

SYRIA: 70,000 Syrian Armenians have fled during the war, and few will return

World Watch Monitor (27.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2y01Gat> – The fragrance of Middle Eastern cuisine wafts into your nostrils, even before you open the door of the café opposite the central railway station in Yerevan, Armenia's capital.

Nerses Kevo, the café's owner, is one of thousands of Armenian Christians who fled the Syrian civil war and moved to Armenia, with sorrow for what they'd left behind and determination to start a new life in what they call their historic homeland.

One day, amidst the cauldron of war, Kevo found his Aleppo factory, which produced air filters for vehicles, demolished to the ground by air strikes.

"Seeing the result of years of hard work perish overnight, and fearing for our lives, my family and I decided to leave Syria," Kevo says. "As with so many Syrian Armenians, we were also convinced that we would be most welcome in Armenia, with our compatriots." According to Armenia's Ministry of Diaspora, around 25,000 ethnic Armenians have moved there from Syria since the beginning of the war; 3,000 of them later left for other destinations, or returned to Syria.

Syria's Armenian community, of more than 100,000 pre-war, mainly consists of people whose great-grandparents were exiled

from their historic homeland during the Armenian Genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire in 1915. The Turks forced Armenians into long “death marches”* across the Syrian Desert – Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time – the final destination being the city of Deir ez-Zor, where concentration camps were waiting for the refugees. The ones who escaped or survived the camps made Syria their second home.

Since then, this Christian minority has built dozens of churches, schools and cultural centres, making the Syrian Armenian community one of the main cultural hubs of the worldwide Armenian diaspora, though 70 per cent of the community are now believed to have left the country, according to figures quoted by the Armenian Ambassador to Syria, Arshak Poladian, last year.

Kevo, who now leads the Syrian Armenians’ Union in Armenia, says he thinks the diminution of Syria’s Christian minority is irreversible because, he says, very few refugees will ever go back.

“Henceforth, that region of the Middle East is going to be a dangerous zone for Christians, as any conflict may erupt at any time again. Armenians who have been living in Armenia for four to five years have children settled in schools and universities. They don’t speak Arabic, so taking them back would make their lives difficult,” Kevo explains. “Plus, many of them have started small businesses here. Some people are waiting until it’s the right time to go back and sell their land and property in Syria at a reasonable price, to then completely move out of that country, as are some who have stayed there.”

Armenia and many organisations belonging to the Armenian diaspora worldwide have provided financial and humanitarian aid to Syrian Armenians during the war. The ones who have settled in Armenia will soon receive financial aid in the sum of 3,000,000 Euros from the European Union, Armenian news agency [Armenpress reported](#). The aid will target Syrian Armenians' housing issues, development of their businesses, and their re-training and skill development.

Kevo's colleague from the Syrian Armenians' Union, Vani Nalpantian, joins our conversation. She moved to Armenia from Aleppo in October 2012 with her husband and two children and now imports wooden jewellery boxes from Syria. Nalpantian also co-ordinates programmes for Syrian Armenian women, to teach them various skills such as crafts and cooking, so they can make a living.

She is also convinced that life will never be the same for the dwindling Armenian community in Syria.

"Before the war, we were 100 per cent sure that we were safe and secure in Syria, but it turned out we weren't. Now that the situation is so volatile over there, we should expect anything, anytime, to happen again," Nalpantian says.

Through the war

Of all the Armenian communities within Syria, Aleppo's was the biggest and therefore the most affected by the civil war.

In July 2012, finding themselves the targets of armed militants, Aleppo's Armenians engaged in self-defence. Around 170 Armenians died, more than 100 were taken hostage (most were later freed after ransoms were paid), and seven others disappeared without a trace.

Of Aleppo's 17 Armenian churches, only seven survived the war – the others were destroyed or burnt down. Armenian residential areas, cemeteries, shops and factories were also damaged and looted.

Across the country, 11 Armenian schools were destroyed, among them the Karen Jeppe secondary school in Aleppo, named after a Danish missionary who delivered aid to victims of the genocide. The school was the landmark of the Armenian community and an educational hub for the Armenian diaspora, so it was given top priority for reconstruction and reopened in September 2017. Before the war the college had 1,300 students; now there are only 300.

Having been successful entrepreneurs, and possessing a strong flair for trade, over the years Armenians have made a significant contribution to the Syrian economy, thus earning the respect and support of the Syrian state. They have practised their religion, language and culture without any hindrance, according to Nerses Kevo, and have had many privileges in comparison with other minorities. But Kevo says that during the war, because of their close relationship with the state, their position became more precarious.

“From the very beginning of the war, Armenians took Assad’s position. But Aleppo’s Arab population was in opposition,” Kevo explains. “We, the Armenian community, and Arabs were always respecting each other, but we needed to realise that it was dangerous to ostensibly take Assad’s side. We needed to be more diplomatic and remain neutral.”

‘Our Church is our kingdom’

Despite all the doubts and the sense of insecurity, the life of the Armenian community in Syria continues as normal, a lady who has lived in Aleppo throughout the war told World Watch Monitor. Hrip Kananian, the head of the regional administration of the Armenian Relief Cross in Syria, gave an up-to-date insight into the current situation in the country during a visit to Yerevan.

“The task of the leadership of our organisation is to give people hope and make them believe that the city is revitalising. Even if we don’t believe what we preach ourselves, we need to give people hope and encourage them to come back, build their homes and lives,” she says.

“We have estates, land, churches, schools, clubs, all belonging to the community. It will be a shame to abandon all of that and leave the country. We make a very big effort to prolong the life of the community on the Arabic land.”

A teacher for 25 years, Kananian cared for children at an Armenian orphanage during the war. She recalls the morning of 31 December 2015, when she took the children into town to see the New Year decorations and buy them presents.

"I was with the children when my nephew called me and said, 'Your house has just been bombed'," Kananian remembers. "I ran home and saw dust all over, burning cars, but the house was not damaged: the bomb had exploded in front of it. Many rockets fell in our district, but my house was not destroyed, which reassured me even more that I needed to stay there and be useful for the community. I stayed with the kids of the orphanage to give them strength."

Now, as ever, she says the Syrian Armenian community is united around the Church, trying to live "as if nothing has happened". As in every Armenian community worldwide, the Armenian Church in Syria is not just a religious establishment but also part of the Armenian identity and, in practical terms, the main organiser of community life. As the Armenian Apostolic Church has more members in Syria than the Armenian Catholic and Evangelical Churches, it is the representative of the Armenian people to the state.

"Over the last 100 years, the Church has been the uniting point for everyone. We have become one with the Church. The Syrian state recognises the Armenian community through its Church," Kananian says. "For us, the leader of the Church is our king, and the Church is our kingdom."

The future of the Armenian Church in Syria largely depends upon the steps taken at present. Under a new scheme announced in May, by order of the spiritual leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos Karekin II, primary school graduate boys of the Syrian Armenian community will be offered places to study in the religious seminary of the Armenian

Church in Lebanon for eight years to train to become celibate priests. At the end of the studies, whoever decides not to go down that path can either become a married priest or a teacher.

The Sunday buzz in and around churches is a reassurance that life continues and the Armenian Christian presence within Syria will still continue, says Hrip Kananian. But the number of students in schools and that of clergy in churches will never be the same, she warns, saying the community rarely gets a chance to welcome anyone back.

Kevo will not return there either, but says he is very worried about the huge Christian cultural heritage in Syria, which he says will need care and maintenance. This concern is etched across the man's face as I take my leave.

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Ethiopian Evangelical sent back to prison for 'causing outrage to religious feeling'

World Watch Monitor (27.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2tAnzoG> – An Ethiopian court of cassation has rejected an appeal by an Evangelical Christian sentenced to seven months in prison for “causing outrage to religious peace and feeling”.

Temesgen Mitiku Mezemir, 24, the leader of an Evangelical fellowship group, was taken back to prison in the southern city of Arba Minch, after being [released on bail](#) in May pending the outcome of his appeal. Mezemir was found guilty in February of [defaming the tabot](#), a replica of the Ark of the Covenant sacred to Orthodox Christians.

The judges of the cassation court in Wolaita Zonal Administration, 300km south of the capital Addis Ababa, said on 20 June they had found “no legal misinterpretations” on Mezemir’s case and upheld the sentence by the lower court.

Local sources told World Watch Monitor that with deduction of time he already spend in detention, Mezemir, 24, still has to serve four months and ten days in jail. However, he can request parole after serving two-thirds of his sentence and could be released in two months.

World Watch Monitor understands the charges against him were brought by members of the predominant Ethiopian Orthodox

Church (EOC), to which just under half of Ethiopia's population belongs.

The EOC is seen by some Ethiopians as a symbol of national identity and its leaders play a prominent role in state and religious affairs. However relations between the EOC and the fast-growing Evangelical churches are often strained, characterised by mutual suspicion.

Arba Minch lies in an ethnically diverse part of Ethiopia known as the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region. Between 1994 and 2007 the proportion of Protestants there jumped from 35 per cent to 55 per cent, while the proportion of Orthodox Christians fell from 27 per cent to 20 per cent.

Background

Mezemir was charged on 23 January after telling EOC members to compare Orthodox accounts of the tabot with information about the Ark of the Covenant on the Internet.

He denied that by downloading a picture of the tabot he had intended to insult the EOC, and explained to the judge at his 26 January hearing that he had downloaded it for reference, showing the website from which he had sourced it. There is no law in Ethiopia against possessing or sharing such photos.

Local Evangelicals expressed concern at Mezemir's sentence, arguing that it set a precedent whereby anyone could bring

unfounded accusations against Evangelicals with impunity. They also expressed concern that the [legal process was wrought with irregularities](#).

One member of Mezemir's fellowship group told World Watch Monitor that the weeks leading up to the court case had been marked by several violent incidents for which he believed members of the EOC were responsible.

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USA: Thermostats, locks and lights: Digital tools of domestic abuse

By Nellie Bowles

NY Times (23.06.2018) – <https://nyti.ms/2KrQ52q>– The people who called into the help hotlines and domestic violence shelters said they felt as if they were going crazy.

One woman had turned on her air-conditioner, but said it then switched off without her touching it. Another said the code numbers of the digital lock at her front door changed every day and she could not figure out why. Still another told an abuse help line that she kept hearing the doorbell ring, but no one was there.

Their stories are part of a new pattern of behavior in domestic abuse cases tied to the rise of smart home technology. Internet-connected locks, speakers, thermostats, lights and cameras that have been marketed as the newest conveniences are now also being used as a means for harassment, monitoring, revenge and control.

In more than 30 interviews with The New York Times, domestic abuse victims, their lawyers, shelter workers and emergency responders described how the technology was becoming an alarming new tool. Abusers – using apps on their smartphones, which are connected to the internet-enabled devices – would remotely control everyday objects in the home, sometimes to watch and listen, other times to scare or show power. Even after a partner had left the home, the devices often stayed and continued to be used to intimidate and confuse.

For victims and emergency responders, the experiences were often aggravated by a lack of knowledge about how smart technology works, how much power the other person had over the

devices, how to legally deal with the behavior and how to make it stop.

“People have started to raise their hands in trainings and ask what to do about this,” Erica Olsen, director of the Safety Net Project at the National Network to End Domestic Violence, said of sessions she holds about technology and abuse. She said she was wary of discussing the misuse of emerging technologies because “we don’t want to introduce the idea to the world, but now that it’s become so prevalent, the cat’s out of the bag.”

Some of tech’s biggest companies make smart home products, such as Amazon with its Echo speaker and Alphabet’s Nest smart thermostat. The devices are typically positioned as helpful life companions, including when people are at work or on vacation and want to remotely supervise their homes.

Some connected device makers said they had not received reports of their products being used in abuse situations. The gadgets can be disabled through reset buttons and changing a home’s Wi-Fi password, but their makers said there was no catchall fix. Making it easy for people to switch who controls the account of a smart home product can inadvertently also make access to the systems easier for criminal hackers.

No groups or individuals appear to be tracking the use of internet-connected devices in domestic abuse, because the technology is relatively new, though it is rapidly catching on. In 2017, 29 million homes in the United States had some smart technology, according to a report by McKinsey, which

estimated that the number was growing by 31 percent a year.

Connected home devices have increasingly cropped up in domestic abuse cases over the past year, according to those working with victims of domestic violence. Those at help lines said more people were calling in the last 12 months about losing control of Wi-Fi-enabled doors, speakers, thermostats, lights and cameras. Lawyers also said they were wrangling with how to add language to restraining orders to cover smart home technology.

Muneerah Budhwani, who takes calls at the National Domestic Violence Hotline, said she started hearing stories about smart homes in abuse situations last winter. "Callers have said the abusers were monitoring and controlling them remotely through the smart home appliances and the smart home system," she said.

Graciela Rodriguez, who runs a 30-bed emergency shelter at the Center for Domestic Peace in San Rafael, Calif., said some people had recently come in with tales of "the crazy-making things" like thermostats suddenly kicking up to 100 degrees or smart speakers turning on blasting music.

"They feel like they're losing control of their home," she said. "After they spend a few days here, they realize they were being abused."

Smart home technology can be easily harnessed for misuse for several reasons. Tools like connected in-home security cameras

are relatively inexpensive – some retail for \$40 – and are straightforward to install. Usually, one person in a relationship takes charge of putting in the technology, knows how it works and has all the passwords. This gives that person the power to turn the technology against the other person.

Emergency responders said many victims of smart home-enabled abuse were women.

Connected home gadgets are largely installed by men, said Melissa Gregg, a research director at Intel working on the implications of smart home technology. Many women also do not have all the apps on their phones, said Jenny Kennedy, a postdoctoral research fellow at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, who is researching families that install smart home technology.

(One in three women and one in four men have been victims of physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner, according to a 2010 Centers for Disease Control report.)

The people who spoke to The Times about being harassed through smart home gadgetry were all women, many from wealthy enclaves where this type of technology has taken off. They declined to publicly use their names, citing safety and because some were in the process of leaving their abusers. Their stories were corroborated by domestic violence workers and lawyers who handled their cases.

Each said the use of internet-connected devices by their

abusers was invasive – one called it a form of “jungle warfare” because it was hard to know where the attacks were coming from. They also described it as an asymmetry of power because their partners had control over the technology – and by extension, over them.

One of the women, a doctor in Silicon Valley, said her husband, an engineer, “controls the thermostat. He controls the lights. He controls the music.” She said, “Abusive relationships are about power and control, and he uses technology.”

She said she did not know how all of the technology worked or exactly how to remove her husband from the accounts. But she said she dreamed about retaking the technology soon.

“I have a specific exit plan that I’m in the process of implementing, and one of my fantasies is to be able to say, ‘O.K. Google, play whatever music I want,’” she said. Her plan with the smart thermostat, she said, was to “pull it out of the wall.”

When a victim uninstalls the devices, this can escalate a conflict, experts said. “The abuser can see it’s disabled, and that may trigger enhanced violence,” said Jennifer Becker, a lawyer at Legal Momentum, a women’s rights legal advocacy group.

Eva Galperin, director of cybersecurity for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group, said disabling

the devices could also further cut off a victim. "They're not sure how their abuser is getting in and they're not necessarily able to figure it out because they don't know how the systems work," Ms. Galperin said. "What they do is they just turn everything off, and that just further isolates them."

Legal recourse may be limited. Abusers have learned to use smart home technology to further their power and control in ways that often fall outside existing criminal laws, Ms. Becker said. In some cases, she said, if an abuser circulates video taken by a connected indoor security camera, it could violate some states' revenge porn laws, which aim to stop a former partner from sharing intimate photographs and videos online.

Advocates are beginning to educate emergency responders that when people get restraining orders, they need to ask the judge to include all smart home device accounts known and unknown to victims. Many people do not know to ask about this yet, Ms. Becker said. But even if people get restraining orders, remotely changing the temperature in a house or suddenly turning on the TV or lights may not contravene a no-contact order, she said.

Several law enforcement officials said the technology was too new to have shown up in their cases, though they suspected the activity was occurring.

"I'm sure that it's happening," said Zach Perron, a captain in the police department in Palo Alto, Calif. "It makes complete

sense knowing what I know about the psychology of domestic violence suspects. Domestic violence is largely about control – people think of physical violence but there’s emotional violence, too.”

Some people do not believe the use of smart home devices is a problem, said Ruth Patrick, who runs WomenSV, a domestic violence program in Silicon Valley. She said she had some clients who were put on psychiatric holds – a stay at a medical facility so mental health can be evaluated – after abuse involving home devices.

“If you tell the wrong person your husband knows your every move, and he knows what you’ve said in your bedroom, you can start to look crazy,” she said. “It’s so much easier to believe someone’s crazy than to believe all these things are happening.”

Asking everyone in a home to understand smart home technology is essential, researchers said.

“When we see new technology come out, people often think, ‘Wow, my life is going to be a lot safer,’” said Katie Ray-Jones, chief executive of the National Domestic Violence Hotline. But “we often see the opposite with survivors of domestic violence.”

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KENYA: How outlawing female genital mutilation has driven it underground and led to its medicalization

By Damaris Seleina Parsitau

The Brookings Institution (19.06.2018) – <https://brook.gs/2MqJVQx>– The fight against female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) has been fraught with both success and failure, resistance and acceptance. Since Kenya banned the practice in 2011, FGM/C is now increasingly conducted underground, secretly in homes or in clinics by healthcare providers and workers.

The medicalization of FGM/C–defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as any “situation in which FGM/C is

practiced by any healthcare provider whether in public or private, clinic or home or elsewhere”—has received recent media and public attention. Earlier this year, a doctor filed a court case asking the Kenyan government to declare the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2011, which outlawed and criminalized FGM/C, unconstitutional. Further, she wanted the Anti-FGM Board, a body created to help eradicate FGM/C and early marriage, also declared unconstitutional.

The doctor, Dr. Tatu Kamau, argues that the dignity of traditional practitioners of female circumcision is disregarded by the law which has failed to stop FGM/C in the country. She claims that FGM/C is still largely practiced in Kenya and is increasing due to medicalization. In Kenya, there is evidence that scrupulous medical personnel collude with parents to circumvent the law by cutting girls in their homes or in their private clinics away from public view.

This trend is evident in both rural and urban Kenya where 15 percent of women and girls have been cut by a medical practitioner. The practice is especially prevalent in Kisii counties in Western Kenya where FGM/C is nearly universal. Drawing on interviews with girls and women who have been cut by health providers, my research shows that parents are increasingly having their girls, some as early as 5 years old, cut by nurses or other healthcare workers either in homes or in health clinics.

Moraa (not her real name), an 18-year-old college girl from Nakuru in the Rift Valley, explained to me how her mother, a primary school teacher, brought a nurse to their home during school holidays to cut her at dawn when she was barely 8 years

old. Moraa feels resentful and bitter towards her parents, especially her mother for colluding with a nurse to have her cut without her consent, and has considered suing her parents for violating her rights. Moraa's story is just one of many cases of medicalized cutting.

The commercialization and medicalization of FGM/C

Throughout my larger research on FGM/C and early marriage, I came across many stories of medicalization of FGM/C both in rural and urban areas in Kenya. A nurse I spoke with told me that she carries out the cut for money. "Look," she said, "when parents call me to perform the cut on their girls, both in urban and rural areas or even in my clinic, I respond because they pay me handsomely. Some even pay for my bus fare and accommodation; I travel widely to cut girls and women. I see no reason why I shouldn't do this. I have not forced anyone to undergo the cut. I simply provide my services to those who need them."

Medical professionals who perform cutting services claim that they are fulfilling the demands of communities and that they help enhance women's values and marriageability in communities that do not want to abandon the practice. They believe that by doing so they respect patients' cultural rights since some are of a mature legal age.

However, the real reason driving this is its economic value. Medical professionals are cutting girls and women for payment, replacing the traditional cutters in rural villages. Additionally, the commercialization of FGM/C helps parents and

guardians to avert the law and authorities. The medicalization of FGM/C not only provides legitimacy to the cut but it continues to put millions of girls at risk from the consequences of the cut. It also continues to perpetuate and give tacit approval of the harmful practice by discouraging changed behavior and attitudes, thereby leading to the normalization of the cut in medical spaces.

While the medicalization of FGM/C is not a new phenomenon, its growing popularity is worrying and points to emerging shifts and tensions in the war to end it—a cat and mouse game between resistant communities and authorities. And while the medicalization of FGM/C went under the radar as authorities and stakeholders focused on traditional cutters in rural villages as well as alternative rites of passage, it is now emerging as a new frontier in the war against the harmful practice. Global, regional, and local focus should now shift away from traditional cutters to medical practitioners.

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EGYPT: Copt's fields torched after rumours he was turning his house into a church

World Watch Monitor (26.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2N0pknm> – A Coptic Christian from Beni Suef governorate in Egypt saw his wheat fields set on fire, just four days after he was accused of planning to turn his house into a church.

On 2 June, Ibrahim Sadeq Ayad from Ezbed Ragy village, near the city of El-Fashn, informed the police that his 2.5 acres of land had been torched by unknown assailants, World Watch Monitor was told by the lawyer who accompanied him to the police station.

Three days prior to the incident, Ayad was at the same police station but in a different position. According to his lawyer, Bassem Farid, a report had been filed against him, accusing him of turning his home into a church.

As there is no church in the village, Ayad has hosted a Sunday school at his home for the past four years, led by church ministers from El-Fashn.

On 29 May, Ayad had a visitor from the neighbouring village of Ezbet Marco: the pastor of St. Mary and St. Michael's Church,

Fr. Eshaq Kastour, who had come to pray for Ayad's sick wife, at his invitation.

Background

As there is no formal church in Ezbed Ragy, local Coptic Christians used to go to the church of St. Mary and St. Michael in the neighbouring village of Ezbat Marco, which is 8km away. But in October 2012, they were attacked by some local Muslims who protested against their regular visits. Since that time, they have been going to church in El-Fashn, which is twice as far from home.

"When the Muslim villagers of Ezbet Ragy saw the priest visit Ibrahim's home, they concluded that his home would turn into a church," Farid said. Then they filed a complaint with the police against him and Ayad was arrested.

Three days later, the Coptic man was released after signing a pledge that he would not turn his home into a church and that no prayer meetings for children would be held there again.

The next day his land was burnt and his lawyer implied a link between that incident and his release. No arrests have been made in relation to the burning of the land so far.

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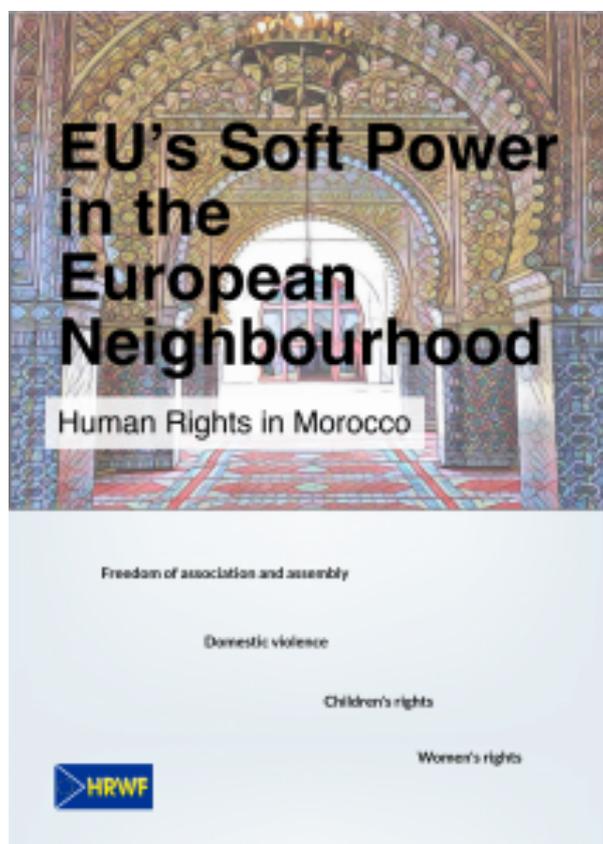
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Newly released: Human Rights in Morocco: Achievements and Challenges Ahead



[Human Rights in Morocco: Achievements and Challenges Ahead](#)

This report of *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* first describes the mandate, the structures and the activities of the CNDH. This driving force, with 13 regional committees, has had and is having a real positive impact on freedom of association and assembly, domestic violence, woman's rights, and children's rights, just to name a few. Each of these issues is covered in this report, taking stock of the criticisms expressed by domestic civil society organizations and the international community, describing the dynamics towards positive changes, and outlining the remaining obstacles to overcome in order to achieve satisfactory results *de jure* and in practice.

[Read report](#)

SWEDEN: 3 Arab men convicted of firebombing Swedish synagogue

JTA (25.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2ItQmjp> – Three Arab men were convicted of the attempted arson of a synagogue in Sweden.

The three men – two Palestinians and a Syrian – were convicted and sentenced Monday in Gothenberg District Court. Two were sentenced to two years in prison and the third to 15 months.

They were part of a group of more than a dozen men who hurled firebombs in December at the Gothenburg synagogue hours after locals marched in the southern city against the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Teens from the local Jewish community were attending a party inside the synagogue complex at the time.

One of the Palestinian attackers was a 22-year-old who had his asylum application rejected after the attack and will be deported after serving his prison sentence. The other two assailants had Swedish residency permits, according to The Associated Press.

The attack, which was classified as a hate crime, was caught on surveillance cameras, according to Aftonbladet. There was only minor damage to the building.

Following the attack, the teens waited for police and their parents in the synagogue basement for safety reasons.

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UZBEKISTAN: Five-day jail, fines for unapproved worship

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18

Forum18 (21.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2ItNgf7> – *Nabijon Bolikulov was jailed in Karshi for five days and three fellow Baptists were fined for meeting for worship without state permission. The Judge told Bolikulov: “Do your prayers at home. It is against the law of our state to meet for worship without state registration.”*

A court in the southern city of Karshi [Qarshi] has punished four members of a Baptist congregation for meeting for worship without state permission. One Baptist was jailed for five days after pointing out that he and his fellow Baptists did not break the Constitution or international human rights law, and the other three were fined several days’ average wages. The Judge illegally did not specify exactly what part of the law the Baptists had broken.

“Each time they come they film us and record our names,” Nabijon Bolikulov told Forum 18 after his release from a five-day jail term. “And then they gradually punish our people whose names they record.” During his trial, the Judge told

Bolikulov: "Do your prayers at home. It is against the law of our state to meet for worship without state registration" (see below).

In Urgench [Urgench] in the north-western Khorezm Region, two officers from the local police Department for the Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism broke into the home of a Protestant. They handed him an official warning that he must not participate in unlawful religious meetings, must not keep religious literature in his home, must not teach religious doctrines, and must not violate the Religion Law. Local Protestants pointed out to Forum 18 that the warning given to Saidjon Urazov is itself illegal (see below).

In the capital Tashkent, a Baptist has failed to overturn on appeal an illegal fine and the destruction of a memory chip with family photos. The original court illegally put Alina Chernikova on trial without informing her that a trial was taking place. Both the original court and the appeal court also illegally failed to supply her with copies of their decisions within the legally specified time (see below).

And also in Urgench, a court lowered a fine illegally imposed on a Protestant, but left unchanged an order that confiscated religious literature including a Bible should be destroyed and her phone confiscated. Illegally, neither the police who opened the case, nor the Court which heard it, had informed Shakhzoda Rajabova about the original trial. She also had her mobile phone taken for the authorities to use themselves, the first time she heard of the trial being 82 days later (see below).

All exercise of freedom of religion and belief with others without state permission is illegal, including sharing any beliefs with anyone, and meeting with others for worship or the study of sacred texts in homes. "Law enforcement" officials raid with impunity people of all faiths meeting together to exercise freedom of religion and belief. Those taking part in such meetings are very often threatened, detained, subjected to violent physical assault and torture, given large fines, and have religious literature – including Islamic texts and the Bible – confiscated and destroyed (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

Jasur Akramov, the new Chair of the Religious Affairs Committee, has evaded answering Forum 18's questions about why people exercising their freedom of religion and belief continue to be jailed and fined, and also have their own religious literature confiscated and destroyed (see below).

Karshi: Raid, seven and a half hour interrogations, trial

On 23 May Karshi Police officers (who would not give their names) raided the homes of both Khamid Rakhmonov and Ziyatullo Rakhmonov (not related to Khamid) in Yakkabog District of Kashkadarya Region. Officers took the two men to Karshi Police Station, where they questioned them on why they attend Baptist worship meetings which do not have state permission, and who invites them to these meetings, a local Protestant told Forum 18 on 13 June.

Police also on 23 May summoned for questioning Nabizhon

Bolikulov and other local Baptists, including Viktor Tashpulatov, Mikhail Balykbayev, Munira Gaziyeva, and Svetlana Andreychenko. All the Baptists were held at the Police Station for seven and half hours, from 11.30 am to 7 pm. When they were released, police told the Baptists to come to the Police Station at 2 pm the next day, 24 May.

When the Baptists arrived at the Police Station on 24 May, officials took them directly to Karshi Administrative Court. The authorities did not allow other Baptists enter the Court to support their fellow-believers.

Judge tries to stop Baptist worship meetings without state permission

During the 24 May hearing, Judge Azamat Khushvakhtov asked Bolikulov questions such as: "Who invited you to the worship meetings?"; "Where did you get Bibles?"; and "Will you go on attending the meetings?".

When Bolikulov answered that he bought his Bible in Tashkent from the officially registered Bible Society, and that he will continue attending the meetings, Judge Khushvakhtov replied: "Do your prayers at home". The Judge then told him that "it is against the law of our state to meet for worship without state registration".

Council of Churches Baptist congregations exercise their right under international human rights law not to apply for state permission to meet for worship. However, Uzbekistan against

international law makes state permission compulsory for exercising freedom of religion and belief (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

Judge Khushvakhtov also threatened the Baptists that if they continue holding meetings for worship without state permission, he "will file a petition to the Prosecutor's office to open a criminal case against Tashpulatov, Balykbayev, Gaziyeva and Andreychenko".

Bolikulov protested at the Judge's attempt to coerce the Baptists into stopping meeting for worship, pointing out to the Judge that the Baptists are exercising their rights as recognised in both Uzbekistan's Constitution and the country's binding legal international human rights obligations. He pointed out that the Baptists are not violating either the Constitution or international human rights law by holding their worship meetings.

However, Judge Khushvakhtov jailed Bolikulov for five days on 24 May. "Immediately after the Judge announced the verdict, the officers handcuffed me, and took me to Karshi Police's detention centre," Bolikulov stated. "I was kept there for five days and was released on 29 May." While he was in custody the police officers on duty "treated me normally" he added.

The Judge also fined Khamid Rakhmonov, Ziyatullo Rakhmonov (not related to Khamid) and Jamol Bobomurodov one month's minimum monthly wage each, or 172,240 Soms, Bolikulov told Forum 18 on 13 June. These fines represent about three days'

average wages for those in formal work.

The Judge punished all four Baptists under Administrative Code Article 240 (“Violation of the Religion Law”), but did not against the law did not specify what exactly they had done to violate this Article. All the parts of this Article ban the exercise of freedom of religion and belief without state permission, as well as restricting what aspects of this freedom can be exercised with state permission (see Forum 18’s Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

Judge Khushvakhtov refused on 13 June to answer Forum 18’s questions about the punishments he imposed on the Baptists. As soon as Forum 18 introduced itself he put the phone down immediately. He did not answer further phone calls on the same day.

“Each time they come they film us .. then they gradually punish our people”

Bolikulov told Forum 18 that the punishments also follow previous raids and fines imposed on Karshi Baptists for meeting for worship (see eg. F18News 18 November 2015 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2122). “Each time they come they film us and record our names,” he explained. “And then they gradually punish our people whose names they record.”

Police carry out both covert and open surveillance of all

religious communities (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

Urgench: Illegal warning not to exercise freedom of religion and belief

Captain Mukhammad Rakhimov and another officer of Urgench Police's Department for the Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism from Urgench in the north-western Khorezm Region on 11 June broke into the flat of Saidjon Urazov. Captain Rakhimov gave Urazov, a Protestant, an official warning that he must not participate in unlawful religious meetings, must not keep religious literature in his home, must not teach religious doctrines, and must not violate the Religion Law.

Urazov refused to sign the warning Protestants from Urgench, who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 15 June. The Protestants pointed out that the warning was illegal, as such warnings can only be given within one year of a conviction of breaking the Code of Administrative Offences.

Major Khamro Masimov, Chief of Urgench Police's Department for the Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism, and his deputy Captain Rakhimov did not answer their phones on 18 June. Duty officers at Urgench Police, who would not give their names, would not put Forum 18 through to any officials to discuss the case. Major Masimov and Captain Rakhimov have also raided and threatened Urgench Baptists with criminal prosecution for meeting for worship at at Easter (see F18News 24 May 2018

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2380).

Urazov was one of the Protestants present when on 23 July 2017 police armed with automatic weapons raided a church meeting for worship in Pastor Ahmadjon Nazarov's flat. All those present were arrested and taken to Urgench Police Station, where the women were strip searched. Women in the church have been particularly targeted by officials (see F18News 7 August 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2304).

Tashkent: Illegal fine upheld, another illegality committed by court

On 22 January police in the capital Tashkent claiming to be conducting a passport check raided the home of Aleksandr Khokhlov, a member of the local state-registered Baptist Church. Kholkov's step-daughter and fellow-Baptist Alina Chernikova was arrested and taken for questioning. On 7 February Bektemir District Administrative Court in Tashkent illegally put Chernikova on trial without informing her that a trial was taking place.

Chernikova was convicted without the chance to defend herself and fined 20 times the minimum monthly salary under Administrative Code Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons"). The court also ordered the confiscation and destruction of a memory chip with personal family photographs. The decision was given to her 33 days after the legally specified time for such decisions to be delivered (see

http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2361).

Unjust trials with flagrant breaches of due process are normal (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

Chernikova paid the fine without waiting for the result of cassation appeal on her case, Protestants who wished to be anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 18 June. On 8 May Judge Jakhongir Jurayev of the Cassation Appeals Board of Tashkent Administrative Court upheld the original decision. That Court delivered its decision to her on 12 June, 31 days later than the three day limit the law requires.

Dadakhon Saidakhbarov, an official of the Court's Chancellery, on 18 June refused to comment on either court's multiple illegal actions or put Forum 18 through to Judge Jurayev. "If you want an explanation you need to come to the Court" he claimed before putting the phone down.

Urgench: Illegal fine lowered, but illegal Bible destruction order unchanged

On 23 July 2017, Shakhzoda Rajabova, a Protestant from Urgench, was present when 25 police armed with automatic weapons raided a church meeting for worship in Pastor Nazarov's flat. All those present were arrested and taken to Urgench Police Station, where the women were strip searched

(see F18News 7 August 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2304).

On 18 December 2017 Rajabova was given a large fine for having Christian books, and texts including the Bible were ordered to be destroyed. She also had her mobile phone taken for the authorities to use themselves. Yet in a flagrant violation of Uzbek law neither Urgench Police who opened the case, nor the Court which heard it, had informed Rajabova that she was on trial. The first Rajabova heard of the case and punishments was 82 days later in 10 April 2018, when she received a copy of the court decision. The Judge refused to answer when Forum 18 asked him why the police and his court had broken the law, ordered a Bible and other texts to be destroyed, and taken Rajabova's mobile phone (see F18News 31 May 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2383).

On 6 June 2018, Judge Zhamilya Sultanova, Chair of Khorezm Regional Administrative Court, lowered the fine from 80 times the minimum monthly wage to 5 times the minimum monthly wage, or 748,875 Soms. Despite the illegality of the original court hearing, Judge Sultanova did not rescind the order to confiscate and destroy Rajabova's Bible and other religious literature.

Judge Sultanova told Forum 18 on 18 June that she did nothing apart from lower the fine "because Rajabova has filed an appeal to the Supreme Court". The Judge put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 asked why Rajabova was fined for exercising her right to freedom of religion and belief by meeting other Protestants for worship, and why her Bible and other literature was ordered destroyed.

Women in Pastor Nazarov's church have been particularly targeted by the authorities, in addition to the original strip search by male officials with one female police officer (see F18News 31 May 2018 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2383).

No answers from new Religious Affairs Committee head

Jasur Akramov, the new Chair of the Religious Affairs Committee, has evaded answering Forum 18's questions about why people exercising their freedom of religion and belief continue to be jailed and fined, and also have their own religious literature confiscated and destroyed.

Ulugbek Jurayev, Akramov's Assistant, would not put Forum 18 through to Akramov on 18 June. Each time he was called back, Jurayev asked Forum 18 to call again in another hour. He refused to indicate when Akramov might be available for questioning.

Akramov's appointment as the new Religious Affairs Committee head was made public on 18 April. He replaced Artykbek Yusupov, who had headed the Committee since 2006. Akramov leads a team of 51 Committee officials, according to a 16 April Presidential Decree.

The Committee's main role is to stop people exercising their freedom of religion and belief (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan

religious freedom survey
http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

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US quits 'biased' UN human rights council

BBC (20.06.2018) – <https://bbc.in/2tiif8o> – The US has pulled out of the United Nations Human Rights Council, calling it a “cesspool of political bias”.

The “hypocritical and self-serving” body “makes a mockery of human rights”, said US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley.

Formed in 2006, the Geneva-based council has been criticised for allowing countries with questionable human rights records

to be members.

But activists said the US move could hurt efforts to monitor and address human rights abuses around the world.

Ms Haley announced her country's intention to quit the council at a joint news conference with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who called the council "a poor defender of human rights".

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in a statement released through his spokesman, responded by saying he would have "much preferred" the US to remain in the council.

The UN human rights commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called the US withdrawal "disappointing, if not really surprising, news". Israel, meanwhile, has praised the decision.

The move comes amid intense criticism over the Trump administration's policy of separating child migrants from their parents at the US-Mexico border.

On Monday [Mr Hussein has called the policy "unconscionable"](#).

More dismay among allies

This is just the latest rejection of multilateralism by the Trump administration, and will likely unsettle those who look to the United States to protect and promote human rights around the world.

The United States has always had a conflicting relationship with the UN Human Rights Council. The Bush Administration decided to boycott the council when it was created in 2006 for many of the same reasons cited by the Trump administration.

The then UN ambassador was John Bolton – who is currently President Trump’s national security adviser and a strong critic of the UN.

It wasn’t until years later, in 2009, that the United States re-joined under the Obama administration.

Many allies have tried to convince the United States to remain in the council. Even many who agree with Washington’s long standing criticisms of the body believe the United States should actively work to reform it from within, rather than disengaging.

What is the UN Human Rights Council?

The UN set up the council in 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which faced widespread criticism for letting

countries with poor human rights records become members.

A group of 47 elected countries from different global regions serve for three-year terms on the council.

The UNHRC meets three times a year, and reviews the human rights records of all UN members in a special process the council says gives countries the chance to say what they have done to improve human rights, known as [the Universal Periodic Review](#).

The council also sends out independent experts and has set up commissions of inquiry to report on human rights violations in countries including Syria, North Korea, Burundi, Myanmar and South Sudan.

Why has the US decided to quit?

The decision to leave the body follows years of US criticism.

The country initially refused to join the council in 2006, arguing that, like the old commission, the UNHRC had admitted nations with questionable human rights records.

It only joined in 2009 under President Barack Obama, and [won re-election to the council in 2012](#).

But human rights groups voiced fresh complaints about the body in 2013, after [China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Vietnam were elected members](#).

This followed [Israel's unprecedented boycott of one of the council's reviews](#), alleging unfair criticism from the body.

Last year, [Nikki Haley told the council it was "hard to accept" that resolutions had been passed against Israel yet none had been considered for Venezuela](#), where dozens of protesters had been killed during political turmoil.

Israel is the only country that is subject to a permanent standing agenda item, meaning its treatment of the Palestinians is regularly scrutinised.

On Tuesday, despite her harsh words for the UNHRC, Ms Haley said she wanted "to make it crystal clear that this step is not a retreat from our human rights commitments".

What's been the reaction?

Some countries and diplomats were quick to express disappointment about the US withdrawal.

The UNHRC's current president, Slovenian ambassador Vojislav Suc, said the body was the only one "responding to human

rights issues and situations worldwide”.

After the US decision to quit, he said, “it is essential that we uphold a strong and vibrant council”.

[UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said the decision was “regrettable”](#), arguing that while reforms are needed, the UNHRC is “crucial to holding states to account”.

A number of charities and aid groups criticised the move, with the American Civil Liberties Union saying the Trump administration was leading a “concerted, aggressive effort to violate basic human rights”.

The New York-based group Human Rights Watch condemned the US decision to leave the council and called President Trump’s human rights policy “one-dimensional”.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to support the measure, posting a number of tweets praising the country’s “courageous decision”.

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LEBANON: The Chief's Daughter



SB OverSeas is a humanitarian organisation working in Lebanon to provide access to education. They are strictly against the practice of child marriage which affects many of the girls in our schools and work to keep them in education. Read more about our work here: www.sboverseas.org

Written by Kevin Charbel, Project Manager in Saida, Lebanon

SB Overseas (06.20.2018) – I still see her sometimes, walking through the maze of corridors in the shelter she lives in. Our eyes will meet for the briefest of moments as she smiles nervously before dropping her gaze, and passing me by silently. In that instant I feel the urge to reach out to her, to ask her how she's been and what she's up to, but I

always hold back, because I know that any interaction between us carries a risk to her safety.

Sarah was married under duress three months ago, at the age of 14. For some time, she openly defied her father, the community's chief, resisting his attempts to marry her to another teenager. She wanted to stay in school, to keep learning and to be with her friends. Eventually though, her father grew tired of her refusals, resorting instead to beating her into submission. It didn't take long after that for Sarah to be engaged. When I found out what had happened I made sure she knew we could protect her and that we would defend her right to choose, but by then, in her mind, the only thing worse than getting married to a stranger was to stay living with her father.

The once vibrant, cheeky student who would knock on my office door just to say hello disappeared from one day to another. Her marriage precludes her from continuing her education as she is now expected to prioritise domestic duties. This 14 year old girl is under pressure to learn to be a "good wife", meaning she must quickly master the skills to keep a clean home and satisfy her husband's appetite, as well as learn not to flinch when he makes sexual advances. Sarah's own desires and thoughts no longer matter; her position in society limited by the four walls of her modest home, where she is expected to remain while her husband is at work.

Child brides are often told that the more compliant and submissive they are, the easier the transition will be. They are the ones who must adapt, not their husband. They are the ones who must sacrifice, who must accept hardships and who must, all of a sudden, become women. Sarah's imagination and

fiery stubbornness were once assets in the classroom, where they could be put to good use. Now these traits are a risk to her; she must lose this part of herself if she is to fit into the mould her father has set for her. She has no real choice in the matter, as if she were to end up discarded by her husband, she would not have the option to start again, she would be tainted.

Her friends, who are still in school, tell me that Sarah's father threatens her with more violence should she seek to continue contact with any of our staff members. If she is isolated there is much less risk of her rejecting her conditions and, as time goes on, the combination of aloneness and intimidation will numb Sarah into accepting a reality she would otherwise never have chosen for herself.

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