

RELEASED BY: AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED

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# Religious freedom now compromised in a majority of countries worldwide

Königstein, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014 – A REPORT released today showing that religious freedom is compromised in nearly 60 percent of countries worldwide is expected to send out a signal to Governments and religious leaders that this is an issue that can no longer be ignored.

International Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need's **Religious Freedom in the World 2014 Report**, compiled by journalists, academics and commentators, reveals worrying concerns for people of faith in 116 of the world's 196 countries.

The report – looking at all religious groups and covering events from autumn 2012 to summer 2014 – concludes that where the situation regarding religious liberty has changed, it has almost always changed for the worse.

In the 196 countries analysed, deteriorating conditions are noted in 55 countries (or 28 percent).

Only six of the 196 countries – Iran, United Arab Emirates, Cuba, Qatar, Zimbabwe and Taiwan – have been classified as improved and yet, even of those, four remain categorised as experiencing “high” or “medium” persecution.

The **Religious Freedom in the World 2014 Report**, launched today (Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> November) by Aid to the Church in Need offices around the world, is available online at [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)

A 32-page executive summary of the full report, published in most major European languages, categorises 20 countries as having a “high” degree of religious intolerance or active persecution.

Of these, 14 experience religious persecution linked to extremist Islam. These are Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Maldives, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

In the remaining six countries, religious persecution is mainly linked to authoritarian regimes. These are Burma (Myanmar), China, Eritrea, North Korea, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

John Pontifex, London-based Editor-in-Chief of the report, said: “In the period under review, global religious freedom entered a period of serious decline and the report confirms media perceptions of a rising tide of persecution aimed at marginalised religious communities.

“The report we have produced indicates that many of those in authority – governments and religious leaders – have continually failed to stand up for religious freedom and hence it has become an orphaned right.

“Serial human rights abuses – from the threat of massacres in the Middle East and discrimination in the workplace in Western countries – are the direct result of religious freedom violations.

“As a Catholic organisation, it is our duty not simply to stand up for Christians suffering religious freedom violations, but for people of all faiths.”

The report, which covers the period October 2012 to June 2014, is the latest in a series, published every two years by the Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need, whose international headquarters are in Königstein, near Frankfurt, Germany.

In the report's foreword, Dr Paul Bhatti, brother of Shahbaz, the Federal Minister for Minorities who was murdered in 2011, writes: "Religious freedom is by its nature a right for all, equally shared, and that is why I commend Aid to the Church in Need's 'International Religious Freedom in the World' report for looking at and assessing the situation over a broad cross-section of faith groups in countries throughout the world."

"In doing so, this report challenges people to think afresh about this fundamental right, which is central to a free, fair and flourishing society," he writes.

He concludes: "It is the most critical need of the moment in a divided world where, in some parts there is a religious revival and in others a trend towards religious indifference and atheism."

The report notes other trends, including:

- The rise of religious intolerance and "aggressive atheism" in Western Europe.
- Large population displacements due to religious persecution, especially in the Middle East.
- A growing "religious illiteracy" among Western policy makers, leading to misunderstandings in foreign policy areas.
- A worrying growth of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe

On the positive side, the report found a number of examples of religious co-operation; however these were often the result of local initiatives rather than progress at the level of national governments.

Peter Sefton-Williams, Chairman of the report's Editorial Committee, says in his summary of the main findings: "The clear lesson from this research is that the urgent call to reverse the violence and oppression directed towards religious minorities must come, first and foremost, from within religious communities themselves."

And he concludes: "The necessity for all religious leaders to use their pulpits and the media to loudly proclaim their opposition to religiously-inspired violence, and to re-affirm their support for religious tolerance, is becoming – in the present climate – ever more urgent."

- **The 'Religious Freedom in the World 2014 Report' will be available for download later today at [www.religion-freedom-report.org](http://www.religion-freedom-report.org)**

## Editor's Notes



For more information, contact [NATIONAL OFFICES TO ADD CONTACT NAME AND DETAILS]

Directly under the Holy See, Aid to the Church in Need supports the faithful wherever they are persecuted, oppressed or in pastoral need. ACN is a Catholic charity – helping to bring Christ to the world through prayer, information and action.

Founded in 1947 by Fr Werenfried van Straaten, whom St John Paul II named "An outstanding Apostle of Charity", the organisation is now at work in about 130 countries throughout the world.

The charity undertakes thousands of projects every year including providing transport for clergy and lay Church workers, construction of church buildings, funding for priests and nuns and help to train seminarians. Since the initiative's launch in 1979, Aid to the Church in Need's *Child's Bible – God Speaks to his Children* has been translated into 176 languages and more than 51 million copies have been distributed all over the world.

Aid to the Church in Need's International headquarters are in Königstein, near Frankfurt, Germany. The charity has fast-approaching 20 national offices around the world.

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