

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Minorities and freethinkers in Algeria



CASE STUDY

THEMES:*Legislative restrictions, blasphemy, proselytization, places of worship*

In 2021, religious freedom conditions in Algeria continued to get worse. Algerian authorities convicted and sentenced individuals for blasphemy and proselytization, maintained the closure of dozens of Protestant churches, and charged religious minorities with gathering illegally, despite providing no legal means for them to worship collectively. Many groups are affected, including Protestant Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and freethinkers.

In February 2021, for example, a court sentenced Said Djabelkhir, an expert on Sufism and advocate for a progressive interpretation of Islam, to three years in prison for “offending the precepts of Islam.”

In June, a court in Oran ordered the government to physically seal three churches despite an ongoing appeal by the Protestant community against the order for their closure. Since 2017, the Algerian government has ordered the closure of 20 Protestant churches under Ordinance 06-03, which prohibits non-Muslim organizations from establishing places of worship without authorization. The Evangelical Protestant Association (EPA) applied for authorization but the National Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups, which reportedly never meets, has not adequately responded to the request. In November 2021, the Algerian government summoned the president of the EPA to court for practicing non-Muslim rites without permission.

Algerian authorities also continued to prosecute Ahmadiyya Muslims for gathering without authorization. The Algerian government insists the Ahmadiyya Muslim community register with the Commission for Non-Muslim Religious Groups, while Ahmadis, who consider themselves Muslim, believe that to be in violation of their conscience as Muslims. At the end of 2020 over 200 Ahmadiyya Muslims were facing such charges.

Source

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/2022%20Algeria.pdf

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Persecution of Afro-Brazilian traditional religions



CASE STUDY

THEMES:*Social hostilities, hate crimes*

In Brazil, followers of traditional Afro-Brazilian religions are facing violent attacks from neo-Pentecostal neighbours and gangs who consider their religion to be demonic and evil. In 2017, hate crimes against practitioners of Umbanda and Candomblé in Rio de Janeiro represented 90% of the cases reported to the state of Rio's public complaints hotline. Reported cases of religious discrimination nationwide had increased 4960% in five years.

Regular attacks on worshipers began approximately one year after Father Márcio Virginio opened a Candomblé house in northern Rio de Janeiro. Stones were thrown from the neighbouring building, breaking parts of the roof and an image of Caboclo, an orixá worshipped in the house. "When we find a broken image of a spirit it makes me sad, because it is the home of our sacred entity." Father Márcio put a tarpaulin over the courtyard to prevent people from being hit by the stones being thrown during religious ceremonies. "My house has a lot of old people, people who come in wheelchairs. People already arrive in fear."

Father Márcio reported the assaults to the police when they became more frequent. He says he went to the station at least 20 times to make complaints. "They did nothing," he says. Advocates of religious freedom see a link between police inaction and prejudice.

The rise in violence appears to be linked to a rise in neo-Pentecostalism among members of criminal gangs, with drug traffickers attempting to banish traditional religions from the drug territories they control. In September 2017, the terreiro of the priestess Carmen de Oxum was attacked in Nova Iguaçu. In a cell phone recording of the attack a trafficker can be heard giving orders to destroy the sacred objects: "Break everything, put out the candles, for the blood of Jesus has power... All evil must be undone in the name of Jesus."

Sources

RioOnWatch <https://rioonwatch.org/?p=40117>

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Rohingya Muslims in Burma/Myanmar



CASE STUDY

THEMES:*Persecution, genocide, citizenship, statelessness, refugees*

Burma borders Bangladesh, a border defined during British colonial rule. In the 1970s, when Bangladesh (East Pakistan) was struggling for independence from Pakistan, there was an armed uprising by some separatist Muslim Rohingyas in Burma who wanted their region of Burma to be part of Bangladesh.

In 1982 a law was introduced which denied citizenship to most Burmese Rohingyas. They have been subjected to arbitrary taxation, land confiscation, forced eviction, house destruction and restrictions on marriage. Rohingyas are not allowed to leave their settlements and have been the subject of a campaign of commercial boycott led by Buddhist nationalist monks – with serious threats against those who trade with Muslims and against aid workers who help them. Like many ethnic minorities in Burma, Rohingyas are used as forced labourers on roads and at military camps.

Both the military and Buddhist nationalists have committed repeated acts of violence towards the Rohingya community. The most severe violence occurred in August 2017, following separatist attacks on police outposts. Government troops backed by local Buddhist mobs burnt down hundreds of villages, murdering thousands of people. A United Nations investigation accused the military of carrying out mass killings and rapes with “genocidal intent”.

According to the UNHCR, approximately 720,000 Rohingya refugees have fled targeted violence and human rights violations in Myanmar since August 2017. They join an existing group of 213,000 Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh in previous years. Nearly 80% of Rohingya refugees are women and children.

Sources

Burma Human Rights Network www.bhrn.org.uk

UNHCR www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-the-facts/

BBC News www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41566561

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Targeting of Muslims in the Central African Republic



CASE STUDY

Approximately 89% of the population of the Central African Republic (CAR) identify as Christian with 9% identifying as Muslims.

In 2012, following longstanding grievances about government marginalization and discrimination against Muslim minorities, predominantly Muslim militias in the north of the CAR mobilized and marched on the capital. In response, militias from predominantly Christian- and folk religion-practicing communities mobilized for self-protection and began retaliating against Muslim civilian communities.

This triggered more than half a decade of political and ethnoreligious violence, including attacks on individuals based on their religious identity, on houses of worship and on religious enclaves in cities. Women have been the targets of rape and sexual slavery, which have been used as deliberate tactics of war. Muslim minorities bore the brunt of the violence, with an estimated 80 percent of CAR's Muslim population displaced in the first two years. Muslims continue to lack access houses of worship, as the civil conflict destroyed an estimated 417 of the country's 435 mosques.

Following some progress in previous years, the situation deteriorated in 2021 with an increase in targeted attacks on Muslims including arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, torture and inhumane treatment. This violence was based on the assumed affiliation of Muslims to rebel groups based on their religious or ethnoreligious identity.

In February, national security forces and foreign fighters with links to Russia overran a mosque in Bambari and shot dead at least three Muslims. In May, CAR authorities arrested a Muslim shopkeeper in Kaga Bandoro and the next day his charred body was found on the outskirts of town, cut into pieces. In June, foreign fighters reportedly stormed the home of the Sultan of Kouï and insisted he and two companions accompany them. The Russian-linked fighters returned a few hours later and told the Sultan's family that he and his companions had been killed by a landmine. A United Nations (UN) human rights investigation found that they had in fact been shot. A few months later, foreign fighters reportedly raided the home of the second most influential Muslim cleric in Kouï, the imam of Kouï central mosque, and disappeared him after harassing him for weeks to stop teaching children in the Quranic School.

Source

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
www.uscifr.gov

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

State control and genocide in China



CASE STUDY

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), whose members are banned from believing in or practicing any faith, is increasingly hostile toward religion. Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism are recognised but religious organisations are state-controlled, must be politically loyal to the CCP and are legally required to assist or work with the government in enforcing state laws, regulations, and policies. This includes requirements to alter religious teachings to conform to CCP ideology and policy. New legal measures are frequently introduced as part of a government campaign to rid Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, and Christianity of “foreign” influences. This includes restrictions on clergy, religious schools and religious content on the internet.

Underground Catholics, house church Protestants, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong adherents and the Church of Almighty God, are vulnerable to persecution with reports of harassment, raids, detention, arrest, physical abuse, demolition of places of worship, torture and deaths in custody.

In Xinjiang province, Uighurs and other Muslims have faced crimes against humanity/genocide. Over one million ethnically Turkic Muslims are estimated to have been held in internment camps without any legal process, for example for wearing a headscarf or beard. This is the largest detention of an ethnic and religious minority since the second world war. Wearing a headscarf or a beard has been sufficient ‘religious’ activity to result in incarceration.

Arbitrary detentions continued in 2021 with former detainees reporting indoctrination, forced labour, rape, forced sterilisation and abortion, with a major impact on the birth rate of the group. As many as 880,000 Muslim children have been separated from their parents and sent to boarding schools. Thousands of mosques and cultural sites have been destroyed.

Numerous governments, research groups and the United Kingdom based Uyghur Tribunal has investigated and determined the atrocities in Xinjiang to be genocide and/or crimes against humanity. Evidence suggests that Chinese authorities have begun to implement similar repressive policies against Hui Muslims throughout China – a group the government previously tolerated.

Source

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

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FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Minorities in India



CASE STUDY

The Indian government is increasingly promoting and enforcing policies that negatively affect Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Dalits, and other religious minorities based on an ideological vision of a Hindu state. Both national and state levels of government are implementing existing and new laws hostile to minorities.

Laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the Sedition Law are being used to harass, detain and prosecute government critics – not least religious minorities and those reporting on and advocating for them – creating a climate of intimidation and fear.

The government arrested, filed complaints against, and launched criminal investigations into journalists and human rights advocates documenting religious persecution and violence, including Khurram Parvez, a prominent Muslim human rights advocate who has reported on abuses in Jammu and Kashmir. The government also broadly targeted individuals documenting or sharing information about violence against Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities. For example, UAPA complaints were filed against individuals for tweeting about attacks on mosques in Tripura.

The government has severely limited international funding under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) which bans funding for activities “detrimental to the national interest.” Thousands of NGOs have been forced to close, including those that document violations of freedom of religion or belief and humanitarian organisations that help marginalized religious communities.

Laws in around one-third of India’s states limit or prohibit conversion, with the exception of conversion to Hinduism which is regarded as ‘re-conversion’ – a return to the ‘normal’ state of every Indian. National, state and local government officials have demonised conversion. In October 2021, Karnataka’s government ordered a survey of churches and priests in the state and authorized police to conduct a door-to-door inspection to find Hindus who have converted to Christianity. In June 2021, Yogi Adityanath, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, warned that he would deploy a team of over 500 officials to counter those (including, by his account, children) who were carrying out conversion activities and invoke the National Security Act, which allows for the detention of anyone acting in any manner that threatens the security of state. State hostility to conversion has created a culture of impunity, with mobs and vigilante groups threatening and committing violence particularly against Muslims and Christians accused of conversion activities.

Increasingly anti-conversion laws also target or criminalise interfaith marriages, typically requiring couples to give advance 'public notice' of their marriage, which risks violent reprisals. Authorities also assisted nonstate actors attempting to prevent interfaith marriages by approaching couples, converts, their families, and their religious communities.

Source

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

www.uscifr.gov

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Baha'is in Iran



CASE STUDY

The Iranian government continues to systematically crack down on religious minorities, people who leave Islam, and members of the majority community who do not conform to the regime's interpretation of Islam, including women who refuse to wear head coverings and the LGBTQ+ community.

Persecution of the Baha'i community is particularly severe. The government of Iran considers the Baha'i faith to be heretical and has systematically persecuted the Baha'i community since 1979. In January 2020, Iran removed the "other" option from the religion category on national ID cards, forcing members of the Baha'i community to either deny their religion or be denied this crucial document. The government arrested scores of Baha'is across Iran in 2021. Many of those detained were held incommunicado or taken to undisclosed locations.

State persecution affects many areas of life including the right to education. Baha'is are not permitted to attend university. In 2019 alone, 22 students lost their university places after it was discovered that they were Baha'i. On some occasions the right to lower-level education is denied. On July 8th, 2020, Adib Vali received a call from his principal at the Salam School in Tehran with news that he cannot enrol in tenth grade. Vali had been at the top of his class since starting at the school in seventh grade, and received multiple first-place medals in international robotics and Artificial Intelligence contests. Vali's expulsion was a direct result of his Baha'i faith – the week before his expulsion he had filled out a student form identifying his religion.

In August 2021, officials demolished the homes of three Baha'is without warning. In November of the same year government agents closed six Baha'i businesses and in December, thirteen Baha'i farms were auctioned off by the state. The government of Iran also continued to deny Baha'is the right to bury their deceased in empty plots at the Golestan Javid cemetery outside Tehran which the community has used for decades. Instead, Baha'is are being forced to use the Khaveran mass grave site where victims of the 1988 prison massacres are buried.

Sources

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

www.uscirf.gov

National Iranian American Council https://www.niacouncil.org/human-rights_tracker/bahai-student-prodigy-banned-from-school-in-iran/

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Religious law in Malaysia



CASE STUDY

Malaysia is highly religiously diverse with a Sunni Muslim majority of 62%. The country has a dual legal system in which Muslims are required to follow Shariah laws governed by religious courts.

Blasphemy is criminalized at the federal level in Malaysia's secular Penal Code, and at least five states criminalize apostasy with fines, imprisonment, and/or detention in a 'rehabilitation' centre.

Under Malaysia's Islamic law, having Muslim parents makes one a Muslim, Muslims are not allowed to change their religion and Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslims. Revathi Massosai's parents had converted from Hinduism to Islam before she was born. However, Revathi was brought up by her Hindu grandmother as a Hindu and married a Hindu man in a religious ceremony. The authorities became aware of the marriage when the couple tried to register the birth of their child. Revathi tried to change her religious registration to Hindu, but the religious court sent her to an Islamic re-education centre for six months for marrying a Hindu and refusing to return to Islam. When Revathi continued to refuse to be a Muslim, she was declared a minor and she and her daughter were placed in the custody of her Muslim parents.

In parts of Malaysia, Islamic legislation is becoming more stringent. In November 2021, a new legal code came into effect in Kelantan province containing 24 provisions that all Muslims in the state are obliged to follow. These include the criminalization of attempting to convert out of Islam, distorting Islamic teachings, and disrespecting the month of Ramadan. Penalties include imprisonment of up to three years and a fine or corporal punishment.

Sources

Forum Asia www.forum-asia.org/?p=7086

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
www.uscirf.gov

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Minorities in Russia



CASE STUDY

A wide range of legislation is used to persecute religious minorities in Russia. The 1996 religion law sets strict registration requirements and empowers state officials to impede and monitor religious groups' activities. It also bans 'missionary activities', defining this very broadly to include preaching, praying, disseminating religious materials, and answering questions about religion outside of officially designated religious sites. Other legislation criminalizes 'extremism' without adequately defining the term, and charges of 'terrorism' require no advocacy of or participation in violence, enabling the state to target a vast range of nonviolent religious activities.

On April 5, President Vladimir Putin signed amendments to this law that further expanded the state's ability to restrict religious practice, including more frequent reporting requirements for religious organizations, a mandate for all foreign-educated clergy to be recertified within Russia, and prohibitions for anyone on the government's expansive extremism and terrorism list from participating in or leading religious groups.

Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, members of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Falun Gong, and adherents of indigenous religions are among those affected.

Following over 400 raids on members' homes during 2021, over 100 peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses, including elderly and disabled members were convicted of 'extremism', facing prison sentences of up to eight years.

Members of the indigenous Mari religion faced hostility, with one local official instructing municipal authorities to block the Mari from worshipping on public property, which includes forests sacred to their religion.

However, peaceful Muslims comprise the majority of those imprisoned for their faith. Numerous prison sentences were given to followers of the moderate Muslim theologian Said Nursi. Crimean Tatar Muslims opposed to the Russian occupation of their Ukrainian homeland continued to receive lengthy prison sentences for unsubstantiated charges of terrorism based on their Muslim identity and alleged involvement in Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a nonviolent Islamist group that is legal in Ukraine and most Western countries.

Source

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
www.uscifr.gov

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Hate crimes in Sweden



CASE STUDY

In Sweden 55% of hate crimes are racist with black people worst affected, 17 % focus on religious identity with Muslims and Jews worst affected, and 13% of hate crimes target people due to their sexual identity.

Hate crimes can take place in public places, on the internet, around the home, at work and in schools. These crimes can lead to shock, fear, insecurity and depression. It can also lead people to hide their religious or sexual identity and to withdraw from public roles that place them at risk.

Threats and harassment are the most common forms of hate crime reported, along with hate speech on social media. Crimes facing religious groups range from verbal abuse, being pushed, a headscarf being pulled to threats, severe forms of violence, vandalism of religious sites and arson. Research has shown that Muslim women, particularly those who wear religious clothing, such as the hijab, are more likely to experience hate crimes committed by strangers in public spaces, while Muslim men are more likely to experience hate crimes from neighbours or colleagues.

Sylvia Bäckström, a member of the Jewish association in Umeå, northern Sweden says “Very few Jews, in fact no-one, dares to wear a kippa in central Umeå.” In the southern city of Malmö, Rabbi Shneur Kesselman had registered over 80 cases of harassment and threats to police, after only seven years living in the country.

Many hate crimes go unreported.

Sources

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention

Expressen www.expressen.se/ledare/naomi-abramowicz/malmo-mest-utsatte-jude-vagrar-att-fly/

Expressen www.expressen.se/kronikor/bilan-osman/antisemitismen-varken-slutade-eller-borjade-med-forintelsen/

FORB AROUND THE WORLD

Authorities harass independent religious groups, Vietnam



CASE STUDY

For many years, the Vietnamese state has targeted independent religious groups – disrupting religious services, ceremonies and training and harassing, detaining and threatening members and activists. Unregistered Christian groups from the indigenous Hmong community and the indigenous Montagnard communities of the Central Highlands region are particularly vulnerable to persecution.

In 2021, local authorities harassed, detained, intimidated, and physically abused members of the Montagnard Evangelical Church of Christ in Phu Yen Province. The group has reportedly tried to register with the government but received no response in the past few years. The Protestant Church of Christ in Dak Lak Province similarly had trouble registering their religious activities and gatherings with local authorities.

Punishment for belonging to these Protestant groups has included subjecting members to “criticism sessions”, forcing them to renounce their faith in public and refusing to issue identity cards and household registration documents, often in retaliation against those who refuse to renounce their faith. This has effectively rendered people stateless, unable to access public services or vote.

Christians are not the only groups targeted. Authorities also harassed independent Hoa Hao Buddhists and Cao Dai followers who do not belong to the state-sanctioned Buddhist and Cao Dai groups. For example, in September 2021, authorities in Cho Gao District, Tien Giang Province, detained and interrogated independent Cao Dai followers and forced them to join the state-sanctioned group. Several independent Cao Dai groups tried to register their religious activities in early 2021 but received no response.

Source

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

www.uscirf.gov