



Freedom of Religion or Belief World Report 2013

Human Rights Without Frontiers International

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In 2013, the situation of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in a number of countries has made headlines in the international media while other FoRB violations in other countries, sometimes just as serious, have gone unnoticed. This report of Human Rights Without Frontiers is based on a compilation of incidents in 80 countries from public and private sources. The report focuses on 13 countries of particular concern where the freedom to change one's religion or belief, the freedom to share one's religion or belief or the freedom of association, worship and assembly have been severely restricted by repressive state regulations, governmental policies, social hostility, inter-ethnic or inter-communal tensions and various forms of armed conflicts. In 2013, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria and Uzbekistan distinguished themselves by a high number of incidents which indicate the violation of FoRB. Concrete examples documented in this report support this selection and illustrate different facets of the violations that have been identified. The examples are also contextualized and analysed accordingly. The report covers cases pertaining to a wide range of religious or belief communities and their members: • Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches and Jehovah's Witnesses • Sunni and Shi'a communities, Ahmadis, Sufis and Said Nursi readers • Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Falun Gong practitioners and atheists However, this FoRB overview seen from the sole angle of 'incidents occurred in 2013' would not give a reliable assessment of the issue unless it also examines the systemic problems generated by state laws that provide for prison terms or even the death penalty. Such laws have such a deterrent effect that nobody dares infringe upon them. This means that incidents go unreported and the countries concerned are able to escape criticism. A number of states have also implemented various forms of 'soft' religious cleansing over the last decades such that diversity has been masked and the rights of minorities have become a non-issue. This process is still ongoing in some parts of the world. Mapping FoRB in all its complexities can only be a kaleidoscope taken from different perspectives: laws and policies restricting the main components of FoRB, incidents, discrimination, social hostility of variable intensity or the protection of minorities. Reports from these various angles are useful to identify a sudden rise in the number of violations, their frequency and significance, possible solutions and appropriate policy recommendations.. Such reports can also complement each other, but none of them can claim to present a unique and true picture of the reality. An artificially unified picture with a ranking or a coloured map may be interesting and appealing to the media and the general public, but it is not a useful tool for addressing the challenges affecting FoRB in our times. The challenges here outlined by Human Rights Without Frontiers in 2013 are symptomatic of deeper problems that are suffered in many other countries as the table hereafter shows. From this perspective, it can be said that North Korea remains the most repressive state in the world in regard to religion. The practice of religion has been all but eradicated and replaced by a civil religion, the worship of the Kim dynasty. It is followed by a group of 14 Muslim countries where restrictive laws criminalize conversion from Islam to another religion as well as missionary activities, providing for the death penalty: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Maldives, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen. Last but not least, China remains the country with the highest number of faith prisoners, followed by Iran and Eritrea.

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