



Aid to the
Church in Need
ACN INTERNATIONAL

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AT RISK

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT BULLETIN 2025



Allegorical statue of Lady Justice holding scales and a sword, representing fairness and the law.

Report on Religious Freedom in the World

Since 1999, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) has been publishing this international report, which analyzes the degree of compliance with or respect for this human right in all countries of the world (196) and for all religions. A total of 50 independent authors and experts, research teams

at universities and/or study centers on different continents dedicated to international relations have analyzed, over the last two years, every country in the world according to objective parameters and precise methodology. It consists of more than 1,000 pages and has been translated into six languages.



Introduction

*Regina Lynch, Executive President
ACN International*

For the past 25 years, the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need has produced the Report on Religious Freedom in the World, with the firm intention of denouncing threats to this fundamental human right enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Religious freedom is not only a guarantee of worship, but also the real possibility of believing, practicing, and publicly expressing one's faith without fear of persecution, discrimination, or violence.

This report, published every two years, has become a unique tool that rigorously documents, with data and testimonies, the many faces of intolerance: from violent oppression to subtle marginalization, from ideological censorship to structural repression. The current landscape reveals extreme situations in countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan, Nicaragua, and North Korea, as well as new forms of hostility driven by exclusionary nationalism, fundamentalism, ideological populism, and authoritarian regimes.

Through this ongoing editorial effort, ACN not only gives a voice to victims of religious hatred, but also reaffirms its mission as a bridge of hope for those who live their faith in hostile contexts. Present in more than 140 countries, the foundation supports more than 5,000 pastoral, educational, and humanitarian projects annually. It does so with a clear con-

viction: that respect for the dignity of the person begins with respect for their inner freedom, their conscience, and their faith.

In 2025, the report represents not only a new edition, but also living testimony to an unwavering commitment: to remember that religious freedom is non-negotiable and that solidarity, to be authentic, must be translated into action. Where religious freedom flourishes, peace, justice, and the full dignity of the human person are strengthened. Religious freedom is not a privilege. It is a fundamental human right.



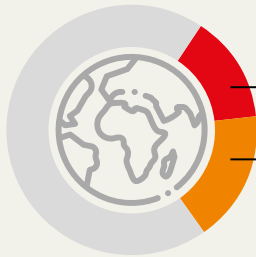
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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS VIOLATED

Religious Freedom in 196 countries of the world

In **62 countries** there are violations of religious freedom



24 countries suffer **persecution**

38 countries suffer **discrimination**

64.7% of the world's population

- **almost 5.4 billion** - live in countries with serious or very serious violations of religious freedom.



AUTHORITARIANISM IS THE GREATEST THREAT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM *



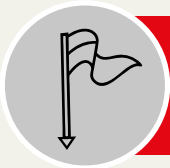
52 countries

Authoritarianism



25 countries

Religious extremism



6 countries

Ethno-religious nationalism



3 countries

Organised crime

* some of these countries are included in more than one group.

GUARANTEES FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



In **31 countries**, religious freedom is not guaranteed by law.



In **50 countries**, the law is equal for all on paper, but not in practice.



In **34 countries**, people are not free to change their religion.



In **53 countries**, social pressure causes religious discrimination/persecution despite neutral laws.

SINCE 2023, IN AS MANY AS:



44 countries

People have been killed because of their faith



29 countries

People have been abducted for religious reasons



21 countries

Social media have been used to spread hatred against religious minorities

Countries suffering serious violations of religious freedom

Persecution

Discrimination

Evolution compared to 2023

↑ Improvement

— No change

↓ Worsens

Latin America and the Caribbean

Mexico ↓

Cuba ↓

Haiti ↓

Nicaragua ↓

Venezuela ↓

OSCE Countries

Morocco —

Algeria ↓

Libya ↓

Mauritania —

Mali ↓

Niger ↓

Chad —

Nigeria ↓

Burkina Faso ↓

Cameroon —

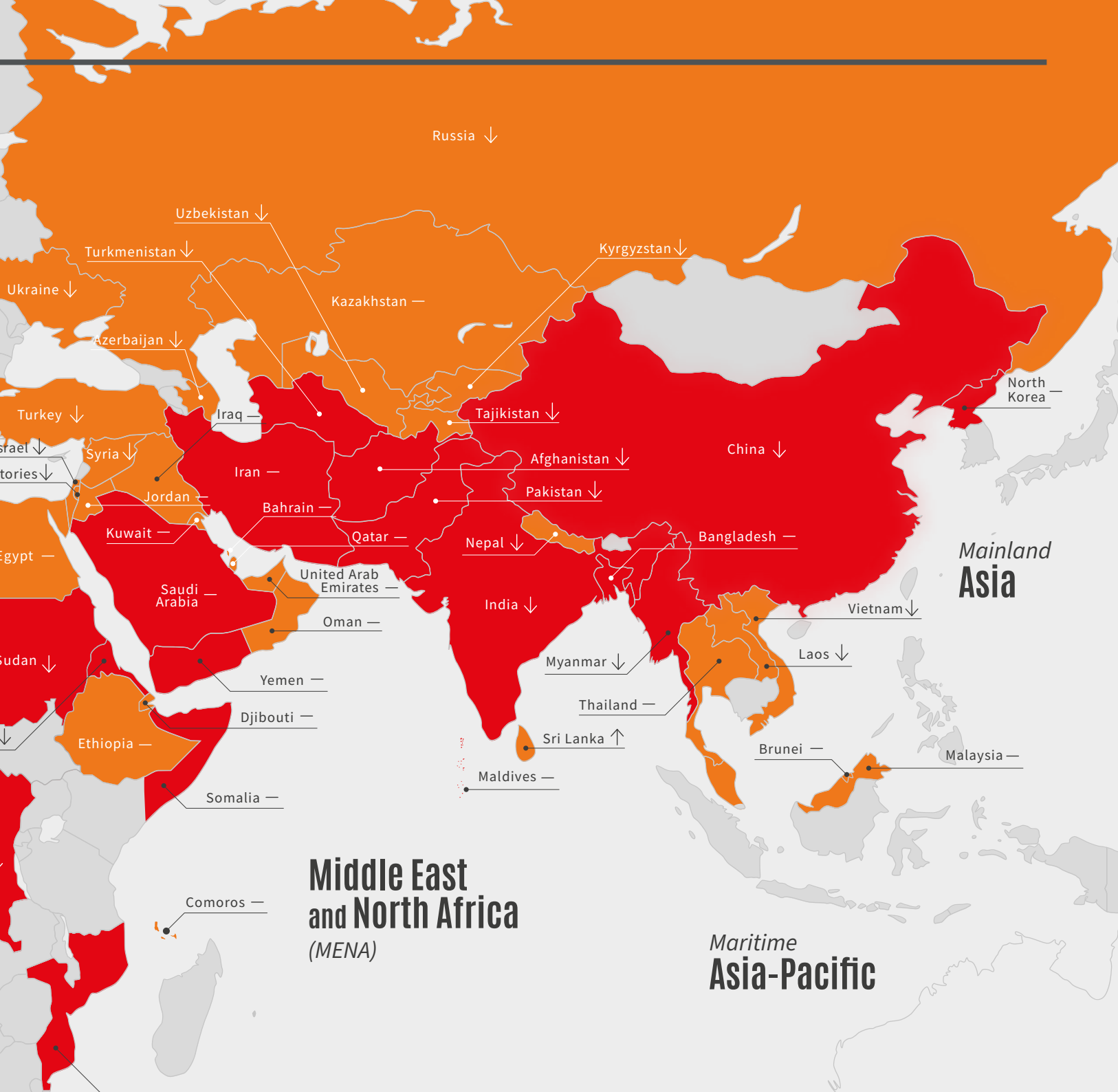
Eritrea —

Democratic
Republic
of Congo ↓

Sub-Saharan Africa

THERE IS PERSECUTION WHEN:

- Hate crimes and violence are committed on religious grounds.
- Victims are discriminated against, dispossessed and even “legally” killed.
- Persecution becomes genocide when it becomes systematic, not circumstantial.
- An active campaign to exterminate, expel or subjugate a certain group of people on account of their religion, by the State or other groups, takes shape.
- Members of certain religions may be subjected to crimes punishable by law, including murder, dispossession of goods and property, deportation, exile, kidnapping, sexual enslavement under the pretext of religious conversion, accusations of blasphemy... All covered by laws that do not consider these citizens on an equal footing, and those who commit the crimes are often not punished.



Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Maritime Asia-Pacific

DISCRIMINATION OCCURS WHEN:

- Hate crimes and violence are committed on religious grounds.
- Laws at any level marginalize a certain religious group and not all.
- Limitations on freedom of expression and conscientious objection to members of certain religious groups.
- Limitations on access to employment and public office.
- Inability to wear certain religious symbols.
- Inability to buy or repair property.
- Inability to live in a certain neighborhood.
- Victims can only resort to international justice in their defense.

Latin America and the Caribbean



People gathered around the coffin of murdered Catholic priest and activist Marcelo Pérez during a mass in the main square of San Andrés Larráinzar, Chiapas, Mexico, on October 21, 2024.

Although Latin America is predominantly Catholic and Christian, and has high levels of religiosity, it is not exempt from serious violations of religious freedom, which take contemporary forms that are less visible but deeply aggressive. The regional analysis in the 2025 Report on Religious Freedom in the World reveals a worrying picture, where organized crime, political authoritarianism, and certain exclusionary ideologies have created areas of risk for the free exercise of faith.

One of the main factors is the control of organized crime, especially in Mexico, where priests have been killed for denouncing violence or refusing to collaborate with armed groups. The case of the two Jesuits murdered in Chihuahua in 2022 still resonates as a symbol of the risk faced by religious leaders in regions dominated by drug trafficking. Haiti also suffers from this situation: kidnappings of religious figures, burning of temples, and extortion have become frequent.

In Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega's regime represents one of the most severe forms of institutionalized repression: expulsion of congregations, imprisonment of bishops, closure of Catholic radio stations, and surveillance of churches are part of a systematic offensive against the Church. Similarly, in Cuba, the Catholic Church and other religious groups face legal restrictions, state surveillance, and limitations on public access.

In Colombia, although there is no direct persecution by the state, there are regions under the control of illegal armed groups where the entry of missionaries is restricted or pastoral activity is conditioned. Attacks on churches and threats to religious leaders in rural areas have also been documented.

Another alarming phenomenon is the growing instrumentalization of religion for political purposes, as occurs in parts of Brazil, where certain leaders use religious discourse to polarize or exclude other faiths. Added to this is an increase in ideological intolerance toward religious education in academic settings and judicial decisions that limit its public expression.

Finally, forms of discrimination and symbolic violence against Jewish communities and Afro-descendant religions stand out, especially in Brazil and the Caribbean, where temples have been desecrated or attacked.

Latin America is thus experiencing a complex reality: it is not only a matter of direct repression, but also of multiple forms of violence that silence, intimidate, or exclude faith. Making these facts visible is key to defending the inalienable right to believe, live, and express one's faith without fear.

Main findings

In a world marked by polarization, authoritarianism, extremism, and technological abuses, religious freedom continues to be a fundamental right that is increasingly under threat. The 2025 Report on Religious Freedom in the World, prepared by the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), presents a global overview of violations of this right in 196 countries. Although slight progress has been made in some regions, the overall trend is one of deterioration. These are the main conclusions of the report:

1. General deterioration of religious freedom: In the last two years, the right to religious freedom has been seriously violated in 61 countries, where 65% of the world's population lives.

2. Extreme persecution in 24 countries: In nations such as China, North Korea, Nigeria, and Iran, persecution includes mass surveillance, imprisonment, violence, and forced displacement.

3. Discrimination in 38 countries: From Mexico to Egypt, access to public office, educational rights, and public expression of faith are restricted.

4. Slight improvement in two countries: Sri Lanka and Kazakhstan showed small signs of progress in respect for religious freedom.

5. Growing authoritarianism: Governments such as those of Nicaragua, China, and Eritrea intensified repressive laws and state control over religious communities.

6. Expansion of jihadism: Extremist organizations are advancing in the Sahel, Mozambique, and Asia with violent attacks, displacement, and destruction of temples

7. Religious nationalism as a threat: In India and Myanmar, governments use the majority religion to justify exclusion and violence against minorities.

8. Political exploitation of religion: Radical political groups manipulate faith to polarize and gain power, weakening interfaith relations.

9. Persecution causes forced migration: Millions are displaced because of their faith, as in Nigeria, where attacks on Christians are systematic.

10. Organized crime violence: Religious leaders are murdered or extorted by criminal groups in Mexico, Haiti, and Colombia.

11. Attacks on places of worship: Hundreds of churches, synagogues, and mosques were vandalized in Europe, America, and the Middle East.

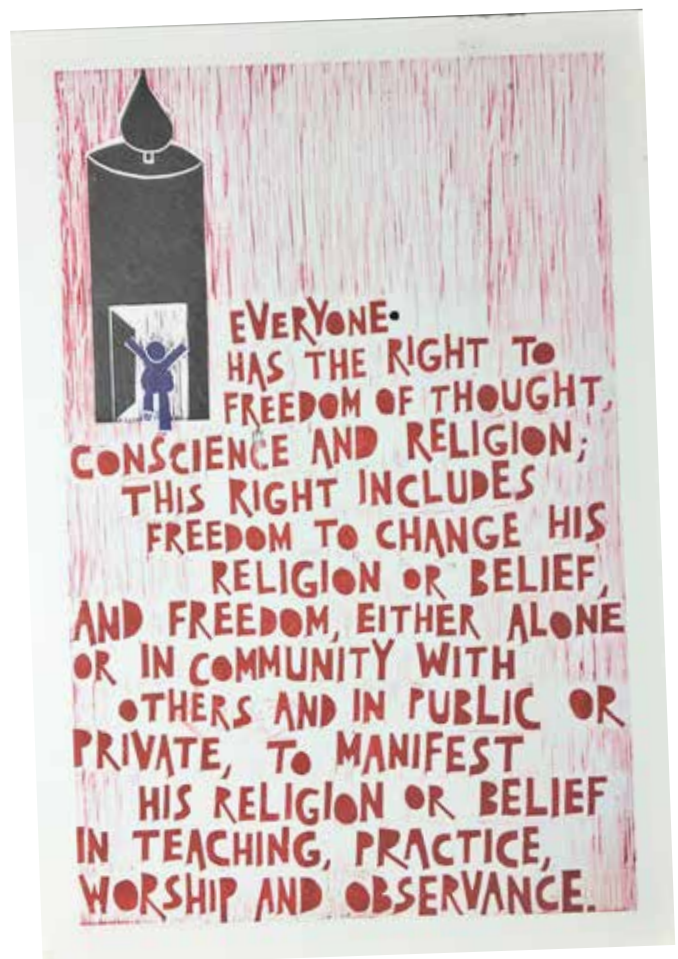
12. Rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred: Conflicts such as the one in Gaza have fueled hate speech, even in democratic countries.

13. Restrictions on conscientious objection: In several Western countries, the right of professionals to act according to their faith is limited.

14. Abuse of girls from religious minorities: Especially in Asia and Africa, girls are kidnapped, forced into marriage, or forced to convert.

15. Digital surveillance of religious communities: Authoritarian regimes use AI and advanced technologies to repress and control religious life.

16. Religious communities as agents of peace: Despite threats, they remain a living hope: they promote dialogue, education, humanitarian aid, and social reconstruction.



Courtesy of the Vladimir Herzog Institute.



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

PONTIFICAL
FOUNDATION



With you we bring hope
to suffering Christians

Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), thanks to the support of people like you, serves the Catholic Church in its evangelizing work throughout the world, with priority given to the most needy, discriminated and persecuted communities.



Construction
of churches



Support
of priests



Transportation



Formation
of missionaries



Catechetical
material



Support of
religious



Support to
Media



Emergency aid

With you, we want to continue financing nearly 5,000 pastoral projects every year in 128 countries of need and religious persecution. Join us in this story, your commitment will make you grow in love and, by getting to know them, your faith will become stronger.

- **Pray** for the suffering Church.
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Dry God's tears on Earth, wherever He weeps.