

## Executive Summary

*History shows that nations that uphold the rights of their people -- including the freedom of religion -- are ultimately more just and more peaceful and more successful. Nations that do not uphold these rights sow the bitter seeds of instability and violence and extremism.* President Barack Obama

### Introduction

**In 2013, the world witnessed the largest displacement of religious communities in recent memory.** In almost every corner of the globe, millions of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and others representing a range of faiths were forced from their homes on account of their religious beliefs. Out of fear or by force, entire neighborhoods are emptying of residents. Communities are disappearing from their traditional and historic homes and dispersing across the geographic map. In conflict zones, in particular, this mass displacement has become a pernicious norm.

In **Syria**, as in much of the Middle East, the Christian presence is becoming a shadow of its former self. After three years of civil war, hundreds of thousands fled the country desperate to escape the ongoing violence perpetrated by the government and extremist groups alike. In the city of Homs the number of Christians dwindled to as few as 1,000 from approximately 160,000 prior to the conflict. Elsewhere, in the **Central African Republic**, widespread lawlessness and an upsurge in sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims reportedly resulted in at least 700 deaths in Bangui in December alone and the displacement of more than one million people throughout the country during the year.

Anti-Muslim violence in Meikhtila, **Burma**, led to up to 100 deaths and an estimated 12,000 displaced residents from the area in early 2013. This event showed that mob violence against Muslims was no longer confined to western Rakhine State, where over 140,000 persons have also been displaced since 2012. Although the government's overall human rights record continued to improve, organized anti-Muslim hate speech, harassment, and discrimination against Muslims continued, exploited by those seeking to divide and pit Buddhist and Muslim communities against one another, often for political gain.

**All around the world, individuals were subjected to discrimination, violence and abuse, perpetrated and sanctioned violence for simply exercising their faith, identifying with a certain religion, or choosing not to believe in a higher deity at all.** Militants in **Pakistan** killed more than 400 Shia Muslims in sectarian attacks throughout the year and more than 80 Christians in a single church bombing; the government arrested and jailed a number of those responsible for sectarian attacks, but it generally failed to prevent attacks. Both Shia Muslims and Christians faced violent and deadly attacks in **Egypt**, and Shia Muslims in **Saudi Arabia** continued to face discrimination and prejudice, as were others who did not adhere to the government's interpretation of Islam. In **Iran**, officials threatened, detained and harassed members of almost all non-Shia religious groups. Hindus and other ethnic and religious minorities in **Bangladesh** faced increased harassment and physical attacks amidst political turmoil while in **Sri Lanka** violent Buddhist nationalist groups destroyed mosques and churches while security forces simply stood by. **China** prosecuted family members of self-immolators, imprisoned and tortured Falun Gong practitioners, continued its harassment of members of house churches and unregistered Catholic bishops and priests, and sought the forcible return of ethnic Uighurs who were seeking asylum overseas. Members of unregistered religious groups were continuously intimidated in **Eritrea**, where 1,200 to 3,000 people were imprisoned because of their religious beliefs. Throughout Europe, the historical stain of anti-Semitism continued to be a fact of life on Internet fora, in soccer stadiums, and through Nazi-like salutes, leading many individuals who are Jewish to conceal their religious identity.

And yet, amidst the darkness of religious strife lay inspiring and unheralded acts of interfaith solidarity. Following the deadly Peshawar church bombing in **Pakistan** resilient Muslim community members formed human chains around churches during services in a show of solidarity and to stand up against senseless violence. In **Egypt**, Muslim men stood in front of a Catholic church to protect the congregation from attacks. And after an increase of mosque attacks in the **United Kingdom**, a local orthodox Jewish neighborhood watch team began assisting Muslim leaders to ensure safe access to mosques and alert them to possible attacks.

Despite the momentary glimpses of progress, there is much work to be done. President Obama recently noted that “around the world freedom of religion is under threat.” The 2013 International Religious Freedom Report, now in its 16th

year, chronicles where and when the universal right to religious freedom was neglected and protected, upheld and abused. Congressionally-mandated and comprising of almost 200 distinct reports on countries and territories, this report continues to reflect the United States commitment to, and advancement of, the right of every person to freedom of religion or belief.

### **Government Repression of Religious Freedom**

Governments from all regions subjected members of religious groups to repressive policies, discriminatory laws, disenfranchisement, and discriminatory application of laws. These governmental actions not only infringed on freedom of religion themselves, but they also often created a permissive environment for broader human rights abuses. Restrictive policies included laws criminalizing religious activities and expression, prohibitions on conversion or proselytizing, blasphemy laws, and stringent registration requirements or discriminatory application of registration requirements for religious organizations.

**North Korea** again stood out for its absolute prohibition of religious organizations and harsh punishments for any unauthorized religious activities. Countries such as **Saudi Arabia, Iran and Sudan** put severe restrictions on members of religious groups that did not conform to the state-approved religion(s) while in **China, Cuba, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan**, religious activity was only lawful if explicitly authorized by the state.

In **North Korea**, the government continued to severely restrict religious activity, except for some officially recognized groups tightly supervised by the government. Reports by refugees, defectors, missionaries, and NGOs indicated that religious persons who engaged in proselytizing in the country and those who were in contact with foreigners or missionaries were arrested and subjected to extremely harsh penalties, including executions.

In **Pakistan**, authorities continue to enforce blasphemy laws and laws designed to marginalize the Ahmadiyya Muslim community; these laws continued to restrict religious freedom, and remained the most visible symbols of religious intolerance. Meanwhile, the government took some limited steps in response to major incidents of violence against members of religious minority communities, such as condemning attacks against Shia and Christian worshipers and adding some

additional security measures, but generally failed to take adequate steps to hold accountable those responsible for the attacks. There were continued reports of law enforcement personnel abusing members of religious minorities and persons accused of blasphemy while in custody.

**Tajikistan** is the only country in the world in which the law prohibits persons under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities. Muslim women are also effectively barred from attending mosques under a religious edict enforced by the government. Authorities prohibited the operation of some unregistered religious groups, and raided, monitored, and harassed members of both registered and unregistered groups.

In **Turkmenistan**, there were reports of beatings and torture of persons detained for religious reasons, including Jehovah's Witnesses, whose beliefs prevented them from complying with compulsory military service. One report also indicated that government officials threatened a relative of a Jehovah's Witness with rape during detention after a raid on her home. Changes to the administrative code in September introduced monetary penalties for disseminating religious literature and further codified a variety of restrictions faced by members of religious groups.

In **Eritrea**, members of religious groups not sanctioned by the government faced harassment and detention while persons who refused to serve in the national militia on religious grounds were detained for extended periods and pressured to convert. An estimated 1,200 to 3,000 individuals remain imprisoned for their religious beliefs and at least three died in 2013 due to prison conditions.

In **China**, police detained students, monks, laypersons, and others in many Tibetan areas who called for freedom, human rights, including respect for freedom of religion, or for expressing support for the Dalai Lama or solidarity with individuals who had self-immolated. China criminalized various activities associated with self-immolation, and prosecuted family members and colleagues of self-immolators on charges of "intentional homicide." In September Falun Gong practitioner Yu Jinfeng was reportedly arrested and then taken to a former reeducation-through-labor (RTL) facility. Her lawyer, Tang Jitian, was refused access to Ms. Yu and then detained for five days. Unregistered house churches and their practitioners continue to face persecution by Chinese officials. In April

seven house church Christians were sentenced in Ye County, Henan Province, to prison terms ranging from three to seven-and-a-half years reportedly for recording and copying sermons. Human rights organizations asserted that security forces shot at groups of Uighurs in their homes, claiming they were “terrorists”. The government reportedly sought the forcible return of ethnic Uighurs seeking asylum overseas. There were reports of imprisonment and torture of Uighurs who were returned.

In **Iran**, the government imposed legal restrictions on proselytizing and regularly arrested members of the Zoroastrian and Christian communities for practicing their religion. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for members of nearly all non-Shia religious groups, most notably for Bahais. Pastor Saeed Abedini, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen, remained imprisoned at year’s end after being sentenced to eight years in prison on charges related to his religious beliefs.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited; freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law. Shia and other Muslims who did not adhere to the government’s interpretation of Islam faced discrimination. The government detained individuals on charges of insulting Islam, encouraging or facilitating conversion from Islam, “witchcraft and sorcery,” and for engaging in non-Muslim religious services. No public places of worship for non-Muslims exist.

In **Uzbekistan**, the government continued to imprison individuals on charges of “extremism,” raid religious and social gatherings of unregistered and registered religious organizations, confiscate and destroy religious literature, and discourage minors from practicing their faith. There were reports of deaths in custody, torture, beatings, and other harsh treatment of prisoners the government considered religious extremists, and some reports of police beating members of unregistered religions. By continuing to deny registration to some religious groups and punishing members for their activities, authorities effectively deprived these individuals of their right to worship freely, which is also provided for in Uzbekistan’s constitution. NGOs estimate that approximately 10,000 to 12,000 people reportedly remain imprisoned on vague charges of religious extremism due to their religious beliefs or practice.

In **Sudan**, the government prohibited conversion from Islam to another religion, denied permits for churches, closed or demolished churches built without permits, and failed to provide legal remedies for some instances of religious discrimination.

In **Burma**, there were reports of violence against Christians; the destruction of religious buildings in areas of active conflict in Kachin State; and policies prohibiting or impeding Muslim land ownership in some areas and discrimination on the basis of religion in the promotion of government employees into senior government and military ranks. Local government officials reportedly participated in anti-Muslim discrimination and failed to stop violence in Rakhine State, and local officials were slow to respond to anti-Muslim violence in Meiktila, Mandalay Division.

In **Russia**, the government used a new law against “extremism” and amendments to existing laws to further restrict the activities of members of minority religious groups, including making it illegal for foreigners to participate in religious organizations. The government continued to grant the Russian Orthodox Church a privileged position, but generally allowed other established Judeo-Christian groups to practice their beliefs freely. Police across the country participated in raids on private homes and places of worship of minority religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and followers of Sunni theologian Said Nursi. Local officials often refused minority groups permission to establish houses of worship. Especially after instances of extremist violence in the North Caucasus, members of Muslim ethnic groups were subjected to physical attacks and social discrimination. Violence against moderate religious leaders in the North Caucasus continued.

**Bahrain** continued to experience political/sectarian tensions. Sunni Muslims enjoyed favored status, while Shia Muslims suffered discrimination in employment and government services, and there were reports of arbitrary arrest and excessive use of force. The government continued to rebuild mosques demolished in 2011, and at the end of 2013 reported 10 of the 30 projects were completed. On various occasions during the year, however, security forces prohibited citizens from performing prayers at the locations of some of these demolished mosques. Leading up to the Shia holy day of Ashura, Ministry of Interior personnel removed Ashura flags, and decorations from streets and houses. In September, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs brought a lawsuit seeking to disband the Islamic

Ulema Council (the main assembly of Shiite clerics in Bahrain) claiming it was an illegal organization.

### **Discrimination, Impunity and Displacement of Religious Minorities**

When governments choose not to combat discrimination on the basis of religion and intolerance, it breeds an environment in which intolerant and violent groups are emboldened, even to the point of physically attacking individuals on the basis of their religious beliefs. Governments in these countries failed to protect vulnerable communities and many religious minority communities were disproportionately affected, resulting in a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons.

In **Syria**, the Asad regime increasingly characterized the conflict in sectarian terms and targeted religious groups it considered opposition-aligned, particularly members of the country's Sunni majority. Regime-aligned militia groups composed of Iraqi Shia and Hezbollah fighters targeted members of groups seen as aligned with the opposition, especially Sunnis. Militant groups, especially those linked to al-Qa'ida, increased their targeting of Alawite, Shia Muslim, Christian, and other religious communities, some because of perceived alignment with the regime. Many Syrian Christians have fled the country as a result.

In **Sri Lanka**, the Sinhala Buddhist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) continued to promote its anti-Muslim campaign, which was linked to violent activities during the year. Local media and NGOs noted strong linkages between the BBS and the government. According to numerous reports, the BBS was behind a growing wave of anti-Muslim activities carried out by other violent Buddhist nationalist groups. Nationalist groups were allegedly involved in a series of attacks on mosques, protests over animal slaughter, and a sustained attempt to further marginalize Muslims by outlawing the halal system of meat certification. On December 1, Buddhist monks reportedly led a mob of 200 villagers that destroyed the Methodist Church of Habarana, located in Anuradapura District. Two Criminal Investigation Division (CID) police officers arrived at the scene and ordered the church to shut down, saying that it had no legal recognition to operate.

In **Egypt**, on multiple occasions organized groups attacked churches and Christian-owned homes and businesses and then looted and torched the properties. Islamist-

led mobs carried out acts of violence, intimidation, compelled expulsions, and punishment against Christians, especially in Upper Egypt. Attacks on Christians spiked August 14 -17 when, according to NGO reports, assailants attacked at least 42 churches in various governorates, in addition to schools, orphanages, and other Christian-affiliated facilities. The violence resulted in the looting and destruction of at least 37 churches and the deaths of at least six Christians who were targeted because of their religious identity. On June 23, a mob of thousands of angry villagers led by Salafist sheikhs killed four Shia citizens, including a prominent cleric, in a village near Cairo. The lynching followed months of government and official Islamic anti-Shia rhetoric and was immediately preceded by incendiary speech at a mosque. In June then-President Morsy attended a televised conference at which a Salafist sheikh described Shia as “non-believers who must be killed,” according to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW).

In **Iraq**, there were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, although to a lesser extent in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) than in other areas of the country. A combination of sectarian hiring practices, corruption, targeted attacks, and the uneven application of the law had a detrimental economic effect on minority non-Muslim communities, and contributed to the departure of non-Muslims from the country.

In many instances, governments increasingly failed to prevent, investigate, or prosecute crimes targeting members of religious minority groups. Governments’ failure to hold perpetrators of religiously motivated crimes accountable helped create an environment which legitimized intolerance and emboldened those who would commit abuses and violence.

In **Bangladesh**, there were a large number of arson attacks and looting of minority religious sites and private homes across the country, especially against the Hindu community. According to a domestic human rights organization, 495 statues, monasteries, or temples were destroyed; 278 homes and 208 businesses were destroyed; 188 were injured; hundreds displaced, and one person was killed during the year. In November, a mob assaulted a Hindu man and set fire to 26 homesteads in a predominantly Hindu village in Bonogram, Pabna. The police reportedly did not detain any of the perpetrators the victim named but did detain an individual who sheltered Hindus during the attack. Increased violence against



minorities in the lead-up to the elections shows how minority communities are especially vulnerable during periods of political instability, when some partisans exploit latent communal sentiment to settle scores, take land, or intimidate opponents to achieve political aims.

In **Indonesia**, the government sometimes did not adequately prosecute instances of violence, abuse, and discrimination against individuals based on their religious belief, especially when minority Shia or Ahmadiyya Muslims were victimized. In January and February, the Surabaya Court lightly sentenced five suspects for their roles in the August 2012 attack on a Shia community in Sampang, East Java, which left two Shiites dead, dozens of homes burned, and 300 people displaced. There were also cases of officially encouraged conversion. In May the minister of religious affairs attended a conversion ceremony in Tasikmalaya, West Java, during which 20 members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community publicly professed their commitment to Sunni Islam. Members of small minority religious groups found it difficult to register births or marriages. A group of 116 Ahmadi Muslims living as internally displaced persons in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara, reported that the local government refused to issue to them identity cards or their children birth certificates, thus impeding their access to government services. Interreligious couples also continued to face obstacles to marrying and officially registering.

In **India**, clashes in the Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh between Hindu and Muslim communities between late August and mid-September led to the deaths of 65 persons, 68 persons injured, and an estimated 40,000-50,000 displaced. Broader communal violence spread after a Muslim youth was killed by two Hindu youths who accused the boy of sexually harassing a female family member. The local police and the army reportedly allowed unlawful gatherings by individuals carrying arms on September 7 and local administrators allegedly did not respond to counter public calls by politicians and community leaders for violence.

Repression of fundamental freedoms creates a more fertile environment for violent extremism to take hold, as people denied their right to freely practice their beliefs become more alienated and resentful and vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. Violent extremist groups continued to interfere with the enjoyment of religious freedom conditions particularly in Africa, Asia, Eurasia, and the Middle

East and led some governments to invoke draconian anti-extremism laws and impose restrictions that increasingly infringed on the religious freedoms of members of minority religious groups. Such laws were used to target Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Scientologists, and Falun Gong practitioners.

In **Nigeria**, casualties and human rights abuses associated with Boko Haram attacks and the government's response escalated. Boko Haram killed more than 1,000 people during the year. The group targeted a wide array of civilians and sites, including Christian and Muslim religious leaders, churches, and mosques, often killing worshippers during religious services or immediately afterward. The federal government was ineffective in preventing or quelling the violence, only occasionally investigated, prosecuted, or punished those responsible for abuses related to religious freedom, and sometimes responded to violence with heavy-handed tactics, which were associated with both human rights abuses and civilian casualties. Over 10,000 people have fled to neighboring countries as refugees, fearing both Boko Haram and sometimes the military.

Rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment in parts of Europe demonstrated that intolerance is not limited to countries in active conflict. The European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism among Jews in eight member states (**Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and United Kingdom**), released in November, found that in some countries as many as 48 percent of the local Jewish population had considered emigrating because of anti-Semitism.

Religious minority communities were disproportionately affected by violence, discrimination and harassment. In many regions of the world, religious intolerance was linked to civil and economic strife and resulted in mass migration of members of religious minority communities throughout the year. In some of these areas, the outward migration of certain communities has the potential to permanently change the demographics of entire regions.

### **U.S. Policy and Programs in Support of Religious Freedom**

*Promoting religious freedom is a key objective of U.S. foreign policy. And I'm proud that no nation on Earth does more to stand up for the freedom of religion around the world than the United States of America.* President Barack Obama

Religious freedom is a human right knitted into the fabric of our founding and enshrined in our Constitution. As such, the U.S. government continues to prioritize the advancement of this freedom into its broader foreign policy objectives. The same law that mandated the International Religious Freedom Report and created the Office of International Religious Freedom also gave us a series of powerful mechanisms to promote the cause of religious freedom worldwide. This includes the ability to identify and sanction governments that engage in or tolerate “particularly severe” violations of religious freedom. It also includes the ability to deny entry to the United States of government officials who have themselves directly carried out or were responsible for “particularly severe violations of religious freedom”.

As in years past, the 2013 report chronicles the efforts of senior U.S. officials and our diplomatic corps to help people throughout the world enjoy the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Our officials are charged with speaking truth to power, promoting accountability and redress for injustices, and helping the global community connect with and understand the plight of members of little-known groups in far-flung places. Every day and at every level, we are meeting with and pressing government officials to respect the human rights, including religious freedom, of all individuals. Through various programs and resources, speeches and statements, campaigns and multilateral resolutions, we are intervening on behalf of oppressed communities and individuals, speaking with average citizens, and providing comfort and support to victims of abuses.

Promoting religious freedom is a whole-of-government effort, and the President, the Secretary, our country Ambassadors, and other senior Department officials, including the Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom and the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, regularly raise religious freedom concerns around the world. The President has raised cases regarding individuals imprisoned for their religious beliefs, such as that of imprisoned Iranian-American Saeed Abedini, publicly and privately with other governments. In **Egypt**, the President condemned sectarian violence, including attacks on churches. Secretary of State Kerry has also emphasized the importance of ensuring freedom of religion for all Egyptians, regardless of their faith, with equal rights and protections under the law.

Embassies around the world advocate for and support freedom of religion. Active engagement by Embassy officials in **Armenia** encouraged the passage of a law to protect conscientious objectors. This led to the release of 28 Jehovah's Witnesses in the fall of 2013. In **Pakistan**, we support victims of religion-based persecution, fund programs to promote peaceful coexistence between religious groups, and are working to develop curricula and training materials to promote religious tolerance and combat violent extremism. In **Egypt**, our programs are developing Arabic-language and English-language educational materials that encourage diversity and understanding of others. The U.S. Embassy in **Albania** organized a civic education and religious tolerance program that engaged over 7,000 students in discussions of common civic values shared across religions.

U.S. officials from the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security, using foreign assistance funds provided by the State Department, are implementing a training program in various countries in all regions of the world to assist governments in training local officials on enforcing non-discrimination laws and in cultural awareness with religious minorities. The training includes topics such as legislative reform, best practice models, prosecuting violent crimes motivated by religious hatred, and combating discrimination in employment, housing and other areas. So far, successful training sessions have been held in **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, and Indonesia**.

Teachers in **Estonia**, funded by the U.S. Embassy, were trained on Holocaust education which was incorporated into their existing curricula. The U.S. Ambassador in **Moldova** worked closely with municipal authorities to encourage them to allow the Jewish community to display a menorah publicly for the first time in three years. In **Niger**, continuous U.S. Embassy involvement with the local interreligious council provided resources that allowed the council to mediate local religious-based disputes and opportunities for members to participate in exchange programs to increase their religious tolerance education and efforts.

These efforts underscore the U.S. government's commitment to religious freedom. But creating a more free and tolerant world, is not a job reserved for any one government or institution. Rather, it is a global requirement incumbent on all of humanity. Whereas repression of religious freedom contributes to instability and economic stagnation, respect for it leads to more security and prosperity.

On International Religious Freedom Day, Secretary Kerry stressed that “nations that protect this fundamental freedom will have the partnership of the United States and the abiding commitment of the American people as we seek to advance freedom of religion worldwide.” It is our hope that this year’s report not only identifies the abuses, problems and violations, but also sparks the areas for change, action, and accountability. We invite governments, community groups, faith-based and secular organizations, students, activists, human rights defenders, change makers and every-day citizens to use this report to defend and advance international religious freedom, a universal right which we are all entitled.