

Defending Religious Freedom: Addressing the Persecution of Christians in Democratic Countries

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Recognizing:

- That freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international law, and protected by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- While many cases of religious persecution are associated with authoritarian regimes, there is an alarming rise in the persecution of Christians within democratic states, where institutional frameworks ought to protect minorities and uphold FoRB.
- That Christianity is the most persecuted religion globally, with over 380 million Christians facing high levels of discrimination and persecution in 2024 alone.¹
- Despite these challenges, Christianity—particularly the Catholic Church—is growing in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South-East Asia, demonstrating resilience and vitality.²
- That the Christian Church continues to play a vital role within the European Union, contributing to social cohesion, education, healthcare, and humanitarian efforts across the continent.

Acknowledging:

¹ OpenDoors (2025), World Watch List 2025: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>

² Maria Zandt, The Situation Of Christians In Sub-Saharan Africa. KAS International Reports 6/2011.

- That Christianity’s cultural and historical role in Europe is increasingly marginalised in public discourse and policy making, despite it being a foundational element of European democracy and identity.
- That the European Union upholds FoRB as a fundamental right under Article 10 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and has adopted specific instruments to protect this right in its external actions, including the EU Guidelines on FoRB, the appointment of a Special Envoy, and the funding of interfaith initiatives.
- The European People’s Party (EPP), in its 2024 Manifesto, explicitly affirms Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots as a defining element of its identity and stresses the importance of preserving and promoting this heritage.³
- That defending Christianity is not a matter of partisanship, but a commitment to the values of human dignity, freedom, and solidarity, and stands for the protection of Christian communities and religious freedom both in Europe and worldwide.
- That in many democratic countries, legislation and administrative policies are increasingly used to restrict religious freedom. These include anti-conversion laws, restrictions on church construction, and the misuse of blasphemy laws, observed notably in India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, that affect Christian minorities.⁴
- That state inaction or complicity in the face of religious persecution has enabled or exacerbated violence and discrimination. In countries such as Nigeria, India, and Sri Lanka, authorities have either failed to prevent or have implicitly supported attacks on Christian communities and places of worship.⁵
- That Christian leaders and faith-based organisations are often targeted for their social and moral advocacy in countries with high levels of corruption and organised crime, such as Honduras and Mexico, as well as in authoritarian regimes such as Venezuela and Eritrea.
- Social hostilities and mob violence against Christians, often fuelled by misinformation, hate speech, or religious intolerance, remain alarmingly frequent in democracies including Pakistan, India, and parts of Latin America, with perpetrators often going unpunished.⁶

³ The European People’s Party (2024), EPP Manifesto 2024:
https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2024/03/Manifesto_2024.pdf

⁴ Human Rights Watch (2025), World Report 2025:
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/01/World%20Report%202025.pdf

⁵ Human Rights Watch (2025), World Report 2025:
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/01/World%20Report%202025.pdf

⁶ Human Rights Watch (2025), World Report 2025:
https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/01/World%20Report%202025.pdf

- Within the European Union, there is a growing trend of church vandalism, desecration of Christian symbols, and hate crimes particularly in France, Germany, Spain, and Belgium which reflects a broader erosion of religious respect and a rise in aggressive secularism.
- In several countries governed by socialist or communist regimes, such as Nicaragua, Cuba, China, and Eritrea, Christian communities are subjected to systemic repression, including surveillance, forced closures, arbitrary arrests, and censorship.

YEPP calls on:

- The European Commission to reaffirm its commitment to FoRB within and outside of the EU, in line with the EU Guidelines on FoRB.
- The European Commission to further emphasise FoRB in the European External Action Service by:
 - promoting FoRB in its international partnerships, political and human rights dialogues with third countries, and trade policy.
 - by ensuring that humanitarian aid and development cooperation actively promote religious tolerance and do not inadvertently support regimes or policies that violate FoRB.
- The European Parliament to expand its monitoring and reporting activities for religious freedom violations, particularly in democratic states where persecution is increasing.
- The European Commission to review and renew the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues to establish appropriate accountability mechanisms.
- The European Commission acknowledge the gender-specific nature of the persecution faced by women and girls from religious minorities within its gender equality strategies, including the Gender Equality Strategy.
- The European Commission to support faith-based organisations (FBOs) and churches that promote peace, human rights, and religious coexistence, both within the Union and beyond, through established mechanisms such as EU humanitarian and development aid.
- The member organisations of YEPP across Europe to stand in solidarity with persecuted Christians and to defend their right to live out their faith without fear, both at home and abroad.