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

***Freedom of religion and from religion: Human Rights Without Frontiers publishes over 2200 documented of prisoners on its database online***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In **China**, Falun Gong practitioners, whose movement was banned in 1999, are massively put in prison, a number of Catholic priests and bishops have also been missing, since

their arrests many years ago for being faithful to the Pope instead of swearing allegiance to the Communist Party.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **About anti-Muslim ideologies, anti-Muslim state policies and inter-Muslim hostilities**

**By Willy Fautré**

HRWF (04.01.2017) – Surveys highlight that in non-Muslim majority countries Muslims often face hostility, stigmatization and discrimination from state and non-state actors. Furthermore, in Muslim-majority countries, the majority Muslim denomination is often responsible for persecution and discrimination against minority Muslim denominations.

Various ideologies underpin global or specific anti-Muslim state policies and social attitudes, including

- a nationalist ideology closely linked to a dominant religion in Myanmar, leading to pogroms, mass killings, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing;

- the Communist ideology enforcing atheism in China, leading to severe restrictions of religious freedom, arrests and imprisonment;
- religiously motivated anti-Muslim ideologies among the Christian right Evangelicals in the United States and in some European Christian majority countries
- populist, extreme-right, fascist or neo-nazi ideologies, such as in Europe and North America
- competing and conflicting theologies inside Islam, each having a different political and social governance agenda, as in Iraq or Syria..

Inter-Muslim hostilities – stemming from theological disputes and struggles for power among various violent Islamist groups – produce innumerable victims of suicide bombings, terrorist attacks, regional conflicts and wars. No global statistics are available on the number of fatalities per religion, but according to a 2011 report from the U.S. government's National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC), Muslims suffered between 82 and 97% of terrorism-related fatalities during the previous five years.

Terrorist and jihadist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Talibans, al-Shaabab and Boko Haram have killed and continue to kill dozens of Muslims every day. Their goal is to impose a totalitarian form of governance inspired by their vision and interpretation of Islam. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) at the University of Maryland (United States), between 2004 and 2013, roughly half of all terrorist attacks and 60% of fatalities due to terrorist attacks took place in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan – all of which have a majority Muslim population.

Sunni communities are oppressed in Iran, a Shia majority country, while the Sunni community in Bahrain oppresses the local Shia majority, and Saudi Arabia, a Wahhabi majority country, persecutes its Shia minority.

When a state opts to recognize one form of Islam, dissidents and reformers may be deemed heretical and persecuted, as is the case in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Moreover, other currents of Islam (such as Sufis, Tablighi Jamaat and Said Nursi) may be banned, even though the groups are nonviolent and pose no problem to the security and the territorial integrity of the state. Their members may be arrested and imprisoned, as is the case in Azerbaijan, Russia, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.

This list offers a snapshot of anti-Muslim and inter-Muslim persecution around the world.

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## **About anti-Christian ideologies, anti-Christian state repression and anti-Christian hostility**

**By Willy Fautré**

HRWF (02.01.2017) - According to a recent Pew Center Research report, Christians, who numbered 2.3 billion in the world in 2015, were harassed by governments or social groups in a total of 128 countries – more countries than any other religious group.

Christians of all faiths around the world are currently victims of state repression, discrimination and/or (violent) social hostility for being Christians and/or practicing their

fundamental right to religious freedom: freedom to have and to keep their religion; freedom of expression about issues related to religion, freedom of association, worship and assembly; freedom to have missionary activities and to convert. Various ideologies are underpinning anti-Christian state policies and social attitudes. They lead to diverse violations of human rights and religious freedom committed

- in the name of various forms of Communist ideologies enforcing atheism, such as in China, Eritrea, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam...
- in the name of Islam in Muslim majority countries where it is the official religion of the state or the primary source of the Constitution and the legislation, such as in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen ...
- in the name of Islam in Muslim majority countries where there is no official state religion, such as Indonesia, Nigeria, Syria, Turkey...
- in the name of Hinduism, including in (nominally) secular state, such as in India and in Nepal
- in the name of secularism/*laïcité*, anarchist ideologies or Islam in liberal democracies where anti-Christian social hostility is expressed through hate speech, acts of vandalism of places of worship and community buildings, physical attacks, etc. which are often under-reported or ignored by public powers and the media.

State repression against Christians can include the death penalty (Pakistan), various forms of physical punishment (Saudi Arabia), prison terms (China), exorbitant fines (Central Asia) and discriminatory restrictions to their rights.

Social hostility by individuals or collectively organized non-state actors can include a wide range of religiously or ideologically motivated acts: discrimination, insults, hate speech and hate crimes, derogatory statements by public officials, acts of vandalism targeting places of worship and community buildings, physical attacks, torture, killings, extra-judicial executions, communal violence, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide.

This is a picture of anti-Christian persecution around the world.

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## About the Islamic totalitarianism

**By Willy Fautré**

HRWF (01.01.2017) - An ideology that wants to radically change the existing nature of a state into a theocracy to be dominated by one religious worldview

An ideology that wants to change the structure of a diverse civil society into a society to be dominated by one religious worldview

An ideology that wants the daily life and the behavior of each individual to be dominated by one religious worldview

is a totalitarian ideology, as was the Communist ideology inspired by the political philosophy of Marx and Engels.

Islamic totalitarianism is a totalitarian ideology inspired by the Quran but it is not a religion.

It divides and fragments the Muslim communities around the world.

The primary "collateral victims" of the fight for power of Islamic totalitarianism are Muslims, who in many countries adhere to an historically peaceful Islam.

Christians are a second category of "collateral victims" of Islamic totalitarianism in Muslim majority countries.

Diverse civil populations in countries where Islam is not professed by a majority are the third category of "collateral victims" of Islamic totalitarianism.

The Islamic totalitarian virus infecting the software of the *ummah* must not infect humankind. An antidote must be administered.

Combating Islamist totalitarianism with ideas, with words and in practice is legitimate. It is obligatory. It is the self-defence of states, of non-Muslim societies and minorities, and of individuals.

Combating groups and individuals, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic universities such as al-Azhar, which promulgate Islamic totalitarian ideologies is a must.

This is not Islamophobia. It is a fight for human dignity for all, for equality for all and for human rights for all.

## **Twenty-three Catholic missionaries were killed in the world in 2017**

ZENIT (29.12.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2gdx7a5> - Twenty-three Catholic missionaries were killed in the world in 2017: 13 priests, one Religious, one nun, and eight laymen reported the Vatican Agency *Fides*, on Thursday, December 28, 2017. (\*)

For the eighth consecutive year, the highest number was recorded in America, where 11 Catholics on mission were killed (eight priests, one Religious, and two laymen), followed by Africa with 10 victims (four priests, one nun, and five laymen), and by Asia where one priest and one layman were killed.

According to data published by *Fides*, from 2000 to 2016, 424 Catholics on mission were killed in the world, of which five were Bishops.

The Agency explained that "numerous pastoral workers were killed during robbery attempts in contexts of economic and cultural poverty, of moral and environmental degradation, where violence and abuses are regarded as a rule of conduct."

For *Fides*, this list is "only the tip of the iceberg," because the list of pastoral workers or of "simple Catholics" who were "assaulted, beaten, robbed, threatened" is much longer, as well as that "of Catholic structures at the service of the whole population, which were assaulted, vandalized or pillaged."

To the provisional lists drawn up annually by *Fides*, "the long list must always be added of those of whom there has been no news for a long time or whose name is unknown,

who – in the four corners of the planet – suffer and pay with their life for their faith in Jesus Christ.”

The murderers of priests or Religious “are rarely identified or condemned,” deplored *Fides*, which gave the example of the murder of Spanish missionary Vicente Canas, killed in Brazil in 1987. During the first trial in 2006, the accused were acquitted for lack of evidence; a new trial led to the condemnation of the sponsor, sole survivor of the accused.

*Fides* also explained that its annual list “doesn’t concern only the missionaries *ad gentes*, in the strict sense of the term, but attempts to register all the pastoral workers who died in a violent way, not explicitly “out of hatred for the faith.” “For this reason, we prefer not to use the term ‘martyrs,’ except in its etymological sense of “witnesses,” so as not to anticipate the judgment that the Church might give eventually on some among them.”

(\*) <http://www.fides.org/en/news/63464>

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