

## Research Report

**COMMITTEE :** Human Rights Council

**ISSUE :** *What measures can be adopted to combat human rights violations of religious minorities?*

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### ***What measures should be adopted to combat violations of the human rights of religious minorities?***

#### **KEY WORDS**

**Human Rights Council (HRC):** The main United Nations human rights body. Its role is to assess situations of human rights violations and make recommendations to remedy them, to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. The Council has the power to discuss any human rights issue and situation in the world.

**Human rights:** Human rights concern all aspects of life. Their observance enables everyone to decide freely about their life, respecting the principle of equality and human dignity. They include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the collective rights of peoples. They set the boundaries within which the State can exercise its power. The UN defines human rights as rights that are essential to all human beings, regardless of their nationality, gender, ethnic origin, colour, religion, language or other status.

**Violations:** Any kind of violation of an individual's rights, depriving them of parts of their fundamental rights.

**Minority:** A group numerically inferior to the rest of a country's population, whose members possess characteristics that differentiate them ethnically, religiously or linguistically, and who manifest, even if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity oriented towards the preservation of their culture, traditions, religion or language.

**Religious minority:** A grouping of persons bound together by religious affinities such as shared beliefs or common religious practices.

**Freedom of religion/worship/belief:** "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance (*Art. 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*)"

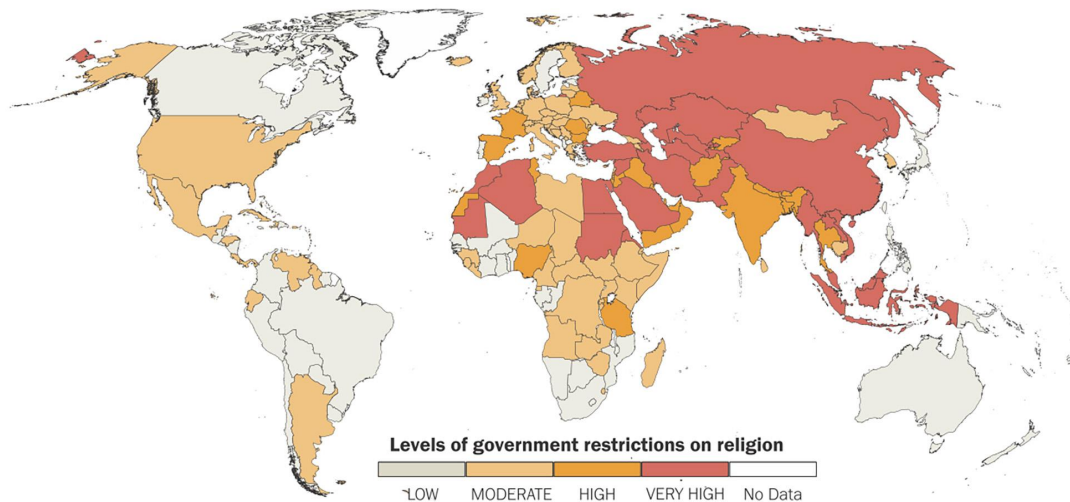
## OVERVIEW

Religious freedom is a central principle in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the founding document of the UN, and has since influenced many other national and international charters. However, religion and respect for the beliefs of others is still a major source of conflict, sometimes leading to wars of unprecedented proportion. Religious persecution can be triggered by a State when it considers a religious group to be a threat to its interests and security, or by religious groups towards other groups considered inferior or impious. Such violence seems to have a recurring objective: reducing the visibility and legitimacy of the community under attack. These minorities are constantly confronted with serious human rights violations, social exclusion, economic marginalisation, poverty, and discrimination, in both developing and developed countries.

Of the 197 countries in the world, 81 are identified as places where religious freedom is under threat, in other words, in one out of three countries in the world. Of these, 20 countries in the Middle East and Central Africa are rated as "high" in terms of lack of religious freedom and persecution of religious minorities. Fourteen of them experience persecution related to extremist Islam. In the remaining six countries, persecution is linked to authoritarian regimes.

### Government restrictions on religion around the world

*Level of government restrictions on religion in each country as of 2017*



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of external data. See Methodology for details.  
 "A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World"

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## Religious intolerance today: three examples

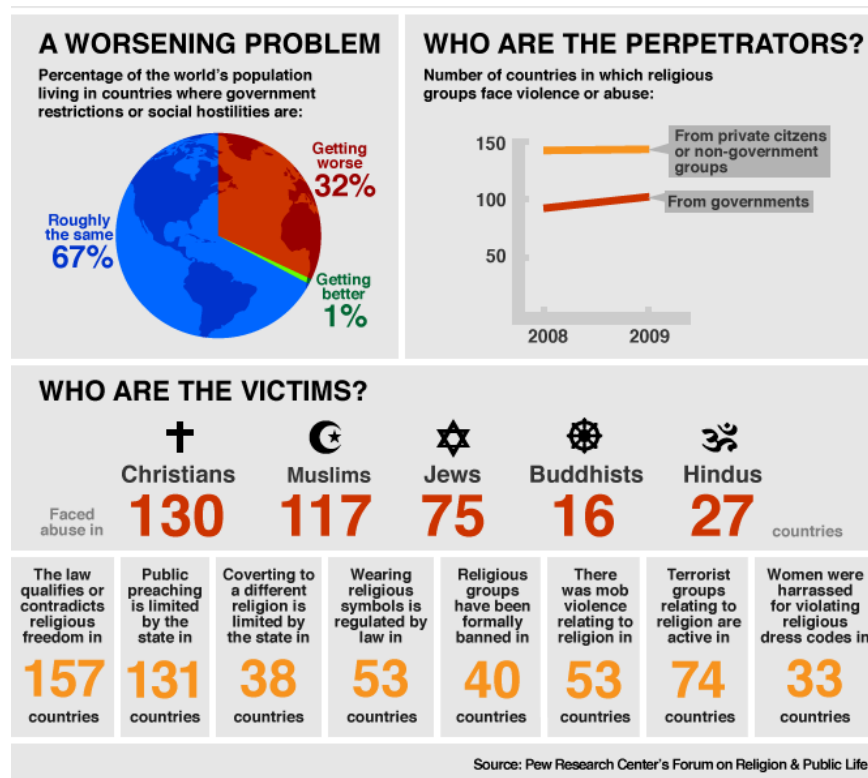
1. The persecution of Christians covers a variety of actions and behaviours which have in common the repression of Christianity and the cultural or even physical elimination of Christians by religious or secular powers. This persecution can go as far as organised massacres.

**"One in nine Christians is persecuted because of their faith".**

*NGO activist "Open Doors" - 2019*

The international humanitarian non-governmental organisation (NGO) "Open Doors", whose aim is to support and protect persecuted Christians, has been gathering information on Christian religious freedom in the private and public spheres since 1993: criteria include the possibility to pray and read the Bible, freedom of marriage and conversion, pressure on clothing, discrimination in employment, respect for rights, control or destruction of churches... and on physical violence suffered because of the Christian faith: murders, destruction, detention without trial, rapes, assaults, sexual harassment... This data makes it possible to organise projects adapted to the different local contexts and needs of Christian populations. According to one of their studies, North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia and Libya are the most hostile countries towards the Christian faith in 2021.

2. Muslims are also subject to abuse of power, especially when forming minority groups:
  - The Rohingyas, considered enemies within Myanmar since the Second World War, have been repeatedly repressed by the country's military dictatorship, notably between 1978 and 2017. This Muslim community is subject to ethnic cleansing and is considered to be one of the most oppressed religious minorities, according to the UN. While the Burmese constitution recognises 135 minorities, it ignores the Rohingyas, who have been forced to flee their country for two years in order to escape genocide.
  - The Uyghurs, whom the government of the People's Republic of China is trying to incorporate by force into what is perceived as the greater ethnic society, are denied the most basic rights: thousands of individuals are locked up in what the press and NGOs regularly call concentration camps, thus becoming the largest mass internment of the 21st century.
3. Anti-Semitism first took on the form of religious persecution during the Middle Ages, then adopted more nationalistic undertones from the 19th century onwards, before becoming a pseudo-scientific racial cleansing according to Nazi ideology. Since the end of the Second World War, it has taken on a new form in anti-Zionism. History calls for vigilance. In Europe, multi-faceted antisemitism persists. According to French newspaper *Le Monde*, a survey carried out over the last two years in sixteen countries of the European Union estimates that 20% of Europeans hold anti-Semitic views. Over time, the forms of hostility against Jews (anti-Judaism and antisemitism) were studied by analysing hostile acts that would aim to convert, exclude, expel, or murder people identified as Jews.



## RELEVANT UN TREATIES AND EVENTS

**18/12/1992**

Ratification of the "Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities" by the UN General Assembly. It contains essential principles for the guarantee of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, thus becoming a key reference for UN action. It encourages States to take measures to promote the rights of minorities and to ensure the protection of their identity. [Minority Rights Declaration - OHCHR](#)

**22 August**

International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief  
On this occasion, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for messages of peace to be countered by messages of hate.

**"We have seen an increase in attacks targeting people because of their religion or beliefs. The world must take action to eliminate anti-Muslim hatred, persecution of Christians and other religious groups."**

*Antonio Guterres - August 2019*

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In order to promote greater respect for the human rights of religious minorities, it is important to target different areas, including political, cultural, judicial and educational spheres, at all different levels (local, regional, international...)

*The World Council of Churches has made recommendations in this regard, such as:*

1. Increased funding for bilingual education and ethnic studies in public schools
2. public recognition of minority religious holidays

*Other solutions could be proposed:*

- 1) Encouraging Member States to strengthen their legislation in order to protect freedom of religion on the one hand, and to combat hate speech and incitement to religious persecution on the other
- 2) Encourage communication between religious and human rights groups to identify signs of discrimination and cases that can be taken to court or discussed bilaterally to resolve conflicts
- 3) Ensure the participation of religious minorities in public life and decision-making that affects them by guaranteeing their political representation, free exercise of their right to vote, access to employment and public services of all kinds, and by protecting their right to establish and maintain their associations and organisations
- 4) Protect historical and symbolic sites and places of worship of religious minorities from attack, defacement or desecration
- 5) Release detainees imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of religion, belief and expression, including human rights lawyers, activists and followers of a persecuted religion
- 6) Take the necessary measures to ensure that police, prosecutors, judges and all other officials involved in the administration of justice in cases dealing with religious freedom are effectively protected from threats and intimidation

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/religious-based-violence-victims-day>

### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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