing to exit the country are permitted to do so unimpeded.
- Armenians who wish to remain in Nagorno-Karabakh are guaranteed legal and civil rights, human rights, and religious freedom.
- A full investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity is completed by an independent, impartial tribunal or entity, and reparations are made to victims and sanctions levied against perpetrators.

September 2023 saw an abrupt and unanticipated 'end' to a nearly 40-year-old protracted conflict in the Southern Caucasus region, in which the republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia have viciously fought for control over the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, a small enclave within the territory of Azerbaijan home to a 95% Armenian population, the vast majority of whom identify as Christian. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh formally declared independence from Azerbaijan, a Soviet Socialist State, and decades of rivalry were further cemented, causing what would be "the longest-running" conflict "in post-Soviet Eurasia".

Armenian forces by 1993 had established control over Nagorno-Karabakh, and between 1994 and 2020, the looming threat of a resurgence of the war over the region was perpetuated by sporadic bursts of violence and weapons-use. After a years-long tumultuous cease-fire, in September 2020 soldiers on both sides once again clashed, though this time more viciously and for an entire six weeks; thousands of Armenian and Azerbaijani troops perished, and an additional approximately 200 civilian casualties were recorded. Only with intervention by Russia and subsequent diplomatic negotiations were the two parties able to broker a new cease-fire, although nearly the entirety of the Nagorno-Karabakh region was retaken by Azerbaijan.

2022 saw a further escalation in border clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani troops, a development which displaced

PRAY THAT:

- Forces directed by or aligned with Azerbaijan and Turkey make commitments to refrain from any invasions or acts of interference which endanger the Armenian existence.

some 3,000 civilians. In December, humanitarian aid and assistance to the civilian population of Nagorno-Karabakh was impeded by environmental conservation protesters obstructing highways as well as the Azerbaijani government establishing a checkpoint through which all imports were scrutinized. A positive turn of events occurred in September 2023 when both governments agreed to reopen the highway for the distribution of aid to civilians. However, these hopes for a pacification of the conflict and a restoration of relative stability were dashed when Azerbaijan embarked on an “anti-terrorist” incursion into Nagorno-Karabakh, causing significant civilian casualties, thousands of displaced residents, and a de facto surrender by the Armenian government. As a result, nearly all 120,000 Christian Armenians had been uprooted from their home and forced to flee into Armenia in an act of what they have deemed ethnic cleansing, which is defined by the United Nations as “a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove another ethnic and or religious group from certain geographic areas.”

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY PARTNERSHIP IN NEPAL

In April 2023, Jubilee Campaign traveled to Kathmandu, Nepal to participate in the annual Religious Liberty Partnership consultation with our partners in advocacy across the world. In collaboration with Jubilee Campaign Netherlands and Voice for Justice, we were able to arrange the travel of Pastor Keshav Acharya to the conference and hold a meeting with his legal team regarding his case and next steps aiming towards his acquittal.

Pastor Keshav’s nearly four-year-old case dates back to March 2020 when Nepalese authorities in Kaski District arrested without warrant the church leader on charges of spreading misinformation about COVID-19. This citation was in response to a video uploaded onto YouTube in which Pastor Keshav expresses his belief that prayer can cure the disease. Released upon his wife’s bail payment in April, Pastor Keshav was immediately re-detained the following day for proselytism. In November 2021, the Dolpa District Court convicted Pastor Keshav, subsequently sentencing him to two years’ imprisonment which was later reduced to a one-year term by the Jumla High Court in July 2022.

Despite our shared efforts with Jubilee Campaign Netherlands, ADF International, Barrister and religious freedom expert Mark Hill, and Pastor Keshav’s legal defense team to compile a robust and comprehensive grounds for appeal, the Supreme Court of Nepal upheld Pastor Keshav’s sentencing this October.

We have not lost hope in advocating for Pastor Keshav’s release and acquittal despite a final decision by the court. We are continuing to raise his case on international stages such as the United Nations and the European Union, and we hope to expand our contacts and engage with Nepali embassies and envoys to promote religious freedom and lobby for the pastor’s release. Of utmost concern is repealing or amending provisions within the Nepali Penal Code which curtail freedom of religion or belief by criminalizing acts of peaceful evangelism and sharing of one’s faith.

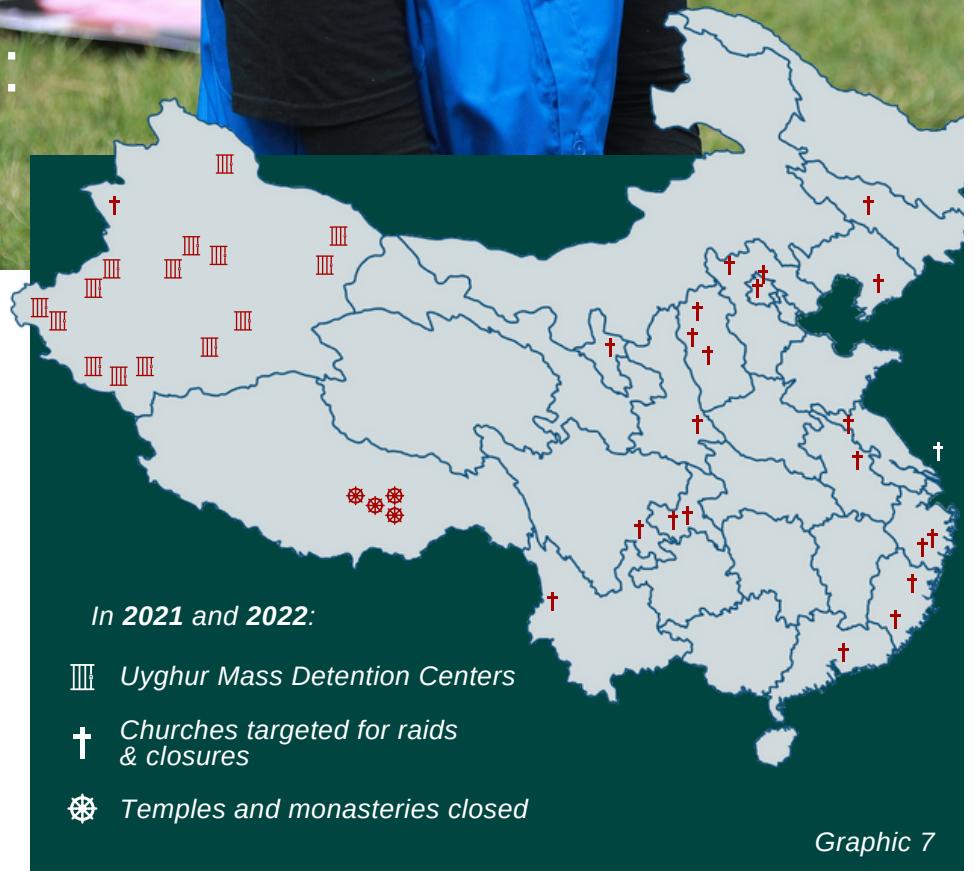
“Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”. - Joshua 1:9

COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: CHINA



March 2023 marked ten years since Zhejiang province's mass campaign "Three Rectifications and One Demolition", according to which authorities removed crosses from thousands of churches and demolished entire Christian houses of worship as retribution for their refusal to join the government-controlled supervisory organ for Christian institutions, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. To this day, the reprehensible trend continues, though it has expanded throughout the whole of the nation. In 2022, there was an observable

increase in the number of churches subjected to violent raids during peaceful worship, arbitrary detention and physical assault of Christian attendees and leaders, and the imposition of unreasonable prison sentences for such individuals. Similarly, Chinese authorities have continued to crack down on persons and institutions which serve Christian youth, as children under the age of 18 years are prohibited from participating in religious activities, faith-based instruction, and more. In May 2022, immigration officials in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces interrogated numerous Christian adolescents who had applied for passports to study abroad, rejecting those of students who were seeking to receive theological education in other countries. In February 2023, a Christian couple was nearly arrested for the wife's training of Sunday school teachers and the husband's distribution of virtual children-aimed gospel lessons via phone. One Christian school located in Henan province, Yabo Academy, had received in October 2023 an "Advance Notice of Administrative Penalty" from the municipal Bureau of Ethnic and Administrative Affairs which ordered the school to terminate its services and pay an enormous sum in penalty fees.



Monasteries and educational institutions in Tibet Autonomous Region have similarly been targeted for abrupt closures and restrictions as a measure taken to exert control over the Tibetan Buddhist population which has historically been seen by the government as a threat owing to their efforts for self-determination. The region's municipal government outlets - operating in conjunction with the Communist Party's orders - have distributed regulations which prohibit institutions' use of faith-based curriculum as well as Tibetan language classes. This serves to erase Tibetan Buddhist religious and linguistic culture, which is the very foundation of the population's unity. A large proportion of adolescents in Tibet are enrolled in boarding schools where they are separated from their families - sometimes even transported to distant locations - and forced to study Mandarin and communist principles. One anonymous boarding school principal reported that monasteries must reluctantly comply with government demands to track down students participating in faith activities and religious observances.

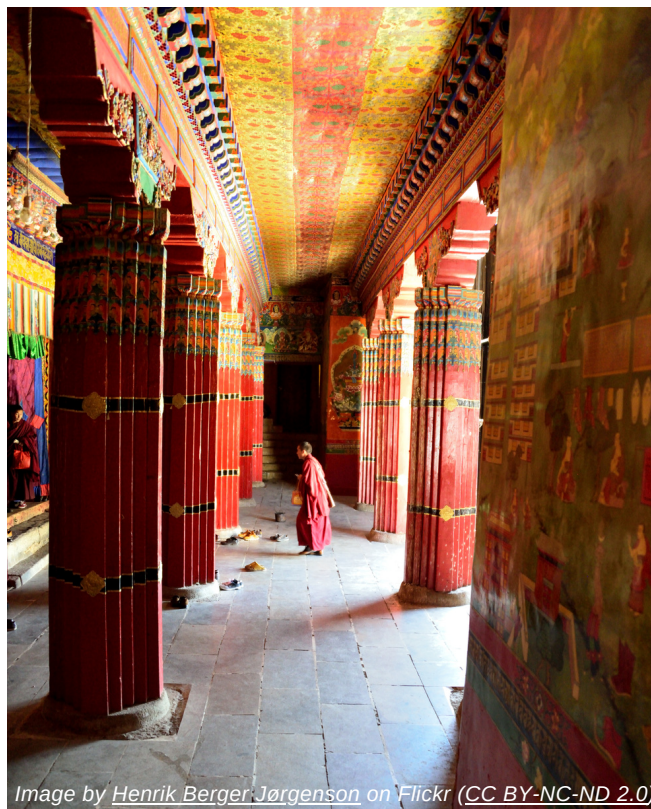


Image by [Henrik Berger Jørgenson](#) on Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

An estimated **1 to 1.5 million** Uyghur citizens have been detained in mass internment camps throughout East Turkestan, the preferred name Uyghurs use for their homeland which China calls the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Approximately 850,000 to 900,000 Uyghur children have been enrolled in state-run orphanages and boarding schools due to the incarceration of their relatives.

To the north of Tibet, the autonomous region of East Turkestan is being subjected to coercive measures by the government which call into question the region's classification as a sovereign area. Between one and two million predominantly Muslim Uyghurs are incarcerated in mass detention camps scattered throughout the region. In these camps, which the Chinese government dishonestly touts as being instrumental in 'de-radicalizing' the Uyghur community, detainees are forcibly indoctrinated with atheist and nationalist views and stripped of their linguistic heritage, and additionally face severe physical torture at the hands of detention facility officers. Meanwhile Uyghur children throughout the region are left with one or no guardians; many of these children are sent to state-run orphanages and boarding schools where, like their detained relatives and their Tibetan Buddhist peers, they are forced to abandon their religious and cultural customs, and are infiltrated with atheist and communist ideas. Teachers and orphanage administrators have reported Uyghur children exhibiting mental suffering and suicidal tendencies resulting from their persecution and family separation.





An AI-generated image of Uyghur detainees

In July 2023, Jubilee Campaign convened a group of partner organizations who advocate for religious freedom in China - ChinaAid, Human Rights Without Frontiers, Uyghur Human Rights Project, and Falun Dafa Association of Washington DC - to collaborate on a comprehensive written submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review. The UPR process raises human rights concerns for each country only every 4.5 years, making this a golden opportunity to raise China's stagnation and decline in religious freedom since its previous review in 2018. Since then, China has introduced, ratified, and/or implemented a plethora of restrictive legislations which have wrested all remaining vestiges of autonomy from religious communities and transferred such power to the state. The government's administrative entities on religion have seized control over the following functions of faith groups: 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. In 2018, the Tibetan Autonomous Public Security Bureau formally classified the following activities as "organized crime": criticizing government activities in Tibet, using the mother language, using religion to guide education, and involving faith leaders in local conflict resolution. Numerous countries have formally labelled China's systemic persecution of the Uyghurs a genocide or crimes against humanity, including: Canada in October 2020, the United States in January 2021, the Netherlands in February 2021, the United Kingdom in April 2021, Lithuania and New Zealand in May 2021, Belgium and Czechia in June 2021, and France in January 2022. Preluding the Beijing 2022 Olympics, numerous countries publicized a diplomatic boycott of the event, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, India, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Taiwan, the UK, and the US.

In 2019, the Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting from Prisoners of Conscience in China (China Tribunal) concluded "beyond doubt" that incarcerated Falun Gong practitioners are China's primary source of illicitly and forcibly harvested organs for transnational export.

"Organ Harvesting - The silent operating table"

Artist: Shàng Dáyè, 2008

Flickr (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)



In November, we submitted to the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment information on the torturous treatment of Uyghur detainees, Falun Gong prisoners of conscience, and additionally multiple renowned human rights lawyers who have defended faith minorities and victims of state persecution.

This December, Jubilee Campaign was pleased to learn that the US House Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously passed the Uyghur Policy Act (H.R. 2766), which would oblige the State Department to, among other requisites, instruct Foreign Service Officers in the Uyghur language and “develop a strategy to gain access to detention facilities and secure the release of detained Uyghurs during diplomatic meetings with CCP officials.” Earlier in the year, the US House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party hosted Uyghur woman Gulbahar Haitiwaji to share about her time in detention in East Turkistan, during which she recalled experiencing and/or witnessing physical and sexual torture, vaginal and objectile rape, forced sterilization and abortions, and other endless atrocities.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

All around the world people are suffering the shackles of persecution, unable to practice the beliefs which form their identities without fear of violence, discrimination, and imprisonment. When evil tries to silence its victims, our voice will not let them be forgotten. In this season of gratitude and exultation, we want to extend our deepest thanks to each and every one of you who has supported to our mission of championing the cause of the oppressed and shaping a brighter future for those who depend on our advocacy. Thank you for being a part of the work to shine the light of truth on human rights abuses which oppressive governments deny or attempt to justify. Your generous financial contributions have been instrumental in enabling us to carry out a diverse array of advocacy initiatives not only throughout 2023, but for many years past. It is thanks to you that we are able to continue to be A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence. As we rejoice in the progress we've made together, we also recognize the challenges that still lie ahead. Your continued support will be crucial in expanding projects in 2024.



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