

Table of Contents

- ***Countdown to death of Christianity in parts of Middle East ticking ever louder***
 - ***OSCE/ODIHR: Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance***
 - ***Faith roundtables provide open forum for believers and non-believers***
-

Countdown to death of Christianity in parts of Middle East ticking ever louder

Report: 2019 Persecuted and Forgotten?): <https://persecutedchristians.acninternational.org/>

Aid to the Church in Need (23.10.2019) - The countdown to Christianity's disappearance in parts of the Middle East is ticking ever louder – and can only be stopped if the international community acts now – according to a new report launched today (Wednesday, 23rd October) in London.

The 2019 *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report, produced by Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), warns of Christianity vanishing from towns and cities in the region, as – despite the defeat of Daesh (ISIS) – the impact of genocide has led to haemorrhaging numbers of the faithful.

There were 1.5 million Christians in Iraq before 2003 but by mid-2019, they had fallen to well below 150,000 and perhaps even less than 120,000 – a decline of up to 90 percent within a generation.

In Syria Christian numbers have fallen by two thirds since the conflict began in 2011.

The ACN report notes that the international community has shown unprecedented concern about the persecution of the region's Christians, but failed to provide the aid required to ensure its survival during that period covered by the report (2017-19).

Persecuted and Forgotten? found that "Governments in the West and the UN failed to offer Christians in countries such as Iraq and Syria the emergency help they needed as genocide got underway."

The report warns that the Church in the region could vanish if radical Islamists were to mount another attack on vulnerable communities – a threat highlighted by reports of jihadists escaping prison, as a result of this month's renewed violence in north-east Syria. The *Persecuted and Forgotten?* report concludes: "Were there to be another Daesh-style assault on the faithful, it could result in the Church's disappearance.

"However, if security can be guaranteed there is every indication that Christianity could survive in Nineveh and Erbil."

Persecuted and Forgotten? also found that the persecution of Christians has worsened the most in South and East Asia – noting that, in 2017, 477 anti-Christian incidents were reported in India.

In the same region, 300 people died – and more than 500 were injured – in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday 2019 when jihadists bombed sites including three churches.

In a number of African countries Christians were threatened by Islamists seeking to eliminate the Church – either by use of force or by dishonest means, including bribing people to convert.

In Nigeria's north and the 'Middle Belt' regions, militants continued a reign of terror against Christians and Muslims alike –3,731 Christians were reportedly killed in 2018.

While in other parts of the African continent, the main threat to Christians came from the state – over a 12-month period, more than 70 churches were attacked in Sudan's Nuba Mountains with 32 burnt down.

The report can be consulted (for now only in the English version – other languages coming soon): <https://persecutedchristians.acninternational.org/>

OSCE/ODIHR: Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance

OSCE (19.09.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2kOPYX9> - Amidst increasing security-driven restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief in the OSCE region, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) published *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance* on 19 September 2019. This new publication, launched at a side event of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019 in Warsaw, provides guiding principles, practical guidance and recommendations to ensure a human rights-based, gender-sensitive approach to freedom of religion or belief and security for policymakers and security practitioners, civil society organizations, religious or belief communities, and the media.

"This policy guidance seeks to contribute to the much-needed reframing of the discourse on freedom of religion or belief and security in the OSCE region and to inform practice in this area," said Kishan Manocha, ODIHR Senior Adviser on Freedom of Religion or Belief. "It offers practical guidance to help OSCE participating States ensure their security measures are in line with their international obligations and commitments in this area."

Some 50 participants drawn from state authorities, civil society organizations, religious or belief communities, academic institutions, and the media attended the launch event. ODIHR will present the recommendations contained in the policy guidance at a number of roundtable discussions and other meetings to be convened across the OSCE region in the coming months.

Faith roundtables provide open forum for believers and non-believers

By Elena Pavlovska

NewEurope (17.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2kNJAzr> - The US State Department organised the Second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington DC during the summer, an annual event that is the largest religious freedom gathering of its kind in the world with more than 1,000 civil society and religious leaders and more than 100 foreign government delegations in attendance.

Participants in the event were reminded that the Pew Research Center, the most renowned and reliable think regarding statistics on religion, found that 80% of the world's population live in a religiously restricted environment.

In an effort to raise awareness about the current state of religious freedom in the world, the ministerial acts a platform to discuss civil society initiatives, including the creation and of 100 International Religious Freedom Roundtables around the globe to help empower civil society to organise around the principle that every person has a right to their religious beliefs.

As expressed by the State Department, roundtables and other similar networks currently exist in Nigeria, Colombia, Brussels (EU), Geneva (UN), Sudan, Ukraine, New York (UN), South Korea, Taiwan, and Italy. More roundtables are expected to launch soon in Romania, Hungary, Iraqi Kurdistan, Indonesia, London, Mexico, Paris, and Mongolia.

The roundtables were first set up in Washington DC more than 10 years ago and quickly became a focal point for the topic of religious freedom for politicians, NGOs, and activists in DC who would have an interest in the issue. The one based in Brussels covers the EU institutions and has existed for several years. Known as the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Roundtable Brussels-EU, it acts as an informal group of individuals from civil society who gather regularly to discuss FoRB issues on a non-attribution basis. The participants gather, speak freely when sharing ideas and information, and propose joint advocacy actions to address specific FoRB issues and problems globally.

The participants are free to propose initiatives regarding the protection and promotion of freedom of religion, conscience, and belief in Europe and around the world, and other participants have then the possibility to join these initiatives and self-select into coalitions of the willing on such initiatives".

The EU Roundtable is chaired by Evangelical Archbishop **Thomas Schirrmacher** of Germany, who is also President of the International Society for Human Rights and Chair of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.

"Freedom of religion and belief needs all actors to sit together and exchange knowledge and ideas, government officials, MPs, multi-state actors, large and small religious and secular worldview actors, official representatives of religions or secular worldview, human rights and advocacy organisations, experts, journalists and many more. Only a rather loose roundtable can guarantee space for all to speak, to interact and to arrange ever new coalitions for specific letters, actions and summits and I am glad that this is working more and more in Brussels," Schirrmacher said while speaking with New Europe.

"FoRB is a really important issue in the world of today. Discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation exists everywhere in the world, persecution exists, and too many people are killed every day because of their religious choices. This is not something that governments alone have been able to solve until now. This is not something that NGOs or activists alone have been able to solve. So we expect that together, activists, NGOs,

faith-based or not, and governments, we will be able to have more concrete results in getting rid of this issue. The Roundtable is open to all good-will, and honestly, it is maybe the only place today that is really all-inclusive on the topic of FoRB and it already has a track of good results and achievements,” said **Eric Roux**, one of Schirmacher’s five co-chairs, after being contacted by New Europe.

The main principle of these roundtables is all-inclusiveness, and in order to make it a safe space for all, they apply the Chatham House Rule—discussions are off the record and any information disclosed during these meetings may be reported by those present, but the source of that information may not be explicitly or implicitly identified.