

# Extremism against Christians

Christians are currently the primary victims of extremism around the world. This briefing highlights the global harassment, intimidation and violence Christians face at the hands of extremists, both religious and non-religious.

It demonstrates why so many Christians are fleeing the land of their birth. It shows how core freedoms – of speech, religion and the freedom to raise a family – are denied to Christians in numerous countries around the world, including some in receipt of UK aid. It also shows that a level of anti-Christian extremism is already present in the UK.

Government counter-extremism policy needs to recognise that Christians are the victims and not the perpetrators of extremism.

Image: Egyptian Christians being executed by Islamic State militants in Libya. Source: Reuters.

# Freedom of Speech

*"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas"*  
(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 19)

## Overseas...

### Sudan

Sudan is dominated by Islamic law and the state is openly hostile to its Christian minority, especially since the secession of the mainly Christian south in 2011.<sup>1</sup> President Bashir's Government condones and takes part in the targeted killing of Christians to maintain his Islamist power base.<sup>2</sup> At least 11 churches have been attacked in the last few years and, at the end of 2014, 37 people were arrested in Khartoum for protesting against one such attack.<sup>3</sup> The state also harasses Christians through strict Islamic law, imprisoning a significant number for 'blasphemy'.<sup>4</sup>

### Iran

Although tolerated in Iran, Christians are very

much second-class citizens.<sup>5</sup> The country's strict conversion laws make almost all Christian activity illegal, especially if it is in the majority Persian languages.<sup>6</sup> Christians who declare their faith

to Muslims, including through written material or preaching, risk prison, where they are likely to be assaulted and beaten.<sup>7</sup>

The bipartisan US Commission on International Religious

Freedom found that, since 2010, over 500 Christians have been arrested and detained because of their faith. It also reported an increase in assaults in prison.<sup>8</sup> The Government has long used its religious laws to silence critics.<sup>9</sup>

### Pakistan

Pakistan is a leading recipient of UK aid but its repressive blasphemy laws are frequently used to attack Christians.<sup>10</sup> Dozens of new cases were filed against Christians in 2014 and the Government has ignored calls to amend the law.<sup>11</sup> Blasphemy carries a possible death penalty.<sup>12</sup>

The Government turns a blind eye to vigilante attacks which follow allegations.<sup>13</sup> Christians must act with caution to avoid being accused.<sup>14</sup>



Over 150 Christian homes and a church were burned by a Muslim mob in Lahore, Pakistan, for alleged blasphemy against Mohammed in March 2014.

## In the UK...

### Oversensitivity

Christians in the UK are sometimes accused of 'causing offence' simply for expressing mainstream Christian teaching.

Two church workers were told by a police officer not to share their faith in a part of Birmingham, because it was 'a Muslim area'.<sup>15</sup>

Hotel owners Ben and Sharon

Vogelenzang were prosecuted and taken to court after a Muslim guest complained that she was offended by comments made during a discussion about religion.<sup>16</sup> Despite being vindicated in the court ruling, they lost contracts over the case and had to close their business.<sup>17</sup>

Christian street preacher Dale Mcalpine was arrested in 2010 after describing

homosexuality as a sin during a conversation with a PCSO.<sup>18</sup> Gay rights activist Peter Tatchell defended his right to freedom of speech and said he should not have been arrested and charged.<sup>19</sup> The CPS later dropped the charges.

Police in Lancashire told the owner of a Christian café to stop displaying Bible texts on a video screen on his premises. Jamie Murray (pictured) was showing

the New Testament verse-by-verse, yet officers told him to stop because it was 'offensive' and breached public order laws.<sup>20</sup> After the police actions were exposed in the media, no action was taken against Mr Murray.<sup>21</sup>



Up to  
**10,000**  
Christians  
killed

each year,  
according  
to expert  
estimates.



**4,344**  
confirmed  
deaths of  
Christians

for faith-related  
reasons in 2014.<sup>73</sup>

**80%**  
of acts of  
religious  
discrimination

worldwide  
are against  
Christians.<sup>74</sup>



**£2.7bn**  
of UK  
taxpayers'  
money

being  
given to countries  
where Christians  
are suffering  
serious persecution.<sup>75</sup>

**200M**  
Christians  
face discrimination<sup>76</sup>



# Freedom of Religion and Worship

*"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." (UDHR, Art. 18)*

## Overseas...

### Iraq and Syria

Christians are among the groups that have suffered the worst abuses as a result of the advance of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. When IS invaded Mosul in June 2014, they issued an ultimatum to Christians: convert to Islam, pay a high tax, or be killed. Over 100,000 residents fled the city, and many were robbed as they left.<sup>22</sup>

This pattern is repeated throughout IS-controlled areas. Christians are frequently attacked, abducted and killed and the Christian population has virtually disappeared.<sup>23</sup>

IS forbids public gatherings not organised by them, while churches have been demolished or turned into jails, stables and Islamic centres.<sup>24</sup>

### North Korea

The pervasive anti-Christian indoctrination in North Korea creates



Provided by  
**MEMRI JTTM**

IS turn a captured church into a mosque in Mosul, Iraq.

a climate of hatred and mistrust, and Christians especially are seen as public enemies.<sup>25</sup>

No deviation is allowed from the official atheist state ideology.<sup>26</sup> Those who secretly engage in Christian activities, or merely own a Bible, risk imprisonment, torture and even execution.<sup>27</sup> Of the estimated 200,000-300,000 Christians living in North Korea, tens of



China Aid

China: Government removes Huzhen Church's cross.

thousands are held in terrible conditions in labour camps, where they are expected to remain until they die.<sup>28</sup>

In May 2014, a South Korean was sentenced to life imprisonment of hard labour for attempting to set up churches, and 33 North Koreans who associated with him were reportedly executed.<sup>29</sup>

The Chinese Government deports Christian refugees who have fled to the relative safety of China back to North Korea.<sup>30</sup> On their return they can expect imprisonment, torture and possible execution.<sup>31</sup>

### China

The atheist Government in China continues to severely restrict religious freedom, in an effort to dominate every aspect of life.<sup>32</sup> The US Commission on International Religious

Freedom noted that persecution of Christians, in both registered and unregistered churches, appears to be on the rise. Leaders in particular have faced increased harassment and arrests.<sup>33</sup>

In some regions Christians face several years in prison if they are caught meeting together in secret house churches. Leaders of these churches are classified as 'cult' leaders by the state.<sup>34</sup>

Government-sanctioned churches have also faced an increase in state hostility. In 2014 more than 400 church buildings were forcibly demolished or had crosses removed.<sup>35</sup>

## In the UK...

### Hostility to converts

Muslims who convert to Christianity in the UK can experience serious harassment and violence.

Channel 4 Dispatches related the case of Nissar Hussain (pictured), who received death threats after he became a Christian. He was rejected by his parents and siblings, had his house and property repeatedly vandalised, and his family were intimidated.<sup>44</sup>

Muslim women who become Christians in the UK are often pressured to leave Christianity. Some are made to attend mosque instead of church, physically abused, or threatened with divorce and having their children taken away.

Dispatches also highlighted congregations run by the Church

### Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's strict Islamic law makes conversion to any other religion punishable by death. Saudis who choose to become Christians must keep their faith completely secret.<sup>36</sup>

Hamoud Bin Saleh was arrested after he wrote a blog post explaining why he had converted from Islam to Christianity. He was released after two months but has limited freedom.<sup>37</sup> There is a significant number of Christian migrant workers in Saudi Arabia who are frequently threatened and abused to force them to become Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Saudi Arabia has

no church buildings at all. House churches are raided, including those made up of expat workers.<sup>39</sup> In 2014, 28 Christians were arrested whilst worshipping together in a house in the town of Khafji.<sup>40</sup>

### Somalia

Somalia is a hotbed of Islamic radicalism and suspected Christians may be killed on the spot. The Government is neither able nor willing to tackle the violence, so attackers can commit atrocities against Christians without fear of arrest. The militant group al-Shabaab states it wants to rid Somalia of all Christians.<sup>41</sup>

Even owning a Bible is dangerous and meeting together in a church building is completely out of the question. The country's constitution is strictly Islamic and converting from Islam is illegal.<sup>42</sup>

Terrorists also cross the border into Kenya, carrying out deadly attacks on Christians.<sup>43</sup>



Kenya: A relative mourns after al-Shabaab attack Christians at a university.

of England, which specifically support Christians from Muslim backgrounds fearing reprisals if their new faith was known. The pastor of one such church said members of his congregation have been attacked for leaving Islam.<sup>45</sup> Dispatches further revealed that in one UK mosque, women and children were taught that Muslims who convert to another faith should be killed.<sup>46</sup>

In 2008 in Gateshead, a 16-year-old foster girl from a Muslim background was baptised as a Christian. Rather than support



Ross Perry Agency

her freedom to change religion, the Council was concerned that she had endangered her safety by breaching Sharia law and said she should stay away from church for six months. Her foster carer was struck off the fostering register but successfully appealed to the High Court.<sup>47</sup>

### Clergy and churches attacked

In 2014, police figures from 25 forces in England revealed 200 incidents against clergy in a five-year period.<sup>48</sup> The main church insurance provider stresses the need for church workers to have a 'personal safety plan' in which they are advised to always know how to escape quickly and to have a personal attack alarm.<sup>49</sup> Ecclesiastical Insurance also report an increase in arson against churches and say it is a major threat for church communities.<sup>50</sup>

# Freedom to raise a Family

*"The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State ... Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." (UDHR, Arts 16(3) & 26(3))*

## Overseas...

### ■ ■ Nigeria

Jihadist group Boko Haram claims to have set up an Islamic state in parts of northern Nigeria, and seeks to expel all Christians from the area. It was blamed for nearly 4,000 killings in 2014, most of whom were Christians.<sup>51</sup>

As well as violent atrocities, in the Muslim north Christians also experience the squeeze of a strongly Islamic culture. They are often denied any access to secondary schools and higher education, as well as other amenities like safe drinking water.<sup>52</sup>

Boko Haram – whose name means 'western education is sinful' – deliberately attacks soft targets such as schools. The kidnapping of over 200, mostly Christian, schoolgirls in 2014



Schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

brought these injustices to the world's attention. It is reported that the girls were forced to convert to Islam and wear Islamic dress.<sup>53</sup>

### ■ India

Violence against Christians increased dramatically after the election of the radical nationalist BJP in May 2014. Extremist attacks against Christians doubled to over 15 per month, creating a climate of fear.<sup>54</sup> Hindu

nationalists operate with near impunity and police sometimes encourage Christians to simply move from an area or hide their faith.<sup>55</sup>

The pressure has been felt by Christian families. For example, in May 2014, Christian families were denied ration cards for not contributing to Hindu festivities in their village.<sup>56</sup>

In February 2014 extremists stopped the construction of

a Christian school in the Kameng district and demanded that all Christian activities in the area should be stopped.<sup>57</sup>

### ■ Egypt

The growth of radical Islam in Egypt since 2013 has led to an upsurge in anti-Christian mob violence and discrimination. Many churches and schools have been attacked, and there is a rising cultural opposition to Christians, who make up around 10% of the population.<sup>58</sup>

In education, Christians are treated as second-class citizens, especially girls. They are often made to sit at the back of the class or ignored by teachers, and are bullied for their faith in the playground. Many leave school without basic skills.<sup>59</sup>

## ■ In the UK...

### Insult, ridicule and exclusion

Anti-Christian activity in several state schools in Birmingham was revealed by official investigations.

In some of these 'Trojan Horse' schools, children were encouraged in anti-Christian chanting, Christmas was banned, teachers called Christians 'ignorant' or

'liars', and pupils had to teach themselves Christian RE. In some schools there was evidence of entryism – certain individuals were seeking to use their position to further an extremist agenda.<sup>60</sup>

The results of the largest ever consultation by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, in 2015, revealed widespread discrimination against

Christians, including parents saying their children are ridiculed for their faith at school.<sup>61</sup>

Christian couples seeking to foster and adopt children often

face difficulties because of their beliefs. In one case parents had their adopted children taken away because of their views on taking children to church.<sup>62</sup>



Christian pupils are ridiculed for their faith at school.

# Recent massacres of Christians

## Kenya

In April 2015, al-Shabaab militants from Somalia attacked a college in Garissa, eastern Kenya. They separated the Muslims from the Christians, and murdered the Christians. 148 people died in the attack.<sup>63</sup> At the end of 2014, 36 quarry labourers at a camp were also killed, with gunmen deliberately targeting non-Muslims. This came less than a fortnight after a similar massacre, where 28 non-Muslim passengers on a bus to Nairobi were separated from Muslim passengers and killed.<sup>64</sup>

## Nigeria

Churches and predominantly Christian villages are frequently under attack from Boko Haram. At least 30 people were killed in June 2014 when Boko Haram gunmen burst into four churches near Chibok during Sunday services and opened fire before then setting the churches alight.<sup>65</sup> In another attack on a village in Borno state, three churches were set on fire and at least 27 residents killed.<sup>66</sup> Christians were the victims of the majority of the 4,000 deaths Boko Haram was responsible for in 2014.<sup>67</sup>

## Pakistan

In September 2013, two Islamic suicide bombers attacked All Saints Church in Peshawar, Pakistan. As people were leaving the historic church, the militants blew themselves up, killing over 80 people and wounding over 100 others.<sup>68</sup>

The Islamist group Jundullah claimed responsibility for the attack, stating: "They are the enemies of Islam, therefore we target them."<sup>69</sup>

## Libya

In February 2015, IS militants released a video showing the beheadings of 21 kidnapped Egyptian Christians in Libya. The video caption, which referred to the hostages as 'people of the cross', made clear the Coptic Christians were targeted because of their faith.<sup>70</sup> Another video two months later apparently showed a further 30 Ethiopian Christians being shot or beheaded.<sup>71</sup>

## A targeted, proportionate response is required

The UK Government rightly recognises that violent extremism threatens British security and freedoms. It is not just a problem beyond our borders.

Yet there is a dangerous confusion at the heart of the Government's counter-extremism strategy. Law-abiding citizens, such as Christians, could be caught

by the wide definition of extremism.

Any objective analysis would recognise the anti-Christian nature of much extremism in the world today. Counter-extremism policies so broad-brush that they catch churchgoers are a waste of resources. Christians are the victims of extremism, not the perpetrators.

The Government has displayed moments of clarity. The Prime Minister has told the UN that "the biggest problem we have today is that Islamist extremist violence that has given birth to Isis".<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately this belief is not filtering down into the Government's counter-extremism strategy, which lacks proper focus.

For references, please visit [christian.org.uk/extremism-references](http://christian.org.uk/extremism-references)