



# Ensuring Religious Freedom – Protecting Christians

Strengthening international cooperation



## Why is the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group committed to religious freedom?

Freedom of religion is one of the most important human rights, protected by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the German Constitution. The special significance lies in the fact that faith forms the basis of many people's lives. People must be able to practise it freely.

A Christian understanding of the human being is fundamental to the work of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group. We therefore consider it our obligation to strive for a better and safer future for Christians as well as for other religions.

For a long time, religious freedom has not been an issue in German politics. However, persecution and violence for religious reasons are on the rise. "Advocating religious freedom is now more than ever also advocating peace," states the Chairman of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, Volker Kauder.

## What does the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group do?

Religious freedom has long been an important issue for the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group. In 2010 it presented the motion "Protecting Religious Freedom Worldwide"

(Bundestag document 17/2334), which was passed by the German Bundestag. Moreover, the Parliamentary Group has shown its commitment by setting up a parliamentary working party in April 2010: the Stephanus Group. This group, named after the first Christian martyr, focuses its activities on religious freedom and particularly the situation of persecuted Christians around the world.

In order to raise public awareness, the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group initiated a series of events entitled the "The Letter 'C' Is Our Mandate" in 2012. At these meetings, representatives of church and society meet to elaborate on how to strengthen the defense of the inalienable right to freedom of religion.

Upon the initiative of CDU and CSU, the commitment to religious freedom was given special priority in the 2013 coalition agreement with the SPD. In 2016, at the request of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, the Federal Government presented its first ever report on the state of religious freedom in the world. The Parliamentary Group now calls upon the Federal Government to issue regular reports on the subject. We are convinced that knowing about a problem is the first step towards its solution.

## How badly are Christians harassed or persecuted?

Of all religious groups in the world, Christians probably still suffer by far the most from harassment and persecution. Estimates indicate that about 100 million believers are affected. In the past years, the extent of persecution has even increased, with countless Muslims now falling victim to radical Islamists as well.

Harassment takes many different forms, ranging from lack of protection to discrimination by the state and from public vilification to open use of violence. Christians are often forced to renounce their faith. In many places, conversion to Christianity is viewed as a crime worthy of the death penalty.

## Why is there discrimination against Christians?

Christians often refer to values contained in the Holy Bible, such as justice and solidarity. Other parts of the population may view this as a threat to their traditional social values and structures. This explains the attacks in India. Dictatorships such as North Korea oppose the idea of freedom that emanates from Christianity. In North Korea, even owning a Bible is punishable by death.

In Islamic nations, state religion serves to foster national unity. As a result, those who practise other faiths find themselves discriminated against for political reasons. In countries such as Nigeria, members of other religions are trying to drive out Christians from their areas of residence in order take control of those areas themselves. The situation for Christians has worsened particularly in the northern provinces of the country, where the radical Islamist group Boko Haram is terrorizing the people.

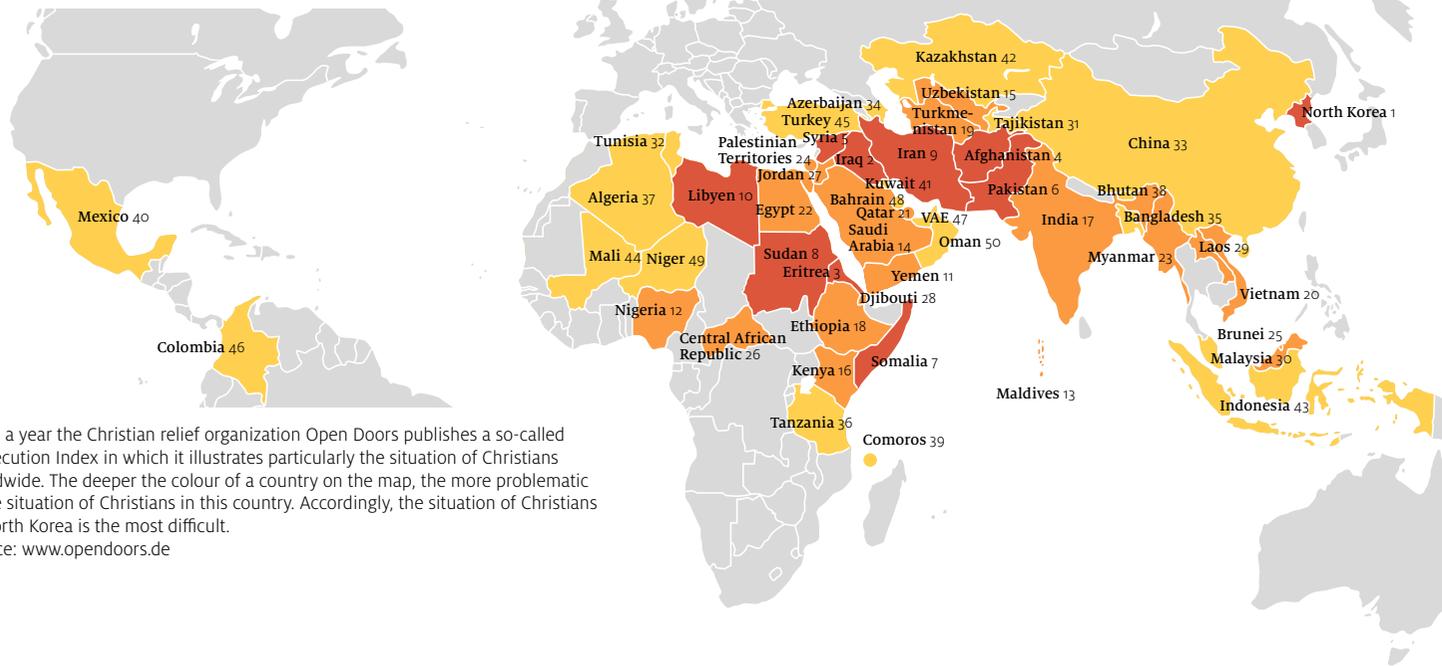
## Where are Christians especially in danger?

Intolerance of Christians is igniting in many places. From Iraq to Nigeria, from North Korea to Somalia: Christians are being persecuted, threatened, and marginalised in many countries of the world. The threat to Christian minorities is growing above all in countries where the majority of the population is experiencing a revival of religious fervour. This religious fanaticism all too often results in an extremism that then targets especially the Christian communities.

However, Christians are also in danger in countries where the state has collapsed. This is the case in northern Nigeria or parts of Iraq, where the terrorist group "Islamic State" carries out its atrocities and poses an existential threat to all those who do not submit to the radicals. Also, in areas where civil wars are being fought, Christians are increasingly caught in the crossfire between warring parties. Syria is an example.

### Persecution Index 2016

Where Christians are persecuted most



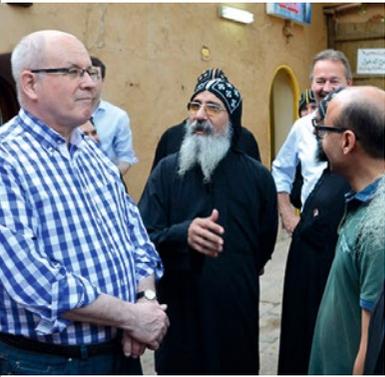
Once a year the Christian relief organization Open Doors publishes a so-called Persecution Index in which it illustrates particularly the situation of Christians worldwide. The deeper the colour of a country on the map, the more problematic is the situation of Christians in this country. Accordingly, the situation of Christians in North Korea is the most difficult.

Source: [www.opendoors.de](http://www.opendoors.de)

## How has the situation in Egypt developed?

The CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group has long had its eye on the tenuous situation of Coptic Christians in Egypt. After the Arab Spring of 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood under Mohamed Morsi came into power,

with the intention of transforming Egypt into an Islamic theocracy. The rights of Coptic Christians came increasingly under pressure. Under the new, secular President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, who has governed the country since 2014, this danger seems to have been averted; however, domestic peace has not yet returned.



## What is the situation for Christians in northern Iraq?

In the summer of 2014, Volker Kauder, Chairman of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, visited the Kurdish regional capital of Erbil in order to obtain a clear picture of the situation of refugees in northern Iraq. Germany supplies humanitarian aid for refugees as well as defensive weapons to support Kurdish fighters in their struggle against the "Islamic State".

## What is the situation for Christian refugees in Germany?

Many Christians from Syria, Iraq, and Iran were forced to flee their homes and have found protection in Germany. However, some of them are encountering the same hostile mentalities in the refugee shelters that they experienced at home. It goes without saying that the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in no way tolerates discrimination or violence towards these or any other Christians.

The Parliamentary Group has made regional authorities, parliaments, and institutions aware of these threats and ensured that violence motivated by religion will now be specifically recorded in the crime statistics. In addition, new standards for security agencies regarding the proficiency of their staff have been formulated. An emergency hotline for Christians and other religious minorities in acute situations of harassment is currently under consideration.

## What is the status of other religious groups?

Members of many other religions are suffering from discrimination and persecution, such as the Baha'i in Iran or people of Jewish faith. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Muslims who resist the terror of ISIS are affected, and thousands of Yazidis in northern Iraq have been displaced, enslaved, and killed.

Meanwhile, terror in the name of religion has also reached Europe. The devastating attacks in Paris, Brussels, or Nice were attacks on the entire free world and on the values of our western democracies. With the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach, Germany also has become a target of Islamist terrorism. This appalling inhumanity must be forced back and defeated.

## What is the role of the United Nations?

In March 2015, the U.N. Security Council had its first ever meeting on the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities by the "Islamic State". Upon the initiative of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, an international conference took place in New York in September 2015, bringing together more than 100 members of parliament from 45 countries who represent all major religions. Their goal was to promote a better protection of the free expression of all faiths and creeds. One year later, participants reconvened in Berlin in order to intensify endeavours towards an interparliamentary foreign policy. This network is to be expanded further in the future.

**Issued by**

CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag  
Michael Grosse-Brömer MdB  
Max Straubinger MdB  
Chief Whips

**Contact**

CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag  
Press and Information  
Platz der Republik 1 · 11011 Berlin  
T 030. 2 27-5 53 74 · F -5 01 46  
fraktion@cducsu.de  
www.cducsu.de

**Citizen Information**

T 030. 2 27-5 55 50  
fraktion@cducsu.de

**Composition/Layout**

Heimrich & Hannot GmbH

**Print**

Produtur GmbH  
Printed on paper from ecologically, economically and socially sustainable forestry

**Picture credits**

Title: Pakistani Christians light candles for victims of a suicide attack in Lahore. 75 died and over 350 people were injured in a park crowded with families enjoying Easter holidays. March 2016 (picture alliance/Pacific Press);  
Inside cover: A resident of a village in the province of al-Hasake in the north-east of Syria prays in St. George's Church destroyed by Islamic State terrorists. August 2015 (picture alliance/dpa);  
Outer cover: Kauder talking with priests in the Coptic-Orthodox monastery at Bachomeus/Egypt. March 2015 (Ulrich Scharlack)

**Parliamentary Motions**

18/8740 Federal Government`s Report on the Situation of Religious Freedom in the World, 9/6/2016;  
18/8558 Modification of Security Firms` requirements, 25/5/2016

**Status**

September 2016

This publication by the CDU/CSU parliamentary group serves solely as information. It may not be used during an election campaign for canvassing purposes.

**Order further publications for free:**  
[www.cducsu.de/publikationen.de](http://www.cducsu.de/publikationen.de)