

Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world

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Amid the recent murders of Coptic Christians in the horrific church bombings in Egypt by ISIS, we must be aware that these events are by no means unique or uncommon. Christianity is now the most persecuted faith on the planet, with some accounts that 900,000 Christians worldwide have been murdered for their faith in the last ten years.

I would encourage you to go to the Voice of the Martyrs website, www.persecution.com, to get a small sample of the persecution and violence that is being directed towards Christians, much of it from ISIS. Here are a few of the cases they cite that have taken place recently in Egypt alone:

In the North Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, 300 families left their homes for safety elsewhere in Egypt after seven Christians were murdered during a three-week period by the ISIS affiliate Wilayat Sinai

In Arish, also in the North Sinai, another 290 families fled from the homes, finding refuge in ten other Egyptian cities. The Egyptian government has committed to provide housing for all of the displaced families, but in the meantime, other evangelical churches in Egypt have been providing the assistance the displaced families need.

The VOM website lists those seven Christians who have been murdered for their faith in the city of Arish, Egypt, since January 30th of this year.

Wa'el Yousef was the owner of a supermarket in Arish. Four masked young men shot him to death after dragging his wife outside by her hair.

On February 11th, Adel Shawky, was shot in the head.

The following day, Dr. Bahgat Welliam, a veterinarian, was shot in the head after masked young men dragged him into the street.

On February 16, Gamal Tawfik Gergis was confronted by two young men in a market where he operated a small business. He was shot in the head after confirming his identity. The killers then stole money from and threatened bystanders who wanted to help him.

On February 21st, Saad Hakim Hanna and Medhat Saad Hakim, a father and son, were murdered in separate attacks. The father was shot in the head, and the son was burned alive.

On February 24th, Kamel Raof Kamel, a plumber, was shot as his wife and five children watched. They then set their home on fire.

In China, Yang Hua Hongwu, the co-pastor of the Living Stone Church in Guiyang was arrested on December 9, 2015, and sent to prison for a 2 1/2-year sentence for divulging state secrets. When he was arrested, he was held for over a year without trial instead of receiving a “typical 10-day administrative detention.” Hongwu’s church has been openly worshipping since 2009, and has been harassed by the Chinese government since its beginning. The church has grown to more than 700 who regularly attend services. Hongwu is now gravely ill and has been transferred from prison to a hospital.

According to the VOM report, “the church’s other co-pastor, Su Tianfu, previously reported that 99 percent of the church’s members have received calls from government officials, pressuring them to leave the church. In addition, church leaders have been continually pressured to join the government-sanctioned Three-Self Church.” That “church” is actually the Three Self Patriotic Movement controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

According to the advocacy group Open Doors USA, the “increase in incidents considered alarming and only getting worse.” When David Curry, the president and CEO of the group spoke to Fox News, he said that “It is appalling that Open Doors has to report that persecution has increased again in 2016 and we are still at the worst levels of persecution in modern times. The spread of persecution has gotten worse, now hitting nearly every continent in the world. There were 23 Christians killed in Mexico specifically because of their faith.”

Their report indicates that 215 million Christians worldwide are “facing some degree of persecution,” but that “our report is conservative because it only calculates incidents that are reported and can be validated. It is likely that there are thousands of incidents that are never reported and nobody knows because Christians are often fearful to tell anyone – even their own family members.”

In Asian countries, Curry said that “governmental raids increased, church membership requirements were suddenly doubled overnight resulting in churches being regarded as now illegal. This is one area of the world that we are keeping a careful eye on because of the dramatic rise in persecution”.

More on the persecution of Christians next week.



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