

FRANCE: An Algerian imam faces deportation

HRWF (15.04.2018) – The French government is trying to expel El Hadi Doudi, an imam preaching a fundamentalist form of Islam contrary to human rights. On 8 March, a Commission composed of administrative and judicial magistrates opened the way to the deportation of the controversial imam after it identified cases of hate speech in the numerous sermons of the imam. Jews are “unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs,” he said. Adulterers “must be punished by stoning to death or decapitation,” while women “must not leave the home without authorization.” The apostate “needs to be eliminated by the death penalty, to protect Muslims.” Most damning, the Commission report said, Imam Doudi “explicitly” justified jihad.



El Hadi Doudi, an imam who preaches a fundamentalist form of Islam, at a courthouse in Marseille, France, in February. The French

*government is trying to expel him. Credit Anne-Christine
Poujoulat/Agence France-Presse – Getty Images*

Imam Doudi, 63 was born in Algeria and is not a French citizen. As he is very active on internet, his influence extends not only in France but also throughout Europe. His lawyer said he is the only imam authorized to issue fatwas. Over 37 years, he has often criticized Jews, women and the modern world, yet former governments have long tolerated his hard-line sermons. President Macron is adopting a tougher line, especially about hate speech.

However, France had never been lax in its fight against extremism and terrorism. From 2012 to 2015, the then Interior Ministry kicked out 40 Muslim clerics, and another 52 people, including clerics, were also deported over the last 28 months.

“It’s not just the terrorist organizations, the armies of Daesh, the imams of hate and death that we are fighting,” Mr. Macron said, referring to the Islamic State, in a speech last week honoring Lt. Col. Arnaud Beltrame, a police officer who died in terrorist attack at a supermarket in southern France after swapping himself with a hostage.

“What we are fighting is also this subterranean Islamism, which advances through social networks, which accomplishes its task invisibly, which works silently on the weak and the unstable, betraying even those it claims to represent, who, on our very soil, indoctrinate through proximity and daily corrupt,” Mr. Macron said.

The expulsion of Imam Doudi was recommended by the Marseille authorities under a French law regarding “deliberate acts tending to provoke discrimination, hatred and violence toward an individual or a group.”

Marseille – France’s second-largest city, one-fifth Muslim – is not especially radicalized. Other cities in the south of France, like Nice, have had higher numbers of young people

leave to fight in Syria, and greater proportion of Muslim residents on the government's terrorism watchlist. However, almost all of the fines in Marseille for wearing a face-covering, head-to-toe veil – which is illegal in France – have been imposed in the vicinity of Imam Doudi's mosque, the police say. The authorities are growing increasingly concerned about the potential for radicalization – especially since two young women were killed in a knife attack at the city's main train station in October.

The Sounna mosque where Imam Doudi preached, on the Boulevard National in the Third Arrondissement of Marseille, was closed by officials in December on the grounds that his sermons could “provoke acts of terrorism.” Five members of Imam Doudi's flock left to fight jihad in Syria, according to the police.

His sermons are “exactly contrary to the values of the Republic,” said Marseille's prefect of police, Olivier de Mazières, a terrorism specialist who has led the case against the cleric.

BRUNEI: Next phase of Shariah penal code underway

Borneo Bulletin (11.03.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Et5Sdl> -Towards the implementation of the next phase of the Shariah Penal Code 2013, a draft on Criminal Procedures Code on Shariah (CPC Shariah) has been approved by the Brunei Islamic Religious Council and has been consented to by His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam for gazetting.

Elaborating on the details on the Shariah Penal Code 2013 at the fifth day of the 14th Legislative Council session yesterday, YB Pehin Udana Khatib Dato Paduka Seri Setia Ustaz Haji Awang Badaruddin bin Pengarah Dato Paduka Haji Awang Othman, the Minister of Religious Affairs, shared the first phase has been implemented on May 1, 2014, while the next phase will be carried out according to the right administrative time.

The minister added that the phased implementation of Shariah Penal Code 2013 aimed to provide or enable strategic planning and early preparation in orderly manner and concrete actions by various relevant agencies including investigations, prosecution and judiciary with the implementation of sentences and penalties.

However, several other procedures need to be looked upon before the implementation of CPC Shariah whereby a grace period will be given especially for law practitioners, justice practitioners and execution of the sentences.

He added that the draft provides all rules (law) and prosecutions that will act as a guide for agencies and parties to implement their roles and responsibilities in upholding justice. Apart from CPC Shariah, provisions towards a number of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have already been provided by all relevant parties in ensuring investigation procedures, prosecutions, trials and implementation of sentences are in accordance to the prescribed CPC Shariah.

The minister explained that the SOPs involved coordination of religious enforcement division and the Royal Brunei Police Force (RBPF) that relate with investigations and enforcement; for prosecution and collaborative coordination with the Shariah prosecutor division and the attorney generals; for Hudud and Qisas that relate with trial at Shariah court; for executions of sentences under the Syariah Penal Code 2013 (involving whipping, death sentences, imprisonment, cutting of

hands and feet as penalties, stoning and Qisas).

There is also an SOP for medical officers at the Ministry of Health that acts as the Manual Working Procedure and Reference Term for the ministry in implementing Shariah Law.

Other sources

<https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/brunei-government-signs-off-on-next-stage-of-sharia>

[Brunei government signs off on next stage of sharia](https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/brunei-government-signs-off-on-next-stage-of-sharia)

70,000 law enforcement forces for the protection of places of worship at Easter

HRWF (02.04.2018) – 41,000 policemen and 29,000 gendarmes were mobilized by the Ministry of the Interior to protect Christian and Jewish places of worship during the religious celebrations of Easter and until 7 April, according to a press release published by the Ministry on 30 March (<https://bit.ly/2pVGGHY>).

State of emergency

In 2017, 20 terrorist attempts were foiled, according to Gérard Collomb, Minister of the Interior. During the state of emergency from November 2015 to 1 November 2017, 32 attempts were foiled, 4457 administrative searches were carried out at the address of individuals having relations with jihadist movements, 625 weapons were discovered (including 78 war

weapons: Kalashnikovs, assault rifles and rocket launchers). This led to 998 criminal investigations, 646 custody cases. 752 individuals were put under house arrest and 41 still are. When suspects were under house arrest, they had to stay at home from 8pm to 6am, report to the police or the gendarmerie two or three times per day, and were not allowed to leave their city without the authorization of the mayor or the prefect. During the state of emergency, 19 Muslim places of worship suspected of hosting preachers spreading hate speeches were closed and as of 1 April 11 were still closed. Their situation is still under investigation, minister Collomb said.

Anti-terrorism law

After 1 November 2017, the lawmakers passed an anti-terrorist law meant to replace the legislation in force during the state of emergency. Under the new law, the prefect is still allowed to order administrative searches but only after consulting a prosecutor and after the decision has been validated by a judge.

The prefect is still authorized to close places of worship if they propagate ideas, theories, oral statements and printed material inciting to violence, hatred, discrimination, terrorism or apology of terrorism. However, France has decided that the closure of places of worship was not a priority in its fight against Islamist terrorism because what was pointed at was the lack of a global strategy of prevention involving local actors – associative, social, educational, cultural and police – to put on the radar all weak signals of radicalization.

House arrests are replaced by “individual measures of surveillance”. Freedom of movement is extended from the place of residence to the commune and it can be extended to the département if the suspect accepts to wear an electronic bracelet.

Controls of personal identification documents are possible without prior authorization of a judicial authority at the border, near and in train stations, within a 20-km radius from international ports and airports.

Deportation of foreign dangerous Islamists remains possible. According to governmental sources, more than 60 people have been deported since 2012.

Protection of places of worship during the state of emergency

According to statistics from the Interior Ministry, published on 1February 2017, 4,320 places of worship and religious community buildings were under surveillance and protection of mobile (non-static) patrols by law enforcement and military forces in 2016:

- 2,400 out of 45,000 Christian sites (5%)
- 1,100 out of 2500 Muslim sites (44%)
- 820 Jewishsynagogues, schools and community centers (100%)

Moreover, in the last two years, a budget of 12.5 million EUR was approved to purchase security and video-protection material for the most sensitive religious sites.

Noteworthy is the fact that soldiers who were protecting religious buildings were targets of physical attacks. On 3rd February 2015, three soldiers guarding a Jewish community center were targeted in a knife attack in Nice, and on 1st January 2016, a man tried to run down troops guarding a mosque in Valence.

In 2016, incidents targeting Jewish and Muslim community buildings respectively decreased by 54% and 37.5% in comparison with 2015 while there was an increase of 17.4% concerning Christian (Catholic) places of worship[1]: 949 according to the Ministry of the Interior, including 399 acts of vandalism and 191 cases of theft of worship items.[2]

The Ministry of the Interior also notes that 14 incidents were satanist motivated, and in 25 cases there was an anarchist

connotation, but most of the time the perpetrators and their motivations are unknown.

These statistical ups and downs follow the same trend as the global statistics about anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents.

Decrease of racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents in 2016 and 2017

After a continuous increase from 2008 to 2015, the number of vandalism incidents targeting Christian and Muslim graves and places of worship decreased in 2016 and in 2017 but violent acts against Jews were on the rise and vandalism cases against Jewish sites increased by 22% in comparison with 2016, according to the Ministry of the Interior.

The global statistics in 2017 are clear: 950 racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents in 2017 v. 1128 in 2016 (-16%).

The number of anti-Muslim incidents (121) dramatically decreased by 34.5%.

The number of racist incidents (518) dropped by 14.8%.

The number of anti-Semitic incidents (311) diminished by 7.2%.

However, the number of acts of violence against Jews has dramatically increased: 97 in 2017 v. 77 in 2016.

Concerning acts of vandalism against religious sites and graves, Christian sites were less targeted: 878 in 2017 v. 949 in 2016, and Muslim sites were also less targeted: 72 in 2017 v. 85 in 2016.

U.S. efforts to protect religious minorities (Knox Thames)

PROTECT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: We will advocate on behalf of religious freedom and threatened minorities. Religious minorities continue to be victims of violence. We will place a priority on protecting these groups and will continue working with regional partners to protect minority communities from attacks and to preserve their cultural heritage.

– National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017

US Department of State Official Blog (22.02.2018) – <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2018/02/22/en/us-efforts-protect-religious-minorities> – Persecution, repression, and discrimination are a daily reality for members of religious minority communities in too many countries around the world. Believers and non-believers alike are targeted for violence; their human rights are limited or sometimes entirely restricted. In response, the United States is advocating for the rights of members of religious minority communities, so that they may fully enjoy religious freedom and other related human rights.

The National Security Strategy, released in December 2017, emphasized the importance of this effort. The U.S. government is working bilaterally, and in concert with our friends and allies, to push back against persecution targeting religious minorities, to fight against discrimination, and to promote religious freedom for all. The State Department has undertaken numerous efforts to prevent persecution and to foster space for diversity of thought and belief. Recently, Secretary

Tillerson demonstrated U.S. concern about global persecution by re-designating 10 countries as “countries of particular concern” for their particularly severe violations of religious freedom, and for the first time the Secretary named Pakistan to a Special Watch List. Specific to my area of focus in the Middle East, we achieved bipartisan agreement that ISIS atrocities against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims constitute genocide. The United States is bringing new resources online to assist religious minorities in Iraq, to help preserve their presence in their ancestral homelands.

Since I began this work in 2015 as the first Special Advisor for Religious Minorities at the State Department, we have provided strategic guidance to our embassies and consulates about how to consistently advocate for rights of members of minorities and promote their equal treatment in society. Recognizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage, we have developed a partnership with the Smithsonian Institution to train church and other leaders of minority faith communities on how to protect ancient places of cultural significance. We have strengthened international efforts to advance religious freedom by partnering with Canada to lead the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief, a network of likeminded countries committed to advocate for this right, as well as supported efforts to build similar parliamentary networks. We have worked with the Organization of American States to recruit countries in our hemisphere to join these efforts to combat persecution in other regions. And I have personally traveled to more than 25 countries, including Iraq four times and Pakistan twice, to raise concerns directly and to meet with allies on how to coordinate efforts.

And yet challenges continue to emerge against religious diversity. Groups like ISIS and al-Qa’ida continue to commit targeted acts of violence around the world, while authoritarian regimes like North Korea continue their daily

practices of egregious repression. In response, we must stay committed to emphasizing the universal importance of this fundamental freedom. Based on my almost 20 years of experience in this field, we can achieve lasting results by building and protecting environments where everyone can enjoy freedom of religion or belief. We will continue to raise concerns when communities are targeted, while protecting this human right for all. Our efforts will be specific in advocacy and holistic in approach.

The specific/holistic approach of U.S. diplomacy is based upon the International Religious Freedom Act. A groundbreaking piece of bipartisan legislation passed 20 years ago, the Act made the promotion and protection of religious freedom a foreign policy priority for the United States. The Act created the position of Ambassador-at-Large and required the Department of State to annually report on religious freedom globally.

In the context of advocating for religious freedom around the world, these reports highlight specific situations concerning members of religious minorities: the jailing of Christian pastors and Baha'is in Iran; the targeting of Baha'is for mistreatment in Yemen by Houthi authorities; the imprisonment of non-Muslims and Muslims alike on charges of "denigrating religion" in Egypt; the prosecution of members of minority groups and the Ahmadis for blasphemy in Pakistan; limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Eritrea; anti-Semitic incidents continuing to arise globally; Turkmenistan and Tajikistan maintaining incredibly tight controls on the free practice of religion; the Chinese government's ongoing campaign to control religious beliefs and activities, in part, by torturing, detaining, and imprisoning thousands religious practitioners; and Muslim communities, including the Rohingya, in Burma facing violence, discrimination, and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The reports have also highlighted a growing trend of

terrorists persistently attacking members of religious minority groups. For instance, ISIS affiliates in Pakistan have attacked churches and Christian gatherings, and extremists there have targeted Hindus for forced conversion. In Iraq, ISIS has launched attacks on Yezidis, Christians, Turkmen, Shabak and Kakai, and sexually enslaved and abused Yezidis in particular. ISIS has targeted Shia Muslims in both Syria and Iraq. Elsewhere, ISIS recently claimed responsibility for attacking a Shia cultural center in Kabul. ISIS strikes out at Sunnis brave enough to denounce its violent and intolerant ideology – including religious leaders. In addition, terrorists have repeatedly attacked members of two seemingly unrelated minority groups- converts and atheists – for their personal decision to choose a different belief system.

There is much work to do. Protecting religious freedom and religious minorities is an American ideal. As we celebrated President's Day this week, we are challenged by the example set by our founders. President George Washington wrote in August 1790 to the Jewish community in Newport, Rhode Island to emphasize that they should not fear persecution as a religious minority in the new United States of America. He declared that, "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship...for, happily, the Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance." President Washington set a high bar, and so inspired by his example and these ideals, our foreign policy will continue to endeavor to protect religious freedom and religious minorities.

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Iceland; 500 Icelandic physicians back bill to outlaw circumcision

JTA(23.02.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2CGWSQP> – Hundreds of physicians in Iceland and some of Belgium's top doctors came out in support of a bill proposing to criminalize nonmedical circumcision of boys in the Scandinavian island nation.

The approximately 500 Icelandic physicians who backed the bill that was submitted last month to the parliament cited the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki on ethical principles.

"Potential complications should offset the benefits" of male circumcision, "which are few," the Icelandic physicians wrote in a joint statement published Wednesday.

Advocates of male circumcision include many physicians who believe it reduces the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and genital infections.

In Belgium, several prominent physicians, including Guy T'Sjoen of Ghent University Hospital, told the De Morgen daily they also support a ban.

"As a physician, I find it very regrettable that we have thousands of unnecessary circumcisions annually of boys who can't have their say about it," he said in an interview published Tuesday.

In Denmark, a petition featured on the parliament's website proposing to ban nonmedical circumcision of boys has received

20,000 signatures out of the 50,000 needed to come up for a parliamentary vote as draft resolution. As per a new law, the petition, which was posted on Feb. 1, will remain active for 180 days.

Throughout Scandinavia, the nonmedical circumcision of boys under 18 is the subject of a debate on children's rights and religious freedoms. The children's ombudsmen of all Nordic countries – Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway – released a joint declaration in 2013 proposing a ban, though none of these countries has enacted one.

In the debate, circumcision is under attack from right-wing politicians who view it as a foreign import whose proliferation is often associated mostly with Muslim immigration. And it is also opposed by left-wing liberals and atheists who denounce it as a primitive form of child abuse.

HRWF Comment

It is to be feared that this anti-circumcision campaign will be exploited by anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim actors in a number of other countries.

China bans Muslim children from Quran classes

Aljazeera (17.01..2017) – <http://bit.ly/2FMGDEI> – Chinese government authorities have banned Muslim children from attending religious events during winter break, in a county in western China that is mostly populated by Muslims.

The notification for the ban has been posted online by the education bureau, as authorities step up their suppression of

religious freedoms.

School students in Linxia county in Gansu province, home to many members of the Muslim Hui ethnic minority, are prohibited from entering religious buildings over their break, a district education bureau said, according to the notification.

Students must also not read scriptures in classes or in religious buildings, the bureau said, adding that all students and teachers should heed the notice and work to strengthen political ideology and propaganda. China is an atheist, communist state.

Reuters was unable to independently verify the authenticity of the notice.

The Linxia education bureau has declined to comment on the document's validity.

Xi Wuyi, a Marxist scholar at the state-backed Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and an outspoken critic of rising Islamic influence in China, shared the picture and welcomed the apparent move by the authorities.

With the notice, the county was taking concrete action to keep religion and education separate, and sticking strictly to education law, she said on the Weibo social media platform.

New regulations on religious affairs released in October last year, and due to take effect in February, aim to increase oversight of religious education and limit religious activities.

Last summer, a Sunday School ban was introduced in the southeastern city of Wenzhou, sometimes known as "China's Jerusalem" due to its large Christian population, but Christian parents found ways to teach their children about their religion, regardless.

Chinese law formally grants religious freedom for all, but

regulations on education and protection of minors also say religion cannot be used to hinder state education, or children taught to believe in a religion, rather than communism.

Authorities in troubled parts of China, such as the far western region of Xinjiang, home to the Turkic-speaking Uighur Muslim minority, ban children from attending religious events.

But religious communities elsewhere rarely face blanket restrictions.

Fear of Muslim influence has grown in China in recent years, sparked in part by violence in Xinjiang.

The Chinese-speaking Hui, who are culturally more similar to the Han Chinese majority than to Uighurs, have also come under scrutiny from some intellectuals, who fear creeping Islamic influence on society.

ERITREA: Gravestones vandalized in Jewish cemetery

JTA (16.01.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2F0St0X> – Dozens of gravestones were toppled and broken in a Jewish cemetery in Eritrea.

The damage at the cemetery located in the capital of Asmara is believed to have happened in recent days, according to two Jewish news outlets that received photos of the vandalism.

The Israel-based Haaretz published photos of the smashed gravestones, reported to be the first time that the Jewish cemetery has been targeted.

“The cemetery suffered vandalism and a large number of graves were defaced,” Danny Goldschmidt, from the Aden Jewish Heritage Museum located in Tel Aviv, told Haaretz. He said that the police have not made any arrests in the incident.

The London-based Jewish Chronicle also was sent photos of the damage by an unnamed reader in London of Eritrean descent, who did not want his name published for fear of retribution against family members who remain in Eritrea.

In addition to cemetery, the site in Asmara site is home to a now-defunct synagogue. The last Jewish family left Eritrea more than ten years ago. There reportedly is one permanent Jewish resident left in the city, who has been identified as Sami Cohen and who reportedly takes care of the cemetery and the synagogue.

The last grave was dug in the cemetery in 1996, Ynet reported in 2006. There are about 150 people buried in the cemetery.

The Jewish Photo Library blog featured a visit and an interview with Sami Cohen in 2015, when he was 67. Cohen, often called “the last Jew of Eritrea,” said he maintains the synagogue, including caring for its two Torah scrolls and Jewish books in the hopes that the Eritrean market will open up, bringing Israeli and Jewish businessmen to the area.

Asmara’s Jewish community numbered as many 500 people in the 1950s, made up of Jews who came from Yemen in the late 19th century due to Italian colonial expansion, and by Jews who fled Europe before and during World War II. Some Jews left Eritrea when Israel became a state, and others left when Eritrea’s 30-year-long fight for independence from Ethiopia reached Asmara. By 1975 the community had shrunk to 150 and by 1993 when Eritrea gained independence Cohen was one of the only Jews left.

Cohen’s wife and children left in the late 1990s. He divides his time between Rome, Tel Aviv and Asmara, according to the

blog. Though he was born in Eritrea, Cohen also retains British citizenship.

CHINA: Church of Almighty God members fatally tortured while in custody

HRWF (17.01.18) – Since early 2017, the Chinese government has increased nationwide arrests of members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), under an initiative they call “Door-knocking Action”. Security officials and police officers search from house to house, arresting, detaining and sometimes torturing and even killing members of the Church of Almighty God.

Two official CCP websites report that 204 members of the CAG were arrested by the Public Security Bureau in Zhejiang on 2nd of July alone. However according to the CAG, at least 583 Christians were arrested in that province that day. It is impossible to estimate the total number of members who have been arrested during this campaign against the church.

Reports of torture while in detention are frequent amongst CAG members. Occasionally, such cases result in death.

The case of Li Qiang

52-year-old Li Qiang (alias), a member of the Church of Almighty God from Xinyang City, Henan Province, was arrested in December 2012, after proselytizing in Xi County with several other members of the church. The group was arrested and taken to the Xi County Public Security Bureau for

questioning and finger-printing. During this period, Li Qiang was forced to point his finger to the Bible while being photographed.

Li Qiang was ultimately detained for fifteen days for 'illegal preaching' and 'disturbing social order'.

Re-arrested & tortured

On the morning of 15th July 2017, Li Qiang was listening to recorded sermons alone in his home when three police officers from the Xi County Public Security Bureau knocked at his door. Without an explanation or arrest warrant, they removed Li from his home and took him to the Xi County Public Security Bureau.

There, Li Qiang was questioned about the whereabouts of another CAG member who he had been arrested with back in 2012. That member had escaped police custody.

When Li did not answer the questions regarding other church members, the police force stripped him, kicked him, and beat him with sticks and leather boots while he lay on the ground. The police did not subside until Li lay motionless on the ground.

On 18th July, Li Qiang was escorted back home by police officers. The police told Li that he was there forth required to report to the bureau every Monday, and warned him that if he was caught professing his religion, they would beat him to death. Out of fear, Li went to stay at his uncle's house that night and then went to the home of a Christian couple the next day. Li informed the couple of what happened and showed his wounds on his body to them. The next day, Li left their house so that they could not be associated to Li by the police.

On the evening 23rd July 2017, Li was walking with his bike near his house when two police officers jumped out of a parked car and rushed to him. Li quickly mounted his bike and attempted to escape. After crashing his bike, Li continued his

escape on foot, running towards the woods. The police chased him until late that night. Li ran to a three-meter-high wall, jumped off, and lay still, pretending to have died. Seeing this, the police ended their chase.

After the police had left, Li Qiang staggered to his aunt's house around 4:30am the next morning. According to his uncle, Li was covered in mud and badly wounded on his hands, arms, and face. Li's uncle took him to a local clinic, where upon examination, the doctor suggested he visit a hospital.

Li however, was worried that if he were to be hospitalized, which requires him to show his ID, the police would be able to easily find him. Despite his severe injuries, Li decided that the risk to seek proper medical treatment was too great.

Psychological impacts

On 27th July, Li's uncle arrived at his house to check on Li. He found him lying in bed with a blue face. It is reported that Li was not in his usual mental state, that he was panic-struck and paranoid, telling his uncle that the police were surrounding his house.

Li's family said that Li was barely eating and that he was spending the majority of his time pacing back and forth repeating the word 'police'. Li refused to speak about what had happened to him while in custody and also refused to eat.

In the morning of 5th August 2017, Li Qiang was found dead in his bed by his mother. His family describes that the physical ailments and psychological scars he suffered due to being tortured and constantly chased by the police caused his death.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, Li Qiang is only one Church of Almighty God member, among many others, who has been tortured and targeted by Chinese authorities for his religious beliefs.

Human Rights Without Frontiers has gathered numerous testimonies of arrest and torture from members of the Church of Almighty God in China. Additional testimonies prove that asylum seekers who are ultimately denied asylum status and deported back to China face a high risk of arrest, detention, and torture.

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges the member states of the European Union & South Korea to grant political asylum to members of the Church of Almighty God who have fled from China in search of a safe haven.

NETHERLAND/ UN/ IRAQ/SYRIA: Netherlands joins UN Security Council to shine light on IS genocide

World Watch Monitor (11.01.2018) – <http://bit.ly/2r10m0c> – The Netherlands has just joined the UN Security Council as a temporary member for a year. Ten days before, its Foreign Minister, Halbe Zijlstra, published a letter explaining the Dutch government's response on the use by politicians of the term "genocide".

The Dutch Parliament had had several debates on the "genocide" committed by members of the Islamic State group (IS), and came to a consensus that it was not for politicians but for the international judicial system to make such a determination.

The Dutch government's response – the main points of which can be viewed at the bottom of the article – followed a joint

legal opinion from the Advisory Committee on International Law Issues (CAVV) and the External Adjudication Adviser (EVA), which it had requested at the end of 2016.

“The Dutch government must be commended for its work on this topic. Hopefully those promises are translated into action and will be visible over the next year.”

The Dutch government supported this legal opinion, and confirmed its reluctance to use the word “genocide” where such a determination had not been previously made by an international court or UN body.

However, concerning the atrocities perpetrated by IS against Christians and Yazidis, the Dutch government confirmed that it “is the opinion that sufficient facts have been established to judge that [IS] is most likely guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity”. It added that the obligations under the 1948 UN Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide apply to IS’s atrocities.

This declaration is late, in comparison with other actors. The opinion published by the Dutch government, relying on the joint legal opinion of CAVV and EVA, clarifies the approach to be taken by government and parliamentary officials concerning mass atrocities that may amount to genocide.

Additionally, the Dutch government indicated in its letter the possible direction of work, including: referral of the situation in Syria to the ICC; supporting the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, a new mechanism established by the UN General Assembly resolution to collect evidence of atrocities in Syria; and assisting the Investigative Team, a new mechanism established by the UN Security Council to collect evidence of IS atrocities in Iraq.

The Dutch government mentioned that it would further advocate focussing on atrocities perpetrated by other actors in addition to IS. Concerning Iraq, this position has been

abandoned by other states for the sake of achieving consensus on the issue of IS.

But the Dutch government emphasised that the atrocities perpetrated by other parties must not be neglected and forgotten.

The Dutch government must be commended for its work on this topic. Hopefully those promises are translated into action and will be visible over the next year.

It should also be emphasised that apart from the commendable joint opinion of the CAVV and EVA, the Dutch government has had great assistance on the topic from MP Pieter Omtzigt, who represents the Netherlands at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and became a rapporteur on bringing IS to justice in late 2016.

His mandate included preparing a report outlining the options to bring IS to justice, and a resolution proposing recommendations to member states to the Council of Europe. The report and the resolution were adopted by the EU in late 2017.

Omtzigt will continue to hold his mandate for another year to follow up on the recommendations made in the EU resolution, as he looks to ensure the Dutch government makes a firm stance at the UN Security Council.

He has said he wants to ensure IS militants are prosecuted for their involvement and complicity through an international or hybrid tribunal (a domestic court with significant support of international expert and judges).

The UK recently claimed that it was not “crucial” to make such a determination of genocide, and that it has fulfilled its international obligations by working with the Iraqi government on UN Security Council Resolution 2379, establishing the Investigative Team to collect the evidence of IS atrocities in Iraq, and has been providing humanitarian assistance. However,

there is more to the story.

Indeed, the determination of genocide should not be crucial to trigger the obligations under the 1948 UN Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; historically, however, this has been done first after the use of the word "genocide".

The UK was the leading force behind the UN Security Council Resolution 2379 that passed successfully on 21 September 2017. However, the resolution proposes that Iraqi courts will deal with prosecutions of the perpetrators. The question is whether Iraqi courts can do so.

British peer David Alton questioned the UK government on what checks it had done before proposing, by way of Resolution 2379, Iraqi courts prosecute IS militants. The UK government responded that it was currently considering the issue, namely after the resolution was adopted and not in preparation of the resolution, to allow it to propose the best solution for bringing IS to justice.

If, in fact, Iraqi courts do not have the capacity, it means that an international or a hybrid tribunal will need to be established, as proposed by Omtzigt. Furthermore, the UK has failed to prosecute returning IS fighters. According to the information submitted by the UK to the Council of Europe, as of early 2017 only 101 individuals connected with IS atrocities have been convicted, which may be just the tip of the iceberg, considering that 425 are said to have returned to the UK.

The UK has been actively supporting the work of the Global Coalition against IS, a coalition of 74 countries with the aim to tackle IS on all fronts. However, at the same time, the assistance provided to the victims of the IS genocide is concerning. The UK government confirmed that it is funding 171 projects in the Christian areas affected by IS atrocities and

80 projects in the Yazidi areas. While this may sound reassuring, the extent, impact, and benefit of these projects is unclear. I attempted to obtain this information by way of Freedom of Information request but have not received word back yet.

However, as indicated in the letter from the Dutch government, the determination of genocide is a vital step towards the fulfilment of the obligations to prevent and punish.

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Believers of all faiths and atheists in prison: 24 countries of particular concern

HRWF Int'l (10.01.2018) – *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* has released its 2017 database of believers and non-believers who have been imprisoned for exercising their freedom of religion or belief.

Twenty-four countries in all were identified by *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l* for depriving believers and unbelievers of their freedom in 2017: **Algeria, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen.**

“In 2017, we documented over 2200 individual cases of illegal imprisonment of believers and non-believers and we carried out campaigns to get their release, some with success,” according to Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l*.

Among all denominations, Christians of all faiths were in jail in the highest number of countries: Protestants in 13 countries, Catholics and Orthodox in 2 countries.

However, members of a dozen other religious or belief communities are known to have been in jail in 2017: Jehovah’s Witnesses in 6 countries; Sunnis in 4 countries; Shias, Said Nursi and Tabligh Jamaat followers in 3 countries; Ahmadis, Baha’is, Buddhists and Sufis in 2 countries; Atheists in Egypt, Falun Gong practitioners in China, and Scientologists in Russia.

“Prison terms are usually imposed on peaceful and law-abiding members of religious or belief groups on the basis of laws restricting their freedom to change religion, share one’s beliefs, and practice their right to freedom of association, worship and assembly. Additionally, they may be imprisoned simply because of their religious identity”, Fautré said.

According to the database, **China, Iran and South Korea** recorded the largest number of freedom of religion or belief prisoners.

In **China**, Falun Gong practitioners, whose movement was banned in 1999, are massively put in prison, a number of Catholic priests and bishops have also been missing, since their arrests many years ago for being faithful to the Pope instead of swearing allegiance to the Communist Party.

Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants belonging to the mushrooming network of house churches, and Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, both of which are systematically suspected of separatism, are also particular targets of the regime.

In **Iran**, the Baha'is, whose movement is considered a heresy of Islam, make up the highest number of prisoners. They are followed by home-grown Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians who extensively carry out missionary activities among their fellow citizens despite the risk of imprisonment and execution. Baluchi and Kurdish Sunnis as well as Sufis are also particularly targeted.

In **South Korea**, over 300 young objectors to military service were still serving 18-month prison terms at the end of 2017. Since the Korean War, more than 19,200 Jehovah's Witnesses have reportedly been sentenced to a combined total of over 37,200 years in prison for refusing to perform military service. Eritrea, Singapore and Tajikistan are other countries which still imprison conscientious objectors.

"Our best wish for 2018 is that the EU converts its words into action and fully uses the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief to help release many FoRB prisoners of conscience," Fautré hopes.

The lists of prisoners per country can be consulted at:
<http://hrwf.eu/forb-intro/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

() Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l has been monitoring freedom of religion or belief as a non-religious organization since 1989. In 2017 it covered in its daily newsletter more than 70 countries where there were incidents related to freedom of religion or belief, intolerance and discrimination. See its news database at <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>*

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