

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: THREE MYTHS & THREE FACTS



When you hear the term “religious persecution” you might think of the attacks on the early church in Rome during the first few centuries after Christ—or some other example in the distant past. Because violent persecution for the faith is not clearly visible from our doorsteps, many Americans may forget the grim reality that attacks on religious people are commonplace in today’s world.

In fact, over 360 million Christians currently live in places designated as areas of “very high” or “extreme” persecution.

Throughout the world, Alliance Defending Freedom International and our allies are defending the rights of Christians and religious minorities against brutal persecution that includes everything from church closures to death sentences for blasphemy.

That’s why we created this short, accessible guide to help debunk some of the common myths about religious freedom outside the U.S.

MYTH #1

MYTH

Religious persecution is a thing of the past.

FACT

Religious discrimination and violent persecution is a growing issue in many countries in the world.

THE DETAILS:

More than 360 million Christians around the world suffered high levels of persecution in 2022, an increase of 20 million from the previous year. Tragically, for many Christians and adherents of minority religions, the right to freely live out one's faith is a daily struggle. For example, blasphemy laws in northern Nigeria allow officials to sentence people like musician Yahaya Sharif-Aminu to death for sharing song lyrics that expressed his faith on WhatsApp that were deemed blasphemous.

In Pakistan, a culture intolerant of Christian converts leads to tragedies like Reeha Saleem's abduction and forced marriage to a Muslim neighbor when she was just 16 years old. ADF International and our allies are helping defend those who face daily religious persecution. Their courageous faith often puts their very lives at risk.

LEARN MORE:

[Challenging blasphemy laws in Nigeria](#)

MYTH #2

MYTH

Persecution only happens in distant countries.

FACT

Persecution is taking place far closer to our doorstep than we would like to imagine.

THE DETAILS:

Even in Western countries like the U.K., so-called “censorship zones” are targeting the basic human right to express one’s convictions, even going after the innermost sanctum of the mind by prosecuting thoughts. Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was arrested—TWICE—after she told officers she “might be” silently praying in her head outside of an abortion facility. With the support of her ADF International attorneys, she prevailed in court, but the fact that she was even arrested in the first place raises concern.

In Finland, Päivi Räsänen, a medical doctor, government minister, and grandmother, was unanimously acquitted in March of 2022 for “hate speech” charges for a 2019 Bible-verse tweet. But the Finnish prosecutor is continuing to pursue charges against her. She was investigated, interrogated for over 13 hours, and prosecuted for speaking the truth about sexuality and marriage in a tweet, a 2004 pamphlet, and a 2019 radio interview. We’re standing with those who stand for truth against “hate speech” laws and other forms of coercion threatening the basic human right to express one’s faith.

In Brazil, Regiane Cichelero has been targeted and punished by government officials for choosing to homeschool her 12-year-old son according to her family’s religious convictions. The court even threatened to take her son away. We’re standing with Regiane to defend her God-given parental rights, and the rights of 70,000 other homeschooled children in Brazil.

LEARN MORE:

[Government to homeschool mom](#): put your son in public school or else.

MYTH #3

MYTH

International human rights law broadly protects religious freedom, so government violations are few and far between.

FACT

International law does broadly affirm religious freedom, but governments across the world are violating the right to worship, imprisoning church leaders, and attempting to shut down churches in clear violation of their obligations.

THE DETAILS:

Religious persecution continues to include the very heart of worship—the church.

Leaders like Nicaraguan Bishop Rolando Álvarez are sentenced to decades in prison for preaching about human dignity and justice. In Russia, Word of Life Church has bravely stood up to a government that has prohibited them from even using their own building—forcing them to meet in a tent in freezing weather.

In Scotland, a blanket ban on all churches from opening during the COVID-19 pandemic was challenged by Priest Canon Tom White with the support of ADF International. Despite most of Europe finding ways to allow worship during 2021, Scotland closed all churches for almost three months while allowing other businesses to remain open.

LEARN MORE:

[Church leader sentenced to 26 years in prison. Find out why.](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW



PRAY

Ask that God would open the hearts and minds of officials who are targeting Christians and religious minorities.

- 🙏 Pray for Christians and others suffering persecution and languishing in prison for bravely clinging to their faith. Pray that God would grant them strength to endure and swiftly end their persecution.
- 🙏 Pray that lawmakers and law enforcement would recognize the right of every person to express their faith and live out the Gospel without fear of punishment. That includes those who steadfastly pray for mothers and their babies outside of abortion facilities.
- 🙏 Pray for victims of human rights abuses such as forced marriage, blasphemy charges, restrictions on the freedom to worship, and other violations.

Finally, please join us as we ask that God would grant favor to ADF International's legal team and our allies as we defend our clients in the courtroom and the culture.



SHARE

[Share our content with your friends!](#)



GIVE

You can help make a difference in ensuring that persecuted Christians have a voice and an advocate in the courtroom. [Give today to help defend religious freedom!](#)



ALLIANCE DEFENDING
FREEDOM

To learn more about Alliance Defending Freedom,
visit [ADLegal.org](https://adlegal.org) or call 800-835-5233.

