

RUSSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

THE FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE IN TODAY'S WORLD

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The annual report “The Freedom of Conscience and Religious Intolerance in Today's World” is produced by the Russian Association for the Protection of Religious Liberty for the purposes of highlighting the most important events that take place in the area of protecting the rights for the freedom of conscience and religious worship, and is based on regular situation monitoring.

The structured report contains the summary of materials on the topic, which were detected from August 2019 to May 2020 in the Russian and foreign Media including periodicals and new agencies. The most representative specifics of violating religious freedoms are analyzed in the report. Numerous examples demonstrate the current situation in the countries where crimes are committed against believers and both trends and reasons for persecution are analyzed.

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INTRODUCTION

The annual report “The Freedom of Conscience and Religious Intolerance in Today’s World” is produced by the Russian Association for the Protection of Religious Liberty for the purposes of highlighting the most important events that take place in the area of protecting the rights for the freedom of conscience and religious worship, and is based on regular situation monitoring.

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The report materials are grouped into four sections. Section 1 introduces the reader to the most important evidence of acts of physical violence against Christians, Muslims, and Jews, provides information on the nature of the persecution and the level of the current crisis. Section 2 contains information on violations of the rights for the freedom of conscience and religious worship in different countries.

Section 3 covers events related to the growing trend of religiophobia and the spread of secular values, particularly in Western countries (Christianophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, juvenile justice, legalization of same-sex marriages, promotion of non-traditional values, destruction of family institution, etc.) and also contains comments on the spread of religiophobia in the world.

Section 4 is devoted to the analyzing the implementation of events aimed at protecting religious freedom directly within the framework of state-religion relations, interconfessional and interreligious dialogue, as well as civil society initiatives.

Each section has a number of subdivisions that focus the reader's attention on the aspects and features of the observed processes. The summary part summarizes the overall result of the materials under consideration. For illustrative purposes, the conclusions on the state of religious freedom in the world are shown in the graphs.

1. PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

1.1. General information about physical violence

There are various situations in the modern world in which religious communities are persecuted because of their faith. The conditions of believers belonging to any given religion depends on the standard of living in a country, the system of government, the prevailing ideology, and the general historical background. Among the cases that can be classified as physical violence are terrorist acts, murders, attacks on places of worship and prayer meetings, kidnappings, sexual and psychological abuse, beatings, torture by police officers, arrests, and imprisonment. As a rule, the reasons for these situations are the desire of radicals to convert the population into their faith, the extremist activities of terrorist groups, and state policies that are hostile to religion.

According to estimates of non-profit organizations and organizations that monitor violations of religious freedom, Christian communities are the most frequent victims of systematic persecution and physical violence.

According to the Russian Association for the Protection of Religious Liberty, 245 million Christians are currently being persecuted. The persecution covers 144 countries. In 2019 alone, 4,136 Christians were killed¹, and a number of countries have been witnessing intensified persecution beginning the following year. Other information is provided by Open Doors: in its annual report, the organization claimed that 260 million Christians were persecuted around the world in 2019². The list of the most dangerous states for Christians, announced by US State Department, includes Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan³.

¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65934-245-millionov-khristian-vo-vsem-mire-podvergajutsya-presledovanijam--rars> 25.10.2019

² URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2020/01/17/report-around-the-world-260-million-christians-face-persecution/> 17.01.2019

³ URL: <http://pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7276> 25.12.2019

Christians of Asia and Africa are in the worst situation. In some countries the persecution of Christians reaches the level of genocide. Violence episodes against members of Jewish communities take place in the United States and some European countries. The rise of anti-Semitism among the population is claimed to be the cause for such attacks. Muslim communities have been subjected to violence in both Asian and European countries. The nature of these incidents can be described as isolated. Among the countries regularly mentioned in reports of physical violence between August 2019 and May 2020 are Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Ukraine, China, and the DPRK. Specific cases of violence will be discussed in detail below, alongside general data on the number of incidents and their causes, and an analysis of the factors leading to harassment.

1.2. Physical violence in Asia

Pakistan should be mentioned among the first countries that violate religious freedom and allow physical violence. There are strong radical Islamic influences in the country; representatives of the criminal world and various aggressors use religion as a cover for achieving their goals and unchecked violence. Early in the reporting period from July to September 2019, 43 cases of anti-Christian violence were documented in the country, including several murders motivated by religious hatred, kidnappings, rapes, and forced conversions to Islam. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has published data according to which 60% of non-Muslim students experienced discrimination because of their faith in higher education institutions, among non-Muslim teachers this figure reaches 70%, and 72% of parents reported child abuse based on their faith⁴.

The reason for violence may be a land issue, an accusation of “blasphemy” or “apostasy”. Kidnappings for the purpose of forced conversion to Islam are common. As the Christians are one of the poorest segments of the population and are viewed as second-class

⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/25/icc-documents-43-cases-persecution-pakistani-christians-three-months/> 25.10.2019

citizens, some incidents are not motivated by any rational reasons, but are caused by a contempt towards the “lower strata of society”. The murder of Saleem Masih is important for understanding such attitude. He was tortured by the villagers of Baguyana (Kasur district, Punjab province) for using -tube well to bath and therefore “polluted” it⁵. The murder of 18-year-old Christian Akash Masih, who worked at bakery in Sialkot was motivated by religious hatred. The murder was characterized by police action, which was regarded by relatives as a cover-up of the perpetrators of the tragedy. Despite the demands of the family members to exhume Akash’s body, what might be revealed the causes of death had been blocked. According to Christians, the police did not give due attention to the investigation, and the management of the bakery’s administration demanded from the parents to stop trying to find out the circumstances of their son’s death⁶. This situation is not exclusive to Pakistan. Police brutality which includes arrests and torture is not uncommon. Anti-Christian incidents are being covered up and investigators do not carry out all necessary investigative measures in order to identify the perpetrators. These circumstances make followers of the radical teachings and representatives of the criminal world convinced of the impunity of their actions. The violence extends to newly converted Christians, who are accused of “betraying “ their faith⁷. Such accusations are effective because of the radical understanding of religious dogmas of Islam that is common in rural areas, the negative stereotype of Christians that has developed in society, and the desire to achieve ethnic and cultural “purity” in the country. The tragic accident on August 21 in the state of Lahore, when two Christian brothers, Javaid Masih and Suleman Masih, were killed, was the result of months-long harassment of Christians by local residents⁸. The beating of the worker Shan Masih was preceded

⁵ URL: <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/12544/pakistani-christian-man-killed-by-muslim-landowner-for-dirtying-well>- 03.03.2020

⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/14/pakistani-christian-family-claims-sons-murder-covered/> 14.11.2019

⁷ URL: <https://vom.com.au/pakistan-islamic-holidays-bring-extra-attention-to-new-christians/> 01.08.2019

⁸ URL: <https://vom.com.au/pakistan-islamic-holidays-bring-extra-attention-to-new-christians/> 01.08.2019

by minor insults and daily humiliations⁹¹⁰. He was tortured by the employer when he asked for leave to attend a service. The story also contains a significant point concerning the relationship between Christian employees and employers: Shan Masih was not paid the sum that was agreed by parties before employment, and many days of work were not taken into account when payday. Members of religious minorities seek to keep their jobs even if they are paid irregularly or are directly deceived by the employer. The workers are forced to do so because of their difficult financial situation, which is used by unscrupulous landowners or heads of companies who are interested in low-cost labor.

The death penalty caused by “blasphemy” remains one of the threats for Christians. According to a study by Release International, Christians are ten times more likely to be accused of blasphemy than other citizens of the country¹¹. The case of a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was acquitted in October 2018 and moved to Canada, where she was granted political asylum, in May 2019, had a wide resonance. In September, the Christian woman gave an interview in which she urged the world community to pay attention to those sentenced to death and influence the Pakistani authorities to either abolish or reform its blasphemy law. This paragraph in the legislation can be used as a tool of pressure on communities at this time. According to a 2018 U.S. State Department report on international religious freedom, nearly 80 people — Muslims and Christians — are in jail in Pakistan for allegedly violating Section 295 of the Penal Code, the country’s blasphemy law. At least 28 of them have been sentenced to death¹². One of those sentenced on false charges is a Christian couple, Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar. The couple have been on death row since 2014. The lawyers are trying to have their sentence overturned,

⁹ URL: <https://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7343> 25.03.2020

¹⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/12/muslim-employer-pakistan-beats-christian-employee-asking-go-church/> 12.03.2020

¹¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/14/pakistani-christians-ten-times-likely-accused-blasphemy/> 14.12.2019

¹² URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/asia-bibi-people-must-help-pakistanis-falsely-accused-of-blasphemy/> 03.09.2019

but the date of the appeal hearing was postponed in April due to a coronavirus pandemic and Christians remain imprisoned at this time¹³. At the same time, despite the number of processes that cause wide disputes in the world community the government of Pakistan approved a new law in January of this year that may lead to an increase in the number of false accusations of “blasphemy” against Christians. According to the law, social media companies will be required to remove any “defamatory” matters from social networks within 24 or 6 hours. Violation of the requirements can lead to a block or a fine of 500 million rupees (about \$ 3.2 million). Meanwhile, it has been repeatedly reported about precedents when Christians were found guilty of “blasphemy” for publishing on the Internet, but did not post in person¹⁴.

Regarding the case of Asia Bibi, it should be emphasized that it received a continuance in May 2020. On May 25, the body of 50-year-old Christian Jounas Masih, who was the husband of Asia Bibi's sister, was found in Dao Ki Mallian village (Punjab province). The radicals killed him by cutting his throat¹⁵.

The use of the courts to put pressure on Christian communities and police brutality is widespread in Pakistan. Christian human rights defenders documented four cases of police torture against Pakistani Christians including fatal cases in late August and early September. In three cases, there were unfounded accusations of various kinds of crimes. In two cases, the unlawful actions were motivated by personal motives, such as the incident in which five police constables illegally raided the home of a Christian family in Sialkot on August 31 when a Christian woman had previously rejected the romantic advances of one of the police constables. In revenge, the constable falsely accused the girl's brother of theft and used the accusations as a pretext to raid the house belonging to a Christian community. As a result, five Christian women were detained and beaten up.

¹³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/13/appeal-pakistani-couple-sentenced-death-blasphemy-delayed-covid-19/> 13.04.2020

¹⁴ URL:<https://christiannews.net/2020/02/26/christian-blasphemy-cases-could-rise-under-pakistans-new-social-media-law/> 26.02.2020

¹⁵ URL: <https://www.bosnewslife.com/2020/05/28/brother-in-law-christian-asia-bibi-killed-in-pakistan/> 28.05.2020

The women were released only after members of the community staged protests and incident reports were published in the press¹⁶. Amir Masih, a 28-year-old Christian was tortured to death. On 2 September, after several days of torture, the police handed him over to family members, who took him to a hospital in Lahore, where he died of his injuries. It is indicated that the detention itself, made on August 29, was illegal¹⁷. Such egregious incidents as organized raids by law enforcement officers on Christian community meetings were also documented. As an example, four policemen violently raided a Christian wedding ceremony in Pakistan's Punjab province. Several Christians were beaten. In addition, the police vandalized the home where the ceremony was taking place. Those injured were refused medical treatment at the hospital, as per the police directives to the medical staff¹⁸.

Methods of suppressing activist activity are used. At the beginning of the reporting period, from August to September, multiple cases of threats, attacks, murders against Christian activists and representatives of non-profit organizations were documented.

On August 13, activist Nisar James was brutally beaten in Pakistan's Punjab province. On August 16, Chaudhary Asghar Fazal, a well-known Christian activist, was murdered in the same province. According to members of the local community and the son of the deceased, the reason was to protect the interests of Christians. In addition, it is noted that the activist *was threatened with blasphemy charges*, which is another example of how this law are used against religious minorities¹⁹.

In villages and towns, residents can attack Christians over land issue. Because of the perception of Christians as “second-class” citizens, attacks are being made on parishes, homes, and urban areas.

¹⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/01/four-cases-police-abuse-documented-two-weeks-pakistan/> 01.10.2019

¹⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/10/christian-family-claims-relative-tortured-death-police-pakistan/> 10.09.2019

¹⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/11/christian-wedding-pakistan-violently-raided-police/> 11.12.2019

¹⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/12/christian-activists-pakistan-threat/> 12.09.2019

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned incident of the beating of a worker Shan Masih was continued relating to the land grab: after beating the hired worker, his employer bought the land where the Masih's family lived and possessed their properties by depriving them of their home²⁰.

Two priests were beaten and robbed by a group of seven extremists in Karachi. The extremists demanded that the priests vacate the parish house used for prayer meetings. And if they disobeyed the extremists threatened them with violence by saying that "they don't want a Christian center near the mosque"²¹.

A mob of armed Muslims who stopped Christians from constructing a church building in the village of Punjab province, were motivated by a similar motive²².

On November 10, in the neighborhood of Lahore, a Christian home where Manzoor Masih and his family lived, was set on fire by radicals. Local residents repeatedly threatened the Christian family with violence in case they do not leave the area and move to a settlement which is intended only for Christians. A broader perspective is offered by the comment of a local Muslim, Muhammad Mehmood, who said that criminals use Islam as a cover to achieve their goals of taking over the area. According to the Muslim, about ten years back, this was Christians-majority neighborhood, however all of them were forced to leave their homes for safety reasons²³.

Because of perceiving Christians as "undignified" citizens, police inaction and, above all, the wrong understanding of Islam, radical Pakistani citizens regularly kidnap under-age girls from families and forcefully convert them to Islam. On August 16, a group of criminals attempted to rape a young Christian girl in Gujrat²⁴. August and

²⁰ URL: <https://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/734325.03.2020>

²¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/14/extremists-attack-parish-house-southern-pakistan-demand-priests-vacate-muslim-neighborhood/> 14.08.2019

²² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/08/christian-villagers-pakistan-beaten-stopped-constructing-church/> 08.11.2019

²³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/15/pakistani-christian-home-destroyed-apparent-arson-attack/> 15.11.2019

²⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/25/christian-family-pakistan-charged-murder-defending-daughter-attack/> 25.08.2019

September saw the reports of about five cases of sexual assault of Christian minors in Punjab province alone²⁵. In November, two Catholic girls, 13-year-old Samra Munir and 14-year-old Neha Pervaiz²⁶, were reportedly kidnapped. The case of the abduction of 14-year-old Huma Yunus attracted the attention of the world community. On October 10, the Christian teen was kidnapped by three armed men²⁷. It was later reported about her forced marriage and forced conversion to Islam²⁸. When her case was tried in court, the kidnappers did not allow her to attend, which caused the hearing to be postponed²⁹.

On September 16, a 14-year-old Christian teen named Samra Bibi was abducted and later forcibly converted to Islam³⁰. On 11 April, the abduction and torture of a 14-year-old Christian schoolgirl³¹ and the sexual assault of a 7-year-old Christian girl were reported in Kasur district, Punjab province³².

Male teenagers can also be victims of kidnappings, however, such cases are quite rare. Usually, in such episodes, sexual abuse is committed, and the victims are killed or left at the crime scene. In July, a 10-year-old Christian boy named Badil was brutally murdered after being repeatedly beaten and raped by his employers³³. On March 1, three Christian teenagers, Sunel Naim, Harry Booth and Yash Booth, were attacked by four rapists in Lahore³⁴.

²⁵ URL: <https://vom.com.au/pakistan-series-of-sexual-assaults/> 05.09.2019

²⁶ URL: <https://aleteia.org/2019/11/19/in-pakistan-two-kidnappings-of-underage-christian-girls/>

²⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/05/family-kidnapped-christian-teen-pakistan-begs-daughters-safe-return/> 05.12.2019

²⁸ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-12/persecuted-christians-pakistani-kidnapped-girl-forced.html> 23.12.2019

²⁹ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/pk-2020-03-12.htm> 12.03.2020

³⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/29/pakistani-teenager-abducted-forcibly-converted/> 29.09.2019

³¹ URL: <https://vom.com.au/pakistan-abducted-christian-teenage-girl-is-rescued/> 20.02.2020

³² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/20/young-christian-girl-assaulted-pakistans-punjab-province/> 20.04.2020

³³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/01/young-christian-boy-beaten-death-muslim-employer/> 01.08.2019

³⁴ URL: <https://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7348> 28.03.2020

There have been three anti-Muslim attacks in the Pakistani city of Quetta since 2019. The first one, which took place on May 24, was reported in the 2018-2019 report. The last two attacks occurred on August 16, 2019 and January 10, 2020. In the first case, after the explosion of a bomb planted in the building, 4 people were killed, 15 parishioners were injured³⁵, as a result of the second incident, 13 people were killed and more than 20 were injured³⁶. Extremist groups were behind the attacks. It becomes obvious that the city is under systematic pressure of radical organizations. Among the anti-Muslim terrorist acts in Asia, it is necessary to note the terrorist attack on October 18 in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. The victims of the attack, as in the case of the terrorist attacks in Quetta, were mosque parishioners. The explosion occurred during Friday prayers and took away at least 62 lives of believers. About 60 people were injured³⁷. The probable cause of the terrorist action is the ongoing armed conflict on the territory of the country. The alleged perpetrators are extremist organizations.

At the end of the period covered in this report, on May 22, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India denied the information given in the report of the US Commission for international Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for the year 2020, stating that there is no religious harassment in the country. The statement of the foreign Service was rejected by representatives of Christian and Muslim communities. In particular, a Christian leader named Father Raja, who oversees almost 500 congregations across five states in India, said that the authorities are distorting reality in an effort to protect their international image³⁸. Violence against religious minorities has not decreased over the past year. According to data from various organizations, there were more religious hate attacks in 2019 than in 2018³⁹. The United Christian Forum (UCF) has activated a specific helpline for victimized

³⁵ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/16/v-pakistane-progremel-vzryv-v-meceti/> 16.08.2019

³⁶ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/10jan2020/pak806.html> 10.01.2020

³⁷ URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/> 18.10.2019

³⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/22/local-christians-react-uscirf-recommending-india-country-particular-concern/> 22.05.2020

³⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/24/attacks-christians-india-continued-rise-2019/> 24.03.2020

Christians. According to United Christian Forum (UCF), the first six months of 2019 witnessed 158 incidents of violence against Christians in 23 states of India, in which 110 women and 89 children were also injured⁴⁰. According to the note, among the 158 incidents recorded by “Helpline”, 130 relate to attacks by violent mobs, what gives an understanding of the scale of the problem. Often, these attacks occurred during prayer meetings, including private homes. Thus, as UCF notes, the confession of Christianity “has become dangerous to life in over 90 percent of the Indian territory.” By July 2019 it had been documented 158 attacks on Christians in 23 States of India including 110 injured women and 89 children⁴¹. In the autumn, the number of acts of violence crossed the two hundred mark^{42,43}; and subsequently reached 275 (with 145 women and 106 children among the victims⁴⁴). According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, Christians in India were violently attacked 366 times in 2019 alone⁴⁵.

A characteristic feature of most attacks is organization. As a rule, Hindu radicals or supporters of tribal religions attack in large groups, choosing places where Christians gathers. Such cases were reported in India’s Rajasthan state, where a mob of Hindu-nationalists, numbering about 250, attacked a Christian wedding. When police were called to the scene, the Christians were falsely accused of forcefully converting people and disturbing the peace of the community. Several believers, including the pastor and his 3-year-old child, were arrested⁴⁶. The case shows that the aggression of radical Hindus not only does not meet with any opposition by law enforcement agencies,

⁴⁰ URL:http://www.fides.org/en/news/66468-ASIA_INDIA_Violence_against_Christians_in_23_States_of_India_158_incidents_in_six_months

⁴¹ URL:http://www.fides.org/en/news/66468-ASIA_INDIA_Violence_against_Christians_in_23_States_of_India_158_incidents_in_six_months 07.08.2019

⁴² URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/16/report-shows-religiously-motivated-violence-india-continues-escalate/> 16.10.2019

⁴³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/20/200-incidents-anti-christian-violence-reported-india-2019/> 20.09.2019

⁴⁴ URL: <http://christian.by/stati/4267-v-indii-rastet-uroven-agressii-protiv-khristian> 02.12.2019

⁴⁵ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/22/christian-family-violently-expelled-village-central-india/> 22.03.2020

⁴⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/09/mob-nationalists-attack-christian-wedding-india/> 09.08.2019

but also receives their support. This is explained by the fact that the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that took power in the country is aimed at expelling Christians from India. The States of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh have passed laws prohibiting forced conversions. Laws are used to justify violence against Christians and to stigmatize them socially. In turn, stigmatization leads to widespread attacks. Among the most notable are the attack on a prayer meeting in Uttar Pradesh on July 28, when a group of radical Hindus beat a priest Raju Prasad⁴⁷, the attack on four Christians in Haryana state on September 22⁴⁸, the July incidents in Telangana state⁴⁹, and the February attacks in the run-up to Donald Trump's state visit. Preaching is seen by Hindus as a way to impose faith on rural people. The BJP party considers only "traditional" religions to be acceptable to the Indian people. Pastors, missionaries, and community leaders are being threatened into stopping their preaching activities. These demands were accompanied by an attack by a mob of 30 Hindus on a pastor and community members on 2 October in Vasalamarry village, Telangana state⁵⁰ and a raid on a Christian service in Jharkhand state on 8 September during a service⁵¹. On December 17, Hindu radicals carried out a brutal attack on two Christian families in India's Odisha state after they refused to recant their Christian faith⁵². On March 8, a preacher and 30 activists in Tamil Nadu experienced violence while distributing aid to the poor⁵³. After the attack, the Christians were informed that

⁴⁷ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/10/pastor-northern-india-dragged-house-fellowship-beaten/> 10.08.2019

⁴⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/02/christian-family-hospitalized-brutal-attack-northern-india/> 02.10.2019

⁴⁹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/14/christian-communities-shaken-series-attacks-southern-india/> 14.08.2019

⁵⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/06/christian-birthday-celebration-attacked-radicals-india/> 06.10.2019

⁵¹ <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/28/hindu-radicals-live-stream-assault-christians/> 28.09.2019

⁵² URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/15/christian-families-beaten-banned-village-northeast-india/> 15.03.2020

⁵³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/31/christians-southern-india-beaten-detained-giving-aid-poor/> 31.03.2020

they are subject to arrest for preaching Christianity. As a result, the Christians were released, but they were warned not to return to the village where they were distributing aid. On February 20, six Hindu radicals attacked the family of a Christian preacher in Chhattisgarh state. The injured preacher's mother, wife, and 11-month-old child were hospitalized⁵⁴. Often cases of violence tend not to be brought to trial, and the police themselves act as a conciliator encouraging the parties to resolve conflict through negotiations. In fact, law enforcement agencies cover up the acts of violence and in many ways force Christians to withdraw their claims. An example is the attack on the family of pastor Sawan Paul in Uttarakhand state. The family was seriously injured at the hands of followers of a Hindu leader and was hospitalized, and reconciliation with the villagers was imposed. As a result, the case was closed⁵⁵.

Numerous attacks on preachers were recorded in many States of India. As shown by the incidents of violence on 22 September in Haryana state, where 30 Hindu radicals attacked a retired pastor, his wife and two children⁵⁶, on 22 October in India's Gujarat state, where two preachers and the wife of one of the pastors were the victims of aggression⁵⁷, on 28 October India's Bihar state when a mob attacked the home of pastor Joseph Johnson and his family⁵⁸, and on 12 November in Parihara village (Jharkhand state), when radicals attacked pastor Basant Kumar Paul and his family⁵⁹, pastors' families are at risk of violence. The atmosphere of fear and violence against relatives for the purpose of intimidation are deterrent measures that are widely used by supporters of the ruling party to put pressure on

⁵⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/05/indian-evangelists-family-beaten-absence/05.03.2020>

⁵⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/04/pastors-family-northern-india-brutally-assaulted-mob/04.12.2019>

⁵⁶ URL: <https://vom.com.au/india-christian-family-hospitalised-after-brutal-attack/10.10.2019>

⁵⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/27/pastor-beat-unconscious-radicals-indias-gujarat-state/27.10.2019>

⁵⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/30/mob-radicals-nearly-kill-pastor-family-northeast-india/30.10.2019>

⁵⁹ URL: [http://asianews.it/notizie-it/Jharkhand,-radicali-ind%C3%B9-attaccano-la-famiglia-di-un-pastore-cristiano:-la-moglie-%C3%A8-in-coma-\(Foto\)-48549.html14.11.2019](http://asianews.it/notizie-it/Jharkhand,-radicali-ind%C3%B9-attaccano-la-famiglia-di-un-pastore-cristiano:-la-moglie-%C3%A8-in-coma-(Foto)-48549.html14.11.2019)

Christian communities. Other acts of aggression against preachers and distributors of Christian literature include an attack on a Christian preacher, Isaac Palouse⁶⁰ and the beating of eight Christians in India's Madhya Pradesh state⁶¹. In India's Andhra Pradesh state, villagers, trying to prevent the construction of a Church wall, severely beat a preacher, Eswara Rao Appalabattula⁶². The radicals also tried to stop the distribution of Christian literature. In October, a group of religious book distributors was harassed in Chhattisgarh state⁶³. On 12 March, the radical Hindus in Odisha state's Kodalmetla village, attacked a Christian Kama Sodi and his family. After the beating, the Christian went into a coma⁶⁴.

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that by threats and concerted attacks, the residents seek to displace the missionaries from the village. Cutting off families from water and food sources can be used as a form of pressure on community members and preachers in villages. Christians are also ostracized after being expelled: for example, the pastor lalu Kirade family, who survived the attack, was forced to leave the village and live in the nearby jungle. Subsequently, Pastor Kirade's 9-year-old daughter went to the settlement on her way back from school, because of what the villagers began to threaten her with violence⁶⁵. Indian nationalists and followers of Hinduism, speaking out against the alleged "imposing" of the Christian faith, are seen in intimidating Christians in order to force them to recant Christ. On November 1, five Christians from India's Odisha state were attacked, the reason was precisely refusal to recant their Christian faith⁶⁶. State ideology affects the radicalization of the population. In India, parents who profess Hinduism beat their

⁶⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/09/pastor-left-critical-condition-following-attack-radicals-india/> 09.03.2020

⁶¹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/12/eight-christians-central-india-attacked-falsely-accused-forced-conversions/> 12.12.2019

⁶² URL:<https://www.christianpost.com/news/elderly-pastor-brutally-beaten-mocked-by-hindu-extremists-i-am-ready-to-die-for-christ.html> 17.02.2020

⁶³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/22/christians-distributing-bibles-india-harassed-radical-nationalists/> 22.10.2019

⁶⁴ URL: <https://vom.com.au/india-christian-beaten-into-coma/> 16.04.2020

⁶⁵ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/22/christian-family-violently-expelled-village-central-india/> 22.03.2020

⁶⁶ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/06/five-christians-northeast-india-beaten-refusing-recant-christian-faith/> 06.11.2019

11-year-old daughter for converting to Christianity⁶⁷. Apart from the followers of Hinduism, armed Communist groups — the Naxalites are noticed in the brutal inculcation of their ideology. In Odisha state, a Christian pastor named Saanvi was beheaded by members of Naxalite political group that often carried out terrorist acts in some parts of India⁶⁸. The reason was his active ministry work, which contradicted the Communist ideology of the radicals.

Incidents such as the one that occurred on September 3 in the Indian state of Jharkhand, when a crowd of 500 militant Hindu extremists broke into the territory of a Jesuit College, are worrisome. The devastating consequences of the attack included: the serious injury of two students (they were saved only thanks to the timely intervention of sisters in service at the College. Although an ambulance was called, the crowd did not allow the victims to be taken to the hospital, blocking the path of an ambulance; the wounded were hospitalized only with the later intervention of police officers), and the destruction of the campus and boarding school. Several people were injured, including a priest, Nobor Bilung, who tried to calm the crowd. The attack continued for four hours, at some point the police were called to the scene, but law enforcement officers were met with resistance and forced to back down⁶⁹.

The fact of the attack shows a sense of impunity for radicals and the inability of the police to protect Christian institutions. After the incident, the authorities and the Police Department did not take immediate and effective actions to restore justice and search for the perpetrators, which seems to support the idea of the police tacitly accepting and approving violent actions.

On December 29, an attack on a public event was carried out in India's West Bengal state. Hindu radicals carried out their attack the day the community hall was being inaugurated by local Christians. Four people were injured in the attack, including two children⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/64954-v-indii-roditeli-induisty-izbivali-za-veru-svoju-11-letnyuju-dochy-khristianku> 12.09.2019

⁶⁸ URL: <https://vom.com.au/india-pastor-beheaded-by-radical-communists/> 24.10.2019

⁶⁹ URL:http://www.fides.org/en/news/66609-ASIA_INDIA_Acts_of_vandalism_by_militant_Hindu_extremists_on_a_Jesuit_College 12.09.2019

⁷⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/31/christian-community-hall-eastern-india-ransacked-bjp-activists/> 31.12.2019

In January, house churches were subjected to an organized attack. On January 5, an incident occurred in Bichpari village, Haryana state, a mob of some 250 to 300 radicals attacked the parish and beat up a Christian preacher named Jai Singh⁷¹. On January 19, 20 radicals in the village of Malasamudra, Karnataka, beat up children who had gathered at a service, with the aim to “discourage” them from going to Church⁷². It was reported about the mass attacks in Jamalpur village, located in India’s Bihar state and Bennakup village⁷³, Karnataka state⁷⁴. The first attack targeted a Christian meeting attended by about 100 Christians, while the second saw over 150 Hindu radicals which attacked a parish during a service and tortured a community leader for several hours. On March 2, a Christian hospital in India’s Karnataka state was attacked by Hindu extremists. The crowd gathered at the direction of the religious leaders after it became known about a Bible in one of the chambers. The Hindus then beat up and handed over Simon George the public relations officer and the hospital administrator to the police. The police charged them with insulting Hindu deities⁷⁵.

These cases show that acts of aggression are becoming more widespread. The level of coordination of raids, the ability to attack for a long time without police intervention—all these factors affect the creation of a hostile atmosphere for Christians when the profession of Christianity is becoming less possible. The main threat is false accusations of forced religious conversion of residents to Christianity, as well as in some cases fabricated charges of other crimes. From January to April 2020, four trials were launched against Christians in Karnataka state on charges of “forced conversion”, which led to an upsurge in anti-Christian violence⁷⁶.

⁷¹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/28/pastor-northern-india-severely-beaten-falsely-accused-forced-conversions/> 28.01.2020

⁷² URL: <https://vom.com.au/india-children-beaten-and-threatened/> 27.02.2020

⁷³ URL:<https://vom.com.au/india-hindu-radicals-demand-death-for-organisers-of-christian-film-screening/> 12.09.2019

⁷⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/10/pastor-tied-tree-beaten-hours-radicals-southern-india/> 10.03.2020

⁷⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/17/christian-hospital-india-attacked-extremists/> 17.03.2020

⁷⁶ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/04/christians-indias-karnataka-state-endure-spike-persecution/> 04.04.2020

Also on March 9, 11 members of the parish in the town of Chelur of the same state were arrested, including a pastor⁷⁷. Preachers Sukhiram Kare and Rohit Kumar were arrested on March 19 in Uttar Pradesh. Before their arrest, they were attacked by members of a Hindu nationalist organization. The reason was a conversation with a shopkeeper, who was offered to read a Gospel tract⁷⁸.

A vivid example of false accusations of other crimes is the arrest of American pastor Brian Nerren on October 5, 2019, who arrived to attend two Christian conferences in India. The case had an international resonance. The pastor was detained at customs after agents became aware of his religious affiliation. The authorities charged him with false accusations of illegal foreign currency trading. For seven months, Nerren was in police custody without being able to return to the United States. As a result, the pastor was released to his homeland after the government officially acquitted him due to the lack of evidence⁷⁹. The radical policy of the governing party allows the police to use torture against detainees and prisoners with impunity. Human rights activists are expressing increased concern about police brutality in the Uttar Pradesh state. The state police are aggressive and biased against both Christian communities and Muslims. It was repeatedly reported that believers were beaten in police stations⁸⁰. On November 26, 2019, Pastor Ajay Kumar, Pastor Om Parkash, and Kapil Dev Ram, were arrested by police in Uttar Pradesh state. They reported that they had been attacked by fellow prisoners on several occasions because of their religious affiliation during their two-month detention on false charges of forced religious conversion. Other prisoners spread the rumor that pastors received money from foreign countries. The police did not take any action to stop the violence. In the same state, four Christians were tortured⁸¹.

⁷⁷ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/in-2020-03-12.htm> 12.03.2020

⁷⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/26/pastors-northern-india-falsely-imprisoned-police-three-days/> 26.03.2020

⁷⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/29/american-pastor-arrested-detained-india/> 29.10.2019

⁸⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/12/rights-advocates-claim-police-indias-uttar-pradesh-working-tandem-extremists/> 12.01.2020

⁸¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/28/indian-christian-pastors-describe-nightmare-imprisonment-false-charges/> 28.02.2020

On March 15, during the attack by nationalists on a church gathering in the Dhamayapur village, the police detained Christians and for the next eight hours, they were beaten in the police station. The believers were charged with intent to cause mass riots. The Christians were released later that day, but forced to sign affidavit stating that they would stop their prayer meetings in the village⁸². This is the standard method used by police to root out Church activity in rural areas. In another episode of physical violence, the police, along with a group of radical Hindus, attacked a house church in Shanti Dham village. Two pastors and eight worshippers arrested in a police raid have been accused of forcible conversion⁸³.

The upsurge in violence towards Muslims was recorded in late February in new Delhi, where protests by followers of Islam against the accepted amendments to the citizenship law broke out. According to these amendments, representatives of six ethnic and religious groups from neighboring countries could receive citizenship, but the situation of Muslim migrants was ignored, with the result that they were deprived of the opportunity to become citizens. Due to the riots, the number of attacks on members of the Metropolitan community has increased, and repeated arson attacks on mosques have been recorded⁸⁴. The acts of violence against Muslims went unpunished by the police. A mob of radical Hindus set fire to a mosque in the Ashok Nagar district, a crime was accompanied by shouting the words of a Hindu hymn⁸⁵. In addition to the fact that the police ignored most of the appeals by Muslims in connection with physical violence, law enforcement agencies took part in pogrom. During the riots, police attacked a number of Muslim civilians, including those who did not participate in mass demonstrations⁸⁶. The attack of radicals on two Muslims in New Delhi could be cited as an example of religiously

⁸² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/16/four-christians-tortured-police-northern-india/> 16.03.2020

⁸³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/23/illegal-arrests-false-criminal-charges-used-harass-christians-india/> 23.03.2020

⁸⁴ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/26feb2020/india456.html> 26.02.2020

⁸⁵ <http://islam.ru/news/2020-02-27/57520> 27.02.2020

⁸⁶ URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/world/asia/india-police-muslims.html> 12.03.2020

motivated violence by the Hindu population. Two young Muslim men, Mohammed Adil and Mohammed Kamil, were stopped by the perpetrators on their way out of the pharmacy. As a result of the brutal beating, one of the believers was hospitalized. The anti-Muslim nature of the crime was confirmed by the fact that the perpetrators became aggressive after they saw traditional Islamic skullcaps on the heads of young people. Before the attack, one of the radicals taunted the worshipper by offering to sing lines of a Hindu hymn⁸⁷.

Episodes of extreme intolerance to the Christian faith were recorded in Vietnam. In this country, as well as in China, communism has the greatest influence on domestic policy and the lives of citizens. There is a widespread prejudice against Christians as carriers of an “alien” religion among rural residents. The Communist party of Vietnam, fearing the influence of other ideologies, wishes to take over country’s religious organizations and control their activities. Anyone who disagrees with the party’s policies or publicly professes their faith is arrested and charged with anti-state activities. This also happened to Christian teacher Nguyen Nang Tinh, who was sentenced to 11 years in prison on charges of “propaganda against the state.” He was arrested. on May 29 over posts made to a Facebook account. At the same time, it is noted that the teacher was not affiliated with the publication for which he was arrested, since this account did not belong to him. It is most likely that the real reason for the arrest and conviction for a long time was Tinh’s activism and outdoor affiliation with the Catholic Church⁸⁸.

In villages, intolerance of Christianity can be seen in episodes of extreme cruelty to members of the community. For instance, in one of the villages, radical residents beat a six-year-old girl because her parents converted to Christianity. Before the violence, the municipal authorities demanded from the family to renounce their faith. After refusing, the villagers attacked the worshippers and savagely injured them. As a result of the attack, the girl fell into a coma for

⁸⁷ URL:<https://m.thewire.in/article/communalism/muslim-youth-assaulted-injured-in-maujpur-ne-delhi-itbp-deployed/amp> 24.05.2020

⁸⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/18/christian-teacher-sentenced-11-years-alleged-facebook-post/> 18.11.2019

a month. After returning to the village, which was made possible by the intervention of the local pastor, the family was ostracized. It was reported that believers continue to receive death threats because of their religious affiliation⁸⁹. In another high-profile incident, the village elders subjected to prolonged torture of a Hmong Christian. The reason for the aggression was also the refusal of the believer and his wife to renounce Christ. After refusing, the villagers tortured the man with fire until he agreed to renounce his faith. Afterwards, the couple were forced to leave the village⁹⁰.

From the news reports processed during this period, we can conclude about the extremely difficult situation of representatives of different faiths in China. The prevailing Communist ideology in China implies the suppression of any kind of preaching activity if it runs counter to the line of the Communist party of China. The prevailing Communist ideology in China implies the suppression of any kind of preaching activity if it goes against the line of the Communist party of China. The party demonstrates a move towards tighter control over organizations that have an impact on the ideological education of the population⁹¹.

Christians are seen by the country government as unreliable citizens who can conduct anti-Communist propaganda and act as agents of influence promoting the values and the agenda of Western countries. To regulate the activities of Catholic parishes, the Patriotic Association was made — a body designed to control the activities of parishes and priests. The communities that join the Association refuse the primacy of the Vatican and swear allegiance to the party. Refusal to join is regarded as a manifestation of disobedience and evidence of unreliability. As part of the response, Christian parishes are demolished and community leaders and members are arrested. On April 3, a Catholic priest who refused to join the Patriotic Association was kidnapped in Fujian province. The most likely perpetrators of the kidnapping were security officials⁹².

⁸⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/11/six-years-old-vietnamese-girl-beaten-parents-faith/> 11.09.2019

⁹⁰ URL: <https://vom.com.au/vietnam-new-believer-tortured-for-faith/> 14.08.2019

⁹¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/15/four-preneens-sichuan-church-briefly-detained-police/> 15.12.2019

⁹² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/07/chinese-priest-fujian-taken-away-authorities/> 07.04.2020

Police raids, detentions because of anti-state activities, and long prison sentences are common in the country's regions. The most high-profile was the trial of pastor Wang Yi, which began on November 15⁹³. The pastor was arrested on December 9, 2018, along with hundreds of members of his community. There were significant violations of the rights of Christian prisoners in China: relatives were not allowed to visit him, and he was forbidden to use the services of his chosen lawyer. The pastor approached the beginning of the trial without an official representative of his interests in the court. On December 26, he was sentenced to nine years in prison⁹⁴. Tsin Defu, an elder of the oppressed community led by Wang Yi, was sentenced to four years in prison⁹⁵. At the same time, during the trial, the prosecution promised the elder and his family that if he used the services of a court-appointed attorney, the sentence would be commuted. This suggests that defendants used the system, eliminating the opportunity to avoid jail, when a believer is deprived of quality legal aid and forced to accept a lawyer, is not interested in successful conclusion of a case for your client. Together with this, this case shows that the state incriminates believers with crimes that they did not commit: the court's decision was made on the basis of "illegal business operations" which means the distribution of religious literature among parishioners. In other episodes, authorities in Hubei province arrested three Christian women for collecting offerings, and one of them could face up to 10 years in prison if convicted⁹⁶.

There were recorded cases of confrontation between law enforcement officers and security service, on the one side, and believers on the other. In Henan province, worshippers were beaten during the demolition of a temple⁹⁷, and the Church was raided by police officers in Zhejiang province. Many believers were beaten⁹⁸.

⁹³ URL: <https://vom.com.au/china-chengdu-pastor-to-be-tried/> 21.11.2019

⁹⁴ URL: <https://vom.com.au/china-pastor-wang-yi-sentenced-to-nine-years/> 09.01.2020

⁹⁵ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/cn-2019-12-23.htm> 23.12.2019

⁹⁶ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/cn-2020-01-16.htm> 16.01.2020

⁹⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/05/watchdog-organization-reports-another-church-demolition-china/> 05.11.2019

⁹⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/03/zhejiang-church-raided-members-detained/> 03.02.2020

Raids on churches and houses of worship and detentions of believers are characterized by the desire of the police to keep what is happening in secret. For this purpose, mobile phones and other devices were confiscated from believers in the vast majority of cases. Another Hindu-majority country is Nepal. The situation in the country is similar to the situation in India, when the party's policy, centered around the idea of national identity, is fitted with anti-Christian sentiments in rural areas. In this situation, Christian communities are subjected to increased persecution. The government strictly regulates the religious sphere: the country has a law prohibiting forced conversion to any religion. Forced conversion can be understood as any type of missionary activity, as well as open confession of one's faith. Since the end of 2018, when the anti-conversion law was passed, 17 Christians have been arrested. Among those arrested are registered both Nepalese citizens and foreigners⁹⁹. The main religion in the country is Hinduism. Attacks motivated by religious hatred were recorded in rural areas. In particular, in October it was reported about the persecution undergone by a young converted Christian named Sreva. Her husband's parents beat her up for attending Church, so she had to leave the settlement¹⁰⁰.

The whole picture of the oppression of Christians in Turkey is characterized by the absence of mass persecution of communities and the simultaneous growth of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions. According to international Christian Concern (ICC) Middle East specialist Clare Evans, there has been an increase in incidents of physical violence against Christians in the country since the beginning of 2019. The statement followed the murder of Christian evangelist Jinwook Kim in the city of Diyarbakir on November 19¹⁰¹.

The investigation mainly considered the possibility of an attempt at extortion, but representatives of Christian communities expressed confidence that the murder was committed on the grounds of

⁹⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/19/17-christians-nepal-arrested-charged-countrys-anti-conversion-law/> 18.12.2019

¹⁰⁰ URL: <https://vom.com.au/nepal-young-wife-beaten-and-kicked-out-of-home/> 17.10.2019

¹⁰¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/20/christian-evangelist-murdered-southeast-turkey/> 20.11.2019

religious hatred. The fears are caused by the fact that the Turkish government has started a massive deportation of foreign leaders from the country. Members of the community received threats a few days before the murder of Kim, who was Korean by nationality. The day after the murder, the threats were repeated. The Christian, who wishes to remain anonymous, said that the reason for the pressure on the community is the desire of the authorities to prevent the free preaching of the gospel. In General, according to report of local Christians, there is a General trend in the country towards increasing control over persons who carry out preaching activities.

One of the most high-profile incidents of violence against Christians in Turkey was the kidnapping of the parents of a Roman Catholic priest, Adday Ramzi Diril. An elderly couple was abducted on January 11 from their home in the village of Meer, Sirnak¹⁰² province for a long time, their whereabouts, as well as the identity of the perpetrators of the crime, remained unknown. The mother, Simoni Diril, was found deceased on March 20, 2020. The people responsible for the abduction and murder are allegedly supporters of the Kurdistan Workers' party, which is in a state of armed conflict with regular Turkish troops¹⁰³.

In Sri Lanka, especially in rural areas, radical movements of Buddhism have become widespread, resulting in attacks on Christian parishes, organizations and homes of believers. A characteristic feature of the persecution of Christians in this country is the attacks of local residents led by Buddhist monks. A similar incident was reported in the Ihala Yakkura village, where a mob of about 150 people disrupted the service by questioning the pastor. Thanks to the intervention of the police, the attack on the pastor was prevented. The reason for the aggression was the belief of Buddhists that the village belongs only to the Buddhist community. The Buddhist monks insisted that the Christian parish did not have permission to conduct worship activities. Later that evening, the preacher and his family

¹⁰² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/15/priests-family-missing-se-turkey/15.01.2020>

¹⁰³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/21/tragedy-family-missing-couple/21.03.2020>

were attacked by local residents¹⁰⁴. Similar attacks took place in September 2019. On September 11, in the village of Passara, residents opposed the construction of a Christian Church. On September 14, in the area of Gampaha, six Buddhist monks, leading a group of villagers, tried to oust Christians from the village and threatened to kill them in case of disobedience. On September 21, six worshippers were attacked in the Batticaloa district, five of them were hospitalized¹⁰⁵. On August 4, a group of residents led by three Buddhist monks attacked a Christian theology student who was preaching in the village of Mahiyanganaya¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷. It should be noted that the actions of the police varied significantly from case to case. In the episode of the attack on the pastor in the Ihala Yakkura village, police officers sided with Christians, prevented illegal actions by radicals and subsequently detained the instigators of the attack on the family of the community leader. In an incident in the Gampaha area on September 14, police escorted an aggressive crowd and supported false accusations against Christians. In addition, law enforcement officers attempted to intimidate the Christian leader by threatening him with detention if he refused to stop services and did not leave the village. Bangladesh was mentioned in reports during the reporting period in connection with an extremist attack on the world's largest refugee camp, located in Kutapalong. 20 Rohingya Christians were injured, and about 25 Christian families (about 170 people) were forced to move to a UN transit camp¹⁰⁸. During the attack, the extremists kidnapped the Christian preacher's daughter. Subsequently, there were reports that she was forcibly married off to a Muslim by members of the terrorist group. Many other believers missed, and there were reports of attempts to convert the abductees to Islam by force¹⁰⁹.

Myanmar is experiencing an insecurity due to the ongoing armed conflict in the country and the persecution of the Rohingya people.

¹⁰⁴ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/lk-2020-02-13.htm> 13.02.2020

¹⁰⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/08/advocacy-group-documents-series-anti-christian-incidents-sri-lanka/> 08.10.2019

¹⁰⁶ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/lk-2019-08-22.htm> 22.08.2019

¹⁰⁷ URL: <https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9134958.html> 16.08.2019

¹⁰⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/02/christian-leaders-bangladesh-condemn-attack-rohingya-christians/> 02.02.2020

¹⁰⁹ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/bd-2020-02-06.htm> 06.02.2020

A report by the United Nations Commission for the investigation the situation in Myanmar reported that Muslim members of this nation are being systematically persecuted by the government.

Commission Chairman Marzuki Darusman said that followers of Islam from this national minority are under threat of genocide¹¹⁰. Also, Muslims are victims of an armed conflict between the separatists of the “Arakan Army” and government forces. On February 29, in Rokhine state, an artillery attack carried out by a separatist group claimed the lives of three Muslims¹¹¹.

The military conflict affects members of the chin ethnic group who profess Christianity. More than 20 Christians were killed in an attack on mainly Christian settlements in Western Burma on March 14¹¹². In addition, the existing regime in the state restricts freedom of religion. For example, a Christian pastor named Sam was sentenced to two months of hard labor for sharing the gospel in a village in the self-governing in WA state¹¹³. In Indonesia, the situation is marked by harassment of Christian communities due to the hate speech law, as in the case of a Catholic activist named Sudarto, who was accused of inciting hatred after speaking about the situation of communities in West Sumatra province. According to the Christian, the province has a ban on holding non-Islamic services unless they are done so in a church. The ban applies only to non-Muslim communities¹¹⁴.

The Philippines has often been mentioned as a dangerous country for Christians to live in. On the one hand, the head of state, President Rodrigo Duterte, follows radical atheistic positions and has repeatedly made statements of anti-religious content. The main object of his statements is the Roman Catholic Church, which feeds a large part of the population of the island state. An important factor

¹¹⁰ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/bd-2020-02-06.htm> 16.09.2019

¹¹¹ URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/3-rohingya-muslims-killed-in-myanmar-shelling/1750045> 29.02.2020

¹¹² URL: <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/civilian-christians-killed-amid-military-fighting-in-western-burma.html> 25.03.2020

¹¹³ URL: <https://vom.com.au/myanmar-pastor-imprisoned-for-sharing-the-gospel/> 27.02.2020

¹¹⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/10/indonesian-activist-charged-highlighting-christian-persecution/> 10.01.2020

influencing the perception of the Catholic Church in government circles is the position of Christian leaders regarding the President's "war on drug trafficking". The representatives of the Church spoke out against the harsh methods of warfare, resulting in a large number of victims among the civilian population.

President Duterte's rule has been marked by an increased number of acts of violence against Catholic priests who act as defenders of human rights. In August 2019, preacher and activist Ernesto Estrella was shot dead¹¹⁵. In the same month, the victim of violence was a member of the Jesuit volunteer organization Jennifer Buckley, who was killed in her home on August 23. The original version of the investigation was an attempted robbery. Her neighbor, 30-year-old lawyer Ann Kathleen Gatdula, was injured in the attack. She was hospitalized with a stab wound¹¹⁶.

There is a tangible threat of terrorist attacks by ISIS (a terrorist organization banned in Russia). The threat of attacks on Catholic communities in northern Luzon was reported by representatives of the armed forces. In August, large-scale security measures were taken involving law enforcement agencies and the army. The Minor Basilica of the Blessed Virgin of the Holy rosary in Manaoag has been under heavy security for a long time¹¹⁷. During the Christmas period, when Christians are often targeted due to large gatherings of worshippers in churches, a terrorist attack was prevented in Basilan province. The preparation of the explosion in the Catholic Church was carried out by the group "Abu Sayyaf", who swore allegiance to ISIL (a terrorist organization banned in Russia¹¹⁸). In General, it can be noted that Catholic and Protestant communities in the Philippines are at significant risk, as extremist groups view them as «invaders». In view of the fact that Christianity is the most widespread religion in

¹¹⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/03/protestant-pastor-shot-dead-southern-philippines/> 03.08.2019

¹¹⁶ URL: http://www.fides.org/en/news/66529-ASIA_PHILIPPINES_Filipino_female_Jesuit_volunteer_killed_the_Church_thanks_her_for_the_testimony_of_love_and_service 28.08.2019

¹¹⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/23/soldiers-continue-guard-catholic-church-terrorist-threat/> 23.08.2019

¹¹⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/20/police-foiled-church-bomb-plot-southern-philippines/> 20.01.2020

the country, as well as taking into account the fact that militants from jihadist associations operate in the region, it can be concluded that terrorists can find an opportunity to use deterrent measures.

1.3. Physical abuse in Africa and Middle East

Extremist groups waging an exterminatory war against locals pose the main threat to Christians in the countries of West Africa. Christian communities are being persecuted by authoritarian government in other parts of the continent.

A situation close to genocide has emerged in Nigeria and neighboring countries of West Africa. Christian communities are currently attacked by gorillas of extremist organizations. Actual doers of these attacks are fighters of a terrorist group “Boko Haram” and extremists of Fulani herdsmen. Harassment is an ongoing process in the locality and is reflected in attacks on villages and cities where most people profess Christian religion. There is an open armed confrontation between these forces and governmental forces in the North and middle belt states of the country. The government is inclined to define the nature of conflict keeping away from antichristian background on the part of radicals. Herewith, it doesn't quadruple to facts according to human rights activists and specialists of the organizations analyzing and monitoring religious violence.

According to the International Red Cross, over 22,000 people are missing since the conflict began¹¹⁹. At least 350 Nigerian Christians were killed in first 2 months of 2020¹²⁰. At the same time, the number of attacks has increased after enforcing the lockdown: 32 believers died from the end of March to the beginning of April¹²¹. No less than 50 Christians were killed in March only by attacks on Christian communities by radical Fulani herdsmen fighters. By the beginning

¹¹⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/14/red-cross-22000-people-missing-boko-haram-crisis/> 14.09.2019

¹²⁰ URL: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/350-nigerian-christians-killed-in-first-2-months-of-2020-ngo-report.html> 11.03.2020

¹²¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70298-v-nigerii-radikaly-polyzujutsya-karantinom-dlya-raspravy-nad-khristianami> 08.04.2020

of April the total number of victims surged to 410 people¹²². More than 600 members of Christian communities have been killed since the beginning of 2020 according to a report issued in May, 15¹²³. The number of murdered Christians is about to reach 32,000 people since 2009¹²⁴.

Later the Nigerian Federal government released a statement claiming that Boko Haram is now specifically targeting Christians¹²⁵.

Lack of effectiveness demonstrated by Regular Army is a major factor that must be taken in consideration while analyzing the situation in a country. As a rule, terrorists do not meet tough resistance while attacking defended settlements. As was obvious from the attack on one of the cities of Borno state by terrorist gorillas in January, there is no concurrence between the Federal and the Regional governments. Umara Zulum, the Babagana state governor, commenting on devastating consequences produced by terrorist fighters, pinned the responsibility for the losses among civilians directly on the army, which refused to arrive to the settlements that was at risk of an attack. Also, he added that the state didn't receive necessary support from the government. In his speech delivered in response, President Muhammadu Buhari said it was not only the state troops incapable of protecting the citizens that were to blame. It can be demonstrated by the attack on Gerkid city, Adamava state, when thousands of Christians had to leave their places after terrorist fighters burnt down three churches and wounded a large number of believers. Some Christians were taken prisoners by terrorists. Locals had warned the government and armed forces about the attack, but military personnel failed to respond and remained inactive for hours¹²⁶. Similar situation in which the government troops were likewise inactive happened on

¹²² URL: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/at-least-50-nigerian-christians-killed-by-fulani-attacks-in-march-ngo-reports.html> 07.04.2020

¹²³ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/71525-boleje-600-khristian-ubity-v-nigerii-s-nachala-2020-goda--pravozashhitniki> 20.05.2020

¹²⁴ URL: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/more-than-600-nigerian-christians-killed-in-2020-new-report-says-65880> 18.05.2020

¹²⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/28/nigerian-government-admits-boko-haram-targeting-christians/> 28.02.2020

¹²⁶ URL: <https://vom.com.au/nigeria-thousands-flee-as-extremists-attack/> 05.03.2020

April, 1, in Plato state: the Ancha villagers were expressing concerns about Fulani fighters that had been noticed in the proximity. Despite these pleas for help and the knowledge that this area had been attacked many times before, the government did nothing and did not send any help or personnel to protect the villagers. So, the attackers could move freely on the territory and killed three locals¹²⁷.

The workers of humanitarian aid agencies, missionaries, and preachers are also at risk. Since 2011, 38 workers of organizations sending aid to Africa have been killed by Boko Haram terrorists¹²⁸. There were cases of murdering preachers in Enugu state, where the terrorists killed a Catholic Church preacher Reverend Paul Offu¹²⁹, in Kaduna state where the preacher Jeremiah Omolaru was killed and his wife was kidnapped¹³⁰, and the following month a Baptist leader Alhamdu Mangadus was killed by an unidentified armed group. On September 14¹³¹, Fulani militants attacked the village of Bagoma in Kaduna and killed Rev. Ishaku Katung and his wife¹³²; on January 20, Reverend Dennis Baguri died¹³³.

An episode of killing a Catholic seminarian Michael Nnadi, 18, who was kidnapped on January 8 in Kaduna state, Nigeria¹³⁴, speaks to an obviously antichristian inclination of attacks. As the murderer admitted, the main reason for the crime was the fact that the seminarian refused to renounce his faith when he was in captivity but was witnessing to his kidnappers instead.

¹²⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/02/ancha-village-nigeria-suffers-another-attack-government-nothing/> 02.04.2020

¹²⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/29/38-aid-workers-killed-boko-haram-since-2011/> 29.10.2019

¹²⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/04/priest-killed-southern-nigeriaunknown-gunmen/> 04.08.2019

¹³⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/07/pastor-killed-wife-abductedtravelling-capital-kaduna-state/> 07.08.2019

¹³¹ URL: <http://saharareporters.com/2019/09/12/bandits-kill-baptist-pastorsouthern-kaduna-christians-protest> 12.09.2019

¹³² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/28/suspected-fulani-militants-kill-pastors-wife-still-take-ransom/> 28.09.2019

¹³³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/23/reverend-killed-unknown-gunmen-adamawa-state/> 23.01.2020

¹³⁴ URL: http://www.fides.org/it/news/67332-AFRICA_NIGERIA_Ucciso_uno_dei_4_seminaristi_rapiti_il_Vescovo_di_Lagos_La_violenza_va_fermata_senno_gravi_conseguenze_sulla_psiche_dei_nigeriani 03.02.2020

Both terrorist organizations use the same methods and forms of inflicting damage to civilians. When attacking Christian villages, terrorists were killing civilians, conducted arson attacks against churches and homes of Christians, committed robberies, kidnapped people. Mass attacks of Boko Haram included an assault in Plato state, where 60 people died and 10 people were injured¹³⁵, the attack of the Aldgilati Ngomari village, where 9 people died¹³⁶, the attack on the village of Hukke with three victims in September¹³⁷. On December 22, in Borno state jihadists made an ambush attack on the cars carrying aid workers, soldiers, and police. The attackers stopped the cars, killed four special forces officers and captured five volunteers of humanitarian aid agencies¹³⁸. A chain of attacks took place on January 2, in Adamawa state, where 13 people were killed¹³⁹. The time for the terrorist attack was chosen with the expectation that many believers would come together with their families during the Christmas period. As the number of deaths increases, there are more reports of controversial actions by the authorities: the killing of 8 Christians by Boko Haram near the village of Auno on April 12 was not initially made public. The Nigerian government seems to cover up jihadist attacks so as not to uncover the inability of forces to resist the terrorists. This is motivated by the fact that President Muhammadu Buhari promised to stop the actions of the rebels during the election campaign, however, no success has been achieved at this point¹⁴⁰.

Attacks by Fulani militants claimed the lives of four farmers on November 14 in Kaduna state, Nigeria¹⁴¹ and 13 believers in

¹³⁵ URL: <https://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/60-pessoas-mortas-ataque-boko-haram-118557.html> 01.08.2019

¹³⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/18/bookseller-iran-arrested-sellingchristian-literature/> 18.09.2019

¹³⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/25/another-attack-hukke-village-nigeria-leaves-three-dead/> 25.09.2019

¹³⁸ URL: <https://www.thecable.ng/how-bharam-abducted-aid-workers-killedsecurity-operatives-in-fresh-borno-attack> 22.12.2019

¹³⁹ URL: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/371002-residents-flee-to-mountains-as-boko-haram-attacks-adamawa-villages.html> 03.01.2020

¹⁴⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/15/boko-haram-kill-8-passengers-driving-along-highway/> 15.04.2020

¹⁴¹ URL: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/4-christians-killed-by-fulani-herdsmen-in-nigeria-2-suspects-arrested.html> 27.11.2019

Plateau state on January 8 (on the same day, another armed group attacked a Christian Seminary in Kaduna state and four students were kidnapped¹⁴²). Five people had to be taken to hospital after the attack on the village of Lau (Adamawa state) on March 5¹⁴³. On January 26 and 27, terrorist fighters carried out devastating attacks on the settlements of Kvas and Marish (Plateau state), in which they killed at least 32 Christians¹⁴⁴. Along the way, jihadists also burned down a Church in the village of Marish. In the same state, Christians from the villages of Maidan and Khura became victims of the same type of raids. Ten Christians were killed. There were reports of demonstrative executions of parishioners of the Catholic Church on April 13 in the state of Benue¹⁴⁵.

Sources also mentioned organized terrorist attacks on urban targets: in February, the Nigerian media reported three bombings in Christian churches in Kaduna state. Suicide bombers were the ones to carry out the attacks. 13 people were killed and about 100 more were injured¹⁴⁶.

Kidnappings are a common type of anti-Christian violence. Hostage-taking can happen for both financial and ideological reasons. As with all other aspects of terrorist activities, Fulani and Boko Haram terrorists have similar reasons for kidnappings and methods of hostage-taking. Episodes related to kidnappings are mostly related to mass attacks: in Kaduna state, six girls and two teachers were captured in an attack on a Christian school on October 3¹⁴⁷, four Christians were captured in an attack on a settlement¹⁴⁸, and four students

¹⁴² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/14/two-nigerian-christian-villages-attacked-one-night/> 14.01.2020

¹⁴³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/10/another-attack-farming-community-adamawa-state-five-hospitalized/> 10.03.2020

¹⁴⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/01/another-32-killed-fulani-plateau-nigeria/> 01.02.2020

¹⁴⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/16/fulani-conduct-several-attack-plateau-benue-states/> 16.04.2020

¹⁴⁶ URL: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/5640-24_feared_dead_125_wounded.html 14.02.2020

¹⁴⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/08/christian-students-teachers-kidnapped-school-nigeria/> 08.10.2019

¹⁴⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/11/christian-students-teachers-kidnapped-school-nigeria-2/> 11.10.2019

were kidnapped from a Catholic Seminary¹⁴⁹. The payment of ransom does not guarantee total compliance with the agreements on the part of extremists: the hostages may be executed or tortured in captivity, as happened to the students and employees of the Christian school who were kidnapped on October 3 and mentioned above¹⁵⁰.

On December 17, in Nigeria, the Islamists kidnapped a Christian preacher Kayode Shogbesana¹⁵¹. On October 28, Arinze Madu, a Christian priest, was kidnapped by a group of Islamist militants¹⁵². In Nigeria, a 15-year-old Christian woman, Sadia Amos, was also kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam¹⁵³.

Terrorist attacks carried out by Fulani and Boko Haram fighters are aimed at seizing the territory of Nigeria and “liberating it from Western influence”. In order to do it, terrorists use the most intimidating methods of influence, such as demonstrative executions. On September 22, the terrorist organization Boko Haram released a video of the execution of two Christian volunteers, Lawrence Dun Dakigir and Godfrey Ali Shikagham¹⁵⁴. In December, members of an armed group were reported to execute four Christians who had been kidnapped in July 2019. The pre-Christmas period was deliberately chosen as the time of execution¹⁵⁵, as in the case of the execution of three Christians in Adamawa, the video of which was released on December 26¹⁵⁶. The execution of pastor Levan Andimi on January 3 is significant in view of two aspects: first, the motive for the murder was

¹⁴⁹ URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/four-seminarians-abducted-in-nigeria/14.01.2020>

¹⁵⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/11/nigerian-schoolgirls-teachers-released-torture-ransom/11.11.2019>

¹⁵¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/20/nigerian-pastor-kidnapped-without-trace/20.12.2019>

¹⁵² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/04/priest-kidnapped-released-week-enugu-nigeria/04.11.2019>

¹⁵³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/17/nigerian-girl-escapes-captors-forced-marriage-conversion/17.03.2020>

¹⁵⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65423-v-nigerii-bojeviki-iz-boko-kharam-kaznili-dvuh-khristianskih-volonterov03.10.2019>

¹⁵⁵ URL: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/368139-boko-haram-faction-kills-four-kidnapped-aid-workers.html13.12.2019>

¹⁵⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/06/boko-haram-beheads-bride-bridal-party-members-way-wedding/06.01.2020>

his refusal to renounce Christ, which reveals the religious background of extremist crimes (this was long denied by the Federal government of Nigeria, until February 2020)¹⁵⁷; second, the execution serves as an example of a policy of intimidation used by terrorists who threaten Christians with death if they do not abandon their faith or leave the country.

In their attacks, the radicals deliberately do not show mercy towards children of any age and pregnant women. Cruelty is used as a means of intimidation. On July 15, a pregnant Christian woman, Margaret Wakili, was killed in the village of Ancha, Plata state, and on July 14, a Christian believer, Thomas Vollo, and his seven-year-old son were beheaded in the village of Tafigana¹⁵⁸. The murder of the pastor's pregnant wife was recorded in Kaduna state¹⁵⁹ on November 19; and a 12-year-old boy was killed by militants¹⁶⁰. Children are targeted by Fulani fighters in mass attacks, which can be seen at an example of the two April attacks recorded in Plateau state: of the nine killed on April 14 in the attack on the village of Khura-Mayanga there were six children, five of them aged between three and seven. A pregnant woman was also killed¹⁶¹. On April 7, in a similar incident in the village of Ngbra Zongo Plata state, Fulani militants killed a 10-year-old boy among other victims¹⁶².

Boko Haram is active in countries such as Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. Methods of civilian population extermination do not differ from those used by terrorists in Nigeria: in 2019, 179 people were kidnapped in Niger, most of them women and young girls of Christian faith¹⁶³. In Cameroon, in December alone, seven Cameroonian

¹⁵⁷ URL: <https://vom.com.au/nigeria-pastor-beheaded-after-refusing-to-deny-christ/> 23.01.2020

¹⁵⁸ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/ng-2019-08-01.htm> 01.08.2019

¹⁵⁹ URL: <https://vom.com.au/nigeria-pastors-wife-killed-by-abductors/> 10.10.2019

¹⁶⁰ URL: <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/boko-haram-slaughter-cameroonian-christian-boy-for-resisting-kidnapping-to-become-%E2%80%99Cchild> 26.12.2019

¹⁶¹ URL: <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/six-children-pregnant-mother-among-nine-christians-killed-in-herdsmen-attack-in-nigeria.html> 16.04.2020

¹⁶² URL: <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/pastor-10-year-old-boy-and-two-other-christians-killed-in-plateau-state-nigeria.html> 10.04.2020

¹⁶³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/13/boko-haram-kidnapped-nearly-1-person-day-niger-year/> 13.08.2019

Christians were killed in attacks by the gang, more than 20 were captured¹⁶⁴, and five people were killed on January 17 in the village of Hiduwa¹⁶⁵. In Chad, on December 17, extremists attacked the village of Kaiga. During the attack, 14 people were killed, 5 were injured, and 13 civilians went missing¹⁶⁶.

Means of intimidation are quite similar: on November 6, fighters killed a pastor and a boy from a Christian community¹⁶⁷, and on December 26, a video showing the execution of 11 kidnapped Christians was published¹⁶⁸.

Cameroon, like Nigeria, is under attack by its Fulani extremists. Two Bible translators were killed in the attacks, which were carried out by armed groups: on August 25, along with other believers, a translator Angus Fung was killed¹⁶⁹, and two months later on October 20, another translator Benjamin Tem was killed¹⁷⁰.

The condition of Christian communities in the Middle East is another cause of concern. The picture of persecution of Christians varies depending on the state, the prevailing regime, and the military situation. If you look at the example of Syria, you can see that Christian communities are directly influenced by the armed conflict on its territory. The termination of the war and the victory over the forces of Islamic State in the region was earlier announced, however, after the entry of Turkish troops into Syria, the situation has changed. After the Turkish troops entered the country in October 2019, an urgent evacuation of the religious population began¹⁷¹; Armenian and

¹⁶⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/17/boko-haram-targets-cameroonian-christians/> 17.12.2019

¹⁶⁵ URL: <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/five-christians-killed-in-boko-haram-repeat-attack-on-cameroon-district> 30.01.2020

¹⁶⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/21/boko-haram-kills-14-chad-13-missing-attack/> 21.12.2019

¹⁶⁷ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/66482-bojeviki-boko-kharam-v-kamerun-ubili-pastora-i-malychika-khristianina> 18.11.2019

¹⁶⁸ URL: <http://pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7278> 29.12.2019

¹⁶⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/07/wife-murdered-bible-translator-stable-condition/> 07.09.2019

¹⁷⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/24/second-bible-translator-killed-northern-cameroon/> 24.10.2019

¹⁷¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/11/syrian-christian-villages-evacuate/> 11.11.2019

Syrian Christians were cast out from their land and lost the opportunity to harvest their crops¹⁷². The number of terrorist attacks increased: two explosions occurred on November 11 in the city of Qamishli, one of them near a Christian Church. Six civilians were killed and more than 20 people were injured¹⁷³. The risk of attacks by ISIS-related terrorists has increased: many militants have escaped from prison after the entry of Turkish troops and joined the terrorist organization. As a result, the militants murdered two priests of the Armenian Catholic Church on November 11, priest Hovsep Petoyan and his father, priest Abraham Petoyan. The deacon Hasice Faty Sano, who was accompanying them at the time, received gunshot wounds¹⁷⁴.

Mass persecution of Christians continues in Iran. The reports, which have been received and documented over the past year, are dominated by news about detentions, arrests, and sentences against Christians. There is much intolerance towards preachers and newly converted Christians because Christianity is perceived as a philosophy that brings with itself the influence of Western countries and thus makes a negative impact on the state foundations. For this reason, the security services are closely watching the believers, and special attention is paid to those who may be suspected of “apostasy”, that is, conversion from Islam to Christianity: three converted, Ashar Salehi, Mohammad Reza Rezzaei, and another Christian who wished to remain anonymous, were sentenced to six months in prison with charges of “promoting” Christianity and “anti-state activities.” The believers were arrested in September 2018 during a police raid on Christian homes¹⁷⁵.

In view of the fact that Islam is understood by the authorities as a religion that underlies national well-being and national security, a lot of effort is made to discredit Christians inasmuch as possible, and it is on purpose that the courts deprive believers of legal protection.

¹⁷² URL: <https://vomcanada.com/sy-2019-11-14.htm> 14.11.2019

¹⁷³ URL: <https://vom.com.au/syria-high-cost-of-maintaining-the-christian-presence/> 28.11.2019

¹⁷⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/11/two-syrian-armenian-priests-gunned-one-wounded/> 11.11.2019

¹⁷⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/27/six-month-prison-sentence-iranian-converts/> 27.09.2019

One of the examples is the case of nine Christians who were sentenced to five years of imprisonment. The court ruled that the Christians were involved in “anti-state activities”. At the same time, the defendants were denied the right to use the services of a lawyer of their choice¹⁷⁶. This case is not uncommon among trials that take place in the Iranian courts. If it is forbidden to use the services of a chosen lawyer, accused citizens must either remain without a lawyer in court or allow a lawyer appointed by the state to represent their interests. Such a system allows the state to control the course of the judicial process and prevent the people with presumably «dangerous» views from being released.

Iran is using force to suppress human rights activities in the country. As a rule, participants in social movements, activists, and promoters of human rights initiatives are under constant threat of imprisonment. Government agencies have repeatedly interpreted such activities as malicious. It is exactly what was the reason for the persecution of activist Fatima (Mary) Muhammedi. In July 2019, she was expelled from the University for professing Christianity and her public position. In February, she was arrested¹⁷⁷. Initially, her whereabouts were totally unknown but four days later, the Christian woman was released on bail. On February 24, it became known that the Christian activist was tortured and beaten in prison¹⁷⁸. As a result of the trial, she was sentenced to be flogged¹⁷⁹. A lawyer named Amirsalar Davudi was even more severely punished for his activities, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison for “collaborating with enemies of the state”, “anti-state propaganda”, “insulting an official” and “plotting to overthrow the state”. The real reason for the arrest was the fact that he was an official court representative of a converted Christian Nasser Navarda Goltape and other prisoners of conscience¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/20/nine-iranian-christians-sentenced-five-year-imprisonment/> 20.10.2019

¹⁷⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/10/missing-iranian-christian-possibly-found/> 10.02.2020

¹⁷⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/28/iranian-christian-activist-released-bail/> 28.02.2020

¹⁷⁹ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/ir-2020-04-23.htm> 23.04.2020

¹⁸⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/22/iran-jails-lawyer-helped-christians/> 22.11.2019

It should be noted that the Iranian judicial system provides for the possibility of extending the prison sentence if new circumstances arise in a case or the court finds an opportunity to re-qualify a criminal case. This happened to a Christian Ebrahim Firouzi, who was released on October 26, 2019 after six years in prison¹⁸¹. He was arrested in August 2013, the original sentence was to serve one year in prison, but charges of “acting against national security”, “attending an illegal meeting”, and “collaborating with foreign organizations” were later added, resulting in a five-year extension. In addition, part of the system for monitoring citizens who have fallen under the suspicion of the authorities is to send prisoners into exile in remote cities after their release from prison, which was also the case for Ebrahim Firouzi. 65-year-old Ismail Maghrebinegad faced an additional term for the profession of Christianity. He was sentenced to additional two years in prison for “membership in a group hostile to the state regime” (this refers to the conversion from Islam to Christianity, which happened about 40 years previously)¹⁸². A similar system of charging members of congregations was used in the case of five more believers, who are currently facing from five to 15 years in prison¹⁸³.

Not all criminal cases tried in the courts of Iran become well-known, which is also true for arrests of believers. A newly converted Christian Mohammad Salehi went missing in Iran after being arrested¹⁸⁴.

Cases of Christian being kidnapped have increased in Iraq. After the escalation of the conflict between the United States and Iran in early January of 2020, militants of terrorist groups in the country have become more active. Local Christians report that the security level of Iraqi congregations has now significantly decreased. Local residents note similarities between the current increase in the number of incidents with a similar situation in 2007. Anti-Christian incidents were recorded in the country’s capital, Baghdad. One

¹⁸¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/29/iranian-christian-convert-released-prison/29.10.2019>

¹⁸² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/08/elderly-christian-receives-additional-prison-sentence/08.03.2020>

¹⁸³ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/ir-2019-11-14.htm> 14.11.2019

¹⁸⁴ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/ir-2019-11-14.htm> 14.11.2019

of them relates to kidnappings: on January 20, four employees of a French humanitarian organization that helps Christians in the Middle East were captured. Three of them are French citizens, and one of them is an Iraqi citizen¹⁸⁵. Another incident, which took place on December 26, is related to mass protests by citizens who spoke against foreign interference in the affairs of the state. Radicals from the crowd of protesters attacked a church building and tried to remove the cross from it, but believers and law enforcement officers managed to repel the attack¹⁸⁶. Christians are also persecuted in Iraqi Kurdistan: the Kurdistan Regional government arrested a journalist William Bnyamin Adam. During his 13 days in custody, the journalist was beaten during interrogations. William Adam wrote about the situation of the Assyrian Christian community in the city of Al-Qamishli¹⁸⁷.

The attack with an extremely high number of deaths occurred on January 18 in the Yemeni province of Marib. A Houthi militant group operating in the country attacked a mosque located in a government army camp. More than 100 people were killed and dozens were injured in the attack. Both military and civilian personnel were among the dead. Head of state Abd-rabbu Mansour Hadi said that the attack “confirms their unwillingness to achieve peace”¹⁸⁸. The tragedy demonstrates that life in the countries of the Middle East region is dangerous for believers of all faiths because of the acts of terror.

Another country in the Middle East where Christians are persecuted is Egypt. At the official level, the government is taking steps to improve the lives of Christians but believers are not protected from radical aggression either in rural areas or in major cities.

At the beginning of the reported period, the US Department of State discussed adding Egypt to the list of countries of concern

¹⁸⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/27/christian-aid-workers-kidnapped-baghdad/> 27.01.2020

¹⁸⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/27/baghdad-church-nearly-invaded/> 27.12.2019

¹⁸⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/15/krq-arrests-journalist-reporting-syrian-christians/> 15.11.2019

¹⁸⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74111> 20.01.2020

for poor religious freedom. The annual report on religious freedom in various countries of the world reflects the plight of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The persecution of Coptic Christians included attacks on the Church property, a terrorist attack in Minya province where seven people were killed, and an incident involving a radical attack on a Coptic community temple. There was an indication of a general increase in the number of attacks on Christians and more frequent cases of damage to property, both owned by the Church and owned by individual believers¹⁸⁹. Among the cases of persecution of Orthodox Christians, it is necessary to highlight the attack of a radical man named Mamdouh on a Coptic Christian woman on January 10 in Cairo. Earlier, in 2017, the man was already tried for a similar act of violence, but escaped a long prison sentence¹⁹⁰. A lawsuit was initiated. The investigation resulted in the opinion that the man is a member of a terrorist organization, while the defense requested a medical examination for the defendant, according to which the radical is in a deranged state and is subject to hospitalization. The examination was regarded as an attempt to deflect the threat of a long prison term from the criminal, though, from the point of view of the prosecution, the crimes committed by him would be impossible for a person who is not responsible for his actions. At the time of writing this report, the trial has not been completed¹⁹¹. On February 3, in the capital of the state of Alexandria, a local resident, Karim Madi, attacked a cleric of the Coptic Orthodox Church¹⁹². On the night of November 17, an extremist stabbed a Christian woman and her two sons in Minya province¹⁹³.

Among the episodes that led to the death of Christian communities members are the following: on September 26, a Christian, Maged

¹⁸⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/21/new-state-department-report-shows-persecution-christians-egypt-getting-worse/> 21.08.2019

¹⁹⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/14/coptic-women-narrowly-escapes-attack/> 14.01.2020

¹⁹¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/20/christian-woman-appeals-attackers-claim/> 20.05.2020

¹⁹² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/07/egyptian-priest-nearly-murdered/> 07.02.2020

¹⁹³ URL: <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/coptic-christian-family-attacked-in-upper-egypt-adult-son-in-intensive-care.html> 20.11.2019

Fathi, died after being beaten by a group of radicals¹⁹⁴; on October 6, a Christian convert, Hussein Mohammed, was killed¹⁹⁵.

Extremists have repeatedly used the arson to exert pressure on the believers of the Coptic Church: on December 24 in Ken there were a series of arsons in the homes of Coptic Christians¹⁹⁶; on May 16, there was an attempted arson in an Orthodox Church in Alexandria — a man threw wildfire in the Church¹⁹⁷.

Anti-Christian violence of the authorities was reported: Rami Kamel, an activist who led an organization dedicated to reporting cases of persecution of Christians, was falsely charged with terrorism¹⁹⁸. The harassment is due to the fact that the government of President Abdul-Fattah As-Sisi is unable to ensure religious freedoms for all citizens and is having difficulty quelling extremists and radicals who attack Christian communities using the majority religion, Islam, as a reason. The suppression of activists such as Kamel (one of the leading figures of the Maspero youth Union, an organization created in memory of the mass murder of Christians in 2011 and dedicated to highlight the plight of communities in the country) is primarily perceived by the authorities as an attempt to destabilize the situation in the country, which, consequently, causes an immediate response from the security services.

Another incident that demonstrated the authorities' intolerance towards Christians was the mass arrest of newly converted believers. 50 believers were arrested within several weeks in various regions of the country¹⁹⁹. Although they were released shortly after their arrest, before being released they were strongly advised to keep their

¹⁹⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/03/christian-man-fatally-beaten-egypt/> 03.10.2019

¹⁹⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/09/muslim-family-kills-son-christian-conversion/> 09.10.2019

¹⁹⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/04/coptic-houses-set-fire/> 04.01.2020

¹⁹⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/30/attempted-attack-orthodox-church-egypt/> 30.05.2020

¹⁹⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/26/egyptian-christian-detained-terror-charges/> 26.11.2019

¹⁹⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/11/mbb-pressure-rise-egypt/> 11.03.2020

conversion to Christianity in secret. Measures are taken to prevent non-Christians from spreading their religion, which is considered by the authorities as a threat to national identity and the position of Islam as a state-forming religion. According to reports of local believers, the pressure of the authorities is increasing. This is happening because of a widespread perception among the population that considers leaving Islam to be a betrayal. People who have converted to Christianity are ostracized, forced to leave their homes, and are under close government attention.

The security of Christian community members is under threat in Uganda. The country demonstrates sharp rejection of Christianity among the radical population: after they learned that a family left Islam, radicals killed four members of the family including a newly converted man's daughter and son²⁰⁰; on November 10, a resident of the village of Kokol, Ronald Nayekuliz, was poisoned by his own brothers for converting from Islam to Christianity²⁰¹; on 16 February in the town of Pallisa, a radical beat a pregnant Christian woman Sylvia Nabafu after he learned that she attended Church. Propagators of the Christian faith — priests and missionaries — are tracked down by fundamentalists and are under attacks: for example, a Christian woman named Lydia was attacked by a crowd of extremists for her missionary work, which happened on April 7 in the city of Christie²⁰². In rural areas, there are frequent episodes when radical residents ostracize the families of converted people and even forcibly take away their property²⁰³.

This situation makes it difficult for Christian parishes to function due to the fact that believers often receive death threats. This makes it almost impossible for believers to openly profess their faith and to preach.

²⁰⁰ URL: <https://vom.com.au/uganda-relatives-of-christian-convert-burned-todeath/> 10.10.2019

²⁰¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/25/christian-poisoned-brother-suganda/> 25.11.2019

²⁰² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/22/two-christian-women-beaten-separate-incidents-eastern-uganda/> 22.04.2020

²⁰³ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/29/family-uganda-disowned-following-christ/> 29.02.2020

Due to cases of regular harassment of Christian communities, Somalia was included by the organization of Open Doors in the list of the most dangerous states for Christians, occupying the second place in the list for a while. Christians are forced to practice their faith in secret because Somali society, especially in the villages, is extremely intolerant of Christ followers. A person can expect to be punished by radicals for their conversion to Christianity (this is exactly what forced the Christian Saada Hussein to leave her home and her family²⁰⁴). The situation is aggravated by the fact that the Ash-Shabaab rebel group is operating in the country. On December 28, a terrorist group carried out a terrorist attack in the city of Mogadishu: a suicide bomb attack killed more than 70 people²⁰⁵.

Al-Shabab is not only active in Somalia but also affects Kenyan Christians. In December and early January, militants launched a series of attacks on Christian settlements, resulting in the death of at least 20 people²⁰⁶ (on December 6, in the Mandera district, terrorists ambushed a bus carrying Christian and Muslim workers; after nine Christians refused or failed to read the shahada, a witness of faith in Allahﷻ they were shot on the spot; two more are missing and are also thought to have been killed; a similar case in the same district was documented in November²⁰⁷. The attack on the bus with two Christian victims was repeated in the district on February 13²⁰⁸). In addition, the terrorists killed Christians in single attacks and took hostages²⁰⁹. On January 13, three primary school teachers were killed and one teacher was injured in an ambush outside a Christian school in Garissa²¹⁰.

²⁰⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/07/christian-mother-somalia-flees-family-fear-life/> 07.10.2019

²⁰⁵ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/world/news/2019-12/papa-molitsya-ozhertvah-terakta-v-somali.html> 30.12.2019

²⁰⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/07/al-shabaab-increasing-attacks-kenya/> 07.01.2020

²⁰⁷ URL: URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/09/nine-christians-murdered-kenya-attack/> 09.12.2019

²⁰⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/20/two-christians-murdered-kenya-bus-attack/> 20.02.2020

²⁰⁹ URL: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/2-christians-killed-1-abducted-by-al-shabaab-in-kenya.html> 15.03.2020

²¹⁰ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67833-v-kenii-islamisty-ubili-treh-uchitelej-khristian> 14.01.2020

The situation in South Sudan remains worrisome. Christian residents are pressed between the warring parties in the civil war and at the same time suffer attacks by Islamist groups operating on the territory of the country. In this regard, frequent arson attacks and attacks on churches were reported. On November 7, unknown militants attacked a Catholic Church near Rimenze, the alleged reason for the attack was the need to collect supplies for the war. As a result of the violence, four people were killed and several thousand were forced to leave their homes²¹¹. A case of anti-Christian aggression was the destruction of three temporary parishes in the city of Bute, two of them belonged to Orthodox and Catholic churches²¹². The parishes were set up as temporary replacements for the churches that the extremists had burned earlier.

Eritrean Christians are being persecuted by the government. Currently, 600 Christians are being held in prisons, and about 47 Christian children have been left without guardians. Cases of illegal arrests and subsequent loss of people are not uncommon²¹³. During the summer months of 2019, more than 150 Christians were arrested in the country. The arrests began on June 23 in the city of Keren, when security officials arrested 70 members of the Christian community, including 35 women and 10 children. On August 18, another 80 Christians were arrested in Godaif²¹⁴.

In neighboring Ethiopia, the situation is caused by inter-ethnic conflicts that broke out in 2018. At the end of October 2019 during disorders in the capital of Addis Ababa rioters attacked three parishes of the Coptic Orthodox Church and a mosque²¹⁵. As a result of the riots and incitement of the extremist leader Jowar Mohammed,

²¹¹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/19/church-attack-rimenze-south-sudan-displaces-thousands/> 19.11.2019

²¹² URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/25/three-churches-burned-southern-sudan-twice/> 25.01.2020

²¹³ URL: <https://vom.com.au/eritrea-christians-suffer-under-worsening-conditions/> 14.11.2019

²¹⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/23/eritrea-arrests-another-150-christians-june-august/> 23.08.2019

²¹⁵ URL:http://www.fides.org/en/news/66861AFRICA_ETHIOPIA_No_to_the_attempt_to_provoke_an_ethnic_and_religious_crisis_says_the_Premier_Nobel_Peace_Prize 28.10.2019

anti-Christian terrorist attacks are being carried out, churches are being set on fire, and local residents are attacking preachers and members of Christian communities. Not far from the capital, two clerics were beheaded, and a group of Christians were expelled from the city of Jinir²¹⁶.

There is a clear increase in the terrorist threat in Burkina Faso, where rebel groups have set sights on the extermination of Christians across the country. In 2019, at least 166 Christians were killed in terrorist attacks²¹⁷. At least 56 Christians were attacked and killed by radicals between April and June. During the reported period, extremists, mostly not belonging to any particular group, carried out a number of terrorist attacks: on September 8, 29 Christians were killed in an attack²¹⁸; on June 27, extremists killed four Christians in the village of Bani²¹⁹. On February 1, an unknown terrorist group attacked the town of Lamdamol, having killed at least 18 people²²⁰. The village of Pobe-Mengao was hit on October 26, more than 10 people were killed in the attack, many residents are missing²²¹, and a Christian Church in the commune of Futuri on December 1, when 14 people were killed²²². On December 24, a militant attack killed 7 members of the armed forces and 35 civilians in the village of Arbinda²²³. On January 21, the village of Alamu was hit by a terrorist attack (36 dead)²²⁴, on January 26, more than 10 people were killed in an attack on a market in Silgaji²²⁵, and on February 16, 24 people,

²¹⁶ URL: <https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9366779.html> 18.11.2019

²¹⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/18/jihadists-burkinabe-gold-mines-causes-christian-concern/> 18.12.2019

²¹⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/12/burkina-faso-christians-remain-danger-growing-extremism/> 12.09.2019

²¹⁹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64636-v-burkina-faso-dzhihadisty-ubili-khristian-za-nosheniye-natelynyh-krestov> 30.08.2019

²²⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/12/terrorists-kill-18-people-northern-burkina-faso/> 12.02.2020

²²¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/28/burkina-faso-suffers-another-attack/> 28.10.2019

²²² URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73860> 02.12.2019

²²³ URL: <https://africatimes.com/2019/12/25/31-women-killed-in-christmas-eve-attack-in-burkina-faso/> 25.12.2019

²²⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/22/terrorist-kill-36-civilians-northern-burkina-faso/> 22.01.2020

²²⁵ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/28/burkina-faso-suffers-another-large-massacre/> 28.01.2020

including a pastor, were killed in an attack on the Pansy Church in Yaga province²²⁶.

Muslims are also suffering from the actions of terrorists: a mosque was attacked in Salmossi, and 16 people were killed in the attack²²⁷.

Christian preachers and their families are subject to aggression: on February 13, militants killed the kidnapped pastor Tindano Omar and three members of his family²²⁸.

Rebel army fighters are attacking Christian communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: on 28 January, four villages near Beni were attacked, 36 people were killed²²⁹; on 18 February, rebels killed 11 Christians in an attack on a Christian community in the Mutwanga region²³⁰. The militants profess a radical ideology based on a perverse understanding of Islam and aim to expel Christians from the country. Religious motives are confirmed by the murder of Church of England cleric Ngulongo Yer Batsemire on January 29 in North Kivu province for his refusal to renounce the faith. On the same day, 35 more Christians were killed in the province²³¹. Archdeacon Ngulongo Batsemir, a 60-year-old cleric of the Catholic diocese of Erindjeti, was killed in the North-East of the Republic on January 29²³².

Deaths of missionaries and parish staff were reported in South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire. For example, on August 10, Catholic parish Secretary Faustina Bru N'Guessan was killed at her workplace

²²⁶ URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/gunmen-kill-24-in-attack-near-church-in-burkina-faso/2020/02/17/e3f400a2-516a-11ea-80ce-37a8d4266c09_story.html 17.02.2020

²²⁷ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/10/14/bolee-15-celovek-pogibli-pri-atake-na-mecet-v-burkina-faso/> 14.10.2019

²²⁸ URL: <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/pastor-three-family-members-and-deacon-killed-by-jihadists-in-burkina-faso> 14.02.2020

²²⁹ URL: <https://www.christianpost.com/amp/islamic-extremists-hack-36-to-death-with-machetes-including-christian-pastor-in-drc.html> 31.01.2020

²³⁰ URL: <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/eleven-congolese-christians-killed-in-adf-islamist-militant-attack> 25.02.2020

²³¹ URL: <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/02/27/archdeacon-murdered-as-christians-killed-and-kidnapped-in-multiple-attacks-in-africa-and-asia/> 27.02.2020

²³² URL: <https://barnabasfund.org/en/news/pastor-martyred-in-drc-for-refusing-jihadists%E2%80%99-demand-he-convert-to-islam> 06.02.2020

in Côte d'Ivoire²³³, on January 12, an 83-year-old Roman Catholic missionary, Joseph Hollanders, was killed in the North-Western province of the Republic of South Africa²³⁴.

1.4. Physical violence in Europe and North America

Among European countries, Ukraine stands out for the level of violence against believers. Radical supporters of the OCU operating on its territory, especially in rural areas, regularly commit seizures of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, use physical coercion or threats to achieve ownership of rural parishes of the canonical Church. The government does not support radical groups, but at the moment it is too early to talk about a systematic punishment of such incidents by the Federal authorities.

On August 11, supporters of the OUC broke the door of the Holy Protection Cathedral of the UOC and attacked the believers in the village Bobly, Turiyski district of Volyn region²³⁵, on the same day in the village Haluzyntsi, Derajnenski district of Khmelnytskyi region, members of the radical organization “Phoenix” attacked an Orthodox priest and the local police during the assault on the rural Church. The incident demonstrates that the police are now resisting the invaders, in contrast to the widespread cases of assistance in raiding the temples, which used to be the case under the rule of President Petr Poroshenko. Another circumstance that needs to be mentioned is the assistance given by radical organizations to dissenters, which happens due to the fact that the OUC in the minds of many of its supporters is associated with the “national” Church. This attracts members of radical nationalist groups whose major

²³³ URL: http://www.fides.org/en/news/66495-AFRICA_IVORY_COAST_Church_calls_for_justice_for_Faustine_Brou_N_Guessan_parish_secretary_killed_in_her_office 19.08.2019

²³⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67895-v-juar-ubili-83-letnego-missionera> 17.01.2020

²³⁵ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/08/12/na-volyni-pod-penie-predstavitelej-pcu-zloumyshlenniki-vzломali-dver-xrama-a-zatem-izbili-veruyushhix-upc-video/?lang=ru> 12.08.2019

representative is the “Right sector” (an extremist organization banned in Russia)²³⁶.

Cases of physical violence against bishops, clergy, and laity of the UOC were recorded; in the village Mykhal’cha where the Holy Cathedral of Dormition was attacked²³⁷; in the Kopitovskaya village, Koretski district of Rovenski region where representatives of OUC attempted to drive out the vicar of the Rovenskaya diocese of the UOC Bishop of Dubenski Pimen from the church captured by the dissenters²³⁸; in Pryputnaya village, Ichnyanski district of Chernigovskaya oblast where a priest and a parishioner of the UOC²³⁹ were attacked; in the village Buderazh where the Holy Protection Cathedral was attacked more than once²⁴⁰; in the Stenka village, Ternopolski region, where on January 3, about 120 supporters attacked the chapel and the priest, whereas parishioners received death threats²⁴¹; in the village of Bobly (Volynski region), where on December 21 supporters of the OUC captured the Holy Protection Cathedral of UOC, and during the attack a parishioner of the Church was injured²⁴². In the Tetyl’kovtsi village (Ternopilski region) supporters of OUC tried to get into the Church by deception. Physical violence was avoided, but supporters of the OUC and members of the “Right sector” threatened the believers²⁴³. It is worth noting that

²³⁶ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/08/12/v-s-galuzincy-na-xmelnitchine-vo-vremya-shturma-xrama-upc-radikaly-izbili-svyashhennika-i-policejskix/?lang=ru> 12.08.2019

²³⁷ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64554-storonniki-pcu-sela-mihalychaprimenilifizicheskiju-silu-protiv-verujushhih-upc> 26.08.2019

²³⁸ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64710-aktivisty-pcu-vygnali-jepiskopa-dubenskogo-pimena-iz-khrama-v-rodnom-kopytove> 03.09.2019

²³⁹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/09/14/v-sele-na-chernigovshhine-predstaviteli-pcu-izbili-svyashhennika-i-zhenshynu-video/?lang=ru> 14.09.2019

²⁴⁰ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/10/28/xram-upc-v-rovenskoj-oblasti-kotoryj-v-ocherednoj-raz-pytalis-zaxvatit-storonniki-pcu-opechatali-do-resheniya-suda-video/?lang=ru> 28.10.2019

²⁴¹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/01/03/na-ternopilshhini-predstavniki-pcu-vlashtuvali-pogrom-na-teritoriji-domovogo-xramu-upc/> 03.01.2020

²⁴² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67392-v-sele-bobly-aktivisty-pcu-pri-zahvate-khrama-slomali-prihozhanke-klyuchicu> 27.12.2019

²⁴³ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/11/13/viruyuchi-upc-na-ternopilshhini-vchergove-vidstoyalivsvij-xram-vid-zazixan-prixilnikiv-pcu-chinovnikiv-ta-pravogo-sektoru/> 13.11.2019

in total 25 churches of the Ternopolskaya diocese of the UOC²⁴⁴ were seized by dissenters, which indicates a high level of risk for parishioners.

Many communities, like the believers of the Buderaj village, are under constant threat of attacks and are forced to defend the temple from month to month²⁴⁵. Tension in the village is not easing: on April 20, Gregorii Yanchak, a supporter of the OUC, beat a local resident because his wife had attended an Easter service in the UOC Church²⁴⁶. In villages with situation such as this, believers voluntarily stand guard at the temples to protect them from seizure. Mascha is the village of this kind (Rovenskii region), where on the night of January 3 about 20 supporters of the OUC attacked four believers who were on duty at the Church of St. John the Apostle²⁴⁷.

In some cases, the target of the radicals was the clergy: in the village of Malinsk (Rovenskii region), the rector of the village Church, Archpriest Vladimir Gnes' and his family received threats from the radicals²⁴⁸; in the Zakarpatskii region, the priest John Deket received death threats from a Ukrainian nationalist²⁴⁹. On September 19, supporters of the OUC set fire to the house of Archpriest Leonid Pobigailenko²⁵⁰; on February 22, in the village of Mascha, dissenters broke a window in the house of Archpriest Daniel Ilnitsky, who is the rector of the Church of St. John the Apostle²⁵¹.

²⁴⁴ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/03/16/mitropolit-sergij-u-nas-25-xramivzaxopleno-ale-usi-svyashhenniki-zalishilisya-v-upc-i-namagayutsya-matimir-zusima/> 16.03.2020

²⁴⁵ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/11/01/shhe-v-odnomu-bukovinskomu-seliviryani-upc-vidstoyali-svij-xram-foto-video/> 01.11.2019

²⁴⁶ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70788-aktivist-pcu-v-buderazhe-izbil-odnoselychanina-palkoj-za-poseshhenije-khrama-upc> 24.04.2020

²⁴⁷ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/01/03/storonniki-pcu-zhestoko-izbili-veruyushhix-upc-dezhurivshix-u-xrama-v-mashhe-na-rovenshshine/?lang=ru> 03.01.2019

²⁴⁸ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64889-verujushhije-malinska-opasajutsyaprovokacij-protiv-svyashhennika-upc-i-jego-semyi> 10.09.2019

²⁴⁹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/11/18/na-zakarpatti-svyashhenniku-upc-pogrozhuuyut-ubivstvom/> 18.11.2019

²⁵⁰ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/09/20/semyu-svyashhennika-pytalishzhechazhivo-v-sobstvennom-dome/?lang=ru> 20.09.2019

²⁵¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68945-v-mashhe-storonniki-pcu-razbili-okna-v-dome-nastojatelya-zahvachennogo-khrama-upc> 24.02.2020

The situation in Montenegro is beginning to acquire features that characterized the situation with the canonical Church in Ukraine in 2018-2019. Illegal actions by law enforcement agencies were recorded against representatives of the Serbian Patriarchate: on December 26, police officers carried out a brutal attack on the Hierarch of the Montenegrin-Primorskaya Metropolitanate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop Methodius of Diocletian (Ostoich) and several believers²⁵².

According to the Foundation for political, economic and social research of Turkey, the number of crimes motivated by Islamophobia has increased in Europe²⁵³. This is confirmed by such cases as the August 10 terrorist attack in the suburbs of Oslo (Norway), when a young white man opened fire in a mosque. As a result, a 75-year-old member of the religious community was injured²⁵⁴. In the UK, there was also a case of an attack by a radical resident: in February, an attack was carried out in the Central mosque of London, as a result of which the muezzin was injured. He was hospitalized with serious injuries²⁵⁵. In July 2019 in the United States, a 59-year-old member of the Muslim community was the victim of a brutal massacre²⁵⁶.

Jews who live in European countries are at increased risk, and anti-Semitic attacks account for the majority of episodes of physical violence against believers recorded on the continent over the past year. The increase in the number of anti-Semitic attacks is noted worldwide: in 2019, the number of incidents in Australia increased by 59%²⁵⁷, and in the United States, regular attacks have been committed on communities in the State of New York.

On October 9, a 27-year-old German citizen opened fire near a synagogue in Halle. Two people were killed and two were injured

²⁵² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67393-policija-v-chernogorii-zhyostko-izbilararkha-serbskoj-cerkvi> 27.12.2019

²⁵³ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/10/01/turcia-islamofobia-predstavlaet-ugrozu-dla-bezopasnosti-evropy/> 01.10.2019

²⁵⁴ URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/10.08.2019>

²⁵⁵ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/20feb2020/london444.html> 20.02.2020

²⁵⁶ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/07/30/v-ssa-isut-podrostkov-ubivsih-musulmanina/> 30.07.2019

²⁵⁷ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/26nov2019/nathan444.html> 26.11.2019

in the attack²⁵⁸. There were also several single attacks: a 70-year-old Jew in Berlin was attacked by an unidentified person²⁵⁹; a similar incident took place in the capital when a group of teenagers attacked a 68-year-old Jew; on January 8 a 30-year-old representative of the Jewish community was a victim of the attack in the city center²⁶⁰; in the British capital a Rabbi suffered the attack on November 29²⁶¹.

There was previously a danger for Jews in Ukraine where generally positive progress has been made in combating anti-Semitism: in the city of Uman (Cherkasskii region), about 30 unknown assailants attacked a group of Jewish pilgrims and four believers were hospitalized as a result²⁶²; on March 4, an explosive device was reported to be planted in the city synagogue of Kharkov²⁶³. A murder was reported in Russia: on March 13, a 34-year-old resident of Dagestan committed a brutal attack on a 66-year-old Rabbi Izgiyaga Pashayev, after which the victim died in hospital from the injuries²⁶⁴.

Throughout the year, there were regular reports of extreme intolerance towards Jews in the State of New York. The violence reached such proportions that authorities had to resort to additional security measures (cameras were installed in New York City to track down any attacks) and community members organized volunteer patrols. On August 27, a 63-year-old Jewish believer, Abraham Gopin²⁶⁵, was attacked in Lincoln Terrace Park; on August 30, unknown people threw stones at a truck with a representative of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community inside²⁶⁶; the following day, unknown people attacked a representative of the Jewish community in the street of New York City²⁶⁷. On November 21, a 19-year-old Jew was attacked in New-York²⁶⁸; in December, three teenagers threw

²⁵⁸ URL:<https://www.dw.com/ru/09.10.2019>

²⁵⁹ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/29oct2019/berlin_705.html 29.10.2019

²⁶⁰ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/08jan2020/berlin444.html> 09.01.2020

²⁶¹ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/02dec2019/london_202.html 02.12.2019

²⁶² URL: <https://vz.ru/news/2020/1/12/1017725.html> 12.01.2020

²⁶³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74364> 04.03.2020

²⁶⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74481> 20.03.2020

²⁶⁵ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/28aug2019/ny_103.html 28.08.2019

²⁶⁶ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/31aug2019/br803.html> 31.08.2019

²⁶⁷ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/01sep2019/jew4653.html> 01.09.2019

²⁶⁸ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/24nov2019/hassid444.html> 24.11.2019

stones at a bus carrying Jewish school students²⁶⁹. The participation of teenagers in episodes of violence was noted when on November 8 the person suspected of a series of street attacks was arrested and he turned out to be a 16-year-old young man²⁷⁰.

In December, there were two major terrorist attacks: six people were killed on December 10 in a shooting at a kosher supermarket in Jersey City (New-Jersey)²⁷¹. Later, an improvised explosive device was found in a car near the supermarket²⁷². At least 15 people were injured in the attack on a synagogue in Monsey (New York)²⁷³. Earlier, on November 20, in the same city, an attack on a representative of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community was reported as he was on his way to a synagogue to perform morning prayers²⁷⁴.

1.5. Physical violence in the countries of South and Central America

Murders of preachers, Christian mission workers⁶ and Church employees, as well as lay members are common in countries with high levels of poverty where cases of physical violence occur both because of attacks by radical followers of a particular ideology and because of high crime rates.

Several incidents of physical violence occurred in Mexico. On July 28 in the village of Kuamontaks of Huazilingo (Hidalgo state) community leaders cast out four Christians from their homes²⁷⁵. On August 18, in the state of Oaxaca (Mexico) during a Church service a preacher Alphreri Liktor Cruz Canseco was killed²⁷⁶. Despite the fact that the motive of the criminal remained unsolved it is possible to relate this incident to a series of attempts on religious

²⁶⁹ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/05dec2019/rivka444.html> 05.12.2019

²⁷⁰ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/10nov2019/boro444.html> 10.11.2019

²⁷¹ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/11dec2019/nj_101.html 11.12.2019

²⁷² URL: <https://ria.ru/20191212/1562299462.html> 12.12.2019

²⁷³ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/29dec2019/tkifa_702.html 29.12.2019

²⁷⁴ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/20nov2019/ramapo444.html> 20.11.2019

²⁷⁵ URL: <https://vom.com.au/mexico-protestants-forcibly-displaced/> 08.08.2019

²⁷⁶ URL: <https://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/pastor-mexicano-assassinado-pulpito-culto-120293.html> 22.08.2019

leaders initiated by representatives of criminal groups. They are also responsible for kidnappings, which by the way are not ideological by nature in Mexico as they are in Nigeria, and are committed solely for ransom. On January 6, a previously kidnapped Catholic priest, Roli Candelario Pinha Camacho, was found and hospitalized with four gunshot wounds²⁷⁷. He was shot after the ransom that had been requested for him was not paid.

Violence was reported in other parts of America: on September 7, Diana Isabel Hernandez Huarez, an employee of the parish of the Holy Mother of Guadalupe, was killed in Suchitepeques, Guatemala²⁷⁸. In October, a Christian believer Huan Bautista was arrested in Camaguey, Cuba, after police heard him preach in public²⁷⁹.

²⁷⁷ URL: <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/01/08/priest-in-mexico-hospitalized-after-kidnapping-shooting/> 08.01.2020

²⁷⁸ URL: http://www.fides.org/en/news/66594AMERICA_GUATEMALA_Pastoral_worker_committed_to_defending_creation_killed 10.09.2019

²⁷⁹ URL: <https://vom.com.au/cuba-evangelist-arrested-for-public-preaching/> 21.11.2019

2. DISCRIMINATION

2.1. Discrimination in Europe and North America

This section will analyze information processed from August 2019 to May 2020 concerning the discrimination of representatives of different faiths, understood as infringement of religious freedoms, episodes of non-violent religious persecution, legal initiatives, actions of the authorities aimed to restrict religious freedom, and manifestations of religious intolerance in social relations.

As opposed to physical violence, whose epicenter goes to Africa and Asia, and incidents in Europe and North America, which are sporadic, discrimination cases are prevalent in most parts of the world. At the same time, as a rule, countries with high level of violence against religious communities demonstrate the level of discrimination that is as high and can even reach critical levels. There is a certain extent of discrimination against Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the United States and Western European countries, however, the number of religious freedom violations does not reach the indicators of countries such as China, India, Pakistan, etc., and is largely due to the dominion of secular values and the spread of liberal ideology in these countries. Discrimination is also mainly linked to the fact that traditional denominations refuse to follow the principles of liberal tendencies but is not directly related to hatred on religious grounds.

At the same time in countries with strong radical ideologies and strict totalitarian regimes, discrimination can be motivated by an anti-religious system of government that seeks to limit the influence of faith on its citizens, by a nationalistic ideology, based on principles of ethnical “purity” and rejection of other beliefs, and by the expansion of radical teachings of different religions that lead to criminal actions.

The following are some of the indicators for an increased level of discrimination on religious ground: threats of imprisonment, dismissal from work, loss of wealth, ostracism on the basis of religion confession, prohibition of public faith practices, and legislation

that violates the rights of believers. In the context of the events that occurred in 2019–2020, it is necessary to add that state's attempts to interfere with the internal affairs of the Church or the pressure inflicted by the Church on religious organizations with the purpose of submitting them to the political interests, are currently considered as discrimination cases.

The systematic oppression of the Canon Church in Ukraine was stopped as a result of actions of a newly elected President Volodymyr Zelensky who replaced his predecessor Petr Poroshenko and his government, which was characterized by the hostile policy towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, there was a general reduction of tensions in the countryside and anti-clerical rhetoric voiced by the officials from the Federal Government gradually ceased.

However, news agencies continue to report concerning discriminatory actions that still take place in the regions. The bulk of such reports are news regarding illegal transfers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) parishes to the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). It was not uncommon for the officials of regional state administrations to assist illegal raiders and members of dissenting groups and structures. Re-registrations are often done in secret: in a village there is usually no announcement about a vote that will determine the future of the parish, only persons who are obviously in favor of a seizure are invited to a closed meeting, and a fake document of the “voluntary” transfer of the church is often prepared. Such steps are made for the purpose of assigning external legitimacy to the actual takeover. Such transfer to a different jurisdiction after secret ballot was used by the Chernivtsi Region State Administration¹ in two separate episodes: the parish named after St. John the Evangelist in the village of Pyadikovtsi and the church of St. Nicholas in the village of Chereshenka were re-registered in September². The Sumy Region State Administration forced the communities of the Konotop

¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64808-chernovickaja-oga-tajno-pereregistrovala-obshhinu-upc-v-pyadikovcah-v-pcu> 06.09.2019

² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65853-videoobrashhenije-obshhiny-chereshenki-nas-pereveli-v-pcu-bez-nashego-vedoma> 22.10.2019

and Romensky dioceses of the UOC to re-register their statutes³; two churches of the Aleksandria diocese were secretly re-registered by officials of the Kirovograd Region State Administration⁴. In Yasenovka village (Volyn region) the OCU supporters resorted to deception by starting the process of receiving the title for the building of a local church that was illegally taken over in the spring of 2019⁵. As Christians from the community of Budyatichi (Volyn region) said, the local village council helped the OCU supporters to get into the St. Nicholas Church of the UOC twice by giving them the keys⁶.

There were many reports about dissenters who made attempts of seizing the churches. In most cases such OCU activists secretly approached the parishes and cut off the locks. After doing so, as a rule, they went into the church and declared it the property of OCU. On March 11, raiders occupied the church in Buderazh village (Rivne region). According to witnesses, the police arrived at the scene but did not prevent illegal actions from happening and guarded the dissenters who were trying to keep the church⁷. In order to not let such situations happen in the future, twenty-four-hour duties of believers were organized in many rural parishes of the Canon Church. While preparing a regular meeting of the OCU activists, the organizers made use of document forgery in order to capture the Holy-Assumption temple in Uspenka village (Kirovograd region). The assistant to a local Deputy Anatolij Yakovenko is reported to have been an initiator of the meeting, which was deliberately set up to look like a voting event so that a UOC congregation would transfer to the jurisdiction of OCU.

The OCU leaders use negative rhetoric against the UOC believers who defend their rights peacefully by going out to the cross procession

³ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/01/20/chinovniki-sumskoji-oda-na-choli-z-golovoyu-zmushuyut-gromadi-upc-pererejstruvati-statuti/> 20.01.2020

⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68506-kirovogradskaja-oga-pereregistrovala-2-obshhiny-upc-bez-vedoma-verujushhih> 06.02.2020

⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70009-na-volyni-pcu-oformlyajet-stroitelystvo-khrama-zahvachennogo-v-2019-godu> 31.03.2020

⁶ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70242-v-budyatichah-aktivisty-pcu-pronikli-v-khram-upc> 07.04.2020

⁷ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69379-storonniki-pcu-v-ocherednoj-raz-srezaliamki-na-khrame-v-sele-buderazh> 11.03.2020

and prayer standings near the captured church walls. For example, the OCU “hierarch” Simeon (Shostatsky) called to “protect” the Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Savior, which belongs to Vinnitsa eparchy of the UOC, from the “the Russian world concept”. These statements were made in response to weekly standings of believers near the walls of the captured cathedral⁸. Publications of the Ukrainian Embassy in Montenegro became another manifestation of discrimination because they were directed at incitement to hatred against the UOC. There were false accusations against the Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Onuphry in these publications in which he was called an “instructed ‘official’ of political and military circles”, and where the Serbian Orthodox Church was criticized⁹. The reason was the visit of the Primate to Montenegro on February 27 to take part in the celebrations held on the commemoration day of St. Simeon the Myrrh-Flowing. The position of the Embassy was sent to Montenegrin media for further dissemination.

A number of controversial bills included in the list to be considered at a forthcoming session of the Verkhovna Rada caused major concerns among Ukrainian religious organizations¹⁰. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations issued a statement against discriminatory provisions of the media law providing for a fine to be imposed on a print media or a total lock to be used against an electronic information resource in case they contain an insult towards one or another group. The Council pointed out that the adoption of such a law can impact the freedom of speech and freedom of religion in the country. The vague wording in the law is what causes major concerns because in theory it could be used to inflict pressure on church media that chooses to condemn the LGBT-ideology as well as secular and liberal tendencies. The Labor Bill

⁸ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67777-sotni-verujushhih-upc-sobralisy-namolitvu-u-zahvachennogo-sobora-v-vinnice> 13.01.2020

⁹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69070-posolystvo-v-chernogorii-prodolzhajet-razzhigaty-nenavisty-k-upc> 28.02.2020

¹⁰ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/02/11/religioznaya-obshhestvennost-obespokoena-ryadom-zakonoproektov-kotorye-parlament-planiruet-prinyat-v-otnoshenii-religioznoj-deyatelnosti/?lang=ru> 11.02.2020

raises doubts in the same manner because it never took into account the specifics of religious organizations. The concern regarding this legislative initiative was expressed by religious organization to demonstrate that if the specific character of religious institutions remained unnoticed the Orthodox Church as well as other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities could find themselves under the threat of being convicted for not keeping the law in the aspects where religious dogmatic is different from the contemporary understanding of tolerance. The All-Ukrainian Council noted that prohibition of female priesthood, celibacy of Catholic priests and Orthodox bishops, and also ‘unacceptable nature of same-sex relationships and gender-role deviations’ could be interpreted as discrimination, so the Council called to further develop the bill by creating a special working group, which will have to closely examine the bill¹¹.

The difficult situation around the seized parishes and violent actions of nationalists and radicals who take the side of the OCU are complemented by frequent provocations by dissenters. Reports of illegal actions of the police continue to appear: on February 2, in the village of Susval (Volyn region, Ukraine), police officers did not allow believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to enter into the local church¹².

An example of violating the right to freedom of religion was the case in which an employee of the Territorial Medical Association of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine for the city of Kiev who provided medical assistance to participants of bike ride in support of inter-denominational peace in the country was fired from her job by an employing organization¹³.

Intervention of foreign forces into the life of Orthodox churches of sovereign states together with the actions of Patriarch Bartholomew who went on to recognize dissenter structures heavily influenced the

¹¹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/02/11/religioznaya-obshhestvennost-obespokoena-ryadom-zakonoproektov-kotorye-parlament-planiruet-prinyat-v-otnoshenii-religioznoj-deyatelnosti/?lang=ru> 11.02.2020

¹² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68404-v-sele-susvaly-policija-ne-dopuskajet-verujushhih-v-khram-upc> 03.02.2020

¹³ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65708-v-kijeve-proshla-akcija-v-zashhitu-medika-uvolennogo-za-podderzhku-upc> 15.10.2019

situation with discrimination of religious communities in Europe. In Macedonia and Montenegro, where the only Orthodox Church recognized canonically is the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), the difficult situation with the oppression of Orthodox communities is caused by the intention of the government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the authorities of Montenegro to improve the ethnic identity of the people in these countries by creating a church that would be fully controlled by the State.

Montenegro took decisive steps in the area of legislation in order to achieve these goals. In December, the parliament unanimously passed the law “On freedom of religious worship and beliefs and the legal status of religious communities,” which caused massive protests among the Serbian Church believers.¹⁴ Under the legislation, religious communities will have to provide clear evidence of ownership in order to retain their property, otherwise the properties may be nationalized. Due to the fact that the ownership documents for many churches of the Serbian Patriarchate, the largest religious association in the country, according to the new law, is invalid, many churches built before 1917 can be transferred to the state. In the context of the political situation in Montenegro the nationalization of churches that once belonged to the Serbian Patriarchate assumes their further transfer to a dissenter structure called the Montenegrin Autonomous Orthodox Church, an organization supported by the government. The law faced tough criticism from the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox Church (in particular, Bishop Pakratsky and Slavonian John¹⁵) and the Patriarch of Serbia Irenaeus himself, who said that the law is aimed to weaken the Serbian church and to expel Serbs from the country¹⁶. Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral claimed the law was “anti-church” by nature¹⁷. President Milo Djukanovic, even before the law was endorsed by the

¹⁴ URL:<http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/444830/Uhapseni-poslanici-opozicije-zakon-o-crkvama-usvojen> 27.12.2019

¹⁵ URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2020/02/05/news182737/> 05.02.2020

¹⁶ URL:<https://mitropolija.com/2020/02/19/patrijarh-irinej-hoce-da-istrebe-srbez-iz-crne-gore-kao-sa-kosmeta/> 19.02.2020

¹⁷ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67715-ijerarkh-spc-o-novom-zakone-eto-vozvrat-k-zakonam-imperatora-diokletiana> 09.01.2020

parliament, directly stated that the position of the Serbian Church would not be taken into account when considering the draft law on freedom of religion and religious associations.¹⁸

The events that followed, including arrests of hierarchs and priests of the Serbian Patriarchate along with other cases of discrimination, lead to the conclusion that it was the initial intent of the ruling elite of Montenegro to restrict the rights of not only the Serbian Church but also the Serbs who live there. Prime Minister of Montenegro Dusko Markovic made it clear that after mass demonstrations of believers the government refused to revise the law and take into account the interests of the SPC but declared the need to comply with it in an ultimatum form instead¹⁹.

After the law was passed, some protest demonstrations members and opposition leaders were arrested²⁰, illegal searches of priests were conducted²¹, bishop Methodius of Diocleusand and a few other believers were subjected to beating. When believers began to go out into the streets and claim their rights, Montenegrin police refused to protect them during the procession²², which is a direct manifestation of prejudice and discrimination because protesters were the citizens of Montenegro and had the right to be protected by law enforcement bodies. A junior officer of the Montenegrin army Darko Mrvalevic was suspended from service for an open protest against the law²³. False accusations of tax evasion were used against the canonical Church, and Archpriest Velibor Dzomic, head of the legal council of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, spoke out against them.²⁴ The orthodox choir of the SPC also faced discrimination as it was travelling from Belgrade to Podgorica: Montenegrin Border Control prohibited the entry into the country for choir members²⁵.

¹⁸ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67257-prezident-chernogorii-v-cerkovnom-voprose-net-mesta-dlya-kompromissa> 22.12.2019

¹⁹ URL: <https://ria.ru/20191218/1562554532.html> 18.12.2019

²⁰ URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7432379> 26.12.2019

²¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69233-policija-chernogorii-diskriminirujet-svyashhennikov-spc--mitropolit-amfilohij> 05.03.2020

²² URL: <https://ria.ru/20200205/1564296039.html> 05.02.2020

²³ URL: <https://mitropolija.com/2020/03/10/mitropolit-amfilohije-na-konferenciji-za-medije-cast-je-poloziti-zivot-u-odbranu-svetinja/> 10.03.2020

²⁴ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200225/1565155104.html> 25.02.2020

²⁵ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7866267> 29.02.2020

When they had to face such massive opposition from believers, law enforcement began to reduce the official number of people who were taking part in the demonstrations in order to hide the scale of protests against the discriminatory law²⁶.

The Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine Onufry condemned illegal actions of the Montenegrin authorities and declared the similarity of the Montenegrin situation with the Ukrainian scenario. Both situations are characterized by intervention of the government authorities in the internal life of the Church and intention to subdue religion to political needs²⁷.

The situation with the legalization of dissenter structures in the countries with a strong representation of canonical Orthodox churches received a new round after Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople met with the Prime Minister of North Macedonia Oliver Spassovsky. After the meeting, the head of the government said that this could be the beginning of the legalizing process for another dissenter association — the so-called Macedonian Orthodox Church²⁸. As a result of the meeting and after monitoring the situation in the Orthodox countries of the Balcan Peninsula, Vladimir Legoida, a Chairman of the Synodal Department for Relations between the Church, Society and Mass Media of the Moscow Patriarchate, stated that the Patriarchate of Constantinople intends to take a further step towards meeting the interests of political elites who “use the religion in their games”, and claimed that acceptance of the dissenter Macedonian structure would be regarded as the betrayal of the Serbian Orthodox Church²⁹.

The anti-church actions of the United States Democratic Party and the Patriarchate of Constantinople aimed at the further split in the Orthodoxy and demonstrated in the pressure on the heads of local churches in the matter of officially recognizing the OCU can be

²⁶ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200210/1564522870.html> 10.02.2020

²⁷ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/03/01/ekslyuzivnoe-intervyu-blazhennejshego-mitropolita-onufriya-dlya-chernogorskix-smi/?lang=ru#more-385822> 01.03.2020

²⁸ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67815-glava-fanara-nameren-predostavity-tomos-makedonskim-raskolnykam--smi> 14.01.2020

²⁹ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200114/1563422708.html> 14.01.2020

considered to be discrimination. The hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop Irenaeus of Bach, spoke openly about the pressure of American politicians on the authorities and the Churches³⁰. Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov spoke about the role of the United States in forming a deeper division in the Orthodox world, pointing out the geopolitical context of current events in the Balkans³¹ and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia shares this position in full. The Patriarch spoke on this topic twice, both times noting that splits and contradictions, which threaten the unity of the world Orthodoxy, are the initiative of political forces³². On January 27, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia said that the split among the Orthodox Churches was provoked by interested political forces³³.

Indirect confirmation of the above was the fact that after a closed meeting with the US Ambassador the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Jerome, refused to participate in the Pan-Orthodox Council in Amman (Jordan), which was supposed to discuss the current situation in the Orthodox world and the heads of Churches could voice their position against the recognition of the dissenter OCU³⁴.

In connection with these events politically motivated discrimination against the Russian Orthodox Church priests began in Greece: mass visa denials to Russian priests, who were planning to make a pilgrimage trip to Greece, became a norm at the Greek Embassy in Moscow³⁵, and police raids were carried out against the monks of the Russian skete on the Holy Mount Athos, which resulted in the threat for the inhabitants of the skete to be deported from the country³⁶.

³⁰ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/01/03/ijerarx-serbskoji-cerkvi-predstavniki-derzhdepu-ssha-sxilyayut-predstoyateliv-pomisnix-cerkov-do-viznannya-pcu/03.01.2020>

³¹ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=7371606.11.2019>

³² URL:<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7160645.20.11.2019>

³³ URL:<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7617589.27.01.2020>

³⁴ URL:<http://orthodoxostypos.gr/o-/22.11.2019>

³⁵ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/66344-palomnicheskaja-sluzhba-v-salonikah-grecija-ne-vydajet-vizy-russkim-svyashhennikam.12.11.2019>

³⁶ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/66345-vlasti-grecii-khotyat-deportirovaty-safona-skit-monaha-rafaila-berestova.12.11.2019>

There were incidents of violating the rights of believers in other European countries, which was the case for both Christians and followers of Islam and Judaism. An employee of one of the branches of the Swedish company IKEA was fired in Poland. The reason was his refusal to participate in the LGBT support rally and his publication in which he claimed that same-sex relations are a sin from the Christian standpoint³⁷. In the UK, a Christian preacher Keith Waters, who taught at a school in Ely, faced harassment for statements against the idea that Christians should participate in the so-called Pride Month where LGBT people requested support. The pastor also pointed to the harm that gay pride parades could inflict to the growing generation. The pastor was harassed on the Internet, and city councilor Lieb Dem encouraged the police to prosecute him for inciting hatred based on sexual orientation. The school administration reprimanded the preacher for “damaging the school’s reputation” and “violating the Teachers code of conduct.” As a result, this Christian believer was forced to leave the teaching position³⁸. Christian users of the YouTube video platform said that there was a ban on using of the word “Christians” in user postings to promote a video³⁹.

Among the legislative initiatives restricting the rights of Muslims and Jews in European countries, the prohibitions to wear Muslim clothing in the Netherlands and Austria should be noted separately. In the Netherlands the restrictions apply to clothing that covers a face in a number of public places⁴⁰, in Austria, the Conservative Austrian People’s Party initiated the ban for teachers to wear traditional Islamic headscarves⁴¹.

The President of the Conference of European Rabbis, Pinchas Goldschmidt, provided a general assessment of the situation with the rights of believers in Europe. The head of the Council of Rabbis

³⁷ URL:<https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9137067.html> 15.08.2019

³⁸ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/66862-v-anglii-pastora-presledovali-za-utverzhenije-chto-gej-parady-vredny-detyam> 03.12.2019

³⁹ URL:<https://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/youtube-censura-cristao-anuncio-aceita-muculmano-118767.html> 03.08.2019

⁴⁰ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73127> 02.08.2019

⁴¹ URL:<https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/29/v-avstrij-ucitelam-mogut-zapretit-nosit-musulmanskij-platok/> 29.08.2019

condemned the regular infringement of the rights of Jewish believers in the European Union, highlighting the ban on kosher and halal slaughter in the Belgian provinces of Wallonia and Flanders⁴². The statement of Goldschmidt is a matter of concern in the light of increasing anti-Semitic attacks in European countries (see “Physical Violence” chapter).

2.2. Discrimination in Africa and Asia

Christian communities in Africa face more severe oppression. Across the country Christian parishes were closed by the authorities: on September 24, a church in the city of Bogni was sealed⁴³, on October 15, two biggest Christian churches in the country were closed⁴⁴, the next day police officers controlled the closing of the church in Tizirt⁴⁵. On November 10, the authorities of the city of Oran announced the closure of the church⁴⁶. The cases of abuse of power by the police officers were recorded during the process of closing the parishes: in one of the episodes, that took place on August 6, police officers broke into the church during the worship to lock the church down. The pastor was threatened to “bear personal responsibility” for disobedience of his parishioners. As a result, the congregation was forbidden to meet in the church building⁴⁷. The way the authorities perceive Christian leaders, in particular Protestant preachers, namely, as people who are aimed at destabilizing the situation in the country and spreading an ideology that is harmful for country, has led to a full-scale check organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs against protestant parishes. The Minister for Internal Affairs of Algeria sent

⁴² URL:<https://ria.ru/20190904/1558285731.html> 04.09.2019

⁴³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/26/authorities-seal-algerian-church/> 26.09.2019

⁴⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/15/algerian-authorities-close-two-countrys-largest-churches/> 15.10.2019

⁴⁵ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/28/surprise-church-closure-algeria/> 28.09.2019

⁴⁶ URL:<https://vomcanada.com/dz-2020-01-23.htm> 23.01.2020

⁴⁷ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/08/authorities-close-algerian-church/> 08.08.2019

an order to the heads of regions and the heads of the security agencies to launch the investigation of financial activities of preachers. The Minister's actions raised serious concerns among Algerian Christians: parishes that were already in a vulnerable position now faced the risk of even greater persecution on false accusations of receiving foreign sponsorship⁴⁸.

Christian institutions closed in Eritrea: after many health institutions operated by the Roman Catholic Church were forced to discontinue their operations, there were reports in September stating that seven Catholic schools had to close⁴⁹. The reason for that is the perception of officials that medical and educational institutions are used by the Vatican to force the local population to convert to Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church representatives who arrived in Eritrea to participate in joint celebrations with the local congregations faced serious discrimination. The delegation headed by the Archbishop of Addis Ababa Cardinal Berhaneesusu Demerevu Surafielyu was denied entry into the country⁵⁰.

Christian and Muslim population in India is also experiencing discrimination. The government utilizes the law system to legalize persecution on religious grounds. For that particular purpose a number of states have passed the anti-conversion law prohibits forced conversion to another faith. The law does not formally deny the right of religious minorities members to practice their religion, however, as episodes on anti-Christian violation have shown, it is used to justify attacks on believers and preachers, since it provides a legal basis for belittling those who do not profess Hinduism and are not tribal religions followers. Radical followers of Hinduism with the support of the nationalist government use false accusations of breaking the anti-conversion law to make it possible for law enforcement officers to persecute believers of other faiths. Thus, in September the police dispersed a prayer meeting of more than 6 thousand Christians.

⁴⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/13/algeria-orders-investigation-protestant-leaders/> 13.09.2020

⁴⁹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/10/eritrea-closes-religious-schools-following-june-closures-catholic-health-facilities/> 10.09.2019

⁵⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/16/ethiopian-archbishop-refused-entry-eritrea/> 16.03.2020

However, it needs to be mentioned that Christians gathered on the property of a Christian preacher Santosh Jayswal and so had all legal rights for the meeting⁵¹. Three Christians from Madhya Pradesh state were arrested in a similar incident. Their prayer for the health of one of the church members was the reason for their arrest. The police were noticed installing surveillance equipment to watch for church members' homes in Tamil Nadu state. The goal of monitoring the homes was to control the believers and prevent them from having meetings⁵². The fact of someone's conversion to Christianity immediately becomes the reason to deprive Christians of their property, which happened to Christian converts in the Odisha state⁵³.

The authorities tend to obey the requirements of radicals when they protest against the symbols of other religions. Fulfilling the protesters' demands may contradict the constitution, however, appropriate bodies and agencies ignore such cases. Hindu radicals in the Karnataka state wanted a ban to put a statue of Jesus Christ and their demands were satisfied in spite of their unconstitutional nature⁵⁴. The Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church Peter Machado condemned such a decision of the authorities⁵⁵.

The reason for protests that flamed at the beginning of the year in New Delhi was the law which facilitated the citizenship procedures for different ethnicities who live in India but it ignored Islamic believers.

Episodes of discrimination are widespread in Pakistan where Christians are considered to be citizens of "second class". This fact explains a high number of anti-Christian violence episodes: because the social status of Christians is poor and the economic living standard is low, the police do not often pay proper attention to crimes against them. The example of such an attitude is the decision of the Sindh

⁵¹ URL:<https://vomcanada.com/in-2019-10-24.htm> 24.10.2019

⁵² URL:<https://vomcanada.com/in-2019-11-8.htm> 07.11.2019

⁵³ URL:<https://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/irmas-privadas-comida-converterem-cristo-120961.html> 02.09.2019

⁵⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/14/hindu-radicals-protest-jesus-statue-indias-karnataka/> 14.01.2020

⁵⁵ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/11/christian-leader-india-decries-decision-remove-statue-jesus-christ/> 11.03.2020

High Court to justify three Muslims who kidnapped a 14-year-old Christian girl Huma Younus⁵⁶. The Court also refused to annul the marriage despite the fact that the marriage with a juvenile is illegal in Pakistan and the girl's family provided enough documents to prove the girl's age.

There were reported cases in Karachi when Christians were refused to sell or rent out their homes because of their faith. A case in Islamabad was mentioned where two hospitals refused to accept the body of a deceased Christian woman to a morgue⁵⁷.

Another evidence of regular insults and harassment is the case when a Christian woman Gonila Jill was fired from work on religious grounds; and even when she was still by a mass media, she could hear frequent insults because of her faith⁵⁸.

Discrimination on religious grounds at the levels of the government and public relations can be witnessed in Iran. There are Islamic courts in the country that among other things also consider cases of newly converted Christians.

On July 27, a 65-year-old Christian woman, Makhrokh Kanbari, was sentenced to one year in prison by the Islamic Court of Keredzha⁵⁹. Congregations are restricted in their right to practice their faith and openly celebrate religious festivals: on the eve of Christmas, the Tehran authorities banned the Armenian Christian congregation to hold an annual fair⁶⁰.

The Minister of Education of Iran Mohsen Haji Mirzaei stated that children who profess religions, which are not recognized by the state, should not attend school and receive education. The University of Tehran pressured a Christian activist Fatima (Mary) Mohammadi for her position on the rights of religious minorities. She was expelled from the educational institution and later arrested (for

⁵⁶ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/68707-v-pakistane-sud-opravidal-musulyman-pohitivshih-14-letnyuju-khristianku> 14.02.2020

⁵⁷ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/10/pakistans-christians-concerned-new-reports-discrimination/> 10.10.2019

⁵⁸ URL:<http://asianews.it/notizie-it/Lahore,-si-dimette-una-giornalista-cristiana,-perseguitata-al-lavoro-48553.html> 15.11.2019

⁵⁹ URL:<https://vomcanada.com/ir-2019-08-01.htm> 01.08.2019

⁶⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/30/iran-cancels-armenian-christmas-market/> 30.12.2019

more details about her arrest and sentence see the section “Physical violence”⁶¹.

Christian churches and denominations face pressure in China, which is explained by the total control of the Communist Party over all areas of public life. Any events, meetings, or programs of religious congregations should be inspected and approved by the Administration for Religious Affairs, according to recent changes in the “Regulations on Religious Affairs” which came in effect as of February 1, 2020. The law states that religious organizations should “spread the principles and policies of the Communist Party of China and “educate” religious personnel and parishioners to support the Communist regime in everything”⁶². The law was negatively accepted by Christians in general and Catholic congregations in particular. The new law presumes the creation of a separate governing body for each religion — a state-appointed conference, which will be responsible for all decisions made by a particular Church or a denomination. Father Li, a Catholic priest from Hebei Province, said that the very nature of the Church would be destroyed without the leadership of the bishops (which has to be refused under the new legislation) and emphasized the idea that the obvious goal of the police is to abolish the traditional church model. The priest told the media that the parishes strongly oppose the endorsement of this law but in fact do not have the ability to influence this process⁶³.

The end of 2019 was marked by the installation of a surveillance system in churches as part of the program to control the population of believers. Facial recognition technology was deployed in parishes in Xinjiang Uygur region and software was installed in a church in Hubei province in early October to identify parishioners through face and fingerprint identification.

Before entering the church building, believers undergo a compulsory scanning procedure. The software is aimed not only

⁶¹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/26/iranian-christian-activist-expelled-university/> 26.12.2019

⁶² URL:<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/-New-administrative-measures-for-religious-groups:-total-submission-to-the-Chinese-Communist-Party-%E2%80%8B-48919.html> 31.12.2019

⁶³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/04/underground-catholics-will-not-obey-ccps-new-rules/> 04.02.2020

at tracking those who regularly attend church but also tracking the movements of their family members⁶⁴. Pressure on religious leaders and employees of religious organizations is increasing: under the excuse of reducing “foreign influence”, many foreign employees were expelled from the country — they were denied a visa extension without explanation⁶⁵.

Consistent persecution of parishes can be seen in the decisions made by the provincial leaders. In Zhejiang province, a number of restrictive measures have been introduced against Christians with bans relating to the rules for the location of churches, the number of parishes, and their financial activities⁶⁶. In the same region, the authorities imposed restrictions on the performance of funeral services according to Christian tradition and in places that did not receive official approval from the Communist authorities⁶⁷.

The Patriotic Association, already mentioned in the first section, is a state body designed to control the activities of the Roman Catholic Church in the country. Illegal actions were recorded against Christian preachers and communities that refused to join it: Catholic Bishop Vincenzo Guo Xijin was persecuted⁶⁸, in January, more than 10 parishes of the Roman Catholic Church eparchy in Ningde were closed due to a government order⁶⁹. Discriminatory actions were also used against Christian activists and denominational pastors: a Beijing City Christian congregation member Xu Yonghai and an attorney Ni Yulan were put under house arrest⁷⁰, Shandong province banned two congregations from meeting and preaching online⁷¹.

⁶⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/16/china-increases-church-surveillance-monitoring/> 16.11.2019

⁶⁵ URL:<https://www.vomcanada.com/cn-2019-11-28a.htm> 28.11.2019

⁶⁶ URL:<https://vom.com.au/china-new-measures-forbid-baptism/> 06.11.2019

⁶⁷ URL:<https://vomcanada.com/cn-2020-02-27.htm> 27.02.2020

⁶⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/13/chinese-bishop-targeted-church-detachment-strategy/> 13.11.2019

⁶⁹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/06/chinese-catholics-face-church-closures/> 06.03.2020

⁷⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/17/beijing-house-church-members-harassed-human-rights-day/> 17.12.2019

⁷¹ URL:<https://vom.com.au/china-shandong-authorities-ban-online-preaching/> 12.03.2020

The policy of the Communist Party aims to destroy any ideology, which influences the education and formation of moral values that could be different from the principles of communism. Attempts are made to subdue the internal structure of the Church to political goals and force priests and pastors to carry out propaganda functions. In this regard, there is a tendency towards imposing the communist ideology on the churches and attempting to replace serving God with serving the party where communist leaders should be honored instead of honoring God. For this reason, the distribution of “unverified” religious literature is restricted: on July 22, seven Christians in Guangdong province (China) were arrested for distribution of religious literature in an audio format⁷², those who buy religious books are summoned to the police to be interrogated⁷³.

The policy of replacement religious education with ideologically adjusted communist education was demonstrated in the decision of the Ministry of Education that published a new school textbook for the fifth grade, in which all places where God was mentioned were removed from the world literature pieces⁷⁴; on the other hand, publishers were required to include communist elements in Christian printed materials⁷⁵. Under this policy officials ordered one of the denominations to replace the wall painting depicting the Ten Commandments with quotes from the Chinese President Xi Jinping, threatening with arrest and imprisonment if the request is not satisfied⁷⁶. Christian congregations in Jiangxi province were instructed to worship the Communist party⁷⁷, the authorities of Guangzhou province ordered the Christian church to replace the cross with the

⁷² URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/04/christians-arrested-shenzhen-selling-audio-bible-players/> 04.08.2019

⁷³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/06/chinese-christians-harassed-purchasing-christian-books-online/> 06.11.2019

⁷⁴ URL:<https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/08/v-kitae-upominania-o-bogeburali-iz-detskikh-rasskazov/> 08.08.2019

⁷⁵ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/09/christian-magazine-forced-sinicize-biblical-imagery/> 09.11.2019

⁷⁶ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/09/24/chinese-churches-made-to-replace-ten-commandments-with-xi-jinping-quotes/> 24.09.2019

⁷⁷ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/27/chinese-house-churches-directed-worship-communist-party/> 27.09.2019

national flag. After the church refused to do so, the building was sealed and the property was confiscated⁷⁸. Hmong Christians faced the prohibition of using the Gospel that had been translated into their language⁷⁹.

Churches throughout China are searched and demolished: on August 19, police officers and municipal officials of the Xiamen city carried out a search in a Christian home church⁸⁰, in Jiangxi and Fujian provinces many Christian churches were closed or demolished at the direction of the authorities⁸¹, a Christian orphanage for disabled children was closed in Shanxi province⁸².

There were reported cases of violating the rights of believers by local people in Vietnam. In the village of Dak Lak, residents took away a home and land from a 60-year-old Christian woman. She was also banned from entering the village altogether⁸³. The crime was explained by the “harmfulness” of the Christian ideology. On December 6, an episode of hatred towards Christians was recorded in the city of Tang Binh, where radical residents destroyed a traditional Christmas nativity scene and statues of the Virgin Mary and Joseph, which had been previously installed at a festival exhibition⁸⁴.

Different religions groups had to face discrimination in such Asian countries as Indonesia where three parishes were closed because of protests set up by local people.

Indonesia is marked by frequent church closings and a ban on preaching. The country has a number of legislative restrictions that are used to prohibit worship and forcefully close parishes. Three

⁷⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/06/chinese-church-choosing-cross-national-flag-despite-persecution/> 06.12.2019

⁷⁹ URL:<https://vom.com.au/china-restrictions-imposed-on-hmong-christians/> 19.12.2019

⁸⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/08/22/house-church-xiamen-raided-police/> 22.08.2019

⁸¹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/07/christians-china-endure-new-wave-repressive-policies/> 07.11.2019

⁸² URL:<https://vomcanada.com/cn-2019-09-12.htm> 12.09.2019

⁸³ URL:<https://vom.com.au/vietnam-villagers-confiscate-christian-womans-land/> 05.12.2019

⁸⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/11/nativity-scene-removed-force-saigons-loc-hung/> 11.12.2019

Christian churches have been closed in the country since early 2020⁸⁵. In several provinces Christians were prohibited to have worships and festival events during the Christmas season of 2019⁸⁶ under a formal excuse that there was no legal meeting place. There was a report of a police raid to the Pentecostal Church of the Indragiri Hilir District (Sumatra). The police officers broke into a church building during a worship service and cast Christians out onto the street⁸⁷. There is notably a tendency of closing churches after protests of local people: in Central Java police officers ordered the pastor to stop a congregation meeting due to the protests of radical residents⁸⁸; in Tlogosari a Christian congregation was prohibited to continue building their church because of protests⁸⁹.

Discrimination against Muslim congregations and believers is not uncommon either: the employees of the Ministry of Administrative Reforms were prohibited to wear niqabs⁹⁰. The Minister for Religious Affairs Fakhru Razi named security measures as the reason. The prohibition applies only to working hours.

Christians in Sri Lanka faced a ban for worship: on October 23, police officers and government officials ordered to close a Christian center in Deniyaya⁹¹. In Turkey, police officers demonstrated intolerance while screening football club fans. On October 3, they were not allowed into the stadium because they were carrying attributes with Christian symbols⁹². Unofficially the country has restrictions for public and government officers to confess Christianity: thus, a teacher from one of the educational institutions who taught the

⁸⁵ URL:<https://vom.com.au/indonesia-three-churches-closed/> 06.02.2020

⁸⁶ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/19/christmas-celebrations-west-sumatra-banned/> 19.12.2019

⁸⁷ URL:<https://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/perseguiacao-culto-interrumpido-policiais-deus-rua-120913.html> 02.09.2019

⁸⁸ URL:<https://vom.com.au/indonesia-another-church-closure/> 27.02.2020

⁸⁹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/15/baptist-church-indonesia-unable-build-church-due-protests/> 15.03.2020

⁹⁰ URL:<https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/11/12/v-indonezii-sotrudnicam-ministerstva-administrativnyh-reform-zapretili-nikaby/> 12.11.2019

⁹¹ URL:<https://vomcanada.com/lk-2019-11-21.htm> 21.11.2019

⁹² URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/12/turkish-police-remove-sport-flags-crosses/> 12.10.2019

subject “Religious culture and ethics”, was suspended from work for her decision to convert from Islam to Christianity⁹³.

2.3. Discrimination in the context of a coronavirus pandemic

Cases of discrimination against religious organizations have become more frequent in connection with the lockdown which was enforced in many countries of the world. These episodes were linked to extremely strict measures to prevent the spread of infection and to the intervention of the authorities in the internal affairs of the Church. There were cases of discriminations in Italy: the government prohibited to conduct worship and funeral services there⁹⁴, police officers stopped a Catholic Mass in the city of Cerveteri on March 15⁹⁵. A legal action was initiated against the clergy and believers who were present at the baptism of a child in San Gennaro Vesuviano⁹⁶.

A similar situation occurred in Greece where the police arrested the hierarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Seraphim of Kifir and Antikythera, for conducting a worship under the lockdown⁹⁷, and this Metropolis was pressured with the demand to stop divine services. Besides, the authorities interfered with the internal life of the Church by taking a decision to cancel the Easter service, against which was opposed by many believers of the Church in Greece, including Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos⁹⁸.

Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox Church found itself in a tough situation because of the lockdown in Montenegro. After the Church was under pressure from the State for three months and defended its rights to own

⁹³ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/10/turkish-christian-teacher-suspended/> 10.11.2019

⁹⁴ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69383-italyjanskih-katolikov-budut-khoronity-bez-otpevanija> 11.03.2020

⁹⁵ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/police-disperse-catholics-at-sunday-mass-in-italy/> 16.03.2020

⁹⁶ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74522> 25.03.2020

⁹⁷ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200323/1568996394.html> 23.03.2020

⁹⁸ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200331/1569384156.html> 31.03.2020

religious property, which was accompanied by unlawful actions of the Montenegrin security agencies, the country announced travel and walking restrictions, public worship cancellations, and closure of churches. Making use of the pandemic as a cover for the fight against the Serbian Church, the authorities intensified the persecution, including the company to spread false information about the violation of the lockdown rules by the parishes of the Serbian Patriarchate⁹⁹. False accusations were made to cause hatred against the Serbian Church and to justify illegal actions. Eleven parishioners who took part in the service at the Rezhevichi monastery were detained; the hieromonk who performed the service is now to appear before the court¹⁰⁰. In the city of Kotor, the police summoned the Archpriest Stavrophor Momchilo Krivokapich, who performed a prayer service, for interrogation¹⁰¹.

Christian congregations suffered discrimination on religious grounds in Pakistan where Saylani Welfare International Trust refused to provide them with basic foodstuffs¹⁰². The country saw a number of cases in which preachers were arrested as a result of false accusations of the lockdown rule violations. Christian communities of Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq suffered injustice in the distribution of essential goods¹⁰³.

The government of China used the coronavirus pandemic situation to massively remove crosses in Jiangsu, Anhui and Shandong provinces^{104;105;106}. In Chengxi County, Qinghai Province, authorities

⁹⁹ URL:http://www.spc.rs/sr/saopštenje_zajavnost_svetog_arhijerejskog_sinoda_4 23.03.2020

¹⁰⁰ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69951-policija-chernogorii-arestovala-11-verujushhih-i-svyashennika-iz-za-karantina> 29.03.2020

¹⁰¹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69840-v-chernogorii-svyashennika-vyzvali-v-policiju-za-sovershenije-molebna> 25.03.2020

¹⁰² URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/30/minorities-pakistan-claim-refused-aid-due-religious-identities/> 30.03.2020

¹⁰³ URL:<https://vomcanada.com/vomc-2020-04-09.htm> 09.04.2020

¹⁰⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/18/coronavirus-not-stop-church-demolition-cross-removal-china/> 18.03.2020

¹⁰⁵ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/02/cross-removed-three-self-church-anhui/> 02.04.2020

¹⁰⁶ URL:<https://news.barnabasfund.org/Authorities-continuing-to-rip-down-church-crosses-in-China-amid-Covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic/> 20.04.2020

approved of the demolition of a church that had government approval for worship. The demolition took place on Easter¹⁰⁷. During the lockdown in Fujian Province, a Christian parish in Xiamen was under surveillance¹⁰⁸.

In Ukraine, the situation around the coronavirus pandemic was used by opponents of the canonical Church and lobbyists of the dissenter OCU as an instrument for believers' persecution. Officials of the Dalnitsky and Kremidovsky village councils of the Odessa region banned to conduct worships despite the fact that the federal decree only limited the presence of parishioners in churches¹⁰⁹. Three priests of the UOC were fined in the presence of parishioners for conducting services on Palm Sunday¹¹⁰.

The Adviser to the Minister for Internal Affairs of Ukraine Ivan Varchenko stated he was willing to start an administrative and criminal persecution against religious organizations for the lockdown rule violations¹¹¹. In the period of the lockdown, a number of appeals to close the Orthodox abodes increased. Deputies of the Ternopil Region Council addressed the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky with the demand to prohibit services in the Holy Dormition Pochaev Lavra during the lockdown¹¹².

The extreme hostility towards the Church from some officials is evidenced from the beginning of criminal proceedings against priests of the Holy Dormition Pochaev Lavra in front of the parishioners for conducting the Easter worship¹¹³, threats of some politicians to take measures against the UOC in case churches accept their believers for Easter services: on the eve of Easter, by order of the Mukachevo

¹⁰⁷ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/15/state-vetted-chinese-church-demolished-easter/> 15.04.2020

¹⁰⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/10/chinas-xunsiding-church-continues-monitored-despite-covid-19/> 10.04.2020

¹⁰⁹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/70589-v-odesskoj-oblasti-selysovety-nezakonno-zapreshhajut-paskhalynyje-bogosluzhenija> 17.04.2020

¹¹⁰ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200413/1569956251.html> 13.04.2020

¹¹¹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69640-sovetnik-avakova-grozit-nakazyvaty-cerkvi-za-narusheniye-karantina> 20.03.2020

¹¹² URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69791-v-ternopolyskom-oblsoвете-trebyut-zapretity-bogosluzhenija-v-pochajevskoj-lavre> 24.03.2020

¹¹³ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200420/1570284510.html> 20.04.2020

city council, the road to the St. Nicholas convent was blocked, the mayor of Dnipro, Boris Filatov, threatened to turn off the water and electricity to the parishes of the canonical Church¹¹⁴, General Director of Ukrposhta Igor Smelyansky said that he would apply sanctions to employees for visiting churches on Easter¹¹⁵. According to the chairman of the Information and Education Department of the UOC, the media launched a campaign to denigrate the activity of the canonical Church, which resulted in an increased number of church parish arsons. In most cases the media falsely declared the violations of the lockdown by the Orthodox Christians and also propagated the idea that the Church is to blame for the growth in the number of COVID-19 positive cases¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70464-mer-dnepra-ugrozhajet-upc-zalozhennymi-dveryami-khramov-i-perekopannymi-dorogami> 14.04.2020

¹¹⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70553-glava-ukrpochty-grozit-sotrudnikam-sankcijami-za-poseshhenije-khramov-na-paskhu> 16.04.2020

¹¹⁶ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70831-ijerarkh-o-situacii-vokrug-upc-netolyko-podzhogi-no-i-informacionnyje-pozhary> 26.04.2020

3. RELIGIOPHOBIA AND THE SPREAD OF SECULAR VALUES

3.1. Secular values

This section will examine the spread of secular values as a phenomenon: legislative initiatives that emphasize different countries' departure from traditional values, data on the decrease in the number of believers in countries where traditional religions are strong, and in the countries that have been witnessing a long-term decline in the activity of parishioners and an increase in the number of atheists or people who deny the primacy of religion and the Church in their lives.

The spread of secular values as a phenomenon is a threat to the moral well-being of societies that are built on the moral principles propagated by Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Various religious leaders have emphasized the importance of preserving traditional foundations and opposing new-fangled liberal tendencies. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia issued a statement on November 14, 2019, in which he called on the spiritual leaders of the world to stand up for traditional values¹. The Patriarch noted that in the modern world a war is being waged against traditional religions, and this war is used by the extremists who replace weak secular ideology with extremist ideas posing special danger for the younger generation². Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the Chairman of the Department for external Church relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, spoke about extreme liberalism as one of the main problems of the modern world. He condemned permissiveness and the departure from Christian values as a disastrous phenomenon for a moral society³. Leaders of

¹ URL:<https://ria.ru/20191114/1560923971.html> 14.11.2019

² URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73769> 14.11.2019

³ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/66059-rpc-krajnij-liberalizm-i-vsedozvolennosty-privodyat-k-erozii-nravstvennosti> 30.10.2019

the countries with populations that have not deviated from traditional values also spoke about the campaign against religious values, for example, the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev⁴.

The fears of traditional values supporters, including Vladimir Legoyda⁵, the Chairman of the Synodal Department for Church, Society, and Media relations, are justified in relation to Western countries: according to a social study, the number of believers in the United States has decreased⁶, while a survey conducted by the *Pew Research Center* showed the impact of secular values on Catholic society: 74% of Catholics living in America said that they do not object to anticipate marriage, despite the contradiction of this practice with the teachings of the Church⁷. A decrease in the number of parishioners of the Catholic Church in 2019 was recorded in a number of European countries. In particular, 15% more parishioners left the Catholic Church in Austria this year than in previous years⁸, which indicates an increasing proportion of citizens who are falling away from the faith.

Legislative initiatives and public statements that contradict the Church's teaching and canons become the result of the decline in the level of spirituality. In a number of countries attempts have been made to lobby for laws that will allow to disclose the secret of confession in the case of various crimes. In Australia such a law was condemned by the leader of the Catholic Church of Tasmania, Archbishop Porteous, who said that priests under no circumstances can violate the secrecy of confession and will be guided in this matter by the instructions of the Pope and not by the instructions of secular authorities⁹. In Italy, the country of the Catholic majority, there are trends towards secularization and underestimation of the role of the Catholic Church

⁴ URL:<https://ria.ru/20191114/1560917142.html> 14.11.2019

⁵ URL:<https://ria.ru/20191023/1560135119.html> 23.10.2019

⁶ URL:<http://www.christian.by/stati/4161-po-dannym-novogo-sotsoprosa-v-ssha-vse-menshe-lyudej-schitayut-veru-semyu-i-detej-opredelyayushchimi-tsennoyami> 07.09.2019

⁷ URL:<https://catholicerald.co.uk/news/2019/11/07/survey-says-most-catholics-in-us-reject-church-teaching-on-cohabitation/> 07.11.2019

⁸ URL <https://burgenland.orf.at/stories/3030075/> 15.01.2020

⁹ URL:<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/09/12/priests-cannot-comply-with-laws-that-break-seal-of-confession-tasmanias-archbishop-says/> 12.09.2019

in society. The Minister of education Lorenzo Fioramonti has made a proposal to remove crucifixes from the walls of school classrooms in Italy¹⁰. The Council for the prevention and elimination of discrimination and equality sent a request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova to remove the crucifix from the walls. The Council stated that the presence of a Christian religious symbol in the state Department is an infringement of the rights of believers confessing other faiths¹¹.

The influence of secular values is also noticeable in Russia. Various surveys conducted shortly before and during the Lent revealed low rates of believers who plan to observe Lent: according to the survey conducted by the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion, only 10% of Russians intend to observe Lent, 69% of respondents said the opposite¹². At the same time, the *Public opinion* Foundation published its own data, reporting only 9% of Russian residents who observed Lent in 2020¹³.

The ideology of liberalism influences the attitude of society and the government to life and its protection. Leaders of European countries demonstrate the tendency to approve euthanasia and introduce it into the list of medical operations allowed by law; scientists are developing technologies in the field of genetic engineering that will allow to create a person with pre-set properties (Patriarch Kirill spoke negatively against technologies for modifying the human genetic code¹⁴). On February 20, the bill on legalizing euthanasia was supported by the Portuguese Parliament¹⁵, the partial introduction of euthanasia (if terminally ill people have less than six months to live) was approved in the New Zealand Parliament¹⁶, and on February 26, the Federal constitutional court allowed euthanasia

¹⁰ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/65398-ministr-obrazovanija-italii-predlozhit-udaliti-raspyatija-iz-shkolnyh-klassov> 02.10.2019

¹¹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67838-v-moldove-priznali-diskriminacii-ustanovku-raspyatija-v-zdani-mvd> 15.01.2020

¹² URL:<https://ria.ru/20200303/1567773138.html> 03.03.2020

¹³ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74569> 31.03.2020

¹⁴ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74179> 28.01.2020

¹⁵ URL:https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020/02/20/actualidad/1582202350_889184.html 21.02.2020

¹⁶ URL:http://newsru.co.il/world/13nov2019/nz_204.html 13.11.2019

in Germany¹⁷. In an effort to comply with the European States, the proposal to legalize euthanasia was made in Ukraine, such a bill can be considered in the Verkhovna Rada soon¹⁸.

In Canada a legal permit for the procedure has already been introduced, adding to the fact that sanctions have been imposed on medical institutions that refuse to promote this “medical service”. The Irene Thomas Hospice in Delta, British Columbia, lost its funding after refusing to include euthanasia in the list of services¹⁹.

Among the countries that support euthanasia in one way or another, the Netherlands stand out after taking unprecedented measures to approve it in the country. The state has been providing an opportunity to perform euthanasia for several years now, the procedure is performed at the expense of government funds. According to a study by the Ministry of Health of the Netherlands, more than 7 thousand citizens of the country commit euthanasia with the help of the state medical system every year²⁰. In addition, the proceedings related to the actions of doctors reveal new facets of the law. The decision of the district court in the Hague acquitted a doctor accused of violating the requirements for euthanasia. He performed euthanasia on a 74-year-old patient who was in a state of dementia, without final consent, using a permission that had been granted four years before. The court’s decision set a precedent for other similar cases to be rendered in the light of it, so medical professionals will have the formal right not to take the last consent and devitalize patients suffering from dementia²¹. The extension of this right was confirmed by the April verdict of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands in another high profile case of euthanasia of a patient with Alzheimer’s disease²².

¹⁷ URL:<https://www.dw.com/ru/26.02.2020>

¹⁸ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/65490-deputat-ot-slugi-naroda-khochet-vnesti-v-radu-zakonoprojekt-ob-evtanzii> 07.10.2019

¹⁹ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/canadian-hospice-forced-to-close-after-refusing-to-offer-assisted-dying/> 29.02.2020

²⁰ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/68609-v-gollandii-20-chelovek-v-deny-sovershajut-evtanziju--issledovanije> 11.02.2020

²¹ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/09/12/dutch-doctor-cleared-in-case-of-euthanasia-without-final-consent/> 12.09.2019

²² URL:<https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/world/news/2020-04/olanda-eutanasia-dichiarazione-cardinal-ejik.html> 25.04.2020

In the United States, the adoption of the law legalizing euthanasia in the state of New Jersey for people with incurable diseases caused a protest from the Catholic Church: the law was condemned by the Bishop of New Jersey, James E. Chekkio²³. A month after the law came into force in the state, Pope Francis spoke out against the legalized devitalizing of elderly and sick people, emphasizing that euthanasia encourages a utilitarian attitude to human life²⁴.

The legalization of killing is condemned by the Church and religious leaders of Islam and Judaism in all forms, one of them being the legal authorization of abortion for all terms. In different countries, abortion may be prohibited only in the late stages of pregnancy or allowed at any time. In the UK, it is allowed to kill unborn children in the last trimester if the child has a disability, including Down syndrome, clubfoot, and harelip. This assumption is fiercely criticized by the Catholic Church, the medical centers, and non-profit organizations operating in its jurisdiction. It was also opposed by a member of the UK Labor party, Rebecca Long-Bailey, after which she was criticized by members of Parliament and the media²⁵. An opponent of late-term abortions, 24-year-old British citizen Heidi Crowter, who was diagnosed with Down syndrome from birth, sued the UK government because of this law²⁶.

In the United States, two bills aimed at protecting the lives of unborn children were rejected by the Senate. This decision was condemned by Archbishop Joseph Naumann, the head of the Commission for the protection of life at the US Episcopal conference²⁷.

In Russia, where abortions are allowed and introduced into the system of compulsory medical insurance, there is also a problem of termination of pregnancy. According to statistics, in 2018 alone,

²³ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/07/31/bishop-calls-assisted-suicide-affront-to-the-dignity-of-life-on-eve-of-legalization/> 31.07.2019

²⁴ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/09/02/pope-francis-condemns-euthanasia-as-utilitarianism-not-freedom/> 02.09.2019

²⁵ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/labour-leadership-candidate-criticised-over-abortion-stance/> 17.01.2020

²⁶ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/68962-anglichanka-s-sindromom-dauna-podala-v-sud-na-vlasty-za-razresheniye-abortov> 24.02.2020

²⁷ URL:<https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/church/news/2020-03/v-moskve-predstavlen-pravoslavno-katolicheskij-dokument.html> 05.03.2020

4.6 thousand abortions were performed among minors in Russia. In total, 567 thousand abortions were performed in the country²⁸.

3.2. Denial of family values

Among the most dangerous results of the spread of secular values the following can be mentioned: destruction of the institution of family and traditional concepts of marriage, promotion of negative myths about a traditional family, popularization of gender and LGBT ideology while imposing this philosophy on people who live in countries with traditional culture, and LGBT propaganda among children. The Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine Onufry has spoken about the need to preserve traditional values for a positive moral state of the society²⁹.

Religious communities of Russia, Ukraine, Poland and other countries continue to oppose the urgent promotion and aggressive propaganda of LGBT values. In Ukraine representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and a number of other religious organizations of Odessa sent a letter to the mayor Gennady Trukhanov in which they called for cancelling the LGBT parade during the festival *Odessa pride-2019*³⁰. In Poland the President of the Polish Episcopal conference, Archbishop Jozef Michalik of Pshemysl', spoke out against aggressive propaganda of non-traditional values. He was criticized by the LGBT community for criticizing homosexual relations, after which he spoke again, saying that the Catholic Church will resist the spread of this ideology³¹. Archbishop Marek Jadrashewski of Krakow said that the inculcation of LGBT ideology is correlated with the times of the Communist regime, and strongly

²⁸ URL:<https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9107648.html> 02.08.2019

²⁹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/66374-predstojately-semyja--odna-iz-velichajshih-cennostej-kotoryje-dal-nam-bog> 13.11.2019

³⁰ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/64465-v-upc-prizvali-mera-odessy-otkazatsya-ot-provedenija-lgbt-parada> 22.08.2019

³¹ URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/polish-archbishop-vows-to-resist-lgbt-ideology/> 09.08.2019

condemned the propaganda of non-traditional values³², as well as the Hierarchy of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Metropolitan Neophyt of Corfu³³. In Ukraine, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches stands firm opposing non-traditional values, in particular the teaching of gender ideology in schools³⁴. Of all other speeches delivered by representatives of traditional religions, who criticized modern trends, the statement of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk seems rather remarkable, where he condemned the “child-free” ideology and suggested promoting the image of traditional and intact family relations in the media, which “correspond to the religious ideal of love, loyalty, chastity, sacrifice, which a real family is unthinkable without”³⁵. In the United States the Catholic Church and human rights organizations in the State of New York have condemned the bill on paid surrogacy³⁶.

The growing influence of non-traditional sexual minorities allows them to make statements against members of the religious community and impose their influence on organizations that hire all workers including those of the Christian faith. In France, LGBT activists sued Gi Paget, a 61-year-old Catholic priest, for his public statements in which he said that it is totally unacceptable to grant gay couples the right to have children³⁷.

In European countries, religious leaders who come to the defense of traditional values and preach without relying on the accepted concepts of tolerance are currently persecuted. The possible soon-to-be adoption of a law criminalizing discrimination against LGBT people in Switzerland leads to the idea of widespread criminal prosecution for expressing a point of view that is an alternative to the position of the LGBT community. Indicators revealed during the referendum held in Switzerland, when this law was supported by

³² URL:<https://catholiceraid.co.uk/news/2019/10/08/polish-archbishop-compares-lgbt-movement-to-communist-regime/> 08.10.2019

³³ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67017-kiprskij-ijerarkh-gomoseksualizmetogreh-a-grehzarazitelen> 10.12.2019

³⁴ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2019/12/18/vsciro-prizyvaet-pravitelstvo-prekratitnavyazyvanie-gendernoj-ideologii-v-obrazovanii/?lang=ru> 18.12.2019

³⁵ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73301> 10.09.2019

³⁶ URL:<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9503382.html> 14.01.2020

³⁷ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/65444-vo-francii-aktivisty-lgbt-podali-v-sudna-katolicheskogo-svyashhennika> 04.10.2019

63.1% of residents, demonstrate that the modern society accepts these norms³⁸. The ban on the expression of Christian and Muslim positions regarding LGBT ideology lessons in schools in the UK and the US is alarming: after Muslim parents protested against propaganda in the lower grades of a school in Birmingham, the city court banned believers from protesting on the school grounds³⁹, and after that there was a threat of sentencing a Muslim Jabar Hussein, who did not allow his son to attend classes of non-traditional values⁴⁰. The Christian position of journalist John Callar regarding “education” of this kind in schools was the reason for his dismissal from the *Denver Post*⁴¹.

The decline in the level of spirituality and the near-anti-religious state of Western society explain the rise of trends that run counter to religious teachings. So, in the UK the number of citizens who consider homosexuality morally acceptable has increased⁴². In addition, in the United Kingdom a law may be passed to simplify the divorce procedure⁴³. The pressure of gender ideology has led to its indirect recognition in the Roman Catholic Church as we can see from a document approved by the conference of Catholic bishops of France, which recommends to avoid the definition of “father” and “mother” in certificates of the Sacrament of Baptism⁴⁴.

3.3. Cases of Religiophobia

Religious hatred has manifested itself through numerous arsons and acts of vandalism at temples, mosques, synagogues, pilgrimage sites and other religious objects of sacred value for believers.

³⁸ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/68570-referendum-v-shvejcarii-podderzhal-ugolovnoje-nakazanije-za-diskriminaciju-lgbt> 10.02.2020

³⁹ URL:<https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-50557951> 26.11.2019

⁴⁰ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/68440-v-anglii-otcu-zapretivshemu-synu-poseshhaty-lgbt-uroki-grozit-tyuryma> 04.02.2020

⁴¹ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/68191-v-ssha-uvolili-zhurnalista-za-protest-protiv-gendernoj-ideologii> 27.01.2020

⁴² URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/65924-v-britanii-na-trety-vyroslo-chislo-sochuvstvujushhih-gomoseksualizmu> 24.10.2019

⁴³ URL:<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9503413.html> 14.01.2020

⁴⁴ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67925-katoliki-francii-uberut-gendernyje-opredelenija-iz-svidetelystv-o-kreshhenii> 18.01.2020

In European countries, the level of religious hatred has been steadily growing in recent years, which is confirmed by attacks on holy sites, intolerance towards representatives of traditional religions, especially towards Jews and Muslims. In October 2019, the head of the Conference of European Rabbis, Pinchas Goldschmidt, expressed his concerns about the increased level of anti-Semitism in Europe⁴⁵. A survey conducted in the same period by order of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has shown that one in four Europeans holds radical anti-Semitic views⁴⁶. The World Zionist Organization stated a sharp increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents since the beginning of 2020 due to the coronavirus⁴⁷, while the Council of Europe reported the increase in sectarian aggression in European countries in 2019⁴⁸. The president of Montenegro Milo Dukanovic confirmed the information about the growth of anti-Semitism and the increasing danger for Jewish communities⁴⁹. This is corroborated by social survey data and statistics on attacks in various countries, including 25% of Germans expressing anti-Semitic views⁵⁰ and the increase in attacks on churches, mosques and synagogues documented in Northern Ireland from 2016 to 2019.

It were the Jewish communities that suffered a significant part of the incidents related to religiophobia: an anti-Semitic provocation at the Central Synagogue of Kiev, committed by neo-Nazis, that took place in Ukraine⁵¹, a desecration of the monument to Sholem Aleichem, which also happened at the Central Synagogue named after V. Brodsky⁵², an attempted arson attack at the building of the Jewish community in Kherson on April 20⁵³. A defilement of a Judaica store in the center of Lyon⁵⁴ and the desecration of a cemetery

⁴⁵ URL:<https://ria.ru/20190828/1557983730.html>28.08.2019

⁴⁶ URL:<http://newsru.co.il/world/21nov2019/adl444.html>21.11.2019

⁴⁷ URL:http://newsru.co.il/world/20apr2020/antis_502.html20.04.2020

⁴⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=7478221.04.2020>

⁴⁹ URL:<http://newsru.co.il/world/31oct2019/monte444.html>31.10.2019

⁵⁰ URL:<https://www.dw.com/ru/24.10.2019>

⁵¹ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=7358118.10.2019>

⁵² URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=7382225.11.2019>

⁵³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=7477120.04.2020>

⁵⁴ URL:<http://newsru.co.il/world/19oct2019/lyon806.html>19.10.2019

in Westoffen⁵⁵ occurred in France; in the Baltic states, a provocation was documented in Lithuania, where unidentified people wrote a Nazi greeting on the sign of the choral synagogue in the city of Kaunas⁵⁶. A carnival procession in the Belgian city of Aalst, in which the participants carried a caricature of the Wailing Wall, sparked an outrage in the Conference of European Rabbis⁵⁷. Anti-Semitic attacks on places of worship have not spared the Russian community either. On the night of April 13, in Arkhangelsk, unidentified persons set fire to the “Star of the North” Jewish cultural center⁵⁸.

The situation of Jewish communities in the United States is of concern: according to a survey, more than 80% of American Jews feel an increase in anti-Semitic tendencies in this country⁵⁹. This is confirmed both by frequent attacks on Jewish believers in the State of New York, which is described in the “Physical Violence” section, and by the acts of hostility: on December 14, in Beverly Hills, unidentified people desecrated the Netzach synagogue⁶⁰; on the night of April 9, vandals defiled the walls of the Etz Chaim synagogue in Huntsville, Alabama⁶¹.

Speaking of cases of anti-Christian vandalism in Western countries we should mention the attacks in the UK (the act of vandalism in the St. Oswald Church in Liverpool on August 3⁶² and the desecration of a Christian church in the village of Bramshaw by Satanists⁶³), Italy, where vandals mocked loads of Christmas nativity scenes and other installations at festive exhibitions⁶⁴, as well as the arson attacks on Christian churches in the Norwegian cities of Sela and Dombas

⁵⁵ URL:http://www.newsru.co.il/world/03dec2019/westhoffen_0016.html03.12.2019

⁵⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73834> 26.11.2019

⁵⁷ URL:<https://ria.ru/20200225/1565180106.html>25.02.2020

⁵⁸ URL:<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=7468513>.04.2020

⁵⁹ URL:<http://www.newsru.co.il/world/23oct2019/ajc444.html>23.10.2019

⁶⁰ URL:<http://newsru.co.il/world/15dec2019/beverley444.html>15.12.2019

⁶¹ URL:<http://newsru.co.il/world/11apr2020/alabama802.html>11.04.2020

⁶² URL:<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/08/06/catholic-church-vandalised-in-liverpool/> 06.08.2019

⁶³ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/66826-v-anglii-satanisty-oskvernili-cerkovy> 01.12.2019

⁶⁴ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67783-v-italii-vandalami-unichtozheny-sotni-rozhdestvenskih-vertepov> 13.01.2020

on February 20 and March 19⁶⁵. Two incidents took place in St. Petersburg, in one case an attempt was made to set fire to an Orthodox church⁶⁶, in the other the transgressor painted offensive graffiti on the wall of the Church of the Annunciation on Vasilievsky Island⁶⁷. One incident occurred in the Nizhny Novgorod Region: in the city of Sarov, vandals made an offensive inscription on the walls of a wooden church⁶⁸.

In Ukraine, during the reporting period, there were regular reports of arson and desecration of temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The transgressors were radicals and opponents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as well as supporters of the schismatic structure of the OCU. Anti-Christian acts of vandalism were committed on the night of October 14 in the Holy Dormition Church of the UOC⁶⁹; in the village of Nevsky (Luhansk Region) on the night of October 29-30, unidentified people desecrated the main shrines of the Holy Alexander Nevsky Church of the UOC⁷⁰; the St. Nicholas Church in the village of Shestovitsa (Chernihiv Region) was desecrated and robbed on November 10⁷¹. Numerous arson attacks on monasteries and temples of the canonical Church took place during the quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Archpriest Yevgeny Gutyar, secretary of the Odessa Eparchy Administration, linked the incidents with a media campaign to deride the Church⁷², which included publishing false accusations of Church representatives of violating quarantine and spreading infection.

⁶⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69786-v-norvegii-islamskij-migrant-podzheg-dva-khrama> 24.03.2020

⁶⁶ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200408/1569753430.html> 08.04.2020

⁶⁷ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74633> 08.04.2020

⁶⁸ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200128/1563955835.html> 28.01.2020

⁶⁹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/10/15/obvoroval-potomu-chto-prazdnik-v-den-pokrova-vor-izrubil-ikonostas-v-cerkvi-na-poltavshhine/?lang=ru> 15.10.2019

⁷⁰ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/10/30/v-severodoneckoj-eparxii-vandaly-oskvernili-xram/?lang=ru> 30.10.2019

⁷¹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/11/12/v-chernigovskoj-eparxii-oskvernili-i-ograbili-xram/?lang=ru> 12.11.2019

⁷² URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/04/26/sekretar-odeskoji-jeparxiji-pidpali-monastiriv-i-xramiv-upc-splanovana-akciya-proti-cerkvi/#more-397902> 26.04.2020

During riots in Chile, caused by civil protests, vandals attacked a number of Catholic parishes⁷³, including setting fire to the Iglesia St. Francisco de Borja in Santiago⁷⁴. The desecration of churches reached such a level that the Episcopal Conference of Chile had to publish a statement urging law enforcement agencies to stop the vandals⁷⁵.

In Asian countries, vandalism is typical for radicals who use the desecration of shrines as a way to humiliate and intimidate communities of religious minorities. Such incidents have been reported in Turkey, where attacks on cemeteries have become more frequent in 2020⁷⁶. Attacks have taken place in Ankara and Trabzon, the latter involving the desecration of the grave of a late Roman Catholic believer⁷⁷. In Burma, unidentified radicals destroyed a statue of Virgin Mary, erected by members of the Catholic community in Shan State⁷⁸.

The Philippines clearly demonstrated religiophobia at the state leadership level. The President of the island state Rodrigo Duterte, known for his dislike of the Roman Catholic Church, canceled celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in the islands, scheduled for 2021. The Philippine leader explained the decision by saying that in his view, Christianity is the religion of the invaders, alien to the people of the Philippines. At the same time, Christianity is the major religion of the state; according to various sources, about 90% of the population profess it.⁷⁹

⁷³ URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/11/13/chilean-priest-whose-church-was-desecrated-warns-against-seeking-retribution/> 13.11.2019

⁷⁴ URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2020/01/07/mob-sets-fire-to-catholic-church-serving-chilean-police/> 07.01.2020

⁷⁵ URL: http://www.fides.org/en/news/66933AMERICA_CHILE_Looted_and_desecrated_places_of_worship_the_Bishops_ask_to_apply_the_law_and_rebuild_the_social_fabric 11.11.2019

⁷⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/03/17/christian-cemetery-attacks-increase-turkey/> 17.03.2020

⁷⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/18/christian-grave-desecrated/> 18.02.2020

⁷⁸ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/23/virgin-mary-statue-vandalized-myanmar-shan-state/> 23.01.2020

⁷⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/09/philippine-president-duterte-no-need-celebrate-arrival-christianity/> 09.09.2019

4. PROTECTION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

4.1. Government/Religious Dialogue

4.1.1. State Protection of Religious Liberty

Government/religious dialogue depends on a number of factors, including the country's development level, the presence or absence of armed conflicts, the prevalence of certain radical ideologies in it, the degree of ensuring the constitutional rights of believers. International organizations acting both on behalf of the world community and individual countries monitor the oppression of believers and highlight cases of systematic restriction of religious freedom and persecution of citizens because of their religious affiliation. Analysis and assessment of such situations is given in the "Physical Violence" and "Discrimination" sections. This section will analyze the positive phenomena in the relationship between representatives of confessions and the authorities. It will include an analysis of the improvements in religious communities' life both in the countries expressing an unswerving commitment to ensuring the rights of believers, and in the states having the record of their violations. The section highlights the activities of international organizations advocating for religious freedom in countries around the world, as well as the support of the persecuted Church by other states. Attention was paid to the cooperation of religious and secular leaders in improving the well-being of the population and protecting traditional values, their cooperation in resolving disputes and interactions in a crisis. The section includes an analysis of the most notable events reported in information resources from August 2019 to May 2020.

The progress in the sphere of state-confessional dialogue in countries where religious communities live in hard conditions are of a great importance. These countries can be taking both decisive measures to ensure the safety of believers, and the first steps to

overcome acute conflicts. Sudan can be cited as an example of the last option of the situation development: a transitional government has been set up in the country, which aims to end the discriminatory policy of the former head of state, Omar al-Bashir. The Minister of Religious Affairs Nasr al-Din Mofarrah expressed his intention to strengthen relations between Christian and Muslim communities and assured that members of Christian communities will no longer be persecuted for their faith¹. In addition, the confiscated property will be returned to the parishes. Another positive change is the abolition of the death penalty for “apostasy”.² The punishment was used by radical Muslims as an instrument of persecution of Christian communities. Now, by order of the transitional government, a special commission will be established to monitor cases of false accusations under this article. The new Minister for Religious Affairs also appealed to the Jews, declaring his readiness to accept believing Jews to restore the diaspora (the presence of Jews in Sudan on a permanent basis was interrupted in the late 19th — early 20th centuries).³ Thus, the new government emphasizes its focus on building a more tolerant society, but this process can be lengthy. Like Sudan, Egypt, with the arrival of a new government, is focusing on improving the situation of Christians and attracting Jewish communities that left the country in the twentieth century. In Alexandria, the authorities funded the restoration of the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue⁴, and in January the government announced the completion of the restoration of all Coptic churches destroyed by the Islamists in the province of Minya, which suffered the attacks of the Muslim Brotherhood group in 2013⁵. It is important that these works were also financed and organized by the state. Meetings of the state Committee for the recognition of Christian churches, established on August 30, 2016, are held on a regular basis. The Committee was established on August 30, 2016; by the end of September 2019,

¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/05/sudanese-religious-affairs-minister-seeks-peace-christians/> 05.12.2019

² URL: <https://vomcanada.com/su-2020-04-16.htm> 16.04.2020

³ URL: <https://vomcanada.com/su-2020-04-16.htm> 16.04.2020

⁴ URL: http://newsru.co.il/mideast/12jan2020/alex_202.html 12.01.2020

⁵ URL: <http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9501153.html> 13.01.2020

it had given licenses for conducting worship activities to more than 117 parishes.⁶

A rare episode of positive dialogue in India is the decision of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which acquitted eight Christians falsely accused of “forcibly converting” local residents to Christianity⁷. The case is notable for the fact that allegations of “forced conversion” are difficult to challenge in court, especially in light of the BJP’s policy and the prevalence of such allegations in all states.

A neighboring Asian country, Pakistan, announced the creation of a specialized National Commission for the protection of the rights of minorities, including religious ones. The religious minorities in this country are Christians and Hindus. The news sparked controversy among human rights defenders, who voiced concerns that the authorities wanted to imitate improvements in the protection of religious freedoms in order to put themselves in a good light for their Western partners, while not making efforts to resolve the situation. The fears are related to the fact that the would-be commission is not a full-fledged independent body and will act exclusively at the administrative level. However, the dialogue between the country’s government agencies and human rights organizations is being actively held, the efforts of organizations and charitable foundations are aimed at changing the general attitude towards Christians, raising awareness of cases of discrimination and violence, and legal protection of believers. These efforts resulted in the return of the kidnapped 13-year-old girl Saima Jawid to the family on 26 March by the Sahiwal High Civil Court (Punjab Province).⁸

Foreign religious leaders have also appealed to the government of the country — the head of the Archdiocese of the Roman Catholic Church in Philadelphia, Charles Chaput, appealed to the Prime Minister of Pakistan to ensure religious rights and stop violence and discrimination.

⁶ URL:http://www.fides.org/en/news/66675AFRICA_EGYPT_The_number_of_churches_legalized_by_the_Egyptian_government_rises_to_1171 24.09.2019

⁷ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/20/eight-christians-india-acquitted-false-forced-conversion-charges/> 20.02.2020

⁸ Pakistan, announced the creation of a specialized National Commission for the Protection of the Rights of Minorities

The situation with the dialogue between Christian churches and denominations and the government of Turkey seems difficult. Among the positive developments, we should mention the groundbreaking ceremony for the Church of St. Ephraim in Turkey, which was the first event of this kind in 70 years.⁹ The foundation of the temple, which would belong to the Syro-Yakovite Orthodox Church, was supported by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In his speech at the ceremony, the head of state said that protecting the interests of the Christian community is the duty of the government, and also noted that Turkey positions itself as a country that welcomes religious, cultural and ethnic diversity. As noted in the section devoted to episodes of physical violence, the disappearances and murders of preachers and ordinary believers, attacks on churches, arson, and desecration of cemeteries are recorded in Turkey. At the same time, the fact of public speaking can lead to an alleviation of the position of Christians in the country or, at least, to a decrease in negative rhetoric.

New Zealand is an example of a country that immediately took the necessary measures to ensure the safety of believers after the terrorist attack in Christchurch on March 15, 2019. On March 21, the government banned selling semi-automatic military weapons and assault rifles and concluded that the free circulation weapons should be withdrawn from citizens with an immediate refund. After the anti-Muslim terrorist attack, more than 10 thousand weapons were bought out from the population¹⁰. Thus, after the attack, the authorities changed the entire firearm storage system, ensuring compensation.

In Nigeria, the danger to Christians comes from terrorists, not from the government. In the regions of the country, there is a conflict between Muslim rebels and government forces, but Christian communities cannot count on any assistance from federal troops and are often left defenseless against militant attacks. Nevertheless, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said that the government will make every effort to free the children and other hostages

⁹ URL: http://newsru.co.il/mideast/04aug2019/church_203.html 04.08.2019

¹⁰ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/12aug2019/nz_105.html 12.08.2019

of the Boko Haram terrorist group¹¹, and then confirmed his intention, separately focusing on getting a Christian schoolgirl, Liya Sharibu, who was kidnapped by militants of Boko Haram on February 19, 2018 and is still in captivity, released.¹²

Security from terrorist attacks was ensured by the Indonesian authorities during the Christmas period of 2019. In order to avoid attacks in crowded places, 192 thousand police and military officers were allocated to guard and check parishes in all cities of the country. A spokesman for the Police Department Argo Yuwono said intelligence reports indicated the risk of potential terrorist attacks and required preventive measures. This was prudent in light of the fact that it is the holiday period that is usually chosen by terrorists as the time to strike.¹³ It is worth noting the large-scale distribution of medical supplies organized by the Myanmar authorities for believers. The commanders of the military units provided medicines, protective masks and disinfectants to religious communities, and experts conducted a mass examination of civilians.¹⁴

The German government demonstrated a prompt response to the terrorist attack in the synagogue in Halle. The authorities have repeatedly spoken out about the inadmissibility of the growth of nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiments in the society, the leaders of the Jewish communities in Europe and representatives of the world community spoke about the threat of violence based on interreligious and interracial hatred. The terrorist attack in Halle was condemned by Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier,¹⁵ Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.¹⁶ Immediate search activities were carried out and initiatives were supported to eradicate the ideology of hatred.¹⁷ On October 30, the government agreed on a nine-point

¹¹ URL: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/376636-all-children-kidnapped-by-boko-haram-would-be-freed-buhari.html> 10.02.2020

¹² URL: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/377969-again-buhari-restates-commitment-to-free-leah-sharibu-other-boko-haram-captives.html> 18.02.2020

¹³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73953> 17.12.2019

¹⁴ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/04/burmese-army-provides-disease-prevention-supplies-religious-leaders/> 04.04.2020

¹⁵ URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/> 10.10.2019

¹⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73515> 09.10.2019

¹⁷ URL: <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3197934> 10.10.2019

plan aimed at countering right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism.¹⁸ The New York city administration set itself a task of countering anti-Semitism and ensuring the safety of Jewish communities. Following a series of attacks, and more generally amid a growing number of hate incidents, the administration installed surveillance cameras in Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn.¹⁹

In Greece, members of the Pan-Hellenic Orthodox Union, a civil organization, appealed to the court with a demand to annul the decision of the Bishops' Council of the Greek Orthodox Church to recognize the schismatic structure of the OCU²⁰, the Supreme Administrative Court accepted the appeal and began consideration.²¹ The appeal to the official authority is due to the fact that in Greece, religion is not separated from the state. Attempts to amend the constitution on the separation of religion and state were rejected by parliament in November, which was positively assessed by experts: in a situation of instability and the spread of secular values, the government did not follow the lead of the liberal public and retained the old order. As the chairman of the Russian Federation Council Committee on Constitutional Law Andrei Klishas noted, “such changes for a country in which a significant part of the citizens are Orthodox can be unpredictable.”

The leadership of Ukraine changed in May 2019; Petro Poroshenko, who had supported the schismatic structure of the OCU, was replaced by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who declared equal attitude towards all religions and non-interference in the affairs of the Church. The positive trends in relations between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the new government were noted by the head of the UOC Department for External Church Relations, Archpriest Nikolai Danilevich, who said that the end of the persecution by the state can be considered a signal for a further change in the general situation. These assumptions proved to be right, the president met with the believers of the Rivne diocese, where members

¹⁸ URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/30.10.2019>

¹⁹ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/11jan2020/brooklyn305.html> 11.01.2020

²⁰ URL <https://rua.gr/news/naukaobrrel/34737-vsegrecheskij-pravoslavnyj-soyuz-podal-v-sud-na-priznaniya-ptsu.html> 21.02.2020

²¹ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200307/1568290244.html> 07.03.2020

of the oppressed community had the opportunity to tell the head of state about cases of discrimination by the regional authorities²², believers of the Chernivtsi-Bukovyna diocese asked the president not to keep Mikhail Pavlyuk at the position of the head of the Chernivtsi regional administration²³, the parishioners of the Transfiguration Church in the village of Luka-Meleshkovskaya asked for protection from hostile takovers.²⁴

The President's declared intentions to prevent religious conflicts were confirmed by consideration of legislative initiatives aimed at protecting freedom of religion: relevant bills were registered on the website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on August 29²⁵; on September 17, the Ukrainian Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov mentioned the end of conflicts based on religion as his goal.²⁶

The head of the Church, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine, Onufry attended official events, including those organized by the Verkhovna Rada²⁷, this fact speaks of a decrease in tension, as well as the fact that the metropolitan publicly supported the peace initiatives of the president.²⁸

The result was that the new officials of the regional state administrations changed their approach to cases of forced re-registration of UOC parishes, and justice began to be restored regarding the believers who became victims of the OCU supporters' aggression. As an example, we can cite the decision of the court to resume the case closed by the police on the beating of a UOC

²² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64886-vladimir-zelenskij-vstretilsya-s-verujushimi-upc-v-rovenskom-aeroportu> 10.09.2019

²³ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65396-chernovickaja-jeparkhija-obratilasy-k-prezidentu-s-prosyboj-smenity-glavu-oga> 02.10.2019

²⁴ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/10/19/parafiyani-luki-meleshkivskoj-zaklikali-prezidenta-zaxistiti-jix-xram-use-bulo-mirno-poki-ne-rozpochavsya-rozkol/> 19.10.2019

²⁵ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/09/12/u-verxovnij-radi-zarejestrovano-zakonoproekti-spryamovani-na-zaxist-viruyuchix/> 12.09.2019

²⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73356> 17.09.2019

²⁷ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/08/29/predstoyatel-prinyal-uchastie-v-torzhestvennom-zasedanii-verxovnoj-rady/?lang=ru> 29.08.2019

²⁸ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/12/05/blazhennejshij-mitropolit-onufrij-podderzhal-mirnye-iniciativy-prezidenta-v-zelenskogo/?lang=ru> 05.12.2019

priest's son,²⁹ the decision of the Lutsk city district court of the Volyn Region to enter the information on criminal offenses against Archpriest Volodymyr Meles into the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations³⁰, the promise of the Deputy Chairman of the Ukrainian President's Office Sergey Trofimov to investigate the circumstances of the forced transfer of the Chernivtsi-Bukovina diocese's parishes to the OCU jurisdiction,³¹ the Sixth Administrative Court of Appeal of Ukraine on January 22 ordered the migration service to return the citizenship to a UOC bishop Makarovskyy Gedeon,³² the Volyn District Administrative Court declared the re-registration of UOC temples in the Vollenitsa Region illegal,³³ the Donetsk Court of Appeal cancelled the transfer of the church in the village of Konstantinovka into the jurisdiction of the "Kiev Patriarchate".³⁴ In December 2019, some statistics were released, according to which Ukrainian courts had opened over 250 criminal proceedings and had held 150 trials on violations of the rights of UOC believers.³⁵ It should be mentioned that international organizations noticed the cases of oppression of religious communities, OSCE mission members visited a number of UOC parishes, which were illegally transferred to the jurisdiction of the OCU, one of them was the community in the village of Uspenki.³⁶

²⁹ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2019/10/10/na-volini-sud-skasuvav-postanovu-slidchogo-pro-zakrittya-provadhennya-shhodo-pobittya-nepovnitnogo-sinasyashhennika/> 10.10.2019

³⁰ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/05/29/na-volyni-sud-obyazal-pravoxranitelej-nachat-dosudbnoe-rassledovanie-v-otnoshenii-nezakonnogo-oformleniya-prava-sobstvennosti-na-dom-svyashhennika/?lang=ru> 29.05.2020

³¹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/11/26/situaciyu-s-nezakonnymi-pereregistraciyami-prixodov-upc-na-bukovine-izuchat-zamestitel-predsedatelya-ofisa-prezidenta-video/?lang=ru> 26.11.2019

³² URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/01/22/sud-vernul-ukrainskoe-grazhdanstvo-episkopu-gedeonu-xaronu/?lang=ru> 22.01.2020

³³ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/02/05/na-volini-ta-xmelnichchini-nezakonno-pererejetrovani-religijni-gromadi-upc-vigrayut-sudi/> 05.02.2020

³⁴ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/02/19/doneckij-apellyacionnyj-sud-priznal-perevod-xrama-upc-v-konstantinovke-v-raskol-nezakonnym/?lang=ru> 19.02.2020

³⁵ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/67040-upc-iz-za-narushenij-prav-verujushhih-za-god-otkryli-250-sudebnyh-proizvodstv> 11.12.2019

³⁶ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/02/19/missiya-obse-posetila-prixod-v-s-uspenka-aleksandrijskoj-eparxii-gde-pcu-ustroili-provokaciyu/?lang=ru> 19.02.2020

The general attitude has also changed: the Supreme Court of Ukraine rejected the claim of the Ministry of Culture against the UOC, thereby allowing the canonical church to keep its current name,³⁷ several MPs condemned the insulting publications of the country's embassy in Montenegro about the head of the UOC, Metropolitan Onuphry, after which they sent a parliamentary inquiry demanding to publish a formal denial.³⁸ In addition to this, certain Ukrainian politicians demonstrated the desire to promote traditional values in the society and to resist liberal tendencies, for instance, the head of the Batkivshchyna party Yulia Tymoshenko opposed the legalization of same-sex marriage in Ukraine.³⁹

The draft law on freedom of religion was widely discussed, representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and other religious leaders of Ukraine urged the Verkhovna Rada factions to send it back for revision,⁴⁰ Chief Rabbi of the country and Kiev Moshe Reuven Azman addressed the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky and deputies of the Verkhovna Rada with a request to finalize the draft law on combating discrimination.⁴¹ The authorities showed their willingness to cooperate, on December 17, the head of the Verkhovna Rada's Human Rights Committee, Dmitry Lubinets, said that the draft law on freedom of religion would be finalized taking into account the comments from the religious community.⁴²

The low level of anti-Semitism in the country was discussed at the Association of Jewish Communities of Ukraine.⁴³ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu highlighted the respect for the rights of

³⁷ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7358293> 16.12.2019

³⁸ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69137-deputy-trebujut-otozvaty-zajavlenije-posolstva-v-chernogorii-o-predstojatele> 01.03.2020

³⁹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67998-timoshenko-zajavila-chto-nepodderzhivajet-legalizaciju-odnopolyh-brakov> 21.01.2020

⁴⁰ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/12/02/konfesiji-ukrajini-zaklikayut-usi-parlamentski-frakciji-doopracuyvati-zakonoproekt-shhodo-svobodi-sovisti/> 02.12.2019

⁴¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73877> 03.12.2019

⁴² URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/12/18/glava-komiteta-vr-po-pravam-cheloveka-zaveril-chto-nardepy-dorabotayut-zakonoproekt-0931/?lang=ru> 18.12.2019

⁴³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73839> 27.11.2019

Jewish believers and Ukraine's contribution to the fight against anti-Semitism.⁴⁴

The information collected over the year shows the stable development of government/religious dialogue in Russia, which was manifested in the development of bills aimed at improving the conditions of communities and regulating the legal aspects of religious organizations' activities, in taking measures to ensure the security of temples, synagogues and mosques, to protect traditional values and to promote interethnic and interreligious tolerance.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia mentioned the high level of state-confessional dialogue in Russia.⁴⁵ The progress in maintaining the stability of the state and interreligious and interethnic peace were repeatedly emphasized. Russian President Vladimir Putin noted the contribution of Islamic organizations into this dialogue,⁴⁶ Dmitry Medvedev, who at that time headed the Russian government, highly appreciated the influence of the Muslim part of the population on countering the ideology of extremism.⁴⁷ The head of state highlighted the contribution of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia in promoting traditional values and developing interethnic and interreligious dialogue.⁴⁸ The success in ensuring a low level of anti-Semitism was noted by Sam Grundweg, a representative of the Jewish Keren Hayesod Foundation, who expressed gratitude to President of Russia Vladimir Putin for this.⁴⁹ Gila Gamliel, Minister for Social Equality of Israel, mentioned Russia's contribution to the fight against anti-Semitism.⁵⁰

At the regional level, religious associations collaborated with local authorities to address various social issues, as in Tula Region.⁵¹

⁴⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73199> 19.08.2019

⁴⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74207> 02.02.2020

⁴⁶ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/12/putin-pozdravil-musulman-s-prazdnikom-kurban-bajram/> 12.08.2019

⁴⁷ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/12/putin-pozdravil-musulman-s-prazdnikom-kurban-bajram/> 12.08.2019

⁴⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74172> 28.01.2020

⁴⁹ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/09/17/evrei-nazvali-ocen-nizkim-uroven-antisemitizma-v-rossii/> 17.09.2019

⁵⁰ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74100> 16.01.2020

⁵¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73146> 07.08.2019

The construction of religious sites for believers of all denominations has reached an impressive scale. The government set itself a task to provide the opportunity to attend services for as many people as possible, for this purpose churches, synagogues and mosques are being built. In August, in the city of Shali in the Chechen Republic, a mosque called “Pride of Muslims” was opened. By its size, it exceeds all mosques in Europe.⁵² As can be seen from the cases of giving old Christian, Jewish and Muslim buildings to of religious communities (this was done in the city of Syzran, where the building of the former synagogue at Kirov Street was returned to the Jewish community free of charge⁵³), the large-scale Program-200, a project for the construction of Orthodox churches in Moscow — crossed the “equator” in 2019: the construction of the hundredth temple complex was completed.⁵⁴ According to January reports, the number of complexes has reached 240, which exceeds the original program scope.⁵⁵ As the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia said, summing up the results of 2019, “by December 1, the number of churches and chapels in the city of Moscow was 1,198,” which is 19 objects more than in 2018.⁵⁶ A total of 18 mosques and three Muslim centers have opened in the Republic of Tatarstan.⁵⁷ In 2020, the construction of temples continued, as the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities, Rabbi Alexander Boroda, said, synagogues will open in four cities of Russia.⁵⁸ The construction of the Program-200 complexes was not stopped even after the beginning of the quarantine — the curator of the program, State Duma member Vladimir Resin said that the main work within the program was focused on project documentation. Repair and restoration works of monasteries in Russia is underway: for example, the restoration of the Novodevichy Convent will be completed

⁵² URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/06/v-cecne-otkrout-gordost-musulman/> 06.08.2019

⁵³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73243> 28.08.2019

⁵⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73263> 02.09.2019

⁵⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74166> 27.01.2020

⁵⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73970> 20.12.2019

⁵⁷ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200109/1563206202.html> 09.01.2019

⁵⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73464> 02.10.2019

in 2022, the restoration of the Solovetsky Monastery is under the control of the Culture Ministry.⁵⁹

In order to reduce the risk of terrorist attacks, the Russian authorities have introduced compulsory conditions that must be adhered to by facilities hosting religious events. Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev approved the requirements for anti-terrorist protection in the first ten days of September 2019.⁶⁰ In February 2019, the process intensified: on February 20, the President of Russia at the FSB board raised the issue of suppressing manifestations of religious hatred, extremism and nationalism and demanded the security service to take decisive actions and active work with people of different generations.⁶¹ The head of the Legal Department of the Moscow Patriarchate Abbess Ksenia (Chernega) announced the implementation of these measures five days later.⁶²

The controversial situation that arose around the construction of the St. Catherine Cathedral in Yekaterinburg, caused a wide public outcry. Opponents of the temple construction condemned the construction of a church in the park, there were provocations that could lead to an open conflict between the parties. The conflict situation was resolved in a legal way, in addition, the federal and regional authorities took a number of preemptive measures to prevent anti-Orthodox provocations. The authorities promptly intervened in what was happening and the Yekaterinburg city administration ensured the ROC unhindered construction of the temple at any of the sites chosen by the diocese. Assistance was provided in conducting the poll, the course of which, according to the press secretary of the Russian President Dmitry Peskov, will be monitored in the Kremlin.⁶³

Russian President called the protection of traditional values “the guarantee of the state’s stability.”⁶⁴ As part of the stating common moral and ethical values, the leader spoke out strongly against

⁵⁹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73573> 18.10.2019

⁶⁰ URL: <https://ria.ru/20190911/1558567968.html> 11.09.2019

⁶¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74300> 20.02.2020

⁶² URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74320> 25.02.2020

⁶³ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6979217> 09.10.2019

⁶⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73320> 12.09.2019

legalizing same-sex marriages.⁶⁵ The topic of protecting traditional values was continued in the discussion of amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Among the amendments that were directly related to the religious sphere, we can single out including the mention of God into the text of the preamble, capturing in the preamble of the fundamental law the concept of marriage as a union of a man and a woman. The initiative, originally suggested by the World Russian People's Council, was supported by the Russian Orthodox Church,⁶⁶ Jewish and Muslim religious leaders, as well as statespersons (in particular, it was supported by the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, Rabbi Alexander Boroda,⁶⁷ Supreme Mufti of Russia Talgat Tadzhuiddin,⁶⁸ the head of the State Duma Committee for the Development of Civil Society Sergei Gavrilov voiced his approval;⁶⁹ in the Russian church, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, said that the mention of God in the Constitution of the Russian Federation does not contradict the secular nature of the state).⁷⁰ Russian President Vladimir Putin personally introduced the corresponding amendments into the legislative document.⁷¹ The amendment was adopted by the State Duma members on March 10.⁷²

The promotion of the values was conducted through educational activities. For example, the former head of the Culture Ministry, Vladimir Medinsky, said that over 130 events dedicated to the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Alexander Nevsky will be held throughout Russia, aimed, among other things, at popularizing the name of the saint in media and social networks.⁷³

⁶⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74257> 13.02.2020

⁶⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74195> 31.01.2020

⁶⁷ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200306/1568262295.html> 06.03.2020

⁶⁸ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200303/1568116704.html> 03.03.2020

⁶⁹ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200212/1564598559.html> 12.02.2020

⁷⁰ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74267> 15.02.2020

⁷¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74348> 02.03.2020

⁷² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69350-gosduma-rossii-prinyala-popravku-v-konstituciju-o-boge> 10.03.2020

⁷³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73308> 10.09.2019

The US government took steps to protect traditional values. It was the support of traditional values and opposing abortions that were identified as priorities for the United States.⁷⁴ This can be seen in the actions of Donald Trump in this sphere: on January 22, he signed a proclamation declaring this date the National Sanctity of Human Life Day,⁷⁵ and on January 24, he supported the anti-abortion movement, speaking at the national March for Life.⁷⁶ The events are remarkable in that they reflect a certain shift in the mindset of the American leadership, which is mainly caused by the figure of the president. Before Donald Trump, no US president in office attended the anti-abortion march. The American leader's speech two days earlier, when the proclamation on the sanctity of human life was signed, serves as further evidence of the US commitment to the fight against abortions: Donald Trump said in his address that he personally intends to "continue to fight to protect the lives of the unborn," and noted, that human life is significant from the moment of conception until death. The president concluded by calling on Congress to stop late abortions of children who can already feel pain. An important step to protect believers amid the growing number of anti-Semitic incidents was to underline the unacceptability of hate crimes and terrorist acts: The Federal Attorney's Office demanded that Robert Bowers, the shooter who killed 11 believers at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, be sentenced to death.⁷⁷

In the neighboring Canada, two high-profile lawsuits were reported. In Ontario, James Sears, editor-in-chief of *Your Ward News*, was sentenced to 12 months in prison for promoting sectarian hatred.⁷⁸ The charge included propaganda of hatred based on religion, gender and ethnicity. The editor was right-wing and founded the New Constitution Party. The case was also opened against the magazine's

⁷⁴ URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/10/23/pompeo-religious-freedom-and-pro-life-goals-are-among-top-us-priorities/> 23.10.2019

⁷⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68032-prezident-ssha-obyavil-22-janvaryadnem-svyatosti-chelovecheskoj-zhizni> 22.01.2020

⁷⁶ URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/22/us/politics/trump-march-for-life.html> 22.01.2020

⁷⁷ URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/society/2700079.html> 27.08.2019

⁷⁸ URL: <http://newsru.co.il/world/25aug2019/sears444.html> 25.08.2019

publisher Leroy Saint-Germain. The results of this trial were highly praised by the Center for Israel and Jewish Affairs in Canada. The general trend was manifested in the expulsion of politician Eric Schomann from the Green Party of Canada in connection to his offensive publications on social networks directed against Muslims.⁷⁹ These examples suggest that Canada has been successfully implementing the policy of eradicating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric at all levels, and is working to prevent the spread of radical ideas that, as the example of US New York State shows, can lead to a surge in hate-motivated violence.

Muslim rights were supported in Europe, Oceania, and Asia. Slovenia has shown a trend towards expanding the rights of Muslims — on February 4, the country's first multifunctional Islamic center with a mosque was opened in Ljubljana.⁸⁰ In Australia and Holland, Muslim communities have been allowed to build mosques and call believers to prayer through loudspeakers.⁸¹ In Belgium, the universities of Leuven and Louvain have announced the possibility of opening educational programs for Muslim clergy.⁸² France demonstrated its adherence to the principles of upholding the rights of believers, when political journalist Eric Zemmour was sentenced to a fine of 3,000 euros for his Islamophobic statements.⁸³

A notable event of the state-confessional dialogue in Asian countries was the four-day summit of leaders and representatives of 20 Islamic countries in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia). The meeting was attended by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Indonesian Vice President Ma'ruf Amin. During the summit, they discussed the problems faced by Muslim countries in the world,

⁷⁹ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/09/17/v-kanade-politik-lisilsa-dolznosti-iz-za-napadok-na-musulman/> 17.09.2019

⁸⁰ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68466-v-slovenii-otkryli-pervuju-v-stranemechety> 05.02.2020

⁸¹ URL: <https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/9363005.html> 17.11.2019

⁸² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68668-v-belygii-dva-katolicheskikh-universiteta-nachnut-obuchaty-imamov> 13.02.2020

⁸³ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/09/20/vo-francii-pisatela-ostrofovaliza-islamofobiu/> 20.09.2019

including the situation in Kashmir, Syria, Yemen and the oppression of Muslims from the Rohingya people in China.⁸⁴

4.1.2. The Government/Religious Dialogue In the COVID-19 Pandemic Conditions

During the quarantine period related to the coronavirus pandemic, important were the governments' actions, their respect for believers when restricting mass worship, closing churches, synagogues and mosques for quarantine, interference or non-interference in church life (in a number of countries, the authorities banned the communion sacrament). In a number of countries, due to the spread of coronavirus infection and the imposed quarantine, the authorities have found ways of mutually beneficial interaction with religious organizations and avoided discriminatory bans on worship. One of the leading states in this respect was Russia, where restrictions on the conducting worship services were not just unforced, but were also accepted and supported by traditional religions: the support was voiced by the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, Rabbi Alexander Boroda,⁸⁵ Chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's Society and the Mass Media Relations Vladimir Legoyda,⁸⁶ Chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia and Mufti of Moscow Albir Krganov.⁸⁷

In its turn, the state supported the churches, as evidenced by the initiative of the St. Petersburg city authorities on providing assistance to parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in organizing the broadcast of services,⁸⁸ and the proposal of the Russian Energy Ministry to reduce the price of gas for religious organizations by 20%.⁸⁹ The issue of assisting religious organizations affected by the crisis was discussed in Germany, where the head of the Central Council of Muslims, Ayman Maziek, asked the government to help mosques facing the threat of bankruptcy due to the crisis. In his turn,

⁸⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73958> 18.12.2019

⁸⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74593> 03.04.2020

⁸⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74729> 16.04.2020

⁸⁷ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74446> 16.03.2020

⁸⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74550> 29.03.2020

⁸⁹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74583> 02.04.2020

the head of the Central Council, along with a member of the Liberal Islamic Association of Germany, Lamyia Kaddor, urged believers to stay at home during the month of Ramadan, which contributed to the success of quarantine measures.⁹⁰

Among the countries where, within the framework of quarantine, religious organizations have expressed their readiness to help the government are Romania, Ukraine, Egypt, Georgia, and Japan. In Tajikistan, the ban on collective prayers in mosques was lifted after the first news of a decrease in the number of cases of infection — the head of the press service of the Tajik government's Committee on Religious Affairs, Afshin Mukim announced the lifting of the ban on collective prayers in mosques introduced in early March.⁹¹

In Ukraine, in this situation, anti-church forces intensified, such as activists of the OCU and malevolent officials, who voiced false accusations of violating quarantine and spreading an epidemic against clerics and ordinary believers. In this regard, MP Oleksandr Kachny urged the Interior Minister Arsen Avakov to ensure a prompt and effective investigation of the crimes committed against the Orthodox Church during the pandemic⁹². Among the positive aspects of the dialogue in the context of the pandemic, we should mention the assurance of the head of the Ukrainian National Police, Igor Klimenko, that police officers would not prevent believers from attending churches on Easter.⁹³ This was of great importance for believers, who were limited in their ability to attend Easter services due to the quarantine. It is necessary to point out the fact that the government of Ukraine did not prohibit holding services without parishioners, despite the misinterpretation of restrictions in the regions (for more details, see the “Discrimination” section).

⁹⁰ URL:<https://www.dw.com/ru/лидеры-мусульман-германии-считают-нераспространение-вируса-приоритетом-нынешнего-рамадана/a-53216432> 23.04.2020

⁹¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74472> 19.03.2020

⁹² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70916-ministra-mvd-prizvali-obespechity-rassledovaniye-prestuplenij-protiv-upc> 28.04.2020

⁹³ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/04/09/glava-nacionalnoj-policii-poobeshhal-chto-v-ukraine-ne-budut-siloi-vyvodit-veruyushhix-iz-cerkvej-na-pasxu/?lang=ru> 09.04.2020

4.1.3. State Assistance to World's Religious Communities

The dialogue between the state and various religious organizations is not limited to interaction within the country and the protection of freedom of religion in a particular state. Countries having influence at the world stage can use their position to help religious communities in other countries in case of persecution. Authorities and spiritual leaders can also contribute to the solution of universal human challenges and overcoming crises.

Russia is a prominent defender of the rights of Christians in countries where they are persecuted. Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly raised the question of the importance of preserving traditional values and ensuring a safety for representatives of Christian confessions in the Middle East. At a meeting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, the President stressed Russia's commitment to protecting Christians in the Middle Eastern states and expressed concern about the use of the schism in the Orthodox world by external political forces to achieve their geopolitical goals.⁹⁴

Russia is taking significant steps to overcome the humanitarian crisis in Syria: on December 3, Moscow hosted the 24th meeting of the Working Group on interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Foreign Ministry on the protection of the rights of believers and assistance in helping the population of Syria.⁹⁵ One of the priority areas in support of Syrian Christians is the reconstruction of shrines and temples destroyed by militants. In this area, Russia cooperates with local believers and community leaders. The joint restoration of a mosque in the province of Essaweida serves as an example of the state's comprehensive assistance to believers, including followers of Islam, who have suffered from the actions of extremists. Russian military personnel and representatives of Syrian clergy were involved in the reconstruction of the temple.⁹⁶

Russia has also shown itself to be a party that draws attention to the problems of Orthodox churches in Europe. Russia's Permanent

⁹⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73804> 20.11.2019

⁹⁵ URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/12/03/news180810/> 03.12.2019

⁹⁶ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/8041621> 21.03.2020

Representative to the OSCE Alexander Lukashevich said that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine should pay close attention to the persecution of the UOC.⁹⁷ In December, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed the world community with an appeal to protect the rights of Orthodox believers in Montenegro.⁹⁸

Representatives of different countries have joined to conduct campaigns against anti-Semitism. The need for a general confrontation of this ideology was declared in 2019 by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin.⁹⁹ Greece and Cyprus have joined the fight against anti-Semitism: the governments of these countries have signed an agreement on coordinating joint actions to eradicate anti-Semitism with the Jewish Sokhnut agency.¹⁰⁰

International organizations have taken steps to protect religious communities and their constitutional rights. One of the steps was the adoption by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly of a resolution on the protection of the rights of believers in the workplace.¹⁰¹

The leaders of Western countries have declared their desire to make every effort to protect Christians around the world. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke about the need for their protection,¹⁰² French President Emmanuel Macron established a special fund to finance Christian schools in the Middle East.¹⁰³

The United States took a number of restrictive measures against the persecutors of Christians: on December 19, the US imposed financial sanctions against Iranian judges Abolghassem Salawati and Mohammad Moghiseh, who were involved in violating the rights of

⁹⁷ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200211/1564554451.html> 11.02.2020

⁹⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74034> 30.12.2019

⁹⁹ URL: http://newsru.co.il/israel/29dec2019/antisemit_703.html 29.12.2019

¹⁰⁰ URL: http://newsru.co.il/world/14jan2020/ea_202.html 14.01.2020

¹⁰¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68793-pase-prinyala-rezolyuciju-o-zashhite-prav-verujushhih-na-rabochem-meste> 18.02.2020

¹⁰² URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/12/24/boris-johnson-we-will-stand-up-for-persecuted-christians/> 24.12.2019

¹⁰³ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/world/news/2020-01/e-makron-podderzhit-hristianskie-shkoly.html> 30.01.2020

Christians to freedom of religion.¹⁰⁴ Besides, the United States has made efforts to ensure the rights and safety of believers in countries where religious communities are oppressed. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov, highlighting the country's progress in protecting religious freedoms;¹⁰⁵ the ministry declared its close work with the Commission on Religious Freedom and the steps taken to ensure the rights of believers.¹⁰⁶ The Secretary of State also urged the government of Montenegro to start a dialogue with the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding the country's law on religious associations.¹⁰⁷

There was active work to improve the situation of Christians in India and Pakistan: the State Department expressed concern about the deterioration of the situation with the provision of religious freedom in India,¹⁰⁸ this issue was raised by US President Donald Trump at a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.¹⁰⁹ At the initiative of US Ambassador-at-Large Sam Brownback, the Department of State stepped up its efforts to free 14-year-old Christian girl Huma Younus, who was kidnapped in October 2019, whose kidnappers were acquitted by the court despite evidence gathered by the family. A number of meetings have been held with some powerful people who may influence the re-examination of the case.¹¹⁰ The US Commission on Religious Freedom has also expressed concern about the denial of food aid to the Christian and Hindu communities in Pakistan.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2019/12/19/us-sanctions-iranian-judge-complicit-christian-persecution/> 19.12.2019

¹⁰⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74209> 03.02.2020

¹⁰⁶ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200429/1570743375.html> 29.04.2020

¹⁰⁷ URL:<https://mitropolija.com/2020/02/29/drzavni-sekretar-sad-podrzavamo-transparentan-dijalog-vlade-crne-gore-sa-srpskom-pravoslavnom-crkvom/> 29.02.2020

¹⁰⁸ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/08/u-s-leaders-express-concern-deteriorating-religious-freedom-india/> 08.02.2020

¹⁰⁹ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/26/president-trump-discusses-concerns-religious-freedom-india-prime-minister-modi/> 26.02.2020

¹¹⁰ URL:<https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/07/state-department-escalates-pressure-pakistan-return-abducted-teen/> 07.04.2020

¹¹¹ URL:<https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-troubled-denial-food-aid-pakistani-hindus-and-christians> 13.04.2020

4.2. Interfaith Dialogue

4.2.1. *Inter-Orthodox Relations*

News concerning inter-Orthodox relations make up the majority of the messages processed during the year. It was in the Orthodox world that the most pressing issues were discussed; accordingly, the dialogue was the most active. This was due to the fact that the anti-canonical actions of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople forced the Orthodox Churches to reconsider their relations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In addition, it became necessary to actively support the oppressed Churches (Ukrainian and Serbian), expressing an active position regarding the schism in the global Orthodoxy.

A dialogue was maintained between the Churches at the level of holding worship services and mutual visits of hierarchs: from July 30 to August 4, the hierarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Bishop Jovan of Pakrac and Slavonia, paid a visit to the Russian Orthodox Church.¹¹² On August 19, the bishops of the Serbian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches concelebrated on the day of the Transfiguration of the Lord.¹¹³ The Primate of the Polish Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Savva of Warsaw and All Poland, served the Divine Liturgy, which was attended by UOC Bishop Simon of the Shakhty and Millerovsky, who took part in the celebrations at the Suprasl Monastery (Poland) dedicated to the Annunciation of Blessed Virgin Mary.¹¹⁴ A meeting of the Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irenaeus, and the head of the UOC representative office to European international organizations, Bishop Viktor of Baryshevka took place in Belgrade (Serbia), on January 30.¹¹⁵ On February 24, Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria met with the hierarch of the UOC, Metropolitan Varsonofy of Vinnitsa and Bar.¹¹⁶

¹¹²URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/08/06/news176631/> 06.08.2019

¹¹³URL: <http://mitropolija.com/2019/08/19/crkva-preobrazenja-na-kljuckom-tavoru-proslavila-hramovnu-slavu/> 19.08.2019

¹¹⁴URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/08/11/news176733/> 11.08.2019

¹¹⁵URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68317-jepiskop-viktor-vstretitsya-s-predstojatelem-serbskoj-pravoslavnoj-cerkvi> 30.01.2020

¹¹⁶URL: <http://www.bg-patriarshia.bg/news.php?id=314131> 24.02.2020

An important event in the interfaith dialogue was the reunification of the Archdiocese of Russian tradition's Western European parishes with the Russian Orthodox Church, which Patriarch Kirill called an important step towards strengthening the unity of Orthodoxy. On November 3, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia presented Archbishop John of Dubna with a letter on the restoration of the unity of the Archdiocese of Western European parishes of the Russian tradition with the ROC.¹¹⁷ Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, said that the Russian Orthodox Church made every effort to ensure that the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe could join the Moscow Patriarchate.¹¹⁸ The integration was supported by the absolute majority of the clergy of the Archdiocese.¹¹⁹ The final unification was highly praised by Patriarch Kirill, who stated that the reunification of the Archdiocese of the Western European parishes of the Russian tradition with the ROC put an end to the long-term church schism.¹²⁰

The interference of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine and, according to many estimates, the politically motivated granting of tomos of autocephaly to the schismatic structure of the OCU met criticism and rejection of representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches as a meddling into the affairs of an independent church that is contrary to the canons. The provision of tomos to a schismatic structure that had the support from the authorities (at that time, the government of President Petro Poroshenko), caused an increase in physical violence and a level of discrimination against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, performed by supporters of the OCU in power, both federal and regional, and radicals, who began to attack the parishes and believers. To legitimize the split in the OCU, it was necessary to obtain the support and recognition of the local churches. Some churches immediately rejected the possibility of recognizing the schism and

¹¹⁷ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73690> 03.11.2019

¹¹⁸ URL: <https://ria.ru/20190911/1558583342.html> 11.09.2019

¹¹⁹ URL: <https://ria.ru/20190928/1559238379.html> 28.09.2019

¹²⁰ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/6974078> 08.10.2019

expressed support for the church led by Metropolitan Onufriy. These were the Serbian,¹²¹ Polish Orthodox Churches.¹²² The Church's support was expressed by Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria,¹²³ hierarch of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Bishop Evlogiy of Adrianople,¹²⁴ Primate of the Cypriot Orthodox Church, Archbishop Chrysostom,¹²⁵ hierarch of the Cypriot Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou,¹²⁶ Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, Patriarch Tikhon.¹²⁷

The OCU was officially recognized by the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and All Greece, but this action, according to the head of the UOC Department of External Church Relations, Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, caused a split in the Church of Greece itself. This opinion is confirmed by the fact that even at the stage of discussing the issue, the recognition of the OCU caused doubts among the members of the Church: about 200 clergy, monks and believers of the Greek Orthodox Church published an open letter to the hierarchs of the Church with an appeal not to recognize the OCU and support the UOC,¹²⁸ a similar call was signed by 1,962 members of the Greek Orthodox Church.¹²⁹ Abbess Thekla, the head of the Holy Trinity Monastery of the Greek Orthodox Church, did not allow the "clergy" of the OCU to perform divine

¹²¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65370-patriarkh-irinej-moja-podderzhka-blazhenijshego-onufrija-ne-stanet-menyshaj> 01.10.2019

¹²² URL: <https://www.orthodox.pl/komunikat-kancelarii-sw-soboru-biskupow-10-30.10.2019>

¹²³ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/12/09/mitropolit-zhitomirskij-nikodim-vstretilsya-s-patriarhom-bolgarskim-neofitom/?lang=ru> 09.12.2019

¹²⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69113-ijerarkh-upc-posetil-krupnejshij-stavropigialnyj-monastyry-bolgarskoj-cerkvi> 29.02.2020

¹²⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65578-glava-kiprskoj-cerkvi-ob-ukrainskom-voprose-ja-svoej-pozicii-ne-menyaju> 10.10.2019

¹²⁶ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/12/03/kiprskij-ierarx-my-cerkov-kipra-priznaem-kanonicheskim-mitropolita-onufriya-video/?lang=ru> 03.12.2019

¹²⁷ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/66984-glava-rpc-poblagodaril-pravoslavnuju-cerkovy-v-amerike-za-podderzhku-upc> 08.12.2019

¹²⁸ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/09/12/svyashhenniki-monaxi-i-miryane-elladskoj-cerkvi-prosyat-svoix-ierarxov-podderzhat-upc-i-ee-predstoyatelya-pismo/?lang=ru> 12.09.2019

¹²⁹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65365-prizyv-ne-priznavaty-pcu-podpisali-uzhe-pochti-2000-chlenov-elladskoj-cerkvi> 30.09.2019

services in the monastery,¹³⁰ demonstrating that she did not recognize their “priesthood”. After the autocephaly of the OCU was recognized at the extraordinary Council of Hierarchs of the Greek Orthodox Church on October 12,¹³¹ the hierarchs of the Greek Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythyr and Antikythera, and Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus, openly opposed the decision and contested the legitimacy of the Bishop’s Council¹³², and Metropolitan Nektarios of Corfu and Paxi supposed that the decision was made under pressure from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.¹³³

For this reason, the Russian Orthodox Church made a decision to partially break off Eucharistic communion with the Church of Greece: on November 3, 2019, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia for the first time did not mention Archbishop Jerome II among the primates of the Local Orthodox Churches.¹³⁴

The Moscow Patriarchate commented on this decision, noting that communication will continue with those hierarchs and clergy who do not share the position of the head of the church and refuse to recognize the Ukrainian schismatic union.

Later, the decision to recognize the OCU was made by the Primate of the Alexandrian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Theodore II.¹³⁵ The reaction was the announcement of braking Eucharistic and prayer communion with Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria, made on December 26 by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.¹³⁶ It is noteworthy that after the decision to recognize the OCU, about 30 priests of the Alexandrian Patriarchate from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia called for its reconsideration.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ URL: <https://rua.gr/news/naukaobrrrel/33468-kto-eti-ryazhennye-v-ryasakh-nastoyatel'nitsa-grecheskogo-monastyrya-ne-pustila-svyashchennikov-ptsu.html> 12.11.2019

¹³¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73531> 13.10.2019

¹³² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65679-dva-grecheskikh-ijerarkha-nazvali-nedejstvityelnymi-reshenija-sobora-po-pcu> 15.10.2019

¹³³ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65864-mitropolit-korfu-o-priznanii-pcu-dumaju-na-predstojatelya-davili-s-fanara> 22.10.2019

¹³⁴ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7075462> 03.11.2019

¹³⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73730> 08.11.2019

¹³⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74025> 26.12.2019

¹³⁷ URL: <https://ria.ru/20191217/1562483705.html> 17.12.2019

As a response to the challenges the Orthodox world had faced due to the recognition of the schism, the Pan-Orthodox Council of Primates was organized in Amman (Jordan). The meeting was the first gathering aimed at avoiding a deepening schism, according to Patriarch Kirill's definition, "the first attempt at a conciliar solution" of urgent problems.¹³⁸ The Russian Church expressed its satisfaction with the meeting.¹³⁹ The DECR chairman Metropolitan Hilarion said that the meeting is an important stage in overcoming the split in the global Orthodoxy.¹⁴⁰ Despite the fact that Patriarch Bartholomew refused to attend the meeting, the head of the DECR noted that the ROC would continue the inter-Orthodox dialogue even if the Patriarchate of Constantinople refused to negotiate.¹⁴¹

Members of the Council of Primates in Amman (Jordan) expressed solidarity with the Serbian Orthodox Church and urged the Montenegrin government to respect the Montenegrin-Primorsky Metropolitan and its property rights.¹⁴²

Prior to the meeting, various media outlets, some of which are Ukrainian, published a number of messages about consent or refusal to participate in the Council, as they previously published information about the recognition of the OCU by the church leaders. Information of this kind could be interpreted as agreement with the policy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Some reports turned out to be false, and the Maronite Patriarchate (the Maronite Patriarchate had previously denied false reports about the recognition of the OCU¹⁴³) and the Polish Church came out with their refutation.¹⁴⁴

Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem declared his firm support for the UOC as the only canonical church in Ukraine¹⁴⁵ (he also

¹³⁸ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200311/1568435982.html> 11.03.2020

¹³⁹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74331> 27.02.2020

¹⁴⁰ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200221/1565029554.html> 21.02.2020

¹⁴¹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74330> 27.02.2020

¹⁴² URL: <https://ria.ru/20200226/1565255256.html> 26.02.2020

¹⁴³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73465> 02.10.2019

¹⁴⁴ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200127/1563945702.html> 27.01.2020

¹⁴⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73288> 05.09.2019

initiated a pan-Orthodox discussion of the Orthodox agenda in Amman¹⁴⁶).

The Council of Primates discussed issues of oppression of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, expressed unanimous support and hope for a solution to the situation. The meeting received a positive response from the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, who highly appreciated the desire of church leaders to find a canonical solution to the issue,¹⁴⁷ and Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine Onufry. After the Council, the Primate of the UOC visited Montenegro, where he led the processions of the cross believers in the Serbian Patriarchate. The visit was criticized by the Ukrainian Embassy in Montenegro and angered opponents of the canonical Serbian Church, in particular, in the media. During the visit, Metropolitan Onufry expressed full support for the canonical Serbian Orthodox Church, which faced oppression from the government, and noted the similarity of situations in Ukraine in 2018–2019. and the current state of the SOC^{148,149}.

The oppression of the believers of the Serbian Church has become one of the main issues of interfaith dialogue since December, when a law on religious associations was adopted in Montenegro and some news was spread about the possible transfer of the shrines of the Montenegrin-Primorsky Metropolitan of the Serbian Patriarchate to the possession of the schismatic Montenegrin Church. In addition to Metropolitan Onufry, support for the SOC was expressed by the Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, Metropolitan Tikhon,¹⁵⁰ representatives of the UOC¹⁵¹ and the Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73810> 21.11.2019

¹⁴⁷ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200311/1568435982.html> 11.03.2020

¹⁴⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74335> 28.02.2020

¹⁴⁹ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2020/02/28/my-zdes-chtoby-podderzhat-vas-kak-brat-brata-blazhennejshij-mitropolit-onufrij-dal-press-konferenciyu-v-podgorice/?lang=ru#more-384637> 28.02.2020

¹⁵⁰ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67832-pravoslavnaja-cerkovy-v-amerike-podderzhala-chernogorskiju-mitropoliju> 14.01.2020

¹⁵¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68219-predstaviteli-upc-prinyali-uchastije-v-protestnom-krestnom-khode-v-chernogorii> 28.01.2020

¹⁵² URL: <https://ria.ru/20191228/1562964689.html> 28.12.2019

4.2.2. Communication of Confessions

Part of the news processed over the year was about the interaction of leaders of different confessions in promoting human rights, resolving conflicts in disadvantaged countries, helping the poor, humanitarian initiatives, and protecting the rights of Christians. An important aspect is the strengthening of cultural and humanitarian interaction, the coordination of common actions in the search for solutions to the problems existing in the modern world, including the search for answers to the challenges that modern secularized culture poses to the global Christianity.

Among the meetings of Christian leaders discussing the issues of mutual cooperation, we should single out the meeting of the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia with the Catholicos of the East and Metropolitan of Malankara, Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II. The leaders discussed assistance to persecuted Christians in different parts of the world, primarily in the Middle East, as well as issues of social service and student exchange.¹⁵³

According to the head of the secretariat for Inter-Christian Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), the Russian Orthodox Church is active in interfaith dialogue and develops interaction "with all parts of the Christian world that remain committed to traditional evangelical norms."¹⁵⁴ As part of the interfaith dialogue, the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, met with a group of youth of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists.¹⁵⁵ The major issues of cooperation were the promotion of Christian values in the modern world, a joint search for answers to the challenges that Christian communities are facing, assistance to Christians in countries where they are persecuted. These topics were also discussed at the conversation between Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Pope Francis, which took place in the Vatican on

¹⁵³ URL: <https://ria.ru/20190903/1558186670.html> 03.09.2019

¹⁵⁴ URL: <https://ria.ru/20190903/1558186670.html> 03.09.2019

¹⁵⁵ URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2020/02/16/news182951/> 16.02.2020

February 13,¹⁵⁶ four years after the historic meeting of Patriarch Kirill with Pope Francis on February 12, 2016 in Havana, when the main directions of the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue were outlined. A month earlier, on January 13, the current state of these relations had been discussed by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk and Catholic Bishop Joseph Vert.¹⁵⁷

Among the important events of the interfaith dialogue, we should point out the meeting of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the appeal of Pope Francis to the Orthodox world with a statement about the need to unite efforts to preserve traditional values.¹⁵⁸ Earlier, on August 30, the pontiff noted the importance of the cooperation between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in opposing the spread of secular values.¹⁵⁹

Communication between the leaders of Christian religions was not interrupted during the coronavirus pandemic. On April 12, on the occasion of the Easter holiday, the Patriarch appealed to the heads of the Churches with an appeal to unite efforts in establishing moral values. The Primate also stated the need to support the unprotected population from the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁶⁰ In the Orthodox-Catholic relations, an important role is played by the academic sphere, which is promoted by the so-called Summer Institutes — short trips for representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, during which the delegation meets with the heads of the Synodal departments of the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, in 2019, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church visited the Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Service of the Moscow Patriarchate¹⁶¹ and met with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68687-v-vatikane-proshla-vstrecha-papy-rimskogo-franciska-i-mitropolita-ilariona> 13.02.2020

¹⁵⁷ URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5562503.html> 13.01.2020

¹⁵⁸ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/8281039> 19.04.2020

¹⁵⁹ URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/09/13/pope-francis-explains-decision-to-give-relics-of-st-peter-to-orthodox/> 13.09.2019

¹⁶⁰ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74681> 12.04.2020

¹⁶¹ URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/08/27/news176892/> 27.08.2019

¹⁶² URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/08/30/news176954/> 30.08.2019

An important role is played by the activities of the Christian church leaders of in resolving conflicts in African countries. The Pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church has repeatedly advocated an end to armed confrontations and mass unrest, and on November 13, 2019, he joined his efforts with the head of the Church of England, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. The parties discussed the situation of Christians in the world and the critical situation in South Sudan,¹⁶³ which resulted in a joint appeal urging the country's authorities to resolve the conflict as soon as possible.¹⁶⁴

4.3. Inter-Religious Dialogue

4.3.1. Mutual Assistance in the Relations between Religions

Interreligious dialogue in the world is of particular importance for the coexistence of representatives of different faiths and the prevention of conflicts on religious grounds, joint opposition to the current challenges and oppression. An important element of the dialogue is the mutual assistance of different religions in critical conditions.

Within the framework of the interreligious dialogue, meetings and agreements between representatives of different religions, clergymen and ordinary believers were reported. The dialogue was aimed at achieving peace among representatives of different denominations and consolidating the efforts of representatives of traditional religions to preserve common values.

The events included the development of the reached agreements, cooperation in strengthening stability and interethnic, interreligious harmony. Also cited are citizens' initiatives demonstrating community interaction.

A bright example of the dialogue at the international level was the creation of a committee for the Declaration of Brotherhood, which was signed by Pope Francis and the Supreme Imam of

¹⁶³ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2019-11/papa-i-arhiepiscope-kenterberijskij-namereny-vmeste-posetit-yuzhn.html> 14.11.2019

¹⁶⁴ URL: <https://ria.ru/20191225/1562825680.html> 25.12.2019

Al-Azar University Ahmad al-Tayyib on February 4, 2019.¹⁶⁵ The Committee for the Implementation of the Declaration of Human Brotherhood was established in Abu Dhabi, its responsibilities include the development of projects promoting the practical implementation of the Declaration on Human Brotherhood's goals in order to maintain harmonious relations between the peoples of the world and their prosperous coexistence. At the regional and international level, assistance will be provided to hold meetings of religious leaders, heads of international organizations.

The dialogue at the international level was supported by the "Religions for Peace" World Congress held on August 20 in Lindau (Germany), where the opening of the X Assembly of the Congress took place,¹⁶⁶ and on December 11-13 in New York (USA).¹⁶⁷ On August 20, about 900 religious leaders, representatives of religious communities and government organizations from 125 countries met in Landau to discuss the promotion of peace and ways to prevent violent conflicts, supporting a harmonious society and protecting the environment. More than 200 representatives of various religious traditions took part in the December meetings in the United States, they discussed the strategic planning of the organization's development for the next five years, summed up the results of their activities. The events of the congress were an example of the collective approach of people from different faiths to solving global problems.

Throughout the year, the heads of religious communities in Russia were holding joint events within the framework of the Interreligious Council of Russia. In their speeches they emphasized the stable and successful development of interreligious dialogue. Alexander Boroda, President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, spoke about the importance of the cooperation of religions for preserving peace in the country and reducing xenophobia in general and the level of anti-Semitism in particular.¹⁶⁸ Within the framework of the joint meeting of the Russian Interreligious Council and the Christian

¹⁶⁵ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/world/news/2019-08/v-abu-dabi-sozdan-komitet-po-deklaracii-o-bratstve.html> 21.08.2019

¹⁶⁶ URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/08/20/news176788/> 20.08.2019

¹⁶⁷ URL: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5547697.html> 15.12.2019

¹⁶⁸ URL: <https://ria.ru/20200130/1564046714.html> 30.01.2020

Interfaith Advisory Committee, prominent religious figures agreed in a positive assessment of the amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation: DECR Chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chief Rabbi of Russia Berl Lazar, Supreme Mufti of the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia Talgat Tadzhuiddin and other religious leaders voiced support to the mention of God and capturing the concept of marriage as a union of a man and a woman in the preamble to the Russian Constitution¹⁶⁹.

In the world religious community, the efforts of the Russian muftiats to ensure interreligious harmony were highly appreciated by the participants of the World Summit of Tolerance in Dubai (UAE).¹⁷⁰

An important role in maintaining interreligious harmonious coexistence plays the mutual assistance of religious communities. The support provided by the Moscow Patriarchate to the Jewish, Muslim and other religious communities of Russia, was mentioned by the head of the Caucasian Muslims Office Sheikh ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade.¹⁷¹

An important aspect of interreligious dialogue is countering extremism and the spread of radical ideologies among the younger generation. In Russia, the spiritual leaders of traditional religions are jointly approaching the threat of extremism. Dagestan has hosted the VI Interreligious Youth Forum, organized by the Makhachkala Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of the Republic of Dagestan, the Council of Jewish Communities of Dagestan and the Ministry of National Policy and Religious Affairs.¹⁷²

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia also spoke about opposing radical teachings. The primate spoke about the danger of the development of a perverted idea of religion and called for the suppression of attempts by radicals to exploit the piousness of believers. Patriarch Kirill mentioned the high level of interreligious dialogue in Russia, highlighting the merits of the head of the Council of Muftis

¹⁶⁹ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74337> 28.02.2020

¹⁷⁰ URL: <https://ria.ru/20191116/1560990143.html> 16.11.2019

¹⁷¹ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7109325> 13.11.2019

¹⁷² URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2019/10/03/news178373/> 03.10.2019

of Russia and the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation Ravil Gainutdin in the establishment of traditional Islam, the desire to build a dialogue with representatives of other faiths “on the basis of the principles of mutual respect, peacefulness and good neighborliness” and expressed hope for the further development of relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Muslim community of the country in order to strengthen religious tolerance and civil accord.¹⁷³ The head of the Russian Orthodox Church also noted the contribution of Dagestan Mufti Akhmad Abdullayev in fighting terrorism and the formation of the Orthodox community in the republic and awarded him the Order of Glory and Honor.¹⁷⁴

Significant were the meetings of people responsible for the dialogue between religions: a meeting of the Interreligious Council of Russia was held in Moscow, where the topical issues related to the current situation of intolerance in the world were raised, and important decisions were taken. In particular, the issue of allowing clergy to visit prisoners in pre-trial detention centers was raised. The II Summit of World Religious Leaders was held in Baku, it discussed some aspects of inter-religious tolerance and ways to counter the threats of the modern world, as well as the role of religious leaders in protecting the rights of women and children.¹⁷⁵

Among the events within the framework of the steadily developing dialogue between traditional religions in Russia, we could highlight the meeting of the DECR secretary for interreligious relations, priest Dimitriy Safonov, and the deputy head of the Iranian Supreme Leader’s Administration, which took place on February 11.¹⁷⁶

The interaction of religions in the world during the coronavirus pandemic was included holding joint prayers for deliverance from the epidemic. For instance, on April 22, spiritual leaders representing various world religions gathered in Jerusalem to offer a joint prayer,¹⁷⁷ the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus announced a joint prayer

¹⁷³ URL: <https://ria.ru/20190826/1557907934.html> 26.08.2019

¹⁷⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73949> 16.12.2019

¹⁷⁵ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7114361> 14.11.2019

¹⁷⁶ URL: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2020/02/11/news182818/> 11.02.2020

¹⁷⁷ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70746-v-ijerusalime-religioznyje-lidery-vmestemolilisy-ob-izbavlenii-ot-pandemii> 23.04.2020

with representatives of the Orthodox Church, various Christian denominations, as well as members of the Jewish and Muslim communities.¹⁷⁸

Pope Francis and the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni, demonstrated agreement between the Christian and Jewish religions, exchanging congratulations on the holidays of Easter and Passover, and emphasizing the importance of cooperation between the two religions.¹⁷⁹ Pope Francis actively contributed to the promotion of interfaith dialogue in the world: it was for this purpose that he visited Thailand in November 2019. The Pope visited Thailand in order to promote interfaith dialogue.¹⁸⁰ On November 22, in the capital of Thailand, Bangkok, he met with 18 heads of Christian denominations and non-Christian religions.¹⁸¹ Pope Francis also congratulated the Jewish community of Rome on the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.¹⁸²

4.3.2. The Interfaith Dialogue in the Situation of Persecution

Interreligious dialogue at the level of communities and organizations was included the initiatives on jointly maintaining security, mutual assistance of community members in conditions of possible physical violence, financial support of citizens of one country and overcoming difficulties by common efforts, meetings of religious leaders to strengthen mutual assistance and harmony in the countries with a high level of anti-religious hostility.

Pope Francis underlined the efforts of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities in the Middle East to achieve peace and reduce tensions in the region.¹⁸³ Religious communities in Russia have made

¹⁷⁸ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74461> 18.03.2020

¹⁷⁹ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2020-04/papa-i-glavnyj-ravvin-rima-obmenyalis-pozdravleniyami.html> 07.04.2020

¹⁸⁰ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2019-11/papa-vizit-v-tailand-vo-imya-prodvizheniya-mezhreligioznogo-dial.html> 15.11.2019

¹⁸¹ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2019-11/papa-vstretilsya-s-religioznymi-liderami-tailanda.html> 22.11.2019

¹⁸² URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2019-10/papa-pozdravil-evrejskuyu-obshinu-rima-s-prazdnikami.html> 08.10.2019

¹⁸³ URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/ru/pope/news/2019-11/papa-prizval-molitsya-o-dialoge-i-mire-na-blizhnem-vostoke.html> 06.11.2019

their contribution to establishing peace in the region: on September 23, in the Barza region in the northeast of Damascus, took place the opening ceremony of a school rebuilt with funds from Russian believers. The Interreligious Working Group on Humanitarian Aid to Population of Syria as part of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the President of Russia took an active part in organizing the project.¹⁸⁴ The Interreligious Council of Russia also called for the restoration of shrines in the Middle East.¹⁸⁵

As a rule, notable cases of mutual aid, in which members of religious communities help other communities, take place in the countries with hard living conditions, where every support initiative has a special significance for the security. Two examples can be cited in Kenya: in South Mandera, a Muslim driver rescued Christian workers from an ambush by militants of the al-Shabaab terrorist group operating in the country¹⁸⁶, and in Kutulo District Muslim residents rescued Christian workers by warning them of a possible attack of al-Shabaab militants, which allowed them to avoid a clash¹⁸⁷.

An important event in the life of oppressed Christian communities in Nigeria was the gathering of the country's Christian and Muslim leaders at the "Dialogue between the Media and Religious Leaders on Promoting Peace and Interfaith Dialogue in the Era of Social Media" round-table discussion.¹⁸⁸ The meeting discussed both issues of strengthening peace and harmony, and proper coverage of religious conflicts in order to avoid an increase in tensions. As a result, a communiqué was signed stating the need to develop interreligious dialogue and counter anti-Christian violence from the Boko Haram terrorist group and extremists from the Fulani people.

In India, interfaith dialogue included a Christian march in Calcutta, during which Christians supported followers of Islam who

¹⁸⁴ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/09/23/v-damaske-otkrylas-skola-vosstanovlennaa-na-sredstva-rossijskih-religioznyh-obsin/> 23.09.2019

¹⁸⁵ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73827> 25.11.2019

¹⁸⁶ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/10/25/muslim-driver-saves-eight-christians-al-shabaab-attack/> 25.10.2019

¹⁸⁷ URL: <https://noticias.gospelmais.com.br/muculmanos-alertam-cristaos-ataque-118673.html> 04.08.2019

¹⁸⁸ URL: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/383685-media-religious-leaders-urged-to-ensure-fairness-balance.html> 24.03.2020

might be victims of discriminatory citizenship laws.¹⁸⁹ Both Christian and Muslim communities are persecuted in the country, therefore, in this case, the manifestation of solidarity was a useful testimony of the unity of believers in a similar difficult situation.

In Indonesia, activists from the Muslim Youth Association helped the army and the police to keep Christian churches safe during the Christmas season.¹⁹⁰ An example of interreligious dialogue at the level of ordinary believers was the case in Indonesia, when the Muslim community allowed a Christian to be buried on the territory belonging to the mosque. The assistance was needed because the land issue is acute for Christians, due to the lack of land they may be prohibited from conducting worship services and rituals. The voluntary assistance of representatives of the Muslim community made it easier to resolve the burial issue.¹⁹¹ One of the notable events of interfaith dialogue in another Asian state, Pakistan, was the activities of a Muslim activist Shakil Ahmed, who provided assistance to 120 Christian families in the Punjab province. The families were denied food aid distributed by the state for residents in connection with the coronavirus pandemic and imposed quarantine. Food distribution organizations refused to give food to Christians because of their religion. The Muslim contacted a local Catholic charitable organization and helped arrange the delivery of food to those in need.¹⁹² Another significant case of the interreligious dialogue was the cooperation of members of the Muslim community of the town of Gujranwala and the believers of the Catholic parish of St. Mary. The Muslims provided most of the amount that was needed to rebuild the church. This step is especially significant against the background of oppression of Christians by the country's radicalized population and the general perception of

¹⁸⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/16/christians-celebrate-march-peace/> 16.01.2020

¹⁹⁰ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/01/01/muslim-youths-north-toraja-help-security-church-christmas-celebration/> 01.01.2020

¹⁹¹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/01/religious-harmony-exemplified-christian-funeral-held-mosque-ground/> 01.09.2020

¹⁹² URL: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Coronavirus:-Kasur,-Muslim-activist-helps-poor-discriminated-Christians-49776.html> 08.04.2020, <https://www.persecution.org/2020/04/14/muslim-activist-provides-critical-aid-pakistani-christians-amid-covid-19-pandemic/> 14.04.2020

them as “second-class” citizens.¹⁹³ At the level of religious leaders in Pakistan, efforts were made to ensure the overall security of citizens: Catholic Archbishop Sebastian Shaw and Muslim cleric Muhammad Asim Mahdum called on Muslims to observe the regime of self-isolation during the month of Ramadan.¹⁹⁴

In the dialogue between Islam and Judaism, stands out a move that was called “revolutionary” — a visit by a delegation of Muslim religious leaders headed by Secretary General of the World Islamic League Dr. Muhammad al-Issa to the Auschwitz death camp. This is an unprecedented case, since the delegation has become the most substantial of the Muslim official groups visiting the camp in the entire history. During the visit, the delegates also visited a synagogue, met with the survivors of the camp and took part in the Shabbath celebration.¹⁹⁵

The solidarity of Muslims with other believers was demonstrated by the communities of Sri Lanka, where Sheikh Abdullah Abdul Rahman urged Muslims to help all residents of the country during the month of Ramadan, regardless of their religious affiliation. Thus, the food and financial support can presumably have a great impact on the well-being of local Christians during the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁹⁶

4.4. Civil Initiatives

Civil society initiatives play an important role both in protecting religious freedom and in fostering unity between believers of different religions. Citizens can also contribute to solving a variety of problems of the society, from helping the socially vulnerable groups to participating in crisis management.

¹⁹³ URL:<https://www.ucanews.com/news/muslim-community-helps-rebuild-catholic-church-in-pakistan/87229> 14.02.2020

¹⁹⁴ URL: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/lahore-archbishop-calls-for-a-subdued-ramadan/87844> 28.04.2020

¹⁹⁵ URL: http://newsru.co.il/mideast/23jan2020/issa_202.html 23.01.2020

¹⁹⁶ URL:<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Ramadan-is-a-time-to-strengthen-interfaith-dialogue-in-Sri-Lanka-49942.html> 28.04.2020

In the countries that seek to control churches and suppress religious activity, citizen assistance is of particular importance. Troubled Christian communities in India have no opportunity to respond to the harassment by radical Hindus and adherents of tribal religions with their own organized actions, because they do not have significant influence on the media, lack public support and are often a minority. Besides, public gatherings can be attacked by Hindus, who are more coordinated in mass attacks and, moreover, often escape responsibility (more on this in the first section). One of the rare Christian demonstrations was a protest march in the state of Jharkhand, which took place on August 31 and brought together about 500 Christians. The Jharkhand Christian Youth Association was the driving force behind the march, and its leader Abin Lakra said the purpose of the march was to draw attention to the discriminatory policies of the authorities. He stressed that, in line with the policy of the BJP radical nationalist party, the state authorities have launched an investigation into the ownership of land registered to Christian communities and about cases of forced conversion of local residents to their faith. Accusations of appropriation of land allegedly legally belonging to tribes and “forced” conversion to Christianity are popular excuses to pressure communities, and Christians spoke out to demand an end to anti-Christian state government policies¹⁹⁷. The danger of protests against the policies of the radical party is confirmed by the massive violence that erupted after the protests of the Muslim population of Delhi in response to discriminatory citizenship laws. More on related incidents in section 1.

However, as the arrest of Brian Nerren, a Christian preacher from the United States, showed, officials use any pretext to suppress preaching in the country. Over 87 thousand people around the world stood up for the pastor, signing a petition for his release.¹⁹⁸ In many respects, the solidarity of citizens of different countries of the world contributed to the fact that after seven months in custody, Nerren

¹⁹⁷URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/09/08/hundreds-christians-indias-jharkhand-state-march-protest/08.09.2019>

¹⁹⁸URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2019/11/10/petition-launched-american-pastor-detained-india/10.11.2019>

was released by the authorities and the criminal case against him was dropped.

A similar situation is observed in African countries. In an unprecedented mass demonstration in Nigeria in early April, Christians from 28 states staged marches to protest anti-Christian violence.¹⁹⁹ The unification of believers has given a result — the marches received wide coverage in the media around the world. The scale of the event — it was attended by 5 million people — indicates the scale of the problem, which the authorities prefer not to notice and deny.

The issue of closing churches in the countries of the Muslim majority and destruction of temples by Islamists is urgent. In Algeria, massive closures of parishes in various cities took place in early August, but the Igzer Amokrana community was able to prevent the closure of one of them.²⁰⁰ As this case has shown, the closure orders were issued illegally, since they were issued by an official who was not authorized to issue documents of this kind. However, this a case was an isolated one, and in general it can be said that the communities of Algeria do not have the opportunity to organize a coordinated rebuff to the authorities, which have been deliberately closing down Christian places of worship since November 2017. The communities of Syria suffer from oppression of a different kind — the inhabitants of the Middle East are being attacked by Islamists. During the attacks, among other things, temples are destroyed. In such a situation, communities are able to restore the destroyed churches. An example of this was the restoration of the Forty Martyrs Cathedral in Aleppo, belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church.²⁰¹

Speaking about the hard-hitting speeches of the residents of totalitarian countries, it is necessary to mention the actions of Hong Kong against the pressure of the Beijing authorities on the Muslims of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which escalated into

¹⁹⁹ URL: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/02/10/nigerian-christians-march-protest-killings/> 10.02.2020

²⁰⁰ URL: <https://www.amigodecristo.com/2019/08/cristaos-impedem-que-igreja-evangelica-seja-fechada-na-argelia.html> 28.08.2019

²⁰¹ URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7350047> 15.12.2019

clashes with the police after the use of tear gas by the law enforcement agencies.²⁰²

In Europe, Orthodox Christians of Ukraine and Montenegro are in the most difficult situation. As mentioned earlier, their position is caused by active rise of schismatic structures. Believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church use every opportunity to return their parishes, hold meetings with President Volodymyr Zelensky, where they mention the churches that they were robbed of and the discriminatory policy of local authorities; they hold stand in prayer actions against hostile takeovers of churches (as on October 20 in Vinnitsa²⁰³), oppose the transfers of churches to the jurisdiction of the OCU (as when voting on the ownership of the Holy Ascension Church in the village of Rynghach²⁰⁴), seek the official immunity of shrines (an example is the petition published on April 27 at the website of the President of Ukraine demanding to leave the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra in the use of the canonical Church).²⁰⁵ Active attitude of believers remains an important factor in the fight against hostile takeovers, since supporters of the schismatic OCU both among citizens and among high-ranking officials use a number of circumstances as an excuse to illegally deprive the UOC of its ownership rights to its monasteries and temples. Demonstrations by believers of the UOC are also important, condemning the recognition of the schismatic structure of the OCU by Local Orthodox Churches. Citizens of the Russian Federation expressed their disapproval of the actions of Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, holding a series of single pickets at the Greek and Turkish embassies.²⁰⁶

Since the end of 2019, the activities of believers of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro have been filled with massive protests against the law on religious associations, was adopted in the country to legalize the takeover of church property from the

²⁰² URL: <https://www.aa.com.tr/ru/1681251> 22.12.2019

²⁰³ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65840-v-vinnice-verujushhije-upc-provelimolitvennoje-stojanije-protiv-rejderstva-pcu> 21.10.2019

²⁰⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/66889-v-s-ryngach-verujushhije-progolosovali-protiv-poocherednogo-sluzhenija-s-pcu> 04.12.2019

²⁰⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/70902-na-sajte-prezidenta-pojavilasy-peticija-osohranenii-kijevskoj-lavry-za-upc> 28.04.2020

²⁰⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73789> 18.11.2019

canonical Church for the state benefit. Loads of religious processions with thousands of participants have been held in different cities, the scope of the protests was highly appreciated by the Metropolitan Amphilochius of Montenegro-Primorsky, who called what was happening “the second birth of the people.”²⁰⁷ The processions turned into a weekly event, gathering more and more participants each time: tens of thousands of people took part in the prayer services on January 16 with the largest prayer services held in Podgorica, Beran, Tivat, Spuzha, Bar, Bijelo Polje and Zabljak;²⁰⁸ On February 9, in the capital of the country, the procession gathered over 50 thousand believers,²⁰⁹ a week later the number of participants exceeded 60 thousand people,²¹⁰ after the same period of time there were 70 thousand protesters,²¹¹ and on February 29 about 100 thousand attended the religious procession.²¹² Based on the data on the processions in Podgorica alone, we can conclude that civic actions were gaining greater and greater coverage. The same can be said about other cities of Montenegro — in March, news reports mentioned protest processions in Pljevlja, Niksic, Herceg Novi;²¹³ Montegrin believers received support from Orthodox believers of other countries: on January 26, a prayer service in support of the persecuted church was held in Belgrade²¹⁵, on January 29, believers of the Rash-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohijsk diocese (Kosovo) went out to the

²⁰⁷ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68251-mitropolit-amfilohij-v-chernogorii-proiskhodit-vtoroje-rozhdenije-naroda> 29.10.2020

²⁰⁸ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67894-protestnyje-molebny-v-chernogorii-sobrali-desyatki-tysyach-verujushhih> 17.01.2020

²⁰⁹ URL: <https://mitropolija.com/2020/02/09/mitropolit-amfilohije-predvodiolitiju-u-podgorici-oni-koji-ne-vjeruju-u-hrista-obnavljaju-zakon-prokletog-caradukljanina/> 09.02.2020

²¹⁰ URL: <https://mitropolija.com/2020/02/16/istinska-crna-gora-16-februara-spasi-gospode-ljude-tvoje-i-blagoslovi-nasledje-tvoje/> 16.02.2020

²¹¹ URL: <https://mitropolija.com/2020/02/24/podgorica-u-znaku-litijskog-podviga-projavimo-slobodu-i-istinu-i-bog-ce-nam-pomoci/> 24.02.2020

²¹² URL: <https://mitropolija.com/2020/02/29/u-svetosimeonovskoj-litiji-u-podgorici-oko-100-000-vjernika/> 29.02.2020

²¹³ URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7927807> 09.03.2020

²¹⁴ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/69413-verujushhije-chernogorii-prodolzhajut-sovershaty-mnogotysyachnyje-krestnyje-khody> 13.03.2020

²¹⁵ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68178-v-belgrade-proshel-protestnyj-molebny-podderzhu-verujushhih-chernogorii> 26.01.2020

procession.²¹⁶ Parishioners of the Serbian Church in the USA and Australia sent their support. Mass demonstrations were suspended only after the introduction of quarantine in the country related to the coronavirus pandemic. The government used the epidemic as an opportunity to increase pressure on the Serbian Patriarchate and arrested Joanikije, Metropolitan of Budimlje-Niksic, and seven clergymen. Believers went out to the streets again, a large crowd of protesters already formed during the arrest, later protest actions were held in the city of Niksic. The protest actions caused a wide public outcry, followed by a reaction from the Bundestag, from the US government. The DECR chairman, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, commented on the events, noting that with such a scale of protests, one has to speak of “President Milo Djukanovic betraying his people.”

Concerned citizens in the countries also held actions in defense of freedom of religion and against violence based on religious hatred in Western Europe. Following the terrorist attack in the synagogue of the German city of Halle, large-scale demonstrations took place in many other cities of the country (13 thousand people took part in the Berlin demonstration in countering anti-Semitism²¹⁷), which brought together both ordinary citizens and representatives of various confessions.²¹⁸

The actions of believers are of particular importance in the countries of Western Europe, where secular and other liberal values are spread and supported by the population. In promoting traditional views and demonstrating to the authorities a different opinion that is not based on fashionable moral tendencies, a big role is played by the events such as the 600,000-strong protest against the IVF bill held on October 6 in Paris²¹⁹, an appeal to the British Health Minister Matthew Hancock of two residents of the United Kingdom, opposing late abortions if a child has a disability (such a law operates in the UK and allows

²¹⁶ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68289-v-kosovo-tysyachi-serbov-vyshli-na-ulicy-v-zashitu-verujushhik-chernogorii> 30.01.2020

²¹⁷ URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/> 14.10.2019

²¹⁸ URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/a-50800327> 11.10.2019

²¹⁹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65497-v-parizhe-600-tysyach-chelovek-protestovali-protiv-zakona-ob-eko-oplodotvorenii> 07.10.2019

termination of pregnancy even in the last trimester in relation to, for example, children with Down syndrome).²²⁰ Attempts to introduce some of these trends in the countries dominated by traditional values have met a strong rebuff: for example, in Brazil, where the Christian population predominates, people protested against the demonstration of blasphemous film “The First Temptation of Christ” by the *Porta dos Fundos* troupe at the Netflix streaming service. Over 2 million people signed a petition demanding to remove the film from the public access.²²¹ In Belarus, believers showed an active civic stance and collected signatures against the adoption of a law banning the promotion of homosexuality. The initiative was supported by more than 50 thousand people who addressed their appeal to the President of the country Alexander Lukashenko.²²²

Throughout the year, believers expressed their right to freedom of religion with processions of thousands, charitable events, and participation in the social and cultural life of their countries. The scale and frequency of the events are largely indicators of the level of the country’s religious life. Russia has stable positive indicators in this area. The attendance rate of religious processions is traditionally high (in St. Petersburg, the procession on the occasion of the transfer of the relics of the Faithful Saint Prince Alexander Nevsky was attended by 115 thousand people,²²³ about 70 thousand believers venerated the relics of John the Baptist during their stay in the same city²²⁴). It should be emphasized that some of the mass events were canceled due to the coronavirus epidemic. Many charitable events and volunteer actions to help those in need were held by Russian Muslims on the eve of the holiday of *Id al-Adha*, about 1,000 volunteers were involved in organizing the holiday in Tatarstan alone²²⁵, an active supply of food took place both during the holy month of Ramadan and during

²²⁰ URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/mothers-of-downs-syndrome-children-call-for-end-to-late-term-abortions/> 25.02.2020

²²¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67165-dva-milliona-khristian-vystupili-protiv-filyama-pervoje-iskusheniye-khrista> 18.12.2019

²²² URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74388> 10.03.2020

²²³ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73316> 12.09.2019

²²⁴ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=74469> 18.03.2020

²²⁵ URL: <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2019/08/14/v-organizacii-kurban-bajrama-v-tatarstane-zadejstvovali-1000-volonterov/> 14.08.2019

the holiday of Id al-Fitr. These events were particularly important in the light of the pandemic, as they aimed to provide food supplies to families in need stranded by quarantine. The restoration of the 19th century synagogue in Astrakhan, carried out by about 400 Jewish families, was an important civil initiative.²²⁶

Mass marches and events were held by religious communities of Ukraine: from July 29 to 30, over 3 thousand believers from 12 regions of the country took part in festive events dedicated to the memory of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God “Svyatogorskaya”²²⁷; on August 19, over 20 thousand believers of the UOC took part in religious processions to the Pochaev Lavra²²⁸; on September 1, believers of the Khust diocese held a procession of the Cross in the city of Vinogradov praying for peace and prosperity all over the country²²⁹; over a thousand people marched in a Cross procession along the central streets of the city of Zhitomir on September 5²³⁰; on October 20, a procession of many thousands took place in Lutsk.²³¹

In 2019–2020 communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church showed their readiness to provide assistance to the residents of the country: the community of the UOC Church of All Saints in Chernivtsi organized the construction of a center for those in need²³², believers of the Volyn diocese organized a charity concert and collected 269,700 hryvnia for those in need²³³, believers of the

²²⁶ URL: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=73342> 16.09.2019

²²⁷ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/07/31/bilshe-3-tisyach-viryany-vzyali-uchast-v-urochistostyax-na-chest-svyatogirskogo-obrazu-bogorodici-foto-video/31.07.2019>

²²⁸ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/08/21/dva-masshtabnyx-krestnyx-xoda-iz-kamenec-podolskogo-i-brailova-otpravilis-v-pochaevskuyu-lavru-grafik-foto-video-obnovlyaetsya/?lang=ru> 21.08.2019

²²⁹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/64752-v-khustskoj-jeparkhii-proshel-krestnyj-khod-za-mir-v-ukraine> 04.09.2019

²³⁰ URL: <https://news.church.ua/2019/09/07/ponad-tisyacha-viryany-projshli-xresnim-xodom-iz-simoma-chudotvornimi-ikonami-vulicyami-zhitomira-video-foto/07.09.2019>

²³¹ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/65821-v-lucke-sostojalsya-mnogotysyachnyj-krestnyj-khod> 20.10.2019

²³² URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/67989-verujushhije-chernovcov-prosyat-pomoshhi-na-postrojku-socentra-dlya-nuzhdajushhihsya> 21.01.2020

²³³ URL: <https://spzh.news/ru/news/68033-na-blagotvoritelynom-koncerte-volynskoj-jeparkhii-upc-sobrali-269-700-grn> 22.01.2020

Chernivtsi-Bukovyna diocese collected 27 tons of humanitarian aid for refugees in the Holy Dormition Svyatogorsk Lavra²³⁴. With the spread of coronavirus infection and the introduction of quarantine, community assistance became even more tangible for the unprotected segments of the population and, moreover, was significant for the state, which received a certain support from the religious organizations and individual believers in the crisis situation. Believers of the Zaporozhye diocese of the UOC have raised funds for the repair of ventilators necessary to treat coronavirus complications²³⁵. The Orthodox youth of the Odessa diocese of the UOC provided assistance to the city's elderly residents, large families and homeless people during the quarantine period²³⁶.

One of the examples of civic initiatives by Christians in North America was a large-scale charity event in the state of Georgia (USA), which brought together Christians from different churches and denominations — believers helped 13 thousand people to buy school supplies.²³⁷ As part of the action to help churches that were under threat of closure due to the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, American believers collected and sent a total of \$ 250,000.²³⁸

²³⁴ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69098-v-svyatogorskiju-lavru-dostavili-27-tonn-pomoshhi-sobrannoj-verujushhimi-bukoviny> 28.02.2020

²³⁵ URL:<https://news.church.ua/2020/03/24/zaporizka-jeparxiya-zibrala-koshtina-remont-dixalnix-apativ-neobxidnix-dlya-likuvannya-uskladnen-vid-koronavirusu/> 24.03.2020

²³⁶ URL:<https://spzh.news/ru/news/69962-v-period-karantina-pravoslavnjama-molodezhy-odessy-pomogajet-nuzhdajushhimsya> 30.03.2020

²³⁷ URL:<http://christian.by/stati/4136-ssha-tserkvi-dzhordzhii-pomogli-13-000-chelovek-v-priobretenii-shkolnykh-prinadlezhnostej> 29.08.2019

²³⁸ URL:<https://www.christianpost.com/news/250k-donated-to-help-churches-impacted-by-covid-19-over-50-churches-chosen-for-grants.html> 15.04.2020

SUMMARY

According to reports processed between August 2019 and May 2020, incidents of anti-Christian violence are on the rise in Asia and Africa. Christians are persecuted due to the widespread radical religious movements in the countries of South Asia and Middle East. In Pakistan, representatives of religious minorities, Christians and Hindus are considered “lower caste”, citizens of the “second class”. This has an impact on the lives of Christians in regard to their employment opportunities, ensuring their religious freedom. Community members are also more likely to be subject to judicial and police arbitrariness. Law enforcement authorities can detain Christians without sufficient reason and torture them in order to obtain a confession of a crime that the Christians did not commit. The police ignore reports of assaults and abductions, thereby fueling an increase in crime rate and creating a public confidence that crimes against Christians will go unpunished. The judicial system is inherently anti-Christian because the evidence presented by Christians is viewed as less reliable than those presented by Muslims. This explains the high percentage of blasphemy charges against Christians compared with similar charges against other citizens of the country. The kidnapping of Christian girls and their illegal forced marriages with Muslims are also partly due to this manifestation of discrimination: after kidnapping, the parents of the girls are usually sent a document stating that they have reached the age of eighteen. The forged documents of the kidnapers carry more weight in the court than the evidence and facts collected by Christians (in this regard, the acquittal of the kidnapers of 14-year-old Huma Yunus was indicative). In Iran, Christianity is viewed as a means of influence by Western countries, therefore, pastors and believers are actually prohibited from professing their faith, let alone carrying out missionary activities. Believers are sentenced to long prison terms and are not allowed to enjoy legal rights. There are known cases of unlawful arrest and torture in prisons. Newly converted Christians find themselves in a difficult

situation — they are considered traitors to Islam, false accusations of anti-state conspiracies, propaganda, actions against national security are brought against them. In Syria, Christians from different churches and denominations are involved in the conflict between government forces and extremist rebel organizations against their will. Christian clerics and believers become prime targets for terrorist attacks because of their faith.

In India, Hinduism is a widespread ideology under the banner of which crimes against religious communities are committed. The radical followers of Hinduism and tribal religions have the support of the nationalist BJP party, which has come to power. False accusations of “forced conversion” and “blasphemy” become the formal pretext for widespread anti-Christian aggression. Often, after mass beatings of Christians, offenders and instigators of riots hand believers over to the police and are bear no legal responsibility for their actions. The police also use torture, it has been reported that police officers, for personal reasons, raided the houses of Christian communities, charging believers of such crimes as the aforementioned “forced conversion” and others, such as theft or drug dealing. Massive violence against Muslims was reported in New Delhi, where protests took place in February against a discriminatory citizenship law. Both police and radicals attacked Muslims, protestors and civilians alike.

In China, believers are also subject to police arbitrariness, in this country it is motivated by communist ideology. Throughout the year, there were reports of inappropriate arrests, beatings of believers protesting against the demolition or closure of churches, and imprisonments.

African countries are divided into states where physical violence is encouraged or not stopped by the state, and countries where terrorist groups operate. Violence from Boko Haram extremists and Fulani militants takes place in West African countries: Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger. Attacks in the northern parts and the middle belt of Nigeria have the nature of a war of extermination, the death toll of believers is close to the level of genocide. The state does not provide protection to communities — the regular army has repeatedly retreated under the attack of militants, leaving settlements unprotected.

Often, military forces and regional authorities did not take any action in response to the population's request for protection, which resulted in terrorists' receiving unrestricted access to villages and cities in which only civilians were located. For a long time, the authorities denied religious hatred as the main motive for attacks by groups, as well as allowed concealing the incidents so as not to draw attention to their incompetent actions in terms of ensuring the safety of citizens.

Among the countries whose authorities facilitate or do not prevent the persecution of Christians are Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea. In Egypt and Algeria, significant steps have been taken to promote religious freedom and improve the lives of Christian communities, but currently this is not enough to stop the aggression of radicals who attack Christians in rural areas and cities. Coptic communities in Egypt face particular pressure, as they are not only attacked by extremists, but also suffer violence from local governments and, in some aspects, federal authorities.

Burkina Faso has reported skyrocketing levels of violence. Extremist groups are carrying out massive attacks forcing residents to flee their homes.

Physical violence is sporadic in the United States and Europe. As a rule, representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities are attacked by radicals from among civilians. The attacks are motivated by racial and religious hatred. According to community representatives, the number of such attacks is increasing from year to year, which may indicate the rise of nationalist forces in the EU and the United States. The European country with the most frequent cases of physical violence against any representatives of religious communities is Ukraine: there, supporters of the OCU are engaged in forced takeovers of temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and attack believers. The radicals no longer enjoy the full support of the state, as it was when Petro Poroshenko was president, but they are joined by nationalists from the Right Sector. Irregularly, from time to time, representatives of the schismatic structure enjoy the protection of the police.

Discriminatory measures against representatives of Christianity, Islam and Judaism are found in almost all parts of the world. The roots

of prejudice against believers and violation of their rights can be found in radical or nationalist ideologies (in countries with such a situation, physical violence is also common) and in the adherence of this or that country to liberal and secular values.

The first category includes countries in Asia and Africa that are regularly mentioned in reports of physical violence. In China, discrimination is manifested through the closure of parishes, mass surveillance of believers, and the promotion of communist ideology. In the provinces, a massive closure of Christian parishes and the removal of crosses were noticed. China is an example of state intervention in the life of a religion, as it tries to subjugate religions and make them serve as an instrument of communist propaganda.

In the countries of the Muslim majority, where Islam is used to establish totalitarian regimes and build a radicalized society, intolerance towards people professing a different faith is manifested. In Turkey, converting from Islam to Christianity may result in dismissal from office, especially if the believer is employed in a public service. A similar situation has developed in Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, the latter is characterized by the closure of churches and the suppression of missionary activity.

In European countries, there were bans on elements of the Muslim and Jewish faith: a ban on halal and kosher slaughter in Belgium, restrictions on the rights of Muslims to wear traditional clothing in Austria and the Netherlands.

At risk of bullying or losing their jobs are the believers who disagree with sinful practices such as supporting LGBT ideology, the critique of which resulted in sacking Christians in Britain and Poland. The religious community of Ukraine expressed joint concern over bills that could lead to censorship of religious publications and interference in the internal structure of religious organizations. In addition, cases of infringement of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were recorded in Ukraine: with the help of officials of regional state administrations religious communities were illegally transferred to the schismatic OCU, and hostile takeovers of parishes were carried out.

The situation that took place in Ukraine during the presidential term of Petro Poroshenko is repeated in Montenegro. The government

of the country initiated the process of taking away the property of the Montenegrin-Primorsky Metropolis of the Serbian Orthodox Church by adopting a law on religious associations. The protest actions of believers were followed by a harsh reaction from the authorities, including episodes of physical violence and arrests. In connection with the growth of tension, there have been isolated cases of infringement of the rights of believers of the Serbian Orthodox Church, such as a not allowing an Orthodox choir to enter the country or the suspension of those who supported the Serbian Patriarchate of their duties.

A particularly significant event among those negatively affecting the religious freedom of Orthodox believers was the US intervention in the interchurch situation in the Orthodox world. As a number of hierarchs noted, the US Democratic Party put pressure on the heads of the local Orthodox churches to force them to recognize the OCU and participated in provocation and deepening the schism in the Orthodox world in pursuit of its geopolitical goals.

Religiophobia is particularly widespread in countries with a pronounced secular ideology, such as Western Europe and the United States. The result is, as can be seen from statistical data and the results of sociological research, a decrease in the birth rate, a drop in the number of parishioners and the growing popularity of atheistic tendencies.

Frequent manifestations of religiophobia in 2019–2020. were arson of temples, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim actions of the inhabitants of the countries. In Europe, an increase in the number of such incidents is associated with the rise of nationalist ideas, a general increase in anti-religious hatred, especially Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

In countries where there is a tangible danger for representatives of religious minorities, mainly in Asia and Africa, religiophobia results in the destruction of churches, desecration of shrines, temples, cemeteries.

In the area of state-confessional initiatives, there were positive changes in the discriminatory policy of states that are among the most dangerous ones for Christians: South Sudan, Egypt, Pakistan. In other countries, such as Ukraine, France, the United States,

an improvement in the security measures of religious sites and the prompt suppression of manifestations of religion-phobia on the part of public figures and officials were recorded. Stable development of state-confessional relations has been noticed in Russia.

The efforts of the major world powers were aimed at protecting freedom of religion. Russia manifests itself as a defender of the rights of believers in the Middle East and a state that prioritizes the safety of persecuted Christians. The US worked in Pakistan and India to protect oppressed Christian communities and improve their situation. Other European countries have shown their desire to help Christian churches in the most dangerous countries.

Interfaith dialogue was mainly focused on overcoming the schism in the global Orthodoxy caused by the anti-canonical intervention of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. Local Orthodox churches expressed solidarity and support for Orthodox believers who have come under pressure from the authorities or radical supporters of schismatic structures — representatives of the Serbian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches.

Within the framework of interreligious dialogue, stand out the joint actions of leaders of different religions to improve the situation of believers in the countries that restrict freedom of religion. Meetings of international bodies were held, the main agenda included countering

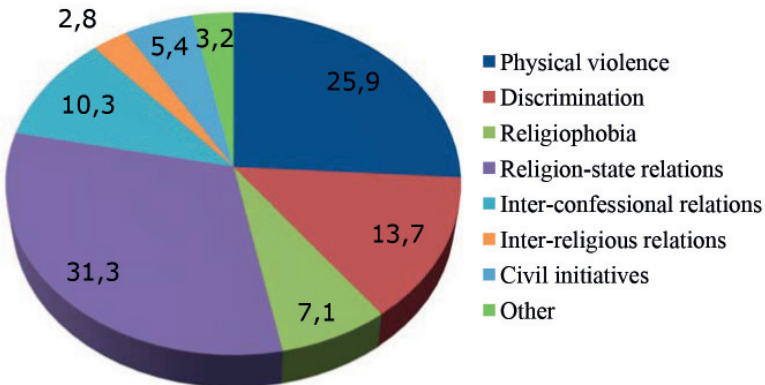


Figure 1

the spread of extremist ideologies, protecting the rights of believers and upholding traditional values. In countries where communities are suffering persecution, there have been episodes of manifestation of solidarity, examples of mutual assistance by representatives of different faiths.

Civil initiatives reflected the commitment of ordinary believers to traditional values and the fight against manifestations of religiophobia. Where there was a tightening of control of the authorities over the Church or attempts to suppress religious communities, as in Montenegro or Ukraine, mass demonstrations by representatives of the Church were held as a protest against violations of religious freedoms.

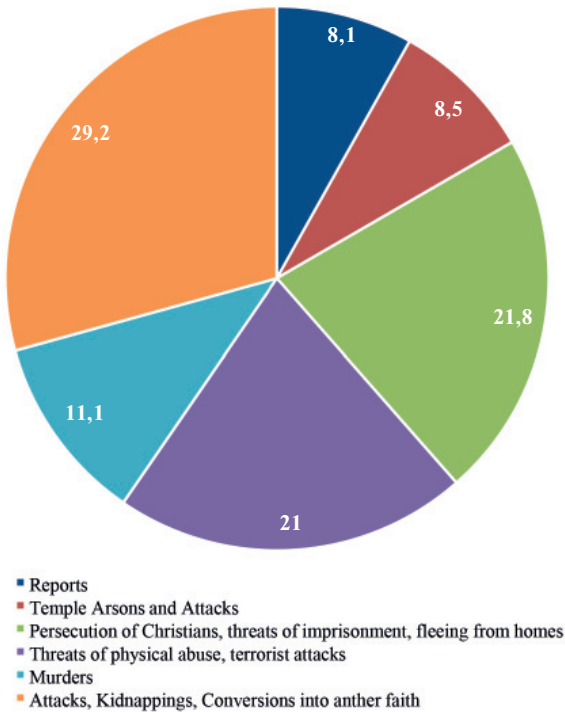


Figure 2

For the period from August 2019 to April 2020, a total of 2,028 news were processed, of which: 527 related to cases of physical violence against Christians, arrests, threats of murder and attempted terrorist attacks; 279 were related to episodes of discrimination on the basis of religion and restrictions on freedom of religion; 145 were related to religiophobia and the spread of secular values; 635 messages reflected religion-state relations; 209 — interconfessional; 58 — inter-religious; 110 reports were related to the area of civil initiatives; other topics — 65 news.

Comparison of topics in percentage is shown in the following graph (Fig. 1).

Representation of physical violence: out of 527 news stories concerning cases of physical violence against believers, 43 are reports on the situation in the world or a particular country, or general assessments, 45 are about church burning or attacks on temples. There are 115 news reports about threats to prison, persecution, flight from homes. A total of 111 news reports are about threats of physical violence and committed or planned terrorist attacks, 59 — about murders, 154 — about attacks, kidnapping, attempts to forcibly convert to another faith (Fig. 2).

The Freedom of Conscience and Religious Intolerance In Today's World

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