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UN Int'l Day Commemorating Victims of Acts of Violence Based on FORB

UN International Day Commemorating Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief

Administrative violence against Tai Ji Men in Taiwan

HRWF (22.08.2022) – Recent reports show that violence carried out by governments against religious minorities is on the rise. The Pew Research Center reported that over 95 countries have been found to unjustly use government force, such as

physical abuse, to coerce religious communities. Among these countries, at least 20 have reported cases of violence that resulted in death.

Non-state actors are also responsible for acts of violence against religious minorities. Cases involving physical violence from non-state actors have increased at least 19 percent since 2017. Radical extremists in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, such as India and Pakistan, are largely responsible for these attacks. Mob violence, which regularly occurs in over 41 countries, is also used to intimidate and harm religious minorities.

A few examples of state violence:

In Pakistan, Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, a Christian couple, faced the death-by-hanging penalty, as a consequence of the notorious “blasphemy” laws. For eight years, they were kept on the death row and were not able to see their children grow. Thanks to the mobilization of the international community they are now free and reunited in a European country.

In Saudi Arabia, Raif Badawi, an agnostic, was arrested and imprisoned in 2012 under the country’s cybercrime law, after being charged with “insulting Islam” and setting up a liberal online forum. He had criticised Saudi Arabia’s religious police on his blog and also called for an end to the role of religion in politics.

A court sentenced Badawi to 10 years in prison in 2014, as well as 1,000 lashes.

Badawi received his first whipping of 50 lashes in January 2015, but the rest were suspended for several years. The United Nations described the penalty as “cruel and inhuman” and in April 2020 Saudi Arabia eventually abolished flogging. He was finally released after serving his 10 years and he now lives in Canada.

In Ukraine, Russian soldiers showed up at the church of Rev. Sergey Chudinovich, put a bag over his head, took him to the police station, then asked him to collaborate with them.

He refused. The Russians tied him up, tossed him in the basement and tortured him for the next two days. In Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine, clergy members are targets. Dozens of priests from the Orthodox Church of Ukraine have been kidnapped or killed since the invasion began. Still more pastors from other denominations have been chased from their pulpits and imprisoned.

Today, on the International Day commemorating the victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief, we pay tribute to those who have lost their lives, who have been physically or psychologically attacked, beaten and tortured due to their religious, spiritual or philosophical beliefs.

In addition to physical and psychological violence, another form of violence and suffering targeting specific religious and spiritual groups usually remains unidentified and undetected by the human rights radars: it is the institutional violence. The perpetrators are state institutions such as tax administrations.

In previous webinars, we have highlighted the case of Tai Ji Men in Taiwan but also the case of four religious and spiritual groups in France, Canada and India which were victims of administrative violence

Although these countries are democratic countries, their respective tax administrations have been instrumentalized by private or political actors to try to stifle them to death under discriminatory huge taxes and fines for the purpose of killing them.

This administrative violence has not been successful but the psychological and even physical suffering of the members religious and spiritual groups has been incommensurable.

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