



Aid to the
Church in Need

ACN CANADA

Four Recent Cases of Persecution Against Christians Around the World

Sri Lanka: Above All, Forgive.

In Sri Lanka, on Easter Sunday 2019, 253 people died in terrorist bombings at St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo, a suburb of the capital, Colombo. More than 500 people were also injured. Among those killed, about a hundred people died instantly, in the middle of Easter Mass. Families were wiped out. Members of a local group who declare that they sympathize with the Islamic State (ISIS) have claimed responsibility. The perpetrators stated that they sought revenge for the New Zealand attack of March 15, 2019, in which a man opened fire in two different mosques in the city of Christchurch during Friday prayers, killing more than 50 people.

Less than a month after the attacks in the parish of St. Sebastian, parishioners who survived the attack showed great resilience. Some of them say that they are already prepared to forgive their assailant.

Eritrea: The Catholic Church Under Attack

In Eritrea, a country in northeastern Africa, the dictatorial regime in place since the 1990s is determined to control religious groups as well as educational and health institutions. For years, the government has been threatening to shut down non-governmental organizations. This year, it carried out its threat.

In June 2019, the authorities seized the 21 health facilities belonging to the Catholic Church: clinics, dispensaries, hospitals. In some places, patients were forced to leave their bed or stretcher immediately, regardless of the severity of their case. The Church alone cared for 200,000 people, among them some of the poorest in society. Then, at the start of the 2019 school year, eight Catholic schools – out of the approximately fifty belonging to the Church – had to close their doors. In both cases, it is unclear how the authoritarian government of this country of 4.4 million people will replace these essential services.

PONTIFICAL
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Burkina Faso: a Country Disrupted by External Forces

Just four years ago, like Senegal, one of its distant neighbours in West Africa, Burkina Faso was considered a model of coexistence between the Muslim majority and religious minorities, such as Christians. However, in 2015 everything changed and acts of violence against Christians in the north of the country began to disrupt social peace. It is important to understand that the perpetrators of these attacks are essentially fundamentalist terrorist groups that claim to follow a radical and ruthless Islam and come mostly from outside the country.

In some cases, the attackers kill the faithful while they are celebrating mass. Two priests lost their lives in the spring of 2019 while presiding over the Eucharist. In other cases, villagers are openly attacked on the way back from the fields. The attackers terrorize them by promising to return and kill them if they do not convert to Islam. Nearly 10,000 people had to flee their villages and seek refuge elsewhere.

Genocide in the Middle East: too late?

Since 2003, the number of Christians in Iraq has dropped dramatically. From 1.3 million, they are now less than 200,000. In Syria, there were 1.7 million before 2011; today, only about 450,000 are left. In Lebanon, their numbers are decreasing from year to year, representing about 20% of the population, compared to nearly 40% about forty years ago. In Israel, the amount of red tape for foreign Christians called to work in Christian holy places has multiplied. For their part, more and more Israeli citizens of Christian faith are facing the rise of a certain Jewish fundamentalism. In Egypt, the 10 million Christians - mostly Coptic - make up, in general, 10% of the total population of the country. But fundamentalist groups still threaten their peace of mind.

In the Middle East, the cradle of Christianity, will Christian communities disappear completely one day, particularly in Syria and Iraq? In Iraq, the influence of the Islamic State (ISIS) group is still making itself felt, with part of the Muslim population having become radicalized. They are trying to make Christians disappear: yes, the bases of the genocide started by ISIS are still present. It remains to be seen what the West will do for these Christians.