



European Parliament Intergroup on

FoRB & RT

Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance

Annual Report on the State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the World 2015

June 2016



2015 Annual Report

The State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the
World

*By the European Parliament Intergroup on
Freedom of Religion or Belief & Religious
Tolerance*

June 2016

100 pages

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."



European Parliament Intergroup on

FoRB & RT

Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance



Focal Countries



Failed States



Other Countries in the Report*

*Some Countries not visible on this map.

ABOUT THE INTERGROUP

The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance is a group of like-minded Members of the European Parliament dedicated to ensuring that the EU, in its external actions, promotes and protects the right to freedom of religion or belief.

In December 2014, the European Parliament Conference of Presidents formally established the Intergroup. The Intergroup is non-partisan, being composed of MEPs from almost all political groups in the European Parliament. It is also impartial with respect to religion and belief systems—the merits and demerits of these are not considered. Rather, the Intergroup is committed to ensuring that the right to believe or not to believe – in accordance with Article 18 of the ICCPR – is upheld for all.

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INTRODUCTION FROM THE BUREAU

Our beliefs occupy the very core of our humanity; it is therefore right that the freedom to hold, change and manifest these also occupy a core place in international human rights law. Tragically, however, while most nation-states profess to uphold freedoms of religion or belief, the reality is inconsistent with this. The overwhelming conclusion of this report is that between June 2015 and June 2016 freedoms of religion or belief have continued to be severely violated across the world. As in our previous report, yet again, we must conclude that in many countries the situation has dramatically deteriorated.

At the outset of this report, the Intergroup calls for the urgent, determined and diligent application of leaders, officials and communities toward addressing these injustices. The purpose of this report is to shed light on those areas in the world where freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is failing to be secured, and to recommend actions aimed at improving the situation.

This report is divided into two sections. The first section offers a review of the state of play concerning FoRB in EU foreign policy, as well as recommendations for reform and further action. The second section describes and analyses the global situation concerning FoRB through 53 country profiles.

Since the Intergroup sits in the European

Parliament, naturally our focus is on achieving reform to these situations by way of reforming the posture and actions of the institutions of the European Union. **Indeed, this is the raison d'être of our Intergroup: to ensure that the EU, in its external actions, promotes and protects the right to freedom of religion or belief.** We seek to achieve this through contact, both formal and informal, with the European External Action Service and the European Commission, as well as through our intensive co-operation with interested NGOs and academics. We also work together with similar parliamentary networks in Member States and in third countries.

It is our belief that politicians are not the only actors who have been endowed with this responsibility toward humanity. While our audience is primarily the EU institutions, the values and conclusions made here are relevant to readers from every sphere of life. The equal protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people of all faiths and beliefs is in the interest of all.

For the Intergroup, this report will constitute our blueprint – our referential working document – toward achieving this in the EU institutions for the year to come. We also hope that you, the reader, are able to find this report helpful toward achieving this universal endeavour in your own spheres.

Yours sincerely,

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FORB IN EU FOREIGN POLICY

Despite the European Union's increasingly significant role as a transnational actor in promoting and protecting FoRB in the world, and its endeavour to prioritise FoRB in its agenda (exemplified in the 2015-2019 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy¹), it has become evident to the Intergroup that there is a discrepancy between the official commitment spoken and actual delivery made by the EU's institutions. The purpose of this chapter is to review the state of play concerning FoRB in EU foreign policy, and to propose practical recommendations for addressing this concerning inconsistency.

Institutional Review and Recommendations

This section will evaluate the activities of the EU's core institutions over the past year (since the publication of our last report in June 2015) including those of the European Parliament, European Commission & EEAS, and European Council (and Council of the EU) respectively. After a descriptive review of their actions, we propose general recommendations to each in turn.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

While the European Parliament has no right of co-decision on foreign affairs, it does engage in dialogue with the HR/VP, either orally or through written questions, and can elaborate recommendations to the Council or the HR/VP. The Parliament also has direct political relations with third countries via its Delegations, and MEPs can raise FoRB in the EP in their own capacity by hosting events and hearings. Perhaps the strongest tool at the EP's disposal is its right to put forward amendments to the European budget (in accordance with article 314 TFEU) – which it must agree to in negotiation with the Council. The common foreign and security policy's budget is part of the overall budget, with the exception of operational expenditure relating to military policies.² This means that the Parliament does have the power to block certain budget lines relating to foreign policy or agree only conditionally, i.e. by putting forward statements to these budget lines explaining the conditions under which the money may be spent. Such statements can, for example, relate to the human rights situation in a third country, if the latter receives assistance from the EU.³

Although not legally binding, the Parliament's resolutions should also be mentioned here. Concerning the promotion and protection of human rights through the EU's external policies, a range of resolutions have been adopted with recommendations for the HR/VP, the Commission and Member States. Here we list those relating to FoRB, which have been adopted over the reporting period (June 2015 – June 2016):

1 https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/action-plan-human-rights-and-democracy-2015-2019-keeping-human-rights-heart-eu-agenda_en

2 The Council can also decide to leave certain other expenditures outside the EU's budget, but only if it decides so unanimously.

3 Since July 2009, the author is a Member of the European Parliament, representing the Dutch Socialist Party. Before he entered the EP, he was Special Advisor on Human Rights and Good Governance in the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2000, he received his doctorate in international law at the University of Maastricht, the Netherlands, on the basis of his thesis: 'The Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion or Belief in the United Nations (1946-1992)'.

European Parliament resolution on EU- China relations	16 December 2015
European Parliament non-legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Cooperation between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam	17 December 2015
European Parliament resolution on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter	17 December 2015
European Parliament resolution on Freedom of expression in Bangladesh including the full endorsement of the principle of non-discrimination and equal protection for people holding non-theistic or atheistic beliefs	26 November 2015
European Parliament resolution on the EU's priorities for the UNHRC sessions in 2016	21 January 2016
European Parliament resolution on North Korea	21 January 2016
Joint motion for a resolution on the systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'	03 February 2016
European Parliament resolution on the situation in Eritrea	10 March 2016
European Parliament resolution of on implementation and review of the EU- Central Asia Strategy	13 April 2016
European Parliament resolution on the 2015 report on Turkey	14 April 2016
European Parliament resolution on Pakistan , in particular the attack in Lahore	14 April 2016
European Parliament resolution on Nigeria	14 April 2016

Intergroup Members were involved in many of these resolutions - particularly including amendments to the "Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the EU Policy on the matter". Through the Intergroup's intervention the report included two comprehensive sections on FoRB in Paragraphs 82 and 83⁴, which state:

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief

4 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2015-0344+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=en>

82. *Recalls that freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief is a fundamental human right, as recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as guaranteed by Article 18 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; equally, recalls its interrelatedness with other human rights and fundamental freedoms encompassing the right to believe or not to believe, the freedom to practise theistic, non-theistic or atheistic belief alike, and the right to adopt, change and abandon or return to a belief of one's choice; expresses its concern that some countries still fail to abide by UN standards and use state repression, which may include physical punishment, prison terms, exorbitant fines and even the death penalty in violation of freedom of religion or belief; is concerned at the increased persecution of religious or belief minorities, including Christian communities, as well as unlawful damage to their places of assembly;*

83. *Calls on the EU and the Member States to step up their efforts to contribute to the eradication of all form of religious discrimination and to promote inter-religious dialogue when engaging with third countries; requests concrete actions to protect religious minorities, nonbelievers, apostates and atheists who are victims of blasphemy laws, and calls on the EU and its Member States to engage in repealing such laws; welcomes the EU's commitment to promote freedom of religion or belief in international forums, including by supporting the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; fully supports the EU practice of taking the lead on thematic resolutions at the UNHRC and the UNGA on this topic; requests concrete action and measures for the effective implementation and improvement of the EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief; considers that action should be taken both in international and regional forums by maintaining an open, transparent and regular dialogue with religious associations and communities, pursuant to Article 17 TFEU, including through EU Delegations; equally draws attention to the need to ensure systematic and consistent training of EU staff, at headquarters and in delegations;*

Generally the Intergroup was satisfied with the adoption of our proposed amendments here – and this section was far more comprehensive than last year – but we were still disappointed at the exclusion of two proposals concerning the establishment of a focal point in the EEAS for matters relating to religion or belief⁵, and the need for reporting on the implementation of FoRB policy.⁶ There was also no clear mention on the follow-up to the adoption of the EU FoRB Guidelines.

(The Intergroup is also active within the European Parliament through a number of other initiatives – a list of our actions over the past year can be found in Annex II)

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE

The Foreign Affairs Council refined the EEAS remit on FoRB at the adoption of the “EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of FoRB” on 24 June 2013, to which the Intergroup actively contributed. Toward achieving these, over the last year the EEAS has made numerous statements and undertook a wide variety of actions on FoRB, including:

- A statement on the legislative passage of the “Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage Bill” in Myanmar (July, 2015)⁷
- Visit of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights to China, during which he urged China to amend provisions that could curtail freedom of religion and belief.⁸ (November, 2015)

5 “We call for the EEAS to create an office to act as focal contact point for religion or belief matters, which would be responsible for the promotion and protection of freedoms of religion or belief, and for facilitating dialogue between EU delegations and relevant religious and belief organisations”

6 “Reporting on country and local situations, engaging in close cooperation with local actors, especially with leaders of religious or belief groups including respect for freedom of religion or belief rights in Human Rights Impact Assessments that are carried out before the EU decides to conclude new trade and investment agreements and urging countries not currently accepting requests for visits from the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to do so.”

7 http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150708_01_en.htm

8 http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151116_03_en.htm

- The protection of FoRB was raised during the 34th EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights.⁹ (November, 2015)
- The protection of FoRB was included in the exchanges on human rights in the context of the 6th EU-Lao PDR Human Rights and Governance Dialogue in Vientiane.¹⁰ (November, 2015)
- The EU enquired about the follow-up to the last visit of the UN Special rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief during the EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue.¹¹ (December, 2015)
- In February 2016, the EU stated its priorities within the UN, expressing “commitment to continue to promote FoRB, strongly opposing religious intolerance, and calling for greater protection of persons belonging to religious and other minorities against persecution and violence”.¹² (February 2016)
- The Geneva delegation hosted a half-day informal panel discussion on ‘Combating religious intolerance: How to make the best use of existing frameworks?’ with the Universal Rights Group. The event presented an opportunity to exchange views, reflections, and information on recent developments, ahead of the 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council in March, where the fight against religious intolerance and discrimination will once again be a key political priority for the international community.¹³ (9 February 2016)
- Like in previous years the EU Delegation also hosted a side event with the UN Special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in the margins of the March session of the Human Rights Council. (8 March 2016: “The Interdependence of Freedom of Religion or Belief and Freedom of Expression”). In addition, it co-hosted a public lecture on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief with the title “Freedom of Religion or Belief as an Indispensable Part of the Human Rights Framework”¹⁴ (March 2016)
- The EEAS organised various training sessions/workshops on religion in foreign policy, including FoRB. On one of these occasions, Prof. Francois Foret (ULB) gave a presentation on his research results concerning how EU delegations handle the topic of religion. A survey was sent to all EU delegations on 16 February 2015, focusing on religion in foreign policy. The results of this research revealed very low levels of awareness of the EU Guidelines on FoRB, at the delegation level. On 9th April, 2016, a “Religion in Foreign Policy” training session hosted at the EEAS, at which Dennis de Jong MEP spoke concerning the FoRB toolkit. (April 2016)
- During the G7 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, the HR/VP emphasised the importance of promoting freedom of religion or belief as a useful tool to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism.¹⁵ (April, 2016)

9 http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151202_03_en.htm

10 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/laos/press_corner/all_news/news/2015/20151106_en_01.htm

11 http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151216_02_en.htm

12 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/15-fac-un-human-rights-fora/>

13 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un_geneva/documents/news/20160209_eu_urg_meeting_combatting_religious_intolerance_feb_2016.pdf

14 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un_geneva/images/2016/invitation.pdf

15 http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2016/160411_02_en.htm

- In his keynote speech Ambassador/Head of EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Amb. Michel Arrion on the occasion of World Human Rights Day 2016 mentioned FoRB.¹⁶ (May 2016)

Recommendations for the EEAS

- While we have been encouraged in our observations of the “Religion in Foreign Policy” training sessions in Brussels this year, it is clear that further training on the EU Guidelines for FoRB is urgently needed for diplomatic staff in EU delegations. Professor Francois Foret’s research results (above) revealed that awareness and expertise is very low. In many cases the delegations were not aware of the Guidelines, and in cases where this was not the case, they were ill-equipped to implement these measures – particularly in terms of reporting on situations, organising demarches, and engaging in public diplomacy.
- Concerning EU delegations themselves, the Intergroup recommends:
 - An evaluation of the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief (particularly in countries highlighted in our country profiles chapter);
 - The development of country-specific FoRB action plans in order to step up the EU’s efforts to protect freedom of religion or belief;
 - Continued support for civil society organisations, including religious or belief organisations helping to promote FoRB.
 - The Intergroup repeats our recommendation from the 2015 Annual Report to ensure mandatory FoRB training for at least one staff member per EU delegation in at least our Focal countries. The Intergroup expresses its willingness to contribute to these training sessions if and when required.
- The Intergroup regrets that it did not receive any information about the implementation of the FoRB Guidelines by delegations and calls for an official evaluative report in this respect.
- EU and Member State representatives in the field and headquarters are urged to use the various tools presented in the EU FoRB Guidelines, in particular reporting on general and specific situations, demarches and public diplomacy. Close cooperation with various actors and stakeholders, both locally as well as internationally, is essential.
- The Intergroup recommends the EEAS urge all countries that do not currently accept requests for visits from the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB to do so in the near future.
- We encourage EUSR for Human Rights Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis in his mandate to continue his work on promoting and protecting FoRB as a priority, and we look forward to enhanced cooperation over the coming year.

¹⁶ http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/nigeria/documents/press_corner/news/20160503-hods-draft-remarks-on-wpfd-2016_en.pdf

- **Respect for FoRB should be consistently monitored as part of the Human Rights Impact Assessments that are carried out while the EU negotiates new bilateral trade and investment agreements. Where gross and persistent FoRB violations occur, no such agreements should be concluded. In the case of less severe violators, FoRB should at least be put on the agenda of the human rights dialogue which most of these agreements foresee, for as long as the violations continue.**
- **The Intergroup welcomes the efforts of the EU delegations at the UN and would like to co-operate with the delegations in Geneva and New York, in particular, in the context of side events on issues related to FoRB and the promotion of religious tolerance. It also believes that the number of such initiatives could usefully be increased.**

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

One of the Commission's important tools for the promotion of human rights in general, and of FoRB in particular, is the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The new EIDHR regulation for 2014-2020 specifically includes FoRB as a priority issue to be referred to in the answers to call for proposals.¹⁷ Out of a total allocation of EUR 20 million, EUR 5 million has been dedicated to supporting projects to promote FoRB and combat discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. Other Country Based Support Scheme programmes also allocated specific funding for FoRB projects.¹⁸ However – over the reporting period, the Intergroup has seen no evidence of EIDHR programming specifically related to FoRB.

A development which the Intergroup strongly welcomes is the appointment of its first Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the European Union, Mr Jan Figel', on May 6 2016, which answered a long-standing call of the Intergroup.¹⁹

At the International Conference on the Victims of Ethnic and Religious Violence in the Middle East, held in Paris in September 2015, and which brought together 56 countries and 11 international and regional organisations, the EU discussed the efforts needed to support the members of the communities who are targeted by Daesh and other terrorist organisations for ethnic or religious reasons, and the communities that are threatened as such in Iraq and Syria.²⁰

Recommendations to the European Commission

- **The Intergroup warmly welcomes the appointment of Mr Jan Figel' as Special Envoy for the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU – it answers a call we have made for a long time. First of all, we propose the extension of his mandate to more than one year, to the end of the EP term (summer 2019). Furthermore, we stand ready to work together in cooperation – particularly as he considers planning his programme for the mandate ahead.**
- **We call upon the Commission, together with EEAS and the Council, to engage in a permanent informal dialogue with the Intergroup on how the EU can best contribute to the promotion of FoRB and religious tolerance.**

¹⁷ https://www.ekd.de/Speech_notes_Sabathil_-_FORB_in_EU_External_Action.pdf

¹⁸ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/20-fac-human-rights/>

¹⁹ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2016/05/09/eu-appoints-first-special-envoy-on-forb/>

²⁰ <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/north-africa-and-middle-east/events/article/international-conference-on-the-victims-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-the>

- While the EIDHR Regulation for 2014-2020 has committed a budget for FoRB, we have yet to see any evidence of programming over this reporting period. Therefore, we request a mid-term review (as previously agreed), as well as a forward-looking action plan for FoRB within EIDHR.
- We also call for the Commission's continued observation of the EU Guidelines on FoRB.

EUROPEAN COUNCIL

- During its meetings, the European Council focused, in particular, on the rise of violence and extremism and threats in particular in Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Iran, Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, Pakistan and Brunei.
- In the EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World (June, 2015), the Council reaffirmed its determination to defend FoRB as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere. In multilateral fora, the EU focused on consolidating the content of FoRB resolutions both in the HRC and in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)²¹ (June, 2015)
- In the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and democracy, the Council agreed, inter alia, with "Ensuring FoRB Remains high on the agenda with third countries as well as in multilateral fora, in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders" (July, 2015)²²
- In its conclusions on Pakistan, the Council welcomed the first visit by the EUSR for Human Rights to Pakistan and called on Pakistan to prioritise and take further action to respect, protect and promote freedom of religion or belief, and the rights of persons belonging to minorities²³ (July, 2015)
- In its conclusions on Syria the Council strongly condemned the indiscriminate attacks, atrocities, killings, conflict-related sexual violence, abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law which are perpetrated by Daesh and other terrorist groups, against all civilians, including against Christians and other religious and ethnic groups.²⁴ (October 2015)
- In its conclusions on Sri-Lanka the Council urged for the protection of persons belonging to religious, ethnic and other minorities.²⁵ (November 2015)
- In its conclusions on Yemen the Council condemned all terrorist attacks in the strongest terms, in particular those against civilian and religious targets.²⁶ (November 2015)
- In its conclusions on Iraq the Council reiterated its call for the Federal Government of Iraq and the Government of the Kurdistan Region to make all possible efforts to ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered to all civilians and again stresses the importance of offering equal protection to all ethnic and religious communities that are part of Iraqi society.²⁷ (December 2015)

21 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/22-fac-human-rights-report/>

22 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/20-fac-human-rights/>

23 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/20-fac-conclusions-pakistan/>

24 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/10/12-fac-conclusions-syria/>

25 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/16-council-conclusions-on-sri-lanka/>

26 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/16-council-conclusions-on-yemen/>

27 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/12/14-conclusions-iraq/>

- In its Conclusions on EU priorities at UN human rights fora in 2016 the Council renewed the EU's commitment to promote freedom of religion or belief, stated that it strongly opposes religious intolerance and called for greater protection of persons belonging to religious and other minorities against persecution and violence (February 2016).²⁸
- The Council adopted conclusions on the EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Daesh threat, calls for the immediate release of any arbitrarily detained persons and the respect of human rights for all, including for religious and ethnic minorities.²⁹ (May, 2016)

Recommendations to the Council

- **While welcoming the many references to the protection of FoRB and of religious and belief communities in the Council's conclusions, there seems to be a lack of follow-up given to these conclusions by the European Commission and the EEAS. For example, we have noticed no response or action following the Council Conclusions on Pakistan or Sri-Lanka (above). We therefore recommend that the Council evaluate the follow-up given to its conclusions by the Commission, the EEAS and Member States at least within half a year after their adoption.**
- **The Intergroup encourages the Foreign Affairs Council to encourage ministers to engage directly with religious leaders. Moderate leaders often hold the key to genuine and reconciliation processes in countries and regions torn by religiously motivated conflict. Furthermore, religious leaders can play an important role in the prevention of radicalisation.**

²⁸ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/15-fac-un-human-rights-fora/>

²⁹ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9105-2016-INIT/en/pdf>

Country Recommendations

The next chapter of our report (Country Profiles) provides a situation report concerning the state of FoRB in a selection of 53 countries. On the basis of this descriptive research, we have categorised some of these as Failed States, and some others as Intergroup Focal Countries. For these selections we have prepared recommendations for the EU's attention, which we outline here. These recommendations focus specifically on FoRB. That being said, the Intergroup does recognise the need for a holistic approach which appreciates the interrelated nature of human rights.



FAILED STATES

Although we recognise that the term “failed states” in itself is worth a discussion-like in the previous Intergroup Annual Report-we use the term for States showing great instability in many aspects, including the absence of the rule of law, strong internal political, social and/or economic pressures, violence, almost no legitimate authority to make collective decisions, inability to provide public services and so forth – with the overall effect of leaving religious and belief minorities unprotected by the state’s rule of law; and thus entirely exposed to violence. Warlords and armed groups determine everyday life. The countries which we consider to be classed as such, in this report, include:

- **Afghanistan** (See country profile on page 77)
- **Central African Republic (CAR)** (See country profile on page 33)
- **Libya** (See country profile on page 50)
- **Somalia** (See country profile on page 40)
- **Syria** (See country profile on page 55)
- **Yemen** (See country profile on page 58)

As well as the absence of effective state power, also important is the lack of effective power by other governments and international organisations. It is therefore also very difficult for the EU to develop effective policies to protect FoRB in these countries. However, in the context of peace-building activities, the position of religious and belief minorities should be a special point of attention.

Recommendations to the EU

- In all of these cases basic security is the immediate priority. For this reason, the EU must cooperate in ensuring that no weapons are delivered to one of the parties in the internal conflict, unless this is directly related to UN-backed peace-building initiatives. In the case of groups grossly violating human rights, the EU should ensure that they are deprived of the proceeds of the selling of raw materials and artifacts, which is, for example, the main source of income for Daesh.
- The EU can also contribute by offering emergency humanitarian aid. We encourage the EU to be generous and careful with its delivery of humanitarian aid to failed states.
- We also urge the EU to cooperate with the United Nations in these areas. Generally the EU has been proactive in supporting basic security in failed states. In Yemen, for example, the EU was able to support the UN Envoy with technical, political and practical assistance ahead of the ceasefire and peace-talks in April.

INTERGROUP FOCAL COUNTRIES

Besides failed states, the Intergroup has distinguished certain countries as focal, on which we have formulated specific recommendations. These have been selected on the basis of two main criteria:

1. **The severity and persistence of human rights violations by the governments involved, or the lack of positive action of governments to protect religious and belief communities against violence from other groups in the country;**
2. **The leverage the EU has over the countries concerned, i.e. the pressure it can exert through its bilateral relations with the countries concerned.**

On this basis, the following focal countries have been selected: Burma, China, Eritrea, India, Iran, Iraq, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Sudan, Brunei, The Maldives.

Since our recommendations are directed towards the EU, we have added for each focal country a short summary of the EU's leverage over the country, as defined above.



BURMA

See country profile on page 80

EU relations

Since 2011 Burma has undertaken democratic political reforms, which the EU has recognised by lifting restrictive measures, restoring Burma's GSP status and creating the Comprehensive Framework and the joint EU-Myanmar Task Force. The EU and Myanmar are also cooperating in the field of human rights. EUSR for Human Rights Stavros Lambrinidis co-chaired two rounds in the context of the EU-Myanmar Human Rights Dialogue in Nay Pyi Taw in May 2014 and June 2015, at which the place of FoRB in the legal framework was among the issues discussed, and he later visited Rakhine State with particular concern for the Rohingya minority.³⁰ The EU is also providing Myanmar with the "second largest development cooperation envelope in Asia" worth 688mEUR. HR/VP set out a strategy on engagement in January 2016, which includes human rights and a focus on religious minorities.³¹

Recommendations

30 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/myanmar/press_corner/all_news/news/2015/20150618_en.htm

31 http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2016/310516_mogherini_myanmar_en.htm

- We propose an analytical report from the EU delegation to ascertain where programming regarding FoRB may be effective.
- We propose the EUSR's leadership on Human Rights Dialogues and recommend that the protection and promotion of FoRB remain high on the agenda of these Dialogues
- The Intergroup proposes that the EU sets reward-based goals - including the offer of enhanced bi-lateral partnerships/agreements - for compliance with human rights by reform.

CHINA

See country profile on page 81

EU relations

EU-China relations are guided by the EU-China Strategic 2020 Agenda, as agreed upon in 2013. This includes a commitment to a human rights dialogue and "exchanges". Regular Summits and Human Rights Dialogues are normally held annually. The latest was in December 2015 (the 34th), during which the promotion and protection of FoRB was raised.³² The EU is also China's biggest trading partner, and China is the second largest two-way trading partner for the EU. In 2013, talks were announced for an EU-China investment agreement which would reduce barriers to trade, and facilitate the EU's long-term goal of a deep and comprehensive FTA - this discussion was continued at the latest EU-China summit 2015.³³

Recommendations

- Intergroup calls for bold EU diplomacy on FoRB in EU-China Human Rights Dialogues, and to raise the issues at the highest possible level.
- Intergroup recommends that the EU support NGOs and activists working on FoRB within China through its EIDHR programming to strengthen advocacy and reporting.

ERITREA

See country profile on page 35

EU relations

The EU is currently negotiating an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) group, within which Eritrea is the only country not a member or observer to the WTO. Eritrea does not fall under the interim EPA signed in August 2009, but is involved in EPA negotiations and remains under the Cotonou Agreement. The EU focuses on short-term security and development programmes. Challenges to cooperation exist commonly in the form of the low capacity of Eritrea's institutions, an unstable regional situation, restricted access and the host

³² http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151202_03_en.htm

³³ <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1435>

country's approach towards aid effectiveness. The EP has been vocal in its condemnation of the government for human rights abuses, including a resolution in March 2016, which stated some violations which "may amount to crimes against humanity." The EP has called for serious reforms in areas such as human rights, transparency and accountability and military conscription, among others.

Recommendations

- **The Commission's decision to provide aid resources to the government of Eritrea went directly against the EP's resolution (March 10). We urge the Commission to review its decision by taking the Parliament's opinion into account.**
- **The EU Guidelines on FoRB provide ample tools for action for the EU delegation in Eritrea. The Intergroup would like to receive a report outlining the actions taken so far and the actions planned for the immediate future.**
- **All ongoing EPA negotiations should include conditions relating to FoRB, and Eritrea should be reminded of its obligations under the Cotonou Agreement.**

INDIA

See country profile on page 82

EU Relations

The earliest EU-India relations focused on trade and economics, but since 1994 they included a broader political dialogue. The 2004 Strategic Partnership and 2005 Joint Action Plan (updated 2008) underpin the bilateral relations. Bilateral Summits are conducted annually, in which human rights are at least nominally on the agenda. However, EU-India relations in general are not strong-troubled by mutual disinterest, confusion and apathy. Indian observers often suggest that relations with India are being neglected in favour of relations with China. However, there are signs that trade talks may be reopened, which may offer opportunities for EU leverage. In general, religion as a topic appears to be an "irritant" to the current Indian government, which they'd rather not discuss. The last human rights dialogue was in 2013.

In March 2016 Prime Minister Modi met with Presidents of the EU Council and Commission. FoRB was conspicuously off the agenda (having been raised by President Obama on the occasion of his India visit in February 2015) – instead the talks focused on environmental issues. The EU provides 80mEUR annually to civil society projects in the area of human rights, but there is no evidence of projects relating to religious tolerance having been undertaken.

Recommendations

- **Given the particularly alarming situation concerning religious minority relations in India, the Intergroup proposes the allocation of EIDHR funding for religious tolerance.**

- In all EU FTA negotiations, a chapter is included on Sustainability and Human Rights. In the context of the EU-India FTA, we urge that human rights be included as a top priority at every stage.
- The Intergroup, acknowledging the source of the problems being largely ideological – rooted in the Hindutva ideology – encourages any political parties (both national and European) with an open political dialogue with the BJP, to raise FoRB as an issue therein.

IRAN

See country profile on page 45

EU relations

Iran's Nuclear programme and related sanctions were the defining feature of relations until the recent Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreed in July 2015 (implementation begun January 2016), which lifted all sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for the reduction of its stockpile of uranium. Following the JCPOA, a human rights dialogue has also been committed to, which will involve "exchange visits of delegations".³⁴

Recommendations

- The Intergroup is encouraged by Iran's apparent willingness to a human rights dialogue following JCPOA, and encourages the EU to take the initiative in making full use of this agreement to dialogue and initiate the agreed exchange visits of delegations as soon as possible. We encourage all officials involved to make full use of the EU Guidelines on FoRB in this process.
- The Intergroup reminds the EU that some restrictive measures including travel bans and asset freezes were imposed specifically on human rights grounds, and recommends the continuation and extension of these until reform measures have been taken, specifically in relation to the protection of religious and belief minorities, such as the Baha'is.

IRAQ

See country profile on page 47

EU Relations

The EU has been engaged in Iraq's recovery and reconstruction, contributing over €1bn since 2003. Another €75mn has been earmarked for the 2014-2020 period. The most recent EU-Iraq ministerial dialogue was held in January 2014.³⁵ In May 2012 the EU and Iraq signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement,³⁶ which provides a framework for advancing dialogue and cooperation

³⁴ http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2016/160416_mogherini_to_iran_en.htm

³⁵ EEAS Country Profile - Iraq, http://eeas.europa.eu/iraq/index_en.htm

³⁶ http://eeas.europa.eu/iraq/tca_en.htm

on various subjects including human rights and security.³⁷The EU supports Iraq's eventual WTO accession. Total bilateral trade between the EU and Iraq amounted to over €16.3bn in 2014 (99.6% of all EU imports from Iraq are in oil).³⁸The European Parliament has passed several resolutions on the situation in Iraq over the reporting period³⁹.

Due to the intensity of the domestic and regional conflict situation, we refer to page 19-20 for recommendations toward securing basic security and humanitarian aid.

NIGERIA

See country profile on page 39

EU relations

In February 2016, President Buhari addressed the European Parliament reaffirming Nigeria's commitment to democracy and human rights. EU-Nigeria trade falls under an Economic Partnership Agreement (under the 2000 Cotonou agreement), which provides preferential access to EU markets. In 2009, both parties signed a "Joint Way Forward" agreement for closer cooperation. Furthermore, the 2014-2020 Country Strategy Paper was signed by the two parties on 19 June 2014, by which €512 million from the 11th EDF is available for activities, including "rule of law, governance and democracy". Between 2009-2013, the EU supported Nigeria with 700mEUR in development aid.

Recommendations

- **Nigeria's supreme court has not yet ruled on the constitutionality of applying Sharia punishments in the 12 northern 'Sharia states'. The Intergroup recommends that the EU delegation encourages the authorities of Nigeria to do so.**
- **EDF funding within "rule of law, governance and democracy" and EIDHR programming should include proposals for projects relating to FoRB and the promotion of religious tolerance.**

Compliance with FoRB should remain an ongoing condition for the continuation of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS).

NORTH KOREA

See country profile on page 90

EU relations

Although the EU established diplomatic relations with North Korea in 2001, and many Member States have diplomatic relations as well, meaningful dialogue with the regime is very difficult if not impossible. The "Six Party Talks" have dominated the negotiations, of which the EU (or any member state) is not a part. The Western voice in the region is still dominated by the US. The EU continues to supply some humanitarian aid.

37 EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement text, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:204:0020:0130:EN:PDF>

38 EU-Iraq Trade Statistics, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_111517.pdf

39 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+MOTION+P8-RC-2016-0149+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=en>

Recommendations to the EU

- The Intergroup is aware that the EU leverage in North Korea is minimal and could therefore be questionable as a focal country. The EU clearly does not have constructive bi-lateral fora with North Korea but equally still urged the European Commission and EEAS to be vocal and active in the relevant International platforms such as the UN. The Intergroup supports the comprehensive Joint Motion Resolution passed by the European Parliament on 20th January 2016, including the urging of North Korea to fully implement the recommendations of the 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry. In particular, we repeat here the resolution's calls made on HR/VP to further monitor and report on the situation, and to develop the EU's strategy making use of the expertise of South Korea. The Intergroup urges the EU to take leadership in negotiating this, where traditionally there has been a reluctance in the region to act without the initiative of the US.

PAKISTAN

See country profile on page 91

EU relations

The EU has a "fully fledged" delegation in Pakistan which employs 80 European and local staff. The diplomatic relationship is very conciliatory, as demonstrated by the EU-Pakistan Strategic Dialogues. Since 2009, the European Union's humanitarian aid to people in need in Pakistan has totalled €535.7 million. It is forecasted to total €20m in 2016.⁴⁰ The EU imports 21.2% of Pakistan's total exports, 78% of which enter at preferential rates, mostly under the GSP+ scheme. Pakistan is a GSP+ beneficiary, which involves a condition of maintaining the signature and "effective implementation" of 27 international conventions, including the ICCPR. This year, the European Commission published its review regarding its opinion on the beneficiary's compliance with GSP+ conditions, and stated *"Pakistan maintains the death penalty for a large number of crimes, some of which do not fall into the category of "most serious crimes" to which the death penalty should be limited according to ICCPR... it is highly questionable whether blasphemy laws could be seen as falling under the category of "most serious crimes.""*⁴¹

Recommendations

- It is the Intergroup's assessment that Pakistan is failing to effectively implement the ICCPR (and failing to show intent to comply) by continuing the death sentence for blasphemy, and should therefore have its GSP+ status revoked. The Commission's own 2016 report on GSP+ compliance presented evidence which clearly agrees with our assessment, and we urge the Commission to launch its own full inquiry into this, with a view of suspending or revoking Pakistan's GSP+ status.
- We call on the EU to make use of the EIDHR instrument to offer programmes on inter-religious tolerance.

⁴⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/pakistan_en.pdf

⁴¹ http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2016/january/tradoc_154178.pdf

- We call on the EU to organise training exchange programmes for judges, police forces and public prosecutors.

SAUDI ARABIA (KSA)

See country profile on page 52

EU Relations

The EU's engagement with the KSA happens largely through the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). The Joint Action Programme covering this relationship does not include human rights, but rather trade and economic issues, as well as some nominal "cultural exchange" commitments.⁴² The European Parliament has adopted a strong position against KSA this year. Firstly, by voting Raif Badawi the winner of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought – a blogger famed for setting up the website "Free Saudi Liberals". Secondly by way of a resolution which states in one of its pre-amble paragraphs: *"Whereas Saudi Arabia plays a leading role in financing, disseminating and promoting worldwide a particularly extremist interpretation of Islam; whereas the most sectarian vision of Islam has inspired terrorist organisations such as the so-called Islamic State and al-Qaeda."*⁴³ Despite these calls by the EP, Council and Commission have economic and geopolitical interests that continue to prevail over human rights concerns.

Recommendations

- The Intergroup is concerned how the EU continues to allow economic interests to prevail over human rights in its bilateral relations with KSA, and recommends that the EU sever further economic ties with KSA, including the denial of travel access for persons related to the regime, and to prioritise human rights in all bilateral relations.
- The EU must also work with international partners to stop financial flows from KSA to violent Wahhabi groups across the world.

SUDAN

See country profile on page 54

EU relations:

Since Sudan has not ratified the revised Cotonou Agreement, it has no access to allocations under the 10th or 11th European Development Funds. However, in mid-2010 the Council of the European Union earmarked "Special Funds" from former EDFs (€150 million for Sudan, North and South, for 2011-2013). Some €57 million allocated to Sudan have been disbursed regionally and locally. Sudan also benefits from annual grants under other instruments, especially the EIDHR; the Instrument for Stability; and Development Cooperation Instrument thematic budget lines (e.g. food security, non-state actors).⁴⁴ On 17th February, 2016 the European Institutions received Foreign Minister Prof.

⁴² http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/gulf_countries/eu_gulf_countries/index_en.htm

⁴³ Recital M, Joint Motion for Resolution, 2015/02/12: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P8-RC-2015-0143&language=EN>

⁴⁴ EEAS Country Profile-Sudan http://eeas.europa.eu/sudan/index_en.htm

Ibrahim Ghandour at a meeting in which HR/VP Mogherini stated the EU's commitment to peace and security in Sudan, and an additional €100 million was reportedly set aside to address issues of migration.⁴⁵ On 9 July 2015, the European Parliament passed a resolution regarding the situation of two Christian pastors in Sudan.⁴⁶

Recommendations to the EU

- The Intergroup asks the EEAS to engage with Sudan with regard to the country's upcoming constitutional changes.
- Furthermore, the Intergroup recommends that the protection of FoRB and in particular of religious and belief minorities receive priority in the context of assistance for good governance programmes.

BRUNEI

See country profile on page 79

EU relations

Currently EU relations with Brunei only occur through its contact with the ASEAN bloc, however a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is in its concluding negotiation stages. and due to its economic advancement it is not eligible for development assistance. In June 2015 the European Council concluded a strategy on EU-ASEAN relations, which included human rights.⁴⁷

Recommendations

- The Intergroup is aware that the EU leverage in Brunei is minimal and could therefore be questionable as a focal country. The EU does not have constructive bi-lateral for a with Brunei but equally still urges the European Commission and EEAS to be vocal and active in the relevant International platforms such as the UN.
- As the EU continues negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, we propose the inclusion of FoRB as a necessary element to such an agreement.
- Since EU relations with Brunei are currently only managed via ASEAN, the Intergroup proposes the opening of direct bilateral relations, at which the EU's FoRB concerns - particularly regarding recent developments - should be articulated.

45 EU Delegation to the Republic of Sudan press release - EU calls for end of conflicts in Sudan
http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sudan/documents/press_corner/2016/170216_en.pdf

46 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fTEXT%2bTA%2bP8-TA-2015-0280%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2f%2fEN&language=EN>

47 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/06/22-fac-asean-conclusions/>

THE MALDIVES

See country profile on page 88

EU relations

Though EU-Maldives relations are not formalised in any kind of Cooperation Agreement, relatively close relations have been maintained over the past few decades. Bi-annual joint missions of the Colombo based EU Head of Missions provide the main opportunity for a dialogue with national authorities and civil society actors reaffirming the EU's commitment and support to democracy and human rights. The European Union is the Maldives' largest export partner, and fourth when considering overall trade (exports and imports). The tourism industry of the Maldives remains its biggest foreign income earner, providing approximately 52% of the country's foreign currency earnings and 27% of GDP. Current development and cooperation programmes focus on supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation and strengthening the national response to drug use. There are no specific FoRB development programmes in place.⁴⁸

Recommendations to the EU

- The Intergroup is concerned how the EU continues to allow economic and tourism interests to prevail over human rights in its bilateral relations with The Maldives, and recommends that the EU establishes a specific Human Rights dialogue platform before furthering economic ties with The Maldives.
- The Intergroup recommends that the protection of religion and belief minorities receive priority in the context of assistance for good governance programmes, and the EIDHR.

48 http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sri_lanka/eu_maldives/political_relations/index_en.htm



COUNTRY PROFILES

The main purpose of this report is to survey the current global situation concerning freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), and to recommend actions for EU institutions to better promote and protect FoRB.

Methodology

The Country Profiles section constitutes the largest part of this report. We have selected 53 countries where FoRB is seriously under threat. The data used in this report was collected from various secondary sources, including high-quality analysis from international organisations, NGOs and government publications. While historic examples may be referred, our core reporting period covers June 2015 to June 2016. Our country list is by no means exhaustive, however, based on the evidence we have received and surveyed from these secondary sources, we have deemed them the most severe cases, where the Intergroup's attention is best directed. Our selection was based on an analysis of the legal and infrastructural capacity of national government authorities to promote and protect their citizen's human rights to FoRB; both in terms of direct government policy and implementation, as well as their ability to contain non-governmental threats to FoRB. The trajectory of developments on this front (particularly over the reporting period) were also considered in our selection.

Once all of the data had been gathered, we employed the services of the Human Security Centre (London), who condensed and summarised the material. The Intergroup then further condensed this into the Country Profiles chapter. This year, we were pleased to then include a consultation period with civil society to review a draft of these and offer comments, which we took into account accordingly. We also presented the document to the EEAS for its review and input – particularly concerning our recommendations.

Each country profile follows a uniform structure. First, the religious demographics are described – giving an overall impression of the belief groups present in the country (section 1). Second, we describe the major restrictions to FoRB present in the country (section 2) which we distinguish in terms of government restrictions (section 2a), including all exercises of state power; and non-governmental restrictions (section 2b), including all exercises of non-state actors, societal hostilities etc.

Remit of the Intergroup

* The Intergroup recognises that the EU's ability to persuade compliance to international law in third countries will partly depend on our own ability to consistently uphold these domestically. However, the official remit of the Intergroup only includes the EU's external relations. For interest on issues related to FoRB within the EU, we refer you to the work of our colleague Vice President Antonio Tajani MEP, whose mandate covers Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.



Sub-Saharan Africa

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

Failed State - for explanation and recommendations see page 19

1. Religious demographic

CAR has a population of 5.3 million of which 80% are Christian (51% Protestant and 29% Roman Catholic); 10% identify as Muslim; 4.5% adhere to other religious beliefs; and 5.5% have no religion.

2a. Government restrictions

The interim constitution, known as the Transitional National Charter (adopted in July 2013), guarantees equality before the law regardless of religious orientation, including the choice not to believe, and outlaws all forms of "religious fundamentalism". The 135-member National Council must include six members from religious groups and prohibits political parties from identifying with a particular religious community.⁴⁹ All religious groups, with the exception of indigenous communities, must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, who reserves the right to reject applications on charges of disturbing societal peace.⁵⁰ However, the power of the transitional government is weak and sporadic, and the Constitution is violated on a day-to-day basis in areas not under state control.

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

Despite a decrease in violence compared to the previous year, over the 2014-2015 reporting period, the violence spread from western parts to central and eastern regions of the country.⁵¹ Over 5,000 people have been killed since 2013 and almost a million displaced. According to the International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic, over 80% of the country's Muslim population had been driven out of CAR by December 2014, and the UN estimates that 36,000 Muslim civilians remain trapped in areas besieged by anti-Balaka Militia.⁵² The predominantly Muslim Ex-Seleka forces are also continually attacking the Christian civilian population, who between January and April 2015 killed 1,269 Christians. Despite the disarmament agreement reached during the Bangui National Forum in May 2015, the country continues to be torn apart by ethno-religious sectarian violence between the predominantly Christian anti-Balaka forces on one side, and the predominantly Muslim Ex-Seleka forces on the other. September 2015 saw a spike in violence after the body of a young Muslim man was found in Bangui. Fatalities were incurred during the subsequent looting of churches and police stations. Commissioners of the UN International Commission of Inquiry have reported both sides guilty of "crimes against humanity".⁵³ UN Independent Expert Ms. Keita-Bocoum recognised the visit of Pope Francis in November 2015 as a positive contribution to the situation, as it preceded peaceful elections.⁵⁴

49 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2015, p. 2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238408.pdf>

50 Ibid.

51 HRW, World Report 2015, p. 143 https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2015_web.pdf

52 Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Central African Republic
http://www.globalr2p.org/regions/central_african_republic

53 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49863#.VwvD-qvF7zI>

54 <http://www.csw.org.uk/2015/11/30/press/2886/article.htm>, <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/03/23/press/3033/article.htm>

COMOROS

1. Religious demographics

Comoros has a population of 767,000. More than 99% are Muslim adhering to Shafi'i doctrine. The several hundred non-Sunni residents include Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, and Protestants.⁵⁵

2a. Government restrictions

Despite a positive trend towards a more democratic society, religious freedom is under threat due to the rise of violent interpretations of Islam both in the country and the East Africa region.⁵⁶

Although the constitution of Comoros provides for equality before the law regardless of religious conviction, it favours Islam as the state religion. This results in discrimination against non-Muslims and Muslims who do not adhere to the Sunni Shafi'i doctrine.⁵⁷ Furthermore, proselytising for any religion other than Islam is prohibited. The law also provides for prosecution of converts from a Muslim background, but penalties are ill defined. In general these laws against proselytism and conversion are not widely enforced by the government. In 2013 the government released 19 Shi'a worshippers arrested for practicing and propagating the Shi'a.⁵⁸ Foreigners have been allowed to establish non-Islamic places of worship and two Christian churches operate on each of the country's three principal islands⁵⁹. However, groups of radical clerics and scholars are threatening this by continuing to push for further Sharia legislation and enforcement.⁶⁰

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

Converts from Islam remain a particular concern in Comoros, as they are subject to egregious discrimination and harassment. They are often under intense societal pressure to publicly renounce their faith, and to return to Islam. There have also been reports of converts from Islam being denied medical attention, due to their convictions.⁶¹ Christians have reported a continued struggle with establishing adequate places of worship, and are not permitted to openly distribute Bibles or other Christian resources. House churches are monitored and spied on by local Islamic groups, suspicious of their activity.⁶²

DJIBOUTI

1. Religious demographics

Djibouti has a population of just over 800,000 of which 94% are Sunni Muslim. The remaining 6% include Roman Catholics, Protestants, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Jews, Baha'is, and atheists.⁶³

2a. Government restrictions

The Constitution includes some provisions for religious freedom, however Islam is the state religion,

55 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238412.pdf>

56 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/comoros/>

57 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 29 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

58 Freedom House, Country Profile Comoros 2015 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/comoros>

59 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238412.pdf>

60 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/comoros/>

61 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016 <https://www.opendoors.org.nz/persecutedchristians/countryprofiles/comoros/>

62 Ibid.

63 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238420.pdf>

and all citizens are automatically counted as Muslims. Despite this, most of the government's interference has been over Islamic institutions. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls Islamic institutions, including mosques, religious events, and private Islamic schools. The government uses a 2013 decree to replace imams and close down mosques to crack down on extremism, often in coordination with Western allies – reflecting a general continuation of its “dictatorial paranoia” described in our last report.⁶⁴ The law does not impose sanctions on those who do not observe Islamic teachings or practice other religious beliefs.⁶⁵ Non-Islamic groups registered with the government are able to operate freely, while smaller religious communities (including Bahai's and Jehovah's witnesses) remain unregistered but worship in private without government interference.⁶⁶

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

NGOs monitoring persecution against Christians report a “slight decrease” over the 2014-2015 reporting period. However, there are concerns that the increasingly volatile security situation in the region will prompt ever-stricter controls over religious affairs.⁶⁷ Jihadist groups use the country as a transit route in the region, and the fragile situation has seen the rise of violent Islamic extremism in some communities.

ERITREA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 22

1. Religious demographics

Eritrea's total population consists of 6.4 million people, and while statistics are unreliable approximately 50% are Sunni Muslim and 50% Christian. The Christian population is primarily Orthodox, but Protestants, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, and members of the Greek Orthodox Church are also represented. 2% of the population identify as animists, and a small Baha'i community resides in the country.⁶⁸

2. Restrictions to FoRB

In theory, the Eritrean constitution provides for FoRB. Article 14 states that no person shall be discriminated against based on their religious affiliation and Article 19 enshrines the right to practice freely. In reality, however, the government consistently violates these provisions.⁶⁹ Only four religious communities are officially recognised by the state: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Eritrea. Even these enjoy only limited freedoms, and remain closely monitored by the state.⁷⁰ For example, in 2007 the government forcefully deposed the Eritrean Orthodox Church patriarch, Abune Antonios, after he disobeyed government interference in the affairs of the church. To this day, he remains under house arrest.⁷¹ Similarly, over 180 Muslims remain imprisoned for opposing the state's appointment of the Mufti of the Eritrean Muslim community.⁷²

64 *ibid*

65 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 32

<http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

66 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238420.pdf>

67 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/djibouti/>

68 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238424.pdf>

69 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.3

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238424.pdf>

70 Freedom of Thought Report 2014, Freedom Coalition, p. 33

71 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 40

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

72 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 40

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

Other religious groups must submit applications for registration, including a detailed description of the history and uniqueness of the religion, and intrusive details on church members. Since 2002, the government has not approved a single request for registration, even though the Baha'i community, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church and Seventh-day Adventists have all submitted applications. Consequently, they are deemed illegal and suffer severe persecution by the government.⁷³ Although reliable and uncensored information is challenging to obtain—since no independent media outlet operates in Eritrea⁷⁴—according to NGOs, over the 2014-2015 reporting period, the totalitarian Eritrean leadership continued extreme violations of human rights, including torture, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, forced labour and interference in religious affairs. Tens of thousands continue to be detained without charge in life-threatening conditions and under brutal torture, including hundreds imprisoned for their religion or belief⁷⁵. Released prisoners of conscience have testified that they were confined in crowded conditions, such as underground cells or a 20-foot metal shipping container, while also experiencing extreme temperature changes. Some local authorities are also known to deny community-based services, such as gas and water, to Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals both of whom face strong discrimination.⁷⁶ Jehovah's Witnesses lost their citizenship in 1994 after they refused to participate in Eritrea's 1993 referendum, and suffer for their conscientious objection to military service. Due to this extreme discrimination by a regime that has been called "the North Korea of Africa", hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing the country.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the Eritrean government's resourcing of violent Islamist groups such as al-Shabaab have been the cause of UN Security Council sanctions over the years.^{78, 79}

ETHIOPIA

1. Religious demographics

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has a population of approximately 96.6 million of which two thirds are Christian and one third is Muslim. 44% follow the Orthodox Church (EOC), 34% are Sunni Muslim—with a tendency towards Sufism—and 19% belong to Christian Evangelical and Pentecostal groups. There are also small communities of Eastern Rite and Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and followers of indigenous religions.⁸⁰

2a. Government restrictions

The Ethiopian Constitution provides for freedom of religion and belief and requires the separation of state and religion, as outlined in Article 11. Discrimination based on religious grounds is prohibited and equality before the law is enshrined in Article 25. The defamation of any religion is outlawed, but the law is generally not enforced by the state. Religious instruction in schools and the formation of religious political parties are prohibited; however, churches can teach Sunday school and Muslims can observe a two-hour break on Fridays for prayers.⁸¹ The very broad definition of terrorism in the 2009 Anti-Terror Proclamation (ATP) has been criticised as a tool for the government to crack down on dissent and violate Constitutional principles. Furthermore, since 2011 the government has sought to standardize the teaching of Islam within the country by imposing the al-Ahbash Islamic ideology, a predominantly Sufi movement, which advocates Islamic pluralism and opposes any linkage between

73 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 35 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

74 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238424.pdf>

75 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p40

76 Ibid.

77 The Guardian, Christians flee growing persecution in Africa and Middle East <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/13/christians-flee-growing-persecution-africa-middle-east>

78 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/eritrea.php>

79 UNSC, Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/727

80 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238426.pdf>

81 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238426.pdf>

religion and politics.⁸² Imams, who refused to preach it, were dismissed or, in some instances, jailed. Conversely, the establishment of the National Inter-Faith Peace Council (NIFPC), which is tasked with promoting interfaith harmony and coexistence, “shows the government’s efforts to promote religious pluralism and understanding”.⁸³ All of these measures, alongside regional vulnerability, have led to an increase in tensions between Muslims and Christian communities.

THE GAMBIA

1. Religious demographics

The Gambia has a total population of 1.9 million. An estimated 90% is Muslim of which the majority follow Sunni Islam. 9% of the population is Christian, predominately Roman Catholic, and there are also small numbers of Hindus, Ahmadi and Ndigal Muslims and indigenous animists.⁸⁴

2. Restrictions to FoRB

In December 2015, President Yahya Jammeh declared the Gambia an Islamic Republic, citing the need to distance the country from its colonial past. The decision makes the country the second Islamic Republic in Africa together with Mauritania. The extent to which the government will enforce its new doctrine is not yet clear.⁸⁵ The secular Constitution of 1996 remains in place; however, the government has already introduced new laws that curtail religious freedom.⁸⁶ Although the Constitution states that “every person shall have the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice”⁸⁷ and outlaws discrimination based on religion, the government frequently violates those rights. In July 2010, President Jammeh said, “If you don’t believe in God... you are even below a pig.”⁸⁸ The government also establishes Qadi courts based on Islamic legal traditions, with jurisdiction in the areas of marriage, divorce, custody over children, and inheritance. The courts’ ruling also applies to interfaith couples, if one partner is Muslim. The government promotes and controls Sunni Islam.⁸⁹ The government has also failed to protect its minorities. At least 7 Christians were killed in the Gambia for their religious beliefs and at least 6 Christian churches were attacked, damaged or destroyed.⁹⁰

KENYA

1. Religious demographic

In Kenya, 82% of the population identifies as Christian, 11% as Muslim and small numbers as Baha’i, Hindu and indigenous religions.⁹¹

21. Government Restrictions

While authorities generally uphold freedom of religion on civil matters, reports suggest that security forces have carried out extrajudicial killings and harassments, particularly on harassing Muslim and

82 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 38 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

83 Ibid.

84 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238430.pdf>

85 <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21685736-how-tiny-west-african-tourist-trap-turning-itself-islamic?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/ed/thegambiafashionsitselfasakindofislamicstate>

86 The Economist, The Gambia fashions itself as kind of an Islamic state
<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21685736-how-tiny-west-african-tourist-trap-turning-itself-islamic?fsrc=scn/tw/te/bl/ed/thegambiafashionsitselfasakindofislamicstate>

87 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238430.pdf>

88 IHEU, 2015 Freedom of Thought Report, p218

89 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p.129 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

90 Open Doors, World Watch List Report 2016, p.8 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/documents/ww-report-160113.pdf>

91 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/kenya/>

the ethnic Somali population, in the wake of terror attacks.^{92,93} Violence has increased in different parts of the country, particularly where Islamic radicalism is high and where there is a lack of government protection.⁹⁴

2b. Non-Government related Restrictions

The escalation of inter-religious conflict is a recent development, until which Christians and Muslims appeared to co-exist in relative peace. The recent increase in attacks is directly linked to terrorist organisations Al-Shabaab and Daesh. Al'-Shabaab, who has allied itself with Daesh, increasingly lashes out beyond Somalia's borders, threatening stability in Kenya. A massacre occurred in April 2015 at the University of Garissa where 147 university students murdered, and where Christians were specifically singled out.⁹⁵ Due to a lack of government response, churches have taken action to install metal detectors for fear of attackers and even hired armed police to guard their religious services. Also, in the Muslim-majority northeast of Kenya, non-Muslim beliefs are not permitted and so are forced to practice in secret. Al-Shabaab's influence also impacts different aspects of communities, including burial rights and education – where schools in areas under the group's control are directed to teach a militant form of Islam that promotes waging Jihad.⁹⁶ Secular or faith-based humanitarian aid organisations are subjected to harassment and threats and many religious groups are unable to operate freely.⁹⁷ Despite growing religious tensions, in December 2015 in Mandera, Muslims protected Christians as they stood up against Islamist attackers, refusing to split into groups and saying: "You kill all of us or none of us"⁹⁸.

MALI

1. Religious demographics

The Republic of Mali has a population of 16.5m, 95% of which are Muslims (largely Sunni, but also Sufi). Christians represent 2% of the population (two-thirds Roman Catholic, one-third protestant), with the rest adhering to indigenous, traditional beliefs.

2a. Government restrictions

In government controlled areas, religious freedom is protected. The constitution is secular, providing for FoRB in Articles 2 and 4, which prohibit discrimination on religious grounds, and the Penal Code is consistent with this. Politically, however, Mali's High Islamic Council enjoys a high degree of influence over the government, especially through support for political candidates and parties.⁹⁹ Despite the secular nature of Mali's Constitution, a high degree of influence still remains from Mali's Islamic Council through support for political candidates and parties.

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

The threat to FoRB in the country comes largely from the terrorist network present. In May 2012, two Islamist groups (Tuareg and Ansar Dine) over-ran territory in the north of the country, claimed it an Islamic State (Azawaad – endorsed by AQIM)¹⁰⁰, and began enforcing a punitive Sharia law there, including beheadings and floggings for non-compliance. French military forces intervened in 2013, which lessened this Islamist grip, but over the 2014-15 reporting period hostilities have renewed and the threat of terrorism remains high: with numerous attacks on tourists and populated areas in

92 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/kenya>.

93 <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2015/09/killing-kenya-150923092758366.html>

94 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/kenya/>.

95 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32169080>

96 Somalia 2014, Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/somalia#.VQndh47F8Yc>).

97 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Somalia <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/somalia/>.

98 Ibid.

99 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 138 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

100 <http://global-security-news.com/2012/10/01/jihadists-flock-to-mali-and-al-shabaab-leaves-kismayo-in-somalia-gulf-islamism/>

2015.¹⁰¹ Christians are not able to live in safety in the Northern territories, due to the threat of Islamist extremism – in January 2016, a Swiss Missionary was kidnapped by AQIM.¹⁰² In June 2015 a peace deal was signed between the government and Tuareg rebels, concerning greater autonomy and investment in the region,¹⁰³ but incitement to hatred and violence based on certain interpretations of Islam has persisted since.

NIGERIA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 25

1. Religious Demographics

The Federal Republic of Nigeria has a population of approximately 180 million, 90% of which are Muslims and Christians, in almost equal division. Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is and non-believers make up for less than 5% of the total population, with the remainder adhering to indigenous beliefs.¹⁰⁴

2a. Government restrictions

While freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Section 10 of the Constitution, the constitution also provides the right for state courts discretion to include Sharia for "civil proceedings" but is silent on their use for criminal cases.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, in 12 northern states Sharia courts have the right to rule over criminal cases (technically on the condition that complainant and defendant agree – however, there have been cases where non-Muslims have been forcefully brought before sharia courts¹⁰⁶) which includes punishments such as caning, amputation and death by stoning for blasphemy and other offences. In addition, the state governments of Bauchi, Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, Jigawa, Gombe and Kano have established a Sharia enforcement group, the Hisbah.¹⁰⁷ Here, churches and land are often seized with little or no compensation and non-Muslims suffer discrimination in access to education and are left lacking basic health and water services.¹⁰⁸

Under Section 204 of the Penal Code, blasphemy is prohibited, and "any person who does an act which any class of person considers a public insult of their religion" can be sentenced to two years in prison, and in some northern states even face execution. In Kano in January 2016, for example, a cleric was sentenced to death by hanging on blasphemy charges.^{109 110}

2b Non-governmental restrictions

Boko Haram constitutes the most severe threat to human rights in Nigeria. Since 2009, Boko Haram has killed at least 20,000 people and made 2.5 million homeless, targeting schools and children for slavery. This reporting period has seen some of their most egregious slaughters; most recently in February 2016, an assault on the village of Dalori where at least 80 were killed; some burned alive, including children. Boko Haram declared allegiance to Daesh in March 2015, and calls for the universal implementation of what it considers pure Sharia law and demands the departure of all Christians from Northern Nigeria.¹¹¹ Some progress has been made against Boko Haram since the African Union approved an 8,700-troop Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprised of

101 <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/20/africa/mali-shooting/>

102 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/take-action/pray/tag-prayer-updates-post/al-qaeda-takes-responsibility-for-abduction-of-swiss-missionary/>

103 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33213931>

104 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, Nigeria, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238460.pdf>

105 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, Nigeria, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238460.pdf>

106 CSW direct submission of evidence to the Intergroup, 27/05/2016, commenting on report draft

107 *ibid.*

108 CSW comment submission

109 BBC, Nigeria court in Kano sentences cleric to death for blasphemy <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35241608>

110 Nigeria Law. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm>

111 The Guardian, Boko Haram declares allegiance to Islamic State

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/07/boko-haram-suicide-bombers-50-dead-maiduguri>

soldiers from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, under the leadership of President Buhari, which successfully liberated and re-captured dozens of towns and strategic positions from Boko Haram.¹¹²

Since 1999, inter-communal clashes have been on the rise, especially in the region covering the Middle Belt states, with devastating consequences: 18,000 casualties, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs), and the destruction or severe damage to thousands of religious edifices, local businesses and houses.¹¹³ The Fulani Militia have been categorized the fourth most deadly terror group in the world – having killed more than al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. Reportedly, a total of 4,028 Christians were killed in Nigeria because of faith-related reasons in 2016 and 198 churches were attacked, damaged or destroyed between November 2014 and October 2015.¹¹⁴

SOMALIA

Failed State - for explanation and recommendations see page 19

1. Religious demographics

The Federal Republic of Somalia has a population of approximately 10.4 million. Accurate demographic data on religion is unavailable due the continuous state of conflict, but 99.8% of the population adheres to Islam, with the majority towards the Sunni and Salafist interpretations.¹¹⁵ Other beliefs groups exist, practicing in secret “underground”. There is little to no international diplomatic presence in Somalia.¹¹⁶

2a. Government restrictions

Although the Federal Government of Somalia only controls part of the country, it does have a “Provisional Federal Constitution”(PFC).¹¹⁷ While the PFC recognises freedom of religion, it does not provide for freedom of (non-religious) beliefs. Moreover, the Constitution is inconsistent: whereas Article 17 states that “every person is free to practice his or her religion”, at the same time it is added that “no religion other than Islam can be propagated in the Federal Republic of Somalia”.¹¹⁸ It also establishes the Sharia as the principle source of legislation and bans non-Muslims from higher office, such as the Presidency or holding seats in the legislature. Conversion and proselytism are banned, as is interfaith marriage. Atheism is outlawed and acts of blasphemy and apostasy are subject to severe punishment under the 1963 penal code in accordance with Sharia law.¹¹⁹

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

An internationally backed government took power in 2012 and returned a degree of stability to the country, but anarchy remains in the areas outside of the control of the government. Al-Shabaab-the extremely violent Somali Islamist group and Al-Qaeda affiliate – violently imposes its dogma by harassing, maiming, or killing people who are suspected of converting from Islam or who are failing to uphold the principles of Islam. Since 1993, Somalia has been of particular concern in terms of Christian persecution following a policy of religious cleansing and has declared it “wants Somalia free of any Christians.”^{120, 121} In areas where al-Shabaab rules, Christians are forced to practice in complete secrecy or face execution on the spot. Reports suggest that “anyone accused of apostasy risks execution by the Shabaab, which has also denied FoRB to moderate Muslims and has caused

112 BBC, Boko Haram: Can regional forces beat Nigeria's militant Islamist? <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31695508>

113 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 101 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Nigeria%202015.pdf>

114 Open Doors, World Watch Report 2016, p. 8 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/documents/ww-report-160113.pdf>

115 https://web.archive.org/web/20130309232303/http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/globalReligion-full.pdf

116 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238472.pdf>

117 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238472.pdf>

118 UN Mission, The Federal Republic of Somalia Provisional Constitution <http://unpos.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=RkJTOSpoMME>

119 The Freedom of Thought Report 2013, p. 53 (file:///C:/Users/jl788_000/Downloads/FOT2014%20Full%2020141210.pdf)

120 Somalia World Watch List, Open Doors (<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/somalia.php>)

121 Ibid.

deep offense among many Somalis by destroying the graves of Sufi saints.”¹²²

Due to the Somali federal government’s inability to fully enforce the PFC, discrimination of religious and non-religious minorities persists. There are no public places of worship for non-Muslims; and private schools, which are the primary source of education, tend to offer only Islamic religious instruction. Additionally, there is strong local pressure for all community members to conform to Sharia, “a mere suspicion leads to a rush public beheading”.¹²³

122 Somalia 2014, Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/somalia#.VQndh47F8Yc>)

123 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/somalia/>



Middle East and North Africa

ALGERIA

1. Religious Demographics

Algeria has a population of 38.8m of which 99% are Sunni Muslim. Christians, Jews and Ibadi Muslims constitute less than 1% of the population (many of which are foreign residents).

2a. Government Restrictions

Although Article 36 of its constitution provides for the inviolable right to belief and opinion, Article 2 declares Islam the state religion, and several provisions guarantee preferential treatment of Muslims – for example, mosques receive state funding. Blasphemy is a criminal offence and carries a sentence of 5 years prison; and though not often enforced, non-Islamic proselytism is illegal. Some domestic laws prohibit behaviour incompatible with Islamic morality.¹²⁴ On a positive note, non-Muslim religious groups can register with little hindrance, and a secular political party is active.

2b. Non-Government Restrictions

Parts of the northeast and south are still occupied by terrorist insurgency networks, including AQIM. In July 2014, a group of non-fasters were severely beaten by an angry mob of radical Islamists.¹²⁵ In 2015, well-known Algerian poet and journalist Rachid Boudjedra discussed his atheism on national television and caused a media storm.¹²⁶

BAHRAIN

1. Religious Demographics

Bahrain has a population of 1.3 million, 51% of which are foreigners. Of the local population (citizens) 60-65% are Shi'a and 30-35% Sunni, and 1-2% are non-Muslims, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and Baha'is.¹²⁷ Of the total population however, 70-75% are Muslim. The government continues to monitor political religious activity to detect and prevent reformist democratic movements. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish whether discrimination occurs for purely religious reasons or to crack down on political dissidents.¹²⁸

2a. Governmental restrictions

The constitution calls Islam the religion of the state and Sharia as the principal source for legislation. 19 religious groups are legally registered with the state. Blasphemy is outlawed under the penal code (Articles 309 & 310); however, it is not punishable by death like in many other countries in the region, and the penalty shall not "exceed a jail sentence of one year or a fine of BD 100 (\$265)", although longer sentences have been handed down, mostly in connection with political motives¹²⁹. Proselytism directed at Muslims is illegal.¹³⁰ Furthermore, press and publications laws outlaw

124 ibid

125 Fdesouche, Ramadan. Béjaïa (Algérie) : Des non jeûneurs lynchés par la foule
<http://www.fdesouche.com/488871-ramadan-bejaia-algerie-des-non-jeuneurs-lynches-par-la-foule#>

126 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 87
<http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

127 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

128 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 332 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

129 http://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/bhr/1976/bahrain_penal_code_html/Bahrain_Penal_Code_1976.pdf

130 ADF International submission pt. 27 – "Comments on FoRB draft" 27/05/2016

anti-Islamic media: "Any publication that prejudices the ruling system of the country and its official religion can be banned from publication by ministerial order."¹³¹

Although both Jafari Shi'a courts and Maliki Sunni courts are recognised by the government, the latter school of jurisprudence enjoys favoured status and forms the basis for the curriculum of all public schools¹³². Members of the Shi'a population suffer discrimination in various walks of life. They cannot serve in the military and hold no relevant positions in the Bahraini government.¹³³ The Shi'a Islamic Scholars Council was banned by a Bahraini court in January 2015, following a lawsuit by the Ministry of Justice which deemed the society illegal.¹³⁴ HRW reported a concerning incident of anti-Shi'a hate speech by a member of the Office of the Ombudsman in the Ministry of Interior¹³⁵ (Ahmed al-Malki), when he wrote in July 2015: "You cannot win Zionists' loyalty, that's why Hitler decided to exterminate them and the British established a colony for them in Palestine; and this is what must be done with Welayat al-Faqih [code for Bahrain's Shia population]".¹³⁶

EGYPT

1. Religious demographics

Around 90% of Egypt's population follow Sunni Islam (less than 1% Shi'a) and the remaining 10% are Christian, of which 8% are of Coptic origin. There is a tiny minority of Shi'a Muslims, making up less than 1 percent of the total population. There are also small groups of Quranists and Ahmadi Muslims. Roughly 2,000 Baha'is, 1,000-1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses, and a tiny number of Jews live in the country. Other Christian denominations together constitute less than 2 percent of the population.¹³⁷

2a. Government restrictions

The new Egyptian Constitution (January 2014), is based on a mix of secular and Islamic law. Article 2 states that Islam is the State religion and that Sharia is the source of all legislation. Article 3, however, states that the personal and religious affairs of Christians and Jews shall be governed according to Christian and Jewish law respectively. Article 53 declares that all citizens are "equal in rights, freedoms and general duties, without discrimination based on religion, belief... or any other reason." Article 64 follows on: "Freedom of belief is absolute. The freedom of practicing religious rituals and establishing worship places for the followers of Abrahamic religions is a right regulated by Law". Article 74 states that "no political parties may be formed on the basis of religion".¹³⁸ Clearly, restrictive and discriminatory laws remain in place, which curtail religious freedom and outlaw blasphemy. Atheists are one of Egypt's least-protected minorities in this regard as the Sisi government has launched new initiatives to counter atheism.^{139, 140}

Although no law against apostasy exists, other laws, including "instigating sedition and division", are effectively used.¹⁴¹ The Egyptian Criminal Code explicitly outlaws blasphemy, and in January 2015, a new decree was passed by President Sisi that allows the government to ban any foreign publication

131 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

132 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

133 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 7 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

134 Freedom House, Bahrain 2015 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/bahrain#.VQMdHo7F8Yc>

135 HRW, World Report 2015, p. 88; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015>

136 HRW, The Blood of People Who Don't Cooperate <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/11/22/bloodapeopleawhoadontacooperate/continuingatortureanda mistreatmentadetainees>

137 US Department of State, Egypt 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom, p. 2

138 State Information Service, Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014 <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Newvr/Dustor-en001.pdf>

139 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 89 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202015.pdf>

140 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 89 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202015.pdf>

141 Law No. 58 01 The Year 1937 Promulgating the Penal Code (www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/Egypt/criminal-code.pdf)

it deems insulting to religion¹⁴². “Indictments involving charges of “contempt of religion”... are on the increase”¹⁴³. In 2016, 3 Coptic teenagers were sentenced to five years in prison and Egyptian writer Ms. Naaot was sentenced to 3 years, on these grounds. While the majority of charges are levelled against Sunni Muslims; the majority of those sentenced to prison are Christians, Shi’a Muslims and atheists, who often suffer flawed trials.¹⁴⁴

Since 1960, under Law 263, the Baha’i Faith and Jehovah’s Witnesses have been illegal in Egypt.¹⁴⁵ Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, the government increased surveillance on all Muslim religious institutions under the premise of fighting extremism and terrorism. After an administrative court upheld a decree by the Ministry of Religious Endowment in February 2015 – a regulation that prevents imams who are not graduates of Al-Azhar from preaching in licensed and unlicensed mosques-thousands of small places of worship were closed down.¹⁴⁶

USCIRF highlights in its report “the significant shift in tone and rhetoric” with regards to religious freedom under President Sisi, and he has publicly called for major reforms of Islam.¹⁴⁷

2b. Non-governmental hostilities

Despite strengthened safeguards in the new constitution, sectarianism still permeates Egyptian society; and Christians, Shi’a Muslims and other minorities are routinely abused and discriminated against. Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, sectarian attacks decreased, but the government failed to adequately protect religious minorities, particularly Coptic Orthodox Christians. Christian schoolgirls continue to be abducted at an alarming rate, and the government’s inability to respond over several years has made the situation worse. Anti-Semitism is rife in Egypt; and most Jews have fled the country. The government has made efforts to protect the Christian community, particularly during Christian holidays, and soldiers were wounded and killed in the process.¹⁴⁸ The number and severity of violent attacks against Christian Copts and their religious infrastructure decreased significantly under President Sisi, reports USCIRF;¹⁴⁹ however, “increased slightly” in 2015 compared to 2014 (69 churches attacked, damaged or destroyed).¹⁵⁰

IRAN

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 24

1. Religious demographics

Muslims make up 99% of Iran’s 80m population: 90% of which are Shi’a, 9% Sunni, including approximately 2-5 million thought to practice Sufism.¹⁵¹ The remaining 1% includes significant Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Baha’i communities.

2a. Government restrictions

Iran is effectively a totalitarian theocracy. The Vilayet-e Faqih (guardianship of the Islamic Jurists) is enshrined in law, which makes Iran one of the few nations in the world where Islamic law through religious leaders is in absolute control. “Consequently, four religious leaders may block all draft legislation enacted by the Parliament. The Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader thus centralise

142 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 90 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202015.pdf>

143 <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/02/26/press/2995/article.htm>

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

146 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 90 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202015.pdf>

147 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 89 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202015.pdf>

148 MEC, MENA Region: Persecution of Christians, 2015 Written evidence to EP Intergroup FoRB

149 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 89 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Egypt%202015.pdf>

150 Open Doors, World Watch List report 2016, p. 5

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/documents/ww-report-160113.pdf>

151 Home Office: Iran Country of Origin Information (COI) report, 2013, p. 10

all powers in Iran.”¹⁵²

The constitution of Iran explicitly places the tenets of Jaafari Shi’a (Twelver) Islam at the heart of decision-making. While the constitution permits three official religious minorities (Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews) to practise their faith, and allots five seats in the Majlis (Iranian Assembly) to representatives of minority religions¹⁵³, in all respects non-Muslims do not enjoy equal legal status. Non-Muslims are barred from all influential positions in state organs; barred from publicly expressing religious affiliation or proselytism; suffer harsher sentences for crimes committed (for example, non-Muslims suffer the death penalty for adultery, while Muslims receive lashes¹⁵⁴). While “Iranian law does not provide the death penalty for apostasy the courts can hand down this punishment, and have done so in previous years, based on their interpretation of Sharia law and fatwas”—which according to 167 of the Constitution “should be enforced where there is no codified law applicable in civil matters”.¹⁵⁵

According to the UN Special Rapporteur’s 2016 report, “discrimination against the Baha’i community is legally sanctioned by a lack of constitutional recognition”, leading to “systemic policies designed to discriminate, target, harass... Baha’is”¹⁵⁶ According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre, the regime executed 966 people for various crimes in 2015, including 21 for *moharebeh* (enmity against God).¹⁵⁷ The Baha’i Faith is considered a “political sect” and Baha’is are deemed apostates by the government and denied civil rights.¹⁵⁸ Members of the Baha’i community are banned from higher education, denied the right to establish and maintain religious institutions, excluded from the social pension system, arbitrary restrictions have also been placed on their businesses and they do not hold the right to inherit property.¹⁵⁹ They also suffer arbitrary arrest—there are currently 80 Bahai’s in prison for their faith. Shi’a reformist groups and minority Muslims denominations (particularly Sunni and Sufi Muslims) are also subject to harassment and imprisonment. The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran reports that the Christian community faces “systematic persecution and prosecution” by the Iranian regime.¹⁶⁰ As of February 2015, “approximately 90 Christians have been in prison, detained, or awaiting trial because of their religious beliefs and activities.”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, during the 2014-2015 reporting period, “human rights groups inside Iran reported a significant increase in the number of physical assaults and beatings of Christians in prison”, particularly directed at converts and leaders of underground churches.¹⁶² Though the regime introduced a new rule in February 2015 that allows Jews not to attend classes on the Sabbath¹⁶³, the state continues to foster a climate of hatred and propagate anti-Semitic rhetoric and demonise the country’s Jewish community for “real or perceived ties to Israel”.¹⁶⁴

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

Last year, an Iranian newspaper hosted a Holocaust denial cartoon contest in direct response to the

152 Freedom of Thought Report 2014, Freedom Coalition, p. 321

153 Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs
(<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religious-freedom-in-iran>)

154 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 307, <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

155 <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/reports/1000000512-apostasy-in-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran.html#executive-summary>

156 10 March 2016 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran) <http://shaheedoniran.org/english/dr-shaheeds-work/press-releases/press-conference-statement-on-10-march-2016/>

157 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 6
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238666.pdf>

158 <https://www.bic.org/focus-areas/situation-iranian-bahais/current-situation#eusyYARAtfephY3j.99>

159 US Department of State, Iran 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom report, p. 3

160 World Watch Monitor, Iranian Christians face ‘systematic persecution and prosecution’,
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/05/2489177/>

161 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 47 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Iran%202015.pdf>

162 *ibid*

163 *ibid*

164 *ibid*

attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris.¹⁶⁵ Another such event is planned for 2016.¹⁶⁶

IRAQ

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 24

1a. Religious demographics

Accurate demographics are difficult to obtain due to internal conflict, migration flows and regional instability, but the best estimates approximate a population of 32.6 million, of which 97% are Muslim: 60-65% Shi'a and 32-37% Sunni. There are approximately 260,000 Christians, 5,000 Yazidis, 4,000 Sabeen-Mandaeen, 2,000 Baha'is and 200,000 Kakais left in the country, which together represent no more than 3% of the total population.¹⁶⁷

2a. Government restrictions

Iraq is loosely divided into areas controlled by Kurdish, Daesh and government forces respectively – the boundaries of which are indefinite and fluid. Daesh territory is now being rolled back by Kurdish offensives supported by Western airstrikes and an invigorated Iraqi army. As of November 2015, it was estimated that Daesh had lost about 25% of the territory it held in 2014.¹⁶⁸

Article 2 of the constitution establishes Islam as the official religion of the state, and Sharia as the primary source of all legislation, and that no laws shall contradict the provisions of Islam, but also that Iraq “guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandaean Sabaeans.” FoRB is also covered by other constitutional provisions including equality before the law, the freedom to practice religious rites, and manage religious affairs and institutions.¹⁶⁹ Citizens also have the freedom to choose between civil and religious courts in matters of personal status, including marriage, divorce, custody of children and inheritance. However, the Baha'i faith is not recognised and the Wahhabi branch of Sunni Islam is outlawed. Given its Ba'athist, secular legacy, Iraq does not have a strong tradition of blasphemy prosecutions. However, Article 372 of Iraq's Penal Code of 1969 does note that ‘any individual who insults the creed of a religious sect or its practices, or publicly insults a symbol or person that is an object of sanctification, worship, or reverence for a religious sect, may be punished with a term of imprisonment not exceeding three years or a fine not exceeding 300 Iraqi dinars’.¹⁷⁰ Article 26 of the recent National Identity Card Law stipulates that a non-Muslim may switch his religion, while Muslims may not. Furthermore, a minor is registered Muslim following a conversion of their parent to Islam – and will therefore not be free to convert.¹⁷¹

2b. Non-governmental hostilities

The UN has called ISIS guilty of “directly and systematically target[ing] Iraq's various diverse ethnic and religious communities, subjecting them to a range of gross human rights abuses... [with] a deliberate and systematic policy that aims to suppress, permanently cleanse or expel, or in some instances, destroy those communities within areas of its control”¹⁷². Daesh's systematic slaughter

¹⁶⁵ NBC, Iran group launches contest for cartoons that deny Holocaust

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-magazine-attack/iran-group-launches-12-000-contest-cartoons-deny-holocaust-n300626>

¹⁶⁶ Times of Israel, Israeli officials urge UN to condemn Iran Holocaust cartoon contest

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-officials-urge-un-to-condemn-iran-holocaust-cartoon-contest/>

¹⁶⁷ US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238668.pdf>

¹⁶⁸ The Daily Telegraph, ISIS may have lost a battle or two, but the war for control of Syria is not over

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12000690/Isil-may-have-lost-a-battle-or-two-but-the-war-for-control-of-Syria-is-not-over.html>

¹⁶⁹ Iraqi Nationality, Iraqi Constitution http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi_constitution.pdf

¹⁷⁰ Library of Congress, Laws criminalizing apostasy <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/index.php#iraq>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/iraq-law-id-discrimination-minorities.html>

¹⁷² Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq July-September 2014, UNAMI/OHCHR

https://web.archive.org/web/20141009043028/http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf

of religious minorities has been labelled “genocide” by the European Parliament, US House of Representatives, the International Association of Scholars on Genocide, and others.¹⁷³

Christians are forced to convert to Islam, pay the *Jizya* tax (which establishes them as second class citizens), or otherwise face execution. The 2,000-year-old Christian community in Iraq is facing extinction and estimates suggest that the Christian population in the country has fallen from 1.2 million in the 1990s to 500,000 in 2013, to 260,000 as of 2015.¹⁷⁴ HRW has published a report documenting IS treatment of Yazidis, which includes cases of forced conversion and marriage, sexual assault, slavery, torture and murder, with some victims being children. After Kurdish forces pushed IS out of Sinjar they discovered 35 mass graves.¹⁷⁵ Dissenting Sunni, Sufi and Shi’a minorities have also been attacked. During and immediately after the fall of Mosul, IS executed around 160 Shabak people, likely of Shi’a confession.¹⁷⁶ In December 2015, an IS suicide bomber detonated himself when he was intercepted by a guard as he was trying to enter a Shi’a mosque in Baghdad, killing at least six.¹⁷⁷

JORDAN

1. Religious demographics

Jordan’s population is estimated at 7.9 million, of which 97% are Sunni Muslim, 2% are Christians, and Shi’a and Sufi Muslims, Druze and Baha’is account for less than 1%. Jordan currently hosts 650,000 refugees from Syria, which amount to almost 10% of the population-these refugees are predominantly Sunni Muslim and not included in the official estimate.¹⁷⁸

2a. Government restrictions

While the Jordanian constitution recognises freedom of religion or belief and prohibits discrimination based on grounds of, inter alia, religion; Article 2 of the constitution declares Islam as the religion of the state, and that the King must be a Muslim.¹⁷⁹

The legal system is based on Sharia and all Muslim citizens are subject to the ruling of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence. Non-Muslims, who are recognised by the government, have their own parallel tribunals, as laid out in Article 108 of the constitution, but these are only available to Christians, as the only three recognised non-Muslim tribunals are Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Anglican.¹⁸⁰

While apostasy is not illegal, it has led to marriages annulled, children removed, identity cards and passports revoked, and property seized.¹⁸¹ Proselytism is illegal on grounds of “inciting sectarian strife”. Blasphemy is outlawed under Article 273 of the Penal Code.¹⁸² In March 2015, the Jordanian parliament introduced a draft bill at the Inter-Parliamentary Union calling for a global blasphemy law, including a ban on insulting religion or religious symbols. Jordan eventually withdrew the draft after

173 <http://genocidewatch.net/2015/09/22/an-appeal-to-the-united-states-congress-from-genocide-scholars/>

174 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/iraq.php>

175 <https://news.vice.com/article/new-report-finds-35-yazidi-mass-graves-in-iraq>

176 http://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/MRG_Rep_Iraq_ONLINE.pdf

177 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-attack-idUSKBN0TS1K020151209>

178 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238674.pdf>

179 Government of Jordan, Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constitution_jo.html

180 Berkeley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs Religion in the Jordanian Constitution

<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religion-in-the-jordanian-constitution>

181 World Watch Monitor, Ex-Muslim Tried for Converting to Christianity

https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2008/04-April/newsarticle_5345.html

182 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 4

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238674.pdf>

mounting protest.¹⁸³ Baha'is and Druze have been permitted to practice their faith, but continue to suffer institutionalised discrimination due to a lack of recognition.¹⁸⁴ Atheists are required by law to associate themselves with a religion for official identification. Christians in Jordan receive preferential institutional treatment; enjoying a quota of parliamentary seats and senior military ranks.¹⁸⁵

Over the reporting period, Jordan continued to struggle with the spill-over effects of the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Syria. In response King Abdullah and Queen Rania, as well as other high officials, spoke publicly about the need to combat incitement to hatred and violence based on certain interpretations of Islam and the need to foster religious tolerance¹⁸⁶. The government has begun monitoring mosques and other religious activities; in October 2014, several imams were banned for their preaching of pro-IS sermons. Moreover, returning jihadi's are facing criminal charges before the State Security Court (SSC).¹⁸⁷

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

Relations between Muslims and Christians were generally peaceful, with the notable exception of violence related to conversions.¹⁸⁸ "Honour killings" of women deemed unclean under strict religious customs by society, often by their own family, also continue. The Penal Code Articles 98 and 340, which allow for lenient sentences for perpetrators, remain in force.¹⁸⁹ At least 10 women and girls were killed by male family members in 2014.¹⁹⁰ Both King Abdullah¹⁹¹ and his wife Rania¹⁹² have repeatedly taken a stance against violent interpretations of religion over the past year.

KUWAIT

1. Religious demographics

Kuwait has a population of roughly 3.7 million, 1/3 are Kuwaiti citizens and 2/3 non-Citizens. Approximately 70% of Kuwaiti citizens are followers of Sunni Islam, including the ruling family, and the majority of the remaining 30% adhere to the Shi'a branch of Islam. Christians and Baha'is account for only a few hundred citizens.¹⁹³ Amongst the citizen population, 150,000 are believed to be Shi'a, 600,000 Hindu, and the Christian population is reaching half a million. There are also an estimated 100,000 Buddhists, and 10,000 Sikhs.¹⁹⁴

2a. Government restrictions

According to Article 35 of the Constitution, "freedom of religion is absolute", despite Article 2 stipulating Islam as the official state religion and Sharia as the main source of legislation. Seven churches are officially recognised by the state, however, religious minorities not sanctioned in the

183 National Secular Society, Jordan proposed ban on "insulting to religions" at next IPU meeting

<http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/03/jordan-proposes-ban-on-insults-to-religions-at-next-inter-parliamentary-union-meeting>

184 Freedom House, Country Profile Jordan 2015

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/jordan>

185 They can serve in the Jordanian cabinet, and the law allots nine out of 150 parliamentary seats to the Christians community, on top of which they can compete for additional 27 seats via the national candidate list. It is also a tradition of the government to reserve senior ranks in the military for Christians, although leadership positions are given to Muslims only. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238674.pdf>

186 Ibid.

187 Freedom House, Country Profile Jordan 2015

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/jordan>

188 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/jordan/>

189 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 347 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

190 HRW, World Report 2015, p. 323 https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2015_web.pdf

191 See for example: King Abdullah calls ISIS "outlaws" of Islam <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/01/world/isis-king-abdullah-jordan/>

192 See for example: People, Queen Rania blasts Islamic extremists

http://www.people.com/people/package/article/0,,20395222_20958770,00.html

193 Government of Kuwait, Nationality by Religion

<http://stat.paci.gov.kw/arabicreports/#DataTabPlace:ColumnChartEduAge>

194 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238676.pdf>

Qu'ran, such as the Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs, have no official status in the country.¹⁹⁵ The Kuwaiti government imposes quotas on the number of clergy of officially recognised religious groups, as leading positions are almost exclusively awarded to Sunnis on grounds of religious discrimination.¹⁹⁶ Blasphemy, apostasy and proselytism are forbidden. Blasphemy is a criminal offence in the country and carries a fine ranging from \$34,130 to \$682,600 equivalent, or a prison sentence of up to ten years.¹⁹⁷ In June 2015, the National Assembly passed a new cybercrime law that includes restrictions on insulting religion, religious figures and the emir.¹⁹⁸ On a more positive note, members of non-recognised communities such as the Indian Orthodox Church, Mar Thoma, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been granted the freedom to practice their faith in churches and private homes without government interference over the reporting period.¹⁹⁹

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

In June 2015, a twin suicide attack was carried out by IS on a Shi'a mosque, in which 27 people were killed and over 200 injured. The emir arrived at the location of the bombing just hours after the attack and expressed his solidarity with the community. Several Kuwaiti citizens have been found to have contributed significantly to IS in Syria.²⁰⁰

LIBYA

Failed State - for explanation and recommendations see page 19

1. Religious demographics

Libya has a population of 6.2 million, of which 97% are Sunni Muslim and the remaining 3% include Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Ahmadi Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews. Many members of the Amazigh (Berber) ethnic minority are Ibadi Muslims; nearly all other non-Sunni Muslims are foreign residents.²⁰¹

2. Restrictions relating to FoRB

The National Transitional Council's (NTC) constitutional declaration of 2011 continues to function as the interim constitution. It states that "Islam is the state religion, and Sharia is the principal source of legislation; however, non-Muslims are given the freedom to practice their religions"²⁰² and "there shall be no discrimination among Libyans on the basis of religion or sect" with regard to legal, political, and civil rights.²⁰³ There is no law that gives individuals the right to choose or change their religion or to study, discuss, or promulgate their religious beliefs. Neither is there a law prohibiting conversion from Islam to another religion or prohibiting proselytising. Nevertheless, it is prohibited by law to "instigate division" and insult Islam or the Prophet Muhammad; such charges could carry a maximum sentence of death.²⁰⁴ It is difficult to provide an authoritative assessment of the state of religious freedom in Libya, as a result of the continuing instability in the country. The state of

195 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238676.pdf>

196 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 8
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238676.pdf>

197 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238676.pdf>

198 HRW, Kuwait cybercrime law blow to free speech (Retrieved 11 January, 2016)
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/22/kuwait-cybercrime-law-blow-free-speech>

199 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 6
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238676.pdf>

200 HRW, World Report 2015, p. 340 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015>

201 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238680.pdf>

202 Constitute Project, Libyan Constitution,
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Libya_2011.pdf

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid.

'insecurity' means that no national mechanisms exist to enforce the rule of law.²⁰⁵

Coptic Christian immigrants and workers from Egypt have been the main targets of the murderous violence by Daesh—it also specifically targets their holy sites, such as shrines and cemeteries. Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, Daesh pushed further into neighbouring countries, taking advantage of Libya's state of lawlessness and thereby contributing to an increase in religious freedom violations. Christian migrants and refugees in the country "face widespread abductions, torture, theft and physical assaults by criminal gangs and human smugglers"²⁰⁶ In February, IS kidnapped and murdered 21 Coptic Christians in Sirte and showed their decapitation in a video. In April, they published another video of the killing of approximately 30 Christian men, reportedly Ethiopians. In June, MEC received reports that the graves of Christians in the Christian graveyard in front of the Souk Al Talat' island in central Tripoli were destroyed. The same month, Daesh kidnapped an additional 88 Eritrean Christians.²⁰⁷ Sufi Muslims have suffered attacks from hardline Islamists since the 2011 civil war ended. Daesh began a campaign in 2015 against Sufi shrines.²⁰⁸ The government's response to instances of violence against Coptic Christians and Sufi sites across the country have been limited to condemning acts of violence.²⁰⁹ Justice and security structures rely on a variety of extra-state groups to support local security.²¹⁰ In October 2014, the Islamic Shura Youth Council in Derna pledged allegiance to IS and announced an autonomous Islamic Emirate in eastern Libya. They established an Islamic Court, Islamic Police and "carried out public executions and floggings."²¹¹ Libyan atheists and agnostics are threatened and intimidated due to their writings on social media." The group also raises the persisting issue of honour killings: "sexual harassment is prevalent, male relatives are reported to have killed several women in honour killings."²¹²

MAURITANIA

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania has a population of 3.5million. Government restrictions are severe. The constitution restricts FoRB: Article 5 claims Islam to be the only religion of its citizens; apostasy and blasphemy are outlawed, with death-sentences applied in some cases. Officials also openly "incite hatred or violence" against religious minorities. Non-Muslims are restricted from citizenship.²¹³ Blogger Mr. Mkheitir remains on death row for "insulting Islam". Proselytism is not outlawed, but is effectively prohibited.²¹⁴ Charges of atheism are systematically used by the religious establishment, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, to silence journalists and activists. "Left-wing activists have been called upon to repent to God and integrate themselves into Muslim society, fatwas signed by a group of Mauritanian religious scholars have been issued accusing some activists of apostasy, and the Supreme Council for Fatwa and Grievances has issued a statement calling on activists on social media to 'stop offending Islam and the Prophet and spreading atheism'".²¹⁵

205 Governments of Belgium and the Netherlands: Libya: Judiciary and Security Sector

<http://www.government.nl/files/documents-and-publications/reports/2014/12/20/libya-judiciary-and-security-sector/libya-report-judiciary-and-security-sector-netherlands-19122014.pdf>.

206 APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, Amnesty report highlights vulnerability of Christians in Libya

<https://freedomdeclared.org/news/amnesty-report-underlines-the-vulnerability-of-christians-in-libya/>

207 MEC, MENA region: Persecution of Christians, 2015 Written evidence to EP Intergroup FoRB

208 The Daily Mail, ISIS continues its desecration of the Middle East: Islamic State reduces Sufi shrines in Libya to rubble in latest act of mindless destruction <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2987800/ISIS-continues-desecration-Middle-East-Islamic-State-reduces-Sufi-shrines-Libya-rubble-latest-act-mindless-destruction.html>

209 Ibid.

210 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.3

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238680.pdf>

211 HRW, World Report 2015, p. 357

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2015_web.pdf

212 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 98

213 IHEU, 2015 Freedom of Thought Report, p140

214 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238450.pdf>

215 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p.142 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

MOROCCO

Over 99% of Morocco's 33m population is Sunni Muslim, with remaining 3-8,000 Shi'a Muslims, 5,000 Christians, 3-4000 Jews and 400 Baha'is. Morocco's new 2011 constitution received 98.5% of referendum vote approval. It contains significant human rights provisions. Article 3 of the Constitution declares Islam the religion of the state, with the guarantee of freedom of belief for minority groups. Articles 7 and 41 are also problematic for FoRB. The government hosted a religious freedom event in January 2016 with Muslim leaders from over 100 countries. Political parties founded on religious motives are outlawed. A government Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MEIA) oversees and monitors the Friday prayers in mosques, as well as the Islamic religious schools in order to inhibit the proliferation of Islamic extremism. The public circulation of religious materials that are not Sunni Muslim is prohibited – Bibles are permitted in 4 languages. Criticism of Islam is illegal, as is the attempt to convert a Muslim (220 of Moroccan penal code)²¹⁶ – only Maliki Sunni Muslims are permitted to proselytise. In January 2015, a man was arrested in Fez for converting to Christianity from Islam²¹⁷. Non-Muslim meetings and individual religions are subject to monitoring.²¹⁸ Jews are offered special preferential treatment, and are highly represented. Casablanca hosts no less than 17 active synagogues, three Jewish schools, a Jewish museum (the only one in the Arab world) and a Jewish community centre.²¹⁹

SAUDI ARABIA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 27

1a. Religious demographics

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has a population of 27.3 million, approximately 85-90% of which are Sunni Muslim and the remaining 10-15% Shi'a. It is estimated that expatriate workers currently make up 30% percent of Saudi Arabia's population; who have various faiths, including Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.²²⁰

2a. Restrictions to FoRB

The very foundations of the Saudi state trace to an alliance between the House of Saud and religious leader Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab – the father of Wahhabism – in 1744, which still forms the basis of the relationship between the religious authorities and monarchy in Saudi Arabia today.²²¹ The government restrictions constitute the most severe violations of the freedom of religion or belief in the world. Article 1 of the KSA Constitution states that Islam is declared the state religion, reinforced by Article 7, which states that the "government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia derives its authority from the Book of God and the Sunna of the Prophet (PBUH), which are the ultimate sources of reference for this Law and the other laws of the State." Apostasy, blasphemy, "sorcery" and peaceful dissent are punishable by death. The legal system is based on the Hanbali school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, obtained from the Qur'an, Sunna and fatwas (religious rulings) of the ulema (the Council of Senior Religious Scholars), and the state derives its legitimacy in part from its custodianship of the two holiest places in Islam: Mecca and Medina.²²²

The government's interpretation of Islam enjoys privileged status over all others, and the public

216 http://www.constitutionnet.org/files/morocco_eng.pdf

217 <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/take-action/pray/tag-prayer-updates-post/morocco-christian-arrested/>

218 ADF International submission pt. 22–"Comments on FoRB draft" 27/05/2016

219 Ibid.

220 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238688.pdf>

221 "perceiving the potential for using Wahhabi ideology to overcome his rivals, Ibn Saud pledged to support Abd'al-Wahhab's preaching Mission. According to the agreement, Ibn Saud would adopt the title *Amir* and his family would remain temporal leaders of the Wahhabi movement, while Abd'al-Wahhab, calling himself *Imam* would be the movement's spiritual guide." (Sardar 2015: 43)

222 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.3

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238688.pdf>

practice of any religion other than Islam is illegal – even private worship is severely restricted. Citizens are required to carry identity cards, which classify them into “Muslims” and “non-Muslims” and non-citizens applying for naturalisation must convert to Islam prior to the procedure.²²³ In case of death, compensation for the plaintiff is dependent on his religious affiliation: Jews and Christians are only entitled to 50% of the compensation a Muslim male would receive and all other non-Muslims receive no more than one-sixteenth of the total sum.

Since 2014 KSA has classified blasphemy and atheism as terrorism. The regulation states that terrorism includes “calling for atheist thought in any form, or calling into question the fundamentals of the Islamic religion on which this country is based.”²²⁴, and this new law “effectively elevate[s] non-religious views to a national security threat.”²²⁵

Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, the government has continued to imprison and execute individuals for FoRB related violations. In January 2016 Saudi Arabia executed 47 prisoners in one day, including Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, whose execution was called “part of a campaign by the authorities in Saudi Arabia to crush all dissent, including those defending the rights of the Kingdom’s Shi’a Muslim community”²²⁶ “discrimination against the Shi’a minority remained entrenched and Shi’a leaders and activists were detained and, in some cases, sentenced to death in unfair trials.”²²⁷

The Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, often referred to as the “religious police” or “morality police” in international media, a semi autonomous agency, which observes social behaviour and enforces a morality codex in coordination with Saudi law enforcement based on the country’s interpretation of Sunni Islam, reports directly to the King and is not subject to judicial review.²²⁸

Since our previous report, one minor improvement has been made in the education system. We reported that Jews and Christians had been “likened to apes and swine and apostates from Islam to be killed” in schoolbooks previously – these have since been altered.²²⁹

Saudi society is conditioned through the education system to have a negative impression of Shi’a Islam, where textbooks routinely make a point of portraying Shi’a Islam as a “heretical sect”.²³⁰ The education system more specifically discriminates against Shi’a by barring them from a number of institutions for higher education.

The influence of KSA in funding violent extremism abroad, must also be taken into account. According to then US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, “Saudi Arabia remains a critical financial support base for Al-Qaeda, the Taliban... and other terrorist groups”.²³¹ It is estimated that Saudis, since the 1980s, have spent between \$87bn²³² and 100bn²³³ on propagating Wahhabism abroad; some of which has gone toward humanitarian and religious facilities, but there is extensive evidence that much has been diverted to violent terrorism. Given the extent to which the State is in control of every aspect of society, the Intergroup assigns culpability of the KSA authorities for these transfers.

223 Ibid., p.14

224 USCIRF, Annual Report, p. 60
<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Saudi%20Arabia%202015.pdf>

225 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p.17 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

226 Amnesty International, Saudi Arabia: Appalling death sentence against Shi’a cleric must be quashed
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2014/10/saudi-arabia-appalling-death-sentence-against-shi-cleric-must-be-quashed/>

227 Amnesty International, Annual Report 2015/16, p. 312 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2016/02/annual-report-201516/>

228 Ibid., p.370

229 USCIRF, Annual Report, p. 60 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Saudi%20Arabia%202015.pdf>

230 Centre for Academic Shiah Studies, Saudi Arabia: Anti-Shi’a Discrimination in Employment and the Work Place <http://www.shiaresearch.com/Doc/Anti-ShiaDiscriminationintheWorkplace-SaudiArabia.pdf>

231 Simon Ross Valentine, Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond 2015: p244, C Hurst and Co. Publishers

232 Simon Ross Valentine, Force and Fanaticism: Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and Beyond 2015: p235, C Hurst and Co. Publishers

233 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-yousaf-butt/saudi-wahhabism-islam-terrorism_b_6501916.html

1a. Religious demographics

The population of the Republic of Sudan is estimated at 35.5 million of which roughly 96% are Muslim. The majority adheres to Sunni Islam, but there is a significant Sufi population and also small communities of Shi'a, Salafists and Republican Brothers. Christians reside mainly in the north, and account for another 3%. Only 1% of the population follows indigenous religions. The US Department of State believes, but cannot confirm, that a very small Jewish community remains in the Khartoum area.²³⁴

2a. Government restrictions

While the constitution of Sudan provides for FoRB, President Omar al-Bashir has indicated his intent to make Sudan a "fully Islamic state operating under the strictest interpretation of Sharia law."²³⁵ Sharia underlies many of the existing laws including the 1991 Criminal Code, the 1991 Personal Status Law of Muslims, and the many state-level public order laws.

Sudan is one of the world's most extreme enforcers of Sharia law. Apostasy is a crime punishable by death, though this punishment has yet to be carried out. The well-known case of Meriam Ibrahim shows the extent to which the legal provisions are applied in these cases. Ms. Ibrahim was charged for apostasy because the government regarded her Muslim by virtue of the fact that her father was a Muslim – she was given three days to renounce her Christian faith but refused. She was also accused of adultery because of her marriage to a Christian man, which is not a recognised marriage in Sudan. She was forced to give birth while in chains.²³⁶ Both charges were eventually overturned by the Court of Appeal. In January 2015 a parliamentary amendment widened the scope of apostasy laws, such that fundamental discussions concerning Islam's tenets would be included. This was applied in November 2015 when 27 Muslims were arrested for apostasy on grounds that they were Quranists (denying the authority of the Hadith). Their case was dismissed in February 2016, but no change in the law has been made.²³⁷

An aggressive campaign of "Islamisation" and "Arabisation" is being enforced by President al-Bashir and the National Congress Party (NCP).²³⁸ Muslims receive preferential access to government employment and government services, as well as favoured treatment in court cases involving Muslims against non-Muslims.²³⁹ Muslims are frequently granted permits to construct and operate mosques, but permission to build churches has been impossible to obtain since the 1990s and the government has started to demolish churches.²⁴⁰ In 2014, the government stated that it would no longer permit the building of new churches²⁴¹, and for those remaining, have intervened excessively in their internal affairs²⁴². Furthermore, all schools, including private faith or belief institutions, are required to teach Islamic education and the government designates Muslim teachers. School textbooks often negatively stereotype non-Muslims.²⁴³ Blasphemy is criminalised and carries a six-month prison sentence, flogging and/or fine. Whilst proselytism is not illegal, conversion from Islam to another religion is punishable by death. Since 2011, over 170 people were arrested for attempting to convert Muslims. In June 2015, Sudanese authorities arrested Fardos Al Toum and nine other women at a church because they wore jeans and long shirts, deemed as an indecent

234 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238478.pdf>

235 ADF International: Sudan Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

236 *ibid.*

237 Bloomberg, Sudan tries 27 Muslims on apostasy charges that may bring death sentence <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-12-03/sudan-tries-27-on-apostasy-charge-that-may-bring-death-sentences>

238 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 65 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Sudan%202015.pdf>

239 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 5 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238478.pdf>

240 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 65 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Sudan%202015.pdf>

241 ADF International: Sudan Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

242 <http://www.csw.org.uk/2016/04/14/news/3062/article.htm>

243 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 108 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

dress code. Al-Toum was sentenced weeks later to 20 lashes and a fine.²⁴⁴

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

Sudanese government officials have reported growing tensions amongst Muslim sects, specifically between the Salafist groups which are prone to using hostile rhetoric. Concerningly, sectarianism amongst Christians and Muslims is growing, which largely derives from years of brutal conflict when Sudan was still a united country. During these last few years, at least 11 churches have been attacked.^{245 246}

SYRIA

Failed State - for explanation and recommendations see page 19

1. Religious demographics

The population of Syria is 74% Sunni Muslim, 13% Shi'a (including Alawites), 3% Druze, and until the civil war Christians accounted for the remaining 10% (1.9million). Though accurate statistics are difficult to attain, it is estimated that this number of Christians in Syria has fallen to between 600,000 and 900,000, from 2 million in 2011.²⁴⁷

2. Restrictions relating to FoRB

The Assad government only controls about 20% of the country's territory due to the ongoing civil war, making enforcement of even nominal safeguards difficult. Though Syria has no official state religion, Sharia law is the principle source of legislation—as reflected in Article 3 of the constitution. Article 33 outlaws religious discrimination, however by branding certain religious groups as “extremists” the state is able to create exceptions, which enables targetting. While laws against religious defamation exist, they are seldom enforced. Proselytising, while legal, is discouraged. Conversion from Islam is prohibited, in accordance with Sharia law, however the government does recognise converts to Islam.

Brutal ethnic and religious cleansing by Daesh of Christians, Yazidis and other minorities, as well as the targetted actions of the Assad government against Sunni Muslims persist as emergencies in the country. Massacres carried out by the Islamic state against religious minorities – sometimes involving entire towns – have been called “genocide” by several international bodies, including the European Parliament. One of the worst atrocities committed by Daesh in 2015 took place in Palmyra, wherein around 400 people were slaughtered, many of them women and children.²⁴⁸ It is estimated that of Raqqa's 1500 families present in 2011, only 50 now remain,²⁴⁹ and in Aleppo only 60,000 Christian individuals from 400,000.²⁵⁰ Since then, Islamic State has set about destroying the ancient UNESCO World Heritage sites within the city.

Daesh is not the only party in the conflict guilty of violent violations of FoRB. Advocacy group Genocide Watch warns that the Syrian Government is fighting an “all out war” on Sunni Muslims.²⁵¹ In October 2015, the organisation issued a Genocide Alert for Syria accusing the Assad Government of shelling Sunni cities and towns, “intentionally targetting hospitals, schools and markets” and

244 CNN, Sudanese woman sentenced to lashes, fine for wearing trousers <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/14/africa/sudan-women-indecent-dress-case/>

245 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 66 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Sudan%202015.pdf>

246 <http://www.csw.org.uk/2015/10/27/news/2844/article.htm>

247 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/syria/key-questions.php>

248 The Guardian, At least 400 killed in Palmyra, say Syrian TV reports'

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/24/killed-isis-palmyra-syria-tv-reports-tadmur-islamic-state>

249 “Living as a Christian in the Islamic State” 18 Feb. <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/02/4307204/>

250 The Open Doors 2016 Report - Freedom of Religion and the Persecution of Christians p17

251 Genocide Watch, Genocide and mass atrocities alert: Syria

http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/Syria_13_04_26_Alert_Update_Revised.pdf

depriving Sunni cities of food and medical services.²⁵² The Assad government continues to aggravate the insecurities of the minority groups for leverage while conducting its own anti-Sunni campaigns. Even Kurdish forces, which have a better history of religious neutrality and expanded their territory significantly in 2015, have been accused of selective persecution particularly against Arab communities. The fluid nature of opposition coalitions further complicate issues, as extremist, sectarian and non-sectarian forces cooperate in short “marriages of convenience” to further their own goals, blurring faction lines. Furthermore, Iran’s increasing presence in the conflict in the form of Shi’a militias will only serve to worsen the sectarian nature of the conflict, and increase violence.

TUNISIA

1. Religious Demographics

99% of Tunisia’s 11 million population follow Sunni Islam. It has been lauded a success story of the Arab Spring, following the ousting of Ben Ali in 2011, but has been troubled by Islamist terrorism.

2a. Government Restrictions

Article 1 of the new constitution (01/2014) declares Islam the official religion of the state. Article 6 calls the government protector of all religious affairs but also criminalises any criticism of Islam.²⁵³ The constitution does however, commit to “the prohibition of, and the fight against, appeals to Takfir [charges of apostasy] and incitement to violence and hatred”.²⁵⁴ A blasphemy bill proposed by the conservative Ennahda party failed to acquire support in 2012. The government recognises the Christian and Jewish religious groups founded before independence in 1956, which may operate freely – but new registrations are “impossible”.²⁵⁵ Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools but secondary school programs also include the study of Christianity and Judaism. The Tunisian government pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi, and condemned an anti-Jewish demonstration that took place in January 2012.²⁵⁶

2b. Non-Governmental Restrictions

Over the reporting period, numerous incidents of terrorism have also taken place, some of which Daesh have claimed responsibility for.^{257, 258} As of March 2015, 3,000 Tunisians have left for Syria and Iraq to join Daesh – making it the largest origin country of foreign fighters²⁵⁹. Following these incidents, wearers of the Niqab have claimed routine discrimination from security and police forces.²⁶⁰ Petitions for and against the ban of the full-face Niqab have both gained lots of support – indicative of the struggle between secular and religious political forces. Recently, the Muslim conservative party in coalition government, Ennahda, hosted a party conference where it declared its intent to further separate religion and politics – a move praised by the international community as a step toward religious tolerance and democratic consensus.²⁶¹

252 Genocide Watch, Genocide Alert: The Syrian Arab Republic

<http://genocidewatch.net/2015/10/15/genocide-alert-the-syrian-arab-republic/>

253 <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2014/02/03/problem-tunisia-s-new-constitution>

254 Freedom of Thought Report 2014, Freedom Coalition, p. 110 file:///C:/Users/jl788_000/Downloads/FOT2014%20Full%2020141210.pdf

255 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/tunisia.php>

256 <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religious-freedom-in-tunisia>

257 AP, Islamic State claims responsibility for Tunisia Attack, MSN, 19 March 2015

<http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/tunisia-death-toll-in-museum-attack-rises-to-23/ar-BBiqmqN>

258 Laura Smith-Spark, Nick Paton Walsh, Phil Black, Tourists flee Tunisia after Resort Attack, CNN, 28 June 2015 <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/27/africa/tunisia-terror-attack/>

259 <http://news.sky.com/video/1439662/tunisias-deadly-exports>

260 Conor Shiels, Lifting the Veil on Religious Freedom in Tunisia, al-Araby, 30 April 2015 <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/politics/2015/4/30/lifting-the-veil-on-religious-freedom-in-tunisia-1>

261 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/25/how-big-were-the-changes-made-at-tunisias-ennahda-just-made-at-its-national-congress/>

1. Religious demographics

Qatar has a population of just over two million with only 10.5% of the population being Qatari citizens. Qatar is a Sunni-dominated country, with estimates varying from only 5-15% of the citizen population referring to themselves as Shi'a. However, one of the most distinguishable aspects of Qatar is that both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are able to practice their religion freely, regardless of the demographic weighting. Of the non-citizens, 35% of the demographic trace their lineage to a Hindu background, Roman Catholics are unofficially estimated at 20%, while Buddhists are estimated at approximately 7% of non-citizens. Anglicans, Egyptian Copts, Greek and other Eastern Orthodox and Baha'is of Iranian origin constitute less than 5%

2a. Government restrictions

Article 1 of the Constitution declares Islam the religion of state; and Sharia as the main source of legislation. However, Article 35 states that "all persons are equal before the law and there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex, race, language, or religion"; and the "freedom to practice religious rites" is enshrined in Article 50 of the Constitution.²⁶² Yet, the state only recognises the three Abrahamic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Unrecognised religions include Hinduism, Buddhism and the Baha'i Faith.²⁶³ It is prohibited in Qatar to register humanist, atheist or secularist organisations deemed illegal under the law and persecuted by the government²⁶⁴. Blasphemy, apostasy and proselytism are prohibited in Qatar. Article 256 of the Penal Code imposes a prison sentence of seven years for "abusing, distorting, or desecrating the Holy Qur'an" and "insulting any of the divine religions protected by Islamic law". A one year prison sentence or a fine of QR 1,000 (\$275) can be imposed on anyone who produces or circulates content that is insulting to religion.²⁶⁵ The government generally respects the right of non-Muslim citizens and foreign residents to practice their religion and "has created a permanent intergovernmental committee whose purpose is to address concerns of non-Muslim religious groups in Qatar, focusing on barriers to registration and legal incorporation".²⁶⁶ However, religious minorities not recognised by the state, such as Hindus, Buddhists and Baha'is, still have no access to authorised facilities to practice their faith and are reduced to worship in private homes of members of their respective communities. Furthermore, the government prohibits Christian communities from publicly displaying Christian symbols, like crosses, and advertising religious services outside their own communities.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

1. Religious demographics

The UAE has a population of 9.1 million of which an estimated 89% are non-citizens. Of the citizens, more than 85% are Sunni Muslims and 15% are Shi'a Muslims.²⁶⁷ 76% of non-citizens are Muslim, 9% Christian and 5% Hindu and Buddhist. Parsis, Baha'is, Druze, Sikhs, Ahmadis, Ismailis, Dawoodi Bohra Muslims and Jews account for less than 5% of the population.²⁶⁸

2a. Government restrictions

262 USCIRF, Comparative Study of Constitutions of OIC Countries

<http://www.uscifr.gov/reports-briefs/special-reports/comparative-study-constitutions-oic-countries-2012-update>

263 Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238686.pdf>

264 IHEU, The Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 364 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

265 End Blasphemy Laws, Qatar <http://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/qatar/>

266 Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Religious Freedom in Qatar

(<http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/religious-freedom-in-qatar>)

267 World Bank, United Arab Emirates <http://data.worldbank.org/country/united-arab-emirates>

268 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238694.pdf>

The UAE is regarded as one of the most liberal countries in the Gulf region, although the degree of freedom varies between the more international larger emirates and the more conservative smaller emirates.²⁶⁹

The UAE Constitution generally provides for FoRB, but not the right to hold non-religious views and on the condition that religious minority practices do not violate traditional Islamic customs. Article 25 enshrines equality before the law without distinction “in regard to race, nationality, religious belief or social status”; however, Article 7 stipulates Islam as the official religion of the state and Sharia as the main source of legislation. Consequently, all citizens are automatically defined as Muslims without the freedom to change their religion.²⁷⁰

In July 2015, the UAE passed a new anti-hate law that encourages an “environment of tolerance” and “broad-mindedness” in the fight against religious extremism.²⁷¹ Religiously loaded-terms such as “kafir” (unbeliever) or “infidel” will be outlawed under the new law, and offenders are facing fines of \$500,000 and/or more than 10 years in jail. However, blasphemy laws continue, which “prohibit any act that would be considered as insulting God, his prophets or apostles or holy books or houses of worship or graveyards”²⁷². Religious teaching of non-Muslim denominations is not permitted in public schools, and Islamic studies are mandatory for Muslim children in both public and private schools. However, if they are found to be teaching subjects offensive to Islam, they face fines and closure.²⁷³ Non-Muslim holidays are openly acknowledged. The country’s major internet providers, Etisalat and Du, frequently blocked access to websites with religious content critical of Islam, like testimonies of ex-Muslim converts or atheists. Such websites are banned by the country’s Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) for containing “material which expresses hate to religions”.²⁷⁴

YEMEN

Failed State - for explanation and recommendations see page 19

1. Religious demographics

Yemen has a population of 26.7million, of which 99.9% are Muslim²⁷⁵; approximately 65% are believed to be Sunni Muslims (mainly Shafi’i), and approximately 35% Shi’a Muslims (mainly Zaydi).²⁷⁶ The number of Jewish and Christians inhabitants has fallen to “a few hundred” respectively,^{277,278} a few thousand Ismaili Muslims, unknown numbers of Shi’a Twelvers and Sufi Muslims, as well as Baha’is and Hindus almost remain.²⁷⁹

2a. Government restrictions

There has been political turmoil and violence in Yemen since the former President Saleh was ousted in 2012. President Hadi took over, but fled in 2015, when Shiite Houthi rebels took the capital Sanaa. The UN, US and others continue to refuse to recognise Mr. al-Houthi’s rule. In the resulting power vacuum, many groups are fighting to gain control, including militant Islamist groups such as

269 Open Doors, Country Profiles 2015, United Arab Emirates http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/united_arab_emirates.php

270 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238694.pdf>

271 The New Arab, The New Arab, Tolerant or repressive? UAE passes tough anti-discrimination law (Retrieved 2 January, 2016)

<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/politics/2015/7/22/tolerant-or-repressive-uae-passes-tough-anti-discrimination-law>

272 Gulf News, New UAE anti-hate law in detail, (Retrieved 2 January, 2016) <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/new-uae-anti-hate-law-in-detail-1.1553188>

273 IHEU, Freedom Of Thought Report 2015, p. 383 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

274 UAE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, Open Data

<https://www.tra.gov.ae/en/open-data.aspx>

275 APPG Yemen, Conflict in Yemen: The Forgotten Crisis, A Report by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Yemen, 22 October 2015, p. 3

276 US Department of State, Yemen 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom, p. 2

277 Yemen coup could spell trouble for local Jewish community, JPost, 21 January 2015

<http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Yemen-coup-could-spell-trouble-for-local-Jews-388495>

278 Yemen World Watch List, Open Doors <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/yemen.php>

279 US Department of State, Yemen 2013 Report on International Religious Freedom, p. 2

al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The violence is estimated to have claimed 1,527 lives between March and June 2015.²⁸⁰ Yemen's democratic process is continuously threatened by violent interpretations of Islam and tribal antagonism, which, at times, leaves power in the hands of individual tribe leaders as opposed to a recognised state entity.

Articles 2 and 3 of Yemen's constitution declare that Islam is the state religion and Sharia the source of all legislation.²⁸¹ The constitution does not protect freedom of religion or belief per se, however it is stated in Article 27 that no citizen shall be discriminated against "based on sex, color, ethnic origin, language, occupation, social status, or religion".²⁸² Non-religious beliefs are not recognised and anyone professing them may not hold public office.²⁸³ No official records are kept of individual's religious identity, and religious groups are not required to register. Blasphemy, apostasy and proselytism are prohibited and content that could be deemed offensive to any religious group is prohibited. The government does not tend to enforce capital punishments for these, but tribal leaders have done.

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

Inter-communal violence between the Shi'a Houthi rebels and Sunni tribes continued over the reporting period. In September 2014, Houthi rebels stormed the house of a powerful army general and Sunni tribal leader in the context of clashes between the Shi'a rebels and the government, which killed at least 340 people.²⁸⁴ There is now clear evidence that Daesh has also expanded into the country.²⁸⁵ In March 2015, extremists affiliated to IS carried out suicide bombings on two Shi'a mosques in the capital of Sana'a, killing at least 137 people.

Christians and Jews have been permitted to worship without interference from the government, but do suffer harassment from Islamic tribal leaders. Numerous fatal attacks were reported in 2015, "As the violence has escalated, Christians have been increasingly targeted by militants for diverting from the social norm of adhering to Islam."²⁸⁶ Reportedly, "Islam is part of the identity of Yemeni tribes, and tribal leaders are likely to enforce punishments for those who wish to leave Islam: this could mean honour killings, house arrest or, for women, forced marriage."²⁸⁷ The Jewish minority have inhabited a government-guarded district of Sana'a, however since control of the city has been lost, they have been subject to intimidation, and in February 2015 Reuters reported that nearly half have chosen to depart.²⁸⁸ In addition, Yemen is a well-known hotbed of terrorist activity networks.

280 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: Situation of Human Rights in Yemen, 7 September 2015 (A/HRC/30/31).

281 Yemen Constitution, 16 May 1991 http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ym00000_.html

282 *Ibid.*

283 IHEU, 2015 Freedom of Thought Report, p386

284 At least 340 killed in Yemen's week-long fighting, Daily Star Lebanon, 22 September 2014

<http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2014/Sep-22/271549-at-least-200-killed-in-recent-yemen-fighting-ministry.ashx#axzz3E3iuXhsm>

285 APPG Yemen, Conflict in Yemen: The Forgotten Crisis, A Report by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Yemen, 22 October 2015, p. 19

286 The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, Yemen: Christian Converts Martyred for their Faith, 3 December 2015 <https://www.vomcanada.com/print-archives/pnp-15-12-03.pdf>

287 Open Doors, Country Profile: Yemen <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/yemen.php>

288 Mohammed Ghobari, Yemen's last Jews eye exodus after Islamist takeover, Reuters, 15 February 2015 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-jews-idUSKBN0LJ0QB20150215>

The Americas

CUBA

1. Religious Demographics

Cuba has a population of 11.2 million, of which approximately 60-70% are Roman Catholic and 5% Protestant. The remainder includes various religious communities, with the following approximate memberships: Assemblies of God, 110,000; the four Baptist conventions, 100,000; Jehovah's Witnesses, 96,000; Methodists, 36,000; Seventh-day Adventists, 35,000; Anglicans, 22,500; Presbyterians, 15,500; Muslims, 2,000-3,000; Jewish community, 1,500.²⁸⁹

2a. Government Restrictions

The 1992 constitution abolished atheism as the state creed, and declares Cuba to be a secular state, providing for the separation of church and state. However, constitutional guarantees are "limited by the condition that the maintenance of socialism and communism takes precedence over all other rights."⁴ The Cuban Communist Party interferes in internal affairs of religious communities through ORA and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Only after receiving MOJ recognition are organisations permitted to request the ORA's permission to conduct their varied activities.⁵ In line with Cuba's continued repression of freedom of expression, the state owns and controls all media outlets, except for some ORA-approved Catholic Church periodicals and websites, and also small Christmas and Easter broadcasts on the state-run radio stations.

Over the reporting period, restrictions to religious freedom in the country have increased severely. Religious leaders have continued to face harassment and detention, and the government has frequently interfered in religious groups' internal affairs.²⁹⁰ Legal Decree 322 gives exhaustive powers to the authorities to appropriate property at their discretion. This law has been used to seize a great many churches, including historic properties, across the island.²⁹¹ Local Communist Party officials rarely authorise the construction of new places of worship. However the Catholic Church has enjoyed wider freedoms, in terms of freedoms to meet, share information, organise funding, and for the first time since 1959, two new Catholic churches are currently being built.²⁹²

On the other hand, some other denominations have seen their freedoms curtailed. The Assemblies of God have suffered an extensive crackdown including 100 church closures or destructions, and all others (around 2,000 churches) have been declared illegal. This accounts for some of the spike in violations over the reporting period. 2,300 separate violation incidents have been recorded in 2015, in comparison to only 220 in 2014, 180 in 2013, 40 in 2011.²⁹³ Furthermore, the strict censorship has directly led to the persecution of religious leaders and followers of the "Apostolic Reformation" too.²⁹⁴ This harassment included actions such as: "short-term arrests of leaders; government-organised mob attacks; confiscations, destruction of or threats to destroy church property; harassment and surveillance of church members and their relatives; fines on churches; and threats

289 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238748.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238748.pdf>

290 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 145
<http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Cuba%202015.pdf>

291 Reuters, Cuba's atheist Castro brothers open doors to church and popes
<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-cuba-castros-idUSKCN0R71LU20150907><http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pope-cuba-castros-idUSKCN0R71LU20150907>

292 ibid

293 CSW FoRB in Cuba Brief, January 2016

294 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238748.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238748.pdf>

to leaders and members of loss of employment, housing, or educational opportunities".²⁹⁵ Further, for the first time in in four years a church leader was sentenced for holding unauthorised religious services.²⁹⁶

MEXICO

1. Religious demographics

Mexico has a population of approximately 120 million, of which 83% identify as Roman Catholics, 5% as Evangelical Protestants, and other Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews and Muslims constitute less than 5% of the population.²⁹⁷

2a. Government restrictions

Religious freedom in Mexico is provided for by the constitution. Article 24 grants all individuals the right to practice the religious belief of their choice and to participate in ceremonies and acts of worship in both the public and private sphere.²⁹⁸ A constitutional amendment that took effect in 2013 outlaws the use of acts of worship for political purposes.²⁹⁹ Moreover, the constitution prohibits members of the clergy "from holding public office; advocating partisan political views; supporting political candidates; or publicly opposing the laws or institutions of the state".³⁰⁰ Religious groups are also banned from administering radio and television stations. Education in public schools is required to be secular; however, private institutions have the right to teach religious instructions.³⁰¹ Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, Mexico remains the most dangerous country for Catholic priests in Latin America.³⁰² Powerful criminal groups see the church as a target for extortion and money laundering, and regard some priests as preventing them from imposing their influence.³⁰³ As a result, attacks on priests in Mexico increased by 80 percent between 2012 and 2014.³⁰⁴ "Priests who have been killed have been killed in very cruel, violent ways".³⁰⁵ Often, the clergy is under attack for condemning the violence of drug cartels and their extortion practices, prompting the Catholic Church to call on the Mexican government to ensure the safety of their clergy.³⁰⁶

Local community leaders frequently try to enforce uniformity in terms of religious practice and belief. By using "The Law of Uses and Customs", they are compelling indigenous members of non-conformist communities to participate in the religious activities of the majority or face punishment, including removal from their homes³⁰⁷. Mexican authorities are reluctant to get involved and uphold constitutional religious freedom guarantees, effectively allowing a culture of impunity to foster.

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

295 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 146

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Cuba%202015.pdf>[http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Cuba 2015.pdf](http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Cuba%202015.pdf)

296 CSW FoRB in Cuba Brief, January 2016, p2

297 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238770.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238770.pdf>

298 OAS, Art. 24 of the Mexican Constitution

http://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdfhttp://www.oas.org/juridico/mla/en/mex/en_mex-int-text-const.pdf

299 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 184

<http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/><http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

300 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 4

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238770.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238770.pdf>

301 ibid

302 Christianity Today, Mexican priests are most persecuted in the world <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/mexican.priests.are.most.persecuted.in.the.world/41789.htm><http://www.christiantoday.com/article/mexican.priests.are.most.persecuted.in.the.world/41789.htm>

303 The Guardian, Dying for Christianity: millions at risk amid rise in persecution across the globe <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/27/dying-for-christianity-millions-at-risk-amid-rise-in-persecution-across-the-globe><http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/27/dying-for-christianity-millions-at-risk-amid-rise-in-persecution-across-the-globe>

304 ibid

305 LA Times, In Mexico's Guerrero state, priests are a prime target for drug gangs

<http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-priests-20151129-story.html><http://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-priests-20151129-story.html>

306 ibid

307 <http://morningstarnews.org/2015/02/christians-in-mexico-deprived-of-homes-for-declining-to-renounce-their-faith/>

For example, in January 2015, around 25 armed, hooded individuals believed to be *caciques* (leaders of indigenous groups) reportedly attacked Evangelicals in the Las Ollas community part of the San Juan Chamula municipality (Chiapas state) for having refused to take part in the Virgin of Guadalupe festival earlier in December.³⁰⁸

308 Morning Star News, Christians in Mexico deprived of homes for refusing to renounce their faith <http://morningstarnews.org/2015/02/christians-in-mexico-deprived-of-homes-for-declining-to-renounce-their-faith/>



West and Central Asia, and non-EU Europe

AZERBAIJAN

1. Religious demographics

The population of the Republic of Azerbaijan is estimated at 9.7 million, of whom 96% are Muslim (65% Shi'a, 35% Sunni). Other groups constitute less than 4%, including the Russian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic Churches, Seventh-day Adventist, Jews, Molokans, Baha'is, other Christian denominations and non-believers.³⁰⁹

2a. Government Restrictions

Although the country has a secular constitution and discrimination on religious grounds is theoretically outlawed by Articles 25 and 47,³¹⁰ nonetheless, religious freedom has been under intense political, legal and administrative pressure. Among laws violating FoRB are the Religion Law in 2009³¹¹ which includes: "almost all Protestant denominations denied legal status; members of unregistered religious groups raided; state permission required to produce, import, export, or distribute religious material; and state-approved religious education required to preach, teach religion, or lead ceremonies."³¹² In February 2015, two Jehovah's Witnesses were detained for distributing religious texts not approved by the state and remain in Baku jail.³¹³ The same month, an Imam of the Sunni Lezgin Mosque in Baku's Old City and four others were arrested on the same charges³¹⁴. Altogether, there are about 75 known prisoners of conscience³¹⁵, including those jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief³¹⁶. Muslim groups are monitored, and leadership appointments are overseen by authorities.

Among serious FoRB violations over the reporting period are: the killing of 7 people during a police raid on Muslims praying – even though the Presidential Administration admitted that the Muslims had not used or called for violence³¹⁷; the torture of a prisoner of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion and belief³¹⁸; Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses meeting in private homes for prayer and study being raided, fined, put on criminal trial and deported³¹⁹; two female Jehovah's Witnesses, imprisoned for 50 weeks, not having their criminal convictions for sharing their beliefs overturned, despite the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention finding they were being punished for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief³²⁰; and visa denial to Georgian Orthodox priests, denying that community the possibility of worshipping in its own way³²¹.

309 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238568.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238568.pdf>

310 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 139 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf><http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

311 http://www.legislationline.org/download/action/download/id/5719/file/VC_ODIHR_Guidelines_Legal_personality_religious_communities_2014_en.pdf

312 The Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic, President of Azerbaijan, 27 November 1995 <http://en.president.az/azerbaijan/constitution><http://en.president.az/azerbaijan/constitution>

⁴ USCIRF Annual Report 2014, p. 113

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202014%20Annual%20Report%20PDF.pdf><http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%202014%20Annual%20Report%20PDF.pdf>

313 USCIRF, Azerbaijan: Government must free prisoners of conscience <http://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases/azerbaijan-government-must-free-prisoners-conscience><http://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases/azerbaijan-government-must-free-prisoners-conscience>

314 6 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 328 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report><http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report>

315 <http://www.nhc.no/en/countries/europe/azerbaijan/>

316 See eg. Forum 18, Prisoner of conscience tortured – with impunity? http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2143

317 Forum 18, Police killings, shooting and mass arrests as Muslims pray http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2127

318 Forum 18, Prisoner of conscience tortured – with impunity? http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2143

319 Forum 18, Fines, deportations, criminal trials to punish meetings for worship and study http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2106

320 Forum 18, Convicted and freed, but no compensation for 50 week imprisonment http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2144

321 Forum 18, Prisoner of conscience tortured – with impunity? http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2143

The Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic is the westernmost region of Azerbaijan and is a territorial exclave from the rest of the country. Nakhichevan borders Armenia, Turkey and Iran. The region enjoys a high degree of autonomy and, since 2009, has had a high degree of religious autonomy as well. However, reports reveal that “residents of the Nakhichevan exclave face more severe religious freedom restrictions than elsewhere in Azerbaijan.”³²² Between November and December 2014, up to 200 Shi’a Muslims were arrested and temporarily held by authorities on charges of fostering sympathies with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Reports confirm that “up to 50 mosques—especially those Nakhichevan’s authorities think are oriented towards Iran – appear to have been forcibly closed after the mid-November arrests.”³²³

BELARUS

1. Religious demographics

The Republic of Belarus has a population of 9.6 million of which 68% belong to the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), 14% to the Roman Catholic Church and 3% to other religious groups. Small religious communities include: Protestants, Muslims, Greek Catholics (“Uniates”) and Orthodox groups other than the BOC, Old Believers, Lutherans, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Apostolic Christians, Hare Krishnas, Baha’is and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Approximately 30,000 – 40,000 follow Judaism.³²⁴ The country has a relatively high level of religious affiliation compared to countries with a similar Communist legacy.

2. Government Restrictions

While Belarus’ Constitution provides legal guarantees for FoRB – for example, everyone has the right to choose and change their religious beliefs, as established in Article 33 – in practice these freedoms are systematically restricted and undermined, with political elites and officials still viewing many religious groups with suspicion³²⁵. The combination of restrictive registration laws, suspicious view of foreigners and a strong post-Soviet state-atheist legacy all make it difficult for many religious groups to operate freely. Under the 2002 Religion Law, all religious communities in Belarus are required to register with the state, and preferential treatment is given to the “traditional” religions (Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and evangelical Lutheranism), while others are often denied registration, and are prohibited from practising their faith.³ The government ignored several anti-Semitic attacks, cracked down on political opponents, such as Protestants, and strictly controlled religious activities of foreign citizens, especially of Catholic priests.³²⁶ Prisoners of conscience whose motivation for political opposition is their Christian faith have been denied pastoral visits, communal worship and religious literature while in detention. Religious affairs officials, police and the secret service monitor religious activity in all regions, since religion is viewed with political suspicion as a security threat. Soviet era anti-religious crimes have been negated.⁵

However, some improvements can be reported. “Large events manifesting freedom of religion or belief outside state registered places of worship may have become easier to organise. Over the reporting period Protestant churches have been permitted to conduct outdoor baptisms in lakes, and the Catholic and Orthodox Church have held large visible public processions.”³²⁷ However, a raid on a Baptist meeting in December 2015 preceded the prosecutions of two pastors “not

322 Forum 18, Five latest freedom of religion or belief prisoners of conscience http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2109http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2109

323 Forum 18, Azerbaijan: 200 Nakhichevan Muslims arrested, 50 still detained, 50 mosques closed http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2021

324 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238570.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238570.pdf>

325 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 389 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

326 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 195

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf><http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF Annual Report 2015 %282%29.pdf>

327 Forum 18, From raid to ban in 12 days http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2073http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2073

using living premises for their designated purpose"³²⁸; and smaller and non traditional religious communities like Jehova's Witnesses and Hare Krishnsas continue to experience discriminatory treatment and are prone to detention when offering religious literature on the street.

KAZAKHSTAN

1. Religious demographics

Kazakhstan has a population of approximately 17.9 million, of which 70% are Muslim, predominantly of the Sunni Hanafi school. Other Muslim groups that accounting for less than 1% include Shafi'i Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, and Ahmadis. Russian Orthodox Christians constitute approximately 26% of the population. Other groups accounting for less than 5% include Jews, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Lutherans, and other Christian denominations.

2. Government Restrictions

The Constitution defines Kazakhstan as a secular state and theoretically provides for freedom of religion and belief, as well as for the freedom to decline religious affiliation. Other laws (particularly the 2011 Religion Law), however, place these freedoms as conditional upon explicit state permission.^{329, 330} This is seen in, among other things: making the exercise of human rights conditional upon state permission; systematically increasing the range of possible "offences" people can be punished for if they exercise freedom of religion or belief and related human rights; officials routinely violating the rule of law with impunity; closing down independent mosques, and continuing to seek to close other smaller religious communities; censorship of religious literature and objects, including severe limitations on the numbers of premises where such literature and objects can be distributed; the misuse of psychiatry against people the authorities dislike; and exit bans and jailings imposed on those refusing to pay fines for exercising freedom of religion or belief without state permission.³³¹

The issue of mandatory registration of religious groups, required under the 2011 Religion Law, has become particularly problematic as a major impediment to religious freedom. Without official recognition, religious groups and their activities are branded illegal and the legislation even requires formerly recognised groups to re-register. Of 48 "non-traditional" religious organisations, only 16 were able to re-register.³³² The government obliges Muslim communities to become affiliates of the SAMK, a government-controlled Sunni Hanafi organisation – by which they relinquish their rights to appoint their own imam, forfeit their property, and must pay 30% of their mosque's income to the SAMK.³³³ All other Muslim groups are banned including Shafi'i Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi and Ahmadis.³³⁴ The Committee for National Security (KNB) – the secret police – continue to characterise the fight against religious extremism as a top priority of the internal intelligence service and continue to monitor civil society and religious groups.³³⁵ The Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat is an example of one which has been subject to this–Even the KNB secret police have admitted that Tabligh Jamaat literature does not have "extremist, terrorist, or any other calls against Kazakhstan's laws". However, the KNB claimed "all their activity could be characterised as subversive in the ideological sphere, forming in the population anti-social or anti-civil positions."³³⁶ A court banned the movement in 2013, even though an earlier KNB-initiated study found that there was no reason to ban the

328 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2146

329 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238708.pdf>

330 Constitution Project, Kazakhstan's Constitution of 1995 with Amendments through 2011, p. 4
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kazakhstan_2011.pdf?lang=en

331 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1939

332 Ibid.

333 Ibid.

334 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1939

335 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 7
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238708.pdf>

336 Forum 18, One three-year jail term, 5 or 25 more to follow? http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2023

movement.³³⁷ Protestant churches were subject to a series of raids during the 2016 Easter period, following official allegations of fraud – which Church members have strongly denied, claiming that the Church has long been targetted by the state.³³⁸

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC (KYRGYZSTAN)

1. Religious demographics

Kyrgyzstan has a population of approximately 5.6 million people, of which 75% is Muslim adhering primarily to Sunni Islam and around 20% belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church. Other minority religions represent the remaining 5% which comprises small communities including Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Charismatics, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, and Baha'is.

2a. Government restrictions

By its constitution Kyrgyzstan is a secular state with guaranteed religious freedoms for all its citizens, including "atheistic activities" (Article 16).³³⁹ The constitution guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, the right to practice or not practice a religion, and the right to refuse to express one's religious and other views.³⁴⁰ Article 4 bans the creation of political parties intended to undermine national security by inciting social, racial, inter-national, inter-ethnic and religious hatred.

The government established the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) which has had a restrictive influence particularly against the smaller minority communities through a 2008 religion law. The relationship between the SCRA and Presidential Administration can be tense – with the latter more in favour of implementing human rights obligations. The Religion Law is currently being revised with very concerning amendments proposed – which are expected to "sharply increase SCRA authority; privilege Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church, and define other religious groups as "non-traditional;" require 500 founders for all religious groups to re-register; require an annual SCRA license for any official or worker in a religious group or religious educational institution; and further limit sites where religious texts can be distributed."³⁴¹ Currently, registration is difficult to achieve, and the lack of it deprives them of both legal and societal recognition.³⁴²

The government has extended its control over the majority religious groups of Russian Orthodoxy and Islam, particularly in the name of combating the threat of rising extremism in the case of the latter. Smaller groups, such as Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna devotees and Catholics claim that their members are afraid to openly acknowledge to the authorities their memberships of the above mentioned groups.³⁴³ Kyrgyzstan has refused despite medical evidence to investigate named police who tortured seven Jehovah's Witnesses during a 9 August 2015 raid on an Osh meeting for worship.³⁴⁴

The state has repeatedly failed to stop state officials and imams of the state-backed Muslim Board encouraging or condoning violence and other coercion against people peacefully exercising their human rights. Local people and Muslim leaders, with the connivance of local authorities, have long used mob violence to obstruct or deny burials according to their own rites to deceased Protestants, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishna devotees – especially those of ethnic Kyrgyz or ethnic Uzbek background – in village graveyards they insist are only for Muslims. For example, in early

337 Forum 18, Now 30 Sunni Muslims convicted since December 2014, KNB secret police spy http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2170

338 Forum 18, Good Friday in Almaty http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2163

339 Refworld, Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3ae6b5ae0.pdf>

340 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238710.pdf>

341 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 199 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Kyrgyzstan%202015.pdf>

342 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013

343 Forum 18, Kyrgyzstan: Religious Freedom Survey 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013

344 Forum 18, Freedom of religion or belief without state permission = murder? http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2150

August 2015 Osh City authorities and a local Imam did not allow a Protestant to bury her deceased 25-year-old son in the cemetery in the District where they live. She could only bury him in a distant cemetery when, under pressure from an Imam, she renounced her faith.³⁴⁵

RUSSIA

1a. Religious Demographics

The population of the Russian Federation is 142.4 million³⁴⁶, between 42.5-68% of whom consider themselves to be Orthodox Christian; 7% Muslims³⁴⁷; and less than 5% of the population include Buddhists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, Pagans, Tengrists, Scientologists and Falun Gong adherents.³⁴⁸

2a. Government Restrictions

Although Russia's 1993 constitution provides for FoRB, in practice it is often disregarded. Article 28 affirms "the right to freedom of conscience, to freedom of religious worship, including the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion, or to profess no religion, to freely choose, possess and disseminate religious or other beliefs, and to act in conformity with them."³⁴⁹ This provision, however, is qualified by a number of pieces of legislation. The 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations marked a significant step backwards for religious freedom and belief, allowing officials to block the registration and actions such as property rental on ill-defined grounds.³⁵⁰ Use of the Extremism Law (whose language is broad and unclear) against those with views the authorities dislike, especially Muslims who study the works of Said Nursi and Jehovah's Witnesses, poses a major threat to FoRB³⁵¹. Since spring 2015 at least seven Jehovah's Witness communities have received written "extremism" warnings from prosecutors (a frequent prelude to liquidation suits).³⁵² "Extremist" material can be banned throughout Russia by being placed on the Federal List of Extremist Materials via a ruling by any lower court. Possession of such texts renders the possessor – including communities – liable to criminal prosecution. In 2015 there were 89 known prosecutions for possessing "extremist" literature – a rise from 65 prosecutions in 2014.³⁵³ It is very difficult to remove texts from the List, and it is practically impossible to check what is on the List³⁵⁴. There are frequent failures of due process in "extremism" trials of Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses, which have included prosecution allegations of activities which are lawful³⁵⁵.

Other restrictions include changes to the Religion Law, which came into force in July 2015, which require all religious communities that do not have legal status to notify the authorities of their existence, activity and members' names and addresses, and appears to be designed to make state control easier. Previously, an unregistered community was legally able to operate as a religious group, without informing the state or registration, and to meet privately for worship and study³⁵⁶. The strict 2012 laws against un-authorised public meetings were mainly aimed at political rallies, but had a markedly negative impact on freedom of worship. 2013 saw the coming into force of a blasphemy law, with "public actions, clearly defying the society and committed with the express purpose of insulting religious beliefs" made punishable by up to three years in jail.³⁵⁷ In 2015, 119

345 Forum 18, "His screams of terror and pain could be heard throughout the building" http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2091

346 CIA World Factbook: Russia <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>

347 US Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238638.pdf>

348 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 177 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Russia%202015.pdf>

349 Constitution RU, The Constitution of the Russian Federation <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

350 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 177 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Russia%202015.pdf>

351 Forum 18, "Extremism" religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1724

352 Forum 18, Enforced liquidation of communities accelerates http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2161

353 Forum 18, In 2015, 89 known individuals and communities prosecuted for religious literature http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2171

354 Forum 18, Banning religious texts easy, unbanning them difficult http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2084

355 Forum 18, Contradictions in "extremism" case against imams http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1808

356 Forum 18, Have Religion Law amendments rendered unregistered religious activity illegal? http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2101

357 Index on Censorship: Russia – Blasphemy law has aided the growth of religious censorship <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2015/11/blasphemy-law-has-resulted-in-growth-of-religious-censorship-in-russia>

individuals and 3 religious organisations were prosecuted for publicly exercising freedom of religion or belief of which 83 were convicted—a sharp rise from 23 known prosecutions in 2014.³⁵⁸ The Russian government continues to show preferential treatment towards the Russian Orthodox Church.

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

The overall negative and worsening situation in Russia with respect to religious freedom has aided the rise of xenophobic attacks against religious minorities and the growth of anti-Semitism.³⁵⁹ These violations are particularly severe in the North Caucasus region, and the Crimean peninsula. Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses are the most regularly persecuted groups.

TAJIKISTAN

1. Religious demographics

Tajikistan has a population of 8.1 million people, of which 90% is Muslim. The overwhelming majority are Sunni (Hanafi school), but located in the east, Ismaili Shi'a Muslims account for approximately 4% of the nation's Muslim community. Other minorities include Christians (predominantly Russian Orthodox) and small numbers of Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews.

2. Government restrictions

Although the constitution theoretically provides for FoRB, this has little effect in practice.³⁶⁰ The 2009 "Religion Law" makes religious expression and association, without state permission, illegal.³⁶¹ This also involves a complex process for granting religious entities (defined as any group of people who join together for religious purposes) permission to operate. They "are subject to state registration", which is an arduous process and can be denied. The only synagogue in Tajikistan was demolished in 2008 to make way for a presidential palace, and although the government provided a new place of worship for the community a year later, the worshippers mourned the loss of their "historical and precious" building.³⁶² No Christian Church has been able to register with the government since 2004³⁶³, as a result "at least 90% of evangelical churches are underground".³⁶⁴ The number of (state-controlled) mosques and activities within are tightly restricted (including state-dictated sermons and other communications). There have also been bans on the Jehovah's Witnesses and some Islamic and Protestant movements.³⁶⁵

In June 2011, the Parental Responsibility Law prohibited people under the age of 18 to attend any organised religious activity except funerals and official religious institutions.³⁶⁶ Moreover, religious instruction is only permitted with a state license; all groups that wish to engage in religious education have to obtain permission and register with the government, which in reality is extremely difficult to get.³⁶⁷ Parents can provide religious education to their children at home, but not to children outside the immediate family. Sanctions are also given for those who send a Tajik citizen abroad for purposes of religious education without the consent of the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA).³⁶⁸ The Ministry of Education monitors the syllabus, leadership and teaching practices

358 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2179

359 USCIRF, p. 177 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Russia%202015.pdf>

360 UN, Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan003670.htm>

361 Forum 18, Tajikistan: Religious Freedom Survey, January 2016 (Retrieved 24 January 2016) http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138

362 JTA, Synagogue destroyed by Tajik government rededicated elsewhere <http://www.jta.org/2009/05/07/news-opinion/world/synagogue-destroyed-by-tajik-government-rededicated-elsewhere>

363 Tajikistan World Watch List 2014, Open Doors <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/tajikistan.php>

364 Ibid.

365 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138

366 ADF International brief, see Mushfig Bayram, *TAJIKISTAN: Bans on children's religious activity, illegal meetings, and "extremist religious" teaching close?*, FORUM 18, 22 June 2011, http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1583.

367 Ibid

368 US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report 2014 p. 12 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238720.pdf>

of madrasahs and the Islamic institute of Tajikistan.³⁶⁹ In 2013, the CRA suspended the activities of seven of the country's eight madrasahs, on the basis that they either failed to obtain a license to conduct educational activities, or that their curriculum was not in accordance with the state standards³⁷⁰. The most recent year for complete statistical information on registration data is 2014. In that year, the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) approved 23 religious organisation applications. SCRA officials recorded that in 2013 the SCRA approved 135 out of 416; 238 were refused due to a failure to conform to legal requirements for registration.³⁷¹ Once an organisation's registration request is approved, it faces constant scrutiny from authorities. Both registered and unregistered religious communities have been subjected to raids, surveillance, detentions, and forced closures of religious institutions.³⁷²

The situation for FoRB – particularly for Muslims – has deteriorated dramatically since the March 2015 elections.³⁷³ In March 2015, President Rahmon condemned women wearing “uncharacteristic” dress, and police have begun forcibly shaving bearded Muslim men throughout the country.³⁷⁴ Throughout 2016 control and repression of Muslims exercising freedom of religion and belief is being increased and is continuing using mosque demolitions, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, a ban on state employees at Friday prayers, and youth activists to prevent prayers not in Hanafi or Ismaili tradition³⁷⁵. Part of this campaign is the jailing of at least 55 Muslims for up to 16 years, with officials refusing to explain what crimes they committed.³⁷⁶

Tajikistan has also shown insufficient willingness to cooperate with the UPR process – at its first review rejecting most recommendations toward complying with international norms relating to FoRB.³⁷⁷

TURKEY

1. Religious demographics

The population of the Republic of Turkey is estimated at 81.6 million. 99% are Muslim, of which the majority are Sunnis following the Hanafi school of thought. The Alevis, the largest religious minority group, has a membership of 15-25 million; Shi'a Muslims make up 500,000 (Ja'fari school of thought); and the remaining 1% includes various Christian denominations³⁷⁸, Jews and atheists.³⁷⁹

2a. Government Restrictions

While Turkey was established as a secular state – quite uniquely in the Islamic world – since the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), a political and ideological struggle has ensued within Turkey between the secularist forces (centred around Turkey's military), and the conservative wing of the ruling AKP. Under President Erdogan religious conservatism increasingly plays a role in the affairs of the state and some would even argue that the current government undermines the “gains of the past decade with steps that erode

369 Ibid., p. 9

370 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p.121

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tajikistan%202015.pdf>

371 US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report 2014 p. 6

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238720.pdf>

372 US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report 2014 p.8 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238720.pdf>

373 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138

374 Forum 18, Tajikistan: Religious Freedom Survey, January 2016 (Retrieved 24 January 2016)

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138

375 Forum 18, Continued state “total control” of Islam http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2175

376 Forum 18, Continued state “total control” of Islam http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2175

377 ADF International brief, See UPR-Info, Recommendations and Pledges, Tajikistan, http://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/tajikistan/session_12_-_october_2011/recommendations_to_tajikistan_2012.pdf

378 90,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 25,000 Roman Catholics, 21,000 Jews, 20,000 Syrian Orthodox Christians, 15,000 Russian Orthodox Christians, 10,000 Baha'is, 5,000 Yazidis and 5,000 Jehovah's Witnesses, 7,000 members of other Protestant denominations, 3,000 Iraqi Chaldean Christians, and up to 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians.

379 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238654.pdf>

human rights and the rule of law in Turkey".³⁸⁰ Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, Turkey received a downward trend arrow from numerous human rights organisations³⁸¹ over increased autocratic tendencies, the presence of radical Islam and tension between Sunni Muslims and the Alevi and Kurdish minorities.

The Turkish Constitution somewhat provides for FoRB,³⁸² however some groups enjoy more legal advantages than others. Unlike other religions, the Armenian Orthodox Christians, Jews and Greek Orthodox, have the right to operate schools, albeit under supervision of the Turkish Education Ministry.³⁸³ The 1982 Constitution requires complete state control over religious education. Indeed no belief community has ever had full independent legal existence, so cannot conduct various tasks, including buying property, making contracts, opening bank accounts etc. At the November 2015 Turkish-language launch of the OSCE ODIHR/Venice Commission *Joint Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religion or Belief Communities* – hosted by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee Turkey Freedom of Belief Initiative (İÖG) – Turkish voices repeatedly stressed that legal personality is essential to recognise and safeguard the pluralism that is Turkey's reality³⁸⁴. Islamic institutions in the country are controlled by the government through the "Directorate of Religious Affairs", which is responsible for regulating all mosques and employing all imams. Religious groups are not required to register with the state, but non-registration can lead to complications—for instance, in the legal recognition of places of worship. Worshipping in an unrecognised religious institution is illegal. In March 2016, the government seized ownership of 6 churches in Diyarbakir region. Worship has been permitted to continue, but whether the state means to return them is not yet known.³⁸⁵ Ancient religious sites (like the Aramean Mor Gabriel monastery) have also been expropriated by the government. Authorities have claimed this has been on the grounds of missing documentation, but some religious communities claim these acquisitions have been discriminatory.³⁸⁶ Turkey also requires individuals to list their religious affiliation on identity cards. A 2006 amendment permitted the space to be left blank, but non-Muslims report that both listing and not listing their religious affiliation exposed them to discrimination and harassment.³⁸⁷ While minorities enjoy the legal right to worship, religious minorities have reported a constant struggle to receive permission to build new churches and places of worship. The current Turkish AK Party government have repeatedly made discriminating remarks about the Alevi community.³⁸⁸ The Alevi community are not recognised by the Diyanet as a religious group and therefore do not have legal personality and the organisational rights associated.

Another cross-cutting issue is the use of Article 216 (3) of the Criminal Code against atheists. The Association for Atheism is the first atheist NGO to be founded in a country with a majority of Muslims. In early 2015, its website was shut down after a Criminal Court verdict stating that its content violated the law. There are seven ongoing trials against the Chair and members/supporters

380 HRW, World Report 2015, p. 547 https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2015_web.pdf

381 USCIRF, Annual Report 20015, p. 185 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Turkey%202015.pdf>, IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 377 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>, Freedom House, Country report Turkey 2015 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/turkey>, HRW, World Report 2015, p. 547 https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2015_web.pdf

382 Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, Constitution of the Republic of Turkey <http://www.hri.org/docs/turkey/preamble.html> (Article 2 declares the country to be of a "secular nature"; and in Article 10, the principle of equality before the law, regardless of religious orientation, is enshrined. Article 24 reinforces the commitment to religious freedom stating: "Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. Acts of worship, religious rites and ceremonies shall be conducted freely...no one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious rites and ceremonies, or to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions.")

383 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 8 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238654.pdf>

384 İÖG, IN NEED OF A PRINCIPLED APPROACH Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey, July 2013-June 2014 <http://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/our-work/new-report-in-need-of-a-principled-approach-monitoring-report-on-the-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-turkey-july-2013-june-2014/>

385 https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/04/4392638/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Turkey+seizes+six+churches+as+state+property+in+volatile+southeast&utm_campaign=Turkey+seizes+six+churches+as+state+property+in+volatile+southeast

386 Aramean Movement for Human Rights – Developments from January 2014 – December 2015 (p11) <http://aramesebeweging.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/ABM-Rapportage-2014-15-final-english.pdf>

387 Ibid., p. 16

388 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/turkey>

of the Association for Atheism³⁸⁹. Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) with regard to freedom of religion or belief are not carried out. These issues and others continue to be the subject of individual appeals to the Turkish Constitutional Court³⁹⁰.

Turkey has also been accused of failing to secure its borders (for example around the town of Jarabulus), which has led to a clear lack of protection for religious minority groups who become subsequently exposed to targeting.³⁹¹ The hosting of millions of refugees has brought challenges. Sources have reported a process of radicalisation of refugees, facilitated by Turkish authorities.³⁹² Specifically, this has involved an insistence on the use of the more religiously dogmatic Libyan education system, rather than the secular Syrian system; as well as Turkish authorities funding strict Islamic education classes.³⁹³ This is in the context of numerous reports of Turkey's complicity in resourcing violent Islamic groups in Syria.³⁹⁴

2b. Non-Governmental Restrictions

Particularly Alevis, Christians and Jews continue to experience intimidation and some violence on grounds of faith. Reported evidence has highlighted several incidents and cases in which the government clearly does not offer sufficient protection against violence based on religion against religious minorities such as Christians and Jews.³⁹⁵

TURKMENISTAN

1. Religious demographics

Turkmenistan has a population of approximately 5.2 million people, roughly 89% of whom follow Sunni Islam. Of the remaining 11%, 9% are Orthodox and 2% spread out amongst a variety of faiths. There are small communities of Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Shi'a Muslims, and Evangelical Christians, including Baptists and Pentecostals.³⁹⁶

2a. Government restrictions

Turkmenistan has a secular constitution that theoretically guarantees religious freedoms but, in practice, there is a total lack of respect and the government violates these rights systematically.³⁹⁷ A very concerning development was the new 2016 Religion Law which effectively banned FoRB without state permission, and included the prohibition of foreign missionary activity, foreign religious organisations, political parties established on the basis of religion, and religious attire in public places.³⁹⁸ A typical example was the February 2016 arrest of members of the registered Greater Grace Church congregations in Ashgabad and Mary in Tejen who were talking to local people about their faith. Plain-clothes officers of the State Service for Security Protection of Healthy Society (the former Anti-Drugs Police) questioned the Protestants until late at night and took religious literature, phones and money from them. They were subsequently fined for allegedly having literature promoting "religious extremism, separatism or fundamentalism". Against the law,

389 İÖG, Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey 2015 <http://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/our-work/monitoring-reports/monitoring-report-on-the-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-turkey-2015-is-published/>

390 İÖG, Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey 2015 <http://inancozgurlugugirisimi.org/en/our-work/monitoring-reports/monitoring-report-on-the-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-turkey-2015-is-published/>

391 Wall Street Journal, US urges Turkey to seal border <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-urges-turkey-to-seal-syria-border-1448674401>

392 CSW evidence presented in the European Parliament, April-May 2016

393 ibid

394 ibid

395 USCIRF, Annual Report 20015, p. 188 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Turkey%202015.pdf>

396 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238722.pdf>

397 Constitute Project, Turkmenistan's Constitution of 2008 https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Turkmenistan_2008.pdf

398 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, pg. 4-5 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238722.pdf>

written court verdicts were not given and no action has been taken against police who stole money and property³⁹⁹.

The Council on Religious Affairs (CRA) must approve imported religious literature and only religious organisations and groups that obtain CRA may provide religious education. The registration process is arduous and even registration provides no guarantee for access of an approved place of worship.⁴⁰⁰ The secret police, anti-terrorist police units, local government, and local CRA officials continued to raid registered and unregistered religious communities.⁴⁰¹

Jehovah's Witnesses have been regularly targetted in recent years and have been severely limited in their ability to practice their faith. Since February 2015, there has been a crackdown against Jehovah's Witnesses for exercising their freedom of religion and belief. 10 complaints have been filed with the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee (CCPR) against the government by Jehovah's Witnesses prosecuted for their refusal of military service.⁴⁰² In hearing the first of these cases in March 2015, the CCPR ruled that the rights of the individual in question had been violated and that the person had been subjected to torture. As of the present time, Turkmenistan has not responded to the decision, nor has it implemented CCPR recommendations.

Muslims have also been particularly targetted. The Sunni Muftiate (Muslim Spiritual Administration)–the only form of the majority religion Islam permitted–is under tight government control and the government names the Chief Mufti and imams down to the district level. There are also severe haj restrictions and tight censorship on religious literature. In February 2015, 5 Muslims convicted of "Wahhabism" were sent to and brutally beaten in the Seydi labour camp.⁴⁰³ In early April 2016, the authorities in Ashgabad bulldozed the Sunni Muslim Aksa Mosque with no prior consultation and apparently no compensation. Demolition workers justified the demolition by telling local people that "this mosque has been built without any kind of permission". This was the eighth of 14 mosques in the city to have been destroyed in recent years. Christian churches were also earlier destroyed or confiscated in the capital, with no compensation.⁴⁰⁴

UZBEKISTAN

1. Religious demographics

Uzbekistan has a population of approximately 28.9 million people. Domestic reporting states that Muslims make up roughly 93% of the population – mostly Hanafi Sunni. Approximately 1% of the population is Shi'a, while followers of Russian Orthodoxy make up about 4%. The remaining 3% includes small communities of Baptists, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, ethnic Korean Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Buddhists, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and atheists.

2. Government restrictions

While the Constitution theoretically guarantees FoRB,⁴⁰⁵ other laws have been adopted that strictly restrict it, and implementation is inconsistent. The "1998 Religion Law" is the basis of the

399 Forum 18, Children's summer camp warning, fines, new Religion Law, "no religion" in army http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2169

400 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1676

401 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p.72

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Turkmenistan%202015.pdf>

402 Forum 18, No amnesty for prisoner of conscience, no reparations despite UN instruction http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2164

403 Ibid.

404 Forum 18, More than half Ashgabad's mosques now destroyed http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2168

405 First, Article 18 ensures "that all citizens shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before the law without discrimination by religion." Second, Article 31 guarantees the freedom of conscience to all. It goes on to say that "everyone shall have the right to profess or not to profess any religion. A compulsory imposition of religion shall be impermissible." Third, under Article 57, the Constitution prohibits the "formation and functioning of political parties and public associations" that aim to advocate war, encourage religious hostility, and espouse the use of arms and which are established upon on religious principles. Fourth, as part of Article 61, the state and religion-based associations and organisations and associations shall be kept separate and equal before the law. Also, religious associations' activities will be free from state interference.

government's mandate for controlling FoRB, the implementation of which is executed by the Council on Religious Affairs (CRA). The CRA requires the formal registration of religious groups, which involves stringent criteria including the demonstration of notarised documents regarding the religious education of founding members; sources of income; and a list of at least 100 adult citizen signatories. The Ministry of Justice may approve, deny, or simply cease review without a decision.⁴⁰⁶ CRA distinguishes between 'illegal' groups, which are those not registered properly, and 'prohibited' groups viewed as 'extremist'.⁴⁰⁷ The government has identified various evangelical Christian groups "extremists" because, it claims, these minorities practice faith outside of the structures permitted by the state. Notably, officials stripped registration from the Jehovah's Witness community in Fergana in 2006."⁴⁰⁸

New censorship legislation was introduced in 2014, banning the "distortion" of religious beliefs and prohibiting proselytism.⁴⁰⁹ The authorities have relied on prison sentences as a significant mechanism to punish those who do not conform to government regulations or whom it claims are extremist, including as many as 12,000 Muslims.⁴¹⁰ Authorities routinely search out and raid meetings of Muslim, Baha'i and Christian groups, both registered and unregistered.⁴¹¹ For example, in November 2015, police raided a Protestant worship meeting, detaining and torturing members, as well as confiscating literature and personal electronic devices.⁴¹² Religious education is also strictly monitored; indeed only six registered religious communities have met the requirement to conduct religious education that they must have eight legally-registered regional branches. Summarising the reason for such censorship and raids, a state news agency published an article stating that the government aimed to "isolate the population, especially young people, from the influence of various harmful movements"⁴¹³.

Other issues include: all religious activity without state permission being illegal, including harsh restrictions on Muslims marking Ramadan and going on the haj; a culture of impunity among officials; unfair trials lacking due legal process; many prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief; and denials of this freedom to all prisoners⁴¹⁴.

406 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238724.pdf>

407 Ibid.

408 Forum 18, Uzbekistan: New Fines, Bible Destructions Follow UN concern over Religious Censorship (Retrieved 27 January 2016) http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2122

409 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 77 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Uzbekistan%202015.pdf>

410 Ibid.

411 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 79 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Uzbekistan%202015.pdf>

412 Forum 18, Police raid, torture, steal and plant drugs http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2125

413 Forum 18, "Isolate the population" http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2159

414 Forum 18, Religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862



South and East Asia, and Oceania

AFGHANISTAN

Failed State - for explanation and recommendations see page 19

1a. Religious demographics

The population of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is approximately 31.8 million, of which 80% are Sunni Muslim and 19% Shi'a Muslims, leaving less than 1% affiliated to other religious minorities. Exact numbers are difficult to estimate because they do not tend to practice their faith openly, but estimates also suggest approximately 6,000 Sikh families, 3,000 Hindus and small Baha'i and Christian communities.⁴¹⁵

2a. Government restrictions

The government is not entirely in control of the country, with Taliban forces occupying sways of territory – particularly in the southwest. Where the government is in control, FoRB is not provided for by the Constitution or rule of law. Article 3 of the Constitution states: "no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan".⁴¹⁶ The Hanafi school of jurisprudence is applied universally-without a separate system for Shi'a or non-Muslims. This jurisprudence stipulates that apostasy is one of the *hudud* crimes, for which the fixed punishment of death by stoning applies, with no discretion for judges in cases-however, this can be avoided if the defendant recants and returns to Islam.⁴¹⁷ Likewise, in theory, blasphemy can lead to a death sentence. However, in practice, prosecutions in Afghanistan for both apostasy and blasphemy are rare, and convictions are even rarer-no conviction for blasphemy has been made since 2001.

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

Despite this moderate legal enforcement, social hostilities and illegal private executions of these judgments are more common, for example in March 2015, a young woman was killed by a mob for burning a copy of the Qur'an.⁴¹⁸

Casualties have surged as a result of increased Taliban attacks, which mainly target Afghan Security Forces, but includes the targetting of religious minorities and non-compliant Sunni Muslims too.⁴¹⁹ Over 800 Afghan clerics have lost their lives for refusing to preach the terrorists' version of Islam,⁴²⁰ and threats persist against the Persian speaking Hazara Shi'as who are considered apostates by many Sunni Muslims.⁴²¹ Three major Taliban attacks were carried out against Christians over the reporting period.⁴²² The Baha'i community in Afghanistan is small, but nonetheless subject to institutional as well as social discrimination, and went underground to avoid prosecution for blasphemy and apostasy.⁴²³ The Hindu and Sikh communities suffer limitations on their traditional burial rituals.⁴²⁴

415 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238700.pdf>

416 Afghan Embassy, The Constitution of Afghanistan <http://www.afghanembassy.com.pl/afg/images/pliki/TheConstitution.pdf>

417 Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, Afghan Penal Code [http://www.iec.org.af/public_html/About%20JEMB/Legal%20Framework/Legislation%20of%20Reference/Penal%20Code/Penal%20Code%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.iec.org.af/public_html/About%20JEMB/Legal%20Framework/Legislation%20of%20Reference/Penal%20Code/Penal%20Code%20(English).pdf)

418 ABC, Death sentence overturned in mob killing of Afghan woman
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-02/death-sentences-overturned-in-mob-killing-of-afghan-woman/6591530>

419 USA Today, Afghan casualties surge in 2015
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/01/04/gen-john-campbell-taliban-afghanistan/78262480/>

420 BBC, The 'dissenting' clerics killed in Afghanistan <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22885170>

421 BBC, Afghan killings: Thousands protest over murdered Hazaras <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-34778056>

422 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 136 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Afghanistan%202015.pdf>

423 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 6
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238700.pdf>

424 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 136 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Afghanistan%202015.pdf>

There are also concerns that Islamic State has expanded its operations into Afghanistan.⁴²⁵

BANGLADESH

1. Religious Demographics

The total population of Bangladesh is 166.3 million with Sunni Muslims comprising 90%, Hindus 9.5% and the rest under 1%. Ethnic and religious minority groups inhabit the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the northern districts. Outside these recognised citizen populations are the Rohingya who practice Islam and account for Bangladesh's largest non-citizen population. In 2014, the U.S. Department of State estimated that there are approximately 32,000 registered Rohingya refugees from Burma and an additional 200,000 to 500,000 unregistered Rohingya refugees.⁴²⁶

2a. Government restrictions

The Bangladesh constitution includes some provisions for FoRB; Article 28 notes that "the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth... [and will not] be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution."⁴²⁷ While the Constitution identifies Islam as the state religion, it also states that the nation is secular and "shall ensure equal status and equal rights in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and other religions."⁴²⁸

The Penal Code and other legal provisions, however, are more problematic. Family laws regarding marriage, divorce, and/or adoption differ depending on the religious beliefs that are involved; for example, a Muslim man may marry as many as four wives, whereas a Christian man can only marry one woman, and a Hindu man is restricted due to limited provisions for divorce, such as impotence or madness.⁴²⁹ The Penal Code mandates that any statements or acts that are a "'deliberate and malicious' intent to insult religious sentiments are subject to fines or up to two years in prison."⁴³⁰

Since 1993, the Jamaat-e-Islami has pushed for the implementation of harsher anti-blasphemy laws that would entail a maximum sentence of life imprisonment for insulting the Qur'an and death for insulting Mohammed. The Prime Minister recently rejected demands by Islamists for a new anti-blasphemy law, saying the existing laws were enough to punish anyone who attempted to insult religion and the government continued to block websites and media content it deemed insulting to religion.⁴³¹ Arguably, the extensive defamation of religion laws already in place create a de facto blasphemy law (including 99a-f of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and Section 57 of the ICT Act). Jamaat-e-Islami provided the government with a list of 84 other individuals they want to see investigated for the crime of blasphemy.⁴³²

Although there are no laws prohibiting conversion to another religion, a convert is legally required to present a notary with a signed document in which he declares that his decision to convert is for personal reasons, and made freely and not under pressure. While the procedure can be a mere formality for Hindus, Christians and Buddhists changing their religion, Muslims seeking to convert may face greater social pressure not only from their communities, but also the notaries who might

425 The Daily Telegraph, Islamic State claims Afghanistan and Pakistan for its 'Caliphate' <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/11075390/Islamic-State-claims-Pakistan-and-Afghanistan-for-its-caliphate.html>

426 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238702.pdf>

427 Georgetown University: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Constitution of Bangladesh <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/constitution-of-bangladesh-article-28-discrimination-on-grounds-of-religion>

428 US Department of State, "Bangladesh 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238702.pdf>

429 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 291 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

430 US Department of State, "Bangladesh 2014 International Religious Freedom Report, p. 3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238702.pdf>

431 BBC, Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina rejects blasphemy laws <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22058462>

432 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 193 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Bangladesh%202015.pdf>

refuse to register their document⁴³³.

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

The 2014-2015 reporting period saw a dramatic spike in violence against atheists in particular. Secular activists and bloggers were particularly victimised by these attacks including 6 fatalities since February 2015; Dr Avijit Roy and his wife Rafida Ahmed, Washiqur Rhaman and Ananta Bijoy Das.⁴³⁴ No suspect for these killings has yet come to trial and been found guilty⁴³⁵. An Islamic extremist group known as Ansarullah Bangla Team or Ansar Bangla 7, a front group for al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, claimed responsibility for a series of attacks. The banned group also published a global hit list of secularist and atheist bloggers, writers and activists.⁴³⁶ The police have arrested a number of suspects and promised protection for other potential targets; however, the government has contributed to this hostile situation. In September, following a 10-day visit to the country, Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, also criticised the government's conduct: "The government condemned the recent murders of online activists but did little to protect them," Bielefeldt said. "Some officials publicly admonished them for expressing critical views on religion, particularly Islam... thereby, sending ambiguous messages to society."⁴³⁷

The Christian minority has also suffered; "This pressure is not driven by the government, but by radical Islamic groups, local religious leaders and families."⁴³⁸ In October 2015, a Christian pastor survived an attack by three Muslim men armed with knives.⁴³⁹ Complaints have been made against the inadequacy of the government's protection and prosecution.⁴⁴⁰ In January 2016, a Shi'a mosque in Bogra was attacked, leaving one dead and three wounded. IS claimed responsibility for the attack.⁴⁴¹ Rohingya Muslims have also suffered persecution and Sufis are frequently subject to harassment or worse, because they are not seen as real Muslims by majority denominations.⁴⁴² In June 2016, a Hindu priest was beheaded, with violent Islamists being the suspected perpetrators.⁴⁴³

The rise of Islamist political outfits, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (the largest Islamist political party in Bangladesh) and Hefazat-e-Islam (a Jamaat-backed fundamentalist Islamist association opposed to equal rights for women and secular education), and their alliance with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have exacerbated tensions in a social-political environment where Islam is already privileged as the state religion.

BRUNEI

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 28

433 ACN, Religious Freedom in the World Report-2014: Country Report-Bangladesh, p. 2 <http://religion-freedom-report.org.uk/full-report>

434 CNN, Bangladesh blogger Niloy Neel hacked to death in latest attack <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/07/asia/bangladesh-blogger-niloy-neel-killed/index.html>

Huffington Post, Publisher and two secular writers hacked to death in Bangladesh

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/publisher-and-two-secular-writers-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh_us_5634cb3ee4b0c66bae5ca710

435 According to European Humanist Federation submission "FORB Addition Points-Bangladesh" Intergroup 05/2016.

436 The Guardian, Militant group publishes hit list of bloggers, activists and writers

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/23/militant-group-publishes-hit-list-of-bloggers-activists-and-writers>

437 APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, Special Rapporteur urges Bangladesh to tackle intolerance

<https://freedomdeclared.org/news/special-rapporteur-urges-bangladesh-to-tackle-intolerance/>

438 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/bangladesh/>

439 Christian News, Bangladeshi pastor survives knife attack

<http://christiannews.net/2015/10/10/bangladeshi-pastor-survives-knife-attack-by-muslims/>

440 Open Doors, World Watch List Report 2016, p. 15

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/documents/ww-report-160113.pdf>

441 CNN, Banned Islamist group suspected behind slaying of Hindu priest in Bangladesh

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/02/21/asia/bangladesh-hindu-priest-killed/>

442 Financial Times, Fears rise in Bangladesh after attacks on secular forces

http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/a1cb09e0-8069-11e5-8095-ed1a37d1e096,Authorised=false.html?siteedition=intl&i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fa1cb09e0-8069-11e5-8095-ed1a37d1e096.html%3Fsiteedition%3Dintl&i_referer=&classification=conditional_standard&iab=barrier-app#axzz3ymHXEVX5

443 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36467270>

1. Religious demographics

79% of Brunei's 420,000 population is Muslim (largely ethnically Malay); 9% Christian and 8% Buddhist (largely ethnically Chinese). The indigenous groups, including Dusun, Bisaya and Murut, make up only 4% of the population; 50% of whom adhere to Islam and 15 percent to Christianity⁴⁴⁴

2a. Government restrictions

The constitution states: "the religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim Religion according to the Shafeite (also known as Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam) sect of that religion provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony".⁴⁴⁵ Despite this notion Islamic law has been gradually expanded over the last years and in May 2014, Sharia, which already governed various aspects of Muslim and non-Muslim affairs alike, was extended to the penal code. Brunei is currently in the process of implementing the second phase, which comes with the implementation of harsh punishments such as amputation of hands of thieves and floggings for indecent behaviour. Restrictions already in place will be expanded and include the outlawing of cross-dressing, alcohol and feasting during Ramadan.⁴⁴⁶ The third and final phase will become effective in 2016⁴⁴⁷ and will include including stoning for apostasy and blasphemy.⁴⁴⁸ According to testimony from citizens and non-citizens, Muslims and non-Muslims living in Brunei, there is fear that the new Sharia legislation will undermine peaceful coexistence between different religious groups as previously practiced in the country.⁴⁴⁹ Converts from Islam to Christianity must fear for their lives and can only operate underground. "Non-Muslims cannot say 'Allah' (Bruneian Christians use 'Allah' where in English Christians say 'God')"⁴⁵⁰ Christmas was banned in Brunei this year. "Believers of other religions that live under the rule of an Islamic country-according to Islam-may practice their religion or celebrate their religious festivities among their community, with the condition that the celebrations are not disclosed or displayed publicly to Muslims"⁴⁵¹

Public and private schools in Brunei are banned from teaching religious instructions other than Islam, and parents who fail to enroll their children in religious school, face a BND 5,000 (\$4,000) fine, imprisonment for up to one year or both.⁴⁵² The government further restricts rights to public religious gatherings by non-Muslims, as well as their employability in government-related jobs. The only recognised Christian churches are Anglican and Roman Catholic; those unregistered are labeled illegal sects.

BURMA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 21

1a. Religious demographics

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar (or Burma), has a population of 55 million. Roughly 90% adhere to Buddhism and 4% to Christianity and Islam respectively. There are also Hindus, practitioners of traditional Chinese indigenous religions and a very small Jewish community.⁴⁵³

2a. Governmental restrictions

444 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238494.pdf>

445 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 1 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238494.pdf>

446 The Diplomat, The implications of Brunei's Sharia law <http://thedi diplomat.com/2015/05/the-implications-of-bruneis-sharia-law/>

447 The Diplomat, The implications of Brunei's Sharia law <http://thedi diplomat.com/2015/05/the-implications-of-bruneis-sharia-law/>

448 The Diplomat, The implications of Brunei's Sharia law <http://thedi diplomat.com/2015/05/the-implications-of-bruneis-sharia-law/>

449 The Guardian, Christmas banned in Somalia, Tajikistan and Brunei (Retrieved 5 January) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/23/christmas-banned-somalia-tajikistan-brunei>

450 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 254 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

451 The Guardian, Christmas banned in Somalia, Tajikistan and Brunei <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/23/christmas-banned-somalia-tajikistan-brunei>

452 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 5 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238494.pdf>

453 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238496.pdf>

The constitution of Burma fails to adequately safeguard the rights of religious minorities. Article 34 subjugates freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practice religion to “public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this Constitution”⁴⁵⁴; Article 361 “recognises the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union”.⁴⁵⁵ In January 2015, the parliament upper house passed a “religious conversion” bill, which requires anyone who wants to convert to another religion to get approval from an 11-member government committee.⁴⁵⁶ This reflects the attitude that conversions are questionable and deserve state scrutiny. The bill also has implications on interfaith marriages – including a waiting period of 1 year for permission for a non-Buddhist man to marry a Buddhist woman.⁴⁵⁷ Exclusion based on religion applies to citizenship and higher levels of employment, education, and the military.⁴⁵⁸ In some areas, policies have been implemented to prohibit or impede Muslim land ownership as well as restrict Islamic places of worship. Additionally, minorities often do not receive proper protection from the government.⁴⁵⁹ Overall, senior (buddhist) political leaders are aiming to advance anti-Muslim agendas, and the government lacks a “strong and consistent leadership to condemn intolerance enabled abuses”.⁴⁶⁰ Furthermore, Buddhists who have spoken out against anti-Muslim hatred or criticise government policy have been targeted; like Htin Lin Oo, who was convicted of religious defamation under articles 295 and 298 of Burma’s penal code, regarding a speech he made on October 23, 2015, criticising Buddhist extremists for inciting violence.⁴⁶¹

New discrimination laws were instigated in 2015, which erode the rights of groups not formally recognised as citizens, such as Muslim Rohingyas.⁴⁶² Rohingya Muslims have been deprived of their citizenship since 1982; and are not entitled to secondary education, nor any state benefits—the government claims they are illegal “Bengali” immigrants.⁴⁶³ Due to international pressure, the government has been prompted to grant citizenship, but on the condition that Rohingyas renounce their names and enlist as another ethnicity. Despite signs of government intent toward integration, still approximately 135,000 remain in camps and subject to torture, forced labour and rape.⁴⁶⁴ Christians also face discrimination, particularly in Kachin and Chin State, where rights to worship and assembly are subject to arduous and restricted processes. In Kachin state 66 churches have been destroyed since the start of the war in 2011.⁴⁶⁵ Forced conversions to Buddhism have also been reported at special Government Border Areas National Development Training Schools (Na Ta La).

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

Over the 2014-2015 reporting period, inter-communal violence continued, suffered particularly by Rohingya Muslims. The government failed to intervene and, in some instances, even concealed abuses.

CHINA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 22

1. Religious demographics

Of China’s 1.4bn population, it is estimated that between 100 to 300 million hold a religious

454 Burma Campaign, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/Constitution-1.pdf>

455 Burma Campaign, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar <http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/Constitution-1.pdf>

456 ADF International: Myanmar Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

457 ADF International: India Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

458 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 269 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

459 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 5 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238496.pdf>

460 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 27 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Burma%202015.pdf>

461 CSW written statement HRC 31 – Agenda Item 4: Interactive Dialogue, February 2016

462 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238496.pdf>

463 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 28 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Burma%202015.pdf>

464 ADF International: Myanmar Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/10/21/amnesty-report-on-rohingya-migrant-deaths.html>

465 CSW written statement HRC 31 – Agenda Item 4: Interactive Dialogue, February 2016

conviction. Estimates vary widely since believers often do not register with one of the 5 state recognised religious organisations (Buddhist Association of China, Chinese Taoist Association, Islamic Association of China, Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association).

2a. Government restrictions

While China's constitution includes some provisions for religious freedoms, these only extend to officially recognised religious groups, provided they practice "normal religious activity" under Article 36 of the Constitution. Unregistered believers and groups sometimes face severe repression under the pretext of posing a threat to state interests. Participating in so-called "superstitious sects" is outlawed under Article 300 of China's Criminal Law. The focus of who the authorities consider to be "cult groups" have acquired an expanded meaning under the new National Security Law of 2015. Human rights activists criticise the law for its vague provisions and lack of detail on what is deemed an offence.

State policies have tightened over the reporting period resulting in "unprecedented violations against Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Falun Gong practitioners"⁴⁶⁶ who have been subjected to fines, arbitrary and selective arrests, torture, long prison sentences, denial of adequate legal representation and destruction of religious infrastructure. Uyghur Muslims (China's largest Muslim group) in Xinjiang province similarly face repression as the state brands the group as a political "terrorist"⁴⁶⁷ threat. While events such as the Urumqi market suicide bombings have highlighted potential security concerns, the response of the government has been overwhelmingly harsh: hundreds or even thousands of Muslims were arrested and charged with reading unauthorised Islamic books, fasting during Ramadan, attending religious gatherings and activities allegedly "endangering state security"—a crime that can carry the death penalty. The persecution of Christian groups is especially severe in the Zhejiang Province, where in 2014 at least 400 underground as well as state-sanctioned churches have been destroyed and at least 1500 crucifixes have been removed from churches. In 2015 at least 18 Christians and leaders were detained.⁴⁶⁸ Generally, Buddhism and Taoism enjoy wider freedoms than others—except in Tibet, where the detention of Buddhist monks and activists continues.⁴⁶⁹ In July 2015 there began a large-scale crackdown took place on activists in the form of an unprecedented mass detention of close to 300 human rights lawyers.⁴⁷⁰

INDIA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 23

1a. Religious demographics

With a population of 1.2bn people, India is the world's largest democracy. Hindus form the overwhelming majority with around 80% of the population, Muslims form the largest minority with around 13.4%, Christians account for around 2.3%, Sikhs, 1.9%, and Buddhists, Jains, Jews, Zoroastrians and Bahais, the rest.⁴⁷¹

2a. Government restrictions

While India's constitution provides for freedom of religion and belief, the country continues

466 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 3 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

467 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf> (p34)

468 CSW, EP intergroup on FoRB Report 2015: cases and incidents, p. 3 Written statement to EP Intergroup FoRB, 'China: Human Rights, Civil Society and Freedom of Religion or Belief.' Report April 2016

469 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2016/02/annual-report-201516/>

470 CSW, China: Freedom of religion or belief rule of law and civil society, p. 1: Written evidence to EP Intergroup FoRB

471 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: India, p.1

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238706.pdf>

to struggle with religious majoritarianism and inter-religious tensions. President Modi's BJP government was elected in 2014 on a large Hindu nationalist platform, and is widely seen to be the political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) organisation, which advances its "Hindutva" ideology-the supremacy of "Hindu-ness" for the Indian nation. The current government's preferential treatment of Hinduism is arguably at the source of much religious minority persecution. For example, especially worrisome are the "anti-conversion laws" introduced in 5 Indian states. The perpetrator's rhetoric is that the Hindu nation has been a victim of conversion by foreign intruders and that the nation must reclaim what it has lost. According to these laws, the government must assess the legality of conversions and resort to prosecutions when the conversion is found to be a result of "force, fraud, allurement or inducement". It is the opinion of the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief that these conditions are "loosely defined". This has made religious minorities feel insecure in their right to share their faith.⁴⁷² Furthermore, they demonstrably originate from an intent to maintain the Hindu majority in the country: in September 2015, BJP MP Mr. Vijay announced the tabling of a Private Member's Bill for a nation-wide anti-conversion law, stating: *"For the first time, the population of Hindus has been reported to be less than 80 per cent. We have to take measures to arrest the decline. It is very important to keep the Hindus in majority in the country and I think a Bill of this nature [anti-conversion law] will... allow Hindus to remain a majority in India."*⁴⁷³

Furthermore, in certain villages, local councils have forbidden non-Hindus from entering to propagate their faith.⁴⁷⁴ In some cases, non-Hindu minorities have been refused allocations of rice rations under the Public Distribution System for their faith, and have been required to donate 2,000 Rs to the village goddess for the renewal of their ration cards.⁴⁷⁵

2b. Non-governmental restrictions

This government bias for Hinduness has the unwelcome side-effect of legitimating wider societal discrimination of minorities, since aggressors feel they act under the government's patronage.⁴⁷⁶ "India had the highest level of social hostilities involving religion".⁴⁷⁷ The BJP entered government in May 2014, and for the 2014-2015 reporting period, incidents of violent religious intolerance dramatically increased. Over the past year India has seen increased harassment and violence directed against Muslims. These incidents include the attack of Azizpur village and numerous other violent incidents against Muslims in Gujarat⁴⁷⁸. Muslims face significant hate campaigns perpetrated by Hindu nationalist groups and local and state politicians that include widespread media propaganda accusing Muslims of being terrorists; spying for Pakistan; forcibly kidnapping and converting Hindu women; and disrespecting Hinduism by slaughtering cows.⁴⁷⁹ Muslims further protest that most Indian states violate their religious freedom by restricting or banning cow slaughter, which is required for Muslims during Eid⁴⁸⁰, and being discriminatorily denied housing in certain cities.⁴⁸¹ "Hindu vigilante mobs killed four Muslim men over suspicions they had killed or stolen cows for beef..."

Reported incidents of violence against Christians between Nov 2014 and Nov 2015 counted 400; up from 154 between Nov 2013 and Nov 2014 – an increase of 150%.⁴⁸² This dramatic rise has generally been understood to be the consequence of political leadership: "Since May 2014, India has been governed by a BJP government... As a result, radical Hinduism... has increased steadily. While

472 ADF International: India Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

473 <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/uttarakhand/community/bjp-mp-plans-to-table-bill-in-parliament/139072.html>

474 'Bastar Panchayat Ban: HC Says Right to Religion Is Fundamental-Times of India' <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/Bastar-panchayat-ban-HC-says-right-to-religion-is-fundamental/articleshow/49371838.cms>> accessed 26 May 2016

475 CSW's May 2015 report (India: Freedom of Religion, pp. 5-7).

476 "The one type of government restriction that has the strongest association with social hostilities is government favoritism towards one religion to the exclusion of other religions. When you favor one, that tends to be associated with high social hostilities." Brian Grimm

477 <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/02/26/religious-hostilities/>

478 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 150 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/India%202015.pdf>

479 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 149 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/India%202015.pdf>

480 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 150 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/India%202015.pdf>

481 Delhi Homeowners Shut Doors on Muslim Tenants: UN Varsity Study' <<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/muslim-delhi-rooms-on-rent-for-muslim-muslims-tenants-united-nation-ncr-homeowners-2805994/>> accessed 26 May 2016

482 Open Doors, World Watch List India 2016

intolerance has risen, and minorities are constantly attacked, the central government has refused to speak out against atrocities – thus further encouraging the radical Hindus to step up their actions.⁴⁸³ The level of impunity has gone up remarkably, for those who push for a completely Hindu India.⁴⁸⁴ Furthermore, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) offshoots, including the “National Volunteer Organisation” and “Dharma Jagran”, took an active role in ghar wapsi (‘homecoming’ ceremonies) which have the purpose of re-converting converts from Hinduism back to Hinduism.⁴⁸⁵

INDONESIA

1a. Religious demographics

Indonesia’s population is estimated at 253.6 million, of which Muslims account for 87% (mostly Sunni), which makes it home to the world’s largest Muslim population. Among its minorities, Protestants account for 7%, Roman Catholics 3%, Hindus 1.5%, and followers of other, indigenous or unspecified religions comprising approximately 1.3% of the population. The country’s atheist minority claims it has more than 500 members.⁴⁸⁶

2a. Government restrictions

The Indonesian Constitution includes provisions for FoRB (Article 28E, 28I, 29(2)) and officially grants protection to six religious groups: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. Article 29 states: “The State shall be based upon the belief in the One and Only God,” while at the same time, “the State guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief.”⁴⁸⁷ Religious affiliation is described on identity cards. “Official ID cards must list one of the six official religions; therefore, atheism or humanism are not permitted options.”⁴⁸⁸ Members of unrecognised groups sometimes find it more difficult to find jobs or apply to schools.⁴⁸⁹ Freedom of expression concerning religion or belief is also restricted. Article 156(a) of the Penal Code⁴⁹⁰ assigns up to five-years imprisonment for anyone who “deliberately in public gives expression to feelings or commits an act: a) which principally has the character of being at enmity with, abusing or staining a religion, adhered to in Indonesia; or b) with the intention to prevent a person to adhere to any religion based on the belief of the almighty God.”⁴⁹¹ Notable examples include Sebastian Joe and Alexander Aan, who were sentenced to imprisonment for “advocating atheism”^{492,493} Article 86 of the 2002 Child Protection Act is also of concern, as the wording includes the prohibition of the conversion of minors through “tricks” and “lies”, which have been broadly interpreted.⁴⁹⁴

Respect for freedom of religion or belief varies significantly across the country’s decentralised regions. The region of Aceh remains a particular concern, where Sharia law is applied. Under Presidential Decree 11/2003, the provincial government has been allowed to implement a local interpretation of Sharia law and enforce strict regulations on social behaviour (dress codes, gambling, alcohol and pork consumption, unchaperoned male-female liaisons) via a vice patrol called the Wilayatul Hisbah. According to the Jakarta Post, hundreds of people have been caned in Aceh for Sharia related crimes⁴⁹⁵. The provincial government has also banned various sects,

483 <http://m.ucanindia.in/news/tribal-christians-flee-village-following-threat-32077.html>> accessed 26 May 2016

484 *ibid*

485 ADF International: India Brief, 2016 submission for the Intergroup Annual Report

486 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report, 2014, p. 2

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238510.pdf>

487 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 259 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

488 *Ibid.*

489 *Ibid.*

490 (which is based on Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 adopted by presidential decision in 1965),

491 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 259 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

492 *Ibid.*, p. 261 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

493 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 157 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Indonesia%202015.pdf>

494 <http://www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty/INDONESIA-RELIGIOUS-LIBERTY-CRUMBLING>

495 <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/09/19/dozens-sharia-violators-caned-aceh.html>

including Shi'a Muslims, Sufis and Ahmadis; permitted attacks on members of banned sects to occur with impunity; forcibly closed down Christian churches and Buddhist temples; and enjoyed the support of top level government officials.⁴⁹⁶ In 2014, the local legislature passed a new bylaw, which strengthened the Sharia even further and, for the first time, extended it to the 90,000 non-Muslims living in Aceh province.⁴⁹⁷ For the first time, in April 2016, a non-Muslim was convicted and punished under Sharia law.⁴⁹⁸ There are rising concerns for the potential inter-communal violence that may follow this extension of Sharia enforcement.

Indonesia has a long tradition of religious tolerance. President Joko Widodo, elected in 2014, has expressed on several occasions his intent to restore the country's reputation of religious pluralism and has called for "national reconciliation and unity", including a new law to protect religious minorities.⁴⁹⁹ The Ahmadiyya faith is seen by the government to not be following the 'true Islam' and therefore remains outside the 6 officially recognised faiths. The Ahmadiyya's, along with the Bahai's, are considered 'indigenous' faith groups, and as a result face several legal restrictions on the right to practice and propagate their religion and have also been on the receiving end of communal violence. A Joint Ministerial decree passed in 2008 that required Ahmadis to halt all their activities. Further, in April 2014, the Indonesian Ulema Council of Ciamis in West Java instructed Ahmadis to shut down all activity at a particular mosque for security and order.⁵⁰⁰ Ahmadiyya's continue to face severe treatment. Recently, on Bangka Island, the Ahmadi population was asked to either convert to Sunni Islam or be expelled.⁵⁰¹ In February 2016 authorities banned any activities of the Ahmadi religious community in the town of Subang, in West Java province. Due to fear of violence, local authorities had to evacuate the community's women and children.⁵⁰²

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

Ahmadi's also suffer societal violence, including an attack on a mosque in May 2016.⁵⁰³ In October 2015, Suka Makmur in the Aceh Besar region was hit by a wave of violent attacks against Christians. A mob of Islamist extremists wielding machetes and axes attacked a church and torched the building. They then turned to another church in the same area and fighting broke out between Muslims and Christians, in which one Muslim attacker was killed. The violent outbreak left three churches destroyed. Authorities failed to curb the violence and even encouraged more tension by declaring just days later the destruction of ten additional churches on grounds of permit violations.⁵⁰⁴ Most recently, in January 2016, the country faced terrorist attacks in its capital Jakarta, killing eight.

In March 2015, sectarian banners were spotted in the city of Yogyakarta, saying Syiah Bukan Islam (Shia is not Islam) and Syiah Kafir (Shiites are infidels).⁵⁰⁵ In October 2015, bombs exploded during the annual Ashura procession in Dhaka, killing two and injuring many more.⁵⁰⁶ Christians in Indonesia faced "problems in registering church buildings, sometimes even suffering violent attacks", over the reporting period.⁵⁰⁷

496 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 157 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Indonesia%202015.pdf>

497 Ibid.

498 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/a6982721.html>

499 News Va, Stop intolerance and promote religious freedom <http://www.news.va/en/news/asiaindonesia-priorities-for-new-president-joko-wi>

500 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 156

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Indonesia%202015.pdf>

501 Jakarta Coconuts, Convert to Sunni Islam or be expelled

<http://jakarta.coconuts.co/2016/01/18/government-bangka-island-demands-ahmadiyah-convert-sunni-islam-or-be-expelled-human>

502 HRW, Ahmadiyah community persecuted

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/11/indonesia-ahmadiyah-community-persecuted>

503 <https://www.rabwah.net/ahmadiyya-mosque-indonesia-latenight-attack/>

504 Foreign Policy, Islamist hardliners attack Indonesian churches

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/20/islamist-hardliners-attack-indonesian-churches/>

505 The Jakarta Post, Endless Sunni-Shi'a sectarianism in Indonesia <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/03/11/endless-sunni-shia-sectarianism-indonesia.html#sthash.Fnhvwbdy.dpuf>

506 UCA News, IS Murderous influence spreads across Asia

<http://www.ucanews.com/news/islamic-states-murderous-influence-spreads-across-asia/75063>

507 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/indonesia/>

LAOS

1. Religious demographics

The Laotian population is estimated at 6.8 million. Ethnic Lao comprise roughly 40 to 50% of the population and almost unanimously follow Theravada Buddhism. The Laotian government currently recognises 48 ethnic minorities and claims that most of them practice animism and ancestor worship. Animism is the primary faith among some of the most notable branches of minorities including the Sino-Thai, Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Baha'is, Mahayana Buddhists, and followers of Confucianism constitute less than 3 percent of the total population.⁵⁰⁸

2a. Government restrictions

In theory, the Constitution of Laos guarantees religious freedom. "The Constitution provides citizens with the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religions."⁵⁰⁹ Article 9 ensures the freedom of lawful religious practices by Buddhists and other faith-based communities, but also prohibits acts that foster divisions between religions and social classes. This caveat has been used by authorities to justify a 2002 Decree called "Decree 92", giving the government sweeping powers to monitor and manage faith groups activities, including: mandates for registering all religious bodies and their activities; required identity cards for religious workers; constraints on proselytising; controls on the printing of religious materials; and onerous registration requirements.⁵¹⁰ These are understood to be in place to limit the expansion of religious minority communities.

Protestant Christians have particularly suffered discriminatory enforcement of these laws. In 2015 the Laotian government banned celebrations and observances of Christmas⁵¹¹; building permits have been consistently denied them⁵¹²; and Christian NGO Open Doors reported "that one district enacted a law that bans local people from believing in Christ so that, if anyone carries out any Christian activity publicly or privately, the village expels them."

2b. Non-Government restrictions

Reports confirmed that the majority of violations against Protestant Christians in Laos have concerned converts to the religion. Converts face societal harassment particularly in remote, rural areas, though also in urban areas - where one of the most common punishments is forced eviction.⁵¹³ There have also been reports of sexual violence against Christian women committed on account of their faith.⁵¹⁴

MALAYSIA

1. Religious demographics

Of Malaysia's 30.1 million population, 61.3% are Muslim, 19.8% are Buddhist, 9.2% Christian, and 6.3% Hindu. Other groups include followers of animists, Sikhs, Baha'is, Ahmadis, and some traditional Chinese religions like Taoism and Confucianism.⁵¹⁵

2a. Government restrictions

508 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238520.pdf>

509 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238520.pdf>

510 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 167 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Laos%202015.pdf>

511 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 168 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Laos%202015.pdf>

512 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 7 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238520.pdf>

513 CSW, Laos: Freedom of Religion or Belief: Evidence submitted to EP Intergroup FoRB

514 Open Doors, World Watch List Report 2016, pg. 15 and 19 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/documents/wwareporta160113.pdf>

515 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238522.pdf>

In Malaysia, Article 3 of the Constitution calls Islam the state religion, while other religions may be practiced in 'peace and harmony'. Furthermore, Article 11 of the Constitution stipulates that every person has the right to profess and to practice his or her religion and to propagate it. For ethnic Malays, it is illegal or not recognised to identify as an atheist or non-religious.⁵¹⁶ The Constitution, however, also provides the government with the power to "control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam".⁵¹⁷ Moreover, Article 160 of the Constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslims from birth. By Muslim, the government mainly refers to Sunni Islam, as it deems other forms of Islam illegal.⁵¹⁸ In a recent decision when the Federal Court unanimously ruled that Article 10 on freedom of expression must be read in conjunction with Articles 3(1) of the Constitution that holds Islam the religion of the Federation. As such, the court reaffirmed the right of state agencies to strictly regulate publications, such that 'any person who prints, publishes, produces, records, disseminates or possesses any book or document for sale which are contrary to the Islamic law is said to have committed an offence punishable by a fine not exceeding RM3,000 (~\$725) or a maximum two years' jail or both, upon conviction".⁵¹⁹ The government has been reported to maintain lists of "devious and dangerous" religious sects (such as Shi'a, Ahmadis, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the Latter Day Saints and Al-Arqam). These groups have been subject to government efforts at conversion, as well as arrest and detention.⁵²⁰ The government also established a religious police force whose personnel have the authority to "cover any insult to Islam", but must "enforce Islamic laws against Muslims only".⁵²¹⁵²²

According to Joseph Chinyong Liow, Senior Fellow at Brookings: the "politicisation of Islam is taking place against a backdrop of an exceedingly strong state which has taken it upon itself to police Islam and curtail any expression of faith that departs from the mainstream Shafi'i tradition. For example, sermons released by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs or the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Department have included statements such as "Muslims must understand Jews are the main enemy to Muslims" (March 2013) and "divisions among Muslims is caused by Christians and Jews" (January 2014).⁵²³ While Muslims are permitted – sometimes, with the encouragement of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs – to proselytise non-Muslims, non-Muslims are prohibited to proselytise Muslims.⁵²⁴

National identity cards specify religious affiliation and are used by the government to identify who is subject to Sharia law. This discriminatory policy breaches the ICCPR under which countries have no right to ask for someone's religion.⁵²⁵ The state also holds exclusive rights to allocate land for places of worship and non-Muslim communities frequently report difficulties obtaining required permits. In November 2015, the Selangor state finally approved the construction of a Christian church, six years after the request was made.⁵²⁶ The debate has coincided with the confiscation of tens of thousands of Bibles in Malaysia. In a recent example, Selangor's Islamic enforcement department confiscated 321 Bibles from the Malaysian Bible Society in 2014, and the organisation continued to be under investigation in 2015.⁵²⁷ Shi'a Muslims, Ahmadis, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of the

516 IHEU, 2015 Freedom of Thought Report, p263

517 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238522.pdf>

518 Ibid.

519 The Star, Selangor right in banning un-Islamic books, says Federal court
<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/09/28/court-selangor-ban-book/>

520 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 5
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238522.pdf>

521 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 172

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

522 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 171

<http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

523 Forward, A close encounter with Asia's anti-Semitic capital

<http://forward.com/culture/327354/a-close-encounter-with-asias-anti-semitic-capital/>

524 Freedom House, Country Report Malaysia 2015

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/malaysia>

525 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015, p. 265
<http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

526 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 6
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238522.pdf>

527 Christian Today, Fears of crackdown against Bible Society in Malaysia

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/fears.of.crackdown.against.bible.society.in.malaysia/57502.htm>

Latter Day Saints and Al-Arqam are also groups facing increased harassment, which have been subject to government efforts at conversion, as well as arrest and detention.⁵²⁸ Police interfered in the Ashura festival and arbitrarily arrested 16 Shi'a worshippers. Other members of the community were asked to come to the police station for questioning, including women and children.⁵²⁹

2b. Non-government restrictions

Poll results in 2013 found that 86% of the Muslims in Malaysia it surveyed said that they favour making Islamic law the official law in the country; and 66% of Malaysian Muslims who were in favour of making Sharia the law of the land also favoured punishments like cutting off the hands of thieves or robbers.⁵³⁰ This is symptomatic of the rise in Islamic extremism in Malaysia that has only been fanned by many politicians. Recent developments show a society that becomes increasingly intolerant to religious diversity and moves towards a more politicised Islam nationwide. Religious groups deemed "deviant," such as Shi'a, Ahmadis, and Baha'is, suffer particularly. Anti-Semitic sentiments are also on the rise in Malaysia. The Anti-Defamation League published a poll last year indicating that 61% of Malaysians hold anti-Semitic views, as opposed to only 22% in the rest of Asia.⁵³¹ This includes high profile politicians like former PM Mahathir Mohamad, who recently said Sunni and Shi'a Muslims should stop killing each other because it makes the Jews rejoice.⁵³²

MALDIVES

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 29

1. Religious Demographics

The indigenous portion of the 400,000 population are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, but due to the presence of roughly 100,000 foreign workers – largely from the subcontinent, Maldives is home to various religious minorities.

2a. Government restrictions

The constitution not only recognises Islam as the state religion, but makes its practice mandatory on all Maldivian citizens. The Non-Discrimination Clause in the 2008-Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of "race, national origin, colour, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political or other opinion, property, birth of other status, or native island", conspicuously leaving out religion as it is a legal requirement that every Maldivian citizen "preserve and protect the State religion of Islam".⁵³³ The country's administrative elite, such as the President, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and judges, must be Sunni Muslim, non-Muslims may not vote or hold public offices.⁵³⁴ A strictly government approved reading of Islam is taught in schools and Mosques, and is expected in practice.⁵³⁵ Even the certification of imams, the content of their sermons and any public discussion of Islam has to be explicitly approved by the government or its local councils. Most mosques are also maintained and funded by the government and there are several cases where Muslims have complained of discrimination or persecution for not being seen to adhere faithfully

528 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 5
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238522.pdf>

529 ABNA, 16 arrested Shiites at Ashura
<http://en.abna24.com/service/east-asia/archive/2015/10/24/716696/story.html>

530 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society, 30 April 2013, pp.46, 52 <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/04/worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-full-report.pdf>

531 Forward, A close encounter with Asia's anti-Semitic capital
<http://forward.com/culture/327354/a-close-encounter-with-asias-anti-semitic-capital/>

532 Free Malaysia Today, Dr M tells Sunnis to accept Shias as Muslims
<http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/09/15/dr-m-tells-sunnis-to-accept-shias-as-muslims/>

533 Constitute Project, Constitution of the Republic of Maldives <https://www.constituteproject.org/ontology/Maldives?lang=en>

534 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p.2
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

535 Ibid P.3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

to the government-approved version of Islam.⁵³⁶ Non-Muslim foreign residents can practice their religion in private, but may not congregate for prayer, invite Maldivian citizens to participate in their religious practices or ever acquire Maldivian citizenship. The regulations about religion are generally not enforced on tourist islands, where alcohol may be imported so long as it is only sold to tourists; and where religious items, such as Bibles or even Christmas cards, may be brought in so long as they are not used to proselytise Maldivian citizens.⁵³⁷ Civil law is subordinate to Islamic law and severe capital punishments are in place, including the death penalty for apostasy, but have yet to be enforced.

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

Throughout the 2014-2015 reporting period, freedom of religion remained severely restricted in the Maldives, and the trend towards a more conservative interpretation of the religion of Islam continued, resulting in sectarian rhetoric and occasional physical attacks against Muslims supporting a liberal strand of their faith as well as religious minority groups.⁵³⁸ Vigilante mobs using violent interpretations of Islam have been known to abduct Maldivian citizens suspected of being irreligious, blindfold them in remote places and hold vigilante trials. Those victimised tended to be online activists advocating atheism or secularism.⁵³⁹ Christians are also unable to openly live their faith, since Church gatherings and Christian places of worship are outlawed.⁵⁴⁰

NEPAL

1. Religious demographic

Of a population of 30.4 million, Hindus constitute 81.3%, Buddhists 9%, and Muslims (the majority of whom are Sunni) 4.4%—other groups constituting less than 5% include Kirats (indigenous religion with Hindu influence) and Christians.⁵⁴¹ Those without any religious affiliation constitute less than 1% of the population.⁵⁴²

2a. Government restrictions

Nepal does not feature in the 2014-2015 FoRB report, however, the intergroup finds that recent developments are cause for concern and warrant further analysis.

While the new 2015 constitution preserves Nepal as a secular state, it also increases restrictions on religious conversion.⁵⁴³ Section 26 (1) makes reference only to the right to profess, practice, preserve, or be free from religion, but not to choose or to change one's religion. It is unclear whether this comprises of any religion, including one adopted by choice, or whether this could be interpreted as a pretext to limit religion to the one inherited through birth, family tradition, or cultural predominance.⁵⁴⁴ The constitution also makes proselytism and conversion criminal acts, banning the right to peacefully spread one's faith.⁵⁴⁵ A recent proposal for an 'anti-conversion bill' is fuelling concerns regarding the government's stance providing its citizens with the freedom to change religion.⁵⁴⁶ The bill is currently tabled in the parliament⁵⁴⁷, another issue that is coming up relates to the religious nature of Nepal's state. The current ruling coalition partner (RPP-N) promises to "table

536 Ibid P.3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238712.pdf>

537 UK Government, Maldives Travel advice 2015 <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/maldives/local-laws-and-customs>

538 Freedom House, Maldives 2015 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/maldives>

539 IHEU, Freedom of Thought Report 2015 p.312 <http://freethoughtreport.com/download-the-report/>

540 Open Doors, World Watch List 2015, Maldives

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/maldives/>

541 2013 Nepal International Religious Freedom Report, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222549.pdf>.

542 Freedom of Thought Report 2015, Nepal, p. 314-315.

543 Freedom of Thought Report 2015, Nepal, p. 314-315.

544 ADF International, submission of evidence to the Intergroup, commenting on report draft, p5-6, 26/05/2016

545 Ibid.

546 <http://www.ucanews.com/news/anti-conversion-law-will-send-nepal-backward/75477>

547 Anti-conversion bill will send Nepal backward, 14 March 2016, <http://www.ucanews.com/news/anti-conversion-law-will-send-nepal-backward/75477>.

an amendment motion in Parliament to reinstate Nepal as a Hindu nation.”⁵⁴⁸

For the time being, reports of official harassment are rare, indicating religious tolerance is broadly practiced. That being said, Christian groups report substantial difficulty registering as religious organisations, which in practice leaves them unable to own land.⁵⁴⁹ In a puzzling move, the government declared Christmas will no longer be a public holiday in Nepal. In April of 2016 it decided to only grant Christmas leave to officials whereas it has been a public holiday for everyone for the past eight years.⁵⁵⁰

NORTH KOREA

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 25

1. Religious demographics

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) has a population of roughly 24.9 million.⁵⁵¹ Because of the country’s isolation, no recent or reliable statistics regarding religious demographics are available. Historically, North Korea has traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism and had a sizeable Christian population prior the Korean War in 1950.⁵⁵² Since the establishment of the current regime in 1948, Kim Il-sung and his successors have dismissed all forms of religion as a direct challenge to the personality cult of the ruling family.⁵⁵³

2a. Government restrictions

North Korea is considered by many to be the most severe violator of FoRB in the world. North Korea is officially an atheist state. Though its Constitution nominally protects the rights of its population to worship, this sits beside a restriction that “religion must not be used as a pretext for drawing in foreign forces or for harming the State or social order”.⁵⁵⁴ This condition is so broadly interpreted such that the practical reality in the DPRK is that any form of religious practice beyond the auspices of the government is repressed. The extreme nature—even by dictatorial standards—of central government control in the DPRK has resulted in the country becoming the most repressive of freedom of religion and belief in the world today.⁵⁵⁵ During the 2014-2015 reporting period, there was no change in the overall status of respect for religious freedom in the country, which remains completely non-existent. Individuals who secretly engage in religious practices are subject to arrest and severe punishments like torture and, in some instances, execution. Estimates indicate that among a total of 200,000 prisoners, “thousands of religious believers and their families are imprisoned in labor camps”.⁵⁵⁶ The North Korean leadership seeks to provide a domestic interpretation of Marxist-Leninism via the twin ideologies of Kimilsungism. These principles feed the cult personality rule of Kim Jong-un, which scholars have labelled a “civil religion” or “pseudo-religion” by combining “a relationship with god (i.e. the Supreme Leader Kim Il-sung) and a sincere

548 Ruling coalition partner want parliament to reinstate country as Hindu state, 3 April 2016 <http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-nepal-s-ruling-coalition-partner-wants-parliament-to-reinstate-country-as-hindu-state-2197899>; <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/Nepals-coalition-partner-seeks-Hindu-State-status/articleshow/51673390.cms>.

549 Freedom in the World 2015, Freedom House, Nepal, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/nepal>.

550 Protests for Christmas as public holiday, 4 April 2016, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2016-04-04/protests-for-christmas-as-public-holiday.html>.

551 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238516.pdf>

552 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 51

553 KINU, Paper on Human Rights in North Korea 2014, p. 217 http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/pub/pub_04_01.jsp?bid=DATA04&page=1&num=40&mode=view&category

554 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238516.pdf>

555 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 51 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/North%20Korea%202015.pdf>

556 Ibid.

faith (...) with a religion that prescribes loyalty to the nation.”⁵⁵⁷ Absolute obedience to the Supreme Leader is demanded and all expression of individualised thought, belief and behaviour is coercively suppressed.

99.7% of defectors from North Korea believe there was no religious freedom in the country and just 4.2% had seen a Bible in their life.⁵⁵⁸ KINU reports that no Protestant or Catholic churches exist in North Korea, with the exception of the capital, where four state-controlled churches reportedly operate: two Protestant churches (Bongsu and Chilgo), a Roman Catholic Church (Changchun) and the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church. In addition, the government allegedly allowed some forms of religious education including three-year college training programmes for Buddhist and Protestant clergy and a graduate institution for training pastors. In-depth information, such as the number of congregants at these churches, is unknown or unverifiable. While North Koreans may not have a firm understanding of these institutions, they are aware of the existence of the Bible and ceremonies from lecture series such as “let us resolutely crush the enemy’s cunning conspiracy and malicious agitation to spread religion in our society”⁵⁵⁹. Christians are routinely sent to labour camps and referred to as “crazy people”.⁵⁶⁰ It is no surprise that the government “considers the spread of Christianity a particularly serious threat, since it challenges ideologically the official personality cult and provides a platform for social and political organisation and interaction outside the realm of the state”⁵⁶¹ to the point that even persons found to have been in contact with Christian churches or nationals of the Republic of Korea may be ‘forcibly “disappeared” into political prison camps, imprisoned in ordinary prisons or even summarily executed.’⁵⁶² Estimates suggest that 200,000–400,000 Christians live in North Korea of whom approximately 50,000–70,000 are currently being held captive in “Nazi-like concentration camps and prisons”.⁵⁶³ Survivors have testified that the general purpose of the camps is to oppress and degrade, with women routinely raped, and anyone caught trying to escape publicly executed.⁵⁶⁴ In May 2014, South Korea Baptist missionary, Kim Jung-wook, was sentenced to life in prison by a North Korean court for the crime of establishing up to 500 Christian underground churches. According to reports, Kim Jong-un ordered the execution of an additional 33 people, all from North Korea, who were suspected of having been in touch with Jung-wook.⁵⁶⁵

PAKISTAN

Intergroup Focal Country - for explanation and recommendations see page 26

1a. Religious demographics

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a population of 196 million, 95% of whom are Muslim; 75% Sunni (including the largest Ahmadi community in the world) and 25% Shi’a. The other 5% is comprised of Hindus, Christians, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Baha’is, Sikhs, Buddhists and others, with a very small Jewish minority, and 0.5% listing no religious affiliation.⁵⁶⁶

2a. Government restrictions

557 APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, Religion and Belief in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea 2014, p. 16 <https://freedomdeclared.org/media/Religion-and-Belief-in-the-DPRK-APPG-on-FoRB-report-Dec-2014.pdf>

558 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 5
<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238516.pdf>

559 Ibid., p224.

560 CSW, Country Profile North Korea 2014 http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/country.asp?s=gi&urn=North_Korea

561 COI, Human Rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, p. 7
<http://www.cfr.org/north-korea/report-un-commission-inquiry-human-rights-democratic-peoples-republic-korea/p32393>

562 Ibid. p. 9

563 Open Doors, North Korea Magazine 2014, p. 12
http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/north_korea/documents/Jan_2014_Magazine.pdf

564 Daily Mail, Raped by officials then executed so they stay silent
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2518152/North-Korean-prison-camp-officials-raped-women-killed-secret.html>

565 Freedom House, Country report North Korea 2015
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/north-korea>

566 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238716.pdf>

Article 2 of Pakistan's constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. While Article 20 ostensibly grants that every citizen shall have the right to "profess, practice and propagate" their religion, it also states that this is "subject to law, public order and morality". Blasphemy laws appear in articles 295-298 of the Pakistan Penal Code⁵⁶⁷. Offences include defiling the Qu'ran, derogatory remarks against the Prophet Mohammed, and acts that "outrage religious feelings". Punishments range from fines, imprisonment up to life and execution.⁵⁶⁸ Furthermore, these laws disproportionately discriminate against minorities: Ahmadis suffer 37% of accusations, and Christians 14%, despite constituting only <2% of the population respectively⁵⁶⁹. In a positive development, in October 2015, the Pakistani Supreme Court expressed concern about widespread misuse of blasphemy laws and issued a detailed judgment warning against false blasphemy accusations and stating that in Islam a false accusation can be as serious as blasphemy itself⁵⁷⁰. Its findings are in line with a 60-page report on blasphemy in Pakistan, released by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in November 2015.⁵⁷¹ The most prominent blasphemy case in recent years has been that of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five sentenced to death by hanging for "defaming the Prophet". In July 2015, Asia Bibi's death sentence was suspended, pending an appeal hearing scheduled for March 2016.⁵⁷² During the 2014-2015 reporting period, five individuals were sentenced to death on blasphemy charges and one to life in prison, bringing the total number of blasphemy prisoners in Pakistan to 38.⁵⁷³

Discrimination exists in the legal system beyond blasphemy laws too. There is no permitted category for the non-religious in national and legal documentation.⁵⁷⁴ Hindu marriages do not enjoy legal status, which has implications on inheritance rights for women and has paved the way for their sexual exploitation. Ahmadis are subject to the most severe officially-sanctioned discrimination: they are banned by law to "pose as Muslims" (may be sentenced for 3 years in prison for using the Muslim greeting "peace be upon you"⁵⁷⁵) and are explicitly deemed non-Muslims, all of whom must register as such in a separate electorate which only votes for 5 percent of the seats, with the other 95 percent reserved for Muslim voters only. The non-religious are barred from holding public office.⁵⁷⁶ There is no legal requirement for individuals to practice or affiliate nominally with a religious group, but the highest political offices are reserved for Muslims only, including the President, the Prime Minister, and the judges in the Federal Sharia Court. The Federal Court has the right to strike down any law it considers to be repugnant to the injunctions of Islam.⁵⁷⁷ At odds with the country's otherwise very strict Islamic codex, non-Muslim missionaries are permitted to proselytise-though only among non-Muslim communities, so long as they do not actively preach against Islam. They require a specific visa, which is valid from two to five years and allows them no more than one entry into the country over the course of one year⁵⁷⁸, and reissued visas are often denied to Christian missionaries.⁵⁷⁹

2b. Non-governmental hostilities

The Taliban and other terrorist groups have continued to severely persecute religious minorities in Pakistan. The specific targetting of the Christian community has continued to be extreme, and is often explained by terrorist spokesmen to be carried out in revenge for Western intervention (such as US drone strikes) – with the Pakistan Christian community being considered "agents of the

567 Pakistani, Pakistan Penal Code <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/1860/actXLVof1860.html>

568 Freedom House, Policing Belief: The Impact of Blasphemy on Human Rights <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-reports/policing-belief-impact-blasphemy-laws-human-rights#.VP2FEnSzUqN>

569 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12621225>

570 The Guardian, Pakistan supreme court warns against false blasphemy accusations

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/28/pakistan-supreme-court-blasphemy-mumtaz-qadri>

571 APPG International Freedom of Religion or Belief, Pakistan report: Blasphemy trials are fundamentally unfair <https://freedomdeclared.org/news/pakistan-trials-for-blasphemy-fundamentally-unfair-says-report/>

572 News.VA, Asia Bibi, a new hearing on March 26 <http://www.news.va/en/news/asiapakistan-asia-bibi-a-new-hearing-on-march-26>

573 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 111 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Pakistan%202015.pdf>

574 IHEU, 2015 Freedom of Thought Report, p318

575 Pakistan's Ahmadis Battle Mob and State for Identity' (*The Express Tribune*, 28 November 2015) <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1000013/pakistans-ahmadis-battle-mob-and-state-for-identity/>> accessed 26 May 2016

576 IHEU, 2015 Freedom of Thought Report, p316

577 Ibid.

578 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2014, p. 3 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238716.pdf>

579 Monthly e-Magazine *Minority Concern of Pakistan*, Issue No. 69, July 2015. (Available at: www.minorityconcernpk.com)

west".⁵⁸⁰ On Easter Sunday March 27th 2016, 74 people were killed, including 29 children, and over 370 were injured in a suicide blast at Gulshan Iqbal Park in Lahore, Pakistan. At the time of blast, about 3,000 people were visiting the park while some Christian families were celebrating Easter following prayer services. Ehsanullah Ehsan, a spokesman of the Jamat-ul-Ahrar, (a splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban), announced: "We claim responsibility for the attack on Christians as they were celebrating Easter." In other cases over the reporting period at least 39 Christians were killed in Pakistan on grounds of religion, and 17 churches were damaged or destroyed.⁵⁸¹ The latest attack took place on June 4th, where gunmen opened fire in a Lahore Catholic church.⁵⁸² It is estimated that 11,000 Pakistani Christian asylum seekers are currently in Thailand, due to religious persecution.⁵⁸³ For example in March 2015 Jamat-ul-Ahrar claimed responsibility for a twin suicide bombing targetting Christian worshippers at two churches (St. John's and Christ Church) in the Youhanabad area of Lahore, killing 17 and injuring 70.⁵⁸⁴ Furthermore, Catholic NGOs estimate that around 700 Christian girls are abducted and forcibly married to Muslim men and converted to Islam each year in Pakistan⁵⁸⁵, and in April and May 2016, it was reported that 18 Christian girls were kidnapped and forcefully converted in Punjab.⁵⁸⁶ This bombing provoked a rare show of anger from the Christian community, which organised protests across Lahore which turned violent when some protesters began throwing stones and police used tear gas and water cannons to pacify the crowd.⁵⁸⁷

Other minority groups also suffer grave non-governmental violence. In May 2015, a Hindu parliamentarian claimed that 5,000 Hindus emigrate from Pakistan every year due to discriminatory treatment, forced conversions and fears for their safety.⁵⁸⁸ Furthermore, "police, if present, have failed to stop attackers before people are killed, and the government has not cracked down on the groups that repeatedly target Shi'a Muslims."⁵⁸⁹ In October 2015, a Lashkar-e-Jhangvi suicide bomber targetted a Shi'a shrine in Bolan, Balochistan, killing 11.⁵⁹⁰ However, in 2015 and 2016, the Pakistani Government has had some success in targetting this terrorist cell.⁵⁹¹ In November 2015, Sunnis attacked and burned down a factory in Jhelum, Punjab province following rumours an Ahmadi employee had desecrated the Quran. The mob abducted an Ahmadi factory worker and tried to burn him alive in the factory's boiler, however others helped him to escape.⁵⁹² Shortly after an Ahmadi mosque was attacked and occupied⁵⁹³. Further, numerous shops in Lahore display signs with statements like "Ahmadis are not allowed"⁵⁹⁴.

Publically criticising reform to blasphemy laws is dangerous. In 2011 politicians Minister Shahbaz Bhatti and Salmaan Taseer were assassinated in separate incidents for reasons related.

SRI LANKA

1. Religious Demographics

Of Sri Lanka's 22m population, 70% are Buddhist, 12% Hindu, 7.4% Christians (80% Roman Catholic)

580 Mughal, Aftab Alexander, *Aftermath of the Eater Sunday Carnage*, Continental News, Paris, France, 6 April

581 Open Doors, World Watch List report 2016, p.8 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/documents/ww-report-160113.pdf>

582 <http://www.christiansinpakistan.com/lahore-unknown-men-open-fire-at-the-st-joseph-catholic-church-in-the-small-hours/>

583 Mughal, Aftab Alexander, *Christian Asylum Seekers in Thailand Face Persecution*, Asia Sentinel, Hong Kong, 10 March 2016. (Available on: <http://www.asiasentinel.com/society/christian-asylum-seekers-thailand-persecution/>.)

584 BBC, Deadly blasts hit Pakistan churches in Lahore <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-31894708>

585 Open Doors, World Watch List 2016 <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/worldwatch/pakistan.php>

586 <http://www.christiansinpakistan.com/going-from-bad-to-worse-during-april-may-18-christian-girls-kidnapped-and-forcefully-converted-in-punjab/>

587 BBC, Pakistan Christian protest turns violent <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-31904690>

588 Freedom House, Country Report Pakistan 2015

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/pakistan>

589 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 111 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Pakistan%202015.pdf>

590 Dawn, Banned group claims Bolan attack <http://www.dawn.com/news/1215223>

591 Al Jazeera, Pakistan police kill leader of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi group

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/07/pakistan-police-kill-leader-lashkar-jhangvi-group-150729044020252.html>

592 Ibid.

593 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ahmadi-mosque-attacked-in-pakistan-after-blasphemy-rumor_us_5650a369e4b0879a5b0b4242

594 Police Remove Anti-Ahmadi Posters from Lahore's Largest IT Market' (*The Express Tribune*, 11 December 2015) <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1008068/police-remove-anti-ahmadi-posters-from-lahores-largest-it-market/>> accessed 26 May 2016

and 9.7% Muslim (mostly Sunni)⁵⁹⁵.

2a. Government restrictions

Article 9 of the constitution says: "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14",⁵⁹⁶ which guarantee freedom of religion or belief and freedom of worship respectively. One major legal issue has been a 2008 court circular issued by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana and Religious Affairs, which involves an "opaque and slow" process for new religious group registrations, and results in monitoring and harassment by local police.⁵⁹⁷ For example, the National Evangelical Christian Alliance of Sri Lanka reported that 30 churches were forced to close in 2014.⁵⁹⁸ Since coming into office January 2015, President Sirisena has made encouraging actions for FoRB. In February 2015 he affirmed: "While protecting the country's main religion, Buddhism, we also protect the rights and freedom of Hindu, Muslim, and Catholic people in practicing their religion and create consensus among them to build up this country". He also created 3 new ministries to handle religious affairs for Muslim, Christian and Hindu communities respectively; and disbanded the special police unit for religious affairs, which was considered by many a government instrument biased in favour of Buddhist dominance.

2b. Non-Governmental restrictions

The political aftermath of the civil war and on-going allegations of war crimes have continued to exacerbate religious and ethnic tensions.⁵⁹⁹ These have triggered a wave of attacks against ethnic minorities, predominantly at the hand of nationalist Buddhist groups including Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Rayana Balaya and Sinhala Ravaya. Religious freedom violations over the past two years have been linked to hate speech by these extremist groups. In June 2014 a 500 strong Buddhist nationalist mob coordinated an attack against Muslims in the Kalutara district, killing 4 and forcing 10,000 to flee.⁶⁰⁰ Furthermore, UCA News reported that the Ravana Balaya had contacted more than 20 evangelical prayer services in 2014, telling pastors to stop holding services and accusing them of trying to convert Buddhists and Hindus by offering gifts and money.⁶⁰¹

VIETNAM

1. Religious demographics

Vietnam has a population of approximately 94.3 million.⁶⁰² The Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA) estimates that some 90% of the population hold religious beliefs.⁶⁰³ Since traditional beliefs are not counted official, government statistics show only 26% following a recognised religion (12% Buddhist, 7% Catholic, 5% Cao Dai, 1.6% Protestant and 1.1% Hoa Hao Buddhists, with an additional small number of Muslims, Baha'is and Hindus.⁶⁰⁴

2a. Government restrictions

595 'Census of Population and Housing 2011' <<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/index.php?fileName=pop43&gp=Activities&tpl=3>> accessed 26 May 2016

596 The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Parliament LK, 9 September 2010 <http://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution.pdf>

597 CSW, Sri Lanka: Freedom of Religion or Belief, April 2015, p. 5

598 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p. 202 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Sri%20Lanka%202015.pdf>

599 USCIRF, Annual Report 2014, p. 161

600 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Sri%20Lanka%202015.pdf>

601 CSW, Sri Lanka: Freedom of Religion or Belief, April 2015, p. 5

602 CIA, The World Fact Book-Vietnam

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vn.html><https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vn.html>

603 US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2015, p.2 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238558.pdf><http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/238558.pdf>

604 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E><http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14914&LangID=E>

While Vietnam's constitution includes some limited provisions for FoRB, these fall short of UDHR standards, and further government legislation and enforcement severely restricts FoRB. Registration for religious groups is onerous, which the then UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion of Belief Heiner Bielefeldt claimed to be "excessive... certainly amounts to a high burden" and called for a more simplified process.⁶⁰⁵ Further, registration is "no guarantee that freedom of religion or belief is fully respected".⁶⁰⁶ Restrictive decrees and regulations are enforced that suppress religious activities of minority groups, particularly targetting Buddhists (any groups who stand independent of the government controlled VBS denomination), Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Catholics, and Protestants. Individuals have been imprisoned for religious practice. Harrassments include violent attacks by police and hired thugs. All religious texts must be pre-approved. The state often seeks to target groups that it believes are involved in wider political activities.⁶⁰⁷ At least 100-200 prisoners of conscience are detained in Vietnam, some for their religious activity or FoRB advocacy.

Currently the government is in the process of debating a new draft law on religion and belief, the final version of which is likely to be passed in 2016. While it exhibits a few positive features (including FoRB rights to non-citizens, and a commitment to increasing the transparency of the registration process), it has been strongly criticised⁶⁰⁸ by civil society and international actors: in particular, it continues the onerous registration process, extends government interference in internal religious affairs, and unhelpfully is ambiguous in language.⁶⁰⁹

605 Human Rights Council 28th session agenda 3 Report on Mission to Viet Nam (21 to 31 July 2014)

606 <https://freedomhouse.org/article/joint-statement-concern-vietnam-s-draft-law-religion>

607 CSW, Freedom of Religion or Belief in Vietnam: The alternative report

<http://www.cswusa.org/filerequest/3325.pdf><http://www.cswusa.org/filerequest/3325.pdf>

608 USCIRF, Annual Report 2015, p.127 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Vietnam%202015.pdf><http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Vietnam 2015.pdf>

609 <https://freedomhouse.org/article/joint-statement-concern-vietnam-s-draft-law-religion>

ANNEX I

INTERGROUP ACTIVITY REPORT

As the Intergroup seeks to advance the EU's commitment to FoRB in the coming year, we expect to build on our work from the previous year. For reference, here follows a list of some of our actions over the reporting period (June 2015 – June 2016). For more information please visit our website at www.religiousfreedom.eu.

- **8th September 2015: Open letter to the Prime Minister of Nepal.**⁶¹⁰
- **25th September 2015: Open letter to the Prime Minister of Vietnam.**⁶¹¹
- **21st October 2015: Conference in the EP on Defending Freedoms of Religion and Belief for Minorities in Asia, with Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). (Peter van Dalen MEP)**
- **17th November 2015: Statement for a campaign on "Europeans speaking out against Iran's economic oppression of Baha'is".**⁶¹² (Dennis de Jong MEP)
- **10th December 2015: IHEU Freedom Thought Report Launch (MEP Dennis de Jong).**⁶¹³
- **19th January 2016: Statement welcomes release of Iranian Pastor Abedini.**⁶¹⁴
- **20th January 2016: Launch of Open Door's World Watch List concerning the Persecution of Christians in the World (Peter van Dalen MEP).**⁶¹⁵
- **22nd January 2016: Intergroup member Teresa Gimenez Barbat MEP issued a written question to the VP/HR on the rising number of blasphemy sentences worldwide.**
- **5th February 2016: Press Statement on EP resolution calling ISIS/Daesh violence against religious minorities "Genocide".**⁶¹⁶
- **23rd February, 2016: Event concerning ISIS' Crimes Against Humanity in the Middle East (Marian Harkin MEP & Miltiadis Kyrkos MEP)**⁶¹⁷
- **9th May, 2016: Intergroup welcomes the appointment of the first EU Special Envoy on FoRB, Mr. Jan Figel.**⁶¹⁸

Other Related Events/Actions

- **16th September 2015: Intergroup Represented by MEP Peter Van Dalen at the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFORB) Conference in New York**

⁶¹⁰ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2015/09/08/open-letter-to-the-prime-minister-of-nepal/>

⁶¹¹ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2015/09/08/open-letter-to-the-prime-minister-of-nepal/>

⁶¹² <http://news.bahai.org/story/1083>

⁶¹³ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2015/12/09/intergroup-co-chairdennis-de-jong-mep-calls-to-end-the-discrimination-persecution-and-threat-faced-by-non-religious-minorities-in-the-world/>

⁶¹⁴ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2016/01/19/intergroup-chairs-welcome-release-of-iranian-pastor-abedini/>

⁶¹⁵ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2016/01/25/persecution-of-christians-significantly-increased-in-2015-2/>

⁶¹⁶ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2016/02/05/ep-resolution-calls-isis-violence-against-religious-minorities-genocide/>

⁶¹⁷ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/2016/02/25/isis-victim-shares-painful-testimony-in-the-ep-hosted-by-marian-harkin-mep/>

⁶¹⁸ <http://www.religiousfreedom.eu/wp-admin/post.php?post=311&action=edit>

- 5th October 2015: Intergroup Co-Chair, MEP Dennis de Jong speaks at the European Parliament event hosted by the Global Interfaith & Secular Alliance on the religious and secular case for freedom of religion and belief.
- November 2016: Intergroup co-Chair Peter van Dalen led a delegation of MEPs to meet with government Ministers and members of the Prime Minister's office to discuss concrete proposals for reform of blasphemy laws.
- 25th January 2016: Intergroup Co-Chair, MEP Dennis de Jong speaks at the working group meeting for the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions on the External relations of the EU and to give a short presentation on the state of implementation of the FoRB Guidelines
- 19th April 2016: FoRB Training session at the EEAS Intergroup Co-Chair, MEP Dennis de Jong speaks at one of the workshops on the FoRB Toolkit
- 19th May, 2016: Intergroup Co-Chair MEP Dennis de Jong was invited to Copenhagen to give a public lecture at the Danish Human Rights Institute, which was then followed by an address at the launch of the Danish Parliamentary FoRB Network.

Other Meetings include:

- Sarah Renaldi and Sofia Lemmetyinen: European Commission-EIDHR
- Rachel Bayani: Bahá'í International Community Director
- Syrian Christian minorities: CSW MENA delegation
- Kyaw Win: Founder and Director of the Burman Human Rights Network
- EPRID: European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination
- Jan Figel: EU special representative for International Freedom of Religion and Belief
- Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK: Mahmood Rafiq Head of External Relations

ANNEX II

ABBREVIATIONS

AFET - European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee

CAR-Central African Republic

CSW - Christian Solidary Worldwide

Daesh - so called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL)

DROI - European Parliament Human Rights Subcommittee

EC-European Commission

EEAS-European External Action Service

EP-European Parliament

EP Intergroup-European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance

EU-European Union

EUSR-European Union Special Representative for Human Rights

FoRB-Freedom of Religion or Belief

HR/VP-High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission

HRC - Human Rights Council (UN)

HRW-Human Rights Watch

HRWF-Human Rights Without Frontiers

ICCPR-International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IHEU-International Humanist and Ethical Union

IPPFoRB-International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief

MENA region-Middle East and North Africa region

MEP-Member of the European Parliament

NGO-Non-Governmental Organization

OD-Open Doors

OSCE-Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

UDHR-Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNHRC-United Nations Human Rights Council

UN - United Nations

UNGA-United Nations General Assembly

UPR-Universal Periodic Review

US-United States

USCIRF - United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

The European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance is a group of like-minded MEPs dedicated to ensuring the EU, in its external actions, promotes and protects the right to freedom of religion or belief.

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