

## **Adventists and the Coming Storm**

### **Introduction**

Persecution of followers of Jesus Christ is happening around the world today. Sometimes it is hidden, but it is increasingly open, and the response of the international community is muted at best, and blithe indifference at worst. Reports from Open Doors USA, Voice of the Martyrs, the US State Department Annual Religious Liberty Report, and empirical evidence from around the world, indicates that those who bear the name of Christ are suffering under increasing levels of hostility and overt persecution.

Thus, to talk about a “Coming Storm” is in itself a western-centric perspective when we consider the existing storms raging around the world against Christians. And it is a humbling privilege as Western Christians to be associated with the Persecuted Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, as this paper is written for Western Christians, the majority of whom do not experience overt persecution yet, this paper will be written from their perspective and for their benefit.

### **Why is there religious persecution today?**

Viewed from a human perspective, there are a number of possible answers.

First, authoritarian governments seek to control all religious thought and expression, e.g. North Korea. Religious groups are viewed as enemies of the state because they have a higher loyalty than to the state itself.

Second, hostility towards non-traditional or minority religious groups, e.g. Mauritania. Mauritania’s population is >98% Muslim, and hostility comes from society more than from the government.

Third, a refusal to recognize basic human rights, including Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief.” In 1966, the United Nations developed the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 18 of the ICCPR focuses on four elements of religious freedom:

- a) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
- b) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
- c) Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
- d) The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Tragically, in many countries there is almost complete disregard for these UN declarations and agreements. Despite humanity’s best intentions, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is already showing the most sustained levels of persecution of religious minorities in general and Christians in particular of the past 21 centuries.

### **The current reality of persecution of Christians**

Since 2014, humanitarian crises fueled by waves of terror, intimidation and violence have engulfed a growing number of countries. The world has watched in horror at the results of violence masquerading as religious devotion.

In both Iraq and Syria, no religious group has been free of ISIS’ depredations in the areas it has conquered. ISIS has unleashed waves of terror upon Yazidis, Christians, Shi’a and Sunnis. When ISIS conquered Mosul in summer 2014, it immediately murdered 12 leading dissenting Sunni clerics, kidnapped Christian priests and nuns, and leveled ancient houses of worship.

Yazidis and Christians have borne the worst brunt of ISIS’ violence, enduring summary executions, forced conversions, rape, sexual enslavement, abducted children, destroyed houses of worship and destroyed livelihoods.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has attacked both Muslims and Christians, committing mass murders at both churches and mosques, kidnapping children and schoolgirls, and burning entire villages and inhabitants to the ground.

In the Central African Republic, >1 million IDPs. Iraq, >2 million IDPs. Syria, >6.5 million IDPs. Myanmar, >100,000 Kachin Christians are displaced<sup>1</sup>.

Freedom of conscience in general, and those who bear the name of Christ in particular, are under attack in dozens of countries and local communities worldwide. Christians are experiencing severe persecution around the world.

According to Open Doors USA<sup>2</sup>, each month 332 Christians are murdered for their faith, 214 churches and overtly Christian properties are destroyed, and there are 772 forms of extreme violence committed against Christians (rapes, abductions and forced marriages, etc.).

From verbal harassment to hostile feelings, attitudes and actions, Christians in areas with severe religious restrictions pay a heavy price for their faith. Beatings, physical torture, confinement, isolation, rape, severe punishment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death are just a few examples of the persecution Christians are experiencing today on a daily basis.

According to Open Doors USA, the worst 50 countries for Christian persecution in 2016 are as follows:

1. North Korea.	11. Yemen.	21. Qatar.	31. Tajikistan.	41. Kuwait.
2. Iraq.	12. Nigeria.	22. Egypt.	32. Tunisia.	42. Kazakhstan.
3. Eritrea.	13. Maldives.	23. Myanmar.	33. China.	43. Indonesia.
4. Afghanistan.	14. Saudi Arabia.	24. Palestinian Territories.	34. Azerbaijan.	44. Mali.
5. Syria.	15. Uzbekistan.	25. Brunei.	35. Bangladesh.	45. Turkey.
6. Pakistan.	16. Kenya.	26. Central African Republic.	36. Tanzania.	46. Colombia.
7. Somalia.	17. India.	27. Jordan.	37. Algeria.	47. UAE.
8. Sudan.	18. Ethiopia.	28. Djibouti.	38. Bhutan.	48. Bahrain.
9. Iran.	19. Turkmenistan.	29. Laos.	39. Comoros.	49. Niger.
10. Libya.	20. Vietnam.	30. Malaysia.	40. Mexico.	50. Oman.

Persecution is not an abstract concept. It means young Christian girls being raped at will by Muslims in the Iraq, or abducted and forced into Islamic marriages in Egypt. It means whole communities being burned alive in Nigeria by Boko Haram. It means exclusion from public jobs and social discrimination in SE Asia. It means being beheaded along the beaches of Libya by ISIS. It means almost no access to any Christian literature, Bibles or witness for those living under Sharia law in Mauritania. It means willful self-censorship by any in the USA who would otherwise suggest that a straight reading of the Koran and Hadeeth indicates that Islam is not a religion of peace for fear of violent repercussions against fellow Adventists in Pakistan or Bangladesh by those who insist that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance (does anybody notice the profound irony here?).

And it also means prosecution of service providers in the UK and the USA, and the imposition of crippling fines or informal economic sanctions from pro-LGBT corporations, for any who refuse to participate in the LGBT agenda.

Thus, when we talk about persecution, we are talking about real people like you and I, with families whom they love dearly, who have chosen to follow Jesus Christ, and who are paying today, as you read this paper, for that decision in profoundly terrible ways. We are talking about the reality that as you read this document, our sisters in Christ are being raped purely for bearing the name of Christ, our brothers are being beheaded for the same reason, and it is only a matter of time before Christians living in the West will be experiencing such persecution.

Just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus Christ in the sixth seal of Revelation, Jesus Christ reveals in the fifth seal of Revelation that His true Church will be a persecuted, martyred and militant Body. "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of

<sup>1</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2015 Annual Report, <http://www.uscirf.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> [www.opendoorsusa.org](http://www.opendoorsusa.org).

the earth?" They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed" (Revelation 6:9-11, NRSV).