

Freedom of Religion or Belief World Report 2013

Edited by Willy Fautré

Mark Barwick, Alfiaz Vaiya, Serena Romeo & Vicki Mckenna

**Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l
Copyright Human Rights Without Frontiers International. All Rights
Reserved.**

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from Human Rights Without Frontiers International. Requests for permission to make copies of any part of this publication should be mailed to the address below.

Human Rights Without Frontiers International
Avenue d'Auderghem 61/16, 1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel./ Fax: +32-2-3456145
Website: <http://www.hrwf.org>
Email: international.secretariat.brussels@hrwf.net

Table of Contents

Introduction

Countries of Particular Concern

China

Egypt

India

Indonesia

Iran

Iraq

Kazakhstan

Malaysia

Nigeria

Pakistan

Russia

Syria

Uzbekistan

Conclusions

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the situation of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in a number of countries has made headlines in the international media while other FoRB violations in other countries, sometimes just as serious, have gone unnoticed.

This report of *Human Rights Without Frontiers*¹ is based on a compilation of incidents in 80 countries from public and private sources. The report focuses on 13 countries of particular concern where the freedom to change one's religion or belief, the freedom to share one's religion or belief or the freedom of association, worship and assembly have been severely restricted by repressive state regulations, governmental policies, social hostility², inter-ethnic or inter-communal tensions and various forms of armed conflicts.

In 2013, **China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria** and **Uzbekistan** distinguished themselves by a high number of incidents which indicate the violation of FoRB.

Concrete examples documented in this report support this selection and illustrate different facets of the violations that have been identified. The examples are also contextualized and analysed accordingly.

The report covers cases pertaining to a wide range of religious or belief communities and their members:

- Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches and Jehovah's Witnesses
- Sunni and Shi'a communities, Ahmadis, Sufis and Said Nursi readers
- Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Falun Gong practitioners and atheists

However, this FoRB overview seen from the sole angle of 'incidents occurred in 2013' would not give a reliable assessment of the issue unless it also examines the systemic problems generated by state laws that provide for prison terms or even the death penalty. Such laws have such a deterrent effect that nobody dares infringe upon them. This means that incidents go unreported and the countries concerned are able to escape criticism. A number of states have also implemented various forms of 'soft' religious cleansing over the last decades such that diversity

¹ *Human Rights Without Frontiers* is a non-religious organization promoting human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

² This report does not deal with social hostility or ethno-religious conflicts as such but addresses their impact on the individual and collective exercise of freedom of religion or belief.

has been masked and the rights of minorities have become a non-issue. This process is still ongoing in some parts of the world.

Mapping FoRB in all its complexities can only be a kaleidoscope taken from different perspectives: laws and policies restricting the main components of FoRB, incidents, discrimination, social hostility of variable intensity or the protection of minorities. Reports from these various angles are useful to identify a sudden rise in the number of violations, their frequency and significance, possible solutions and appropriate policy recommendations.. Such reports can also complement each other, but none of them can claim to present a unique and true picture of the reality. An artificially unified picture with a ranking or a coloured map may be interesting and appealing to the media and the general public, but it is not a useful tool for addressing the challenges affecting FoRB in our times.

The challenges here outlined by *Human Rights Without Frontiers* in 2013 are symptomatic of deeper problems that are suffered in many other countries as the table hereafter shows.

From this perspective, it can be said that **North Korea** remains the most repressive state in the world in regard to religion. The practice of religion has been all but eradicated and replaced by a civil religion, the worship of the Kim dynasty. It is followed by a group of 14 Muslim countries where restrictive laws criminalize conversion from Islam to another religion as well as missionary activities, providing for the death penalty: **Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen**. Last but not least, **China** remains the country with the highest number of faith prisoners, followed by **Iran** and **Eritrea**.

Freedom of Religion or Belief World Watch List 2013
Laws severely restricting freedom of religion or belief Punishable by

Countries	Freedom to change/keep religion/belief	Freedom association	Freedom worship assembly	Freedom to share beliefs Proselytism	Prison term	Death
Afghanistan	XXX	X	X	X		XXX
Algeria	XXX			XX	XX	XXX
Azerbaijan		X	XX		XX	
Bahrain	XXX					XXX
Brunei	XX				XX	

China	X	X	XX		XX	
Comoros	X			X		
Egypt	X					
Eritrea		XX	XX		XX	
India	X					
Indonesia	XX			XX	XX	
Iran	XXX	X	XX	XXX	XX	XXX
Iraq	XXX	X	X			XXX
Jordan	X			X		
Kazakhstan	XX		XX		XX	
Kuwait	XXX			X		XXX
Laos		X	X	XX	XX	
Libya	X			X		
Malaysia	XX		X	X	XX	
Maldives	XXX	X	X	XX	XX	XXX
Mauritania	XXX	X	X	X		XXX
Morocco	XXX			XX	XX	XXX
North Korea	X	XX	XX	XXX	XX	XXX
Oman	X		X			
Pakistan	XXX			X		XXX
Qatar	XXX			XX	XX	XXX
Russia		X	XX		XX	
Saudi Arabia	XXX	X	X	XX	XX	XXX

Somalia	XXX	X	X	XXX		XXX
Sudan	XXX			XXX	XX	XXX
Syria	X			X		
Tajikistan		X	X			
Tunisia				X		
Turkmenis Tan		X	XX		XX	
UA Emirates	XXX			XX	XX	XXX
Uzbekistan		X	X	XX	XX	
Vietnam			XX		XX	
Yemen	XXX			X		XXX

Footnote: The number of crosses in the last two columns indicates the range of penalties that could be inflicted for the violation of some aspect of FoRB. Two or three crosses indicate the institution of undemocratic laws that are inconsistent with UN standards. Where only one cross is present, it means that sentences other than prison or death may be imposed, such as administrative fines, deportation, discrimination, civil death or some other penalty.

Countries of Particular Concern

CHINA

According to Bureau of Statistics information as of 1st November 2010, the population of mainland China is 1,339,725,000. Accurate estimates of the numbers of religious believers vary widely depending on the source.

According to the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), there are more than 21 million Muslims in the country; unofficial estimates range as high as 50 million. Hui Muslims are concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces. Uighur Muslims live primarily in Xinjiang. According to Xinjiang Statistics Bureau data from 2010, there are approximately 10 million Uighurs in Xinjiang.

The 2011 Blue Book of Religions, produced by the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences which functions directly under the State Council, reports the number of Protestant Christians to be between 23 and 40 million. A June 2010 SARA report estimates there are 16 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). According to 2010 Pew Research Centre estimates, there are 67 million Protestant Christians, of whom 23 million are affiliated with the TSPM.

According to SARA, more than six million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). The Pew Centre estimates that there are nine million Catholics on the mainland, 5.7 million of whom are affiliated with the CPA.

In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments have legalized certain religious communities and practices, such as Orthodox Christianity in Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang and Guangdong Provinces.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, a self-described spiritual discipline, it was estimated that there were 70 million adherents.

The government of China recognizes five so-called 'normal' religions: Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Taoism and Islam. The registration of particular religious groups is a prerogative of the state. For each of the five officially recognized religions there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities: the *Chinese Buddhist Association*, the *Catholic Patriotic Association*, the *Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement*, the *Chinese Islamic Association* and the *Chinese Taoist Association*. All religious groups must register with the appropriate religious organisation to be allowed to carry out their activities legally.

State recognition is all the more important since only state-sanctioned groups are afforded 'protection' under China's religious freedom rules. The other side of this so-called protection is that they must accept strict government supervision and can only preach inside designated temples, churches and mosques. Religious groups

that are not affiliated to one of the five government-recognised religious associations are illegal and cannot carry out any activity, even in private homes.

In November 2013, China was given a controversial three-year seat on the UN Human Rights Council, although the country has not ratified the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and has a persistent and troublesome record of human rights violations.

Some Incidents

Raids on Unregistered Churches

On 1st January, police raided the home **Zhang Keding** in Mengzhou City, Henan Province, where a meeting of Christians was taking place. An electronic organ, an accordion, a printer, a TV set, audio equipment, cell phones, beds and bedding, passports and other legal documents and clothing were confiscated. The police failed to show a search warrant, simply telling those assembled that their meetings were illegal.

On 4th January, local police raided a Bible study of the Chinese House Church Alliance in the city of Nanyang, Henan Province. The police officers and government officials ordered the Bible study attendees to register their names and banned the Alliance from ordaining new clergy.

On 20th January, at least 21 members of the Beijing Shouwang Church were arrested for attending an outdoor worship service. Some were released soon thereafter, and the remainder were detained at two police stations. Most of them were released the same day.

On 25th February, leaders and believers of various house churches in Beijing held a seminar on the Cape Town Commitment, an Evangelical position document, at a private residence in Wangjing Community, Chaoyang District. They were harassed by an official from a local police station who checked everyone's ID papers.

On 1st April, the People's Court of Ye county sentenced seven leaders of a house church to prison terms ranging from three to seven and a half years. They were convicted of 'using a cult organisation to undermine law enforcement.'

On 26th April, **Pastor Li Ming** and 15 lay leaders of a house church in Langzhong, Sichuan Province, were arrested while learning how to play musical instruments. Ten of them were released the following day and six were administratively detained. Three were kept in custody for three to five days. **Li Ming, Wang Yuan** and **Li Chengxi** were released after fifteen days.

On 28th April, a house church in Inner Mongolia was raided by more than 60 police and government officials. They stopped the worship service with batons and tear gas, checked ID papers and interrogated more than 10 lay leaders.

On 5th June, the Union Church in Xinjiang was raided by police during a meeting with an American missionary couple. The 20 believers in attendance were taken to the local police station. The police also seized the church's offering box, computer, CDs and a Chinese Union Bible. At the station **Zhang Yinan**, the church's leader, was ordered to close it down, but he refused.

On 5th August, Pastor **Tan Wen** was leading a worship service at Muen Church in Urumqi, Xinjiang, when more than 20 police officers forcibly entered the church. The officers did not show identification papers or follow other applicable procedures. Instead, they ended the worship service and seized the Bibles, hymnals and other books. Pastor Tan was taken to the police station. That same night, he was transferred to the Xishan Police Station and then to a detention centre. The police announced that he would be detained for 15 days.

On 22nd August, workers from the Religious Affairs Bureau and local police interrupted a house church gathering of more than 20 members in the city of Tongren. The pastor and other organisers were detained by the police for several hours.

On 14th October, a house church in Shunyi District, Beijing, was raided for being an 'illegal gathering.' More than 20 police officers, religious affairs officials and other agency officials raided a meeting of 25 believers, breaking up the meeting, ransacking the room and removing four or five cases of Bibles. The house church members reported at least three house church meetings in the local area had been recently raided by police.

Restrictions on Meeting Places

On 19th March, over 200 people were attending a training session at the gathering site of Enxin Church when it was raided. The landlord also reported that the Public Security Bureau and the Bureau of Religion had exerted pressure on him to terminate the lease.

On 28th March, a house church in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, received notice from the landlord that they would be obliged to vacate the premises within seven days. The landlord said that he had received instructions from agencies in charge of religious affairs and the Public Security Bureau.

Similar notices were given to a number of house churches in various regions of the country, directing them to vacate the rented premises upon order of the authorities.

On 13th April, the Alashan Left Banner Religious Affairs Bureau of Alashan, Inner Mongolia, closed the Grace Holy Love (Enhua Shen'ai) house church, ordering it to register with the Three-Self Patriotic Church or be banned.

On 26th May, officials from the Religious Affairs Bureau and the local Hongqi Street Community delivered an order for the ‘voluntary dissolution’ of the Sanya Hosanna Church in Hainan Province. The congregation was given 15 days to move out from the rented space. Other churches were similarly closed during this period.

Other Repressive Actions toward Christians

On 4th April, **Li Wenxi**, a Christian bookseller from Beijing, was beaten, threatened and arrested by local police. Li had been helping to open a religious book store in Taiyuan, Shanxi. He was held without trial in a provincial prison for three months for ‘illegally operating a business.’ He was also refused bail, due to the seriousness of his ‘crime.’

In May, Chinese police surrounded the village of Donglu to prevent Catholic pilgrims from travelling to the city for celebrations to honour the Virgin Mary. The pilgrimage has attracted the faithful since 1929. Police have attempted to stop them from accessing the city every May since 1996.

On 9th June, **Pastor Tan Wen** was sentenced to 10 days of public security detention and fined 500 yuan by the police for organizing an ‘illegal gathering.’

On 23rd June, police officers arrested **Lu Xia** at a house church gathering. She was sentenced to five days administrative detention.

On 7th August, **Father Song Wanjun**, a Roman Catholic priest, was arrested at the Qiaodong District of Zhangjiakou City by Chinese Public Security officers while he was driving.

In August, **Wang Yongfeng** and five other Christians in Lashan County, Inner Mongolia, were arrested by local policemen, because they continued to meet after being banned by the local Religious Affairs Bureau. These Christians were each fined 500 yuan. Three of them, including Wang, were also detained for 15 days.

On 17th November, Pastor **Zhang Xiaojie** of Nanle County Christian Church, a Three-Self Patriotic Movement state-sanctioned church, was arrested along with 20 others while meeting in the church and detained.

Repression of Tibetan Buddhists

Gendun Choekyi Nyima and his parents from Lhari County remain missing. Gendun was kidnapped in 1995 by Chinese authorities after he was named by the Dalai Lama as the 11th incarnation of the Panchen Lama of Tibet, a decision which was considered ‘illegal and invalid.’ Their whereabouts are unknown.

Migyurg Gyatso, Choedar Dargye and Gedun Thogphel, monks from Khangmar Monastery, continue to serve a 12-year sentence for possessing photos of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, conducting prayers for the Dalai Lama and possessing a painting of the Tibetan flag. They were arrested in January 2003 in Marthang, Hongyuan.

Bhumo and Sonam Lhasto continue to serve long prison sentences for holding a 2008 protest against government demands that nuns of Pangri Nunnery denounce the Dalai Lama.

Repression of Uyghur Muslim community

Seydehmet Awut, Abdujilil Abdughupur, Abdulitip Ablimit and Erkin Emet, arrested between March and June 2008 for allegedly 'splitting the state' and sentenced under Article 103 of the Criminal Law, continue to serve long sentences.

On 27th March, Chinese courts sentenced 20 people of the Uyghur minority to up to life in jail on charges of separatism, 'religious extremism' and spreading propaganda. Witnesses claimed they were only guilty of listening to US-funded Radio Free Asia.

Repression of Falun Gong Practitioners

Zhiwen Wang continues to serve a 16-year sentence in Tianjin Prison on charges of the illegal acquisition of state secrets, 'using superstitious sects [cults] to undermine the implementation of the law' and causing human deaths by organizing and using a cult. The Falun Gong practitioner was arrested in 1999.

Chang Li, also arrested in 1999, serves an 18-year sentence in Tianjin Prison for using 'the cult' to obstruct law enforcement, illegally obtaining state secrets and causing death.

Yi Zhang, from Putuo District, Shanghai, arrested on 1st February 2012, serves a four and a half year sentence for practicing Falun Gong at the Shanghai Reformatory.

Zhongtian Hu from Shanghai, who was arrested on 2nd February 2012, continues to serve a three and a half year sentence for being a Falun Gong practitioner.

Xiangren Chen, from Renshou County, Sichuan Province, serves out a five-year sentence, following his arrest on 1st September 2012.

Rongying Hu from Jiyuan, Henan Province, continues to serve a four-year sentence for speaking to people about Falun Gong and distributing DVDs about their practices. He was arrested in October 2012.

Yuqiang Sun from Wanghaisi Village, Hebei Province, was arrested on 31st December 2012 for distributing brochures about Falun Gong at Dabaitou Market. He serves a three-year sentence.

On 1st August, **Bagen Lu**, from Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province, was arrested for handing out informational materials about Falun Gong and sentenced to seven years in prison.

On 15th September, **Guiyue Ma**, from Hefei City, Anhui Province, was arrested while speaking to people about Falun Gong and sentenced to three years of detention.

On 30th October, **Du Qingxiu**, from Lingyuan City, Liaoning Province, was arrested while sending messages about Falun Gong on her cell phone. She was sentenced to six years in prison.

Trends & Analysis

A fundamental explanation for China's wide-scale and increasing violations of religious freedom may be found in the country's 'core interests' that are considered non-negotiable: state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system, overall social stability and sustainable economic and social development.

The Chinese authorities have consistently determined their policy on Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur Muslims on the basis of the 'core interests' of national security and territorial integrity.

China's policy with regard to the Roman Catholic Church is viewed through the lens of its core interest of sovereignty.

The repression against unregistered Protestant groups, whose active proselytising affects all segments of society, including officials of the Communist Party, can be explained by the fact that these groups' activities are perceived as a threat to China's political system, promoted by the United States.

In September 2011, the SARA published plans for a three-phase campaign to eradicate Protestant house churches:

- First phase: From January through June 2012, local authorities were to conduct an investigation of house churches and create dossiers on each of them;
- Second phase: In the next two to three years, unregistered churches would be 'encouraged' to affiliate with the TSPM;
- Third phase: Within 10 years, churches refusing to comply would be shut down.

It is evident that phases 2 and 3 are currently being implemented.

The Chinese Communist Party (CPP) has taken on the role of ‘accompanying religion to adapt to a socialist society.’ In the CPP lexicon, ‘accompanying’ obviously means control of the most ruthless sort.

The motivation behind the repression of religious groups has more to do with fear of the loss of influence than anything else. Whenever numbers of adherents of any religious group increase at the national, regional or local level, the government response has been disproportionately severe.

The CPP would do well to reconcile its policies with diverse interests of the population that it seeks to govern, including those of religious groups, rather than trying to compel such groups to ‘adapt’ to a mythical social project where everyone believes the same. If state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, social stability and sustainable economic development are indeed among its self-declared ‘core interests,’ then assuring the protection of minorities, including religious minorities, should be among its strategies to achieve this. Clearly, the violation of the rights of minorities within any country creates a destabilising force with which to reckon.

Paradoxically, the Chinese state, by its own actions, has already undermined its ‘core interests’ and risks the very scenarios that it has sought to avoid.

EGYPT

According to a U.S. government estimate³, Egypt's population is 83 million. Approximately 90 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim and about 10 percent is Christian. The majority of Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Other Christian communities together constitute less than 2 percent of the population and include the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian), Maronite, Orthodox (Greek and Syrian), and Anglican/Episcopalian churches, which range in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. A Protestant community, established in the mid-19th century, includes the following churches: Presbyterian, Baptist, Brethren, Open Brethren, Revival of Holiness (Nahdat al-Qadaasa), Faith (Al-Eyman), Church of God, Christian Model Church (Al-Mithaal Al-Masihi), Apostolic, Grace (An-Ni'ma), Pentecostal, Apostolic Grace, Church of Christ, Gospel Missionary (Al-Kiraaza bil Ingil), and the Message Church of Holland (Ar-Risaala). There are also followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Shia Muslims constitute less than 1 percent of the population. There are also small groups of Quranists and Ahmadi Muslims. The country's Jewish community numbers less than 70 people, mostly senior citizens. There are 1,000 to 1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses and 1,500 to 2,000 Baha'is; however, the government does not recognize these groups.

In 2012, the election of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi to the Egyptian presidency triggered a new wave of popular dissent and widespread protest. As in the period leading to the removal of Hosni Mubarak from power, Cairo's Tahrir Square again became the focal point for millions of citizens calling for the resignation of their president, this time Mr Morsi. On 3rd July 2013, the army removed him from office and suspended the Constitution.

Toward the end of the year, considerable attention was given to the revision of Egypt's embattled constitution. The Morsi-era constitution had included provisions that left the door open for a stricter application of Islamic law. The new draft removes this language whilst retaining the country's historic recognition of the three Abrahamic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism – thereby excluding followers of other religions.

This is especially pertinent for Baha'is in Egypt, who have experienced a long history of antagonism from the country's government. In October, a delegation of Egyptian Baha'is met with the constitutional drafting committee to discuss their concerns. The delegation expressed hope that religious minorities in Egypt would be sanctioned under the new constitution and that the ban on their activities would be lifted. However, their appeal was unsuccessful.

Egypt's referendum on the new constitution is set to take place in January 2014.

³ International Religious Freedom Report 2012

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

Another disappointment in 2013 has been the spike in protests and incidents of violence in the wake of the ouster of Mr Morsi's government. Coptic and other Christians have been particularly targeted by protesters. Attacks on churches and other religious institutions have been widespread and devastating. To date no clear end is in sight.

Some Incidents

Blasphemy and defamation

On 28th January, Florida-based pastor **Terry Jones** and seven Egyptian Coptic Christians were sentenced in absentia to death by an Egyptian court. Among the charges was 'insulting and publicly attacking Islam' in connection with the anti-Islam film, 'Innocence of Muslims,' which represents the Prophet Muhammad as a fraud. The film led to protests by Muslims in several countries. In Egypt maximum sentences are common in cases tried in absentia.

On 26th February, the appeal from the families of **Rzik Nagy** (Age 10) and **Mina Faraq** (Age 9), the two boys accused of desecrating the Koran in 2012, was dismissed by the Court of Bani Suef, Upper Egypt. Their parents stated that the two children found the book among the rubbish, and since they are illiterate they could not have known what was written on the pages. The boys remain in juvenile detention. It is unclear when a final verdict will be reached.

On 8th May, **Demiana Ebeid Abdelnour**, a 24-year-old teacher of social sciences in Luxor, was accused by the parents of three students of defaming Islam and insulting the Prophet Muhammad during one of her classes. She was arrested and remained in detention for 15 days.

On 1st June, a 25-year-old Coptic Christian lawyer, **Rumany Mourad**, was sentenced in absentia by the court in Assiut to one year in prison and to a 500 Egyptian pound fine and 10,000 Egyptian pounds (US\$1,400) in compensation to the plaintiffs. He had been accused of insulting Islam by two fellow lawyers. During a private conversation at the Library of the lawyer's Syndicate in Assiut in July 2012, one of the men had asked him his opinion on miracles in the Bible. Mourad tried to avoid the question, but some days later the accusation was made against him.

On 11th June, **Demiana Abdel-Nour** was found guilty of blasphemy and fined 100,000 Egyptian pounds (10,600 Euro). She was accused of comparing Prophet Muhammad to Pope Shenouda III.

On 16th July, the Nasr City Misdemeanour Court sentenced the Salafist preacher **Abu Islam** to 11 years of detention for insulting Christianity. In September 2011, Abu Islam burned a Bible during demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy. Abu Islam's son was sentenced to 8 years for complicity with his father.

Violence against Copts and Other Christians

On 4th April, Egyptian authorities arrested four Coptic men (**Shadi Sami, Michael Morcos** and two others) following a violent attack on St. Mark's Cathedral. The men had attended a funeral some days before, where violence broke out and several deaths and injuries occurred. The men were detained for 15 days, although the charges remain unclear and video footage confirms that security forces had instigated the attack.

On 5th July, four Christians were killed during assaults on Christians in al-Dabayia, a town west of Luxor in southern Egypt. The killings occurred two days after the Egyptian military removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power.

On 6th July, the Coptic Christian priest **Mina Aboud Sharween** was shot while he was walking in the Masaeed area in El Arish. The shooting was believed to be by Islamist insurgents in the region.

On 11th July, the decapitated body of **Magdy Lamei Habib**, a Christian electronics merchant, was discovered in Sheikh Zuweid, a few kilometres west of the Israeli border.

On 3rd August, in a Bani Ahmed café an argument started between Christian and Muslim customers. The confrontation quickly escalated when a large group of Muslims arrived, carrying weapons and repeating slogans mostly against Copts. Several Christian-owned businesses were plundered and houses were set on fire. When the security forces finally arrived, tear gas was used to disperse the crowd. At least 18 people were injured, and police issued arrest warrants for 35 people. The riots caused damage estimated at nearly 3.4 million Egyptian pounds (\$480,000).

Arrests and Violence against Converts

On 14th January, the criminal court of Beni Suef sentenced **Nadia Mohamed Ali** and her children **Mohab, Maged, Sherif, Amira, Amir,** and **Nancy Ahmed Mohamed Abdel-Wahabto** to 15 years in prison for illegally changing their names on official documents. After the death of their Muslim father, they converted back to Christianity and then changed their names. Seven workers from the registration office were sentenced to five years in prison for assisting the woman.

On 1st March, dozens of Muslim residents of Kom Ombo tried to forcibly enter a church in search of a woman suspected of converting to Christianity. Eleven police officers were injured during the violence. Another twelve Christians were reportedly wounded, including one in serious condition.

Attacks on Churches and Other Christian Properties

On 15th January, hundreds of Islamists demolished a building owned by the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. George Taymah in the Diocese of the Fayyum. The attack

occurred despite an attempt of reconciliation through a meeting between representatives of the Muslim and Christian communities just before the assault.

On 19th January, hundreds of extremist Muslims attacked the predominantly Christian village of el-Marashda, Province of Quena in Upper Egypt. The attackers set homes and shops on fire and tried to demolish the local church. The reason behind the assault was the alleged abuse of a six year old Muslim girl by a Christian man. Police investigations later proved that the girl had not been assaulted.

On 16th February, four people, including a priest, were injured during an attack on a church in Fayoum Province. An extremist Muslim mob attacked the church, first with rocks and then with a homemade bomb. The attackers gained entrance into the church and destroyed crosses, icons and the church's support structure, leading to the collapse of the church's dome.

On 24th February, construction was halted at the church of Abu Maqar in Cairo after Islamists entered the site, claiming the church did not have the necessary permit.

On 7th April, at St Mark's Cathedral, during a funeral for Christians killed previously in sectarian clashes, an attack on worshippers resulted in the death of two people and the injury of more than 80 others.

On 13th May, a Muslim mob entered the Tadroa el-Mashreki church in Menbal, Matay district. The assailants threw stones at the church, looted Christian shops nearby and burned cars. These clashes arose out of a dispute between a Coptic Christian and a Muslim, who claimed that the Christian had behaved inappropriately towards his sister.

On 17th May, Muslims in Alexandria attacked the Church of St. Mary, setting fire to the entrance of the building and shattering windows. One man died of a heart attack during the attack. Copts tried to protect their church by creating a human wall.

On 4th August, a group of Muslims barricaded the entrance to the Coptic Church in Bani Ahmed, preventing members from attending mass.

On 14th August, Islamists looted and burned a Franciscan school in Beni Suef and paraded three nuns like war prisoners. Two other female employees were sexually harassed and abused.

On the same day, Islamists with assault rifles broke through the evangelical church gate in Beni Mazar around midday.

Beginning on 14th August, a wave of attacks on churches and other Christian institutions began in many parts of Egypt following a government crackdown on

supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi.⁴ Hundreds were confirmed dead and thousands more injured.

Alexandria

Father Maximus Church

Arish

St George Church

Assiut

Good Shepherds Monastery, Angel Michael Church, St George Coptic Orthodox Church, Al-Eslah Church, the Adventist Church, St Therese Church, the Apostles Church, Holy Revival Church and the headquarters of Qusiya Diocese

Beni Suef

Franciscan school and St George Church

Cairo

St Fatima Basilica (Heliopolis) and Virgin Mary's Church (Hakim Village)

Fayoum

St Mary Church (El Nazlah), St Damiana Church, Amir Tawadros Church, the Evangelical Church (al-Zorby Village), St Joseph's Church and the Franciscan school

Gharbiya

Headquarters of the Diocese of St Paul

Giza

Atfeeh Bishopric

Minya

Church of the Virgin Mary and Father Abram (Delga, Deir Mawas) and St Mina Church (Abu Hilal Kebly, Beni Hilal), the Baptist Church (Beni Mazar), Monastery Deir Mawas, the Delga Church, the Jesuit Church (Abu Hilal district), St Mark's Church (Abu Hilal district), St Joseph Convent, Amir Tadros Church, the Evangelical Church, Anba Moussa al-Aswad Church and the Apostles Church

Qena

St Mary's Church

Sohag

St George Church, St Damiana, Church of the Virgin Mary, St Mark's Church & Community Centre and Anba Abram Church

Suez

St Saviour Anglican Church, the Franciscan church and school, Holy Shepherd Monastery and Hospital, Good Shepherd Church and the Greek Orthodox Church

⁴ The following list of reported attacks, burnings and attempted assaults on churches and other Christian institutions was compiled by Amira Mikhail (<http://nilerevolt.wordpress.com/>) with the assistance of Mai El-Sadany and **Amir Beshay**. These incidents have not been independently verified by HRWF.

In addition to the aforementioned churches and other institutions, many other Christian-owned or managed properties were attacked during this period, including homes, businesses and social organisations.

On 20th October, unidentified gunmen opened fire on guests at a wedding party as they left a Coptic church in Cairo. Among the four people dead were an eight-year old girl and a woman who died on her way to the hospital. At least nine others were injured in the attack. The motivation for the violence remains unclear and the attackers have not been identified. On 31st December, a Coptic Christian was shot outside Mar Girgis (St. George's) Church in Cairo. **Ihab Ghattas** was shot by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood after a protest organised by the Islamic group outside the church. The man was taken to three hospitals and each of them refused him treatment.

Trends & Analysis

By all appearances, Egypt will have missed an historic opportunity to meaningfully incorporate freedom of religion or belief into its constitutional framework at a level that is consistent with international norms. The country's unwillingness to protect its religious minorities will likely remain a destabilising force for years to come.

Sunni Muslims already constitute about ninety percent of the Egyptian population. Regrettably, Egypt's future greatness could be limited if it fails to ensure the rights of all its citizenry, including those who do not share the beliefs of the majority. Despite some small steps forward, Egypt's inability to institutionalise legal protections for religious minorities will perpetuate the structural difficulties that have fuelled the spate of extremist-inspired violence in recent years.

At a minimum, Egypt should strengthen its capacities for law enforcement and bring to justice those who have committed acts of violence against religious minorities. The transitional government has been slow to prosecute these offenses. However, the incoming government can signal a more democratic future for Egypt by repealing discriminatory decrees against religious minorities, abolishing the blasphemy codes and passing laws that apply consistently and democratically to all religions in the country.

INDIA

The Republic of India is a mosaic of cultural traditions, religions and political entities. According to the 2011 census, the total population is 1.21 billion. Hindus constitute 80.5 percent, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, and Sikhs 1.9 percent. Groups that together constitute less than one percent of the population include Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews and Baha'is.

The concept of *Hindutva*, a word referring to 'Hindu-ness,' is used to promote Hindu nationalism in India. Several political parties, including the prominent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and paramilitary organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bajrang Dal continue to seek support by evoking fears and resentment toward religious minority groups. The results have often been explosive.

Social hostility and violence directed against Christians were especially alarming in 2013. Widespread animosity toward minorities is often used as a political strategy to gain support for nationalist ideologies. Christians in particular are targeted for intimidation and violence. Moreover, vague and ambiguous laws have been used as cover to justify this violence.

For instance, the Freedom of Religion Acts, originally intended to prevent forced or manipulative conversion, have been exploited by Hindu nationalist groups to restrict Christians' right to propagate their beliefs. The result has been a distressing climate of harassment, vigilantism and widespread impunity for religiously-motivated hate crimes.

Some Incidents

Harassment, Violence and Social Hostility toward Christians

On 8th January, a wall surrounding a Christian graveyard in the Jagdalpur district was torn down with the aid of government officials. Local Hindus had complained that it extended too far. Anti-Christian slogans were shouted at the pastors and church leaders present as the wall was being destroyed.

On 10th January, protesters disrupted the dedication ceremony of the newly built Enlightening Prayer Tower in Dantewada district, accusing the Christians inside of forced conversion. The meeting was stopped immediately and the matter reported to Kirandul police.

On 11th January, Hindu protesters disrupted the prayer meeting of New Life Grace Ministry in Sawantwaditaluka, Sindhudurg district. They beat up participants, including women, children and the elderly. Christians sought help from the police, but no action was taken.

On 13th January, the religious service of the independent church in Ghaspara, Raipur district, was disrupted by a mob of around seventy Hindu extremists. The protesters accused church members of forced conversion, afterwards filing a complaint with the police. The church's pastor filed a counter complaint, claiming that the Hindu protesters had assaulted members of his congregation.

On the same day, **Bahadur Murmu** and **Rama Soreng** from the New Creation Church in Dubia village were arrested in Baripada, Mayurbhanj district, after holding a prayer meeting. Hindu extremists had accused them of forceful conversion and threatened bodily harm. The two Christians were arrested under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act and sent to Baripada jail. They were released on bail two days later.

On the same day, **Rajesh Yadav** and **Raju Devangan** were arrested in Saranggarh, Raigarh district, while attending a healing service. The prayer meeting had been interrupted by members of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, who registered a complaint of forced conversion. The men were released on bail the following day.

Again on the same day, protesters surrounded the house of Pastor **Ankush Bariyekar** in Chandi Nagar, Raipur district, during a prayer meeting. The pastor was threatened and accused of forceful conversion. Although the protesters left after police arrived, Bariyekar was relocated for safety reasons.

On 28th January, a group of Hindus stole Gospel tracts and money from **Mr Emmanuel** of the Indian Pentecostal Church in Kottur, Coimbatore district. The assailants wanted him to leave the area. The man filed a complaint but later retracted it.

On 6th February, 20 Hindu nationalist activists disrupted a prayer meeting and accused two Pentecostal pastors, **Nagesh Naik** and **Mallikarjun Shingol**, of forced conversion. The pastors were taken to the Hanumanthappa Hindu Temple in Korlahalli village, where they were stripped, insulted and beaten. The police intervened and took them to hospital. They were released the next day, only to be re-arrested under Article 295A of Indian law which protects people from religious persecution or insult.

On 8th February, more than 100 Hindus armed with sticks and iron rods disrupted a revival meeting of the Assembly of God church in the city of Rajnandgaon. The armed men beat church members and damaged church properties and vehicles. The police failed to intervene.

On the same day, a group of Muslims in Secunderabad threatened harm to Pastor **B. Rakshanandam** if he did not stop conducting religious meetings. The pastor was forced to cancel two Sunday worship meetings. Protesters were upset because Rakshanandam had baptized 10 Muslims. However, the Muslims withdrew their complaint to the police after the pastor's landlord intervened, stating that no one had been forced to convert.

On 9th February, a group of Hindu extremists led by the village chief in Nagpur, Jhabua District, Madhya Pradesh, attacked two Pentecostal pastors, the Revs **Jorder** and **Ilam**, during a prayer service. The victims were taken to hospital, but police did not accept a complaint against the assailants because the church was not registered.

On 10th February, members of Hindu Vahini, a Hindu nationalist organisation in Adilabad District, Andhra Pradesh, filed a complaint against **Anand Rao**, accusing him of forced conversions. He had come to deliver a lecture on the Bible. Police took him into custody and he was released on bail the next day.

On 12th February, **P. Anand** was arrested after he prayed with friends attending a college in Basara, Adilabad District. The friends were questioned about the reason for Anand's visit. They then called the police, who charged Anand under sections 295A and 193A. He was released on bail the same day.

On 15th February, Pastor **Sharda Prasad** was attacked by 15-16 Hindu fundamentalists in Dola, Anupur district, Madhya Pradesh, while visiting a house church. The attackers accused the pastor of forceful conversion and beat him and others with sticks until police arrived.

On 16th February, Evangelist **Ashok Nahar**, **Arjun Singh** and **Anand Kumar** were arrested in Sawalikedra village, Khandwa district, Madhya Pradesh, during a prayer meeting. Villagers came to the house and accused them of trying to convert others. They were then punched, kicked and dragged to the Khalwa police station. They were released on 6th March.

On the same day, during a prayer meeting in Gulai village, Khandwa district, Madhya Pradesh, a Hindu nationalist group attacked Pastor **Isaac Rajamani** of Friends Missionary Prayer Band and an evangelist identified as **Raju**. The Hindus assaulted the two Christians and then took them to Khalwa, where they were further beaten by other Hindu nationalists. They were later handed over to police at Khalwa and charged under section 295A.

On 18th February, Pastor **Ilyas Buck**, **Hira Lal**, **Vishram Korku** and **Sundar Rachiya** were holding a prayer meeting in Roshni, Khandwa district, when 70 members of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist paramilitary organisation, interrupted the gathering and started to punch and kick the four Christians. They were then dragged to the local police station and interrogated. The police released the four that evening and did not file charges against them.

On 20th February, a seminar in Dumartola, Bajagvillage, Dindori district, was interrupted by about 15 men chanting 'stop this conversion'. The event was being conducted by Pastor **Jiyalal Maravi** and four other pastors. The police arrested the pastors, interrogated them and then released them that evening. No charges were filed.

On the same day, church leaders in Deori, Surguja District, ended early a three-day meeting after Hindu protesters stormed the proceedings and accused the organisers and guest speakers, pastors **Sukhchain Masih** and **Lalsa Tirkey**, of forced conversion.

On 21st February, in Aara, Surguja District, about twelve Hindus with some police officers disrupted a Christian revival meeting and arrested **Akshya Kumar Vishyakarma**, **Angad Singh** and a man identified only as **Harendra**. The pastor who organised the event, **Albis Bara**, was arrested the next day. The four were released on bail and are now facing charges of disruption of the public peace.

On 25th February, a group of around ten women in Secunderabad were assaulted while returning from visiting a sick friend. The attackers, numbering around 15 people, accused them of 'luring people to Christianity'. The women were punched and slapped, and two of them, **Laxmi Amma** and **Rahel Amma** suffered minor bruises on their faces. The day after their pastor registered a formal complaint.

On 1st March, in Bhalutangara village, Kankadahada block, Dhenkana, Hindu extremists threatened **Rabinarayana Marandi** with assault and banishment from his village if he did not give contributions towards the Hindu festivals. After he refused to give his contribution, he was beaten up, and he and his family were chased out of town.

On 8th March, a group of Hindus in Moodubelle village, Uduoi, interrupted an all-night prayer meeting. The participants were assaulted and accused of forced conversions. Pastor **Robert Lobo** and six believers suffered serious injuries. Police arrested 10 attackers.

On 10th March, Christian convert **Mohan Soren** fled his village in Dengabahalli, Dhenkanal, with his family after they were threatened with death. They took refuge in the home of a Christian leader in another area.

On 24th March, in Gunia village, Chhattisgarh, Hindu extremists surrounded the house of brothers **Kayaram** and **Musuram Kashyat** shouting anti-Christian slogans. They threatened to expel them from the village if they did not renounce Christ. The day after, the two brothers were attacked and later hospitalized. They also filed a police report.

On the same day, in Charlapalli, Ghatkesar Mandal, the construction of the new Life in Christ Ministries church was interrupted by Hindu extremists. The attackers claimed that the church would have caused disturbance in the neighbourhood. Although the pastor of the church claimed to have had all necessary permits to build the church, he was told by the police to obtain permission directly from the most senior local administrator.

On 25th March, in Nagra, Balrampur Ramanujanj, the police forced organisers of a gospel meeting to close down because of complaints of forced conversion. Pastor

Mukti Prakash Lakra said that the church was organising the three-day meeting before extremists had disrupted their plans.

On the same day, police detained members of God Grace Ministries Church in Vasnathvihar, Maulali, Hyderabad, after local Hindus filed a complaint accusing the church of forced conversions. The All India Christian Council said the congregation is building a church on their own land, leading to the hostility of some Hindus in the area.

On 28th March, the head of Mokhagoan village, supported by local Hindu residents, requested the government to stop the opening of a day care centre built by Indian Evangelical Mission. The government investigated the centre's operations and dismissed the petition to halt operations.

In April, a church in Taragaon, Chhattisgarh, was demolished by members of Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of a Hindu nationalist organisation. The Christians of Taragaon had to move their meeting place to the houses of the believers.

On 2nd April, the small Believers' Church in Chhotesalna, Raipur, was burned to the ground by a group of Hindus. The assailants accused the Christian congregation of forced conversion of members of the community. The church has filed a complaint with the police.

On 10th April, a group of Muslims forced themselves into a family house in Shivpura, Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir state, and assaulted Pastor **Neethi Rajan** and his family. The pastor was accused of converting children living in the Agape Home for youth. Police took Rajan and his family into protective custody. The family was later relocated to another area in fear of another attack.

On 11th April, a man named Rangappa, his wife and son, assaulted a pastor and his family in their home. **Kanharaj Hanmanthappa** and his family were beaten and hospitalized. Rangappa had already made many threats and complaints against the pastor, accusing him of forcibly converting residents. Bharamsagra police filed a report against the attackers.

On 23rd April, police in the Gondia district arrested Pastor **Vijay Meshram**, a representative of the evangelical organisation Mission India, and his wife after Hindus accused them of forced conversion and bribery. The couple had been tricked into visiting a home to pray for the sick. A large crowd awaited them, accusing them of forced conversion and bribery. The police arrested the couple under several sections of the criminal code. They were released on bail the next day.

On 3rd May, four pastors in Bhelwa Baddhara were accused of forceful conversion and arrested. Pastors **Mani Munda**, **Vishnu Kerketta**, **Ashok Idaigo** and **Rajgopal Munda** of the Power of Saviour Ministry in Sundargarh, Odisha, were visiting a private home when police arrived and took them to the police station. When 10 local Christians told the police that they had become believers of

their own free will, the men were instead charged with holding an assembly after having been ordered to disperse and then released on bail.

On 5th May, about 20 people interrupted services at Maranatha Worship Centre in Pimpri village, where approximately 50 worshippers had assembled for evening prayer. The congregation was threatened and then ordered the priest to shut down the church and leave town. The priest, Fr. **Wilson Patole**, suffered a swollen eye and other bruises.

On 14th May, 20 villagers in Bilwani village attacked **Rajubhai R. Bhuriyaand** and his family, accusing them of forced conversion. The attack took place during the evening family devotion. Five members of the family were injured during the aggression.

On 15th May, during a Hindu meeting in Pakshirajapura Pastor **Steven Suresh** was accused of insulting the Hindu gods and forceful conversion of members of the nomadic Hikki Pikki Adivasi tribe to Christianity. Police arrested the pastor and 11 other Christians.

On 21st May, in Bhalukasai village **Kati Singh** was assaulted by Hindutva extremists after he refused to contribute to the local Hindu festivals. Singh was injured and admitted to Nilgiri Government Hospital.

On 23rd May, during evening prayer intruders forced their way into the Sarfabad house of **Gyaneshwar Kurwade**, assaulting Kurwade and his son **Shrikrishana**. They were told that Christian activity in the area was not accepted. Although the two reported the attack to police, no further action was taken.

On the same day, **Tapas Bin** was murdered in Twirisa village. Bin was being pressured by his wife's Hindu father to abandon Christianity. Church officials claim the killing was religiously motivated.

On 4th June, Hindu extremists attacked a Telegu pastor's meeting in Thukkuguda, insulting their faith and caste and physically assaulting them with sticks. Four pastors suffered significant injuries and were taken to hospital. Police registered an incident report against the attackers, but no arrests have been made.

On 5th June, Pastor **Vijayan M.** and his wife were attacked in Edathar by eight Hindutva extremists while coming back home from visiting a sick church member. The two were knocked off their scooter, and they were taken to hospital. Local Christian leaders filed a police complaint.

On 6th June, following Hindu accusations of forced conversion, state police in Pandherwani filed an incident report against local Christians. Local Hindus assaulted Christians, destroyed a house, seized farmland and ordered them to leave the village.

On 9th June, while praying for a sick man, Pastor **Ram Chandra** was assaulted by Hindus. Chandra was praying with the man's wife and children when protesters gathered at the family's home assailing the man as soon as he left the house.

On 10th June, in the village of Dangarguda, Odisha State, Christians were attacked with swords, axes, chains and other weapons by a group of people shouting anti-Christian slogans. One of the Christians, **Mudha Madhi**, was beaten unconscious. Four others - **Irma Madhi**, **Mangli Madhi**, **Mudha Madhi** and **Sambru Khurami** - were taken to hospital for cuts and bruises.

On the same day, in Sonari a group threatened to kill Pastor **Ram Prakash** from the Prakash Healing Society church. Prakash was returning home from a visit to a church member, when the group said they would kill him if he did not stop holding worship meetings in the area. The pastor filed a complaint with police, but no further action was taken against the attackers.

On the same day, Pastor **A. Shyam** was assaulted in Kongpal and the newly-built Victory Church of India was damaged. Residents said that the church is an insult, because it is built close to an historic site.

Again on the same day, Christ Church in Gutta Begumpet was demolished by a Hindu mob, assisted by a local government official. Local Hindus insisted that Pastor **Paul Viswas** stop church services in the area.

On 12th June, a three-day meeting of Independent Pentecostal Church pastors and church leaders in Canalpada was interrupted by a crowd accusing the organisers of forced conversion. Some of the intruders chased on motorcycles several meeting participants that were leaving the session in an auto-rickshaw. The rickshaw overturned, injuring eight people.

On 22nd June, a group tried to drive Christians off their farmland near Goudaguda village. The attackers assaulted a Christian couple, **Bina Madhi** and **Ermi Madhi**, and church member **Jagarnath Maekani** with bamboo sticks. A complaint was filed with the Malkangiri Police Station, but no arrests were reported.

On 26th June, a crowd in Narasipura set the Zion Church on fire, beat up the pastor **Annaiah** and another five church members. Three days later, the temporary shed built to replace the church was also burned.

On 3rd August, 50 Hindu extremists attacked **Somashekarwas**, an Evangelical Christian living in a village in Bijapur District. The assailants ordered him to convert to Hinduism or else leave the village along with his wife **Kusumabhai**. They refused. The attackers then reported them to the police in Nedugundhi, accusing them of practicing forced conversions.

On 11th August, the pastor of an independent Pentecostal Church in Chitadurga District, Rev. **Paramajyothi**, was attacked by Hindu extremists. The attackers dragged the man out of the church, beat him in front of his congregation and

family and ordered him to leave the village. After being released from the hospital, Paramajyothi asked protection from the police in Bejikere. Police instead filed a complaint against the attackers as well as the pastor.

On 18th August, Hindu extremists in Chikkamalaguru District attacked the home of Ms. **Doddamma**, a member of the Rehebothe Prarthana Mandir Pentecostal Church. The men dragged her and her daughter to a nearby Hindu temple and ordered them to reconvert to Hinduism. When they refused, the two were beaten and their house was destroyed.

On 22nd August, during a house prayer meeting in Davanagere, 40 Hindu extremists entered the property and accused Pastor **Kotresh** of conducting forced conversions. The attackers physically abused the pastor and warned him to leave the village. The group also burned Bibles and threw stones at some of the Christians in attendance.

On 24th August, Hindu extremists in Bagalakote interrupted a prayer meeting and attacked Pastor **Samson**. The pastor was severely beaten and subsequently hospitalised for a week. The police took no action against the assailants.

On 25th August, three Christians were accused by Hindu extremists of forced conversion of children at St Thomas's School in Uttara Kannada. The Hindus entered the campus and questioned the pupils. They then beat up **Sunil Varghese**, **Alexander** and **Sabu** in front of the police. Rather than arresting the attackers, the police took the Christians into custody and charged them with the forced conversion of children.

On 1st September, in Bangalore North, the Living Hope Church was attacked by Hindu extremists. They interrupted the service and accused the pastor and church members of forcing people to convert to Christianity. One week later, the assailants came back shouting, "No prayer, no church!" On both occasions, some of the believers were beaten up.

On 22nd September, in the Karnatraka district a group of Hindu extremists interrupted a Sunday prayer accusing Pastor **Hemachandra Hebal** of forcing Hindus to convert to Christianity. Pastor Hemachandra filed a complaint at the Tarikere Rural police Station. The church was attacked again one week later during the Sunday worship service. The assailants hit Pastor Hemachandra and his wife and took them to the police station where they were forced to sign an agreement that they would stop work and vacate their place of worship within 24 hours.

On the same day, a group of Hindus summoned two Christian siblings, **Mankuram** and **Mankuram Singh**, to a temple in Kongud, Kondagoan, where they were asked to deny their faith. When the brothers refused, they were accused of forcibly converting people and were then beaten. They did not report the incident, as they were threatened with more violence if they went to the police.

On the same day, **Mitko Kashyap** was beaten by her nephew after refusing to deny her Christian faith. The man struck the woman on the head with a rock, causing injuries that required hospitalisation. Initially, police refused to register the complaint against the attacker, because the case was considered a family matter. However, the police came to examine the woman after the hospital registered the incident. No arrests were made.

On 28th September, about 20 Hindu extremists attacked the St. Thomas Church at Bellur, Varasandra Village in Mandya District, Karnataka, during a prayer meeting. The attackers shouted at the Christians to stop the meeting and set about destroying everything in sight. They also accused Pastor **Solomon Ramesh** of forcing Hindus to convert to Christianity. The pastor filed a complaint at the Bellur Police Station; the Hindus likewise lodged a complaint against the pastor for forced and fraudulent conversion.

On 1st October, the regular Session Court of Phulbani sentenced seven Christians to lifetime imprisonment for the 2008 murder of a prominent Hindu leader. India's churches have lodged an appeal, saying that the men were sentenced without sufficient evidence and that the men are innocent of the crime.

On 6th October, Rev. **Anil Kumar** was accused of forced conversions and beaten in front of Siddapura police agents. The day before, he had held a prayer vigil in a widow's house in memory of the Christian husband who died some years before. Rev Kumar has been charged him with violating Section 109 of the Code of Criminal Procedure concerning 'suspicious persons.' He was later released on bail. On 8th October, in the village of Hadothi in Rajasthan, Pastor **Senthil Kumar** was detained for eight hours by the police after Hindu extremists accused him of forced conversions. The police asked the pastor to leave the village. An inspector threatened him with physical harm if he did not go.

On 9th October, during a house prayer meeting in Neelam Patra, Surbuya, Chhattisgarh, five suspected Hindu extremists interrupted the gathering and asked the pastor to go outside. **Shyam Sunder**, a man who was attending the meeting, intervened and told the five men to leave and not to disturb their meeting again. The man was taken to a house, beaten unconscious and then revived only to be beaten again. Shyam was found later in a semi-conscious state with cuts and bruises all over his body.

In December, Archbishop **Anil JT Couto** was arrested in New Delhi along with priests and nuns from his diocese during a peaceful protest for the rights of Dalit Christians and Muslims. Police injured several people.

Attack against Buddhist Site

On 7th July, a series of blasts hit the Mahabodhi Temple complex in eastern India, a UNESCO World Heritage Site marking the location where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. Five people were injured. On 4th November, Indian

intelligence announced that the Islamist group, Indian Mujahideen, was responsible for the attack.

Trends & Analysis

Indian society is marked by incredible diversities of ethnic, linguistic, religious, class and caste identities. In such an environment, tensions are not surprising and their sources difficult to decipher. Nonetheless, the rise of nationalist groups, that base their Indian or regional identity on religion, is undoubtedly a threat to interreligious harmony in India today. For example, the leveraging of *Hindutva* to harass Christians and resist Muslim influence has exacerbated violence in many parts of the country.

However, it would be a mistake to place all the blame at the feet of radical Indian nationalists. Even though the Constitution proclaims India a secular state, it is clear that its drafting was strongly shaped by Hindu bias during the constitutional debate of the 1940's. These features remain in force today and continue to exert considerable influence upon Indians' sense of national identity. Consequently, there are restrictive legal structures that are in need of reform if interreligious reconciliation is to be promoted in India.

The Indian Penal Code includes sections which may not have been intended in their original expression to curtail religious freedom; however, these are now being exploited for this very purpose. For example, the Freedom of Religion Acts prohibit coerced religious conversion in several Indian states, but the ambiguity of these laws have been used to kindle social hostility towards non-Hindu religious groups, Christians being the main target.

In addition to reactionary legal structures, some context-specific conflicts have impacted religious tensions in their respective regions. This is the case for the disputed region of Kashmir Valley, for example, where 95% of the population are Muslim, and for West Bengal, which has a minority Muslim population while sharing a border with Muslim-majority Bangladesh. Here politics shape societal consciousness, for better or for worse.

Finally, it is also worth noting that despite constitutional guarantees for the freedom of religion, in cases of violence or harassment against minority religious groups, state officials and police have been negligent in the enforcement of this right. Greater efforts toward bringing to justice the perpetrators of religiously-motivated crimes would go a long way toward mitigating the impact of such acts. Unfortunately, where political will is lacking on the part of policy makers, there is little motivation at more local levels to strengthen protections for those who are most vulnerable and in need of protection.

INDONESIA

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country with the majority adhering to Sunni Islam. The Constitution provides for the freedom of religion, while officially recognizing five religions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism. According to a 2010 census report, 87 per cent of the population are Muslim, 7 per cent Protestant, 3 per cent Roman Catholic and 2 per cent Hindu. In practice, other religions can exist and be registered as social organisations, although they might face certain restrictions. According to the first principle of *Pancasila*, the state ideology established by Sukarno in 1945, every national is supposed to have a belief "in one supreme God;" therefore, atheism is technically outlawed. However, conversions between faiths are legal and occur regularly.

Despite Indonesia's recent advances in the protection of human rights, religious freedoms are commonly impeded due to social rather than legal factors. International attention has been drawn to the escalation of Islamist activities, resulting in wider discrimination towards religious minorities, increased religious tensions and societal violence. In some parts of the country, extremist groups have been permitted to operate with impunity, restricting the freedom to assemble and perpetrating violent attacks, abuse and discriminatory practices against religious minorities. These concerns continued in 2013 and threatened to undermine Indonesia's tradition of tolerance and democratic values.

Some Incidents

Violence against Christians

On 27th January, a gang of Islamic extremists attacked the Pentecostal church in Mekargalih village in West Java and assaulted its pastor, **Bernhard Maukar**. Authorities subsequently arrested and sentenced Maukar to three months in prison for holding services without a valid permit.

On 11th February, a group of unknown assailants used Molotov cocktails to attack the Protestant Church Toraja Mamassa in Makassar, capital of the Province of South Sulawesi.

On 20th March, **Pastor Palti Panjaitan** was attacked while trying to leave his church in Bekasi, West Java. The assailant, **Abdul Aziz**, later claimed that Palti had struck him during the incident. The pastor has been charged with assault.

On 1st December, members of the Islamic Defenders Front disrupted the Sunday service and made threats toward the Tandem Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBT) community in the city of Binjai, North Sumatra. The worshippers were forced to return to their homes under police escort.

Restrictions on the Freedom of Christians to Assemble

On 17th March 2013, the Bekasi district administration, citing a missing permit, demolished a church after pressure from Muslim protesters.

On 21st March 2013, the Bekasi local government authorised the demolition of the Batak Protestant Christian Church, because the church did not have a building permit. It is extremely difficult for churches to obtain building permits: currently more than twenty HKBP churches are operating without one. The above demolition was reportedly ordered following pressure from the Islamic People's Forum in Taman Sari, a militant Islamist organisation.

On 27th March 2013, authorities in the Jatibening Baru sub-district of Jakarta ordered a Christian congregation to discontinue worship services until it obtained a valid building permit.

On 3rd July, in Kranggan, West Java Province, Islamist extremists protested against the construction of Saint Stanislaus Kotska Catholic Church, despite the fact that the Christian community had fulfilled all legal requirements for the building construction. Protesters said that a Christian building in a Muslim area would increase sectarian violence in the region.

On 22nd September, Saint Bernadette Catholic Church in Baten Province reopened after nine years of waiting for the regularization of its building permit. A few hours later, Islamist groups took to the streets with slogans and chants demanding that the church be shut down.

In the beginning of December, two churches in West Java and South Sulawesi were closed. One of them was subsequently demolished by local authorities. A week later, International Christian Concern reported that two other churches had been closed near Jakarta after protests from local Muslim groups.

Violence Targeting Ahmadiyah Muslims

Since 2008, at least 60 Ahmadiya mosques have been attacked, 42 mosques have been forcibly closed and three Ahmadiya followers have been killed in mob violence.⁵ While in most parts of Indonesia, Ahmadiya have the official right to gather for worship, some regions, i.e. East and West Java, South Sulawesi and Lombok Provinces, experience increased pressure from extremist groups and from governmental authorities to ban public Ahmadiya practice.

On 4th April, government security personnel raided and closed down an Ahmadiyah mosque in Bekasi. The order came after a Joint Ministerial Decree that prohibited the Ahmadiya from propagating their beliefs.

⁵ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2013

Arrested for Proselytising

On 20th June, the Protestant pastor **Onekesyi Zeha** and three colleagues were arrested in Aceh under the accusation of baptising Muslims. A Muslim family claimed that one of their relatives had become a Christian and was baptised by the pastor.

In the beginning of September, in Aceh Province, ‘Shari’a police’ arrested Pastor **Hendri Budi Kusumo** and four other members of the Indonesian Mission Evangelist Church for proselytising and trying to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Interreligious Hostility

On 5th April, at least eight died and fifteen were wounded after a clash between Burmese Buddhists and Muslims in a refugee centre near the port of Belawan, Sumatra. The violence erupted in response to the massacre of Rohingya Muslims in Mekhtila, Burma, the previous month.

On 25th September, hundreds of residents in South Jakarta gathered in protest against the appointment of a Christian official, **Susan Zulkifi**, to the local administration. Protesters did not want a Christian to hold this position, as the population she would represent is overwhelmingly Muslim. Despite facing strong pressure from the demonstrators, the governor stood firm on her appointment.

End of the year celebrations were cancelled in the Province of Aceh after protests from Islamist groups claiming that New Year’s Eve is not an Islamic holiday.⁶ Organisers suspended the evening celebrations in consideration of public safety.

Prison for an Atheist Criticising Religion

Alexander Aan remained in prison throughout 2013, serving a two and a half year sentence for ‘disseminating information aimed at inciting religious hatred or hostility.’ Aan had set up a Facebook page for atheists in Indonesia. Islamists stated that the sentence was too lenient, some even calling for the death penalty.

On 14th May, a Christian woman in Bali named **Rusgiani** (also known as Yohana) was sentenced to 14 months of detention for calling the daily Hindu offerings ‘dirty and disgusting.’ She was charged under Article 156 of the Indonesian Criminal Code for expressing ‘feelings of hostility, hatred or contempt against one or more groups of the Indonesian population.’

⁶ Nor is New Year’s Eve a Christian holiday.

Trends & Analysis

Long known for its religious tolerance, Indonesia's reputation as a Muslim majority nation with a respect for minority religious groups continued to be discredited in 2013. The Pew Research Centre recently ranked it as among the five countries worldwide with the highest level of religious restrictions, taking into account indices for government restrictions and social hostility.

This may come as a surprise to some people, who persist in thinking of Indonesia as a model for interreligious tolerance. Indeed, in 2013 President Yudhoyono received the World Statesmen Award by the *Appeal of Conscience Foundation* in recognition of his efforts on behalf of human rights and religious freedom in his country. In reality, the Indonesian president has given weak support for these matters. His leadership, along with the strong support of government at all levels of Indonesian civil society, is vitally needed at this time to redress the setbacks of recent years.

The Constitution and legal codes which once protected religious minorities are now either being ignored or locally reinterpreted under pressure from extremist organisations. For example, the Islamic Defenders Front has pressured police into dropping charges for acts of violence against religious minorities. It has pressed city and regional authorities to deny the renewal of building permits for religious buildings and has even instigated the demolition of places of worship. Christians and Muslim minority groups such as the Ahmadiyya are those who are most often targeted.

Indonesia's blasphemy law also criminalises minority groups that are not recognised by the state. This law alone is susceptible to gross misinterpretation and can be applied in ways that are inconsistent with international human rights standards. It has been used to silence the voices of religious minorities, including those of Muslims with views that are different from the Muslim majority. The blasphemy law has a poisonous effect on the freedom of expression in Indonesian society and must be repealed.

Government action could go far towards restoring the country's image of respect and tolerance. The influence of organisations like the Islamic Defenders Front can be countered through increased support and training for regional and local authorities that work in particularly volatile areas. The authorisation for building or maintaining places of worship can also be simplified and executed more fairly. Such concrete measures, among others, would do much to return credibility to Indonesia's claim to be a haven for religious freedom in the world.

IRAN

According to the Statistical Centre of Iran's 2011 National Population and Housing Census, the population is 75.2 million. Muslims constitute 99 percent of the population; 90 percent are Shia and 9 percent are Sunni (mostly Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest, respectively). There are no official statistics available on the size of the Sufi Muslim population; however, some reports estimate between two and five million people practice Sufism.

Groups together constituting the remaining 1 percent of the population include Baha'is, Christians, Jews, Sabean-Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians. The two largest non-Muslim minorities are Baha'is and Christians. The Bahais number approximately 300,000, and are heavily concentrated in Tehran and Semnan. According to UN figures, 300,000 Christians live in the country. The Statistical Centre of Iran reports there are 117,700. The majority of Christians are ethnic Armenians concentrated in Tehran and Isfahan. Unofficial estimates of the Assyrian Christian population range between 10,000 and 20,000. There are also Protestant denominations, including evangelical groups. Christian groups outside the country estimate the size of the Protestant Christian community to be less than 10,000, although many Protestant Christians reportedly practice in secret. There are between 5,000 to 10,000 Sabean-Mandaeans. The Statistical Centre of Iran estimates there are 25,271 Zoroastrians, who are primarily ethnic Persians; however, Zoroastrian groups report they have 60,000 members.

The Islamic Republic of Iran professes to be a theocratic republic based on the Twelver Jafari School of Shi'a Islam, although this is highly disputed within the country itself. The current regime, established after the Shah was overthrown in 1979, has lacked legitimacy from the beginning. On-going internal struggles for power and authority are part of the political intrigue that typifies the government of Iran in our times.

In 2013, Hassan Rouhani won the presidential election by a wide margin in the first round of voting. Rouhani has been viewed by some analysts as a political moderate, although his close ties to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and to Ali Larijani, the hard-line leader of the Iranian Parliament, should dissuade most from being overly optimistic for change. Opposition voices have indeed become stronger within Iran, even within the government, but it is doubtful that any meaningful reform will come from within the country's power structure as it is currently constituted.

Despite legal provisions for the 'full respect' of selected religious minorities, Baha'i and other minorities are considered 'cults' and continue to suffer severe limitations to their freedom. Mr Rouhani has stated that his government supports freedom of religion or belief; however, the new president has yet to produce evidence in support of this claim.

Some Incidents

Persecution of Christians

Churches Targeted

On 27th May, the country's largest Persian-language church, the Pentecostal Central Assemblies of God church in Tehran, was closed by government agents. The incident occurred one week after one of the church's pastors was arrested during a worship service.

On 16th July, eight members of the Church of Iran in Shiraz were sentenced to jail after being charged with "action against national security" and "propaganda against the order of the system." **Mohammad Roghangir** was sentenced to six years, **Massoud Rezaie** to five years, **Mehdi Ameruni** and **Bijan Farokhpour Haghighi** to three years, **Shahin Lahooti** and **Suroush Saraie** to two and half years each, while **Eskandar Rezaie** and **Roxana Forughi** were both sentenced to one year in prison.

On 6th October, in the city of Rasht, four members of the Church of Iran - **Behzad Taalipasand**, **Mehdi Reza Omidi (Youhan)**, **Mehdi Dadkhah (Danial)** and **Amir Hatemi (Youhanna)** - were each sentenced to 80 lashes for drinking alcohol (wine) during a communion service.

On 24th December, Iranian security officers arrested Mr. **Hosseini, Ahmad Bazyar**, **Faegheh Nasrollahi**, **Mastaneh Rastegri** and **Amir Ne'matollahi** and raided the house where they were meeting to celebrate Christmas. Authorities seized Christian books, CDs and a laptop. They also searched a neighbouring house.

Repression of Pastors

On 7th January, **Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani** was released after being jailed for three years. The pastor had been freed earlier in September 2012 but then returned to jail some months later to serve the remaining 45 days of his sentence.

On 26th January, Judge Pir-Abassi of Branch 26 of the Iranian Revolutionary Court sentenced **Pastor Saeed Abedini** to eight years in prison after finding him guilty of undermining national security because of his leadership in house churches. Abedini was refused medical treatment after receiving regular beatings from authorities, resulting in internal bleeding and kidney failure. Abedini has also been subjected to periods of solitary confinement and denied the right to receive visitors. An international movement has been organised to urge his immediate and unconditional release. On 10th October, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on Iran to free him.

On 21st May, **Rev Robert Asserian**, a pastor of the Central Assemblies of God church in Tehran, was arrested while leading a prayer meeting at the church. His

house was raided by security forces and some of his personal property, such as a computer and books were seized. He remains in an unknown location.

On 5th December, **Rev. Vruir Avanesian** was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for actions against national security and proselytizing Farsi-speaking citizens. Mr Avanesian suffers from serious heart disease and diabetes. The court was fully aware of his medical condition at the time of his sentencing.

Raids and Arrests of Converts from Islam

On 10th March, five Christian converts - **Mohammad Roghangir, Surosh Saraie, Eskandar Rezaie, Shahin Lahooti** and **Massoud Rezaie** - were tried by the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz's Fars Province on charges of disturbing public order, evangelizing, threatening national security and engaging in Internet activity that threatens the government. The bail for Mohammed Roghangir was set at \$ 200 000, while the others were fixed at \$ 80 000 each. No date was established for the continuation of the trial.

On 19th March, **Mohammad Roghangir, Surosh Saraie,** and **Massoud Rezaie** were released from jail after each posted bail. **Eskandar Rezaie** was released at the end of March. **Shahin Lahooti** remained in prison.

On 1st May, the Pastor of the Iranian Assemblies of God **Farhad Sabokrooh,** his wife **Shahnaz Jayzan** and church workers **Naser Zaman-Dezfuli** and **Davoud Alijani** were returned to jail after a high court upheld their one-year sentences for converting to Christianity and "propaganda against the Islamic regime through evangelism."

On 20th July, three Christian converts, **Farshid Modares-Aval, Mohammad-Reza Pirri** and **Yashar Farzin-No,** were arrested in a raid by security authorities. Authorities also searched their homes and seized some of their personal property. Security and judicial authorities have provided no reason to their families for the arrests.

On 31st July, **Mostafa Bordbar** was sentenced to ten years in prison for association with an "anti-security organisation" and "gathering with intent to commit crimes against Iranian national security." Mr Bordbar had been arrested on 27th December 2012 along with 50 other Christian converts who met to celebrate Christmas in a house in northern Tehran. They were detained, interrogated for several hours and forced to hand over personal details, including Facebook and e-mail addresses and passwords. Most were released; however, Bordbar remained in prison. Bordbar had been arrested several years earlier in his hometown of Rasht for converting to Christianity and attending a house church.

Repression of Baha'is

On 6th March, the Baha'i International Community released a report documenting hundreds of cases of abuse directed toward Baha'is in Iran since 2005, including torture, physical assault, arson, vandalism, cemetery desecration and aggression toward children. The report indicates that some attacks were executed or encouraged by government agents, authorities and the Muslim clergy.

In May, the Baha'is launched a campaign called 'Five Years too Many' to call for the immediate release of seven Iranian Baha'i leaders who have been in prison for five years.

Murder of a Baha'i

On 24th August, **Ataollah Rezvani** was forced to drive to an isolated place near the railway station on the outskirts of Bandar Abbas where he was shot in the back of the head and killed. He and his family had been harassed and threatened earlier in an effort to force them to leave the city.

Baha'is in Prison

Mahvash Shariari Sabet, Fariba Kamalabadi Taefi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naimi, Saeid Rezaie Tazangi, Behrouz Azizi Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm continue to serve twenty-year sentences for forming an illegal cult, engaging in espionage and acting against national security.

Kamran Mortezaie, Noushin Khadem, Mahmoud Badavan, Ramin Zibaie and Farhad Sedghi who were arrested on 22nd May 2011 in Tehran and charged for taking action against the security of the country continue to serve their prison terms: five years for Kamran Mortezaie and four years for the others.

Peyman Kashfi who was arrested on 13th February 2011 in Tehran and charged with membership in an anti-Islamic group and propaganda against the regime is serving his four-year prison term.

Riaz Sobhani who was arrested on 14th June 2011 in Tehran and charged with being members of the 'deviant sect' of Baha'ism with the goal of taking action against the security of the country is still serving his four-year prison term.

Bhfar Khanjani who was arrested on 21st June 2011 in Mashhad and charged with forming groups, holding membership in groups and organising assemblies with the intent of undermining national security, activity against national security through propaganda against the regime, use, possession and distribution of 63 illegal compact discs containing appalling and offensive material is serving his four-year prison term.

Afshin Ighani who was arrested on September 2011 in Semnan and charged with forming groups, holding membership in groups and organising assemblies with the intent of undermining national security, activity against national security through propaganda against the regime is serving his four-year and three-month prison term.

Azizollah Samandari who was arrested on 7th July 2012 in Tehran and charged with being an active member of the 'perverse Baha'i sect' with the intention to act against national security is serving his five-year prison term.

Taraneh Torabi who was arrested with her three-month old child on September 2012 and detained in Sangsar had her sentence of five years and ten months in prison reduced to two and a half years.

Zohreh Nikayin who was arrested with her eight-month old child on 22nd September 2012 in Semnan and sentenced to seven years in prison had her sentence reduced to 23 months.

Faran Hesami and her husband **Kamran Rahimian** who were arrested on 25th July 2012 in Tehran and charged with conspiracy and assembly with the intent of acting against national security by membership in the Baha'i sect are both serving a four-year prison term.

Kayvan Rahimian, who was arrested on 30th September 2012 in Tehran and charged with assembly and collusion with the intent to commit acts of crime against national security and membership in the Baha'i sect is still serving his five-year prison term.

Repression of Sufis

Hamid-Reza Moradi, who was arrested in 2011 for membership in a sect endangering national security, propaganda against the state, insulting the Supreme Leader and disturbing the public order, continues to serve a 10 and a half year sentence in Evin Prison (Tehran).

Mostafa Daneshjoo, who was sentenced on 18th May 2011 on the charges of membership in a sect endangering national security, propaganda against the state, insulting the Supreme Leader and disturbing the public order, continues to serve a seven and a half year sentence in Evin Prison.

Saleh Moradi, arrested on 27th August 2011 in Kavar for propaganda against the regime, acting against national security and membership in a deviant group (Majzooban Noor), was released on 2nd June 2013 after serving a three-year sentence.

Amir Eslami and **Farshid Yadollahi**, arrested in September 2011 for membership in a sect endangering national security, propaganda against the state, insulting the Supreme Leader and disturbing the public order, continues to serve a seven and a half year sentence.

Afshin Karampour, arrested in September 2011 for membership in a deviant group, disrupting the public order, propaganda against the state and insulting the Supreme Leader, continues to serve a six and a half year sentence.

Mostafa Abdi, arrested in September 2011 on the charges of assembly and collusion against national security through cooperating with Majzooban Noor website, continues to serve a three-year sentence.

Omid Behrouzi, who was arrested on 27th October 2011 for membership in a sect endangering national security, propaganda against the state, insulting the Supreme Leader and disturbing the public order, continues to serve a seven and a half year sentence in Evin Prison.

Kasra Nouri, who was arrested on 11th January 2012 and again on 14th March 2012 for affiliation with the Nematollahi Gonabadi Sufi order and national security crimes related to their activities with the Sufi website, continues to serve a four years and four months sentence.

On 30th April 2013, **Seyed Ebrahim Bahrami, Mohammad-Ali Sadeghi, Mohammad-Ali Dehghan** and **Mohsen Esameeli** were arrested for their affiliation with the Namatollahi Gonabadi Sufi order on the charges of participating in the gatherings with the aim of overthrowing the Islamic Republic, enmity against God and carrying illegal weapons. They are in pre-trial detention in Adel Abad prison.

Repression of Sunni Muslims

In August 2013, an Iranian court sentenced 17 Sunnis to death because of their religious beliefs, including several religious scholars. They were convicted by the Tehran Revolutionary Court of ‘acting against national security’ and *moharebeh* (enmity against God), which is punishable by death in Iran. The prisoners are said to have confessed to these crimes under torture.

The following 17 Sunni prisoners presently await execution in Gohardasht Prison: **Ahmad Naseri, Talib Malaki, Hamed Ahmadi, Adrees Neimati, Jahangir Dehghani, Jamshid Dehghani, Sadiq Mohammadi, Shahram Ahmadi, Varia Ghaderifard, Behrooz Shanzari, Farzad Shanzari, Mokhtar Rahemi, Pooria Mohammadi, Bahman Rahemi, Kamal Malaie, Mohammad Gharebi** and **Mohammad Yavar Rahemi**.

Repression of a Shi’a Dissident

Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemini Boroujerdi who was arrested in 2006 for advocating the separation of religion and religion continues to serve his 11-year prison sentence. He was also speaking out on behalf of the rights of Iran’s religious minorities as well as those of the Shi’a Muslim majority. In addition to

the imprisonment, the government has banned him from practicing his clerical duties and confiscated his home and belongings.

Repression of Zoroastrians

Mojtaba Ahmadi, who was arrested in December 2009, continues to serve a six-year sentence for blasphemy (3 years), conspiracy and propaganda (3 years).

Mohsen Sadeghipour, arrested in December 2009, is still serving a four and a half year sentence in Evin Prison, Tehran, for anti-regime propaganda in favour of the Zoroastrian faith, insulting Islamic practices and the Supreme Leader and disrupting the public order by promoting activities against the Islamic Republic.

Abolfazl (Pouria) Shahpari continues to serve a two and a half year sentence. He was arrested in February 2009 along with his brother Dariush on charges of blasphemy for anti-regime propaganda regarding Zoroastrianism, gathering and conspiracy, membership in the Iran Zoroastrian Committee and insulting the Supreme Leader. His brother **Mohammad Javad (Dariush) Shahpari** continues to serve a two-year and four months sentence.

Trends & Analysis

Whilst some Western analysts have turned a hopeful eye toward the 2013 election of Hassan Rouhani, a more careful assessment of Iran's political calamity will elicit far less enthusiasm. In point of fact, President Rouhani does have a range of possibilities at his disposal for mitigating the discriminatory treatment of Iran's religious minorities, but it is highly doubtful that he will seize these opportunities.

Rouhani has tried to portray Iran as a land where religious minorities are free to practice their faith and enjoy positive relations with the general population.⁷ It is true that Iran has historically been home to multiple religions and cultural traditions. However, a paradoxical situation persists where an authoritarian regime seeks to exert power over a broadly tolerant society. There is an obvious disconnect between the government's official rhetoric and the harsh realities of many citizens within Iran today.

One hopeful sign is Rouhani's initiative to stimulate a national debate over citizen rights, viewed as a positive step toward a wider debate on internationally accepted standards for human rights. In whatever direction this may lead, it is obvious that any serious discussion on citizen rights will examine how those rights have been violated, including those of Iran's religious minorities.

⁷ 5th November 2013 meeting with the Vatican Ambassador, see <http://www.president.ir/en/72556>.

The state of Baha'is remains especially worrying. Considered an apostate sect of Islam, the Baha'i community cannot establish places of worship, schools or religious associations. Baha'is cannot hold military or government jobs. They are also subject to harassment, arbitrary detentions and attacks on personal and community-held properties.

Similar restrictions are often placed on Christians and Sunni Muslims. Many of the ethnic minorities in Iran practice Sunni Islam – such as Arabs, Balochis, Kurds and Turkmen – making them doubly targets for discrimination for both their Sunni faith and ethnicity.

The Iranian people long for much better and for much more than the current regime has thus far offered. Whilst international attention has been directed toward Iran's nuclear programme, it is in the international community's long-term interest to also give strong support for Iran's growth in democracy whilst at the same time securing a nuclear-free future for the region. This is also clearly in the interest of the people of Iran.

IRAQ

The religious demographic statistics for Iraq are difficult to determine due to violence, internal migration and governmental tracking capability. Iraqi government statistics from 2010 place the Muslim population at 97 percent. Shia Muslims, predominantly Arabs but also including Turkmen, Faili (Shia) Kurds and others, constitute 60 to 65 percent. Arab and Kurdish Sunni Muslims make up another 32 to 37 percent of the population.

Approximately three percent of the overall population is composed of Christians, Yezidis, Sabean-Mandaean, Bahais, Shabaks, Kakais and a very small number of Jews.

Christian leaders estimate that there are between 400,000 and 850,000 Christians. Approximately two-thirds are Chaldeans (Eastern rite Catholics), nearly one-fifth are Assyrians (Church of the East) and the remainder are Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenians (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), Anglicans and Protestants. Evangelical Christians reportedly number approximately 5,000.

Yezidi leaders report that most of the 500,000 to 700,000 Yezidis reside in the north, with 15 percent in Dahuk Province and the rest based in Ninewa Province. Shabak leaders state that there are 200,000 to 500,000 Shabaks, who reside mainly near Mosul in Ninewa Province. Estimates of the size of the Sabean-Mandaean community vary widely; according to Sabean-Mandaean leaders, about 4,000 remain in the country, generally along the Tigris and its tributaries. According to a leader in the Sabean-Mandaean community in Basrah, the Sabean-Mandaean population in Basrah has fallen dramatically over the last decade to an estimated 500-750 people. The Baha'i leadership reports fewer than 2,000 members, spread throughout the country in small groups.

The Iraqi Constitution recognises Islam as the official state religion. Article 2 of the Constitution states that Islam is the 'basic source of legislation' and that 'no law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam.'

Government laws and regulations forbid the conversion of Muslims to other religions and require conversion of minor children to Islam if either parent converts to Islam. Laws also outlaw the practice of some faiths and override religious tenets of individuals adhering to non-Muslim faiths. The country's civil and penal codes do not contain legal remedies or penalties for conversion from Islam. According to many scholars, the 2006 Constitution of Iraq binds the new state to upholding both the freedom of religion and the principles of Islam, which includes capital punishment for leaving Islam.

Sectarian violence throughout Iraq has escalated to levels not seen in years. Efforts have been made by the Iraqi government to limit religious violence, including the improved portrayal of minority religious groups in text books and added security for religious sites. However, such efforts have proven to be insufficient. Out of fear, many Christians have fled the country in recent years. The majority of

sectarian violence is between Shi'a Muslims and Sunni Muslims as well as violence by Muslims against Christians. Other minority groups, such as the Yezidi, are also victims of violent attacks.

Some Incidents

Violence against Shiite Muslims

On 3rd January 2013, 17 people were killed and 47 wounded by a car bomb south of Baghdad. They were among the many who were travelling to Karbala to finish commemorations for a revered figure in Shiite Islam. The attack occurred despite a massive security operation to safeguard the millions of pilgrims heading to and from the city.

On 21st May, a bomb attack against two Shiite mosques in Hilla killed at least nine people and wounded 53 others. Just the day before, car bombs and shootings killed at least 61 others in mostly Shiite areas. Citizens are concerned that al-Qaida is behind the attacks and may again be the cause of much violence.

July was the month of greatest violence in Iraq, with 875 killed and 1992 wounded.

Within the first 10 days of August, 230 people were killed and 664 wounded.

On 10th August, Iraq experienced its worst day of violence in 2013 with at least 91 people killed and more than 300 wounded.

On 11th August, several bomb blasts killed 60 people and wounded hundreds of others across the country as Muslims celebrated Eid, marking the end of Ramadan. Shiite neighbourhoods were the main targets, leading to fear of growing Shia-Sunni violence. The explosions were likely coordinated, as they occurred within an hour of each other.

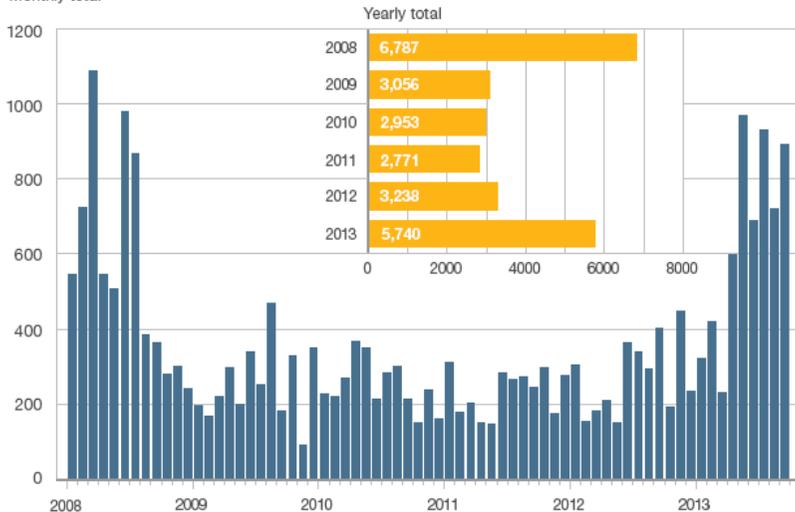
Violence against Christians

18th March marked the 10th anniversary of the Iraq war. Ten years on Christians are still being forced to leave their homes. Some reports claim Christians have suffered more than any other minority group since the fall of Saddam Hussein. The country had been home to 800,000 Christians; now the number is fewer than 400,000.

In July 2013, within the space of a month, five churches in Kirkuk were bombed. Most of the violence is against church buildings and church leaders. Many Christians have been told to convert to Islam, leave or be killed. The Christian community is now around a quarter of the size it was in 1990.

Civilian deaths in Iraq 2008-2013

Monthly total



Source: UN Assistance Mission to Iraq

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24370037>

Trends & Analysis

In 2013, the level of indiscriminate killings caused by sectarian violence in Iraq spiked to levels not seen since 2008. Nickolay Mladenov, the UN Special Representative for Iraq, has characterised these killings as ‘senseless’ and has called upon the Iraqi leadership to ‘take together the necessary bold steps to bring an end to the current mayhem and to foil attempts by terrorists to destroy the social fabric of the Iraqi society.’

Most of these attacks have taken place in Baghdad and have targeted Shiite communities, although violence in other cities and against other religious groups is also in evidence.

The Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Baghdad, Louis Raphael I Sako, noted that more than 1000 Christians have been killed in Iraq since 2003. Others have been kidnapped and tortured. Sixty-two churches and monasteries have been attacked. The Archbishop pointed towards the rise of political Islam as one of the major opponents of the Church in the Middle East. He indicated that the US-led invasion of Iraq destroyed the country and was replaced by a period of sectarian violence.

The escalation of violence in 2013 was largely due to increased efforts of Al Qaeda, the unstable situation in Syria and a political regime that is poorly equipped to respond to increasingly sophisticated attacks. There is a fear by some that the country will fall back into a sectarian civil war.

To avert a return to war, the Iraqi government would do well to work closely with all religious minorities to ensure equal representation throughout the country. More must be done to prevent violence by tackling religious prejudice and hate

Limiting or preventing hate crime is not enough. More policies must be implemented that increase inter-communal harmony and reconciliation. This will not be easy in the present situation, but an unavoidable task for ensuring the country's future.

KAZAKHSTAN

Approximately 65 percent of the 16.9 million people in Kazakhstan are Muslim, the majority being Sunni of the Hanafi School. Other Islamic groups include Shafi'i Sunni, Shia, Sufi and Ahmadi. The highest concentration of self-identified practicing Muslims is in the southern region bordering Uzbekistan.

Orthodox Christians constitute approximately 24.6 percent of the population. Other groups, constituting less than 5 percent of the population, include Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Mennonites, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jews, Buddhists, Hare Krishnas, Bahais, Christian Scientists, Scientologists, members of Grace Church, New Life Church and the Unification Church.

There are approximately 3,088 registered religious organizations, representing 17 different confessions, but a significant number of religious groups have been denied registration.

Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses are the most targeted religious groups. Council of Churches Baptists refuse to register on theological grounds, as they did during the time of the Soviet Union. For this reason, this group is particularly targeted for raids, arrests, heavy fines, suppression of religious literature and short prison terms. In 1961, the Council of Churches split from the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, which has no objection to registering its congregations.

When a religious group is not registered, all its activities are illegal: religious services and prayer meetings in public places and in private homes, distribution of religious literature, proselytising and other related activities.

Some Incidents

Repression of Muslims

Kazakh authorities approved and facilitated the extradition in March 2013 of 38-year-old **Khayrullo Tursunov** to his native Uzbekistan to be tried for 'extremist' religious activity. Tursunov and his family had escaped to Kazakhstan in 2009 for fear of being arrested for praying outside of state-authorized mosques. Tursunov's wife and children have been granted refugee status in a third country. In June, Tursunov was sentenced to 12 years in prison and is presently serving out his prison sentence in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

On 12th September, the Regional Inter-District Economic Court upheld the decision to close down the Tatar-Bashkir Mosque, possibly the country's last remaining independent and publicly-accessible mosque. Community members continue to gather for prayers at the 19th century mosque, despite their diminished numbers, as they continue to challenge the court decision.

Repression of Christians

On 11th January, prosecutors informed **Yuri Bronitsky** and **Fedor Karabeinikov** of Almaty's Council of Churches Baptist congregation that they would face trial under Administrative Code Article 375, Part 1. The date of the trial was not specified in the communication.

On 20th January, on the suspicion of moving and storing religious literature, police raided the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Petropavlovsk, North Kazakhstan. The pastor of the church was accused of violating Administrative Code Article 374-1, Part 1 ('Leading, participating in or financing an unregistered, halted or banned social or religious organisation') and fined 100 MFIs. This amount represents just over nine months' official minimum monthly wage.

On the same day, police raided another three meetings:

- The Sunday meeting of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Taiynsha, North Kazakhstan. The pastor was fined 100 MFIs for likewise violating Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 1.
- The Sunday meeting of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Kishkenekol, North Kazakhstan. All in attendance were questioned and the pastor was fined 100 MFIs for violating Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 1.
- The Sunday meeting of the New Life Protestant Church in Satpaev, Qaraghandy Region. The people were questioned and filmed, as police claimed the church had broken laws by meeting at a different location from where they are registered.

•
On 21st January, Aktobe's Specialised Administrative Court fined Baptist **Dana Abykenov** 50 MFIs under Article 375, Part 1 for offering Christian books to passers-by on the streets of Aktobe in late November 2012. Police confiscated the books and did not return them.

On 20th March, police raided a Baptist service in Oskemen, capital of East Kazakhstan, for refusal to register their church with the state. A special administrative court found the pastor,

Vitaly Krasilnikov, guilty under Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 1. Krasilnikov received the maximum fine of 100 MFIs or 173,000 Tenge. The pastor has since then lodged an appeal.

On 31st March, several Easter services of Pentecostal churches were raided:

- Officials and police raided the Easter service of a New Life Pentecostal Church in Stepnogorsk, Akmola Region, saying that the visiting Pastor **Igor Andreikin** did not have permission to preach there.

- In the East Kazakhstan Region, the police raided the Easter service of seven mostly elderly Pentecostal church members. The congregants were initially accused of storing drugs. **Aleksandr Balaev** was fined the equivalent of six months of his pension. Another person suffered a heart attack due to the stress incurred during the raid.
- A gathering of the New Life Pentecostal Church was raided in Zhaskent, East Kazakhstan Region. A few days later, the nine church members had to go to the local police station and make statements regarding their unregistered religious activity and the storing and use of narcotics. They were interrogated for six hours.

On 18th April, following the Easter raids on Pentecostal churches, four church members were found guilty and fined 50 MFIs fines under Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 2 ("Participation in the activity of an unregistered or banned social or religious organisation").

On 19th April, three more Pentecostal church members were found guilty of similar offenses. Two were fined 50 MFIs under the same administrative code article. **Aleksandr Balaev**, was fined 100 MFIs for his leadership role in the community.

On 20th April, a court in the northern Akmola region ordered the destruction of 121 religious books confiscated from **Vyacheslav Cherkasov**, a Baptist. The books had been confiscated in 2012 in Shchüinsk, Northern Kazakhstan when Cherkasov was arrested for distributing Christian literature to passers-by.

In May, Baptist leader **Aleksei Asetov** was jailed for three days for refusing to pay a fine equivalent to a year and a half's average wage for leading a worship service without state permission.

On 17th May, **Bakhytzhán Kashkumbaev**, a convert from Islam and pastor of Grace Protestant Church in Astana, was arrested and ordered to be held in the Interior Ministry's Investigation Isolation Prison, pending investigation of charges that he had tried to give an hallucinogenic drug to one of his church members. He was charged under Art. 233-1, Part 1 of the Criminal Code: 'Propaganda of terrorism and extremism, or public calls to commit an act of terrorism or extremism, as well as the distribution of material of the content indicated.'

He was detained for 2 months in Almaty Psychiatric Clinic after his first arrest. On the day of his release from 4-months detention, he was re-arrested and prosecuted on the ground of extremism.

On 25th May, secret police raided the Almaty premises of the state-registered charitable organisation United Mercy in Central Asia. Police seized religious literature and documentation on the organisation's operations. The charity workers were questioned after the raid.

In June, members of the Council of Churches Baptists who refused to pay fines were barred from leaving the country until their outstanding fines had been paid.

On 6th June, Baptists **Sergei Kulikov** and **Maksim Kandyba** were fined 86,550 Tenge each under Admin. Code Article 374-1, Part 2, following raids on religious services in East Kazakhstan Region on 28th April and 12th May.

On 10th June, a judge found **Ivan Isakovich Yantsen** in violation of Admin. Code Art. 374.1, Part 1. Yantsen, a minister of the church in Temirtau, was fined 173,100 Tenge.

On the same day, **Nail Agatanov**, **Sergei Pelipenko** and **Marina Kulikova**, all Baptists, were fined 86,550 Tenge under Admin. Code Article 374-1, Part 2.

On 14th and 17th June, eight members of a Baptist Church in Taskala were fined in separate cases. Police filmed them during a raid while they were attending a Sunday worship service on 12th May in the West Kazakhstan Region. **Aleksandr Yalimov** was fined 173,100 Tenge under Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 1. The others, **Natalya Yalimova**, **Malika Sultangaliyeva**, **Gaukhar Sultangaliyeva**, **Tatyana Sultangaliyeva**, **Tatyana Osipova**, **Yelena Zagaychuk** and **Gulmira Ismagulova** were each fined 86,550 Tenge under Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 2. On 27th June, **Sofia Iosifovna Buniak** of the International Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was convicted in Ekibastuz for her activities in an unregistered religious association.

On 16th July, **Aleksandr Gorbunov** of Astrakhan, Akmola Region, was fined 173,100 Tenge under Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 1.

On 30th July, **Vyacheslav Flotch** was fined 86,550 Tenge under Admin. Code Art. 374-1, Part 2, following a police raid on 16th June on a Baptist service in the village of Zaporozhye.

On 10th November, police officers and journalists in Oral, Uralsk, West Kazakhstan Region, raided the Council of Churches Baptist congregation's worship. They interrupted the meeting and journalists started filming without authorisation. Ten individuals - **Sergei Krasnov**, **Ivan Isayev**, **Serkali Kumargaliev**, **Vladimir Nelepin**, **Aleksandr Nelepin**, **Andrei Labinsky**, **Nikolai Novikov**, **Kenzhetai Baytinov**, **Vladimir Trifonov** and **Anatoli Lazarenko** - are all facing trial for administrative offences.

In December two Protestants in Astana were fined the equivalent of four weeks' average wages for the possession of Christian texts considered 'extremist' by the court.

Harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses

On 15th January, the Aktau Administrative Court found two Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of conducting "missionary activity" under Admin. Code Art. 375, Part 3. **Nadezhda Shefer** and **Natalia Lashova** were each fined 100 MFIs.

On 16th January, Jehovah's Witness **Dmitry Bukin** lost his appeal of an earlier decision that had found him guilty of illegal missionary activity under Admin. Code Art. 375, Part 3. Representatives from several foreign embassies attended the appeal proceedings, which fined him 100 MFIs.

On 20th January, police raided the weekly meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Esilm, Aknola Region. Written statements were taken from the participants.

On 24th January, local officials and police disrupted a meeting of nine Jehovah's Witnesses as they gathered in a private home in Karazhal, Karaganda Region. The police arrested them, took statements and confiscated their religious literature.

On 27th January, local officials and police disrupted a private meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Sarykol, Kostanay Region. Written statements were taken from the seven in attendance. Police took three of them to the local police station, where they were interrogated and then forced to sign a statement prepared by the police.

On 30th January, several police officers detained Jehovah's Witnesses **Andrei Rakin** and **Andrei Korolev** in Kokshetau, Akmola Region. Police alleged they were engaged in unregistered missionary activity and seized their personal Bibles and other religious literature.

On 18th February, **Anatoli Lunev** was summoned to the Kentau police station, South Kazakhstan, where a statement was taken regarding Jehovah's Witness services in Kentau.

On 26th February, police detained two Jehovah's Witnesses in Kokshetau and seized their religious literature used for engaging in missionary activity.

On 6th April, police raided, searched and seized the private library of a Jehovah's Witness who was holding a service attended by approximately 40 people in the small town of Karabalyk, Kostanai Region. The police filmed those in attendance and demanded statements from all of them.

On 6th June, **Zarina Burova** was fined for 'illegal missionary activity' after inviting friends by text message to attend a meeting of registered Jehovah's Witnesses. Atyrau's Terrorism Police had carried out investigative actions and established that Burova had carried out missionary activity since 2011 among members of the Kazakh Society of the Deaf.

On 11th July, **Tatyana Degterenko** of Akmola Region's Astrakhan District was fined the equivalent of one month's average salary (86,550 Tenge) under Article 375 for her 9-year-old son's 'illegal religious activity' in his school.

On 29th August, Jehovah's Witnesses filed nine separate complaints to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Geneva on behalf of 15 individuals punished under Admin. Code Art. 375, Part 3. Three of the applications concerned raids on meetings, considered 'missionary activity' by officials. The remaining six were for

arrests carried out on the grounds of 'missionary activity' for simply speaking about religious beliefs with interested persons.

Prison Sentence for an Atheist

On 14th March, activist **Alexander Kharlamov** was arrested following an ongoing investigation into his writings for a local newspaper *Flash!* and for his campaign activities against corruption. In 2012 a court expert had produced a report concluding that Kharlamov's writings on religion contained 'negative information aimed at inciting religious hatred and discord.' On 17th March, the court ruled that he was 'socially harmful' and therefore to be held in pre-trial detention for an unspecified period. Kharlamov was imprisoned in the Investigation Prison in Oskemen.

Trends & Analysis

Historically Kazakhstan has been a crossroad, a place of meeting and dialogue of different religions, cultures and civilizations of the East and West. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country was considered one of the most liberal in Central Asia in regard to religious freedom.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan declares the country a secular state and guarantees freedom of religion to all its citizens. However, conditions for religious tolerance have severely deteriorated in recent years, especially since the adoption of the 2011 Law on Religion. The law imposes restrictions on religious organisations and their activities by compelling these groups to re-register under a new and complex set of requirements. The result has been a sharp drop in the number of registered religious organisations. All unregistered groups are thereby banned and the activities of registered groups have been restricted.

The Law on Religion has attracted criticism from the EU, civil society and religious communities as well as from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Of particular concern is the distinction drawn between traditional and non-traditional religions, which the government says is necessary to protect citizens from the dangerous effects of sects. Kazakh authorities also cite the need to monitor the activities of civil society and religious groups in order to stop the potential spread of political and religious extremism.

New legislation also prohibits political parties based on religious affiliation, widely viewed as an attempt to limit the political empowerment of religious groups and to mitigate government opposition. The government's official support of the Russian Orthodox Church and sponsorship of the Muslim Board, through which all Muslim communities are required to register, are ultimately strategies of control. Security forces are deployed with broad powers to suppress organisations that it brands 'terrorist.'

Aggression, raids, short-term detentions and exorbitant fines are used to intimidate any group that meets without state permission. Other offenses include the sale and distribution of religious literature. Such restrictive policies and the systematic harassment of non-traditional religious groups constitute a serious challenge to religious freedom in Kazakhstan which merits the attention of the international community.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a multi-confessional state where the dominant religion is Islam. According to the 2010 Population and Houses Census, 61.3% of the population practice Islam, 19.8% Buddhism, 9.2% Christianity, 6.3% Hinduism and 1.3% Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions. Although the country has a secular constitution, professing Islam is a constitutional requirement for being a Malay citizen. Religion has indeed ethnic bases, with most Muslims being Malays, and the government promotes Sunni Islam above all the other religions.

The country's law allows conversion to other faiths for those who have reached an age of majority. However, Muslims face obstacles if they wish to leave the Islamic faith and convert to another religion. Moreover, the legal process of conversion is not clearly established. A Muslim that wants to convert to another religion may be punished by the government.

The country maintains two parallel legal systems, the secular justice system and Sharia system, which rules on religion, family and some criminal issues involving Muslims. The secular courts have ruled they do not have authority to intervene in disputes over conversion. The Shariah courts have ruled that ethnic Malays must remain Muslims. Moreover, children born to Muslim parents are considered to be Muslims. If a non-Muslim wishes to marry a Muslim, the person must convert to Islam before the marriage can be considered valid.

With the exception of Islamic places of worship, the state controls the buildings of other religions and since 1998 authorities started a demolition programme of unregistered Hindu temples and shrines. The decision was implemented without a prior public debate and it has raised concerns among the Indian population.

In general, the government supports the Islamic religious establishment and it is the official policy to 'infuse Islamic values' into the country's administration.

Some Incidents

Hostility toward Christians

On 1st January, Sharafuddin Idris Shah, the Sultan of Selangor, issued a fatwa prohibiting non-Muslims from using the word 'Allah' in Arabic. According to the sultan mandate, strict actions should be taken by the Islamic Council of Selangor and the Islamic Affairs department against those who question the fatwa.

On 22nd January, a Christian priest in Butterworth received a note which said that a Bible-burning festival would take place in the town's public park on Sunday [27th January]. The note, written in Malay, ended with an intimidating warning in English: 'Let's teach 'em a lesson.'

On 23rd January, the Malaysia's Bar Council claimed that the independent member of parliament **Ibrahim Ali** should be prosecuted for his call for a mass burning of Bibles. Ibrahim Ali is the head of Perkasa, a group which supports the rights of the ethnic Malay majority. He incited Muslims to seize and burn copies of Bibles in which the term Allah is used to refer to God.

On 19th July, after prayers at the mosque, dozens of Islamists marched to the Vatican's mission in Kuala Lumpur, calling for the dismissal of the Roman cleric who had said Christians could use the Arabic word Allah to describe God. The Islamist protesters were supported by hard-line organisations trying to increase the use of Sharia law in the country. **Joseph Marino**, the Papal Nuncio to Malaysia, declared his support of the Christian Federation of Malaysia's decision to use the Arabic word 'Allah' for God, saying that it was logical and acceptable. Some Muslims protested, and the Malaysian government summoned Marino on July 16th to discuss the issue.

On 25th July, prosecutors demanded a three-month sentence for **Abdul Aziz Bin Naimun**, a man who threatened to kill the pastor of Bekasi's embattled Christian Protestant Church (HKBP). During a tense Easter protest by hard-line Islamists outside the congregation's shuttered church, the man threatened **Pastor Palti Panjaitan**. According to witnesses, he told the pastor 'Palti, I'm going to cut your throat,' while swiping his fingers across his neck, while other protesters threw rotten eggs and cow faeces at churchgoers.

On 14th October, a Malaysian court's decision ruled that non-Muslims cannot use the word 'Allah' anymore to refer to God. The High Court had granted Catholics in 2009 the right to use the term Allah. The decision caused discontent among Muslims, who consider the word exclusive to Islam. Christians are now complaining that for decades they had used the word 'Allah' to refer also to the Christian God, and that the decision violates their religious freedom.

Controversial Issues with Hindus and Buddhists

On 24th June, local Hindu temples complained about the administrative problems they face on the side of the Department of Immigration and Ministry of Home Affairs concerning their applications for bringing Hindu priests and musicians from India to Malaysia. In the country there are approximately 2,300 Hindu temples, but only 600 local and 250 foreign priests are serving in these temples at the moment. It means there is a shortage of about 1,500 priests in the country.

On 25th July, a High Court in the northern city of Ipoh ruled against the 2009 conversion of Hindu children, now aged five, 15 and 16, by their father after he converted to Islam. The three children were converted to Islam without their mother's knowledge. The mother, a kindergarten teacher in her late 30s, lost custody of them after her husband's change of religion. The Malaysian Sharia law, which governs civil matters for Muslims, states that a non-Muslim parent cannot

share custody of converted children. The court's decision was welcomed by non-Muslims groups.

On 12th August, media reported on a video uploaded to YouTube the week before which allegedly showed Buddhist tourists using a surau (Muslim place of worship) in the Johor resort for prayers. This led to the arrest of the resort manager under section 295 of the Penal Code, 'injuring or defiling a place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class.'

On 13th August, the Johor religious authorities considered the idea of demolishing Tanjung Sutera Resort's surau, because it had been used by non-Muslims to host their religious activities. Datuk Nooh Gadut, Johor Islamic Religious Council (MAINJ) advisor, explained that according to the Quran, if such a sacred place had knowingly been used for activities outside the Islamic faith, it should be taken down: 'The most sacred places on Earth are mosques and surau. Accordingly, they are not allowed to be used to carry out religious activities other than for Islam and if a surau is found to have hosted other religious activities, it can be demolished based on surah At-Taubah verse 107 (in the Quran).'

Trends & Analysis

Although the Malaysian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the ability of non-Sunni Muslims to practise their faiths is restricted by government interference. Islam is the state religion and is strongly supported by the government. In spite of the presence of two parallel justice systems, Sharia courts are acquiring greater jurisdictional control compared to the secular civil and criminal court system.

Authorities also limit the freedom of expression of religious minorities through the use of detention and demolition of non-Muslim places of worship, seizure and ban of religious material. All religious groups in Malaysia receive financial support from the government. However, authorities make funding decisions in an arbitrary fashion, thereby non-Muslim places of worship are poorly funded compared to Muslim institutions. The government also intervenes denying or delaying the construction and the renewal of religious buildings.

Converts face not only the hostility of authorities; they are also targeted by society and are often subjected to stigmatisation and social pressure.

At the moment, the most controversial and sensitive issue regarding freedom of religion in the country is the government ban against the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims to refer to God. The government fears that the use of Allah by others would confuse Muslims and could be used to convert them, but Christians contend that they have used the word for centuries to refer to their God. This stand-off has increased religious intolerance, especially toward the Christian community. However, Christians are not the only group who are victimised: in recent years anti-Hindu feelings are also growing among Malaysian Muslims.

The 2013 electoral victory of the conservative Barisan Nasional coalition, albeit by a narrow margin, doesn't bode well for a country which is trying to come to terms with religious tensions. Najib Razak's campaign was based on a strong hostility toward religious minorities, especially Christians, including bans against churches.

NIGERIA

Nigeria is the most populous African country, having about 170 million inhabitants. The three main ethnic groups are the Hausa, who are mainly Muslim, the Igbo, mainly Christian, and the Yoruba, whose members are more or less equally divided between the two faiths. Islam (50.4%) and Christianity (48.2%) are the main religions of Nigeria. The country's geography represents this division, with the North mainly Muslim, the South predominantly Christian.

Since the return to democracy in 1999, there has been a surge of ethnic and religious violence, resulting in some 14,000 deaths, many thousands of displaced people and the destruction of hundreds of buildings, religious sites and private homes. The states which have suffered the most from religion-related violence are Plateau, Bauchi and Kaduna.

Boko Haram, a terrorist organisation committed to eradicating Western influence in Nigeria, is particularly relevant to the prevalence of interreligious violence. Indeed, the very name of the organization means 'Western education is forbidden'.

The group was founded in 2001 as an indigenous terrorist group, but since 2009 it has taken on a Jihadist tone and is linked by several analysts to Al-Qaida in the Maghreb. The group operates mainly in the North and in the Middle Belt, with its aim of establishing Shari'a law throughout the country through the use of terror, killings and suicide attacks. Boko Haram's targets are not limited to Christians and the Nigerian authorities; Muslims who criticize Boko Haram are also targeted.

On 6th August 2013, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) determined that there is 'a reasonable basis to believe' that Boko Haram has committed crimes against humanity as stipulated in the Rome Statute, which established the ICC.

Some Incidents

Attacks against Christians

On 23th February, six died and many were injured in an attack by an unknown gunman on the predominately Christian village of Aduwan Gida in Zangon Katab, Southern Kaduna. Although the attacker remains unidentified, the assault resembles other violent acts by Boko Haram.

On 15th May, Pentecostal pastor **Faye Pama Musa** was shot dead in his Maiduguri home by two suspected Boko Haram members. Musa was secretary of the Borno State chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria. Several people were killed last year in the same town by Boko Haram.

On 29th July, police reported that 12 people died after multiple explosions in the Sabon Gari area of Kano State, where many Christians reside. Witnesses claimed there were many more deaths in the attack. The hardest hit was Christ Salvation

Pentecostal Church, where bombs were detonated during an evening worship service. No group has claimed responsibility for the blasts, but it is widely believed that Boko Haram was responsible.

On 25-26th September, in the northeastern state of Borno, suspected Boko Haram attackers raided the town of Gamboru twice. The first attack killed six. The second killed a further 21.

On 26th September, gunmen killed **Rev. Augustine Yohana**, a pastor, and two of his sons in Garinbaba, Nigeria's northeastern state of Yobe, then set their home and church building ablaze.

On 28th September, in the central state of Kaduna, gunmen moved into the town of Zangang in the early-morning hours, burned homes and killed 15 people. Then, at about 1:30 am Sunday, about 30 gunmen stormed the Agricultural College campus in Gujba, Yobe State. They roused the sleeping students, gathered them into a single place and shot them. News accounts vary about the number of students killed, initially putting the death toll between 40 and 50 and later increasing it to 65. Some of the college buildings were set on fire. The Northern States Governors Forum suspects Boko Haram of the attack.

On 26th November, about 40 people were killed in coordinated attacks on Monday night in four Christian-dominated villages in the central Nigerian State of Plateau. The assailants, believed to be Fulanis, attacked the Berom communities in the villages of Katu Kapang, Daron, Tul and Rawuru. The incident was confirmed by local authorities, although they did not confirm the identity of the attackers.

Attacks against Muslims

On 11th August, at least 44 people were shot dead at a mosque in Konduga, a town located 35 km from the Maiduguri. The killings took place during dawn prayers. The gunmen are suspected of being from Boko Haram.

Trends & Analysis

Whilst fewer attacks on Christians and Muslims can be attributed to Boko Haram in 2013, it is unclear whether this represents a longer-term trend or a temporary easing of the group's bloody campaign to gain control of the country's northern region. In either case, the central government must bear responsibility for failing to ensure the security of its citizens in Boko Haram affected areas. Even more damning is the Nigerian government's unwillingness to prosecute these crimes. This has undoubtedly served to prolong the violence and contributed to an overall climate of impunity. The ICC's expressed interest in Nigeria's situation is therefore a welcome development.

The roots of Boko Haram violence are not easy to identify. The organisation has declared its objective to impose Sharia law in Nigeria. However, it is impossible to separate Boko Haram's actions from the deep territorial divisions within the country itself. Although the violence is not purely religious in nature, the results are undoubtedly religious freedom violations. Religion and religious identity are intertwined in Nigeria with ethnic, political, economic and social controversies. These can be misused by politicians, religious leaders or others to rouse their constituencies for political gain or other purposes.

The result has been a deepening mistrust and hostility between religions. For example, Boko Haram violence has triggered more clashes between Hausa Muslims and Igbo Christians in the Middle Belt. The advancing Sahara desert has increased the southward flow of cattle-herding Hausa from the North, who are predominantly Muslim, thereby stirring up conflicts with the established Igbo Christians in the South.

These clashes may appear religious in nature but are in fact more about control of land resources. Aggravating this situation is the fact that Nigerian law establishes a different standard for rights and opportunities for indigenous people in the South and for settlers coming from the North. This situation can only lead to more frustration and tensions. More decisive leadership is urgently needed from the central government to not only respond to the recurrent incidents of violence but to also address legal structures and government priorities that sustain this crisis.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan has a population of 193 million. Islam is the state religion and is practiced by up to 96% of the people. The Muslim majority is mainly made up of Sunni Muslims (85-90%) with 10- 20% belonging to the Shi'a community. Approximately 4% comprise other minority religious communities, such as Christian, Hindus, and Sikhs. Ahmadis are estimated to comprise 3-4 million Pakistanis, and the community considers themselves part of the Muslim majority. Social pressure is such that very few persons (less than 0.5 percent) claim to have no religious affiliation or to adhere to a particular religious group.

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees all citizens the freedom to 'profess, practice and propagate their religion subject to law, public order and morality;' however, religious freedom in Pakistan is gravely threatened by laws that have been enacted which limit the freedom of minorities. These include blasphemy laws, the anti-Ahmadi laws and the Hudood Ordinances.

Much attention has been given to efforts to repeal Pakistan's infamous blasphemy laws, which have repeatedly been applied in an unjust and arbitrary fashion against the country's Christian population. In late May, a Pakistani senior judge issued a report suggesting that violence against Christians could be reduced by modifying the country's blasphemy laws and implementing sanctions for those who exaggerate blasphemy accusations. The maximum penalty for blasphemy under Pakistani law is death.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 34 people were charged with blasphemy last year. A government statistic says 27 were charged in 2012. At least 16 people are currently on death row for blasphemy, while another 20 are serving life sentences, according to Human Rights Watch.

Ahmadiya is an Islamic reformist movement, founded toward the end of the 19th century. Although Pakistan is the home of the largest Ahmadi population in the world, a 1974 amendment to the Pakistani Constitution declares that they cannot be considered Muslims. In addition, an ordinance passed in 1984 made it illegal for Ahmadis to declare themselves Muslims and also prohibited them from using Islamic greetings in public places or calling their place of worship "mosques". To obtain a passport, Ahmadis have to declare that their founder is a false prophet.

The Hudood Ordinance, decreed in 1979 by the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, authorises severe punishment for offenses such as extra-marital sex, adultery, theft and alcohol consumption. The law effectively institutionalises Sharia provisions for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It has had a particularly severe impact on women, who can be jailed after being raped. The Women's Protection Bill in 2006 aimed to repeal this act, but a 2010 ruling of the Federal Sharia Court declared the Women's Protection Bill unconstitutional.

Violence against minority populations was clearly on the rise in the period leading up to the May 2013 elections. More than 200 people were killed and hundreds more wounded in bomb and suicide attacks during the first part of the year.

Some Incidents

Attacks on Ahmadis

On 11th July, Ahmadis in Fatehpur, Gujrat district, were beaten and ejected from their place of worship during Ramadan by the local government and clerics. The Ahmadis filed a complaint with the police, but the case was not registered and their request for protection was ignored.

On 21st August, **Zahoor Ahmad Kiyani**, a 40-year-old Ahmadi resident of Mujahid Colony, Karachi, was gunned down outside his home by two unidentified motorcyclists.

On 31st August, an Ahmadi doctor was murdered in his Landhi (Karachi) clinic. The 55-year-old homeopathy doctor, **Syed Tahir Ahmad**, was shot while seeing patients. The killers entered the clinic pretending to be his patients and then shot at him. He succumbed to his wounds while being taken to hospital.

On 4th September, **Ijaz Ahmad**, a 36-year-old Ahmadi, was killed in Orangi Town, Karachi. He was shot at point blank range by two unidentified motorcyclists on his way to work. He died while being transported to hospital.

On 12th September, a young person threw acid on Dr **Qazi Munawwar**, an active member of the Ahmadi community in Gowalmandi, Lahore. Fortunately, the injury was not serious.

On 18th September, **Ijaz Kiyani** was shot dead in Orangi Town by unknown assailants on a motorcycle while he was going to work. He was shot six times.

On 21st September, in Sialkot, Lahore, police demolished minarets at an Ahmadi place of worship. A local cleric had complained that the building could not be identified as a mosque, as Ahmadis were not really Muslims. Other complainants demanded that the police take the same action against two other places of worship. On 29th December, a one-and-a-half-year-old infant, who had died the day before was taken by her Ahmadi family for burial in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab Province. At the cemetery, local clerics and other Muslims residents armed with sticks and batons prevented them from burying the child in the common graveyard because she was born to an Ahmadi family. Four days later, the girl was finally buried on a piece of land that a local non-Ahmadi Muslim donated to the family. Two days before this incident, a woman in Faisalabad, who was married to an Ahmadi, was likewise barred from burial.

Attacks on Christians

On 4th February, **Younas Masih**, a 55-year-old Christian, died from gunshot wounds from an attack two days earlier as he was returning home from work. Co-workers had recently tried to convince him to convert to Islam, and he had refused. Mr Masih' son attempted to file an incident report with local police, but the police refused to register his complaint.

On 9th March, a huge mob forced Christians to flee the area surrounding Joseph Colony, Lahore, Punjab Province. The mob ransacked, looted and burned two churches and many homes after a case of alleged blasphemy was filed against **Sarwan Masiha**, a local Christian. Bibles and a cross were also burned.

On 3rd June, three Christian women, **Arshad Bibi**, **Sajida Bibi** and **Sauriya Bibi**, were attacked, beaten and paraded naked by a group of armed men who had broken into their home at night while their husbands were at work. Neighbours intervened to stop the attack, but they were threatened if they were to make a complaint to the police.

On 10th June, 18-year-old **Adnan Masih**, a Christian resident of Sharaqpur Sharif District, Sheikhpura, Punjab Province, died in police custody after being tortured during ten days of illegal imprisonment. Mr Masih had been falsely accused of being romantically involved with a Muslim woman who had gone missing. He was beaten, tortured and then hung in the bathroom to appear like a suicide. The perpetrators were later exonerated of any wrongdoing in the incident.

On 21st June, a Catholic boy named **Sam**, 8 years old, was accused by a Muslim man of having insulted his daughter. The man had links to an extremist group which has been banned by the government. He went to the boy's father to complain. A heated argument ensued and police were called, resulting in the arrest of Sam's 12-year-old brother. He was later released.

On 23rd June, a young Muslim, **Muhammad Naeem**, entered the compound of the Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in Quetta, climbed onto the roof of the church and damaged the cross with a hammer. Those nearby were able to stop him and the police arrested him. The man had previously entered the church threatening the Christians present and insulting Jesus Christ.

On 27th July, 45-year-old **Ishaq Masih**, a Christian resident of a village in the Okara district near Lahore, was shot dead in front of his young sons by Muhammad Luqman, also known as Ranjha. Local Christians refused to bury Masih for three days until police finally agreed to register the murder, arrest two of the suspects and conduct an autopsy. Masih was at last buried, but Ranjha remains free and no charges were brought.

On 22nd September, in northwest Pakistan at least 78 people were killed and another 120 wounded in a double suicide bomb attack on a church in the city of

Peshawar. The two bombers blew themselves up as worshippers were leaving the church.

On 27th October, a Muslim man in Thatta Faqirullah, Wazirabad, purchase fireworks in a Christian-owned store for a wedding party. Once the guests opened the package, they discovered that the powders had been wrapped in pages containing verses from the Koran. Attendees of the wedding party then proceeded to destroy the store. The store owners, **Arif Masih** and **Tariq Masih**, buy fireworks from a factory and do not manufacture them. The two men have since left the area with their families.

At the end of October, **Asia Masih** moved into her new rented house in Punjab and began to burn in the garden some rubbish left by the previous tenant. Two Muslim students noticed some pages written in Arabic and accused her of burning pages of the Koran. The intervention of Muslim and Christian leaders allowed the peaceful and positive resolution of the situation; however, the woman has gone into hiding for fear of retaliation.

Blasphemy Charges

On 28th January, Judge Javed Ahmed of the Bahawalpur High Court found the Christian **Barkat Masih** not guilty of blasphemy after he had spent 18 months in prison. He had been arrested after being accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

On 14th March, the family of **Rimsha Masih**, the young Christian girl who was accused of blasphemy in 2012, left Pakistan to take up residence in Canada. The family had gone into hiding after an appeals court acquitted the girl of the charges. On 3rd April, the High Court of Lahore overturned the death sentence of **Younis Masih** for blasphemy after almost 8 years in jail. The 35-year-old Christian had been sentenced in 2005 by a lower court after requesting a group of Muslims to sing more quietly during a religious gathering late at night. The group became angry with him and beat him unconscious. Muslim leaders then incited mobs to burn Christians' homes and accused Masih of blasphemy and insulting the Prophet. Police arrested Masih and filed the blasphemy charges in an attempt to pacify the mobs.

In June, **Asia Bibi's** sentence was postponed once again by the Lahore High Court. Bibi was charged for blasphemy and has been imprisoned since 29th June 2009, after her neighbours in a village near Nankana Sahib accused her of making insulting remarks about the Prophet. First sentenced to death in November 2010, Bibi remains on death row at a woman's prison in Multan.

On 13th July, a Punjab court sentenced a Christian man from Punjab, **Sajjad Masih**, to life imprisonment and a fine of \$2,000 for sending blasphemous SMS messages in 2011 to Muslim clerics. He was later acquitted of the charges.

On 18th July, a Catholic couple, **Shafqat** and **Shaguftah Masih**, were also accused of texting blasphemous messages to Islamic clerics. The couple has been detained at Toba Tek Singh District Jail.

In November, the British Ahmadi doctor **Masood Ahmad**, age 72, was arrested in his Lahore clinic on charges of blasphemy. Two people, posing as patients, engaged him in a discussion over religious matters. They also filmed Ahmad reciting a verse from the Koran. Previously, someone had painted a black mark both on his car and outside his house. In December, Ahmad's bail application was dismissed by the court on two separate occasions.

On 28th December, 34-year old **Riaz Ahmed** and 38-year old **Ijaz Ahmed** were sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy by a court in Multan. The two, devotees of Chaman Sarkar in Gujrat district, claimed in 2011 that they had seen God and tried to influence others to follow this teaching.

Attacks on Shi'a Muslims

On 10th January, twin bombings targeted Hazaras in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan. In all 117 people were killed and more than 200 injured. Most of the victims were of the Hazara Shiite minority.

On 1st February, 22 people were killed and over 30 injured following a suicide bombing attack on a Shiite mosque in Hangu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. No group has taken responsibility for the violence; however, the attack mirrors others carried out by the Pakistani Taliban and the pro-Sunni Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

On 16th February, at least 84 people died in a bombing attack on a vegetable market in Quetta, again targeting Hazara Shias.

On 3rd March, 42 were killed and at least 135 wounded following a car bombing near a Shiite mosque in Karachi. No group has claimed responsibility, although the attack resembles earlier attacks carried out by Sunni militant groups.

On 9th March, at least six were killed and 30 injured following the explosion of a remote controlled bomb inside the Jania Hanfia Chishtia Mosque in Meena Bazaar, Peshawar.

On 30th June, an Imam Bargah (a place of prayer for Hazara Shiites) was targeted in an attack that left almost 28 dead and over 60 injured. The attack was carried out by a suicide bomber and was followed by gunfire in the surrounding area.

More than 400 people from Pakistan's Shiite Muslim community, which accounts for about 20 percent of the country's population, were killed the previous year in targeted attacks.

Attacks involving Sikhs and Hindus

Sporadic incidents involving Sikhs and Muslims persisted in 2013. For instance, unidentified groups desecrated the Sikh holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, in Shikarpur and Pano Aqil

On 8th October, a crowd of Islamic fundamentalists dug up the grave of a Hindu man and dragged the body through the streets of the southern town of Pangrio during a dispute over the grave's location.

Trends & Analysis

Religious violence in Pakistan is rooted in the deep social hostility that exists toward the country's minorities, who are popularly perceived as threats to national identity. The idea that Pakistan belongs only to Sunni Muslims is pervasive. It motivates consciously and unconsciously much of the violence directed toward non-Sunni populations. The country's restrictive laws are indicators of this deeply-held sentiment.

In such an environment, public officials are not eager to enforce the few legal protections that do exist or to prosecute criminal acts. Indeed, those who try to defend minority rights in Pakistan today are routinely threatened and sometimes killed. It has become increasingly evident, not only to external observers but also to analysts within Pakistan, that reform of the country's legal protections for minorities has reached a critical point.

The challenge ahead for Pakistan's future lies in the country's ability to embrace pluralism at the heart of Pakistani society. This is a long-term project for sure, albeit one in which the national government has a clear role to play. Pakistani leaders have failed to protect Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus and Shi'a Muslims from systematic and deliberate attacks. The expunging of unjust and repressive laws that have been used to wrongfully target religious minorities is a matter of urgent concern. Also, giving priority to national reconciliation and to the respect of minorities would set a new direction for the country's future. Strong leadership in this sense is urgently needed at this time.

RUSSIA

According to the Government Statistics Agency, the population is 143.2 million. In 2012 a Levada Centre poll reported that 74 percent of Russians consider themselves Orthodox while 7 percent identify themselves as Muslim. Religious groups constituting less than five percent each include Buddhists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, members of other Orthodox groups not affiliated with the Moscow patriarchate such as the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church and Old Believers, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and Falun Gong adherents. The 2010 census estimates the number of Jews at 150,000 but according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, there may be 750,000 Jews.

The Russian Federation became an independent state after the collapse of the Soviet Union. An unprecedented openness in post-Soviet Russia resulted in a rapid diversification of religious beliefs.

However, the conservatism of Russian society has resisted the new religious movements that have entered the country, subjecting them to discrimination and labelling them as "totalitarian destructive sects". The Russian Orthodox Church has regularly stated its opposition to "non-traditional religions" such as Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Hare Krishna devotees, Falun Gong practitioners and others.

Accusations of extremism and incitement to religious hatred have been widely misused to censor the religious books used by new religious movements. In this regard, the "Justice Ministry's Expert Council for Conducting State Religious Studies for the Russian Federation" which is headed by a radical Orthodox priest, Alexander Dvorkin, who has often been instrumental in giving a legal basis to the repression of competing non-Orthodox movements.

Federal agencies, such as the Federal Registration Service, and many local authorities have tried to restrict the rights and activities of religious minorities in Russia. The controversial 1997 law "on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" created further legal obstacles for religious communities attempting to register and comply with the law.

In 2013, a controversial new law placed further restrictions on activities of Russian civil society, including those of religious organisations. The law requires NGOs that receive foreign funding and whose activities could in any way be considered 'political' to register as 'foreign agents.' In Russia, the term has been historically linked to espionage.

Another controversial law was passed in 2013 which bans 'public actions expressing open disrespect for society and committed in an effort to cause offense to the sentiments of religious believers.' The law – an obvious reaction to the Pussy Riot incident – punishes offenders with fines and up to three years in prison.

Most critics of the legislation view its enactment as yet another sign that freedom of expression is being rapidly diminished in Russia and that even tougher times are ahead for basic human liberties.

In 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses and Said Nursi readers (a branch of Sunni Islam) were the main victims of oppression by state organs and of social hostility. Most new religious movements with roots in Western countries have been accused of extremism and/or threatening the Russian identity and values.

Some Incidents

Violence and Intimidation against Jehovah's Witnesses

In February, in Samara Province an anonymous caller threatened to blow up the apartments of Jehovah's Witnesses.

On 2nd February, in Moscow Province Jehovah's Witnesses were beaten in Luchkovitsi after attempting to speak to others about their faith.

On 3rd February, in Voronezh Province, Jehovah's Witnesses were attacked in the village of Olen-Kolodez. On the same day, vandals destroyed their place of worship in Adygei, breaking windows, smashing door locks and damaging drain pipes.

On 7th February, nine Jehovah's Witness houses in Tobolsk, Tunen Region, were searched as part of an on-going criminal investigation of violations related to the 'creation of a non-profit organisation that infringes upon the personality and rights of individuals.'

On 6th March, in Omsk two Jehovah's Witnesses were beaten, one of the two women suffering a broken rib and injured lung.

On 24th March, two Jehovah's Witnesses were threatened with a pistol. The assailants fired a shot but missed them.

On 29th March, in Ozeri, Moscow Province a 22-year-old Jehovah's Witness was beaten unconscious in front of his younger brother.

On 1st April, approximately 60 officials and various government agencies searched a Jehovah's Witness centre in Solnechnoye. Exits and gates to the centre were blocked during the raid, those present were video-recorded and literature was seized.

On 7th April, a Jehovah's Witness in Yoshkar-Ola was threatened with a gun and another was struck in the face in the same incident.

On 9th April, **Nikolai Trotsiuk, Alexander Skvortsov, Aleksei Koptev and Yury Baklushin** were charged in Taganrog with organising activities of an extremist group and inciting religious hatred.

On 12th April, in the village of Vorokhobino near Moscow, at least 15 law enforcement agents searched the premises during a Jehovah's Witness service of worship. Agents claimed to have found a banned text. Congregation members argued that the book was planted.

On the same day, near Sergiyev Posad police raided two Jehovah's Witness homes and seized religious literature, computer disks containing religious content, personal recordings and other documents.

On 18th April, unidentified persons in Kurgan threw stones at a Jehovah's Witness centre and forced their way into the building. The following day, the building was fired upon.

On 20th April, in Kalinin, Kirov Province, police arrested **S. Nagaitsev** and **N. Vasiliev** on grounds of proselytising.

On 21st April, unidentified persons in Kurgan poured motor oil on the door of a Jehovah's Witness' home and threw stones at vehicles parked nearby.

On 12th May, a Jehovah's Witness building in Altai territory was fired upon.

On 18th May, unidentified persons wrote offensive graffiti on the fence of a Jehovah' Witness meeting hall in Cheboksari.

On 22nd May, in the town of Okha, Sakhalin Region, police raided a Jehovah's Witness home, seizing religious literature and personal items. Following the raid, the Jehovah's Witness was interrogated, fingerprinted and photographed at a local police station.

On 29th May, in the town of Pallasovka and village of Novostroika, Volgograd Region, police and security officers raided two Jehovah's Witness homes, seizing religious literature, a laptop and personal photographs.

On 25th June, Gorodets District Administration refused to allow Jehovah's Witnesses to hold a worship service at a local sports stadium, because of Gorodets' reputation as an Orthodox spiritual centre and place of pilgrimage.

On 16th July, the local Jehovah's Witness organisation in Orel was found guilty of violating the restriction on conducting a public event without following proper administrative procedure. The charge was related to a 27th April worship service in the same city. An Administrative fine of 100,000 rubles was imposed.

On 28th October, criminal accusations were made against five believers for refusing to renounce their affiliation to a banned 'extremist' organisation, namely

the local Jehovah's Witness group in Taganrog. The men could face up to five years in prison.

From 29th October to 1st November, the criminal case continued in Taganrog against 16 Jehovah's Witnesses accused of 'extremism' on the basis of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

Ban on Jehovah's Witnesses Publications

On 22nd January, 'Natural Disasters: Punishment from God?' was added to the list of banned religious literature.

On 24th January, 'Will you follow Jehovah's loving guidance?' was added to the list of banned religious literature.

On 25th January, Jehovah's Witness **V. Dichkin** lost his appeal at the Segezha municipal court for distributing copies of 'What does the Bible really teach?'

On 31st January, 'Life without Suffering - When?' was added to the list of banned religious literature.

On 14th February, 'What does the Bible really teach?' was added to the list of banned religious literature.

On 3rd April, the Novokuibyshevsk City Court, Samara Region, fined **Pavel Mokshil** 3,000 rubles under Article 20.20 for having in his private possession five copies each of the brochures 'Jehovah's Witnesses. Who Are They? What Do They Believe?' and 'You Can Be God's Friend.' Both brochures have been ruled 'extremist' by the Russian government.

On 25th April, the Vyksa City Court, Nizhny Novgorod Region, fined **Pavel Rusnak** 1,000 rubles for 'production or distribution of extremist materials' (Code of Administrative Offences, Article 20.29). Rusnak was found guilty of giving a copy of the Jehovah's Witness brochure 'The Government That Will Bring Paradise' to a man in Vyksa.

On 8th May, the Lenin district court of Tiumen fined a Jehovah's Witness woman 1,000 rubles for distributing leaflets and religious literature.

On 19th June, the Uspenskiy district court declared the religious books 'Bearing Thorough Witness' and 'About God's Kingdom' to be extremist.

Raids, Arrests and Sanctions of Muslims and Said Nursi Readers

On 8th February, an operation called 'Apraksin Dvor' targeted Islamic prayer houses in a campaign against extremism. Literature with alleged extremist content was seized and 270 people were detained.

On 14th February, in Naberezhnye Chelny, more than 30 alleged members of the 'extremist' group Nurcular were arrested and their home searched. Agents seized more than 3000 books, leaflets, computers and diverse literature.

On the same day, the Magistrate's court of the October district of Novosibirsk questioned imams about Said Nursi and Nurcular.

On 22nd February, the decision to close down the Kazyat Muslim department in Primorsky district was sustained by the Primorsky regional court.

On 25th February, a Tartarstan court declared "Faizrakhmanists", a local Muslim community, extremist and banned it. According to the Prosecutor's Office, the members of the group are required to live in isolation, cannot visit hospitals or send their children to school.

On 24th June, eight readers of Islamic theologian Said Nursi were held in prolonged detention after law enforcement raids in St. Petersburg and the Ural regions of Perm.

On 10th July, the Supreme Court in the region of Stavropol upheld the prohibition of wearing the hijab in high schools.

In early August, the residences of eight Krasnoyarsk Muslim women were raided, and banned books by Nursi were found and seized. One of the women was criminally prosecuted later in the month on charges that she was organising a Nurcular 'women's cell.'

In early August, a Kansk magistrate's court sentenced **Kabylbek Alyev** to a fine of 100,000 rubles for organising a local chapter of Tablighi Jamaat, a non-violent though banned Muslim group, and for holding meetings with the intention of studying 'extremist' religious literature.

On 15th August, the October district court of Novosibirsk denied the appeal of imams **Ilkhom Merazhov** and **Komil Odilov** who were charged with planning activities of an extremist organisation. Merazhov and Odilov have pled not guilty and will appeal the decision.

In late August, a St. Petersburg magistrate's court sentenced **Shirazi Bekirov** to six months in prison for planning the activity of an extremist organization. Bekirov was arrested on 3rd March for organising a meeting to study the works of Nursi.

In September, the Oktyabrsky district court of Belgorod fined an unnamed resident 1,000 rubles for the dissemination of extremist materials. The person had posted the banned book 'On the Way to the Koran' on social network VKontakte.

On 17th September, the October district Court of the city of Novorossiisk banned the idiomatic translation of the Holy Quran into the Russian language by Elmir Kuliev.

On 18th October, an unknown explosive device was detonated in a mosque of the Baksan District of Kabardino-Balkaria. The two bodies found at the site were apparently among those who were transporting the bomb.

Repression of Protestant and Falun Gong Practitioners

The Investigative Committee of Sverdlovsk opened a criminal investigation into blog posts by Pentecostal **Petr Tklich** in the town of Asbest for incitement to hatred or hostility and for the humiliation of human dignity. The 2006 posts contained criticism of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate and of the attitudes of modern Orthodox believers. Tklich's residence was raided and some of his property sent for examination.

On 6th March, the Matveev-Kurgan District Court fined **Dmitry Smolnikov** 1,000 Ruble under the Article 20.29 for distributing 'extremist' literature. The man is a practitioner of the Chinese spiritual practice Falun Gong and distributed copies of the movement's literature to those who expressed interest.

Trends & Analysis

The tightening of legal restrictions on freedom of expression and religious freedoms does not bode well for the future of democracy in Russia. The government claims that it is simply defending 'traditional values' and upholding national identity. At the same time, such draconian measures run counter to all internationally recognised standards of human rights. They also help to establish a climate of hatred, violence, discrimination and fear. It is hard to imagine that this is the kind of Russia that authorities wish to create for future generations.

Sadly, these policies have been pursued with the active support of the Russian Orthodox Church. Church authorities have systematically encouraged limits on the most basic rights of religious and other minorities. Police raids on homes and places of worship are on-going. The most innocuous literature has been labelled 'extremist' and banned from even private use. Abuse, harassment and physical attacks have become commonplace.

The government of Vladimir Putin continues to lose credibility in the eyes of the international community as well as with many of its own citizens. As Putin's beleaguered government struggles to remain in power, many analysts fear for even further deterioration of human rights and increased religious discrimination. In the end, it will prove increasingly difficult to justify state pressure on minority groups within Russia, as younger generations become more globalised in their thinking and the discrimination of their elders fades into irrelevance.

Even still, one must not underestimate the risk of reactionary political and religious groups gaining wider influence in Russian society. This is already happening in the form of right-wing Orthodox youth movements that are set on

making their mark on Russia's future. What shape that future will take will depend in part on sustained international pressure on behalf of freedom and the rights of every Russian citizen.

SYRIA

Syria had a pre-conflict population estimated at about 22 million people. Around 90% of Syrians have Arab ethnicity, while the rest are composed of Kurdish, Armenian, Circassian and Turkomans. The country has historically been a religiously diverse country, the majority being Sunni (74%) and 13% Shia, mostly Alawites. The remainder of the population is Christian, living mostly in Damascus and Aleppo. The small Jewish community lives primarily in the Aleppo area.

Syria is a secular state whose Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. At the same time, the country's president must be Muslim, and Islamic jurisprudence is a primary source of legislation. Religious minorities like Catholics, Protestants and Jews can follow their own personal status laws and adjudicate their own personal status disputes; however, the Syrian legal system discriminates against non-Muslims on issues of proselytising and conversion.

Since March 2011, Syria has been involved in a civil war which triggered a humanitarian disaster of massive proportions. More than 120,000 people dead, 4.25 million internally displaced and another 2 million are taking refuge in neighbouring countries.

The ruling al-Assad family come from the Alawite religious minority. The family has led a dictatorial regime since 1970, giving the Alawites control of the country's security apparatus, repressing any political opposition and provoking resentment among Sunni Muslims. Many Syrians had hoped that the British-born and educated president, Bashar al-Assad, would have introduced some democratic changes, but they have been sorely disappointed. President al-Assad has failed to ensure greater freedom of expression and association or to address gender and ethnic discrimination in the country.

Some Incidents

Accusation of Blasphemy

On 10th June, 14-year-old **Mohammed Qataa** was killed in Aleppo after being accused of blasphemy for refusing a man who had asked for a free cup of coffee 'even if the Prophet himself returned.' Three armed men overheard the comment, dragged him to a car and drove off. A half hour later, Mohammed returned badly beaten with one of the men shouting, 'Whoever insults the Prophet will be killed according to Sharia.' Another man shot him three times and Mohammed died. The city's main Sharia court along with almost all of Aleppo's rebel brigades issued statements condemning the murder.

Attacks and violence against Christians

On 22nd January, Islamists forced Christian families from their homes in Homs and Qusayr to settle temporarily in the 'Christian strip.' The spreading conflict and the rise of Islamist brigades have led to the emptying of these cities. Thousands remain

either because they have no other option or because they are unable to take the risks involved in travelling to safer zones in neighbouring countries.

On 6th February, Al-Nusra Front troops stormed the Christian neighbourhood of Jdeideh where the main Evangelical church had already been razed in November 2012 by extremists. Al-Nusra forces include many foreigners, including fighters from as far away as Indonesia and the Philippines.

On 10th February, a group of rebels affiliated to Muslim extremists kidnapped Fr **Michael**, an Armenian Catholic priest, along with an unknown Orthodox clergyman. Both men were working in Aleppo.

On 22nd April, the Syrian Orthodox bishop **Yohanna Ibrahim** and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop **Paul Yazigi** were abducted by armed rebels on their way back to Aleppo from the Turkish border. The attackers killed the driver before kidnapping the two men. Neither the kidnappers' identity nor the motivation for the abduction has been established.

On 29th July, Al Qaeda-linked fighters in the rebel-held eastern Syrian city of Raqqa abducted **Paolo Dall'Oglio**, an Italian Jesuit priest who championed the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad. Members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant kidnapped Father Oglio while he was walking in the city, which had fallen under the control of militant Islamist brigades.

On 15th August, during the night, members of the al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra took control of the town of Marmerita near Homs. Many residents of Marmerita are Christians. At least 200 women were kidnapped, many unmarried young girls. They were reportedly taken to one of Jabhat al-Nusra's bases where it is presumed that they were tortured, raped and/or killed.

In late August, Christian residents of the town of Tabqa were driven out by non-Syrian extremist forces who told them to 'convert to Islam or leave.'

On 5th September, Islamist opposition forces launched an attack on the historic town of Maaloula, northeast of Damascus. The attackers commandeered a mountain top hotel and used the location to shell the village below. Four hundred fifty Christian families had fled to nearby villages or crossed the border into Lebanon to escape the attacks. At least three Christians were reportedly killed by rebel fighters. Another source reported 20 people killed and 15 abducted in the attack.

On 6th September, a church was destroyed in Erbeen, a suburb of Damascus under the control of opposition groups.

On 17th September, the ancient Church of Mar Elias in Izra's in Dera'a Governorate fell under attack. Following the assault, many Christians left the area. On 19th September, the seat of the Greek Catholic Archbishop of Aleppo was damaged by two mortar shells. No one was hurt.

On 21st October, Al-Nusra Front and Daash rebel forces invaded the city of Sadad. More than 2,500 families were forced to flee to surrounding cities. A month later, when the Sadad residents started to return home, 30 bodies were found in two mass graves. Six members of a family, including **Matanios El Sheikh** (Age 85), his wife **Habsah** (75), their daughter **Njala** (45) and grandsons **Ranim** (18) and **Fadi** (16) were discovered dead in a well.

On 5th November, the Vatican Nunciature in Damascus was hit by a mortar. The device had been aimed toward the sleeping chambers of Nuncio Mgr Mario Zenari, his secretary and his sister. No one was hurt in the attack, but part of the roof was damaged.

Violence against Shi'a Muslims

On 19th July, the custodian of a Shi'ite shrine in Damascus was killed by a rocket strike near the site. The place is a destination site for Shi'ites pilgrims from around the region.

Trends & Analysis

At year's end, the attention of the international community remained riveted on Syria's on-going descent into violent conflict. Predictably, the human rights situation has moved from being bad to abysmal. The already poor conditions of freedom of expression and association – as well as discrimination against women and minorities – have sharply declined.

The current civil war has had a devastating impact on all Syrians, regardless of their religious identity. The escalating violence makes it hard to distinguish between political, ethnic or religious related attacks. Even still, religious affiliation has clearly been a leading factor in targeting the violence. Christians, once protected by the Assad government, now find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position. Threats, murders, bombings, expulsions, kidnappings and disappearances have all become commonplace for Christians in today's Syria.

Further violence is feared if the government falls, raising the spectre of a situation like Egypt, where Coptic Christians met with widespread persecution after the president was removed from power. Christians in Iraq have suffered a similar 'cleansing.'

Dissenting voices to Assad's rule are nothing new to Syria. At first, the Sunni protests against the regime had no religious basis; however, as protests grew stronger and more violent, the president and his supporters fuelled existing sectarian tensions by progressively making use of religiously-oriented language. The violence has now reached horrifying levels. Hostilities along religious and ethnic lines have been sharply drawn.

The present situation leaves the future of religious freedom in Syria altogether unclear. Whatever the outcome of the coming months, the international community must insist on a peace settlement that guarantees religious pluralism, freedom of expression, security and the recognition of the rights of all minorities. These are the minimum conditions for setting the country on the road toward peace, healing and reconciliation. Anything less would be the betrayal of a proud nation and undermine hope for future stability in the region.

UZBEKISTAN

According to government estimates, the population is 29.7 million and approximately 93 percent is nominally Muslim. Most are Sunni of the Hanafi School; about 1 percent is Shia, concentrated in the provinces of Bukhara and Samarkand. Around 4 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, a number that is declining as ethnic Russians and other Slavs continue to emigrate. The remaining 3 percent includes small communities of Roman Catholics, Korean Christians, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and atheists. An estimated 10,500 to 11,500 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain concentrated in Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, and the Fergana Valley.

In 2012, there were 2,225 registered religious groups representing 16 denominations. There were 2,051 Muslim groups (including mosques, educational institutions, and Islamic centres). Among the Muslim groups were several Shia congregations. Registered minority religious groups include 52 Korean Christian, 38 Russian Orthodox, 23 Baptist, 21 Pentecostal (Full Gospel), 10 Seventh-day Adventist, eight Jewish, five Catholic, six Baha'i, two Lutheran, four New Apostolic, two Armenian Apostolic, one Jehovah's Witnesses, one Krishna Consciousness, one Temple of Buddha, one Christian Voice of God Church and one inter-confessional Bible Society. Many more non-Muslim and Shia groups have been denied registration.

Strict registration provisions in the 1998 religion law, especially requiring a minimum membership of 100 adults, complicate the procedure for smaller religious groups. This process allows officials to find technical reasons for denying registration. For example, Article 8 provides that a central religious administrative agency can only be created if the religious organization is represented in at least 8 of Uzbekistan's 13 provinces.

Religious activity of unregistered groups is strictly monitored and penalised.

The Religious Affairs Committee controls the importation of all religious literature, photographs, videos and audio recordings into the country. Additionally, analysis of potentially 'extremist' literature is carried out by the Committee or, in provincial areas, by local university philosophy professors.

Although Uzbek law does not provide a definition of extremism on which authorities may base their opinions/rulings, a broad interpretation of 'extremism' is given in Article 1 of the 15 June 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, of which the Republic of Uzbekistan is a signatory. The Article reads, 'Extremism' is an act aimed at seizing or keeping power through the use of violence or changing violently the constitutional regime of a State, as well as a violent encroachment upon public security, including organization, for the above purposes, of illegal armed formations and participation in them, criminally prosecuted in conformity with the national laws of the Parties.'

According to Article 5 of the 1998 religion law (punishable under Article 240 of Administrative Code and Article 216-2 of the Criminal Code), proselytising and any other form of missionary activity is prohibited.

The state is strict in enforcing its ban on missionary activity, with both majority Hanafi religious communities and other minority groups. Prison terms are imposed on those who do not abide by the law.

Some Incidents

Repression of Protestants

On 4th and 16th January, the police searched the flat of **Sharofat Allamova** in Urgench, Khorezm Region, and confiscated religious material. She was detained and questioned by police for eleven hours for having ‘illegal’ Christian literature. She was charged under Criminal Code Article 244-3 – illegal production, storage, importation or distribution of religious literature – which carries a fine of up to 200 times the minimum wage or a prison term of up to three years. Allamova was sentenced by Urgench City Criminal Court on 11th April to 18 months' corrective labour. The sentence included placement in a low-paying state job with 20% of her income going to the government during her sentence.

On 29th May, Judge Otabek Mustafayev of Karshi Criminal Court fined **Svetlana Andreychenko** 50 times the minimum monthly salary or 3,979,500 Soms (\$1,900) for violating Article 240, Part 1 and 241 of the Code of Administrative Offences. The fine followed a raid of the National Security Service (NSS) during a Sunday morning service in Andreychenko's home. NSS officers seized numerous books and religious materials, including posters, DVDs and an audio-cassette ‘of religious content.’

In June, police seized a plot of land in the Bostanlyk District, Tashkent Region, owned by the Baptist Union and used for summer camping and recreation. Police also seized religious material. Authorities claimed that the land was not owned by the community but was the property of the state.

On 9th June, a Baptist meeting in Tashkent Region was raided by nine officers from Bostanlyk District Police. The Sunday morning meeting was taking place in the home of 83-year-old church member **Lidiya Maksimenko**. All members present were taken to the District Police station, where they were threatened with beatings and a fabricated case against them. Three of the detained church members wrote statements under pressure, but the rest refused.

On 11th June, two Baptists from Gazalkent, Tashkent Region, were prosecuted for leading a meeting for worship without state permission. Police had raided the worship service, detained those who were present and threatened them with violence, all facts that were not heard during the trial. **Nikolai Savorovsky** was fined 80 times the minimum monthly salary, and **Timur Zagvozdin** four times the minimum monthly salary.

On 14th June, the chief of the local police Criminal Investigation Department in Urgench, north-western Khorezm Region, stopped **Sardorbek Nurmetov** in the street near Urgench's railway station. Nurmetov was taken to the nearest police station, where officers confiscated a USB stick from him containing Christian materials. He was beaten and kicked repeatedly. When Nurmetov began to feel sick and asked for an ambulance, police authorities refused to call for it. Nurmetov was detained at Urgench's main police station from 14.30 to 21.00 and was not allowed to move, drink water or go to the toilet.

On 23rd June, police and unidentified men raided a religious meeting of the Karshi Baptist Church. The intruders filmed and took photographs of each church member, recording their information and searching their belongings.

On 23rd July, authorities and police officers, some of them in riot gear, raided a camp for children organized by the local Protestant community in the village of Mironkul, Samarkand Region. Officials seized material and confiscated the passports of two Ukrainian citizens without informing their embassy. Children and adults were intimidated and subjected to six hours of questioning. In addition, nine adults and 22 children were taken to the Mironkul police station for further questioning.

On 30th July, Court Bailiffs raided the home of **Svetlana Andreychenko**, member of a local Baptist Church in Karshi, seizing the church's piano, pulpit, carpet, refrigerator and seventeen benches. Some of the Andreychenko family's private property, including their refrigerator, electric oven, sewing machine and DVD player, was also confiscated.

Repression of Jehovah's Witnesses

On 15th February 2013, in Samarkand, police searched the apartment of Ms **Farida Aminova** without court order or a prosecutor's warrant. They seized her Bible, personal literature and computer. A court subsequently tried Ms Aminova and her mother, **Umeda Rasulova**, fining them each approximately EUR 600. That same day, Mr **Savlat Shakirov**, was subjected to a similar procedure, police conducting an illegal search and confiscating literature and computer. On 5th March, a court fined Mr Shakirov approximately EUR 800.

On 2nd March, 35-year-old Jehovah's Witness **Abdubannob Ahmedov** was surprisingly released before the end of his term. Ahmedov was first sentenced in July 2008 to four years and seven months imprisonment for 'carrying literature that contradicts principles of tolerance and inter-religious accord.' Shortly before his release in July 2012, his detention was extended to a further 30 months for allegedly violating prison regulations.

On 8th April, police officers in Tashkent came to the apartment of Ms. **Dinara Hosiyeva**, ostensibly to check passports. Claiming that she was harbouring illegal tenants, they forced their way into the apartment, twisted Hosiyeva's arms and

screamed obscenities at her. The apartment was searched without court order or prosecutor's warrant. Literature, notepads and computer were confiscated. Five days later, a court ordered Hosiyeva to pay a fine of EUR 1,200 and to forfeit her computer to the state.

Repression of Muslims

On 13th March, 38-year-old Muslim **Khayrullo Tursunov** was extradited from Kazakhstan and then immediately arrested upon arrival in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent. Tursunov faced charges related to his worshipping outside of state-controlled mosques. In early June, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison for 'extremist religious activity' by the Kashkadarya Regional Criminal Court in south-eastern Uzbekistan. He is presently incarcerated in Tashkent.

In early May, Muslim prisoners complained that they were denied the right to openly pray or to receive any Islamic literature. This kind of prohibition is also applied to prisoners of other faiths.

In June, a Muslim father **Mirmuhiddin Mirbayzaiyev** and his son **Sirojiddin** were prosecuted for teaching the Koran to school-age children in the Tashkent Region. Parents who brought their children to the Islamic religious lessons were also fined.

Trends & Analysis

In 2013, Uzbekistan continued to impose high restrictions on freedom of religion or belief. Despite the country's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, the state exerts considerable control over religious communities, exacerbated by laws which require registration for all religious groups. The government defends its registration policy, claiming the process is essential for controlling the spread of Islamic extremism within its borders.

During Uzbekistan's Universal Periodic Review in 2013, First Deputy Justice Minister Esemurat Kanyazov dismissed criticism by the UN Human Rights Council that religious communities and non-governmental organisations faced excessive hurdles for obtaining state registration. Yet complex registration requirements and the arbitrary rejection of particular groups have made the registration process especially cumbersome. The result has been that many religious groups are unable to assemble legally and peacefully.

Groups considered to be 'extremist' or 'suspicious' have been banned and their members subjected to harsh treatment, including torture and physical violence, especially while in detention. Even properly registered groups have been subject to raids, detentions and exorbitant fines, if their activities were not in full compliance with the law on religion.

Some improvement can be noted in 2013 in regard to Jehovah's Witnesses. At the present time, no Jehovah's Witnesses are known to be in detention in Uzbekistan. Even still, only one congregation has been legally registered, meaning that Jehovah's Witness activities remain by and large illegal throughout the country. The group still faces house raids, arrests and high fines for peacefully practicing their religion. The status of Jehovah's Witnesses is currently under review by the government's Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA).

The CRA is also responsible for authorising the production or import of religious literature, including the potential censorship of its contents. Those found to be in possession of illicit religious literature – regularly uncovered during police raids on places of worship and private homes – typically see the material confiscated and heavy penalties imposed.

The feeble state of religious freedom in Uzbekistan is part of a wider social and political malaise in respect to human rights in general. Advancing policies that foster greater openness and freedom will likely remain extremely difficult for the foreseeable future.

CONCLUSIONS

This report on freedom of religion or belief in the world is based on reported incidents which occurred in 2013. The report underscores a worrying trend of increasing violations of this freedom perpetrated by governments, societies and other actors. As in last year's report, HRWF has observed that countries of particular concern are predominately Muslim majority states and Communist or former Communist countries.

Controls and restrictions imposed on religious minorities are most prominent in China and in a number of post-Soviet states. Government repression against individuals is particularly harsh towards Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants in response to these groups' proselytising activities. Inter-religious and inter-communal hostility also affect an increasing number of countries with a Muslim majority. Wherever extremist forms of Islam are accommodated and sanctioned, religious diversity has been suppressed and violence perpetrated against members of religious minorities.

Freedom of religion or belief is a human right which is universally applicable and protected under Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. In 2013, the European Union also adopted Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In doing so, the EU has assumed a responsibility to live up to its commitment to freedom of religion or belief and to address in a proactive manner the range of concerns that are conveyed in these guidelines.

Therefore, *Human Rights Without Frontiers* directs the following recommendations to the European Council, the European Commission and the European External Action Service:

- 1) Mainstream freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) into EU policy in fulfilment of these institutions' obligations under the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights, adopted in 2012 by the EU Foreign Affairs Council;
- 2) Implement the European Union Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- 3) Promote FoRB publicly through statements and visits by the EU Special Representative on Human Rights and other competent authorities;
- 4) Raise the importance of FoRB at multilateral and regional fora and at a bilateral level with third countries;
- 5) Provide training for EU staff and ensure that EU representations in third countries monitor the state of FoRB in those countries, particularly where this freedom is under threat and in countries in transition;
- 6) Consult and collaborate with religious or belief groups and civil society, including the provision of funding for programmes which are designed to strengthen FoRB through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

Human Rights Without Frontiers further recommends that the European Parliament:

- 1) Work collaboratively, especially with the Parliament President and political group leaders, to ensure that EU institutions are effectively promoting and protecting FoRB in EU foreign policy;
- 2) Promote FoRB on all relevant occasions, such as in the DROI committee annual report and during the review of trade or aid agreements in the INTA and DEVE committees;
- 3) Monitor FoRB in the context of country and regional delegations, especially in respect to countries of particular concern;
- 4) Raise awareness of FoRB violations over the course of MEPs' regular parliamentary work, such as resolutions, conferences and parliamentary speeches and questions.