

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN PRESENTS

# PERSECUTORS *OF THE YEAR*

20  
23

THE ANNUAL LIST OF  
THE WORLD'S TOP  
OPPRESSORS



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Letter from the President

Religious persecution is a mostly hidden crisis. The masses know at some level that it exists ‘somewhere’ but would be hard-pressed to cite any examples.

Unfortunately, there are an estimated 200 to 300 million Christians who suffer persecution worldwide. I’ve served this targeted group for more than two decades and still wonder why there is no widespread outcry or outrage on their behalf.

Instead, it’s mostly the sound of crickets from the media. So, we created this persecution annual report to educate and illuminate the who, the what, and the where for the press, those on Capitol Hill, and the public at large.

There were several persecution flashpoints this year, including in Pakistan where a 5,000-strong mob of fundamentalist Muslims destroyed hundreds of homes and two dozen churches in the Christian enclave of Jaranwala.

In Nigeria, like every year for the past 20, thousands of Christians were murdered and many more lost their homes and land, valuable ground their families had cultivated and lived on for a millennium. In other countries, Christians were pulled from buses and assassinated.

Our brothers and sisters are murdered, imprisoned, or tortured the world over, simply for identifying as a follower of Jesus.

After 20 years at the helm of International Christian Concern (ICC), I am inspired by the courage of these Christians on the geographical fringes of our faith.

These believers hold onto and even thrive in their faith while enduring unimaginable pain. They are the spiritual engine, the ever-expanding church in places like China, Iran, and North Korea. Our “glimmer of hope” section highlights a few of their stories and unveils the resilience of the body of Christ.

I am incredibly grateful for our global team that contributed to the release of this report and ask you to widely share it.

No matter your place or role, together we will open prison doors and bring light to the darkness so prevalent in this world.

God bless you.



**JEFF KING**  
President  
International Christian Concern  
*Persecution.org*

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

- MATTHEW 11:28-29 NIV



# Understanding Persecution

## Sources of Persecution

**EVIL**

*“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*  
Ephesians 6:12

**MARXISM**

In communist countries like Cuba, China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea, Christians are targeted because of their allegiance to Christ instead of the Marxist regimes.

**RADICAL ISLAM**


Fundamentalist Islam is intolerant toward other faiths, and Christians suffer greatly in radical Muslim countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Indonesia.

**DISCRIMINATION**


Christian persecution occurs because of social and cultural discrimination. Human beings in general are afraid and intolerant of that which is different.

### TYPES OF PERSECUTION


**DIRECT**



ARRESTS  
IMPRISONMENT/  
TORTURE




ASSASSINATION  
MARTYRDOM




ATTACKS ON LIFE  
& PROPERTY


**INDIRECT**




EDUCATION  
DISCRIMINATION




JOB  
DISCRIMINATION




RESTRICTIONS  
ON CHURCHES &  
BIBLES




FORCED  
CONVERSIONS



CRIMES AGAINST  
WOMEN




DENIAL OF  
RIGHTS




LEGAL  
RESTRICTIONS

# Understanding ICC


## A Holistic Attack on Persecution

**WE ADVOCATE**

by working with government leaders and challenging persecuting countries.

**WE ASSIST**

by coming alongside Christians in their time of greatest need – through rescue, relief, and restoration.

**WE AWAKEN**


by bringing persecution awareness to the sacred and secular world.




### Our Mission

International Christian Concern (ICC) exists to relieve the suffering of the worldwide persecuted church and help it grow in strength and breadth. ICC accomplishes its mission through effective assistance, advocacy, and awareness with integrity toward God and our donors.

## What Sets ICC Apart?

**AGILE**


We are fast, nimble, and get in where others can't. We execute difficult projects on the ground.

**INTEGRITY**

We have a 5-Star Charity Navigator Rating with 28 years in ministry. We have a long history of growth.

**LONG-TERM CARE**

We work with victims for the long-term when needed but don't create dependency.

**MINISTRY FIRST**

We put ministry before fundraising, serving the Lord and the persecuted first. We believe funds follow Godly work.

**OUR STAFF**

ICC has about 50 worldwide staff—half in Washington, D.C., and half spread throughout the world. Regional managers (Africa, Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia) and project coordinators oversee indigenous staff to assist victims and report attacks. Expert analysts work closely with government officials and advocate for victims on Capitol Hill and beyond. ICC strives daily to make the world aware of the suffering of persecuted believers.



# Countries





# Nigeria

TURNING A BLIND EYE TO GENOCIDE

## Summary

- In 128 days spanning from March 4 to July 6, 55 separate attacks resulted in the deaths of 549 Christians from reports gathered by ICC alone.
- Radical Muslim terror groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani militants have waged a 20-year genocide against Christians in Nigeria.
- Christian men, women, and children are brutally kidnapped, tortured, and killed every week in Nigeria.
- The adoption of Sharia criminal law in 12 northern states has contributed to the ongoing persecution of Christians in the region.
- The Nigerian government and much of the international community continue to deny religious motivation behind ongoing violence, despite the clear targeting of Christians and churches.

Whether the world acknowledges the plight of Nigerian Christians or not, the country has become a burial ground for Christians.

## Overview

Nigeria is a country torn by decades of violence. From large, organized terror groups to small, disconnected communal militias, the violence in Nigeria is endemic. Sitting between the Christian-majority south and the Muslim-majority north, the central Middle Belt region is home to much of the violence. There, communities clash over resources, ethnic animosity, and religion every day. Christians experience a disproportionate share of the killings and kidnappings turning the country into a dangerous place to live.

This year saw numerous horrific atrocities committed against Christians. Suspected Muslim terrorists attacked and burned a Catholic seminary in Kaduna State and killed a young seminarian who was trapped in the fire. More than 20 people of the Heipang Village in Plateau State were murdered by suspected radical Fulani militants one night in August. In April, a mass burial was held for 33 Christians killed during an attack against Runji Village in the Zangon Kataf LGA of Kaduna State.

In the north, a radical Islamist insurgency now aligned with Islamic State is waging an effective war against government forces. Preying on the weak and desperate, the insurgency has killed thousands and displaced many more since militarizing in 2011. Sadly, international efforts to bolster anti-terror operations in Nigeria have thus far proven ineffective.



## State of the Church

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

Approx. 100 million

### GROWTH

Steady, with growing regional pockets

### VISIBILITY

Able to worship publicly; attacks in northern region.

### SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

Terrorist groups, Sharia law, governmental orders.

## Quick Facts

### POPULATION

218.5 million

### RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

Approx. 50% Muslim  
48.1% Christian

### CURRENT LEADER

Bola Ahmed Tinubu

## Timeline

2023

### MARCH 2023

More than 35 people were killed in March to discourage Christians from voting for a Christian candidate in the recent election cycle.

### MARCH 10

Boko Haram killed more than 30 fishermen and farmers in a terrorist attack in Borno State.

### MARCH 12 - 17

Christians killed in 6 days through coordinated attacks by Fulani militants.

### MAY 19

At least 100 Christians killed in a one-week attack spread across 16 villages in Plateau State.

### JUNE 2023

Due to violence conducted by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the most active official terrorist group in the region, Nigeria replaces Iraq as the country where the Islamic State is claiming the highest number of operations with thousands of deaths and more than two million people displaced in the region.

### JUNE 2

The Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) attacks a military convoy, resulting in the death of 20 Nigerian soldiers.

### JUNE 16

Suspected gunmen killed a Catholic priest in Abuja while walking outside.

“I want to advise the present government to maintain balance and keep close to constitution irrespective of the religious belief of those in government. The government should respect the constitution of Nigeria because if the government breaks the constitution of Nigeria on religion alone, they have already opened the door for lawlessness in the society.”

- Christian Association of Nigeria



DOWNLOAD ICC'S NIGERIA REPORTS ON PAGE 86.





**“Once again, Nigeria’s Christian community is suffering at the hands of radical Fulani militants. And once again, rather than intervening, the Nigerian government continues to turn a blind eye to the violence, aiding and abetting the ongoing genocide. No longer can this trend of violence be dismissed as a complicated, regional conflict over land rights. The government’s inaction on the matter is inexcusable and the violence will only worsen unless the international community steps in.”**

*- Jeff King, ICC President*

## ICC Analysis

Nigeria is arguably the most dangerous place to be a Christian in the world today. In the North, a very hostile group of Muslim extremists have attacked and devastated the minority population of Christians. In the Middle Belt, armed Islamic terrorists, known as Fulani militants, have been killing Christians and stealing their land at a prodigious rate for the last 20 years.

Between the mass murder and land stealing, millions of Christians have been displaced. Since May of 2011, Boko Haram alone has been recorded as being responsible for more than 38,000 deaths. Nigerian leaders tell the West that this is a complicated problem between herders and farmers with tribal overlays. But the truth is that we are witnessing a genocide of Christians in the North and Middle Belt accompanied by an immense land grab.

**SHARIA LAW:** Sharia law, as applied today in Nigeria, violates the principles of secularism, and endangers non-Muslim religious communities in the northern and Middle Belt regions. Despite repeatedly claiming to be a secular nation, 12 northern states in Nigeria have adopted Islamic Sharia criminal law, meaning that Christians do not participate as equal members of society. Given its inherently religious nature, Sharia is problematic when applied to non-Muslims—particularly when they are charged under criminal Sharia law.

For example, testimony from non-Muslims is considered unreliable within Sharia courts, and a woman’s testimony is worth only half that of a man. As a result, fair adjudication of cases involving non-Muslims is nearly impossible, especially where women are concerned. In 2023, the Alliance Defending Freedom reported providing its legal services to a man sentenced to death for supposed “blasphemy” toward the Prophet Mohammed in a WhatsApp message. This rule of law should not be applicable for those not following religion.

**MUSLIM EXTREMIST GROUPS:** Boko Haram, its offshoot, Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), and Fulani militants are the leading perpetrators of violence throughout the country. In the first six months of 2023, Boko Haram averaged more than six attacks per month. ISWAP has also conducted extreme violence throughout 2023 with many instances occurring between their own militants and that of Boko Haram. ISWAP frequently captured military personnel and kills police officers with several recorded instances in Fall 2023. Deaths caused by these entities remain high, with little, if any, change seen in 2023. Boko Haram and ISWAP have killed tens of thousands of Christians and displaced millions to discard western influence and impose strict Islamic Sharia law. While the Nigerian military repeatedly insists that the group has been defeated, the horrific attacks continue.

Nigeria remains free from Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation for the U.S. Department of State despite the thousands of documented deaths and atrocities. This lack of designation essentially indicates to Nigeria that the U.S. approves of all its actions. Whether the U.S. acknowledges the plight of Nigerian Christians or not, the fact remains the same: Nigeria has become a burial ground for believers of the Christian faith. Men, women, and children are brutally kidnapped, tortured, and killed every day. The Nigerian government’s lack of response toward Christian hate-crimes has only fueled the conflict.



### MORE TO EXPLORE

*Read “Essential Perceptions in Nigeria’s Herder Farmer Conflict” By Greg Cochran, Ph.D., ICC Fellow*

## Forms of Persecution

Three main perpetrators of persecution exist in Nigeria and hold responsibility for this widespread devastation: Boko Haram, Fulani militants, and Islamic conservative communities. All three of these groups affect Christians in a different, significant way.

**BOKO HARAM** has displaced millions of people, many of whom are Christians, and killed tens of thousands of others.

**FULANI MILITANTS** have killed more Christians in the past several years than Boko Haram and have displaced millions of Christian farmers.

**CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES** have allowed the forceful conversion and marriage of many young Christian women and have discriminated against Christians seeking employment throughout the 12 Sharia states.

Despite the devastation, the Nigerian government failed to adequately respond to these threats.



## ICC Advocacy at Work

ICC has advocated for the U.S. Department of State to designate Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern for its egregious violations of religious freedom.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## Nigerian Military Hosts Peace Dialogue for Fulani and Irigwe Leaders

The new commander of Plateau State’s Sector 3 Military Command recently hosted a dialogue to foster peace and unity between the Fulani community in Plateau and leaders of the local Irigwe community. The area has been ravaged by violence in recent years, including in many communities where ICC works.

The leaders present from the Fulani community were not of the militant contingent, which is a rogue element within the greater Fulani community. The Fulani are a traditionally nomadic people group made up mostly of peaceful herders, traders, and businesspeople. Two of the Fulani leaders present at the dialogues were held in a correctional center last year on accusations of terrorism connected to attacks on Bassa LGA, Plateau but have since been freed.

In addition to leaders from the Irigwe people,

representatives from other tribes native to Jos North County were present as well. The attacks in Plateau are ongoing, leading to hundreds of deaths in recent months.

ICC attended the peace dialogue along with at least 100 stakeholders from the Fulani and Irigwe communities as well as leaders from other ethnic groups. The group welcomed the new military commander recently assigned to the Sector and spoke to update him on the security situation in the region. “I called to receive an update on the security situation,” said M. Abdullahi, the new commander of Sector 3, told attendees.

At the meeting, a leader of the Irigwe community demanded that the Fulani community stop grazing at night when crops are unattended and objected to the traditional practice of sending children to watch the cattle. In response, a Fulani leader testified

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Address Security Needs

That Nigerian domestic security policy addresses the needs of particularly vulnerable religious communities by responding to threats quickly and ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice.

### 2 CPC Designation

That Nigeria be added back to the Countries of Particular Concern list—a designation it held in 2020 before inexplicably being removed in 2021. USCIRF has recommended that Nigeria be listed as a Country of Particular concern every year since 2009.

### 3 U.S. Foreign Aid

That U.S. foreign aid in Nigeria be conditioned on substantial improvement around religious freedom, including the repeal of blasphemy laws and rescinding Sharia courts’ authority over criminal matters.



# North Korea

A DYNASTY OF CHRISTIAN DEATHS

## Summary

- There are an estimated 400,000 Christians in North Korea, all practicing in secret.
- The Kim regime views Christians as a vessel of American imperialism and a threat to the regime and its deified leadership. Having loyalties apart from those to the Supreme Leader is forbidden.
- To avoid detection, all Christians practice in secret, usually alone or in very small, trusted communities.
- North Korea operates several political prisons and hard labor camps where Christians, dissidents, and their associates face severe punishment and abuses. In 2023, a two-year-old and the toddler's parents were sentenced to life after a Bible was found in their home.
- Many North Koreans flee the tyrannical regime every year, most through routes in China and occasionally by crossing the treacherous demilitarized zone to South Korea.

Christians are imprisoned and tortured for their faith that threatens the Kim regime.

## Overview

There is perhaps no country on the earth is more closed to Christianity and the outside world than North Korea. There, a despotic authoritarian leader, Kim Jong Un, rules as Supreme Leader, allowing loyalty to nothing other than himself. Kim is just the latest in a dynastic line that has oppressed North Korea for decades, driving not just the economy into the ground but human rights and religious expression as well.

Central to North Korea's system of oppression is a network of prisons throughout the country. There, tens of thousands of political prisoners and people of faith serve long sentences in the extremist of conditions. Rape, torture, and extra judicial killings are common in North Korean prisons, with particularly harsh treatment reserved for those practicing their faith. Simply owning or quoting scripture can easily lead to death, according to survivors who have escaped the country. North Korea reportedly sentenced a two-year-old to life in prison after his parents were arrested for possessing a Bible, according to the U.S. Department of State. The child's parents were taken into custody after being found with a Bible, which is considered contraband in North Korea.

North Korea remains one of the most severe violators of religious freedom. It demands absolute allegiance and loyalty to Kim, and certainly not to Christ or anyone else. Kim is morally and legally responsible for the systematic abuses perpetrated by the system he heads. Undeterred, Kim is seemingly emboldened by the sanctions that the West throws his way.

## State of the Church

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
200,000 to 400,000 estimated

**GROWTH**  
Unknown

**VISIBILITY**  
Underground, mostly individuals or small groups

**SOURCES OF PERSECUTION**  
Kim regime

## Quick Facts

**POPULATION**  
25.97 million

**RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN**  
70.9% Atheist  
11% Buddhist  
1.7% other religions  
16.5% unknown

**CURRENT LEADER**  
Kim Jong Un

## Timeline

1945

**AUGUST 17**

Korea formally divided on the 38th parallel.

1948

**SEPTEMBER 9**

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is declared.

1994

**JULY 8**

Kim Il Sung, regarded as the "sun of mankind," dies. His son, Kim Jong Il, succeeds him.

2011

**DECEMBER 17**

Kim Jong Un announced as third-generation successor.

2019

**JUNE 30**

First sitting U.S. president steps into North Korea.

2022

**AUGUST 19**

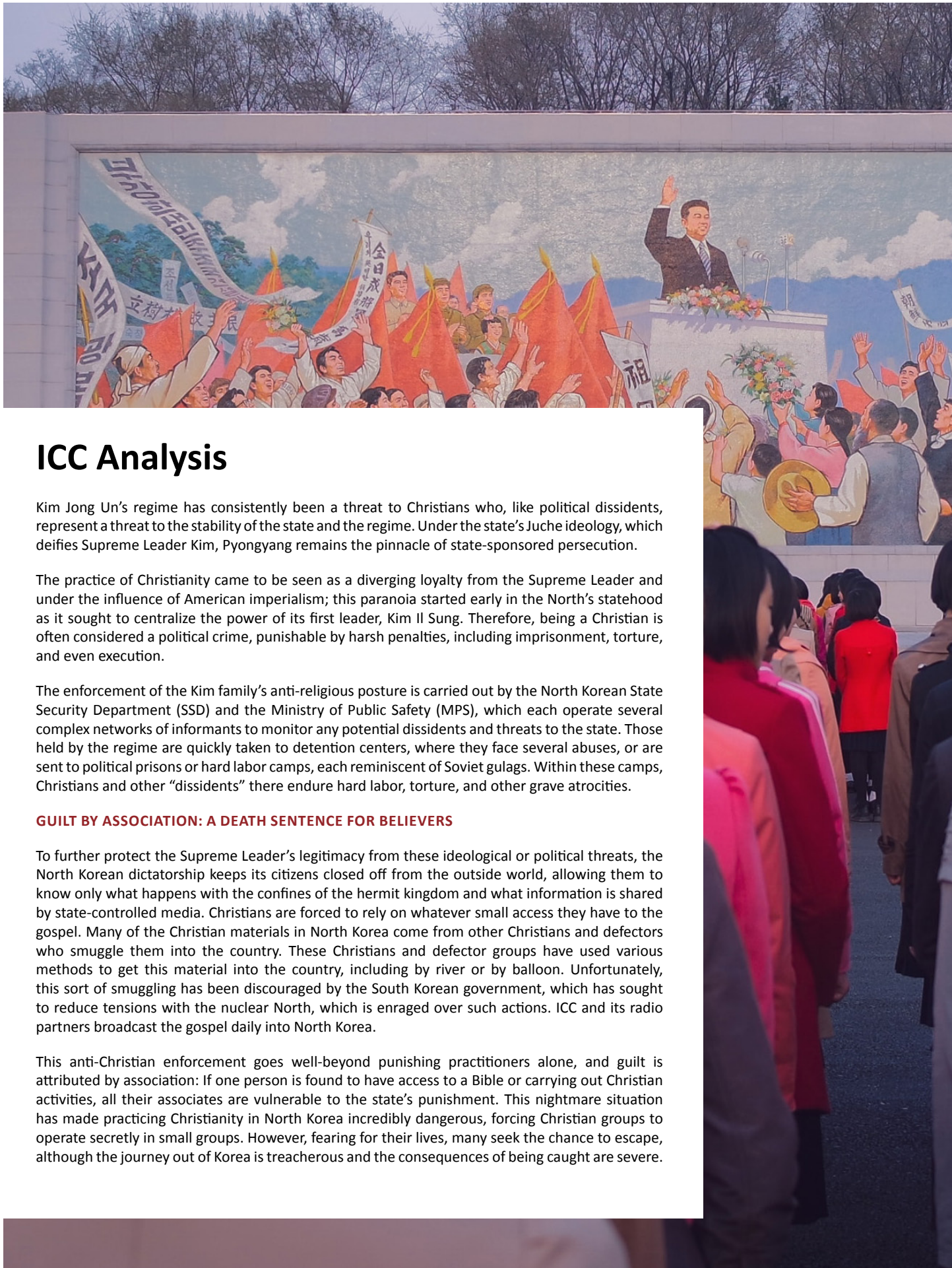
The Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly amends and implements the "Anti-Reactionary Thought" law, which clarifies that practicing Christianity and possessing Christian religious materials is a serious offense with drastic consequences.

"For the Kim regime, religion is a myth and Christianity a product invented and perpetuated by the West. We pray that the Lord continues to transform the hearts and lives of the leaders. God is the only light that can penetrate this bastion of darkness and evil. We also lift up the tens of thousands of believers who must worship behind closed doors."

- Jeff King, ICC President







## ICC Analysis

Kim Jong Un’s regime has consistently been a threat to Christians who, like political dissidents, represent a threat to the stability of the state and the regime. Under the state’s Juche ideology, which deifies Supreme Leader Kim, Pyongyang remains the pinnacle of state-sponsored persecution.

The practice of Christianity came to be seen as a diverging loyalty from the Supreme Leader and under the influence of American imperialism; this paranoia started early in the North’s statehood as it sought to centralize the power of its first leader, Kim Il Sung. Therefore, being a Christian is often considered a political crime, punishable by harsh penalties, including imprisonment, torture, and even execution.

The enforcement of the Kim family’s anti-religious posture is carried out by the North Korean State Security Department (SSD) and the Ministry of Public Safety (MPS), which each operate several complex networks of informants to monitor any potential dissidents and threats to the state. Those held by the regime are quickly taken to detention centers, where they face several abuses, or are sent to political prisons or hard labor camps, each reminiscent of Soviet gulags. Within these camps, Christians and other “dissidents” there endure hard labor, torture, and other grave atrocities.

### GUILT BY ASSOCIATION: A DEATH SENTENCE FOR BELIEVERS

To further protect the Supreme Leader’s legitimacy from these ideological or political threats, the North Korean dictatorship keeps its citizens closed off from the outside world, allowing them to know only what happens within the confines of the hermit kingdom and what information is shared by state-controlled media. Christians are forced to rely on whatever small access they have to the gospel. Many of the Christian materials in North Korea come from other Christians and defectors who smuggle them into the country. These Christians and defector groups have used various methods to get this material into the country, including by river or by balloon. Unfortunately, this sort of smuggling has been discouraged by the South Korean government, which has sought to reduce tensions with the nuclear North, which is enraged over such actions. ICC and its radio partners broadcast the gospel daily into North Korea.

This anti-Christian enforcement goes well-beyond punishing practitioners alone, and guilt is attributed by association: If one person is found to have access to a Bible or carrying out Christian activities, all their associates are vulnerable to the state’s punishment. This nightmare situation has made practicing Christianity in North Korea incredibly dangerous, forcing Christian groups to operate secretly in small groups. However, fearing for their lives, many seek the chance to escape, although the journey out of Korea is treacherous and the consequences of being caught are severe.

## Forms of Persecution

### IMPRISONMENT, TORTURE, AND FORCED LABOR

Christians arrested by the regime have been subjected to cruel punishments in North Korea’s labor or prison camps, including severe beatings, starvation, sexual abuse, solitary confinement, and long hours of hard labor.

### EXECUTION

Christians have often been sentenced to death by execution or by hard labor in one of the country’s many labor camps for their practice of Christianity.

### SOCIAL REJECTION AND OSTRACISM

Because of North Korea’s demonization and severe punishments of Christians, believers are often rejected by family and friends to avoid guilt by association.

### CENSORSHIP

Information in North Korea is heavily regulated by the regime to prevent “social instability.” Christians, like all North Koreans, are cut off from accessing the gospel or information from outside sources.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## The Gospel is Unstoppable

In the shadowy night of Chongjin, North Korea, the dim candle’s feeble glow barely pierced the darkness outside, leaving only the stars to paint the village with light. Huddled in their home, Illyong Ju’s family gathered around a contraband radio, their lifeline to the outside world.

Most nights, beneath the Milky Way’s cosmic canopy, Illyong Ju and his sisters would listen to the melodious tune of a flute. But this night was exceptional. Grandparents, parents, and sisters gathered around a rickety table, illuminated by a flickering candle, cherishing their togetherness despite their poverty.

After dinner, they risked their lives by tuning into an illegal foreign broadcast of Christian

programming. Blankets covered the window, and the radio’s volume was a mere whisper. Discovery meant execution, yet it was worth it.

Illyong Ju, a bearer of tales of suffering under the dictatorship, recalled, “North Korea is a country where there is no freedom. There is no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion. And there is not even freedom of thought.”

His family had been touched by this tyranny. His grandfather, a war veteran, ended up in a political prison camp for discussing human rights issues. His cousin’s family was executed for “showing gospel.”

Though he escaped to South Korea, he

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Sanction NK Allies

That the international community pressure North Korea and, importantly, its allies Russia and China to improve its human rights record through a variety of tools, including bilateral engagement and collective sanctions.

### 2 Reopen Outreach

That South Korea repeal its ban on activists using the country as a launching point for outreach to the people of North Korea. It banned the practice in 2020 after pressure from the North Korean government.

### 3 Diplomatic Pressure

Continued diplomatic pressure of the North Korean government on the issue of human rights and religious freedom.



# India

HINDU NATIONALISM ABOVE ALL ELSE

## Summary

- India is experiencing a rise in radical and religious nationalism, primarily targeting Christian and Muslim communities through blasphemy allegations and anti-conversion laws.
- Mobs, both organized and spontaneous, often attack religious minorities with near impunity, resulting in violence against pastors and disruptions of worship services.
- India Prime Minister Narendra Modi supports Hindu nationalism and fails to enforce the rule of law or condemn these violent attacks.
- Violence against Christians in India increased in 2023, mirroring the longstanding challenges faced by the Muslim minority population.
- In May 2023, violence broke out in Manipur along a complex mixture of ethnic and religious fault lines. Though the violence in Manipur is largely ethnic, religious differences between the main ethnic groups involved have inflamed tensions as shown in the targeting of hundreds of churches and dozens of temples.

**India's surge in radical religious nationalism poses a grave threat to Christians, with violent incidents escalating and Prime Minister Modi's inaction exacerbating the situation.**

## Overview

Radical religious nationalism is rising in India, wreaking havoc in Christian and Muslim communities caught in the current of anti-minority Hindu extremism. Mobs harass peaceful worship services and beat pastors in front of their congregations.

Though technically a secular democracy, India is drifting far from the principles of peace and inclusion that its founders envisioned 76 years ago. The issues are not solely at the communal level either—India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is an avowed Hindu nationalist and spurs the mobs on by his refusal to enforce rule of law or condemn the violent attacks.

In 2023, violence against Christians has continued at a record pace, on track to meet or exceed 2022 when about 600 incidents took place. Human rights watchers have also noticed an increase in the size of violent incidents affecting Christian Indians. Mass violence in Chhattisgarh and Manipur in late 2022 and 2023 supply chilling examples of what the future could hold for India's Christian population if radical Hindu nationalism is not checked.



## State of the Church

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

About 26 million

### GROWTH

Percentage of Christians have remained steady in the last decade.

### VISIBILITY

Worships publicly, but prone to attacks.

### SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

Hindutva ideology

## Quick Facts

### POPULATION

1.41 billion

### RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

79.8% Hindu  
14.2% Muslim  
2.3% Christian  
1.7% Sikh  
2% Other/Unspecified

### CURRENT LEADER

Narendra Modi

## Timeline

1950

**1950s**

*For the last 70 years, since India's current constitution was established, citizens have been free to profess, practice, and propagate the religion of their choice.*

2010

**AUGUST 2008**

*Anti-Christian riots swept across Orissa (now called Odisha), India, instigated by Hindu nationalists when Christians were blamed for the murder of their leader. These riots lasted three months and are still considered the worst Christian persecution in India's history.*

2020

**2014**

*Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wins the election on platform of Hindu nationalism. The party is known to demonize religious minorities and establish anti-conversion laws. India has since gone on to be named the tenth worst country in the world for Christians.*

**NOV - DEC 2022**

*Large-scale riots in Chhattisgarh displace thousands of Christians and destroy hundreds of homes and churches.*

**MAY 2023**

*Violence breaks out in Manipur, with the local Christians bearing the brunt of the attacks. Hundreds of churches are targeted.*

**"It is deeply concerning that the Indian government continues to implement policies that negatively impact Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindu Dalit communities. During this state visit, we ask President Biden to raise religious freedom with Prime Minister Modi directly, including by urging him to amend or repeal policies that target and repress religious minorities."**

*- Stephen Schneck, USCIRF Commissioner*



DOWNLOAD ICC'S INDIA  
REPORT ON PAGE 86.



ICC Analysis

India claims to be the largest democracy in the world. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants the international community to see the growth and progress of India, focusing on the good. However, he often sweeps controversial issues under the rug, late to comment (if ever), and always deflecting. In his trip to Washington in 2023, he was asked in a press conference about India’s human rights record and stance toward minorities. Modi responded that, “Democracy is in our DNA. We have always proved that democracy can deliver, and when I say deliver this is regardless of caste, creed, religion, or gender. There is absolutely no space for discrimination [in India]...this is our foundational principle.”

Modi’s claim, some analysts pointed out, was correct as far as democracy and inclusiveness were at the core of India’s founding. What Modi failed to mention, however, was that he is leading the charge to erode those freedoms and closing India, legally and socially, to non-Hindus.

MOB ATTACKS UNDER MODI’S WATCH

Historically, religious violence against Christians in India tends to take the form of isolated mobs targeting individual churches or pastors. Hundreds of incidents a year bear this pattern out. In 2014, the year Modi took office, there were 144 recorded incidents of religious violence according to civil society leaders in India. By 2019 that number had increased to 328. Reduced social interactions due to COVID lockdowns reduced that number to 280 in 2020, but violence against Christians increased again in 2021 with a record 505 incidents, according to civil society leaders in India. In 2022 there were more than 600 incidents and 2023 is trending similarly with more than 500 attacks reported through July.

Modi is often reluctant to comment on controversial happenings under his watch, but the rising world-wide attention toward attacks in Manipur ultimately demanded a response. He managed to avoid a response for nearly three months after the attacks started, but was forced to speak after a video went viral worldwide of two Kuki women stripped and paraded around nearly 1,000 men in the conflict area. Modi stated “I want to assure the nation, no guilty [people] will be spared,” he told gathered reporters, according to the Guardian. “Action will be taken according to the law. What happened to the daughters of Manipur can never be forgiven. As I stand next to this temple of democracy, my heart is filled with pain and anger.”

While the Indian government pushes the attacks as an ethnic conflict, the fact that Christians seem to be targeted cannot be ignored. Hundreds of churches, thousands of houses and tens of thousands displaced shows that whether it is an ethnic conflict or not, the religious minorities are the ones suffering.

“Radical Hinduism is a great threat to the Christian community in India. The government is purposefully ignorant, the police are corrupt, and the local communities are stirred to violence regularly.”

- Liam Reed, ICC South Asia Regional Manager



Forms of Persecution

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND IMPUNITY

Attacks on Christians and other religious minorities often go unpunished. In most cases, Hindu nationalist political leaders use anti-minority rhetoric for political gain. This hate speech inspires more assaults on minorities. When the police and local authorities take no action against the radicals, it emboldens radicals. Year after year, attacks on minorities are reported in greater number and severity.

ANTI-CONVERSION LAWS

Formally called Freedom of Religion Acts, anti-conversion laws allow state governments in India to regulate religious conversions and criminalize forced religious conversions. Hindu radicals use false accusations of forced religious conversions to harass pastors and justify violence. Currently, anti-conversion laws have been enacted in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand. BJP-led governments in Haryana, Assam, and Karnataka all publicly called for anti-conversion laws to be enacted, explicitly citing the false narrative of fraudulent mass conversions to Christianity and Islam as a justification.

FORCED RECONVERSIONS (GHAR WAPSI)

Radical Hindu nationalist use violence and social pressure to force religious minorities to “reconvert” to Hinduism. These programs are called Ghar Wapsi, which translates to Home Coming.

BLASPHEMY LAW

India has a blasphemy law that criminalizes any action that offends the religious sentiment of another. Hindu radicals use false blasphemy allegations to harass pastors and justify violence.

SOCIAL BOYCOTTS

Hindu radicals and local villagers will pass local resolutions outlawing the practice of Christianity in the village. As a punishment for Christian members of the village, they are socially boycott. This means they are discriminated against unless they agree to recant their faith. Often Christians are disallowed from collecting water from the village well, buying and selling goods in the village, or interacting with other Hindu members of the village.

GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS (FRCAS AND SC BENEFITS)

The Government of India uses several programs to discriminate against Christians and other religious minorities. To stop funds for Christian ministry from entering the country, NGOs must adhere to FCRA regulations. These regulations allow the government to scrutinize and ban any foreign funds from coming into the country that it finds concerning. This is used to cancel many Christian ministries. Scheduled Caste Benefits (and affirmative action program for low-caste peoples) is denied to Christians and Muslims by law. This stops low-caste individuals from converting to Christianity or Islam because they would automatically lose government benefits. This is especially harmful to Christians, as 80 percent of the Christian population in India come from low-caste backgrounds.

ICC Recommends

- 1CPC DesignationThat India be added to the Country of Particular Concern list, as recommended by USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom) every year since 2020. The designation, which has yet to happen, would send a serious message to India that religious freedom is an important right.
- 2Democracy & Human RightsGreater consistency in the American government’s messaging on the topic of democracy and human rights in India. Deepening economic and military relations need not silence the U.S. in its effort to promote rights around the world.
- 3Repeal Discriminatory LawsThat India repeals its many religiously discriminatory anti-conversion laws, overturn the exclusion of Christians and Muslims from vital social benefits, and treat all persons as equal under the law, regardless of religion.



ICC Advocacy at Work

ICC has advocated for the U.S. Department of State to designate India as a Country of Particular Concern. ICC has also produced a long form report on India which was shared with our contacts in the U.S. government and on Capitol Hill.



# Iran

## BRAZENLY STAMPING OUT CHRISTIANITY

### Summary

- Iran, led by Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, operates as an Islamic republic with strict adherence to Islam.
- Iranian prisons are notorious for harsh conditions and torture, with many Christians suffering incarceration for their faith.
- Iran's anti-Christian agenda extends beyond its borders, as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) influences neighboring countries.
- Direct restrictions on church activities, worship, and Christian gatherings, coupled with growing anti-Christian sentiment, pose significant challenges to religious freedom in Iran.
- Government crackdown on the 2022-2023 public protests saw many Christians arrested and imprisoned.

Christians and religious minorities endure severe persecution under Sharia law and theocratic rule, facing arbitrary arrest, torture, and threats.

### Overview

Iran is led by Ali Khamenei, the Grand Ayatollah and Supreme Leader of the land. Under his leadership, Iran operates as an Islamic republic, harshly eliminating political and religious resistance to its hard line adherence to Islam. Even moderate Muslims suffer under the unbending strictures of the government which has no tolerance for minority religious belief other than in a few tightly controlled historic communities.

The Iranian regime runs a series of prisons – including the notorious Evin Prison – known for exceptionally harsh conditions, including extreme torture. Sadly, these prisons house many Christians incarcerated by a skewed judicial system for practicing their faith. Those who survive the experience tell chilling tales of severe deprivation and inhumane treatment.

Iran's anti-Christian ambitions do not stop at its borders. In fact, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) can be found in several neighboring countries, exerting Iranian influence in the region and assisting jihadist terror groups. Inside the country, the IRGC is merciless in its efforts to stamp out Christianity.

### State of the Church

#### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

500,000 to 800,000

#### GROWTH

One of the fastest growing churches in the world.

#### VISIBILITY

Underground believers and house churches.

#### SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

Government-sponsored and Islamic culture.

### Quick Facts

#### POPULATION

87.92 million

#### RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

99.4% Muslim  
90-95% Shia, 5-10% Sunni  
0.3% Christian, Jewish, other

#### CURRENT LEADER

Ali Khamenei



### Timeline

1980

1979

The Iranian Revolution puts the Grand Ayatollah as the Supreme Leader of Iran, overseeing all Iranian affairs. The Islamic Republic of Iran establishes Sharia Law. Only 500 Iranian Christian converts in Iran.

1990

1989

Following the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ali Khamenei becomes the Grand Ayatollah.

1990

Christian convert Rev. Hossein Soodmand becomes the first Iranian executed for apostasy.

2010

2009

Persecution against Christian converts escalates with raids and arrests on house churches increasing.

2020

2020

Independent Study reveals close to one million Iranian Christian converts.

2021

Ayatollah Khamenei heavily influences presidential election, allowing the new president to be Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline cleric known for severe human rights abuses.

MAY 2022

Iranian Civil Court fines Christian convert for promoting Christian education "contrary to Islam."

AUGUST 30, 2022

House church pastor Joseph Shahbazian begins a 10-year prison sentence for leading Farsi worship services with converts in his home.

SEPTEMBER 16, 2022

Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman, died under suspicious circumstances under police custody after incorrectly wearing a hijab in public. Her death sparked massive protests.

DECEMBER 2022

Iranian Regime pressures the recognized Armenian and Assyrian Church leaders to issue statement in support of the government in its crackdown of the mass popular protests of the Iranian people.

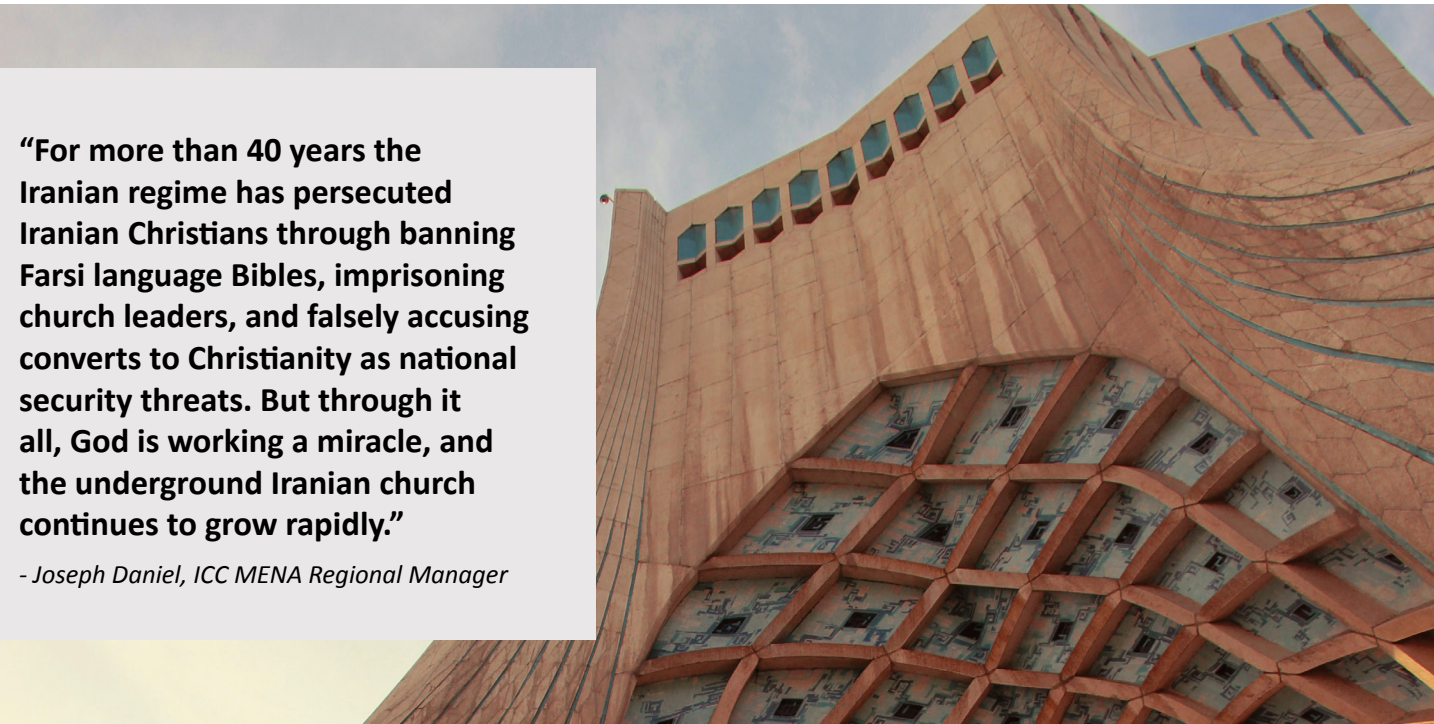
2023

More than 600 people were executed from September 2022 to September 2023.

**"...The U.S. Congress should reauthorize the bipartisan Lautenberg Amendment, a family reunification program providing a legal path for resettlement for Iranian religious minorities fleeing government persecution."**

- Susie Gelman, USCIRF Commissioner





**“For more than 40 years the Iranian regime has persecuted Iranian Christians through banning Farsi language Bibles, imprisoning church leaders, and falsely accusing converts to Christianity as national security threats. But through it all, God is working a miracle, and the underground Iranian church continues to grow rapidly.”**

*- Joseph Daniel, ICC MENA Regional Manager*

## ICC Analysis

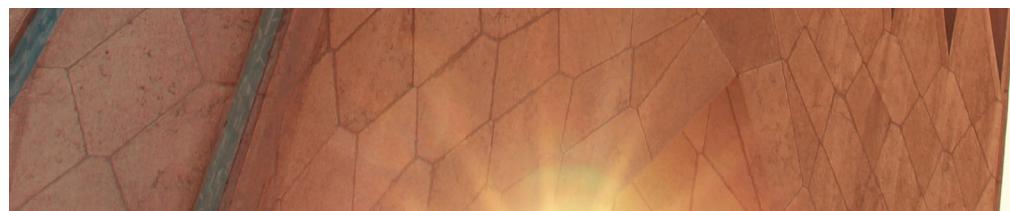
When the Iranian revolutionaries led by Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in 1979, they immediately pushed to rid the country of any foreign Christian elements, ending all formal foreign missionary efforts. Ethnic Christian groups inside Iran, such as the historic Armenian and Assyrian churches that pre-date Islam in Iran, were offered some protection and recognition predicated on their support for the new government.

For the past 44 years, there has been wave after wave of persecution against Iranians who decide to become Christians. The regime attempts to publicly silence Christians’ faith. All Farsi Bibles and Christian literature are banned; sharing one’s faith with others is outlawed; Christian groups are constantly monitored by authorities, and pastors have consistently been arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned. Iran’s regime has even sentenced some to death under charges of apostasy and as spies threatening its Islamic system. The Iranian government refuses to acknowledge Iranian converts to Christianity and denies them all religious freedom.

Under persecution, Iranian Christians, mostly consisting of legally unrecognized converts from Islam, have grown into hundreds of thousands in number from all different kinds of walks of life.

In 2022-2023, the world’s focus toward Iran has been on the unprecedented popular protests and the regime’s violent crackdown. The protests were sparked by the arrest and gruesome killing of a young Kurdish women named Mahsa Amini by the morality police for not “wearing the hijab properly.” This tragic incident sparked a nationwide protest movement with Iranians from all ethnic and religious backgrounds taking to the streets in dozens of Iranian cities. Estimates have thousands injured and killed by government crackdowns, with several fast-tracked trials contributing to the increased number of approximately 697 people executed between September 2022 and September 2023, according to Oslo-based non-profit Iran Human Rights.

Dozens of Christians continued to languish in Iranian prisons in 2022-2023, and others have been forced to pay large fines for their participation in house churches. House church pastor Joseph Shahbazian began a 10-year prison sentence for leading Farsi worship services with converts in his home in Fall 2022.



## Forms of Persecution

### LEGAL ISSUES

Iran’s Constitution establishes a theocracy under Shia Islam, but ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guaranteeing freedom of religion. This contradiction has led to legal persecution of minority religious groups. While Iran recognizes and protects some Christian, Zoroastrian, and Jewish communities, they are defined by ethnic and historical ties, excluding Christian converts. These groups face strict boundaries and severe penalties for violations. Government-led persecution, especially through the judicial system, is a major concern, restricting religious gatherings and persecuting individuals, particularly converts from Islam.

### RAIDS ON HOUSE CHURCHES

Islamic Revolution Document Center (IRDC) works in conjunction with the Intelligence Ministry of Iran to identify Christian converts and crack down on the use of house churches.

### ARRESTS, DETENTIONS, AND DEATH PENALTIES

The 2022-2023 protests saw an increase in detention of protestors and application of the death penalty for blasphemy charges for those opposed to the regime. At the same time, Iranian courts charged Christian converts to new sentences and denied review of current prison sentences of house church pastors.

### RESTRICTIONS ON CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Iran perceives Christianity as threatening its Shia Islamic state and restricts Christian gatherings and worship. Only a few ethnic Christian churches are allowed to operate, excluding converts. The government monitors church activities to deter new church members. The use of the national language Farsi in Christian services is prohibited, and possessing Farsi Christian literature leads to prosecution. Iran has a small Assyrian and Armenian Christian population, with the rest facing severe risks to practice their faith, often in secret house churches. The government opposes house churches, fostering an anti-Christian sentiment.



## ICC Advocacy at Work

ICC has helped Iranian Christians facing persecution resettle and find safe, long-term living solutions.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## Iran Pardons Two Imprisoned Christian Converts

The Iranian government has pardoned and released two imprisoned Christian converts as a part of the annual tradition of pardoning prisoners during the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Hadi Rahimi was released on February 20 after spending just more than a year in prison, and fellow church member Saheb Fadaie was released on February 9 after spending 5 years in prison. Both men were imprisoned on charges of “acting against national security

by organizing house-churches and promoting ‘Zionist’ Christianity.”

Both men had been held in Iran’s notorious Evin prison, where many Christians have been imprisoned more than the years. As converts to Christianity from Islam, they are not recognized as Christians and have no freedom or protection in worship according to their Christian faith. Many of these Christians face charges related to practicing their faith such as “Propaganda against the state through

proselytizing Christianity,” and “Acting against national security by conducting evangelistic activities.”

The release from prison and reunification with family members for Christians like Hadi and Saheb are indeed victories to be celebrated. However, dozens of Christians still remain in Iranian prisons while the regime continues to restrict and ban the practice of Christian faith by converts.

## ICC Recommends

### 1 CPC Designation

That the U.S. Department of State continue to list Iran as a Country of Particular Concern and the IRGC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. These designations help to maintain what diplomatic pressure is possible.

### 2 Support Activists

That the international community support activists and survivors of religious persecution who are targeted by agents of Iran, including in the United States and elsewhere in the West.

### 3 Foreign Policy

That American foreign policy priorities in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the region include funding to protect vulnerable Christian communities targeted by the IRGC and other arms of Iranian influence.



# China

PUTTING PARTY BEFORE GOD

## Summary

- The Chinese government aggressively suppresses free religious expression, seeing it as a threat to the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) control and national security.
- State-run Protestant and Catholic churches in China act as government propaganda, leaving house churches as the only alternative for Christians.
- House churches face persecution, with members experiencing constant harassment and pressure due to their affiliation.
- The CCP, under President Xi Jinping, is heavily regulating and “Sinicizing” religion, aiming to align it with socialist principles and Chinese culture to bolster national unity and party loyalty while suppressing dissenting voices within religious communities.

Christians must comply with China’s strict religious mandates or risk being jailed and tortured.

## Overview

Thousands of shuttered churches, crosses being removed from buildings, and government officials altering Scripture, are symbolic of the state of Christianity in China. Christians who attend state-sponsored ‘churches’ fly under the radar. Those who choose to worship freely and openly, however, risk being imprisoned and tortured for their faith.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does not tolerate freedom of religion. The Chinese government requires that citizens worship the state, coopting every religious structure possible into a mouthpiece of CCP propaganda through a program known as Sinicization.

Though the government does allow a Protestant and a Catholic church to exist, both are state-run and operate as puppets of the government. Today, the only choice for Christians wanting to worship outside the confines of the state is to join a loose network of house churches. Sadly, these house churches are heavily persecuted, and members face constant harassment and pressure for their affiliation.

Not content with persecuting religion and suppressing human rights within its borders, Chinese government has also become a world leader in transnational repression, regularly reaching across borders to repress dissent in places as far away as the U.S., Europe, Canada, and Australia.



## State of the Church

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
70-100 million underground Christians

**GROWTH**  
Rapidly growing

**VISIBILITY**  
State-sponsored churches, but mostly underground

**SOURCES OF PERSECUTION**  
Government surveillance and laws

## Quick Facts

**POPULATION**  
1.412 billion

**RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN**  
51.8% Unaffiliated  
21.9% Chinese Folk Region  
18.3% Buddhist  
5.2% Christian  
2% Muslim  
<0.9% Other

## Timeline

2023

**APRIL**

The heavily persecuted Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, often called the “Mayflower Church,” was granted asylum in the United States and made their final voyage to Texas.

**JULY**

Pastor Yang Xibo and his wife, Wang Xiaofei, face a fine of 400,000 Yuan, or approximately \$55,100 USD, from the CCP for their underground church in Xiamen, China.

**JULY**

The CCP reportedly rewrites portions of the Bible in an effort to increase its control over religion.

## Forms of Persecution

### IMPRISONMENT, TORTURE, AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE:

Christians are detained or arrested on fabricated charges. Vaguely defined laws and regulations around religious practice are enforced, making their compliance nearly impossible.

### CENSORSHIP AND SUBVERSION

Beyond China’s widespread internet censorship, China attempts to ban unauthorized online religious activity. Unable to eradicate religion, the CCP uses sanctioned religious movements in support of state power through Sinicization. The CCP seeks to invoke social compliance and patriotism by incorporating the teachings of CCP’s successes, socialist values, and communist worldviews like “Xi Jinping Thought” into the practices of the church. Children under 18 are forbidden from attending any religious education in China, undermining parents’ ability to raise up the next generation of Christians. Multiple Christian home schools have been raided and shut down during the pandemic.

### CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

Individual’s livelihoods have been threatened for church involvement—instances have occurred where the CCP has had one’s job threatened, and others have lost access to financial lending. This sort of discrimination is expected to grow as China’s social credit score moves beyond pilot programs.

### SURVEILLANCE

Churches are fitted with CCTV cameras and have been asked to foster patriotism, national unity, and love of party [CCP] and country through flag raising ceremonies or “Red Song” competition.

“We are gravely concerned about how the Communist regime also treats the State-sanctioned church. Previously, they asked for sole allegiance to the Communist Party, but since the 20th National Party Congress, they shifted their emphasis to aligning with Xi Jinping.”

- Bob Fu, ChinaAid President and Founder



# ICC Analysis

China continues to emerge as a global power and has expanded its suppression of Christians and religious minorities to levels not seen since the Cultural Revolution. The country has taken new steps to sideline any movement which may shake the regime’s legitimacy. The official number of Christians in China is unconfirmed; however, estimates are between 70 million and 100 million, many of whom make up China’s unregistered house churches. This number could possibly outnumber the 95-million-member ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Like political activism, the CCP had perceived Christianity and religion as a threat to civil stability and to their legitimacy, and thus to national security. In response to the CCP’s civic paranoia, Chinese President Xi Jinping has relied heavily on the practices of regulation and Sinicization, an intentional attempt to make Christianity and religion more in-line with the principles of socialism and Chinese culture.

Through the revision of Christian doctrine and the regulation of religious practice, the CCP believes they can shape religion into a tool of national security, promoting national unity, love of country, and of the party, resulting in the increased securitization of religious beliefs. The government enforces strict religious guidelines for clergy and religious leaders with obligations to promote national unity, love of country, love of the CCP, and to root out dissidents.

## PUTTING PARTY BEFORE CHRIST

State-sanctioned religious organizations, managed by the United Front Work Department, oversee all religious practices in China. Those operating outside the state’s apparatus or who challenge its instructions are liable to face punishment by Chinese authorities. Under this new lens, the Chinese government increased its crackdown on unsanctioned churches and pastors, and many are regularly harassed or arrested and charged with embellished crimes, including “subversion of state power.” Others have disappeared entirely.

China’s anti-religious influence now extends beyond the mainland. Following the establishment of the National Security Law in June 2020, the once-autonomous city of Hong Kong, which boasts 1.2 million Christians, is now significantly influenced by Beijing. Concern has grown for Christians and clergy as loyalty to the party is expected among the city’s religious institutions.

Over the last two years, it is estimated that the Chinese government closed more than 7,000 churches in mainland China. Crackdowns on online gatherings have also increased in the past year, as the government has begun to more closely monitor online activity. These online crackdowns come hand in hand with tightening internet and social media restrictions and have ratcheted up the pressure on Chinese believers attempting to communicate virtually or produce and access digital content.



## GLIMMER OF HOPE

# Heavily Persecuted Mayflower Church Granted Asylum in Texas

The heavily persecuted Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, often called the “Mayflower Church,” was granted asylum in the United States and made their final voyage to Texas this year.

The Mayflower Church’s entire congregation left China in 2019 due to religious persecution to seek asylum in South Korea. When they could not receive refugee status in South Korea, they began to see resettlement in the United States.

Not only did the Korean government refuse to grant them refugee status, but back home, they recorded at least 56 times when their family members were summoned or threatened by Chinese authorities during their two-year stay.

Named “traitors,” they were accused of “collusion with foreign forces” and “subversion of state power,” charges that could easily land them in jail. In addition, the police told their family members that a cult misled these Christians and that their family’s education and work could be negatively affected if they did not return to China.

In 2022, ICC’s regional manager for Southeast Asia visited church leaders in Thailand. As a last resort, Pastor Pan Yongguang and his congregation decided to leave Korea for Thailand in August 2022. Yet, the Southeast Asian country was

infiltrated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Chinese agents followed and filmed the team at their hotels, restaurants, and other locations.

While in Thailand, the congregation sought protection from religious persecution with the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR. However, they traveled on 15-day tourist visas, hoping their applications could be processed unprecedentedly quickly. Instead, the group was detained in Thailand for several months due to visa violations.

The church eventually departed for the United States after their UNHCR application was approved after nearly nine months of waiting. Freedom Seekers International, a nonprofit that helps people fleeing religious persecution, worked with them to resettle in a northeastern city in Texas.

Church members believed that the Lord would make a way throughout their journey, as He has been with them on this arduous journey.

The congregation is now settling into life in the United States and has plans to stay permanently, ending their three-year search for a new, free home. Please join ICC in praising the Lord that He has brought the Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church into safety at last.

## IN THE NEWS

### Underground Pastor Fined

The CCP fined the pastor of an underground church in Xiamen, China. Pastor Yang Xibo and his wife, Wang Xiaofei, face a fine of 400,000 Yuan (\$55,100 USD). This fine follows several years of government persecution against the underground church in Xiamen.

### CCP Rewrites Portions of Bible

The CCP is rewriting portions of the Bible in an effort to increase its control over religion in the country. U.S. Rep. Mike Gallagher stated that Chairman Xi Jinping is on a “quest to make the faithful serve the party rather than God.”

# ICC Recommends

## 1 CPC Designation

The U.S. Department of State should continue to list China as a Country of Particular Concern for its egregious violations of religious freedom, as it has done consistently since 1999 when the designation began.

## 2 Stop Organ Harvesting

The international community should work together to stem the flow of foreigners entering China for organs illegally “harvested” from disfavored religious groups and others, as thousands are reported to do every year.

## 3 Combat Repression

Stop China’s practice of transnational repression against dissidents across the world, including some who fled China’s aggression against religion and freedom of conscience.



DOWNLOAD ICC’S CHINA REPORT ON PAGE 86.



# Pakistan

A HOTBED OF PERSECUTION

## Summary

- The U.S. labeled Pakistan as a “Considered as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC)” and has failed to adequately address its religious freedom issues.
- Pakistani state endorsement of Islamic fundamentalism is contributing to the growth of extremism.
- Islamic Fundamentalism continues to grow and receive state sponsorship.
- Pakistan has deepened a trend of unstable government, further allowing extremism to flourish.
- Authorities use blasphemy laws to legitimize persecution and force conversions across society to suppress Christians and other religious minorities.

## Pakistan’s constitutional endorsement of Islam and blasphemy laws make it easy to punish Christians.

### Overview

Religious intolerance is a deep-seated problem visible at every level of Pakistani society. In the law, draconian policies relegate Christians to the lowest rungs of society and criminalize them for speaking about their faith. Pakistan is one of a handful of countries around the world with the death penalty for speaking against Islam. Though the death penalty is rarely enforced, the law is used to harass and intimidate Christians who sometimes land in prison for years based on a mere rumor of blasphemy.

Socially, Christians are kept from accessing robust educational opportunities and are seen as fit for only the worst, most dangerous jobs like diving into the sewage to clear blockages or sweeping trash off the streets. In fact, some advertisements for jobs like these outright declare that the job will be given to a non-Muslim.

Generations of Pakistani Christians are trapped in cyclical poverty and repression. Following the direction of its staff on the ground, ICC is working to break down barriers and lift believers out of these cycles through sustainable livelihood projects and educational aid.

## State of the Church Quick Facts

- CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
~3 million
- GROWTH**  
Percentages have remained the same.
- VISIBILITY**  
Public Christian communities and churches
- SOURCES OF PERSECUTION**  
Radical Islamic groups, Islamic government

- POPULATION**  
238.2 million
- RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN**  
96.5% Muslim  
3.5% Other (Christian and Hindu)
- CURRENT LEADER**  
Arif Alvi

## Timeline

1990

1991

Sharia law formally incorporated into Pakistan’s legal code leading to a spike of persecution incidents.

2000

2001

Pakistan postures itself toward the west by joining the U.S. in its fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

2002

Election results strengthen role of Islamist parties within the political system.

2004

Two pastors killed and a church compound bombed. Police protection is absent from these and other cases.

2009

A mob murders eight Christians, leading to mass protests from the Christian community about the state of persecution.

2010

2013

Two suicide bombers kill scores of congregants at the All-Saints Church in Peshawar.

2018

A ruling by Islamabad’s High Court states that citizens must declare their religion when applying for ID documents, voting, or applying for government positions.

2020

2022

Gunmen assassinate a pastoral leader at All-Saints Church; vote of non-confidence thrusts Pakistan into political instability.

2022

A no-confidence motion against Imran Khan led to his removal as the prime minister of Pakistan. In the wake of his removal, pro-Khan activists have consistently gathered in protest across Pakistan, endangering Christians as Imran Khan and his followers are pro-Islamization.

2023

Radical Muslims attacked a Christian community in Jaranwala, destroying nearly 200 homes and churches, displacing hundreds of Christian families.

“Despite blasphemy laws’ inconsistency with international human rights law, they are often defended as a means to achieve peace and religious harmony in society. However, in practice, blasphemy laws are used to promote government intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities and minority viewpoints. They also encourage individuals and non-state actors to seek retribution against alleged blasphemers.”

- USCIRF Blasphemy Factsheet





# ICC Analysis

Pakistan has been designated as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) by the U.S. Department of State since 2018. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said at that time that Pakistan’s designation was “for having engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.”

Just months after this designation, Pakistan was thrust into political instability following a vote of no-confidence which ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan. No prime minister has ever completed their term of service, and historically, periods of political transition increase religious minorities vulnerability. Meanwhile institutions such as the National Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, created to ensure education and media adhere to Islamic values, are given increased opportunity to function in ways that suppress human rights.

While blasphemy laws have existed in Pakistan since the mid-1800s, there has been a steady trend toward increasing their formal usage within society. These laws carry harsh sentences, including life in prison and the death penalty. The laws overwhelmingly penalize religious minorities for any actions deemed offensive to Islam. The inherent religious freedom issues contained within these laws are magnified by their subjective nature. Any Christian may face blasphemy accusations based on community perceptions rather than any actual crime.

Women who belong to a religious minority group are often more severely targeted for persecution. Within the Christian context, forced marriages are a common practice which legally compels women and girls to convert to Islam. Often, these victims are kidnapped before the marriage. Despite laws declaring a minimum age for marriage, law enforcement is not reliable, and therefore perpetrators often walk away with impunity.

## A FLASH POINT OF ANGER IN JARANWALA

While these are the two predominant forms of persecution faced by Pakistan’s Christian community, broader trends within the community exist which actively discourage Christians from identifying and practicing their faith publicly. For example, a Christian clergyman was assassinated in January 2022 while traveling home from church. Targeting a clergyman, whose dress is often distinctly Christian, discourages other believers from openly identifying their faith among society. That case also serves as an example of the authorities not conducting a serious and effective investigation into persecution cases.

The U.S. decision to designate Pakistan as a CPC was a positive step toward acknowledging the extreme persecution that Christians face in Pakistan. The country’s current political instability is expected to increase the vulnerability of Christians, requiring further detailed human rights monitoring and more detailed focus on from those groups regarding the status of minorities.

Blasphemy laws are not just used by the government to abuse religious minorities, they also encourage radical Muslim citizens to act out against non-Muslims with impunity. More than 200 houses and two dozen churches in Pakistan were burned in an attack on the Christian community of Jaranwala by a mob of radical Muslims. While the exact motivations of the attackers remain unclear, the event is understood to have been motivated by religious intolerance, sparked by accusations of blasphemy against Christians in the community. In response to this hateful incident, the government has downplayed the danger and has insisted that they have the best interests of residents of all faiths in mind. However, that has done little to ease the panic in the Pakistani Christian minority, and unease remains high between them and their Muslim neighbors.



“Blasphemy laws are a dangerous tool to suppress non-Muslims in Pakistan. They punish religious minorities with the death penalty and encourage radical Muslims to act out violently against peaceful Christians.”

- Liam Reed, ICC South Asia Regional Manager

# Forms of Persecution

## FORCED CONVERSION AND MARRIAGE

Women and girls are kidnapped from their families, married to an assailant, and held in sexual captivity. The perpetrators justify this through forged marriage and conversion documents. Investigations into these crimes are often nonexistent and a lack of justice encourages further victimization.

## ATTACKS ON PLACES OF WORSHIP

Christian places of worship are often targeted by extremists for deadly terrorist attacks. Many Pakistani Christians fear the possibility of further attacks, particularly when celebrating major Christian holidays.

## FALSE BLASPHEMY ACCUSATIONS

According to a 2020 report by the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), a human rights organization in Pakistan, at least 200 people were accused of committing blasphemy. Blasphemy accusations often have their roots in personal, professional, or business disputes. These types of comments can spark mob lynchings, vigilante murders, and mass protests.

## DISCRIMINATION

Pakistani Christians face extreme levels of discrimination due to their religious identity. They are often regarded as second-class citizens, working the filthiest jobs with no hope of advancement. This discrimination is frequently seen in the number of Christians involved in Pakistan’s sanitation workforce.

## GLIMMER OF HOPE

# Healing the Invisible Scars of Persecution

ICC conducted a trauma training session for students in Pakistan who have suffered trauma and persecution due to their religious beliefs. This training helped equip participants with the knowledge needed to establish a social support group, create a work-life balance, and implement measures to mitigate trauma within their families and lives.

“We hide our religion portion in our resume to avoid rejection. We don’t get jobs easily if we reveal our identity no matter how qualified or capable,” said another participant. “We are constantly made to believe that we are impure, dirty, infidels in one way or the other by our peers, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. They don’t drink and eat with us.”

The participating students were able to learn about the issue of trauma and its impact on people as well as develop personal coping strategies. Many of the students surveyed had a high level of stress and trauma. Together, in a safe environment, they were able to share their experiences.

By the end of this trauma training session, participating students had become more informed about issues related to trauma, had better coping mechanisms to rely on, and understood ways in which they can support one another when it comes to

# ICC Recommends

## 1 U.S. Foreign Aid

That U.S. foreign aid to Pakistan become heavily conditioned on improved human rights conditions in the country, including the repeal of its discriminatory blasphemy law and the release of prisoners accused under it.

## 2 CPC Designation

Continued listing of Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern as the U.S. has done every year since 2018 and a lifting of the waiver that shields Pakistan from the sanctions statutorily associated with CPC designation.

## 3 Support Education

That religious minority communities in Pakistan, including Christians, Hindus, and minority sects of Islam, be targeted for increased educational and career advancement by nonprofit organizations and others.



DOWNLOAD ICC’S PAKISTAN REPORT ON PAGE 86.



# Eritrea

AFRICA’S MOST REPRESSIVE REGIME

## Summary

- Eritrea was part of Ethiopia until 1993 when it held a referendum for independence. The referendum was preceded by a three-decade-long war fought by Eritrean groups to gain independence from Ethiopia.
- A 2022 government decree required all religious groups to register, resulting in the closing of all religious groups except for The Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and Islam. Members of other Christian denominations were forced to flee the country, put in prison, or worship underground.
- People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) is the ruling party, and it is the only party that is legally recognized in the country. The party follows Marxist ideology.
- The Eritrean government is highly repressive and one of the top violators of human rights in the world. Thousands of youths flee the country to escape from forced conscription into the army. Many political dissidents suffer in Eritrean prisons, and 5,000 Christians are kept in military barracks, shipping metal containers, and prison cells due to their faith.

While no one knows the exact number of Christians living in Eritrea, they are among the most persecuted on the planet.

## Overview

When analysts call Eritrea the “North Korea” of Africa, the moniker is not a reference to the countries’ similarly high mountains and deep valleys. The two countries, separated by thousands of miles, are joined by covert military ties and a shared animosity to political and personal freedoms. In Eritrea, those wishing to worship outside the narrow confines established by the government face severe penalties including torture, imprisonment, and death.

The government recognizes three Christian groups, estimated to make up 49-63% of the population, and Islam, whose adherents comprise somewhere from 37-49% of the population. Anybody caught worshipping outside these groups is swiftly dealt with, as are those within the approved groups who dare to challenge the government in any way.

Those who run afoul of the law find themselves held in some of the most inhumane conditions anywhere in the world. Reports from Eritrean prisons, which hold many prisoners of conscience, report torture, food deprivation, and inmates crammed into shipping containers left on the desert floor. For many imprisoned believers, there is no earthly escape.



## State of the Church

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
2.2 million to 3.8 million

**GROWTH**  
Unknown.

**VISIBILITY**  
Underground for non-registered denominations

**SOURCES OF PERSECUTION**  
Government

## Quick Facts

**POPULATION**  
3.5 to 6.1 million (estimate)

**RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN**  
63% Christian  
37% Muslim

**CURRENT LEADER**  
Isaias Afwerki

## Timeline

2022

**NOVEMBER 3**

The government of Eritrea takes over a Catholic-run technical college citing a 1995 regulation giving it authority over religious institutions in the country.

**NOV. 17 - 25**

Eritrean forces kill 111 civilians and injured another 103 in the eastern zone of Tigray.

2023

**APRIL**

Eritrean police raided a group of Christian college students who had gathered to worship and record video clips for social media. Authorities arrested 103 Christians.

**MAY 1**

The United State Commission on International Religious Freedom recommends Eritrea for a Country of Particular Concern designation for the 19th year in a row.

**JULY 22**

Two pastors reach their 7,000th night in prison without being charged with a crime, receiving legal counsel, or a trial.

**AUGUST 7**

A UN human rights report is released outlining the “indefinite compulsory service” required of all people in Eritrea and the human rights abuses they face while fulfilling these requirements, including forfeiting the right to practice religion of any form during their period of service.

“Eritrea remains one of the worst examples of state-sponsored repression of freedom of religion or belief in the world... Eritrean authorities conducted waves of door-to-door searches and arrests of individuals because of their religious identity, and increased oppression of Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian communities.

-Thomas Reese, USCIRF Commissioner





## ICC Analysis

A man broke down and wept openly at a church in Ethiopia. The pastor of the church asked the man what caused his anguish. Distraught, the man revealed that he is an Eritrean Christian who had just fled Eritrea as a refugee. While attempting to cross the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, he and his son were separated. After three weeks of searching refugee camps, he received the worst news any parent can get; his son was shot and killed by Eritrean border guards.

“I came to Ethiopia to take my son away from persecution. Now I must continue on without him,” cried the grieving father.

Unfortunately, this story is all too common for Christians living in Africa’s most repressive country. While no one knows the exact number of believers living in Eritrea, one thing is known for certain: they are among the most persecuted on the planet.

**AFRICA’S MOST REPRESSIVE REGIME:** Eritrea is a small but strategically located nation in the Horn of Africa. After 30 years of war with Ethiopia, Eritrea officially became an independent country in 1993. Since independence, the country has been ruled by President Isaias Afwerki, the former leader of the independence movement. After initially leading the country toward democracy, the Afwerki regime became increasingly repressive to stay in control. His regime only allowed people to worship within one of the official state religions which include four denominations of Christianity. Within these official state religions, the Afwerki regime exercises near complete control significantly curtailing any real religious freedom in Eritrea.

In 2002, the Afwerki regime attempted to help its international image regarding religious freedom by allowing religious groups outside the official state religions to register with the government to worship legally. To register,

religious communities must provide detailed financial and membership information, as well as background on all their activities in Eritrea. The 2022 declaration began a series of raids where Eritrean officials arrested Christians on foundationless grounds. At the end of 2005, there was an estimated 1,750 Christians held in prisons and military camps. Currently, the estimate of prisoners without a trial or even a crime charged to their name is approximately 500, with hundreds more imprisoned with charges such as blasphemy or apostasy.

Since the 2022 registration requirement came into existence no religious group has passed the registration process. For now, all religious activity, outside of the highly regulated official state religions, is still illegal. Christians caught conducting religious activities, even something as simple as a Bible study at home, can be arrested, subjected to torture and possibly executed under charges of treason.

## Forms of Persecution

### IMPRISONMENT AND TORTURE

Eritrea has a well-documented history of treating its prisoners inhumanely and of targeting religious minorities for particularly harsh treatment. Christians are pressured to recant their faith, with the imminent threat of torture and continued imprisonment. They are placed in metal shipping container cells where they face extreme temperatures and starvation.

### GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY

In light of universal conscription into the military, it is worth noting that government violations of religious freedom are particularly severe in the armed forces. Armed forces members are banned from attending Protestant payer meetings, subject to punishment by imprisonment. Armed forces members and national service inductees reportedly face severe punishment for possessing religious literature, including Bibles.

### ISOLATION

In addition to these abuses, the Eritrean government is gradually pushing out humanitarian organizations that were bringing aid to the country. Officials have asked 11 organizations to leave in the last year. The government continues to isolate itself which in turn further isolates Christians and limits their opportunities to receive help. The systematic repression has created such a desperate situation for Christians in Eritrea that they have become easy targets for traffickers in East Africa.



## ICC Advocacy at Work

ICC has published a long form report about the status of religious freedom in Eritrea. ICC also works with several U.S. agencies to highlight cases of persecution and communicate key information.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## Providing Aid to Africa’s ‘North Korea’

Called “Africa’s North Korea” by some, Eritrea is ruled by an oppressive, totalitarian government that is openly hostile to religion. There are an estimated 400-500 Christian prisoners of faith in the country, none of whom have received a trial or even been charged with a crime. Religious prisoners are often subjected to long or indefinite terms in prisons where they suffer unimaginably inhumane conditions.

ICC recently provided emergency food supplies and audio bibles to persecuted Eritrean believers. While not much can be shared about the dangerous trip made through a courageous partner, interviews with former

prisoners were conducted, which revealed harrowing details of the suffering Christians in the country endure.

In one instance, despite the endless torture he faced and separation from other inmates, one pastor disclosed secretly baptizing 50 believers by collecting toilet and shower water in a barrel.

“It’s very tough, especially for Christians,” he said regarding the prison conditions. “Even though they are preventing us [from seeing other prisoners], so many people, even fighters and the prisoners, are receiving Jesus Christ as their personal savior.”

## ICC Recommends

1

### Prison Reform

That the Eritrean government enact reforms, guided by international bodies, of its judicial and penal systems to ease the unjust impact they have on prisoners of conscience.

2

### CPC Designation

That the U.S. continue its consistent pressure on Eritrea regarding its human rights situation, including by redesignating it a Country of Particular concern for its particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

3

### Support Aid

That assistance be given to religious groups in the country, and among the Eritrean diaspora, in their effort to worship freely and in accordance with their conscience.



# Algeria

CLOSING CHURCHES AND ARRESTING CHRISTIANS

## Summary

- Algeria has closed dozens of Protestant churches affiliated with the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA), leaving hundreds with no place to worship.
- The government elected a new president in 2019 after Constitutional reform, which has brought little change for religious freedom.
- Algeria has a blasphemy law in its penal code, allowing authorities to arrest non-Muslims for proselytization and doing anything to “shake the faith of a Muslim.”
- Several leaders in the EPA have faced or are currently facing charges of proselytization.
- Several churches closed for COVID-19 remain closed, despite other places of worship having reopened.

Despite the hope of a new administration, Algeria continues to persecute Christians, as they are viewed as a threat to the nation’s Islamic identity.

## Overview

After decades of relative peace, the evangelical church in Algeria, represented by the Eglise Protestante d’Algérie (EPA), was targeted in the early 2000s by a series of laws challenging their legal status. These laws resulted in one round of church closures in 2008 and another that stretched from 2017 to 2019, when 18 churches in the EPA network were closed. In several incidents, the authorities used violence to eject peaceful churchgoers from their place of worship.

In 2020, authorities closed all places of worship, including churches, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for the move. Though the initial order impacted Muslims and Christians alike, churches were excluded when authorities relaxed the closures on February 15, 2021.

The EPA has been consistent in its efforts to work with the authorities but has seen few results, with authorities simply refusing to engage with the Christian church. The national commission tasked with regulating non-Muslim worship has never met. “We do not understand the relentless injustice of the Algerian government toward us,” a spokesman for the EPA told ICC. “They refuse to hear us or listen to us.”

## State of the Church

- CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
20,000 - 200,000 estimates
- GROWTH**  
Birth of modern Christianity in the last 40 years has led to tens of thousands of Christians.
- VISIBILITY**  
“Above ground” churches have been shut down, while Christian leaders have been publicly persecuted.
- SOURCES OF PERSECUTION**  
Government-sponsored persecution

## Quick Facts

- POPULATION**  
45.7 million
- RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN**  
98% Muslim  
2% other, including Christians
- CURRENT LEADER**  
Abdelmadjid Tebboune

## Timeline

2018

Algerian authorities order the closure of Al-Azagher church in Bejaia province, sealing it just months later, becoming one of the first EPA churches forced to close by the government.

2020

Algerian authorities use the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification to close more EPA churches, which remained closed even after mosques and historical churches begin to reopen.

2021

As mosques reopen, EPA churches closed for the pandemic remain closed. Several Christian converts, including Foudhil Bahloul and Rachid Seighir, are arrested for proselytization activities.

2022

Algerian authorities seal even more EPA churches, closing most Protestant churches in the country.

2023

Algeria authorities begin raiding and arresting house church leaders on grounds of “corrupting the youth away from Islam.”

Christian prisoner of conscience Hamid released in presidential pardon.

“The Algerian government has shown growing hostility over the last few years toward Christians through closing churches, detaining leaders, and punishing Christian outreach and proselytization. Local Christian leaders remain strong in the face of these persecutions, and continue to advocate for Christian prisoners and the opportunity and freedom to gather in their churches.”

- Joseph Daniel, ICC MENA Regional Manager





# ICC Analysis

Although the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 2019 provided an unparalleled opportunity for Algeria to improve its human rights and religious freedom record, the nation has only succeeded in doubling down on repressing its vulnerable Christian minority. The COVID-19 pandemic posed new challenges. Every church was closed. But when Algeria made the decision to reopen society, mosques and the historic churches were authorized to resume their activities.

Protestant churches asked the government for clarity about their status, but for weeks received only silence. Some have since reopened, although they never received a response from the authorities. However, the churches which were sealed pre-dating COVID-19 remain closed.

As the country has emerged from COVID-19, there has been an increase of activity relating to criminal charges pressed against individual Christians, namely protestants, arrested on blasphemy charges when they worship outside of their church, which they cannot access due to the closures. Now more than ever is the time for the international community to pressure Algeria to reverse course and protect the rights of its Christian minority.

The Algerian church is the second-largest Christian community in northern Africa, and it faces a type of government-sponsored persecution that is unique. Like most countries in this part of the world, Algeria is officially Islamic. Indeed, the president’s oath of office requires him to “glorify the Islamic religion.” Still, Algeria’s Constitution contains provisions which guarantee religious freedom, although these protections have frequently been ignored in the creation of subsequent legislation and in government practice.

## DANGER TO ALGERIA’S ISLAMIC IDENTITY

Christianity has existed in Algeria for centuries and is mostly tolerated by the broader society. The government views Christianity, however, as a danger to the Algerian Islamic identity and makes every attempt to regulate the church into non-existence.

Estimates of the Christian population range from 20,000 to 200,000. Protestants make up the fastest-growing Christian population in Algeria. The EPA, a government approved organization of churches, consists of 45 churches spread across the country’s many ethnic and tribal identities.

The largest single church consisted of about 1,000 members before it was shut down by authorities in late 2019. Since the early 2000s, the Protestant community in Algeria has faced three waves of government-sponsored persecution. In each, the authorities target places of worship, shutting them down and refusing to recognize their legitimacy.

In 2023, Algeria continued its closure of churches even amid outstanding requests from the EPA and other church governing bodies. Arrests and detainments of house church leaders across the country also continued. Vague phrases in Algerian law were applied for these arrests. One Christian sports and youth worker was arrested under charges of “corrupting the minds of youth to seduce them away from Islam,” and other Christian pastors and leaders were arrested for “shaking the faith of Muslims.”

“Algeria continues to systematically target Protestant Christians and other religious minority communities. The government’s crackdown on non-Muslim worship practices is displayed through routine arrests of pastors, forced closures of Christian churches, and government surveillance on religious workers. These trends bode ill for the future of religious freedom in Algeria. ICC is committed to advocating for the rights of Algerian Christians to freely practice their faith without fear of government repercussions.”

- Elease Pruitt, ICC Advocacy representative



# Forms of Persecution

## ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT

Algerian authorities have arrested several Christians under their harsh blasphemy laws for discussing their faith outside of churches, many of which remain closed. After arresting pastors, Algeria regularly detains them or keeps them under house arrest to inhibit their ability to preach.

## CLOSURE OF CHURCHES

Algerian official have sealed dozens of EPA-affiliated churches using a wide range of justifications and fails to respond to EPA leaders when requesting proper permits.

## CONFISCATION OF BIBLES

Algerian police have raided the houses of EPA leaders and taken Bibles from their homes to prevent the spread of Christianity.



## ICC Advocacy at Work

ICC has sponsored the legal fees of Christian prisoners who have faced charges because of their faith. ICC has also helped support the families of arrested pastors.

## GLIMMER OF HOPE

# Only 11 Churches Left in Algeria, But the Church is Still Growing

During the beginning of the pandemic, the Algerian government shut down all religious institutions, and never allowed churches to reopen; they are now permanently closing them down and sealing the doors so they cannot be used. There are now only 11 churches left that have not been forcibly sealed from the public. With these closures, some Algerian church leaders are welcoming the persecution in their country.

These leaders explain that when churches close, they are forced to go underground away from government control, and this is

when they start seeing more believers being formed. Mission Network News completed an interview regarding these issues, “Algerian church leaders tell Pastor Riadh, ‘We are happy when we see persecution come in our country.’ People are thirsty to know more about the faith when they don’t see any hope,’ he says.”

The government in Algeria is not open to discussions about religious freedom, and since the new government came to power in 2017, churches have continued to close across the country. An ICC report explains that after

# ICC Recommends

## 1 Reopen Churches

The Algerian government reopen all remaining closed churches and reverse decades of legal precedent which make it effectively impossible for churches to gain full legal recognition.

## 2 Release Prisoners

Authorities release any remaining prisoners of conscience, including leaders held simply for exercising their faith through participation in a nonprofit enterprise or ministry.

## 3 U.S. Special Watchlist

The U.S. Department of State continue its designation of Algeria as a Special Watchlist country, a designation that began in 2021 for the first time and helps to frame diplomatic conversations between the two countries.

the Algerian civil war, many churches were forming from the “war-torn civilization as a result of western missionary activities and indigenous Christian outreach programs” The now mostly Islamic government was not going to allow this, and then started to systematically close down churches to stop the recent rise in Christian population. As this occurs in current day, Christianity has not been extinguished, and persists despite the repression of the community.



# Indonesia

BLASPHEMY LAWS TARGET  
RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

## Summary

- Extremists target religious minorities in Indonesia, exploiting harsh blasphemy laws that intimidate and suppress non-Muslim beliefs.
- Legal barriers on places of worship hinder Christian communities from building or maintaining churches, making them vulnerable to extremist groups.
- In 2022, Indonesia passed a controversial criminal code, increasing penalties for blasphemy and vaguely prohibiting evangelism, affecting minority groups.
- President Joko Widodo emphasized religious freedom, but Christians often face harassment and disruptions in their worship.
- Indonesia faces ongoing challenges in achieving religious pluralism, requiring comprehensive approaches, interfaith dialogue, and international support for tolerance and minority rights.

Challenges persist for Christians in Indonesia as incidents of harassment and disruptions of Christian worship continue.

## Overview

In Indonesia, extremists harass and intimidate Christians and other minorities all while the government recently doubled down on its harsh criminal code, including a prohibition on evangelism. These laws, designed to criminalize minority religious beliefs, are used to intimidate and suppress those outside the majority-Muslim faith.

In addition to the country's blasphemy laws, it also maintains legal barriers on places of worship, preventing many Christian communities from building or maintaining their churches. Extremist groups are known to take advantage of this difficulty, targeting unregistered minority places of worship and did not grant the protections offered to the majority community.

In December 2022, the Indonesian parliament passed a controversial new criminal code that greatly dampened human rights in the country. Among other provisions, the new code loosened the definition of blasphemy and increased the penalty associated with breaking the law. It also contained a vaguely worded prohibition on evangelism, a concerning development for Christians and other minority groups.



## State of the Church

### CHRISTIAN POPULATION

29.1 million

### GROWTH

Younger generation showing tolerance and interest

### VISIBILITY

Public churches face persecution while converts from Islam must remain underground.

### SOURCES OF PERSECUTION

Government and radical Islamic groups

## Quick Facts

### POPULATION

277.3 million

### RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN

87.2% Muslim  
7% Protestant  
2.9% Roman Catholic  
1.7% Hindu  
1.3% Other

### CURRENT LEADER

Joko Widodo

## Timeline

2023

### FEBRUARY 8

Christian apologist Gratia Pello vanishes following arrest in early December.

### FEBRUARY 19

Authorities close a worship service at Kemah Daud Christian Church in Bandar Lampung.

### JUNE 2023

Roughly 100 Muslims protested at a local shopping mall to prevent Christians from using a room they had rented as a place of worship.

### JUNE 28

Residents of Bekasi, Indonesia, attempted to disband a Christian worship service in their neighborhood. In a video circulating on social media, Pastor Ellyson explained that they weren't trying to build a church but only want to worship with other Christians.

### AUGUST 2023

The newly constructed road to the Indonesian Pentecostal Church in Sungai Bahar, Muaro Jami, was unexpectedly blocked off.

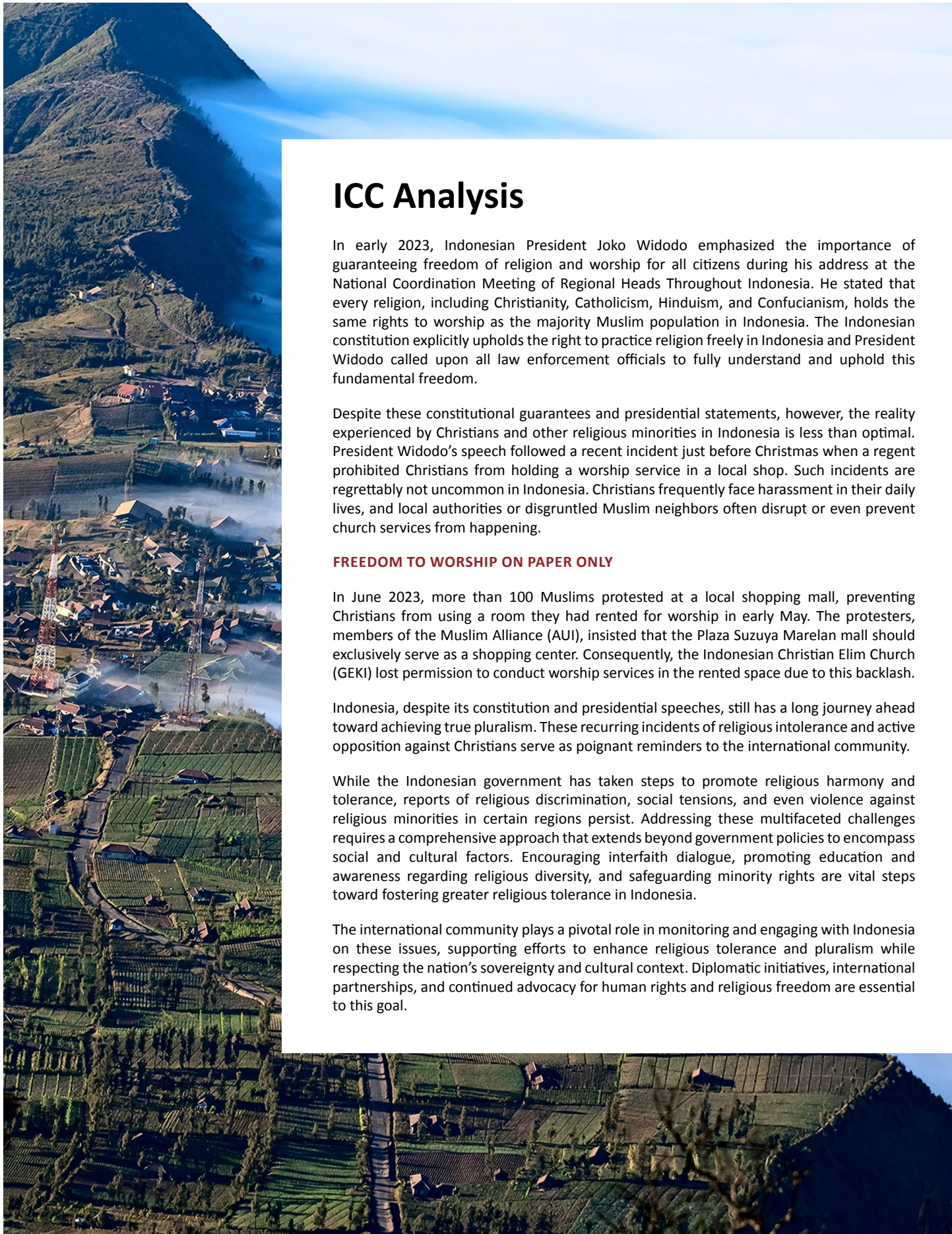
### AUGUST 2023

The Pentecostal Missionary Church in Kabil Village was destroyed by a radical mob that was protesting its construction in a majority-Muslim area.

“[Indonesia’s blasphemy law] violates international human rights standards and until it is repealed, hardline and intolerant groups can continue to target religious minorities...such as Christians... simply for exercising their fundamental freedoms of speech and religion.”

-Tenzin Dorjee, USCIRF Chair





## ICC Analysis

In early 2023, Indonesian President Joko Widodo emphasized the importance of guaranteeing freedom of religion and worship for all citizens during his address at the National Coordination Meeting of Regional Heads Throughout Indonesia. He stated that every religion, including Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, holds the same rights to worship as the majority Muslim population in Indonesia. The Indonesian constitution explicitly upholds the right to practice religion freely in Indonesia and President Widodo called upon all law enforcement officials to fully understand and uphold this fundamental freedom.

Despite these constitutional guarantees and presidential statements, however, the reality experienced by Christians and other religious minorities in Indonesia is less than optimal. President Widodo’s speech followed a recent incident just before Christmas when a regent prohibited Christians from holding a worship service in a local shop. Such incidents are regrettably not uncommon in Indonesia. Christians frequently face harassment in their daily lives, and local authorities or disgruntled Muslim neighbors often disrupt or even prevent church services from happening.

### FREEDOM TO WORSHIP ON PAPER ONLY

In June 2023, more than 100 Muslims protested at a local shopping mall, preventing Christians from using a room they had rented for worship in early May. The protesters, members of the Muslim Alliance (AUI), insisted that the Plaza Suzuya Marelán mall should exclusively serve as a shopping center. Consequently, the Indonesian Christian Elim Church (GEKI) lost permission to conduct worship services in the rented space due to this backlash.

Indonesia, despite its constitution and presidential speeches, still has a long journey ahead toward achieving true pluralism. These recurring incidents of religious intolerance and active opposition against Christians serve as poignant reminders to the international community.

While the Indonesian government has taken steps to promote religious harmony and tolerance, reports of religious discrimination, social tensions, and even violence against religious minorities in certain regions persist. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive approach that extends beyond government policies to encompass social and cultural factors. Encouraging interfaith dialogue, promoting education and awareness regarding religious diversity, and safeguarding minority rights are vital steps toward fostering greater religious tolerance in Indonesia.

The international community plays a pivotal role in monitoring and engaging with Indonesia on these issues, supporting efforts to enhance religious tolerance and pluralism while respecting the nation’s sovereignty and cultural context. Diplomatic initiatives, international partnerships, and continued advocacy for human rights and religious freedom are essential to this goal.

## Forms of Persecution

### TERRORIST ATTACKS

With its allegiance to the Islamic State, it comes as no surprise that the East Indonesia Mujahideen (MIT) terrorist group seeks to terrorize, invoke fear, and attract international attention as it fights to establish a caliphate. Beheadings, shootings, and burning of bodies and properties are common measures taken by MIT against its targets. Desperate for recognition, MIT strives to commit deadly and gruesome attacks.

### BLASPHEMY LAWS AND LOCAL REGULATIONS

Indonesia has strict blasphemy laws that can be used to target religious minorities, particularly those who express dissenting religious views or engage in interfaith activities. In some regions, local governments have imposed regulations that restrict religious freedom, making it difficult for Christians to build places of worship or celebrate their faith openly.

### RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

Some radical Islamist groups view religious pluralism as a threat to their interpretation of Islam and engage in acts of violence against religious minorities, including Christians. Christians in Indonesia may face social discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam, which can lead to alienation and marginalization.

### LACK OF LEGAL PROTECTION

Despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, Christians often find it challenging to seek legal redress for violations of their rights, as the legal system can be slow and biased against religious minorities.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## Finding Christ in a Tsunami

My name is Isla, and I am the eldest of six siblings, born and raised in a deeply Islamic city. Despite being a religious child and participating in Quranic studies at an Islamic boarding school, I struggled to understand Arabic and could only read it. This led me to question aspects of our faith, such as why we face Mecca during prayers when God is everywhere, and why Hajj is a requirement for worship when not everyone can afford it. These questions, however, angered my mother, who urged me to stop asking so many.

Eventually, I stopped asking my mother and began questioning things independently. In 2004, a devastating tsunami struck our city, and I found myself starting to drown in a mosque’s fishpond. The Lord opened my eyes in the water so I could see under the water, and I asked him, “Where am I, Lord?” In that moment, I prayed

to God for clarity and a chance to live a normal life.

In response, God guided me to look up at the sky, saved me from drowning, and urged me to seek answers. It was through Ephesians 2:8 that I found my answer: “For by grace, you are saved through faith; it is not the result of your efforts, but God’s gift.”

In 2005, I joined a humanitarian organization and met a young Christian man who would become my husband. When my parents learned of our intentions to marry, they reacted with anger, severed our relationship, and disowned me. My sister later asked about my faith, and I admitted to being different, prompting her to disconnect our call. At that moment, I felt a calling in my heart to prove that the God I followed was real.

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Repeal Blasphemy Law

That the criminalization of minority religious expression, via Indonesia’s blasphemy law, be repealed. In addition, government structures that restrict minority groups’ ability to register places of worship should be removed.

### 2 U.S. Special Watchlist

That Indonesia be added to the Special Watchlist for its severe violations of religious freedom. USCIRF has recommended this designation since 2003, with no response from the Department of State.

### 3 Repeal Criminal Code

That the harmful new criminal code broadening the definition of blasphemy and generally curtailing human rights be repealed and not allowed to come into effect as planned.

After the birth of our first child, I attempted to reach out to my parents to inform them of their grandson’s arrival. However, my father threatened violence, forcing us to relocate to another city. Five years later, we received news of my father’s passing, and we returned with our three children to pay our respects.

I find solace in the fact that I’ve demonstrated my Christian faith to my family, even though it means I can’t return to my parents’ home and won’t inherit from them. I trust that God will provide for me. I work as a seamstress and have managed to rent a house in installments. Two months ago, my husband passed away.

Recently, I learned that ICC could assist me in renting a house for a year while I work to secure next year’s rent from my tailoring income. I am grateful to ICC for their support in securing a home for this year.



# Azerbaijan

FULFILLING ITS PROMISE TO RID  
ARMENIAN PEOPLE FROM “THEIR” LAND

## Summary

- Even though Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), recognized as Artsakh to Armenians, is internationally recognized as a part of Azerbaijan, many still contest the validity of this fact.
- Over the past decades, Azerbaijan has shown its intent to rid Armenian culture, which is synonymous with Christianity, including destroying important monuments and historical churches from within Armenia and NK.
- Azerbaijan has taken advantage of the war in Ukraine by pushing back the Russian peacekeepers position within its borders and on the Lachin-Corridor Road, the only way for NK to receive resources by land.
- Despite the long advancing blockade in NK (beginning in Dec. 2022), Azerbaijan does little to help the food and health crisis going on within NK.
- Azerbaijan’s end game is clear: to rid its borders of Christianity: either by forcing the Armenian people and their faith out of Azerbaijan or destroying the people and historical sites.

With the world distracted, Azerbaijan focuses its energy on removing Armenian culture and Christianity from its surroundings.

## Overview

Azerbaijan is a small Muslim-majority country sandwiched between Turkey to the west and Iran to the southeast. President Ilham Aliyev has ruled since coming to power in 2003 and has overseen a government marked by strict authoritarianism and little tolerance for political or religious freedom.

For decades, Azerbaijan has warred with neighboring Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) region. Armenia is the first Christian nation and is overwhelmingly populated by Christians. Located between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Artsakh and its mostly Christian population have suffered greatly in a conflict that has worsened in recent years. NK contains between 94-98% majority Christian population, most being Armenian Apostolic.

On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijani forces, aided by Turkish-paid Syrian mercenaries and Turkish drones, attacked Armenian forces stationed in Artsakh. The two sides fought for 44 days, until a Russian-brokered peace deal finally brought an official end to the fighting. Since that time, the violence has continued sporadically with Azerbaijan continuing to act aggressively in the region, including through a blockade of desperately needed humanitarian supplies that spanned a majority of 2023.

After a nine-month blockade this year, Azerbaijan took over Artsakh in just 24 hours on Sept. 19. This forced many Christians to flee to Armenia or face life under Azerbaijan rule.

## State of the Church

IN ARMENIA

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
2.8 million (~93% of total population)

**GROWTH**  
Numbers have remained steady in the last decade

**VISIBILITY**  
Christianity is ingrained in Armenian culture.

**SOURCES OF PERSECUTION**  
Azerbaijan government

## Quick Facts

**POPULATION**  
10.21 million (estimated)

**RELIGIOUS BREAKDOWN**  
96% Muslim  
65% Shia, 35% Sunni  
4% other, including Christian

**CURRENT LEADER**  
Ilham Heydar oghlu Aliyev

## Timeline

2015

**JANUARY 15, 2015**

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited Turkey, saying, “Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijan’s native land. Azerbaijan will restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

**FEBRUARY 8, 2018**

Aliyev claimed some Armenian regions are Azerbaijan’s historical lands and that “...we, the Azerbaijanis, must return to these historical lands.”

2020

**JULY 12 - 16, 2020**

Violence erupted, and at least 18 people were killed, after an Azerbaijani military vehicle drove close to the Armenian village of Movses on June 12. Turkey was the only regional power to declare its full support for Azerbaijan.

**SEPT. 27, 2020**

Azerbaijani tanks, helicopters, and drones engaging Armenian troops killed dozens on the border. Within hours, Armenia and NK leadership sent armored vehicles and reserve troops to the front lines. Azerbaijan declared a partial military mobilization on September 28.

**NOV. 9, 2020**

Russia mediated a ceasefire under the conditions of a withdrawal of Armenian troops from all territories adjacent to NK and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to the region and Lachin corridor. Since, NK has been loosely internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan.

**JULY 28, 2021**

Three soldiers killed and seven wounded following several hours of fighting at the NK border. Russia brokered another ceasefire.

**SEPT. 13, 2021**

Azerbaijani police installed a checkpoint, violating 2020 war ceasefire agreements.

**AUG. 25, 2022**

Azerbaijan’s troops enter Lachin, the only road connecting NK to Armenia.

**SEPT. 13 - 14, 2022**

Two days of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia left hundreds of soldiers dead along around a 200km segment of the countries’ shared border.

**DEC. 12, 2022**

Azerbaijani pro-government activists blocked the only road to NK, causing shortages of food and medication.

**APRIL 23, 2023**

Azerbaijani troops and construction workers started building a new checkpoint at the entrance to the Lachin corridor.

**SEPT. 9, 2023**

A supposed truce between the two countries was struck, opening NK to the Lachin Corridor to the Russian Red Cross to provide humanitarian aid.

**SEPT. 18, 2023**

Azerbaijan launches a military attack and takes control of NK. This begins a mass exodus of ethnic Armenian Christians from the region.







## ICC Analysis

Azerbaijan has been a key persecutor of the Armenian church, under the support of the Turkish government for more than a century. Few condone the actions of Azerbaijan and President Ilham Aliyev toward the Armenian people. Aliyev's words over the years explicitly show a theme of contempt, ethnic discrimination, and religious intolerance. Aliyev regularly uses derogatory rhetoric, such as barbarians, rats, and vandals, to describe and dehumanize the Armenian people. In a Tweet from 2012, he states, "Our main enemy is the Armenian lobby ... Armenia as a country is of no value. It is actually a colony, an outpost run from abroad, a territory artificially created on ancient Azerbaijani lands."

Also noteworthy is the ill-informed understanding of the ancient cultural heritage of Armenia (including NK). For most people living in the region, to be Armenian is to be Christian. Therefore, persecution against Armenians and Armenian residents of NK is persecution against the body of Christ.

The region is home to some of the oldest Christian communities in the world. The first Armenian state of Urartu was established around 860 BC; with Azerbaijan's cultural and religious heritage not coming close, chronologically, to that of Armenia.

### ERASING CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

While the dynamics of the conflict between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and NK are deeply complex, it has strong religious freedom implications. Azerbaijani forces have reportedly promised to erase the Christian heritage from the region, and thus implying the removal or extermination of Christian residents.

Azerbaijan's clear disdain for the Armenian people (who make up the majority of NK) is shown through its destruction of important religious sites and historical grounds. During the 44-day war in 2020, multiple videos surfaces of Azerbaijani forces intentionally destroying Christian cultural sites, including churches such as the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, and centuries-old khachkars, also known as cross-stones.

Most recently, Azerbaijan's nearly yearlong blockade in the Lachin Corridor exemplifies the persecution of the region's Christians. This road is the main access for NK to the outside world. By blocking the road, Azerbaijan has isolated NK from vital outside resources such as food, medicine, and gas.

After gaining control of NK after the 2020 war, Azerbaijan is on its way to achieving its goal of "cleansing" the land of the Armenian people. This is bigger than a territory dispute, it is a blatant act of genocide of a highly cultural and religious community.

**"The issue with Nagorno Karabakh, is not whether its physical location is part of Armenia or Azerbaijan, but much bleaker. What we should be asking is can the people survive Azerbaijan's regime after it has been fully taken over by Azeri forces, or will the people be put in a position to choose their heritage, cultural significant sites, and years of ancestral land, over their lives simply because they are historically and ethnically Armenian Christians?"**

- ICC MENA Regional Team



### MORE TO EXPLORE

*Read Christians Suffer under Blockade, 'Genocide' in Artsakh, by Linda Burkle, Ph.D., ICC Fellow*

## Forms of Persecution

### ATTACKS ON LIFE AND PROPERTY

Blockading essential resources; restrictions on church and attendance; targeted attacks on historically Christian sites and churches.

### DISCRIMINATION

Racist rhetoric and continual push of dehumanizing agenda by Azerbaijan leaders; denial of cultural and religious history.

**"We are deeply concerned by Azerbaijan's plans to remove Armenian Apostolic inscriptions from churches. We urge the government to preserve and protect places of worship and other religious and cultural sites."**

- Nadine Maenza, Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), February 2022

## IN THE NEWS

### Mass Exodus to Armenia

Now that Azerbaijan is in control of Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenian: Artsakh), tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians pour into Armenia from Artsakh.

Ethnic Armenian Christians have lived in Artsakh for centuries despite the enclave being internationally recognized as Azerbaijan, and after the September rapid offensive by Azerbaijani armed forces, the conflict over the region has essentially come to an end. Even with offers of security guarantees for ethnic Armenians from Azerbaijani government forces, the deep distrust and history of conflict, genocide, and ethnic cleansing by Azeris and Turks toward Armenians have tens of thousands choosing to leave their homelands for an uncertain future in Armenia.

An estimated 100,000 refugees fled Artsakh to Armenia after the takeover by Azerbaijan. It is still unclear how the government will accommodate and support the high number of arrivals, especially with Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's government under national pressure to resign after its failure to protect the fall of Artsakh.

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Aid to Refugees

That the U.S. provide humanitarian assistance to the Artsakh region and ethnic Armenian refugees. In addition, ICC recommends that full investigation of war crimes and ethnic cleansing in Artsakh be documented to hold Azerbaijan accountable.

### 2 U.S. Special Watchlist

That Azerbaijan be added for the first time to the Special Watchlist of countries that engage in or tolerate severe violations of religious freedom, as USCIRF has recommended since 2013.

### 3 Pressure on Allies

Pressure by the U.S. on Turkey, a fellow NATO member, regarding its support for Azerbaijani aggression in the region and the human rights violations perpetrated by Turkish-paid mercenaries.

### Azerbaijan Claims Artsakh

Azerbaijan announced a military operation into Artsakh on the night of Sept. 18, after nine months of a brutal blockade on the region. Terming it as a "anti-terrorism operation," the Azerbaijani assault began with heavy artillery shelling of both military and civilian centers, drone strikes, and securing strategic mountain corridor points.

By the afternoon of Sept. 20, the lightning military operation ended with an agreed ceasefire. Azerbaijan's government in Baku announced full control of the Artsakh enclave, and Artsakh representatives have seemingly ceded control of all military installations.



# Entities





# Allied Democratic Forces

RAVAGING CHRISTIANS IN CENTRAL AFRICA

## Summary

- Founded in 1995 to topple the Ugandan Museveni government, the ADF now conducts terror operations in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
- The ADF’s 2019 affiliation with Islamic State has returned its extremist religious motivations to the foreground.
- Years of local and international attempts to uproot the ADF have seen short-term success, but the group has repeatedly regenerated in the face of withering losses.
- A lack of progress toward the promised presidential election in 2023 has resulted in a disorganized police force leaving the ADF with ample time to conduct its violence.
- Starting as early as January 17, the ADF conducted 16 attacks resulting in the death of 267 people in just 155 days.

The Islamic State-aligned Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) commits unrestrained atrocities against Christians.

## Overview

An Islamic State affiliate since 2019, the Allied Defense Forces (ADF) is a longstanding jihadist terror organization wreaking havoc in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda. The region, largely Christian, suffers from endemic poverty exacerbated by poor governance and inadequate infrastructure. Sadly, ADF has managed to capitalize on these weaknesses to spread its reign of radicalization and terror.

When ADF was founded in 1995, it espoused extremist Islamist ideology. That rhetoric faded over the years as it focused on regrouping from losses sustained in the late 1990s and early 2000s. ADF conducted few violent attacks from 2001 to 2012. When it resumed its violence in 2013, there was less of a religious component to the language they used than when they conducted attacks in the 1990s.

In 2019, though, ADF’s language became increasingly extremist when it forged official ties with Islamic State. In 2020, ADF leader Musa Baluku shared in a propaganda video that ADF had been dissolved and fully incorporated into the Islamic State conglomerate. Since that time, ADF has again become primarily marked by Islamist extremism—bad news for Christians in DRC, Uganda, and nearby Mozambique.

## Quick Facts

- YEAR GROUP FORMED**  
1995
- CURRENT LEADER**  
Musa Baluku
- RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**  
Islamic Extremism
- PREDOMINATE REGION**  
Uganda and Eastern DRC



## Timeline

2023

**JANUARY 15**

An IED detonates at a church service where hundreds were gathered for prayer and baptism. 17 people killed and dozens more injured.

**JANUARY 23**

ADF kills 23 people in Makungwe, DRC.

**MARCH 9**

36 people are either burned to death or brutally murdered by machetes in an attack in the village of Mukondi.

**MARCH 12 AND 14**

26 are killed within two days, including an Episcopal priest who was leading a service when the attackers raided.

**APRIL 7-20**

Between April 7 and 20, ADF killed 84 people, including evangelist Emmanuel Kambale and his wife.

**MAY 12**

ADF rebels launched a night assault in Katongo farming fields three kilometers from Kasindi, injuring seven.

**JUNE 8**

The ADF killed 10 civilians and abducted an unknown number of others in the village of Bukokoma, DRC. Ugandan troops were stationed just two miles from the site of the attack.

**JUNE 9**

In their signature style of beheading via blades, the ADF killed 12 people in the DRC. The violence was described as “opening doors and decapitating people with hatchets and machetes.”

**JUNE 11**

An attack by the ADF in Kasindi left 8 people dead, 12 injured, and many others missing. As a strategy to avoid detection, the attackers reportedly used hammers and machetes in their acts of violence.

**JUNE 16**

ADF terrorists held hostages and brutally murdered 40 others people at a secondary school.

“Make no mistake—the ADF is an Islamic terrorist group on a quest for global Jihad. The ADF militants spread terror throughout the DRC through murderous rampages on Christian villages, all while espousing extremist propaganda and forcing victims to join their cause.”

- Kate Piselli, ICC Africa Regional Manager



## ICC Analysis

After officially becoming an Islamic State affiliate in 2018, the ADF has continued to reign terror in the eastern portion of the DRC while continuously failing to be recognized as a religious actor. Observers within the country have reported increased religiosity of the ADF with signs including celebrations of Eid al-Adha, the use of Sharia law, and an Islamic banking system which fighters are compelled to use.

In recent years, humanitarian activists, including members of the UN, have noticed further recruitment of people from neighboring nations in the ADF including militants from Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, and Somalia. While Ugandan soldiers aid the DRC in fighting other rebel groups within the country, the DRC is unable to look to many neighboring regions for help due to widespread suspicion of aid being sent through foreign rebels such as those from Rwanda.

Throughout 2023, the ADF has demonstrated their brutality in the violence they commit by repeatedly murdering people in entire villages using machetes, hammers, or hatchets (instead of guns) to avoid being heard to kill a higher number of victims. Showing no mercy, this group has reportedly attacked villages in the middle of the night during hot summer months when villagers had no choice but to sleep outdoors to find relief from the heat.

### MURDERING CHRISTIANS WITH IMPUNITY

Despite these devastating attacks, very few arrests are made, and police often refuse to acknowledge any violence, with reports detailing police’s refusal to send forces to the scene of a crime, even multiple days after an attack. Murders, kidnappings, burning buildings, forced conversion of religion are daily practices of ADF militants, with many of their victims identifying as Christian.

While the international community recognizes the extreme danger posed by ADF, it does not seem to fully appreciate the religious component of the ADF movement. In searching for long-term solutions to the terror group, it is important that the world address not just the economic roots of the insurgency but the ideological ones as well. Whether through targeted information campaigns on the ground or specific efforts to protect religious communities in ADF territory, it is vital that the world first recognize the persecution happening and then address it accordingly. Only then can a viable solution be reached.



DOWNLOAD ICC’S DRC  
REPORT ON PAGE 86.



## Forms of Persecution

### ASSASSINATIONS AND MARTYRDOM

ADF has killed hundreds, if not thousands, of individuals in Christian areas, including pastors.

### ATTACKS ON LIFE AND PROPERTY

ADF’s modus operandi is to attack and destroy communities it has chosen to victimize. The ADF is known to burn down churches in communities it visits.

### DENIAL OF RIGHTS

ADF is notorious for kidnapping children to serve as child soldiers or suicide bombers. This practice has drawn international condemnation.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## 14 Female Hostages Rescued from ADF by Ugandan and DRC Forces

Ugandan and DRC security forces rescued 14 female hostages from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in mid-July. Elements of the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) executed the rescue in North Kivu province as part of a joint operation known as “Operation Shujaa” targeting the ADF in Eastern DRC.

An ADF element responsible for a June 2023 terrorist attack that killed more than 40 civilians in western Uganda was holding the hostages, according to a spokesman from the UPDF. The rescue comes as a prelude to the upcoming bilateral meeting to review the status of the counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign. Ugandan and DRC security forces have been cooperating in “Operation Shujaa”

against the ADF since November 2021.

Conflict in the eastern DRC has been ongoing since the late 1990s, causing approximately 6,000,000 deaths since 1996, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. Ethnic armed groups—including the March 23 Movement (M23) and Islamic extremist groups, such as the ISIS-affiliated ADF—have contributed to destabilizing the region. The ADF originated in the mid-1990s as an insurgency with ethnic, political, and Salafi-Jihadist elements in its ideology—operating first in Uganda and then in the DRC, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

ICC previously reported on the June 2023 terrorist attack in Uganda, which came days after ICC reported on another ADF attack in the DRC that claimed more than 20 casualties.

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Assist Combat

That the international community provide material assistance to allied forces combating the rise of the ADF in eastern DRC and Uganda. Regional tensions make this force less effective—something that must be addressed soon.

### 2 CPC Designation

That ADF be designated as an Entity of Particular Concern for its consistent violations of not just human rights but also religious freedom, as evidenced by its militantly jihadist rhetoric and actions.

### 3 Foreign Aid

That international assistance to DRC, both humanitarian and otherwise, consider the particularly vulnerable religious groups lying in the path of ADF attacks.

## IN THE NEWS

### Church Attack Leaves One Dead

Suspected Islamic extremists stormed Katikara Anglican Church in Kakumiro District, western Uganda, hacking a church member to death and leaving several others injured on June 20.

### 45 Students Killed by ADF

ADF killed at least 45 students in an attack in Mpondwe, Kasese District, Uganda on June 16. Local sources have confirmed that three members of the community were also killed as the rebels went back, looting homes and killing people.

### Church Bombing Kills 17

Suspected ADF rebels detonated a homemade IED, killing 17 and injuring dozens more at a church in Kasindi, Eastern DRC on January 15. Hundreds were gathered for prayer and baptism when the blast went off.



# Al-Shabab

KILLING WITH ABANDON IN  
THE HORN OF AFRICA

## Summary

- In the five months between August and December 2022, al-Shabab is reportedly responsible for 733 deaths with a total of more than 6,500 fatalities throughout 2022.
- Al-Shabab has ensured that Somalia has remained a region of terror for Christians.
- Militants enforce a strict ban on behavior deemed un-Islamic and have implemented punishments under Sharia law to include floggings, amputations, and public executions.
- Al-Shabab fighters actively attack Somalia’s surrounding nations, including Kenya and Ethiopia, where fighters can easily slip across porous borders and retreat to Somali soil.
- The group also targets churches, police stations, shopping centers, communication masts, and Christian aid workers outside of Somalia.



Al-Shabab is an al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist group that aims to create an Islamic state in Somalia.

## Overview

Al-Shabab, a terrorist organization based in Somalia, ranks as one of the deadliest terror groups in the world. For nearly two decades, it has enforced its radical Islamist ideology on the region through targeted attacks in Somalia and abroad. Weaponizing a combination of radical Islam and Somali nationalism, al-Shabab poses a very real threat to peace and stability in the region.

In many of their attacks, al-Shabab insurgents separate Christians from Muslims before executing the Christians and sparing the Muslims. They do this by forcing people to show their IDs or by looking at an individual’s name, which often reveals what faith that person follows. If neither of these methods work, militants force suspected Christians to say the Shahada, an Islamic statement of faith. If the victims cannot say it or refuse to, they are executed.

An important element of al-Shabab’s mode of operation is the implementation of fundamentalist Sharia law in its areas of control. Its parallel Sharia judicial system is aided by the Somali government’s inability to maintain an effective judicial system of its own, causing many to submit to religious rule that is severely discriminatory against Christians.

## Quick Facts

**YEAR GROUP FORMED**  
2006

**CURRENT LEADER**  
Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah

**RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**  
Radical Islam (al-Qaida)

**PREDOMINATE REGION**  
Southern Somalia and Northeastern Kenya

## Timeline

2023

**MAY 16**

*Somalia and Kenya agree to reopen border points which creates fear of diminishing effectiveness of Kenyan soldiers in Somalia.*

**JUNE 24**

*Al-Shabab beheads five men and torches several houses in Salama-Juhudi villages, Lamu, Kenya.*

**JUNE**

*Al-Shabab kills 30 Kenyan soldiers through various methods like stopping buses, exploding law enforcement vehicles, invading villages, burning down buildings, and executing targets.*

**JULY 6**

*Al-Shabab executes four Christian workers, leaving grieving families unable to provide for themselves.*

**AUGUST 1**

*Al-Shabab militants ambush vehicles, kill one person, and injure 10 others in Lamu, Kenya. Approximately 60 members of al-Shabab were present.*

**AUGUST 23**

*Suspected al-Shabab terrorists kill two people in Kenya and burn down 10 homes and a church. In a separate incident, terrorists kill two motorists in an ambush.*

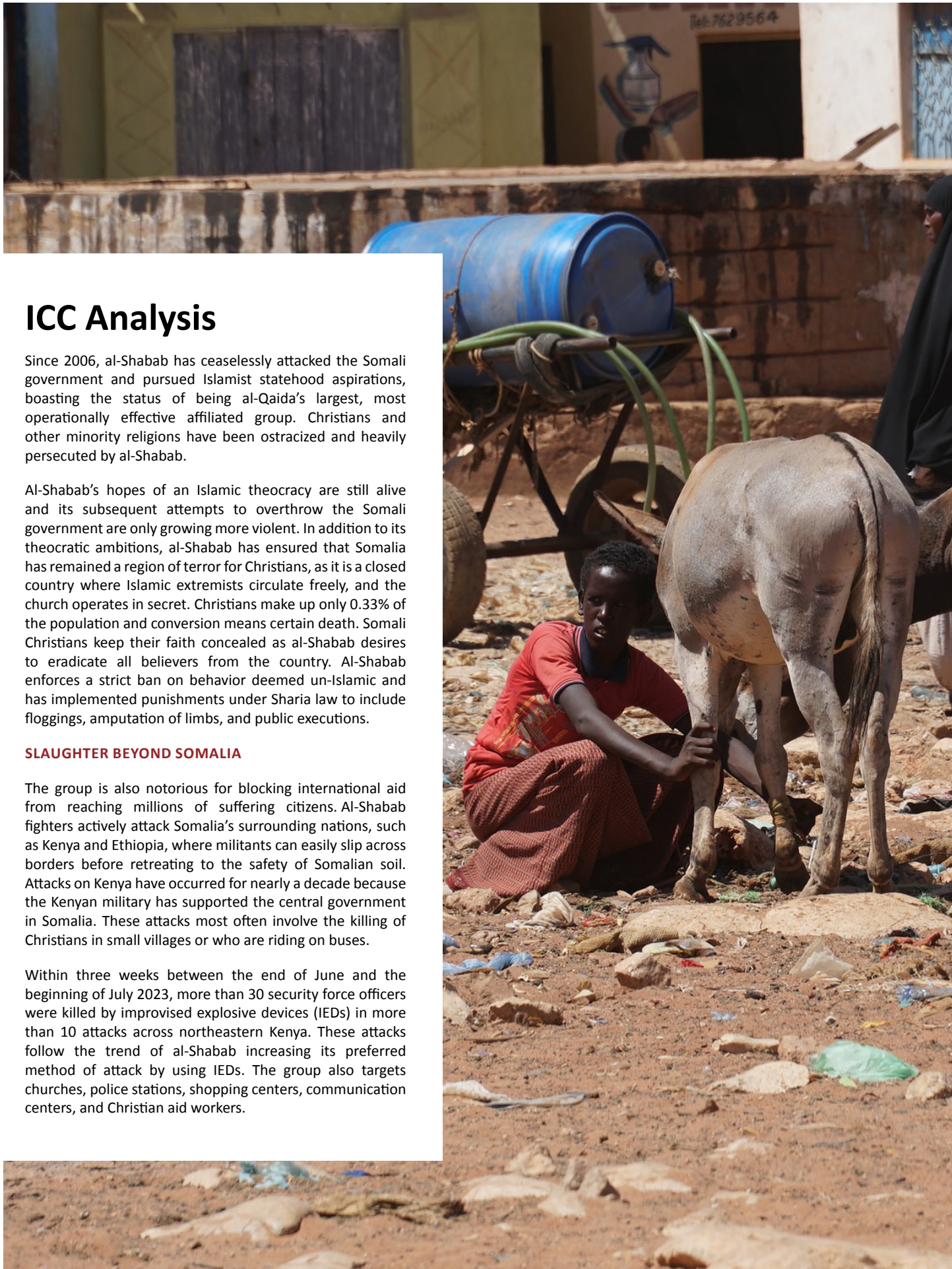
**AUGUST 25**

*A church in Salama Village, Lamu, Kenya, was set on fire and destroyed and nine houses also burned in a terrorist attack.*

“Al-Shabab remains the main persecutor of Christians in East African countries. The group continues to carry out massive attacks in Somalia and across the Eastern Africa region. Since the early 2000s, the Sunni Islamist jihadists idea has been to convert Somalia into an Islamic State, reduce the impact of Christianity, and unite all Muslims in the region.”

- James Kacka, ICC East Africa Regional Director





## ICC Analysis

Since 2006, al-Shabab has ceaselessly attacked the Somali government and pursued Islamist statehood aspirations, boasting the status of being al-Qaida’s largest, most operationally effective affiliated group. Christians and other minority religions have been ostracized and heavily persecuted by al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab’s hopes of an Islamic theocracy are still alive and its subsequent attempts to overthrow the Somali government are only growing more violent. In addition to its theocratic ambitions, al-Shabab has ensured that Somalia has remained a region of terror for Christians, as it is a closed country where Islamic extremists circulate freely, and the church operates in secret. Christians make up only 0.33% of the population and conversion means certain death. Somali Christians keep their faith concealed as al-Shabab desires to eradicate all believers from the country. Al-Shabab enforces a strict ban on behavior deemed un-Islamic and has implemented punishments under Sharia law to include floggings, amputation of limbs, and public executions.

### SLAUGHTER BEYOND SOMALIA

The group is also notorious for blocking international aid from reaching millions of suffering citizens. Al-Shabab fighters actively attack Somalia’s surrounding nations, such as Kenya and Ethiopia, where militants can easily slip across borders before retreating to the safety of Somalian soil. Attacks on Kenya have occurred for nearly a decade because the Kenyan military has supported the central government in Somalia. These attacks most often involve the killing of Christians in small villages or who are riding on buses.

Within three weeks between the end of June and the beginning of July 2023, more than 30 security force officers were killed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in more than 10 attacks across northeastern Kenya. These attacks follow the trend of al-Shabab increasing its preferred method of attack by using IEDs. The group also targets churches, police stations, shopping centers, communication centers, and Christian aid workers.

## Forms of Persecution

### TARGETING NON-MUSLIMS

In many of their attacks, insurgents separate Christians from Muslims, before executing the Christians and sparing the Muslims. They do this by forcing people to show their national IDs, which state their religion, or by looking at an individual’s name, which often reveals what faith that person follows. If neither of these methods work, militants force suspected Christians to say the Shahada, an Islamic statement of faith. When the targets cannot say it or refuse, they are executed.

### SUICIDE BOMBERS

Al-Shabab uses suicide bombings to target high-value individuals, institutions, and spaces antithetical to their mission, including the Somali government, United Nations, and African Union. Most of the group’s suicide bombing occurs in southern Somalia, primarily the country’s capital of Mogadishu.

### CONTROL THROUGH SHARIA LAW

Areas under al-Shabab control are subject to the group’s extreme Islamic ideology, including a strict implementation of Sharia criminal law. Sharia criminal law mandates harsh punishments that stand in contravention of human rights law, including floggings for alcohol consumption, the amputation of limbs for thieves, and death for apostates. Al-Shabab advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. Examples include women being forced to wear full body garments, and the prohibition of anything considered “western,” including the shaving of men’s beards, and various forms of music, movies, and art.

### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## Love and Loss in the Face of Terror

In the arid lands of northeastern Kenya, a chilling tragedy unfolded for four families as al-Shabab, the notorious Somali-based Islamic terrorist group, executed four Christian workers.

As the early morning sun struggled to pierce through the darkness, terror descended upon the workers. The al-Shabab terrorists, driven by their twisted ideology, ambushed them as they were drilling wells, shooting them mercilessly at close range. Four lives were extinguished in an instant. Among them was a husband and father of six, Joseph.

Left behind in the wake of the brutal attack was his grieving wife, Catherine, burdened not only by the immense sorrow of losing her beloved husband but also by the weight of the pregnancy of their sixth child.

“I lost him when I needed him most,” she

lamented. “Not that he was unimportant before I conceived our baby but because we needed his support during the pregnancy and after the delivery of the baby. But the Lord had other plans.”

Hearing of this tragic event, ICC staffers came to the victims’ families to offer support, including food, clothes, cooking gas, and more.

Catherine expressed her heartfelt appreciation to those who saw her grief and offered their help. “Thank you for extending your generosity to me and my baby,” she said. “Just over a month after delivering her, we were going through a difficult period, and I was wondering how we were going to survive. Now I have food in the house and money to buy her clothes and take her to the clinic. I will also keep part of the money to start a grocery shop after she grows up in a few months.”

## ICC Recommends

### 1 EPC Designation

That al-Shabab continues to be designated as an Entity of Particular Concern (EPC) for its violations of religious freedom, as recommended by USCIRF and executed by the Department of State beginning in 2018.

### 2 Diplomatic Reform

That diplomatic efforts be made to press the government of Somalia to reform its flawed judicial system, one of the factors helping to drive the growth of al-Shabab today.

### 3 Humanitarian Aid

That targeted humanitarian aid be provided to Somalia to further any efforts at reform, ameliorate the effects of al-Shabab on the civilian population, and help the country rebuild.

## IN THE NEWS

### 5 Killed by Al-Shabab

Five men were beheaded and several houses were torched in Salama-Juhudi villages, Lamu, Kenya, after an attack by the Somali-based terrorist group, al-Shabab on June 24.

### Terrorist Kill 2, Burn Church

Suspected al-Shabab terrorists killed two people in Kenya on August 22, and burned down ten homes and a church. In a separate incident, the terrorists killed two motorists in an ambush on a local road.

### One Killed, 10 Injured on Road

Al-Shabab militants ambushed vehicles, killed one person, and injured 10 others in Lamu, Kenya, on August 1.



# Fulani Militants

KILLING CHRISTIANS AND STEALING LAND IN THE MIDDLE BELT

## Summary

- The Fulani are an ethnic group who mostly live at peace with their neighbors. The Fulani Militia are members of the Fulani who have become radicalized by extreme Islam.
- The Fulani militants are ruthless and uncompromising. They kill Christian families, steal what they can, and burn everything else down.
- Fulani militants have killed tens of thousands of Christians and left more than three million homeless over the past 20 years.
- The Nigerian government continues to spin the narrative that they are doing the best they can, but that the conflict is beyond their control.
- The government is either incompetent or aiding and abetting the attackers.

For 20 years, militant Fulani jihadists have openly and unabatedly murdered tens of thousands of Christians in Nigeria. While the world continues to deny religious motive, believers in the country have no doubt: they are experiencing genocide, a one-sided war against Christianity.

## Overview

The Fulani are a people group spread across Africa’s Sahel region. Numbering 25 to 30 million, they can be found in every trade at every level of society, though traditionally many of them engage in nomadic cattle herding. Sadly, religious extremism, lack of resources, and ongoing communal violence have radicalized some in the community over the last decade, resulting in increased violence against historically Christian communities in the north and central regions of the country.

The small Fulani Christian population in Nigeria faces danger from these rogue militias. They are doubly persecuted—considered traitors by much of the Fulani community, they are frequently rejected by Christian communities who consider them spies. Though some have been accepted and even pastor multi-ethnic churches, many more face systematic rejection and physical danger from both sides.

Helping to combat the impact of these militias are peace-loving Fulani who risk their lives to warn the Christian community of impending militant attacks. These informants face severe consequences if caught and shine as an inspiring example of kindness and humanity toward their enemies.

## Quick Facts

### YEAR GROUP FORMED

Unknown

### CURRENT LEADER

No known leader

### RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Radical Islam

### PREDOMINATE REGION

Middle belt and northern Nigeria



## Timeline

2023

**MARCH 4**

Militants kill Christian clergy, his two sons, and seven others for not supporting the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) party.

**APRIL 19**

Militants brutally kill 33 Christians in Runji via guns and machetes, and burn 13 people, including women and children, to death in their homes.

**APRIL 29**

Nigerian police fail to aid village for two days after an attack that killed 20 Christians.

**MAY 7**

Armed Fulani militants kidnap 40 Christians from a church service in Madala village.

**MAY 17**

Gunmen wielding AK-47s and machetes kill 42 Christians and burn down dozens of villages from midnight until dawn near Mangu in Nigeria’s Plateau State.

**JUNE 11**

Militants kill 21 and injure several others in a coordinated attack across six different communities in Plateau State.

**JUNE 21**

Fulani militants violate government-imposed curfew for the second time in a month, killing 15 Christians in the Bwai Village of Mangu.

**JULY 9**

Fulani militants kill an eight-month-old baby and 8 people in the Vwang District of Jos.

**JULY 24**

37 Christians are killed in 3 weeks in a string of Fulani militant attacks. Two attacks on July 8 resulted in the death of 31 Christians and another attack on July 16 killed 6 more.

**AUGUST 8**

21 villagers killed in Heipang from Fulani militants open firing from 1:30 to 3:30 a.m.

“The Nigerian government and much of the international community often characterize Fulani militant attacks in Nigeria as ‘Farmer-Herder Clashes’ and deny any religious motivation. This is similar to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which was initially attributed to ‘farmer-herder clashes’ with no ethnic undertone. As seen in the Rwandan genocide, denial of evidence proving the targeting of a people group will end in devastation for said people group.”

- Kate Piselli, ICC Africa Regional Manager





## ICC Analysis

The Fulani, who are majority Muslim, are the world’s largest nomadic ethnic group. While most Fulani live at peace with their neighbors, militant Fulani, having been radicalized by extreme Islam, have emerged from their people group with Jihadist intent.

For centuries, Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers in Nigeria lived in relative harmony. The two groups formed mutually beneficial agreements where cattle could graze on fallow farmland and in return, crops were fertilized by cattle dung. If “clashes” between farmers and herders would arise, they were usually mediated by local chiefs and community council members. Rarely would a disagreement become violent.

Today, desertification in the Sahel has brought larger numbers of Fulani into Nigeria in search for greener pastures. Many of these Fulani hold radical Islamic views, having been influenced in their proximity to the Middle East, the epicenter of the global jihadist movement. While other factors are at play, such as economic prosperity and the desire for land grabbing, the measures taken to fulfill such desires are fueled by the extremist notion that they are superior to those whom they consider ‘infidels’ – anyone that does not follow their extremist agenda. This gives Fulani militants the excuse to rid the country of anyone they see as a

threat to their goals.

During this intended process of Islamification, Fulani who choose to remain at peace with Christians or stick to a more moderate view of Islam are regarded as “impure” Muslims, also deserving of death.

**TRENDS OF PERSECUTION:** The Nigerian government and much of the international community often characterize attacks in Nigeria as “farmer-herder clashes” and deny any religious motivation. This is similar to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, which was initially attributed to “farmer-herder clashes” with no ethnic undertone. As seen in the Rwandan genocide, denial of evidence proving the targeting of a people group will end in devastation for said people group.

Fulani militants strategically target Christian communities, key Christian leaders, and Christian houses of worship. Between the first documented 2023 attack in March and the most recent documented attack in July, Fulani militants specifically targeted Christian communities in 30 staged attacks, resulting in the death of 324 Christians, with 85 deaths occurring within 6 days in May alone. Sadly, these numbers are likely a significant undercount due to the lack of reporting of Christian persecution in the country.

## Forms of Persecution

### TORTURE, RAPE, AND KIDNAPPING

Fulani militants are known to enter Christian communities, cut off limbs and other body parts of their victims, rape women and girls, and abduct others.

### MURDER

Fulani militants use AK-47’s or machetes to kill their victims. Often bodies are found burned beyond recognition.

### ATTACKS ON LIVELIHOOD AND PROPERTY

During their rampages, Fulani militants set fire to entire villages, burning down homes and vehicles and destroying farmlands.

### EDUCATION

The mass movement of Christians due to Fulani militant attacks has indirectly affected the upcoming generation. Millions of children who have grown up in IDP camps have been forced into extreme poverty and are unable to afford school.



### GLIMMER OF HOPE

## The Church with No Roof

Fulani militias swept through one rural community in Plateau State, Nigeria, on Easter weekend in 2021 and 2022, burning hundreds of houses and a church.

This Easter, an International Christian Concern (ICC) staffer joined hundreds of worshipers at the same burned church. Families sat on the ground, on cinder blocks, or on plastic chairs that they brought from home. They gazed up at the sky because the church had no roof. “Sometimes we worship in the rain,” said the pastor. “... I am passionate to preach the gospel of Christ.”

Militants have attacked dozens of farming Christian communities in the Rigwe chieftdom in Plateau in recent years. They often attack villages at night or ambush Christians in the day while they travel to their farms or church.

We wanted to learn more about the courage and faithfulness of the pastor and his community.

Below are questions we asked of him – we are withholding his name and that of the church.

You and many of your worshipers have lost everything and endured much. What keeps you going? What gives you hope?

“The Scriptures tell us about this. We know that we are living in the last days, and we cannot stop worshipping God. That is why we have come back and continued our work because it is our land. Secondly, we know our God. Thirdly, even if we die in the Lord, we have no regret.”

To read the full story, visit [www.persecution.org/the-church-with-no-roof](http://www.persecution.org/the-church-with-no-roof).

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Assist Combat

That the Nigerian government take seriously the threat that communal militias pose to the life and safety of Nigerians across the country with programs that address the economic woes and religious radicalization fueling the conflict.

### 2 CPC Designation

That ineffective, federally operated, policing programs be largely replaced with local policing efforts designed to optimize effective prevention as well as swift justice after incidents.

### 3 Foreign Aid

That just and equitable laws be enacted around nomadic herding—the starting point of much of the violence between farmers and herders, who clash over access to fertile areas.

## IN THE NEWS

### 21 Killed in Night Raid

Despite warnings of an attack earlier in the week and the presence of security guards, 21 villagers were killed by suspected radical Fulani militants in north-central Nigeria on August 10.

### 2,500 Killed in Six Months

Fulani militants and other allied jihadist groups slaughtered 2,500 Christians in Nigeria in the first six months of 2023. The data came from a report published by the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, a Nigerian investigative firm focusing on human rights issues.

### Catholic Priest Shot Dead

A Catholic priest who was ordained less than a year ago was recently shot in the back and left for dead in Nigeria. Rev. Charles Onomhoale Igechi died in Abuja, Nigeria on June 7. It is the latest violence against Catholic leaders in one of the deadliest places to be a Christian. Since May, three Catholic priests were abducted and later released in separate incidents.



# Sahel Terror Groups

THE MELTING POT OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

## Summary

- The Sahel is debilitated by poverty, desertification, and weak governances – all factors that make civilian populations more vulnerable to jihadist attacks and recruiting.
- As with militant jihad anywhere in the world, Christian communities in the Sahel are at particular risk as their belief system stands in direct opposition to jihadism.
- Recent years have seen not only a rise in jihadism, but an increase in these groups’ sophistication, coordination, and resources.
- In addition to the direct threats that these jihadist groups pose to societal order in the region, governments’ helplessness in the face of their rise has created mass discontent and political upheaval.
- With increased instability following another military coup in Niger, international agents have been forced to evacuate including many French actors involved in establishing stability within Niger.

Though jihadist groups sometimes spar over territory and resources, a common sense of Islamic supremacy animates them all and is increasingly driving them together in Africa’s Sahel.

## Overview

While Islamic State and al-Qaida are best known for their origins in the Middle East, today’s terrorist landscape is increasingly shifting toward Africa where the groups are deepening new strongholds and adding local affiliates in an aggressive push to grow their influence around the world.

Reports from the Sahel indicate that Islamic State and al-Qaida are aligning, at least regionally, despite fighting each other in the Middle East. Such a union could be extremely dangerous as it would mean the joining together of the world’s two most dangerous terrorist organizations.

In a technique stolen out of the al-Qaida playbook, Islamic State in the Sahel has had recent success leveraging influence tactics such as giving loans to young entrepreneurs and providing infrastructure to friendly locals even as it conducts gruesome attacks against Christians and other communities it perceives as hindrances in its efforts to establish an Islamic caliphate. If terrorism grows in the Sahel, the region will be dangerous for the church.

## What is the Sahel?

The Sahel, the vast semi-arid region of Africa separating the Sahara Desert to the north and tropical savannas to the south, is as much a land of opportunities as it is of challenges. Although it has abundant human and natural resources, offering tremendous potential for rapid growth, there are deep-rooted challenges— environmental, political and security— that may affect the prosperity and peace of the Sahel, according to the United Nations.

## Sahel Countries

- |          |              |         |
|----------|--------------|---------|
| BENIN    | MALI         | SENEGAL |
| CAMEROON | MAURITANIA   | ERITREA |
| CHAD     | NIGERIA      | ALGERIA |
| NIGER    | BURKINA FASO |         |



## Timeline

2022

2022

Jihadi violence spikes in Benin during the second half of 2022 with 25 attacks between July and December as compared to the two attacks in the same time interval in 2021.

JANUARY 2

Unidentified men robbed and murdered a Catholic priest in Burkina Faso.

APRIL 6-7

44 people killed from multiple attacks in Kourakou and Tondobi villages in Burkina Faso.

MAY 4

Islamic extremist terrorists killed 33 soldiers and injured dozens in an attack against Burkina Faso’s military.

MAY 22-28

Throughout the month of May, Burkina Faso suffered dozens of deaths with more than four documented attacks on civilians. Between May 22 and 28, 58 people were killed.

JULY 7

16 are killed in an attack by jihadists who set fire to homes, motorcycles, and the local market in Burkina Faso. Four more civilians are killed in a separate attack on the same day.

JULY 14

Human Rights Watch released a report detailing hundreds of deaths by Jihadists in Mali throughout 2023.

JULY 17

Six civilians killed and four wounded in an attack on Nouna, Burkina Faso and another four civilians killed in an attack near the border of Cote d’Ivoire.

2023

AUGUST 2

A military coup occurred in Niger and was militarily backed by Burkina Faso and Mali marking the ninth attempted overthrow of a West African government in the last three years.

2023

1,800 attacks occurred in the first six months of 2023 contributing to up to 4,600 deaths in West Africa.

“The situation in the countries surrounding the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) continues to raise major concerns among INGOs. In our daily operations, we witness the burden on the people we strive to serve amidst insecurity and a reduction in the resources available to carry out humanitarian, peace-building, and development assistance. But we also have hope that coordinated action by all actors, starting from the government and supported by partners including the international community, can save lives, build resilience, move this region toward greater stability, and revive the development process that has been limited by the ongoing crisis in the LCB region.”

- Camilla Corradin, Nigeria International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO) Forum Leader



# ICC Analysis

The Sahel region of Africa has received global attention due to the marked rise in extremism over the past decade, in what is now considered an epidemic of jihadism.

Mali is known to be the epicenter of the Sahel’s insurgency, ever since jihadists hijacked a coup attempt in 2012 and established a caliphate. Though French military troops drove out the Jihadists just months later, the northern portion of the country has remained a hotbed of terrorism. Many extremist groups call northern Mali their safe haven and continue to train and recruit their militants from there while conducting attacks across borders into Niger and Burkina Faso.

In 2021, Burkina Faso experienced a record year of conflict and replaced Mali as the epicenter of Sahel terrorism. On June 4, 2021, the country underwent the bloodiest attack yet in its six-year struggle with jihadists. Al-Qaida affiliates killed more than 135 civilians over two nights. Seven months and several attacks later, soldiers staged a coup and announced a government run by a military junta. In May of 2023 Burkina Faso faced 58 civilian deaths in just one week.

## PERSECUTION BY THE NUMBERS

In Niger, attacks doubled in 2021 compared to 2020. In March 2021, insurgents raided three villages in Niger’s Tahoua region bordering Mali and massacred 137 civilians. Blamed on affiliates of the Islamic State, the attack followed a January attack that killed 100, as well as an attack weeks earlier which left 58 civilians dead. In addition to battling terrorists in its tri-border region with Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger also faces ongoing attacks by Boko Haram in its southeast. Niger also faced a military coup in June 2023 with violence supported by the military of both Burkina Faso and Mali.

In addition to Niger, Boko Haram has some presence in Chad and Cameroon. Most of the Boko Haram activity, however, remains in northern Nigeria where they have maintained an insurgency for 13 years. Now split into two factions, Boko Haram seems to be making a comeback after its territory was significantly reduced in 2015, the year it pledged allegiance to Islamic State and created the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram soldiers, largely forced out of northern Nigeria, entered the Lake Chad Basin where weak governance has enabled them to regain strength.

As Jihadists continue to gain momentum throughout the Sahel and international forces are pushed out of the region, they will deepen their influence across borders and claim territory further into Western Africa. If left without international intervention, 2024 is projected to be a year of expansionism for radicals on a quest for global Jihad.

# Sahel Jihadist Groups

## JAMA’AT NASR AL-ISLAM WAL MUSLIMIN (JNIM) COALITION

Coalition of Salafi-jihadist insurgent groups operating in the Sahel. Founded in 2017, JNIM has waged a campaign of violence against civilians, local security forces, international militaries, and UN peacekeepers.

## ISLAMIC STATE IN THE GREATER SAHARA (ISGS)

Operationally independent subgroup of ISWAP, primarily operates in portions of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. It seeks to establish a Salafi-Jihadist caliphate primarily by seeking to inflame community tensions and violently compete with other jihadist groups. It is known for its violence against civilians.

## ISWAP

Recognized by the Islamic State as its West African presence, the group is an umbrella organization for all IS factions in West Africa. It is primarily active in the Chad Basin, where it fights extensively with Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

## BOKO HARAM

Closely affiliated with Islamic State, primarily operates in northeastern Nigeria.

## AL-QAIDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)

Islamist militant branch of al-Qaida seeking to overthrow the Algerian government and institute an Islamic theocracy in Algeria.

## GLIMMER OF HOPE

# Doctor Freed After 7 Years in Captivity

Kenneth Elliot, an Australian doctor kidnapped in Burkina Faso and held captive by al-Qaeda for more than seven years, has finally returned home to his family.

“Kenneth Elliott was safe and well and was reunited with his wife and their children on Thursday night,” Foreign Minister Penny Wong told the Associated Press.

“We wish to express our thanks to God and all who have continued to pray for us,” added Elliott’s family in a statement released by Wong’s department.

On Jan. 15, 2016, Elliot and his wife, Jocelyn, were taken from their home in Burkina Faso by the Mali-based terror organization al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Jocelyn was quickly released in February 2016.

Elliot and his wife had been running a hospital in Djibo. The hospital, that could hold 120 patients, was closed due to Elliot’s absence after the kidnappings. He was the only surgeon in the area and made his services free to the population of roughly 2 million. He was given the nicknames the “Doctor of the Poor” and “Savior of the Sahel” for the work he was doing.

# ICC Recommends

## 1 Empower Local Efforts

That efforts to empower local anti-terror efforts, though complicated by recent coups including in Niger, be continued with an emphasis on protecting communities that are especially vulnerable because of their religious identity.

## 2 Reduce Poverty

That support be given to good governance and humanitarian programs in the Sahel, with the aim of reducing the endemic poverty providing such a fertile breeding ground for terrorist radicalization in the region.

## IN THE NEWS

### 1,800 Terrorist Attacks

In the first six months of 2023, West Africa recorded more than 1,800 terrorist attacks, contributing to up to 4,600 deaths.

### Niger Coup

The coup threatens the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region, where security has deteriorated, leading to an increase in terrorist attacks. The coup has also prompted the withdrawal of foreign powers, potentially exacerbating the security situation. International pressure may lead the military leaders to restore democracy.



# The Taliban

A CHRISTIAN DEATH SENTENCE

## Summary

- On August 15, 2021, the Taliban overthrew authorities in Kabul, ending the era of American influence in Afghanistan.
- The Taliban’s return resulted in the swift reversal of progress, with girls barred from education, the re-imposition of extreme Sharia law, and the stifling of dissent, severely affecting Afghan civilians.
- The Afghan church, already small before the Taliban’s takeover, is cut off from the global community and face death if discovered as a known Christian.
- Afghans have fled into neighboring countries to escape the Taliban’s wrath, but are met with equally dire circumstances.
- No country formally recognizes the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, but countries like China and Russia have begun forming ties with the regime.

## The Taliban’s violence against Christians worsens as they try to eradicate Christianity.

## Overview

August 15, 2023, marked two years since the Taliban retook Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital and the ignominious fall of the United States’ last stand in its decades-long war against the insurgent terrorist group. The era of American influence in Afghanistan, though it ended suddenly, was a hopeful time for Christians, women, and other marginalized groups. An entire generation was raised with access to the outside world, education, and relative freedom to practice their faith as they pleased.

Tragically, this was all stripped away when the Taliban regained control. It swiftly moved to block girls from education, reimpose Sharia law, and eliminate any dissent from its fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. Pariah on the international stage, the Taliban has managed to hobble along economically though at enormous cost to civilians who are now cut off from critical international aid.

Tiny before the Taliban’s takeover and even smaller now, the Afghan church is in a precarious position. Contact with the outside world has been severely limited by Taliban restrictions and any efforts to send assistance to the church is met with a myriad of legal and logistical difficulties. For now, the Afghan church is largely cut off from the greater global community.

## Quick Facts

**YEAR GROUP FORMED**  
1994

**CURRENT LEADER**  
Hibatullah Akhundzada

**RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**  
Radical Islam

**PREDOMINATE REGION**  
Afghanistan



## Timeline

2021

### AUGUST

United States and its allies withdraw forces from Afghanistan. The Taliban take over the country within days as the Afghan government collapses causing a major evacuation crisis for the United States and others. August 15, 2021, the Taliban assume control of Kabul and begins solidifying control over the rest of the country

### SEPTEMBER

The Taliban reportedly use whips and sticks against women protesting the new restrictions of rights.

### OCTOBER

A U.S. delegation meets with the Taliban in Qatar. Meanwhile, ISIS takes advantage of the chaos and bombs a Shia Mosque.

### NOVEMBER

Human Rights Watch releases a report documenting credible information on more than 100 targeted killings by the Taliban.

2022

### JANUARY

Restrictions imposed on women, including prohibiting long-distance travel, forbidding appearances of TV shows and movies, abolition of the Women’s Affairs Ministry, cutting off secondary education, a workforce ban, and dress code enforcement and societal segregation.

“Through a series of edicts, decrees, and circular letters, the Taliban have systematically restricted the religious freedom of all Afghans, including those with differing interpretations of Islam, but these restrictions have disproportionately impacted women.”

- USCIRF Afghanistan Report



DOWNLOAD ICC’S AFGHANISTAN REPORT ON PAGE 86.

For a comprehensive timeline of the Taliban pre-dating 2021, please see 2021 and 2022 Persecutor of the Year Reports.



# ICC Analysis

The chaotic withdrawal of U.S. military personnel from Afghanistan in August of 2021 plunged the country into disarray with increased food scarcity, the eradication of various human rights, restrictions on press freedom, and other new limitations. Under the emerging Taliban rule, Christians are facing the harshest conditions seen in decades. Most, if not all, Afghan Christians are converts from Islam or Muslim-background believers (MBBs). The Taliban’s hostility toward Christianity includes extreme violence as a means of integrating their radical interpretation of Islam through all levels of government and civil society. Despite some optimism about a reformed Taliban, there has been an internal collapse of fundamental human rights, particularly women’s rights. Meanwhile, what little hope existed for religious freedom reform evaporated within days of the takeover. Religious minorities, especially Christians, live in fear for their lives, knowing that the oppressive regime which historically targeted them has returned to power. Since the Taliban takeover, beatings, kidnappings, torture, and murders of minority groups have increased dramatically.

Because the Taliban’s style of governance targets vulnerable communities, Christians regularly face societal and employment discrimination, as well as harassment. The lack of opportunities and resources places an extreme burden on families, who have no recourse. The group’s takeover has interrupted foreign aid within the country, bringing Afghanistan closer to economic disaster. Food insecurity is rampant, further increasing the vulnerability of religious minorities whose options are already limited. Families have resorted to desperate measures, including selling their underage daughters into marriage to older men in exchange for food.

## NO REPRIEVE OR WAY OUT FOR BELIEVERS

Meanwhile, the Taliban are cracking down on Afghans who are trying to leave the country. Through door-to-door security sweeps they call “clearing operations,” Taliban militants search for Afghans who had U.S. relations as well as those who are living contrary to their interpretation of Islamic law, including Christians. It is reported that the incoming Taliban government gained access to recordings and documents that identified Christians, who were then found and detained. Before being killed, Taliban members tortured them in hopes that they would reveal their Christian contacts. Christian religious leaders have reported an alarming trend where they receive threatening calls saying, “We’re coming for you.”

Humanitarian organizations, including ICC, are working diligently to penetrate into Afghanistan and help those suffering under the regime, but things have only gotten more difficult in the last two years as the Taliban cracks down on methods of money transfer. That said, there are some foreign organizations that the Taliban tolerates, (such as NGO-run drug rehabilitation centers), possibly alluding to the realization that the Taliban is not equipped to properly take care of the people in Afghanistan. This may be a glimmer of hope for those still trapped, but the ideological intransigence has not budged, so former Western affiliated Afghans and religious minorities are in the same dangerous situation as the fall in August 2021.

“The Taliban are not a legitimate regime with their citizens best interests at heart. They are an extremist organization that imposes their archaic interpretation of Islam on women, religious minorities, and any enemy of Islam they arbitrarily decide.”

- Liam Reed, ICC South Asia Regional Manager



# Forms of Persecution

## EXTREME VIOLENCE

Motivated by extremist Islam, the Taliban instituted brutal punishments on ‘violators’ through various means, such as chopping off hands from accused thieves. Many groups have documented the Taliban’s atrocities against women, such as widespread rape and forced marriages of minors, indiscriminate and extra-judicial killings, and targeting of civilian populations through bombings.

## EXTREME SHARIA

Taliban uses an extreme form of Sharia law to discriminate against women, girls, and religious minorities. In the past, they banned education for women and girls, shut down schools, and murdered teachers. They also shut down cultural outlets such as movie theaters and banned photography. They destroyed non-Islamic religious symbols like the Bamiyan Buddha statues. They targeted Christians through various means of persecution, intimidation, and violence.

## GUERRILLA WARFARE AND INSURGENCY

Throughout the 20- year war the United States waged in Afghanistan, the Taliban engaged in guerrilla warfare and insurgency against the United States and NATO allies, using various forms of violence like the IEDs, suicide bombings, and targeted killings.

## OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Taliban received more than \$1.6 billion in 2020, mainly from the sale of illegal drugs, extortion, and other forms of criminal activity.

## GLIMMER OF HOPE

# A New Life in an Unfamiliar Land

In late 2021, Sukru and his family, consisting of three members, found themselves living on a U.S. military base, eagerly awaiting relocation. Their modest accommodation in a drafty Army barracks, shared with other refugees, offered little privacy, but Sukru and his family remained remarkably grateful for their newfound freedom and the ability to practice their Christian faith, unlike many friends left behind in Afghanistan.

This family had narrowly escaped the clutches of the Taliban in Afghanistan, thanks in part to the efforts of the ICC who worked tirelessly to evacuate Afghan Christians before and after the disastrous Taliban takeover two years prior. The journey to safety was perilous; Sukru’s family endured a harrowing ordeal, including spending hours in a dirty canal, being beaten, and losing personal belongings.

Their journey ultimately took them to the U.S. Army base in the States via Kuwait and Spain. Sukru described their escape as nothing short of miraculous, placing their faith in God when all seemed lost.

After months at the Army barracks, the family settled in a rural Texas town, struggling to adapt to their new life in an unfamiliar land. They relied on support from Americans they had known, utilized food stamps and food banks, and worked tirelessly to establish themselves in their rural community.

Sukru immersed himself in learning about the American system, government programs, citizenship, politics, and education, all while navigating bureaucratic hurdles. He now awaits his green card, a ticket to permanent residency in the U.S.

Recently, the family moved to a more cosmopolitan city with better opportunities. Sukru’s wife, Helena, plans to attend university to recertify in her career. Their young son will start pre-K, and Sukru works for an organization aiding refugees in their American settlement.

They’ve found a nearby church, and Sukru intends to establish a fellowship and resource center for refugees, bridging communities and sharing God’s love.

As for their friends in Afghanistan, many live in constant fear, struggling with hunger, unemployment, and uncertainty under the Taliban’s rule. Christians particularly feel like sacrificial lambs, hoping to escape the ever-looming threat of persecution

# ICC Recommends

## 1 Refuse Recognition

That the U.S. and its allies in the international community continue their refusal to recognize the Taliban as the legitimate rules of Afghanistan after their forceful takeover of the country in 2021.

## 2 Humanitarian Aid

NGOs (non-government organizations), governments, and others around the world continue their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance directly to citizens in the country. Though difficult, this work is a critical lifeline for many.

## 3 Immigration

That governments consider how their immigration policies might be improved to better help those fleeing Afghanistan. Though the number today of new ref is not at the level.



# Tatmadaw

A MILITARY THAT TARGETS CIVILIANS

## Summary

- Myanmar comprises diverse ethnic and religious groups, with a majority being Burman and Buddhist.
- Ethnic minorities, like the Karen and Chin, have strong religious identities, with more than 90% of Chin being Christian. This makes Christian communities vulnerable, especially in regions like Chin State.
- After the 2021 coup, the Tatmadaw intensified attacks on Christian Karen and Chin tribes.
- More than 6,000 civilians have died in the violence since the coup, impacting minority groups disproportionately.
- The campaign of terror ramped up in 2023, with deaths from junta airstrikes in the first quarter exceeding the total estimated death toll in 2022.

## The Tatmadaw’s campaign of violence terrorizes Christians and minority groups.

## Overview

On February 1, 2021, the Burmese army, or Tatmadaw, staged a coup that toppled Burma’s civilian government and began what is now more than 2.5 years of military rule. The Tatmadaw is no stranger to power—its war on the Burmese people stretches back in a continuous string of violence to 1948 when Burma first gained its independence. Now without the limits provided by a civilian government, the Tatmadaw has spent the years since the coup in unchecked violence, killing thousands and jailing many more.

As in many countries, Burma is divided along both ethnic and religious lines, with most of the ethnic majority Burman population being Buddhist and many of the ethnic minorities made up of Christians or Muslims. About 20-30% of ethnic Karen are Christians, while other groups—such as the Chin—are more than 90% Christian.

Despite international condemnation, the Tatmadaw refuses to back down from its brutal tactics against the civilian population and continues its pattern of imprisoning dissenters, bombing infrastructure, and raping women. New evidence shows that these tactics may not be working, with some groups reporting that the Tatmadaw enjoys solid control over as little as 17% of the country by area.

## Quick Facts

- YEAR GROUP FORMED**  
March 27, 1945
- CURRENT LEADER**  
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing
- RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**  
Buddhism
- PREDOMINATE REGION**  
Myanmar\*

\*Burma/Myanmar: The country was called Burma for generations until military leaders changed the English name to Myanmar in 1989.

## Timeline

2010

2015

2020

1962

2007

2011

2015

2017

2020

2021

2023

A military coup in Myanmar marked the commencement of decades of authoritarian governance, during which the Tatmadaw systematically marginalized and suppressed religious minority communities, including Christians.

The “Saffron Revolution” unfolded, featuring pro-democracy protests across Myanmar. Christian leaders, alongside Buddhist monks, played a significant role in advocating for political change. The Tatmadaw responded with a harsh crackdown on the protests.

The Tatmadaw initiated ceasefire negotiations with select ethnic armed groups, yet conflict persisted in Kachin State, where the Christian-majority population experienced displacement and alleged human rights violations.

Myanmar held its first openly contested elections in decades, resulting in the electoral triumph of Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) party. Despite this, the Tatmadaw retained significant power and influence.

The Tatmadaw’s harsh military operations against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State drew global attention and condemnation. Concurrently, some Christian communities in conflict-affected areas also endured displacement and violence.

Amid allegations of electoral fraud, the Tatmadaw orchestrated a coup, detaining civilian leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Widespread protests against the military regime erupted, encompassing Christian-majority regions.

Ethnic armed groups, including those affiliated with Christian communities, joined forces with anti-coup demonstrators, leading to heightened violence in conflict-prone areas and mounting concerns over religious freedom and human rights.

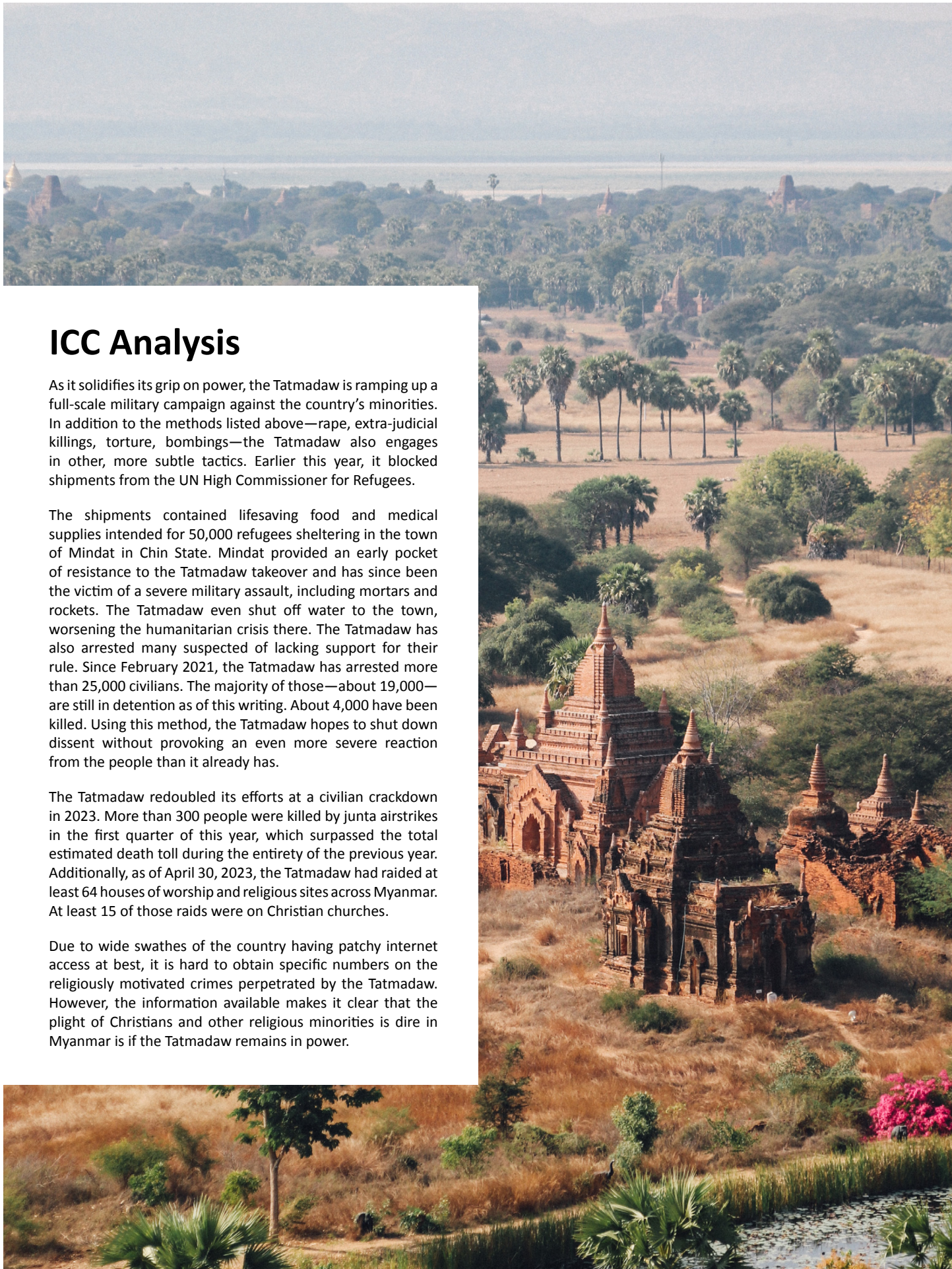
The Tatmadaw continues its campaign of violence against religious minorities, including cutting off access to humanitarian aid to the majority Christian states in the northern part of the country.

“It has been two years since the coup and we have yet to see the [Tatmadaw] brought to justice for the Rohingya genocide and myriad abuses of religious freedom and human rights.”

- Eric Ueland, USCIRF Commissioner







## ICC Analysis

As it solidifies its grip on power, the Tatmadaw is ramping up a full-scale military campaign against the country’s minorities. In addition to the methods listed above—rape, extra-judicial killings, torture, bombings—the Tatmadaw also engages in other, more subtle tactics. Earlier this year, it blocked shipments from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

The shipments contained lifesaving food and medical supplies intended for 50,000 refugees sheltering in the town of Mindat in Chin State. Mindat provided an early pocket of resistance to the Tatmadaw takeover and has since been the victim of a severe military assault, including mortars and rockets. The Tatmadaw even shut off water to the town, worsening the humanitarian crisis there. The Tatmadaw has also arrested many suspected of lacking support for their rule. Since February 2021, the Tatmadaw has arrested more than 25,000 civilians. The majority of those—about 19,000—are still in detention as of this writing. About 4,000 have been killed. Using this method, the Tatmadaw hopes to shut down dissent without provoking an even more severe reaction from the people than it already has.

The Tatmadaw redoubled its efforts at a civilian crackdown in 2023. More than 300 people were killed by junta airstrikes in the first quarter of this year, which surpassed the total estimated death toll during the entirety of the previous year. Additionally, as of April 30, 2023, the Tatmadaw had raided at least 64 houses of worship and religious sites across Myanmar. At least 15 of those raids were on Christian churches.

Due to wide swathes of the country having patchy internet access at best, it is hard to obtain specific numbers on the religiously motivated crimes perpetrated by the Tatmadaw. However, the information available makes it clear that the plight of Christians and other religious minorities is dire in Myanmar is if the Tatmadaw remains in power.

## Forms of Persecution

### VIOLENCE AND ATTACKS

Christians, particularly those belonging to ethnic minority groups, have faced physical violence and attacks on their communities, churches, and homes.

### FORCED CONVERSIONS

In some areas, Christian minorities have been pressured to convert to Buddhism, the majority religion in Myanmar.

### DISCRIMINATION

Christians have faced discrimination in various forms, such as being denied access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities due to their faith.

### CHURCH CLOSURES AND DEMOLITIONS

Authorities, including the Tatmadaw, have forcibly closed and demolished churches, particularly in ethnic minority regions. Permits for the construction of new churches are often difficult to obtain.

### RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The government has imposed restrictions on religious practices, including limitations on public gatherings, preaching, and the distribution of religious literature.

### FORCED LABOR AND DISPLACEMENT

Some Christian communities have been subjected to forced labor, particularly in conflict zones. They have also been forcibly displaced from their homes, leading to humanitarian crises.

### DENIAL OF CITIZENSHIP

The Rohingya Muslim minority, some of whom have converted to Christianity, have faced severe persecution, including the denial of citizenship rights.

### CHILD SOLDIER RECRUITMENT

In conflict-affected areas, children from Christian communities have been forcibly recruited as child soldiers by armed groups, including the Tatmadaw.

### SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Women and girls from Christian communities in conflict zones have been subjected to sexual violence, often used as a tool of intimidation and control.

### INTIMIDATION AND THREATS

Christians and church leaders have been threatened and intimidated by authorities and extremist groups for their religious beliefs and activities.

## IN THE NEWS

### Bombing Kills Civilians

On December 30, 2022 the Burmese military shelled St. Michael Catholic Church in San Hka village, located in predominately Christian Kachin state. At least one civilian was killed and five were reported injured.

### Tatmadaw Frees Thousands

On May 3, the ruling military junta freed 2,135 political prisoners. One of those prisoners still unjustly detained is a prominent Burmese Christian leader, Dr. Hkalam Samson.

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Refuse Recognition

That the U.S. and its allies in the international community continue their refusal to recognize the Tatmadaw as the legitimate rulers of Burma after their forceful coup in 2021.

### 2 EPC Designation

That the Tatmadaw be designated as an Entity of Particular Concern (EPC). Though thoroughly sanctioned already, the designation would help to shine a light on the impact their rule is having on freedom of religion.

### 3 International Pressure

That the Tatmadaw’s international allies, in the Chinese and Russian governments particularly, be pressured to cease their financial and military support of the brutal regime.



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### Suffering Continues

The two-year civil war in Myanmar (Burma) has killed an estimated 30,000 people and displaced some two million more. There is wide dissatisfaction with the military junta that threw out the elected government and took over the country in early 2021.



# Individuals





# Yogi Adityanath

WREAKING HAVOC FOR CHRISTIANS IN UTTAR PRADESH

## Summary

- Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, is a prominent figure in India’s shift toward radical Hindu nationalism.
- He founded the radical Hindu youth group Hindu Yuva Vahini in 2002 and was elected the youngest Lok Sabha member in 1998.
- Under his leadership, Uttar Pradesh adopted an anti-conversion ordinance in 2020, making it dangerous for Christians.
- Adityanath passed laws restricting religious freedom in Uttar Pradesh, targeting Indian pastors, missionaries, and interfaith couples.
- He openly promotes an anti-Christian and anti-minority narrative, aiming to establish a Hindu political state in India.

The chief minister has made an entire state in India hostile to Christianity.

## Overview

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, India’s largest state by population, Yogi Adityanath is a leading figure in India’s swing toward radical Hindu nationalism. He was the youngest member of the Lok Sabha, India’s lower house of parliament, when he was elected in 1998 and has since made a name for himself as a firebrand.

“When I speak, thousands listen,” he told a crowd in 2009. “When I ask them to rise and protect our Hindu culture, they obey. If I ask for blood, they will give me blood. I will not stop until I turn Uttar Pradesh and India into a Hindu Rashtra.”

Under Adityanath’s watch, Uttar Pradesh adopted an anti-conversion ordinance in 2020. Since being ratified by the legislature in 2021, it has swiftly turned the state into one of the most dangerous places for Christians in India by empowering mobs to attack people of faith. According to civil society leaders in the state, more than 230 people have been jailed under the law since 2021 and the number continues to climb almost daily.

“When I speak, thousands listen... When I ask them to rise and protect our Hindu culture, they obey. If I ask for blood, they will give me blood. I will not stop till I turn UP and India into a Hindu rashtra.”

- Yogi Adityanath, 2009 rally



## About

**OFFICIAL TITLE**  
22nd Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

**ASSUMED OFFICE**  
March 19, 2017

**BORN**  
June 5, 1972

**PARTY AFFILIATION**  
Bharatiya Janata Party

“Yogi’s rise to power heralds India’s dangerous shift to normalizing radical Hinduism. He insists that you aren’t a true Indian unless you practice Hinduism, instead of promoting peace and prosperity for the everyone in ‘the world’s largest democracy.’”

-Liam Reed, ICC South Asia Regional Manager

## Forms of Persecution

As Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Adityanath passed new laws that severely restricted religious freedom in his state. The 2020 Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance was passed under the guise of protecting women and poorer Indians from being induced to change their religion.

In practice, the law is used to attack Indian pastors, missionaries, and interfaith couples. Dozens of people have been arrested under this law.

In addition, he and his administration refuse to hold police forces accountable for abuses of power when they illegal arrest and hold Indian Christians. UP police have reportedly acted in tandem with Hindu radicals to harass religious minorities, and there are several instances where UP police have used violence against minority prisoners.

Perhaps Adityanath is most known for is his highly publicized speeches promoting an anti-Christian, anti-minority, Hindutva narrative that seeks to ostracize the Christian minority and embolden other persecutors across the country. He is open about wanting to turn UP and India into a Hindu political state, known as a Hindu Rashtra, and effectively relegate religious minorities to second-class citizens.

## ICC Analysis

Adityanath has become a central figure in the Hindutva political movement. As Chief Minister of India’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, Adityanath wields considerable influence in the Indian political scene. He has even gone as far as to establish his own radicalized political base separate from the BJP, which he uses to threaten the BJP into ever more radical Hindu nationalism when he perceives them as being soft on the Hindutva philosophy.

Adityanath is not blind to his own influence and does not shy away from explaining his desire for Hinu hegemony in India. “When I speak, thousands listen,” he told the gathered crowd at a 2009 rally. He was then a member of the Lok Sabha, India’s lower house of Parliament. “When I ask them to rise and protect our Hindu culture, they obey. If I ask for blood, they will give me blood. I will not stop until I turn Uttar Pradesh and India into a Hindu Rashtra.”

The idea of a Hindu Rastra, a popular rallying cry of Hindu nationalists, envisions an India where radical Hinduism reigns supreme and religious minorities are relegated to the farthest corners of society, if allowed to remain at all. The concept bears comparison to the similarly exclusive idea of an Islamic caliphate.

Uttar Pradesh’s anti-conversion law was approved by the Council of Ministers, headed by Adityanath, and the governor in 2020 as an ordinance and passed by the state legislature as a law in 2021. Officially called the “Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Law,” the legislation not only outlines an extraordinarily expansive definition of forced conversion but includes enhanced sentences for a broad array of conversion scenarios.

These enhanced sentences increase the minimum fine from ₹15,000 or approximately \$180 to ₹25,000, equivalent to slightly over \$300. More importantly, the enhancements increase the maximum period of imprisonment from five to ten years—past the seven-year mark at which an offense becomes unailable, meaning that accused now sit in jail for weeks or months, unable to post bail and unattended to by India’s backlogged judicial system. In practice, though, those accused under the anti-conversion law are rarely offered bail, regardless of whether they face enhanced charges or not.

Uttar Pradesh, under Yogi’s leadership, is one of the twelve Indian states which maintains an anti-conversion law. Though it is one of the more recent entrants to the list, it has quickly become one of the most concerning areas in India regarding enforcement of the law and overall violence toward religious minorities due in no small part to Yogi’s intransigence toward religious minorities.

## ICC Recommends

1

### Sanctions

That Adityanath be individually sanctioned for his involvement in furthering religious radicalization and encouraging violence against religious minorities in Uttar Pradesh and beyond.

2

### Repeal Laws

That Uttar Pradesh’s discriminatory anti-conversion law be repealed and those currently imprisoned under the law be set free.



# Isaias Afwerki

THE RUTHLESS DICTATOR OF ERITREA

## Summary

- Isaias Afwerki has maintained nearly absolute power over Eritrea since becoming president in 1991, leading the only political party, the PFDJ.
- During Afwerki’s presidency, Eritrea has become one of Africa’s most closed countries, particularly regarding religious freedom, despite a religiously diverse population.
- Afwerki’s regime has systematically restricted religious practice, leading to the appointment of religious leaders by the government in 2021.
- The systematic persecution, arbitrary detention, torture, and inhumane treatment of religious minorities and dissenters constitute crimes against humanity that demand international attention and action.

Religious suppression, arbitrary arrests, and human rights abuses at the hands of a ruthless dictator who flies under most international radar.

## Overview

Isaias Afwerki maintains nearly sole power over Eritrea, a small but influential country in the horn of Africa. He took the presidency in 1991 after a 30-year war for independence from Ethiopia and has retained the position ever since. He also leads the country’s only political party, the PFDJ, as its chairman.

In his time as President, Afwerki has turned Eritrea into what many analysts say is the most closed country in Africa. Though Eritrea is split roughly evenly between Christians and Muslims, Afwerki’s government is extremely closed to free religious practice. The PFDJ exerts direct control over religion, appointing the heads of both the Sunni community and the Eritrean Orthodox church in 2021.

Individuals that dare cross the government are swiftly arrested, with many Christians and other persons of conscience thrown in prison for standing by their faith in the face of government persecution. There, they face gross violations of their human rights with survivors of these prisons reporting regular beatings, severe torture, and degrading conditions in the overcrowded facilities.



## About

**OFFICIAL TITLE**  
President of Eritrea

**ASSUMED OFFICE**  
May 24, 1993

**BORN**  
February 2, 1946

**PARTY AFFILIATION**  
People’s Front for Democracy and Justice

“It’s not anything personal. I will stay as long as it takes. That’s not my choice, that’s not my preference. It has to be decided based on the situation on the ground ... I will not be scared by someone coming telling me ‘well you have to go, we have to find a change’ ... I’m not a fool.”

- Isaias Afeworki

## Forms of Persecution

**ARRESTS, IMPRISONMENT, AND TORTURE**  
Prisoners are subjected to physical and psychological torture, including prolonged periods of solitary confinement and other forms of cruel and inhumane treatment.

**RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS**  
Laws require religious groups to register with the government, severely restricting and regulating worship.

## ICC Analysis

Eritrea, despite its religiously diverse population, has been transformed into a nation with one of the most repressive regimes in Africa under President Afwerki’s leadership. Although Eritrea is roughly split between Christians and Muslims, the government, led by the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), under Afwerki’s direction, has consistently restricted religious practice.

After initially leading the country toward independence and democracy in 1991, the Afwerki regime became increasingly repressive. Afwerki himself became paranoid about losing authority and restricted all activities that could threaten his ultimate authority in Eritrea; including religion.

In 2021, the PFDJ, with President Afwerki as its chairman, directly appointed the heads of both the Sunni Muslim community and the Eritrean Orthodox Church. This move effectively allows the government to exert its influence and manipulate religious institutions to align with its ideology and maintain tight control over its people.

President Afwerki’s authoritarian regime in Eritrea has led to a disturbing state of religious freedom, where the government tightly controls religious institutions and ruthlessly suppresses dissent. Those who wish to follow Christ freely must do so underground, as their faith doesn’t follow the strict regulations set forth by the government.

The systematic persecution, arbitrary detention, torture, and inhumane treatment of religious minorities and those who dare to challenge the government’s authority amount to crimes against humanity. The international community must continue to raise awareness of these atrocities and advocate for the restoration of religious freedom and human rights in Eritrea.

## ICC Recommends

- 1

**Leverage Sanctions**  
That the U.S. and others leverage the sanctioning tools at their disposal to punish those abusing the Eritrean prisoners of conscience under Afwerki’s watch.
- 2

**Humanitarian Aid**  
That assistance be given to religious groups in the country, and among the Eritrean diaspora, in their effort to worship freely and in accordance with their conscience.

“The world needs to wake up to the atrocities taking place in Eritrea today. Not only are Christians imprisoned, tortured, and killed, but the everyday person lives under the oppression of an authoritative regime, dictated by Isaias Afwerki, a ruthless leader with a totalitarian agenda.”

- Kate Piselli, ICC Africa Regional Manager



# Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

OPPRESSING CHRISTIANS BEYOND HIS BORDER

## Summary

- President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won re-election once again in 2023, extending his nine-year presidential term to an additional five years.
- Erdoğan's ruling party continued their deportation efforts against foreign Christians in Turkey.
- Erdoğan's nationalist Justice and Development (AKP) party pushes a "to be Turkish, is to be Muslim" agenda at local levels isolating ethnic Turkish Christians.
- Christians in northern villages of Iraq and Syria constantly live in fear of airstrikes from Turkey.
- Erdoğan's public and military support for its ally Azerbaijan helps to perpetrate a modern attempt of genocide of 120,000 ethnic Armenian Christians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

President Erdoğan continues to utilize his nation's geopolitical importance to push Turkey's Islamic nationalism agenda at home and abroad.

## Overview

Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wants to expand his influence across Turkey's former Ottoman Empire – with a similar level of hostility as the latter toward Christians throughout the Middle East for centuries into the early 20th century.

Since the 2016 coup attempt against him, Erdoğan has ushered the nation into a new chapter, one which includes a significant emphasis on foreign policy and military expansionism. Countries previously part of the Ottoman Empire, and countries with a significant Muslim population, are specifically targeted for engagement by Turkey's military or Turkish-paid mercenaries.

The unique religious freedom concerns that were once contained within the boundaries of Turkey's borders are now found wherever Turkey has influence. They include attacks against Christians, desecration of Christian sites, and suffocation of Christian communities.

Domestically, Erdoğan and his nationalist AKP party continue pushing anti-Christian rhetoric in the education system, societal hostility toward Turkish Christians, and deportation of foreign Christians from the country.



## About

**OFFICIAL TITLE**  
President of the Republic of Turkey

**ASSUMED OFFICE**  
August 28, 2014

**BORN**  
February 26, 1954

**PARTY AFFILIATION**  
Justice and Development Party (AKP)

**“We do not allow terrorist leftovers of the sword\* in our country to attempt to carry out [terrorist] activities. Their number has decreased a lot but they still exist.”**  
- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, May 2020

## Forms of Persecution

### MILITARY ATTACKS AND DESECRATION OF RELIGIOUS SITES

Erdoğan's support for ally Azerbaijan in its blockade of Artsakh and support for Islamist mercenaries committing war crimes against religious minorities in northern Syria.

### DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS

Deportation of foreign protestant church leaders and party's cultural narrative of discrimination and distrust toward ethnic Turkish Christians as being traitors to Turkey. Also denial of permits of any national theological seminary/school in Turkey and a biased discriminatory school curricula against Christianity.

## ICC Analysis

During Erdoğan's unprecedentedly long term as Turkey's president due to a constitutional amendment he and his party (AKP) made, Erdoğan has cleverly played his nation's strategic geopolitical location to the advantage of his neo-Ottoman expansion agenda. Many experts saw the 2023 Turkish election as being his most challenging event to his presidency, with his popularity sinking to new lows amid a deep economic crisis and a perceived insufficient governmental response to the devastating earthquakes that hit southern Turkey in February 2023. However, with strong support in a coalition from both his AKP base as well as nationalist and Islamist factions, the AKP not only held onto the presidency but also the parliament, showing a remaining support and popularity with Erdoğan's nationalist rhetoric. While some Turks are deeply concerned with the direction Erdoğan is taking modern Turkey in, he continues to silence and imprison critics of his rule and push Turkish militarism abroad and Turkish religious nationalist at home.

Abroad, Erdoğan has used Turkey's strategic access to the Black Sea waterway to emerge as a key power broker in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. He has used it as a bargaining chip with the West to turn attention away from his continued crackdown on political and religious dissent to the prevailing AKP power. He has also used his position in the war to maintain weapons sales through the NATO alliance to continue to use in his military expansion agenda in northern Syria and Iraq. He also supported Azerbaijan's inhumane blockade and takeover of the ethnically Christian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

Domestically, Erdoğan's government continued both direct and indirect crackdowns on Christianity in Turkey. Like most of the refugees of any country in the world, anti-refugee rhetoric dominated as one of the key topics in the 2023 election. As such, Erdoğan has continued the "resettlement" of thousands of refugees, including cases of religious asylum cases stuck in limbo from persecuting nations such as Iran and Afghanistan. Deportation of foreign protestant workers continued in 2023, with security forces still issuing N-82s and denying visa renewals for long-time residents for no clear reasons. Finally, ethnically Turkish Christians continue to face societal persecution, with school curricula and societal attitudes push the AKP's strong Islamist-Nationalist agenda that to be "Turkish is to be Muslim," and any Turk that decides to be a Christian is suspected as a national traitor and not a full and real Turk.

\* "Leftover of the sword" (kılıç artığı in Turkish) is a commonly used insult in Turkey that often refers to the survivors of the Christian massacres that mainly targeted Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire and its successor, Turkey.

## ICC Recommends

- Condemn Abuse**  
U.S. leaders should continue to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and condemn Erdoğan's abuses in all high-level meetings with Turkish officials.
- NATO Membership**  
The U.S. and its allies in NATO should re-evaluate Turkish membership and hold Turkey to human rights benchmarks for its participation in the alliance.
- USCIRF**  
The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom should continue to inform Congress on Turkish airstrikes in northern Iraq and Syria.
- Special Watch List**  
The Department of State should designate Turkey as a Special Watch List country for violations of religious freedom.
- Release Prisoners**  
Governments should call on Turkey to release all prisoners of conscience detained for promoting rights of religious minorities.

**“In the current religious climate, government leaders, the education system, and the general society all push the narrative that to be Turkish is to be Muslim. Any Turk who decides to leave Islam and become a Christian is seen as a traitor and a threat to national unity and security.”**

- Joseph Daniel, ICC MENA Regional Manager



# Xi Jinping

PUSHING NATIONALISM ABOVE GOD

## Summary

- Xi Jinping, China’s General Secretary of the CCP, has led a decade of human rights violations and religious suppression.
- Jinping’s regime promotes an ethnic, socialist nationalism called Sinicization, attacking minority identity and independent religious practices.
- Independent Christians in China, gathering in house churches, face harassment, beatings, and imprisonment by the government.
- China’s religious repression includes the use of mass internment camps against Uyghurs, declared a genocide by the U.S. and other nations.
- The international community must take real action against China’s human rights violations, including economic pressure and diplomacy focused on religious freedom.

**Xi’s campaign against religion has forced believers to either practice their faith under threat or become a mouthpiece for the regime.**

## Overview

Chinese president Xi Jinping is rapidly turning China’s communist authoritarian rule into a personality cult around himself. A precedent-breaking third presidential term in 2023 sets him up to rule for life after term limits were cut from the Chinese Constitution. The Communist Party, which unilaterally rules the country, is carefully packed with supporters of Xi and seems unlikely to push back against his rule.

Gathering in groups known as house churches, independent Christians in China face regular harassment from the government, including beatings and the imprisoning of their pastors. The government sees religion as competition to its demand for absolute loyalty to the state and devotes significant resources to rooting out any pocket of independent religion.

To erase any socio-religious identity other than that of secular Han Chinese, the government aggressively co-opts religious and cultural practices for the state in a practice known as Sinicization. To that end, it does allow some form of Christian church, but only within the strict confines of Sinicization—an effort that is increasingly glorifying Xi himself with state-sponsored church forced to display pictures of Xi and distribute his literature.



## About

**OFFICIAL TITLE**  
General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party

**ASSUMED OFFICE**  
March 14, 2013

**BORN**  
June 15, 1953

**PARTY AFFILIATION**  
Chinese Communist Party

**“We will fully implement the Party’s basic policy on religious affairs, insist on the sinicization of Chinese religions, and provide active guidance for religion and socialism to coexist.”**

- Xi Jinping, report to the 19th Party Congress

## Forms of Persecution

### INTERNMENT CAMPS

Xi’s use of mass internment camps to attack religion is a relatively new development and, for good reason, has attracted significant international attention. The Trump administration officially declared the campaign against the Uyghurs a genocide in January 2021, and other governments worldwide have begun to follow suit in the months since. The Biden administration concurred with the previous administration’s assessment.

### SINICIZATION

Another major effort under Xi’s rule is Sinicization, a campaign to make religious groups within China submit to socialism and CCP ideology by forcing them to accept a unified national identity with Han Chinese characteristics. This campaign intensified after the Four Requirements campaign was launched by the CCP in June 2018. All state-approved churches are required to raise the national flag, promote the Chinese Constitution and other laws, place regulations on worship, preach “Core Socialist Values,” and maintain China’s “traditional culture.”

### RAIDS AND ARRESTS

A consistent trend throughout the past year has been church raids. Not only were churches shut down or demolished, but pastors and church attendees were often arrested. One example happened in September 2020 in Sichuan province when China’s Public Security Bureau deployed over 30 police officers to raid an underground Protestant house church, known as Sola Fide. When police arrived on the scene, they arrested 50 Sola Fide members, tore down crosses and other Christian symbols, and destroyed hymnbooks and Bibles.

## ICC Analysis

China systematically commits, and even exports, religious violence and it is no secret to the international community. In response, countries around the world have publicly condemned China, insisting that it allow its citizens to practice their religion freely. From the United States to Europe and beyond, governments around the world recognize the need to push back on the severe religious freedom violations happening in China.

While China’s brazen disregard for religious freedom certainly merits the international condemnation it has received, it is also incumbent on the international community to take real action against China’s human rights violations and root this action in effective policy. Through economic pressure and other means, China should be motivated to change its ideological intolerance of religion. There is a clear case to be made for the advancement of religious freedom on the simple grounds of human rights and individual dignity. It is also in the best interests of China and the rest of the world to push for religious freedom in China. A report by a committee of UN human rights experts, published in November 2019, warned that China’s repression of minority rights posed a security risk to the country through its potential to foster anti-regime sentiment.

The U.S. should seek ways to economically penalize the use of religious prisoners of conscience in factories. Unfortunately, much of the conversation on Sino-U.S. relations focuses on their respective

economic interests and how trade between the two countries should be regulated. The United States’ economic interest is a valid concern of its own, but the discussion must also include human rights and religious freedom concerns.

To this end, human rights observers in Washington, D.C. welcomed Customs and Border Protection’s public enforcement actions against China’s use of forced labor in 2019. More policies against the use of forced labor need to be promulgated. Research suggests that tens of thousands of Uyghurs have been sent to work in factories across China. The problem of forced labor intersects with the issue of religious freedom in China, and the international community should respond by refusing to financially support these abuses.

The U.S. diplomatic apparatus should increase the profile of religious freedom issues in its communications with its Chinese counterparts and the greater international community. Multiple administrations have recognized the importance of consistent and specific diplomatic pressure on religious freedom. The Obama administration made it standard practice to raise the issue of prisoners of conscience in diplomatic conversations with governments who engage in this practice. The Trump administration issued an executive order on international religious freedom with similar requirements. This kind of diplomatic pressure is vital to the goal of advancing religious freedom and should undoubtedly be practiced concerning China.

## ICC Recommends

- 1

**Condemn Abuse**

That Xi’s aggressive moves to co-opt religion in favor of the worship of state and himself be countered by protecting the autonomy of the church in China, including the Catholic church which has recently been subjected to serious high-level pressure.
- 2

**NATO Membership**

That Xi’s aggression against Christians fleeing his rule, including in South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States, be rigorously combated with every means at the international community’s disposal.



# Kim Jong Un

A HEINOUS DICTATOR IN THE HERMIT KINGDOM

## Summary

- There are an estimated 400,000 Christians in North Korea, all practicing in secret.
- The Kim regime views Christians as a vessel of American imperialism and a threat to the regime and its deified leadership. Having loyalties apart from those to the Supreme Leader is forbidden.
- To avoid detection, all Christians practice in secret, usually alone or in very small communities.
- North Korea operates several political prisons and hard labor camps where Christians, dissidents, and their associates face severe punishment and abuses.
- Many North Koreans flee the tyrannical regime every year, most through routes in China and occasionally by crossing the treacherous demilitarized zone to South Korea.

The Kim family has kept North Korea the most isolated nation on the planet and the most dangerous place for Christians.

## Overview

The latest in a line of repressive North Korean dictators, Kim Jong-un is bent on furthering a system designed to suppress religion, eliminate dissent, and elevate Juche, the country’s official ideology. The Kim family has ruled since the country’s establishment in 1948, passing power down through successive generations and deepening the cult of personality around itself.

Under Kim, Christianity is brutally restricted. Aside from the extremely narrow confines of the state-sponsored church, which is kept for show, religion is viewed as a direct threat to the state and even so much as owning a copy of Scripture, praying, or talking about one’s faith can result in torture, imprisonment, or even death. Precise information on the size of the North Korean church is nearly impossible to ascertain given how closed the country is, but credible reports put the number somewhere between 100,000 and 400,000, including tens of thousands in prison for their faith, according to numbers cited by the U.S. Department of State which monitors these issues.



## About

**OFFICIAL TITLE**  
Supreme Leader

**ASSUMED OFFICE**  
December 17, 2011

**BORN**  
January 8, 1983

**PARTY AFFILIATION**  
Korean Workers’ Party

“Religion is a kind of myth. Whether you believe Jesus or Buddha, it essentially believes a myth.”

- Kim Il Sung

## Forms of Persecution

### IMPRISONMENT, TORTURE, AND FORCED LABOR

Christians arrested by the regime have been subjected to cruel punishments in North Korea’s labor or prison camps, including severe beatings, starvation, sexual abuse, solitary confinement, and long hours of hard labor.

### EXECUTION

Christians have often been sentenced to death by execution or by hard labor in one of the country’s many labor camps for their practice of Christianity.

### SOCIAL REJECTION AND OSTRACISM

Because of North Korea’s demonization and severe punishments of Christians, believers are often rejected by family and friends to avoid guilt by association.

### CENSORSHIP

Information in North Korea is heavily regulated by the regime to prevent “social instability.” Christians, like all North Koreans, are cut off from accessing the gospel or information from outside sources.

## ICC Analysis

Kim Jong Un’s regime has consistently been a threat to Christians who, like political dissidents, represent a threat to the stability of the state and the regime. Under the state’s Juche ideology, which deifies Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un, Pyongyang remains the pinnacle of state-sponsored persecution.

The practice of Christianity came to be seen as a diverging loyalty from the Supreme Leader and under the influence of American imperialism; this paranoia started early in the North’s statehood as it sought to centralize the power of its first leader, Kim Il Sung. Therefore, being a Christian is often considered a political crime, punishable by harsh penalties, including imprisonment, torture, and even execution.

### PUNISHMENT BY ASSOCIATION

The enforcement of the Kim family’s anti-religious posture is carried out by the North Korean State Security Department (SSD) and the Ministry of Public Safety (MPS), which each operate several complex networks of informants to monitor any potential dissidents and threats to the state. Those held by the regime are quickly taken to detention centers, where they face several abuses, or are sent to political prisons or hard labor camps, each reminiscent of Soviet gulags. Within these camps, Christians and other “dissidents” there endure hard labor, torture, and other grave atrocities.

To further protect the Supreme Leader’s legitimacy from these ideological or political threats, the North Korean dictatorship keeps its citizens closed off from the outside world, allowing them to know only what happens with the confines of the hermit kingdom and what information is shared by state-controlled media. Christians are forced to rely on whatever small access they have to the gospel. Many of the Christian materials in North Korea come from other Christians and defectors who smuggle them into the country. These Christians and defector groups have used various methods to get this material into the country, including by river or by balloon. Unfortunately, this sort of smuggling has been discouraged by the South Korean government, which has sought to reduce tensions with the nuclear North, which is enraged over such actions.

This anti-Christian enforcement goes well-beyond punishing practitioners alone, and guilt is attributed by association: If one person is found to have access to a Bible or carrying out Christian activities, all of their associates are vulnerable to the state’s punishment. This nightmare situation has made practicing Christianity in North Korea incredibly dangerous, forcing Christian groups to operate secretly in small groups. However, fearing for their lives, many seek the chance to escape, although the journey out of Korea is treacherous and the consequences of being caught are severe.

## ICC Recommends

### 1 Sanctions

That Kim’s allies in the Chinese and Russian governments be pressured to stop their enabling of his brutal regime. Sanctions seeking to cut the regime off from the international system must be better enforced.

### 2 Propaganda Combat

That South Koreans trying to counter Kim’s propaganda in the North by sending leaflets into the country should be encouraged rather than criminalized by the South Korean government.



# Reports & Briefs

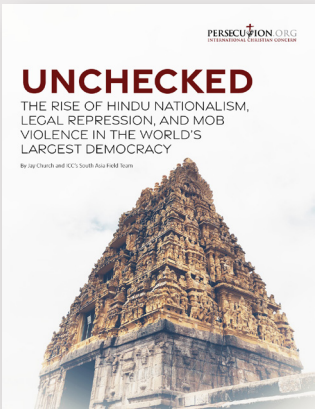
RESEARCH FROM THE SOURCE

ICC exists to serve the persecuted Christian community around the world. In addition to delivering assistance to the persecuted church, one way ICC conducts advocacy and awareness together is through its reports.

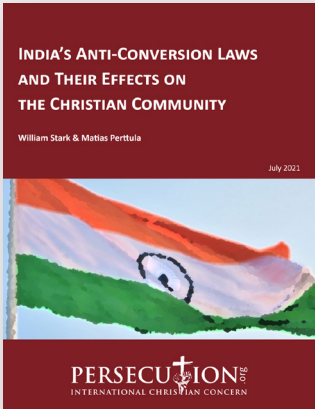
ICC staffs a team of expert analysts on persecution that have compiled their research into a series of reports. These publications summarize the issues using first-hand knowledge from ICC field staff and victims themselves of what persecution looks like.

Combining this first-hand knowledge and the geopolitical expertise of ICC’s analysts, these reports help to illuminate major trends in international religious freedom with the aim of providing governmental leaders in the West on persecution issues and empowering them to enact policy that promotes real change for the body of Christ.

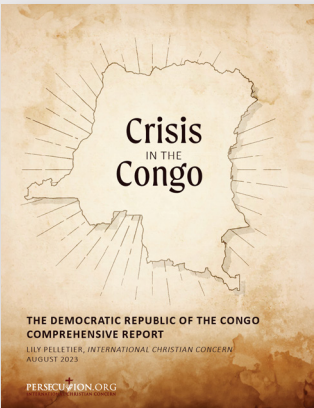
The following page includes reports based on the contents of this publication. If reading the physical copy, please scan the QR code with your mobile device to go directly to each report. If viewing this publication virtually, simply click on the cover of each report to read. To view the full list of ICC’s reports, please visit [www.persecution.org/reports](http://www.persecution.org/reports).



**Unchecked:** The Rise of Hindu Nationalism, Legal Repression, and Mob Violence



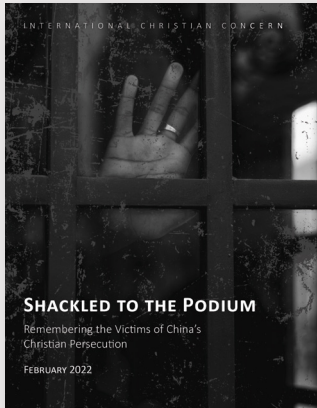
**India’s Anti-Conversion Laws** and Their Effects on the Christian Community



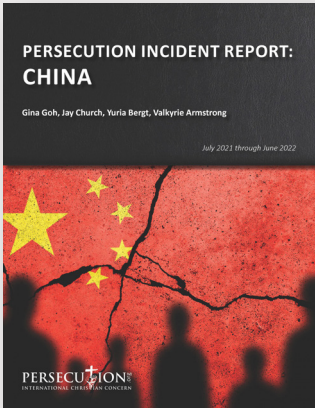
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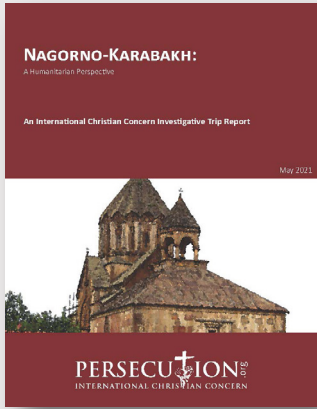
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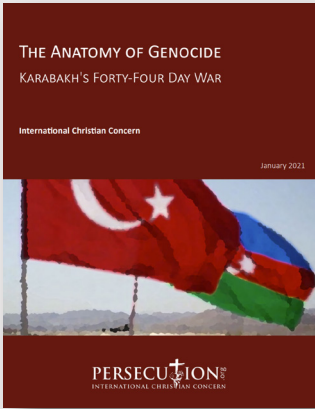
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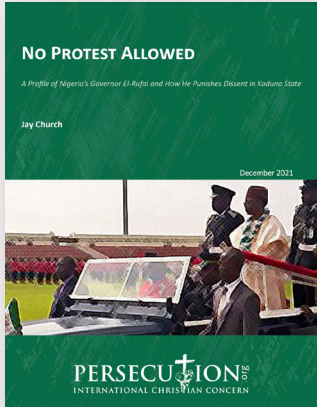
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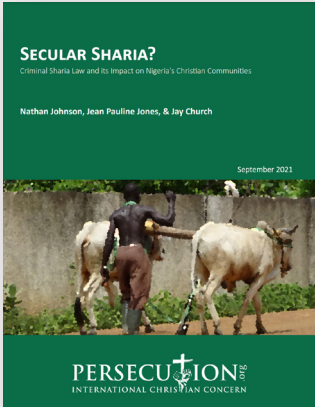
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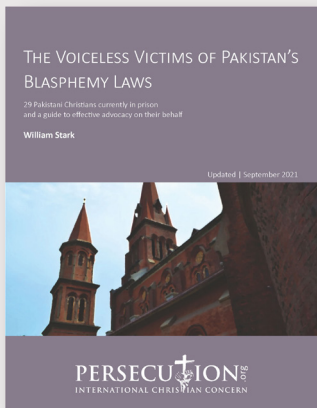
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