

*Security Council*

*MetMUNC XLVIII*

*Topic: Persecution of Christian Minorities*

*Chairs: Ian Irushalmi & Christopher Tzimopoulos*



---

Religious persecution is the mistreatment of individuals because of their religious beliefs. The act has occurred countless times throughout history, and nearly every religion has experienced it. In most cases of it, the religious (or irreligious) elite in power in a state perceive certain religious minorities as a threat to their hegemony or the creation of an ideal society. This animosity often takes the form of either oppressive laws designed to persecute religious minorities and prevent them from living their lives in accordance with their faith or agitation within communities. This committee session will focus specifically on the persecution of Christians.

The persecution of Christians began nearly immediately after the religion first emerged in the eastern Roman Empire. Devout Christians refused to worship the divine monarchs; therefore, the ruling elite perceived the faith as sacrilegious and treasonous. Also, due to their inferior status in the Roman Empire, Christians were used as scapegoats to receive the blame of the corrupt practices of the Roman Emperors.<sup>1</sup> Individual communities also persecuted Christians at their



**Figure 1:** An illustration depicting Christian martyrs living in the Roman Empire.

---

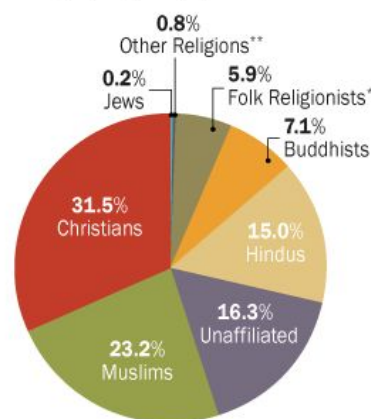
<sup>1</sup> [https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/christianityromanempire\\_article\\_01.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/romans/christianityromanempire_article_01.shtml)

own discretion, often due to misunderstandings of rites that Christians had to keep secret out of fear. Until Christianity was legalized through the Edict of Milan, Christians led difficult lives and could not freely practice their religion.

In contemporary times, the persecution of Christians is still a global issue. In 2013, the Vatican's representative to the UN reported to the Human Rights Council that approximately "100,000 Christians are violently killed because of some relation to their faith every year."<sup>2</sup> Although the credibility of this exact number is questionable, it highlights the often overlooked modern persecution of Christians. Surprisingly, approximately 80% of all acts of religious discrimination are directed at Christians, according to the International Society for Human Rights.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is crucial that the international community addresses this widespread crisis of religious persecution.

Christian persecution most significantly occurs in the Middle East (including North Africa). According to a report commissioned by then-UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, "The level and nature of persecution [in the Middle East] is arguably coming close to meeting the international definition of genocide, according to that adopted by the UN."<sup>4</sup> In fact, several countries (including the US and UK) have officially recognized certain instances of persecution

**Size of Major Religious Groups, 2010**  
Percentage of the global population



\*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.  
\*\*Includes Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths.  
Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.  
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

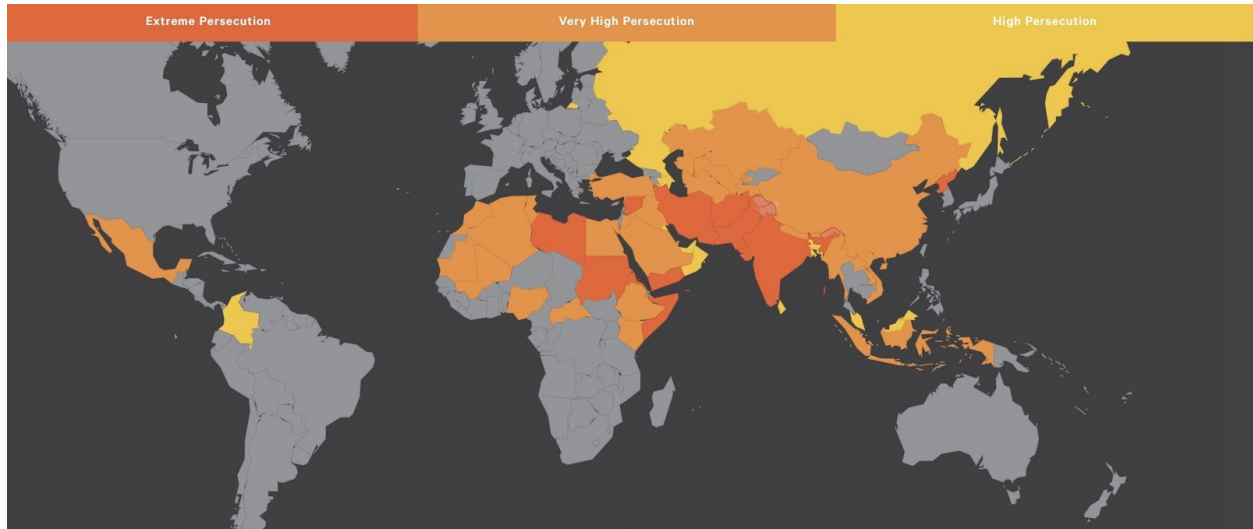
**Figure 2:** Nearly a third of the global population is Christian, yet Christians experience nearly 80% of religious discrimination (pewforum.org).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hudson.org/research/9613-vatican-to-the-un-100-000-christians-killed-for-their-faith-each-year>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/christians-the-worlds-most-persecuted-people-9630774.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/02/persecution-driving-christians-out-of-middle-east-report>

in the Middle East as genocide.<sup>5</sup> Christians face persecution originating from both codified laws and violent extremist groups.



**Figure 3:** A map from Open Doors USA illustrating the suspected levels of Christian persecution in certain countries.

It is impossible to generalize the numerous instances of Christian persecution in the Middle East, but Egypt is an excellent example for analysis due to its large Christian population. Egypt has the largest population of Copts in the world, an ethnoreligious group known for its distinct sect of Christianity. Egypt’s Copts constitute the largest population of Christians in the Middle East, and despite their long history residing in Egypt, they face intense persecution.

In 2010, Human Rights Watch stated that the Egyptian government had failed to “investigate properly and prosecute those responsible for the increasing number of incidents of sectarian violence.”<sup>6</sup> The failure of the government to take persecution seriously endures today; bureaucrats and administrators in small villages and communities are taking on an increasingly

<sup>5</sup><https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/59786a0040f0b65dcb00000a/042-Persecution-of-Christians-in-the-Middle-East.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/01/24/egypt-and-libya-year-serious-abuses>

hateful attitude towards Coptic Egyptians. “Michael Jones,” an Evangelical Christian businessman from Cairo, told The Guardian that disdain for Christians permeates Egyptian culture.<sup>7</sup> His words are best exemplified by identity cards that openly display whether the user is a Christian. A representative from Open Doors, a charity that raises awareness for Christian persecution worldwide, told The Guardian that these identity cards, by making the user’s religion conspicuous, allow for discrimination in hiring and issuing church permits.

Open Doors keeps detailed profiles of each country where Christians are persecuted, and it keeps a ranked list of the most dangerous countries for Christian residents. It rates Egypt number 16 on its list, citing the government-sanctioned discrimination discussed before and numerous instances of Islamist violence.<sup>8</sup> The many incidents include a mob attacking Christians in a village in Minya due to a “blasphemous” Facebook post in July 2018 and an attack on two buses carrying Copts, for which ISIS claimed responsibility, in November 2018.<sup>9</sup> ISIS has executed numerous church bombings in recent years throughout Egypt and the Middle East, and the continuing atmosphere of discrimination in Egypt provides a bleak future for Coptic Egyptians.



**Figure 4:** A Coptic church in Egypt following a deadly bomb attack (express.co.uk).

10 11

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/10/christians-egypt-unprecedented-persecution-report>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/egypt/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/02/world/middleeast/egypt-coptic-christians-ambush.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/30/world/middleeast/egypt-isis-terror-plot-church.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/egypt-coptic-church-bombing-death-toll-rises-tanta-cairo>

Like in Egypt, instances of Christian persecution are ubiquitous across the Middle East. Gruesome attacks by extremist groups and the ramifications of discriminatory laws threaten the very existence of Christian communities in the Middle East, and as a result, their numbers continue to dwindle.<sup>12</sup>

Christian persecution, although most prominent in the Middle East, occurs elsewhere in the world, most notably in South and East Asia. India has one of the largest Christian populations in Asia, yet persecution there is on the rise. Hindu extremists have targeted churches in numerous instances in recent years. For instance, in February 2018, a group of Hindu extremists interrupted prayer services in a South Indian church, demanding the pastor present written approval from the local government.<sup>13</sup> These extremists, who referred to Christianity as a foreign religion in their attack, reflect growing nationalism in India. Ever since the election of Prime Minister Modi, support for his party's goal to create a "Hindu nation" has surged.<sup>14</sup> This has led to the aforementioned attacks on churches and local governments enforcing religious laws more harshly. Certain states require people to seek permission from the government in order to convert to a new religion, and religious identity appears on a person's official record. This, like in Egypt, allows for discrimination in hiring, the issuing of loans, and marriages.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 5:** Tamil Christians protesting to demand government action ending violence against Christians (ucanews.com).

<sup>12</sup><https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/59786a0040f0b65dcb00000a/042-Persecution-of-Christians-in-the-Middle-East.pdf>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.newsweek.com/how-hindu-extremists-are-shutting-down-christian-churches-why-are-you-1360934>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/706808616/the-powerful-group-shaping-the-rise-of-hindu-nationalism-in-india>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.newsweek.com/how-hindu-extremists-are-shutting-down-christian-churches-why-are-you-1360934>

Clearly, Christians suffer extensive persecution at the hands of local extremist groups and governments, yet the UN has taken notably little action in this area. Christian organizations have criticized the UN for not upholding religious freedom enough in troubled areas and not drafting enough resolutions specifically addressing Christian persecution. Recently, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have passed several resolutions addressing religious discrimination and freedom of religion. For instance, Operative Clause 7 of Human Rights Council Resolution 40/10 calls for states to “to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against persons belonging to religious minorities.”<sup>16</sup> However, these resolutions do not address the unique situation of Christians, and provide no incentive for complicit states to follow their guidelines.

Political correctness is one of the major obstacles to UN recognition of Christian persecution. Since Christianity is the primary religion of many developed countries, people often are unaware of the plight of Christians in other regions. Upon releasing his report on international cases of Christian persecution, Jeremy Hunt told BBC, “What we have forgotten in that atmosphere of political correctness is actually the Christians that are being persecuted are some of the poorest people on the planet.”<sup>17</sup>

It is crucial that the Security Council addresses this issue specifically. Although religious persecution is extremely widespread and by no means limited only to Christianity, Christian persecution does not have the recognition of other forms of persecution. Through its resounding voice in the UN, the Security Council has an important and unique role to play in mitigating this

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3804640?ln=en>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48146305>

crisis. As the only organ with power to enforce its resolutions, the Security Council must take decisive action to minimize the suffering of innocent people.

---

**Questions to Consider:**

1. To what extent has your country raised awareness of Christian persecution?
2. To what extent does your country promote religious freedom?
3. To what extent does religious persecution (of Christians especially) occur in your country?
4. How has your country dealt with instances of religious persecution in the past or present?
5. Why do instances of Christian persecution occur? What motivates the perpetrators?

**Helpful Links:**

- <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/> (contains detailed outlines of several countries suspected to be dangerous for Christians)
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48146305>
- <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/02/persecution-driving-christians-out-of-middle-east-report>
- <https://christianpersecutionreview.org.uk/storage/2019/07/final-report-and-recommendations.pdf> (the UK Foreign Secretary report mentioned in the guide)
- <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/13/china-repression-christian-church-intensifies> (another elucidating case study of Christian persecution in Asia)