



Freedom of Religion or Belief: World Report 2012

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l

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Mapping freedom of religion or belief by identifying countries of particular concern is a difficult challenge to undertake. Indeed, what do we understand by freedom of religion or belief? What are the criteria for evaluation and how to view them in a balanced fashion? Can we distinguish the worse violators in black-and-white or a colour map from those respecting them “more or less”? How does one evaluate and rank a country like North Korea, which in the aftermath of the 1950-1953 War carried out a mass religious cleansing to such an extent that there is virtually no independent religious life in the country today? How does one evaluate and rank a country like Nigeria, where Christian communities in some regions are repeatedly attacked by Muslim groups on religious but also other grounds? Should a high number of incidents in India, Iran or China propel these countries to the top of a list of worst violators of freedom of religion or belief? This report has endeavoured to take these questions into consideration. Under freedom of religion or belief, HRWF Int'l affirms Article 18 of the ICCPR, which says: “Art. 18 (1): Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include 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. (2): No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. (3): 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.” This report aims to facilitate advocacy and is divided into several parts. The first three parts identify and analyse a number of constitutional and legislative provisions which restrict freedom of religion or belief in some problematic countries, in particular: (1) freedom to change one's religion or belief: Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Malaysia, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen; (2) freedom of expression within the framework of freedom of religion or belief: Azerbaijan, China, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Laos, North Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam; (3) freedom of association, worship and assembly: Afghanistan, Algeria, Brunei, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Maldives, North Korea, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan. However, challenges to freedom of religion or belief issues can have other roots, such as social hostility leading to repeated and systematic acts of violence or conflicts between religious communities, despite adequate legal protections and the goodwill of the government. The fourth part addresses the issue of freedom of religion or belief from another angle. It lists ten countries (Azerbaijan, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Uzbekistan) which distinguished themselves in 2012 by a very high number of incidents related to freedom of religion or belief on various grounds, such as repressive governmental policies, social hostility and inter-ethnic or inter-communal tensions. These countries were selected on the basis of data collected by HRWF Int'l from numerous public and private sources. Many concrete examples support this ranking and illustrate the different facets of the violations that have been identified. They are also contextualized and analysed. If countries punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief by death or heavy prison terms or by exorbitant fines – sometimes of up to 100 times the minimum monthly salary – such countries must be named publicly, held accountable and urged to revise their constitution, their laws and their practices.

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