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World Hijab Day: Muslim women lament frequent harassment over use of hijab

By Sulaimon Salau

The Guardian (03.02.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2lg14jf> - As the faithful celebrate World Hijab Day across the globe on Wednesday, a coalition of women group, under the aegis of Hijab Rights Advocacy Initiative, has lamented frequent discrimination and harassment of women over the use of hijab.

The group, comprising of Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), Al-Muminaat, The Criterion, Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) and Guild of Muslim Professionals, decried the discrimination against women on hijab, describing it as an violation of the human rights as provided by Nigerian constitution.

The World Hijab Day is an annual event celebrated on every February 1 in over 140 countries worldwide. The purpose of the day was to raise awareness about modest Muslim dress and to encourage non-Muslim women to wear and experience the hijab for a day.

The group's Coordinator, Hajia Mutiat Orolu-Balogun, said some government and private agencies in the country are also involved in this discriminatory act, which she described as an infringement on their constitutional right.

Orolu-Balogun, a lawyer described hijab as religious duty and an obligation on every Muslim woman in the observance of her faith, saying that it is not culture of Arabs or a fashion accessory that one may discard at will.

"The right to believe in and practise one's chosen faith is an inalienable right of every human being, as entrenched in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended),"she added.

Orolu-Balogun, said most women in hijab had been denied jobs and other opportunities, even when they are qualified for such jobs and opportunities. She lamented a situation whereby women in hijab are forced to expose their ears as well as their heads before writing Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME) or getting Bank Verification Number (BVN).

"Imagine being asked to take off your shirt or your trousers because you wanted to get your driver's license, or being told you would not be able to vote in the next elections because you wouldn't bare your shoulders or show your cleavage in the picture on your voters card, or that you wouldn't have access to the funds in your bank account because you refused to show your bare back in order to register for your BVN. These, and worse,

are what a Muslim woman who wears the hijab feels when she is asked to take off her hijab or expose her ears before she could be allowed her constitutional rights!" he said.

Also speaking, the President, Muslims Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) Lagos State Area Unit, Hajia Hafsa Badru, appealed to the media to demonstrate objectivity, fairness and accuracy in reporting cases related to use of hijab.

According to her, asking a Muslim woman to remove her Hijab is a form of violence against women, saying such should have no place in a progressive society like Nigeria.

"One thing we all seem to agree on is that violence against women is wrong in all its forms, whether it is physical, emotional or psychological. However, covering one's head doesn't mean that person should be looked down upon or be underestimated, women in hijab deserve to enjoy their constitutional right," Badru said.

Major trends from the 2017 World Watch List

World Watch Monitor (11.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2jQLHvW>

1. Religious nationalism accelerating in Asia

Religious nationalism has been gathering pace since the mid-1990s, but there is no doubt that it moved into a higher gear with the landslide election of Narendra Modi in India in May 2014. Hindu nationalists were out of power from 2004 to 2014, but they used that time to expand massively into the countryside, where the majority of India's people live. Over 600,000 extremists were trained to run schools with the objective of radicalising families. It paid off. Now Christian organisations in Delhi are claiming an average of 40 incidents per month, where pastors are beaten, churches burned and converts harassed.

As the World Watch persecution analyst for India says: "It's not only violence. There is a deterioration in freedom in all aspects of Indian society, and Hindu radicals have virtual impunity from the government."

The Indian Church is massive, 64 million people, with perhaps 39 million of them caught up in the vortex of direct persecution.

Buddhist nationalism should not be forgotten either. In Bhutan the government does not regard Christians as Bhutanese at all. A new electronic identity card system ignored parts of the Christian minority – around 30% of Christians in Thimpu, the capital, didn't receive a card – though it wasn't clear why.

2. Insecure Asian governments play nationalist card

Nationalism is always a card that an insecure government will play. Vietnam has a new government, Malaysia's leader has been under pressure with corruption allegations and in China President Xi Jinping has been stoking Chinese nationalism even in the realm of religion, claiming that if you must belong to a religion, try a Chinese one like Confucianism – which is clever because it is not actually a religion but a series of moral obligations. Not a single country in East Asia lost "points" (used to work out the WWL order) over the reporting period. In most of these countries, governments do say that to be, for example, Sri Lankan is to be Buddhist; to be a Malay is to be Muslim.

Malaysia has "purification centres" for Christians and "deviating Muslims" to come back to Islam.

Laos has a paranoid government desperate to stay in power, and the tribal Christians bear the brunt, encountering a double persecution from state and tribe.

Even in Vietnam there were three killings of Christians.

Christians are always in vulnerable minorities in Asia, with the exception of Christian-majority Philippines, but even there converts to Christianity in Muslim-majority Mindanao are persecuted. It is an easy and common ploy for tottering governments to gain cheap support by scapegoating Christians.

3. Islamic radicalisation in sub-Saharan Africa goes mainstream

Of course sub-Saharan Africa has been hitting the headlines for years for the vicious activities of its Islamic militant insurgencies, such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, the latter accused by the UN in November 2016 of causing Africa's most urgent emergency, with 8 million in need of humanitarian help as a result of their fight. This still continues.

At least a dozen Christians were killed in Somalia in 2016 by Al-Shabaab militants. But what is not so well known is that Islamic militancy is gaining ground in many more sectors of society. In the past, radicals would only target individual Muslims for support, but now – especially with generous Saudi funding – they are building new networks of extremist schools in Somalia, Kenya, Niger and Burkina Faso, and then targeting local government cadres, asking for concessions to build mosques and sponsoring those who are running for office. In most of these countries it is not only violence driving the persecution; all WWL "squeeze categories" (measuring the pressure on Christians in the five realms of private, family, community, Church and national life) are showing rising levels of persecution.

It is astonishing that Kenya, a Christian-majority country, still remains firmly entrenched in the top 20. Even in Nairobi, Christian pastors have to hire private security firms to man the metal detectors at the church doors. "Extremist violent movements seem to leave behind them a more radicalised people," according to the World Watch List persecution analyst for the region.

Hausa-Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria have driven thousands of Christians from their land.

Somalia is #2 on the WWL because, as a local Christian said: "Everything works against the Christian."

In Sudan, Christians are targeted by the government itself.

Mali is actually the highest riser in the WWL 2017, up 12 places to #32, though Yemen added most "points". Islamic militants came from Libya to join forces with Tuareg rebels to topple a hitherto democratic government in 2012. They were pushed back by an international military intervention, but the situation remains very precarious. On 17 December 2015, three people were killed when a gunman opened fire outside a Christian radio station in Timbuktu.

All over the Sahel region, the situation is worsening for Christians. According to an August 2016 World Watch Research report: "This is a critical time for the future of Christianity in the region ... If the instability gets out of control and the militant groups have their way, Christians will be killed and exiled out of the entire region."

4. Middle East polarised between radical and autocratic regimes

It is no surprise that, with the military pull-back of the USA in the Middle East, two regional powers have moved into the vacuum and both are extremist regimes – Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Saudis are flexing their muscles in Yemen, as they seek to remove the Shia Houthi rebels. The country has become a waste zone, with many Christians caught in the crossfire. Four sisters of the Missionaries of Charity were killed in 2016; an Indian priest captured in the same attack is still hostage and appealing for international help.

Iran, now that its nuclear deal is done with the USA, has arrested record numbers of “house church” Christians, and many are losing their livelihoods after having to pay huge fines. Sectarian divisions are increasing in many areas.

Distinct from these more radical regimes are a group of more autocratic regimes, such as in Syria, Egypt and Algeria, that fight the extremists. Syria received the military backing of Russia in 2016. Syrian Christians in government-run areas have in many cases as much freedom as before, and most Christians now have fled rebel-held territory. But even in more peaceful Jordan (#27), where the king seeks to control the extremists, the backlash from his attempts has resulted in higher levels of pressure on Christians.

5. Christians are being killed in more countries than before for their faith

The toll of Christians killed for their faith has continued in countries where it is sickeningly common, in sub-Saharan Africa in particular – a killing zone for the last decade. But in the WWL 2017 reporting period, the most all-pervasive violence recorded was in Pakistan. Islamic militants attacked Christians in a public park on Easter Sunday in Lahore, killing dozens.

Bangladesh also experienced a year of attacks, which surprised a government which prided itself on its secular approach. Not only Muslim-background converts (who are routinely targeted), but also other Christians, found themselves the victims of violence.

Three Christians were killed in Vietnam in the central highlands, where a huge Church exists among the tribal minorities. One Christian was also killed in Laos.

In Latin America, where large territories are controlled by mafia or guerrillas, standing up against corruption can be fatal. Twenty-three Christian leaders were killed in Mexico, and four in Colombia. It is rare to have a reporting period where the killings of Christians have been more geographically dispersed. Ironically, fewer reports came in of Christians having been killed in Syria and Iraq, as most have already left the territory, which Islamic State established as a caliphate in 2014.

But also two positive trends...

1. Christians looking forward to going back to historic homes in northern Iraq

The days of an Islamic State-run caliphate in Northern Iraq and Syria are numbered. Since an August 2016 offensive, the Islamic militants have been pushed back by a coalition of Iraqi and foreign-backed forces. Some of the towns and villages, such as Qaraqosh – which were once completely Christian – have been liberated. Iraq’s second largest city – Mosul – will soon be in the hands of Iraqi forces. Over 80,000 Christians fled their homes in 2014 and have been refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan since.

“We can’t wait to go back,” said one, in Erbil. “But we will go back with a greater determination to keep freedom defended.”

2. ‘Exodus’ of Middle East Christians slows

Most Christians in the Middle East may have crossed a border within the region, but the majority have not yet left the region as a whole.

The number of Christians exiting the region has slowed. Open Doors estimates the number of Christians in the Middle East and Turkey at currently 16.5 million, including migrant and expatriate Christians in the Gulf States.

Countries to watch for persecution of Christians: beyond the top 50

The 'Persecution Watch' countries are part of a group of countries beyond the Open Doors World Watch List Top 50, in which serious degrees of hostility against Christians and churches are prevalent.

World Watch Monitor (11.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2j0X3xF> -

The Top 7

Below are the seven countries that came closest to being part of the top 50.

51. Uganda

The persecution of Christians in Uganda (85% Christian) continues to increase. The Tabliqs (a sect of puritanical Muslims whose members portray themselves as Muslim evangelists) have continued to advance the cause of Islam in areas like Mbale, Kasese, Arua/Yumbe.

Converts face pressure from family members and the local community, especially in Muslim-dominated areas. Bullying and harassment are very common in eastern parts of the country. Converts from Islam in particular find it difficult to live a normal life. For example, owning Christian materials or discussing Christianity with family members or community members often leads to expulsion, serious physical attacks or even death.

In the WWL 2017 reporting period, violence against Christians rose sharply. Sixteen Christians were killed, mostly in eastern Uganda. Some were killed for being active Christians, and others for leaving Islam and becoming Christians. There were also violent incidents that targeted churches. The Nalugongo Church of Uganda was attacked twice. The desecration of Christian graves and forced marriages were also reported. This cycle of violence is going on unabated partly because the victims are often afraid to report incidents to the police.

From its base in eastern DRC, ADF-NALU is another cause for concern. The group has recruited many youths from Uganda. For the moment, as the group is operating from inside DRC, Christians in Uganda are not affected. However, its main aim is to establish a Sharia state in Uganda, so it is naturally trying to set up networks and support groups in the country.

52. Nepal

Elections for a new parliament and government in November 2013 left Nepal (4% Christian) in a stalemate. In discussions about a new constitution, the restriction of religious beliefs played a prominent role. The country's new constitution, adopted in September 2015, declares that Nepal is a secular state. In addition, it bans changing religion and proselytism. More changes to the constitution are still under discussion.

Despite many hardships over past decades, the Church in Nepal has one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world, according to figures from the World Christian Database; this has given rise to increasing oppression.

Nepal is a small and poor country, bordering China and India – countries with a huge economic and political impact on Nepal.

China objects to the presence of the Dalai Lama in northern India, fearing influence on Tibet's Buddhists. Since May 2014, India has been ruled by the radical Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party under Narendra Modi, leading to an outburst of Hindu radical violence all over India. India is now pressuring Nepal to follow in its footsteps – it even imposed an economic boycott in August 2015. Since then, radical Hindu elements in Nepal have stepped up their activities. Christians have come under pressure.

In July 2016, seven Christians who had Bibles with them were arrested and their Bibles were used as evidence by the police to later accuse them of attempting to forcefully convert children to Christianity. Later a pastor was also arrested in the same case. So it seems that the constitutional provision is being directly used by the authorities to target Christians. In December 2016, all eight Christians were acquitted.

53. Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan (3% Christian), the regime is very clever in its persecution of Christians. Some pastors have been detained and held for about a week and then released. Everyone in their churches assumes that these pastors talked while in detention, so no-one will trust them anymore. Most churches are infiltrated and informers are everywhere. As a result, Christians do not know who to trust. This is also reflected in the reporting of persecution: no-one dares to talk for fear of being arrested – the main reason for the lower score of this country this year (it was No. 34 in WWL 2016). There are also repeated obligatory re-registrations for churches – every six to seven years all churches must apply for new registration. Each time, fewer churches re-register. During the latest cycle, all churches and religious groups were required to renew their registration by 1 January 2010 and no new churches have since registered. It would seem Azerbaijan has found a fool-proof method of getting rid of churches.

The state monitors all religious activity, and especially targets unregistered groups. While registered churches can meet inside their buildings, special permission is needed for organising events outside these buildings. Youth work is very much restricted and all Christian materials must be cleared by the Committee for Religious Affairs in advance. In practice this means that all importing, printing, and distribution is blocked. Training facilities for Christians do not exist. All media are state-controlled and are therefore not accessible for Christian input. Christians can do some social work – e.g. in prisons (where there is usually a chapel). It is a punishable offence to bring religious literature into the country. By law, foreigners are not allowed to preach in the country.

54. Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan (5% Christian) is the odd one out in Central Asia, as it has a democratically elected head of state and parliament. But in 2009 it introduced one of the most restrictive Religion Laws in the region, imposing a 200-member minimum necessary for church registration. (There is now talk that this could increase to 500.) There are very few congregations in the country with enough members for this. No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed.

In December 2012, a new censorship law was introduced, which also affects Christian literature. In March 2015, Kyrgyzstan's parliament passed the so-called "foreign agents"

law, which marks all organisations that receive financial support from abroad as foreign agents.

In Kyrgyzstan, local authorities and councils usually have more power than in other Central Asian countries. This has a negative effect on converts, as these local bodies tend to have strong relationships with the local community, who are all Muslims. And it is in the local councils that decisions about burials of converts are taken. This has already resulted in quite a few cases of families having to travel all over the country to find a place to bury their dead.

55. Niger

In the last two decades, Islamic associations – including Wahhabi groups – have become more active and prominent in Niger (0.3% Christian). In the past few years, Boko Haram's presence in Niger has also become more visible.

Persecution in Niger (No. 49 last year) is mainly shaped by Islamic oppression. Although the pressure on Christians is significant, it is still moderate in comparison with the rest of the region. However, small incidents can spark very high levels of violence, as was evidenced by the protests over the Charlie Hebdo cartoons in January 2015. In the WWL 2017 reporting period, no such large-scale violent incidents took place and the level of violent persecution against Christians decreased compared to the WWL 2016 reporting period. Since the events of January 2015, the government and NGOs have made great efforts to promote peaceful coexistence amongst the various ethnic groups and religions in Niger.

56. Cuba

In 2006, Fidel Castro was replaced by his brother Raúl as leader of the government, but the regime stayed essentially the same, and any groups hoping for change were disappointed. (No change is anticipated following Fidel Castro's death late last year.) Cuba (61% Christian) continues to isolate itself from the rest of the world and functions under totalitarian control. The persecution of Christians, more severe decades ago, is slowly changing. While persecution in the past included beatings, imprisonment and sometimes murder, now it is generally more subtle. It continues in the form of harassment, strict surveillance and discrimination, including occasional imprisonment of leaders. All Christians are monitored and all church services are infiltrated by informers.

Christians are threatened and suffer discrimination in school and at work. The totalitarian regime allows no competitors of any kind. Pastors and Christians are sometimes pressured to stop evangelising and to limit their activities to their own church premises. Permission to print Christian literature locally is hard to obtain. Everything is restricted. Existing seminaries and church buildings may be used, but new churches and seminaries cannot be built. Foreigners who enter the country can bring Bibles with them, but only a maximum of three.

57. Russia

Officially, Russia (82% Christian) is a secular state, but the government is openly courting the Russian Orthodox Church to the disadvantage of other denominations (which are often regarded as foreign). In July 2015, changes were made to Russia's Religion Law, requiring all religions without legal status to register with the authorities and to notify them of their activities, including the names and addresses of all members and meetings. Registered groups are also limited in their activities within the first 10 years of their existence, e.g. teaching and invitations to foreign preachers are very restricted. Unregistered groups experience discrimination all over Russia. In the North Caucasus,

Christians cannot hold public office. On Russian TV channels and printed media, there is a permanent campaign against sects and evangelicals.

Converts from Islam are targets for violence and severe pressure from family and community, particularly in the Caucasus area.

Other 'Watch' countries

The 11 other countries that remain on the 'Persecution Watch' list – eight of which are in Africa – listed alphabetically.

Cameroon

Despite the fact that Christians comprise around 60% of the population and the government is pro-Christian, Cameroon's historically moderate form of Islam (about 20% of the population, 5 million, are adherents) is being challenged due to the growing prominence of Salafist teaching and the activity of jihadist groups across the Sahel and the Sahara, and in particular through the activities of Boko Haram within the country. In recent years, Boko Haram has used the country as an operational base and refuge for regrouping, and has also conducted several kidnap operations and terrorist attacks in Cameroon's north. Many Cameroonian Christians live in the north and are directly threatened by this, as evidenced by the numerous Christians who have been the victims of terror incidents over recent years, including 13 Christians who were reported killed during the WWL 2017 reporting period.

Chad

Though Chad has a large Christian population (35%), the influence and dominance of Islam is manifest and growing. Militant Islamic movements are also present in Chadian society. They want to see all citizens under the banner of Islam and to make the country an Islamic republic. All other religions – especially Christianity – are seen as an obstacle to be removed by any possible means.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

In DRC, with a Christian population of over 95%, the Islamist group ADF-NALU (Allied Democratic Forces – National Army for Liberation of Uganda) is active in the east of the country – specifically in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces. Several villages and churches have been attacked and almost abandoned.

The religious dimension of the attacks is betrayed by the fact that people who wore Islamic dress were not attacked (according to observations by local sources).

The Gambia

The Gambia (4.5% Christian), a Muslim-majority country, is popularly known as religiously tolerant. Not only is the constitution secular, the present government (due to hand over power next week) has so far defended its position on religious tolerance with unwavering commitment. Yet, non-violent measures are being taken to Islamize the country – particularly through the educational system, public institutions, media and areas concerning marriage and family. Muslims who convert to Christianity face considerable problems. Every citizen is considered a member of the Islamic umma (community) from birth and is thus expected to practise the religion of his people. Christian families are rarely free to conduct their family life in a Christian way. The pressure caused by the communal lifestyle means that – particularly in remote areas – Christians, especially converts, are very restricted in expressing their faith. Islamist-

inspired mobs are also present. During the reporting period, outgoing President Yahya Jammeh made The Gambia the second African Islamic Republic after Mauritania.

Guinea

The Church in Guinea (3.5% Christian) mainly comprises Christians from a Muslim background. Under President Alpha Condé, the state is showing a degree of acceptance to Christians. The Authority of Religious Affairs has started to show some level of sensitivity regarding the rights of Christians. For example, the Authority agreed to arrange for government sponsorship of Christians travelling to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage.

Radical Islamic groups are not particularly active and the government tries to reduce the risk they pose to Christians and the society at large. No large-scale violence against Christians was recorded in the WWL 2017 reporting period. In the foreseeable future, the major concern for Christians in Guinea is the growing influence of radical versions of Islam that promote persecution in the entire West African region. Under the influence of radical teachings, many families and communities are becoming less tolerant of Christians and this makes life very difficult, especially for converts.

Israel

In Israel (2.5% Christian) Christians enjoy a higher level of religious freedom than in most other countries in the Middle East. Most violations of religious freedom are caused by individuals or small groups of religious extremists.

Christians from a Muslim background experience a high level of pressure in the private and family spheres of life. Opposition from the family is less severe than in other Middle Eastern states due to legislation protecting religious freedom. An exception is the law prohibiting adults from evangelism of children. Some Christians have been refused entrance to Israel or were forced to leave the country because of their assumed involvement in missionary or political activities.

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish organisations (e.g. Yad Le Achim) hold regular demonstrations in front of buildings where Messianic Jews (Jews who believe Jesus Christ to be the promised Messiah) gather for worship. Other forms of harassment include spreading libel, spitting at clergy, or painting anti-Christian slogans on churches and monasteries. Top Israeli political leaders have condemned these assaults and Israeli police established a special unit to crack down on the culprits. The number of attacks decreased in 2016. Opposition experienced by Messianic Jews from their (extended) family or community varies in seriousness, ranging from tolerating them (if he or she does not try to spread his/her Christian faith) to social exclusion. Several Messianic Jews have been refused residency permits, based on their faith. Many court cases have been fought (and won) to nullify these illegal measures. In some cases, their citizenship was revoked after immigration. After the Ministry of Education considerably cut financial support, church-owned schools reported experiencing pressure to change their status to become state schools.

A court case is currently underway concerning a Messianic Jewish couple who wanted to celebrate their wedding in a public party centre but were refused because the owner told them he'd lose his "kosher" certificate.

Generally, there is a relatively low level of specifically faith-related violence against Christians in Israel. Nevertheless, there have been acts of vandalism against Christian property since 2012 and these continued in 2016.

Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast (35% Christian) witnessed some of the worst violent incidents in Africa in the WWL 2017 reporting period. The most widely reported incident occurred in the resort town of Grand-Bassam, where Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb killed 22 people, including a five-year-old boy.

This creates an atmosphere of terror, especially for Christians. Furthermore, there is an increasing pressure on Christians due to the growing presence of Islam in government, administration, business, media and education, and increasing pressure from radical groups.

Morocco

In Morocco (0.1% Christian), the Islamist party, PJD, remains in power after winning the October 2016 elections. Reverberations from the Arab Spring were also felt in Morocco, but the protests did not bring the monarchy to an end. Instead, King Mohammed VI adopted a number of reforms in order to restore social peace and satisfy the demands of the Islamists. Victims of persecution are mainly Christian converts from a Muslim background, though restrictions also apply to the small and historical Catholic and expatriate communities. Foreign workers must still provide justification for living in the country and for Christian mission workers it is difficult to get residence permits.

In the WWL 2017 reporting period, few violent incidents against Christians were recorded. Compared to previous years, the situation for Christians has not altered much, apart from one important change: the Islamist majority in government. This has had a negative effect on the position of the Church. Islamist influence is becoming more visible, causing many Christians to be pessimistic about the future. Despite being regularly monitored and dismantled by government forces, Islamic State cells represent an on-going threat for Christians in Morocco.

Philippines

In the Philippines (90% Christian), most of the persecution comes from Muslim religious leaders and affects converts from three tribes: the Tausug, Yakan and Sama. There have also been reports of incidents affecting Christians in the Maguindanao and Iranun ethnic groups.

The Philippines faces a long-standing violent independence movement on the southern island of Mindanao, which has a strong Muslim minority. On 24 December 2015, the insurgent group BIFF (Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters) killed nine Christian farmers in Mindanao.

Weapons used to kill four people in an attack in Jakarta on 14 January 2016 were reportedly brought into Indonesia from the southern Philippines; this shows the worrying connections of Islamic militants across borders in Southeast Asia. Islamic State announced plans to create a province of their caliphate in the southern Philippines, and BIFF and some other groups have already pledged allegiance to IS.

Converts from Islam are becoming increasingly vulnerable. Several reports showed that they have to keep their Christian faith carefully hidden from their families and that meeting with other Christians is very difficult, dangerous and at times impossible.

Senegal

Although Senegal (5% Christian) is known for religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence of different religious groups, there continue to be reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Many of these target evangelical churches, which are rapidly growing in membership. For the most part,

persecution occurs in the form of mobs targeting evangelicals, who are seen as encroaching on the identity of this almost entirely Islamic nation.

The BBC reported on 18 November 2015 that Senegal was making plans to ban women from wearing the full-face Islamic veil in public, in response to the increasing threat of jihadism. On 7 November 2015, seven people, including four imams, were arrested by the Senegalese authorities for their suspected ties with radical Islamic groups.

A small number of violent incidents were recorded during the WWL 2017 reporting period, but fewer than in the past.

Venezuela

In Venezuela (92% Christian), the persecution of "born-again" Christians is subtle. There is a political trend towards a socialist society, with the president crushing opposition. The Church has been affected by the complex political situation. Tensions between ex-President Chavez, his successor, Nicolás Maduro, and the leadership of the Catholic Church have been growing. For years, the former Chavez administration attempted to shut down private education of all kinds in favour of state schools. His goal, observers say, was to use the state school system for the political indoctrination of youth. The government gives economic incentives to students who attend state schools, while denying equal recognition to students of private schools. Hence, church-based schools find themselves working against policies and programmes designed to eventually drive them out of business.

The general security situation is rapidly deteriorating due to an alarming increase in violent crime, which puts Christians along with others at greater risk of violent death than before.

What are 'Engines of persecution'?

World Watch Monitor - <http://bit.ly/2j0PFCf> - Open Doors has adopted the term "persecution engine" to help explain a primary reason why Christians are persecuted in a particular area or setting. As such, they represent the various sources of persecution that Christians experience and they usually occur in combination. This enables us to understand better the full dimensions of persecution and assists our strengthening response to it. An engine may not necessarily be anti-Christian in itself, such as Dictatorial Paranoia, or Organized Corruption, but it explains why - in certain circumstances - the Christian community becomes the target of persecution.

Persecution engines rarely occur singly. They cluster and overlap. Islamic extremism is often accompanied by Tribal Antagonism, for example, and Organized Corruption can overlay on all other engines. This shows the causes of persecution are complex, not simple.

The main persecution engines

Islamic Oppression

Tries to bring the country or the world under the "House of Islam" through violent or non-violent actions.

This is the organized attempt to make the world Islamic. Extremists in Islam must ensure that sharia law is applicable over the state or territory for Islam to be properly observed,

though not all Muslims aspire to this. Religious minorities may be tolerated, but strictly as second class citizens.

Islamic extremists range from extremist states that require sharia law, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, to extremist movements that seek to impose Islam but through relatively peaceful means, such as the now-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. There are extremist groups that espouse violence to achieve their aims, such as Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" in Syria and Iraq. And there are extremist households or individuals, which are the most effective in enforcing Islam's apostasy laws.

Islamic extremism is often more effective in stopping Christian witness though the squeeze of a strongly Islamic culture than the actions of violent jihadists, since state, tribe, family and neighbourhood all combine to stifle the exercise of the Christian faith. Islamic extremism constitutes by far the most common engine, in global terms, to Christians.

Religious Nationalism

Tries to conquer the nation for one's religion. Mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, but also Orthodox Judaism or other religions.

This refers to an ideology that seeks to make a territory or a state exclusively the province of a particular religion. It sees its religion as utterly supreme over other religions and traditions, and sets a very clear national boundary on its militancy. In this respect it is to be distinguished from Islamic extremism, which is always trans-national. The Islamic State militants, for example, are not local Syrians who want to make Syria Islamic, but the whole world, which is why they moved into Iraq. But there can overlap. In Somalia, for example, Islamic extremists play the nationalist card, insisting that to be a good Somali is to be a good Muslim.

But this engine refers more specifically, for example, to the Hindu nationalists in India, who use the ideology of Hindutva to justify their vision of a Hindu India. Or, to the nationalist Buddhists in Sri Lanka, who maintain all Sinhala people must be Buddhist lest they betray their heritage and country. It results in Christians being accused of being unpatriotic and walking away from their primary and ancient identity.

Ethnic Antagonism

Tries to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in tribal context. Often comes in the form of traditional religion or something similar.

This refers to the reality that when someone becomes a Christian they are often persecuted because they are seen to have turned their back on the traditions of their tribe. Sometimes the tribe may have its own religion, such as animistic tribes in parts of Africa. Or, sometimes the tribe may simply be a social or blood obligation that can act as strongly as the religious ties.

So, there are two senses in which this applies. First, a Christian may refuse to continue in the rituals of the tribe, especially the more animistic rituals which can involve immorality, blood sacrifices and idol worship. Second, the Christian proclaims their deepest identity is "In Christ," while the tribe demands that they see themselves and act purely as a Pashtun, or a Fulani, or a Lao. This is more marked in certain states where there is little sense of national identity. For example, very few people in Afghanistan see themselves as "Afghans," but Pashtuns, or Tajiks.

The tribe may or may not be religiously constituted (though it usually is), but it does have a distinct identity, and it is often harnessed by religious nationalists or Islamic extremists, making this engine relatively hidden and difficult to spot. One scholar wisely remarked of the Middle East, "Islam only goes back 1,500 years here, but tribalism goes back 5,000." But where tribalism ends and Islamic extremism begins can be difficult to discern in practice. We make the distinction because in many states Christians are persecuted out of tribal reasons. The most persecuted Christians of the Far East, for example, are tribal Christians, who often experience a double persecution from the state and from their tribe, such as the Chakma in Bangladesh or the Hmong in Vietnam.

Ecclesiastical Arrogance

Tries to maintain one's Christian denomination as the only legitimate or dominant expression of Christianity in the country. In most cases this Christian denomination is the majority Christian denomination.

This is where a church tries to impose its version of Christianity on everyone, especially other Christians, and refuses to accept the validity of other traditions. This was a particular problem mainly among the Roman Catholic churches of Latin America, although they have improved in this respect. Orthodox churches have an unfortunate habit of becoming co-existent with the state, and see non-Orthodox Christians as unpatriotic. In Russia, for example, the Orthodox church has often sought to marginalize and disempower those belonging to vibrant Christian communities, such as Baptists and Pentecostals. Today in Ethiopia, Pentecostal Christians can sometimes expect the most intense pressure from radical movements within the Orthodox church.

Communist Oppression

Tries to maintain communism as a prescriptive ideology and/or controls the church through a system of registration and oversight that has come from communism.

Communism is an ideology that seeks to bring about a classless paradise through the triumph of the proletariat and is utterly atheistic in its method. But it is also a system of control, where the state seeks to ensure the church is registered in order to control it. While the ideological drive of communism is fatally wounded today, the communist system of state control over the church remains especially in those post-communist states such as Russia and the so called "Stans" of Central Asia. Today, there are four countries left that are still formally communist: China, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba, though it is hard to say how much of the ideology remains and how much is just the system of control staying in place. But there are parts of the world where ideological communists persecute Christians, such as the Maoists in Nepal and the Naxalites in India. Even in states such as Venezuela, communist rhetoric is far from dead.

Dictatorial Paranoia

Does everything to maintain power, not specifically focused on realizing a vision.

Dictatorial paranoia is where a political leader and the inner clique seek to dominate every aspect of society. The dictator is seized by fear that someone, somewhere, is plotting an overthrow. No one is allowed to organize outside state control. This desire to control can come from a variety of motives. It can originate from an ideology such as communism, but more commonly it emerges from an overbearing leader, who seeks to survive through control.

The world is full of leaders who take more and more power to themselves. Africa particularly is plagued by leaders such as this, so too Latin America. Christians are a threat to any totalitarian regime if they refuse to be dominated, and especially if they

organise outside government control – the ultimate act of disloyalty. It is out of fear that Christians get persecuted because they cannot be controlled. Often Christians are tolerated if they allow themselves to be controlled through registration and laws.

Secular Intolerance

Tries to eradicate religion from the public domain, if possible even out of the hearts of people, and imposes an atheistic form of secularism as a new governing ideology.

Secularism can be understood two ways. First, positively, where it insists that the state stays neutral (or secular) in its refusal to prejudice one religion or denomination over another. Indeed, in this sense, state secularism is a legacy of the Reformation where the Anabaptists, for example, regarded themselves as aggressive secularists.

Secularism has a negative side, too, when atheists exploit secularism to insist all religion be expunged from public life and from crucial discussions about social issues such as sexuality, marriage, and human dignity. These atheists call for the abandonment of the state's historical neutrality, and sponsor a humanistic secularism that regards religious expression and opinion as injurious to the public good. They do not tolerate another interpretation of how to run public life, and often take steps to ensure this takes place without seeking permission or approval. Often this is peddled by atheists who claim that all religious expression and opinion is by definition pathological. It is in the Western world where this engine is strongest.

Organized Corruption

Tries to create a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption as a means for self-enrichment.

Societies contain elites like mafias that run extensive economic rackets, and Christians can get targeted insofar as their ethics threaten these rackets. An obvious example would be those Latin American regions run by guerrilla armies who get their funds through drug trafficking. Pastors or priests who stand out against this trade are threatened and killed. This engine is perhaps the most global of them all, as each society – especially where the state is weak or complicit – contains very deliberate and organized schemes to direct riches to an often violent elite. For an African pastor to speak out prophetically against a corrupt leader like Robert Mugabe can result in instant death or flight.

Some geopolitical specialists talk of "mafia states," where legitimately elected leaders rule the country like giant godfathers, and refuse to encourage the rule of law and the separation of powers. It is not always easy to clearly notice organized corruption. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reports "that while the activities of organized criminal groups have grown significantly across the globe in the last decade, the nature of their organizational structures is much more complex and dynamic than was perhaps the case in the past". The report continues, "One of the clearest examples of the fragmentation of organized crime is the break-up of the cartels involved in the trafficking of illicit narcotics from Colombia. They have been replaced by a large number of smaller and more loosely organized trafficking groups."
