

# Portland Press Herald

## Christians become victims of Middle East genocide

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September 25, 2015

**Christianity is now the most persecuted religion in the world.**

The vivid and heart-rending scenes of tens of thousands of refugees risking their lives (and in many cases, losing them) to flee the raging conflicts in the Middle East have dominated the media recently, just as the refugees themselves are overwhelming Europe's ability to take them in.

Yet, for all the human agony taking place there, attention has been diverted from an extremely significant aspect of the carnage left behind.

That is the fact that, as many human rights organizations have pointed out in horrified yet largely unnoticed terms, an entire region of the world is being depleted – more accurately, “cleansed” – of its most significant minority group, one that has had a presence in the Middle East for 2,000 years.

The group? Christians.

It's not a new story. Journalist Mollie Hemingway wrote on The Federalist website exactly two years ago Friday, “Christians are the single most widely persecuted religious group in the world today. This is confirmed in studies by sources as diverse as the Vatican, Open Doors, the Pew Research Center, Commentary, Newsweek and the Economist. According to one estimate, by the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, 75 percent of acts of religious intolerance are directed against Christians.”

Paul Vallely, a visiting professor of public ethics at Britain's Chester University, wrote a year later in Britain's The Independent newspaper: “The Center for the Study of Global Christianity in the United States estimates that 100,000 Christians now die every year, targeted because of their faith – that is 11 every hour. The Pew Research Center says that hostility to religion reached a new high in 2012, when Christians faced some form of discrimination in 139 countries, almost three-quarters of the world's nations.”

And Vallely cited a former chief rabbi of Britain, Jonathan Sacks, who told the House of Lords that the suffering of Middle East Christians is “one of the crimes against humanity of our time.” Sacks compared it with Jewish pogroms in Europe and said he was “appalled at the lack of protest it has evoked.”

Another liberal British paper, the Guardian, noted in July that on a recent trip to Latin America, Pope Francis, now visiting the United States, called attacks on Christians a “third world war” and “a form of genocide.”

The pope said he was dismayed “to see how in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world many of our brothers and sisters are persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus.” He went on: “In this third world war, waged piecemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide is taking place, and it must end.”

Even Prince Charles has chimed in, telling the BBC in February: “There is a real worry that there could come a time when there are no Christians left in the Middle East because the numbers have gone so dramatically down.”

Reports in this country on the slaughter are available, but they seem to be confined mostly to the Christian press and conservative sources. Still, the ritual beheading of 21 Coptic Christians by the so-called Islamic State was widely reported, as was news that IS terrorists drove out or killed all the Christians in Mosul and other Iraqi cities.

The news that 12 Christian refugees were thrown off a boat crossing the Mediterranean in April for praying to Jesus garnered much less media attention, however.

The journal Christianity Today reported Sept. 22 that “a persecution watchdog,” Christian Freedom International, “has found that more than 200 million followers are facing persecution in 105 countries. This makes Christianity the most persecuted religion in the world. The report has found that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th and 21st centuries than during the previous 19 combined.”

Christians aren’t the only persecuted faith, of course. Jews are persecuted in 77 nations, though they comprise only 0.2 percent of the world’s population.

And Muslims also suffer in many nations – although a large number of them are Muslim-majority countries where different Islamic groups attack each other.

The Open Doors website, cited above, lists nations ranked by their hostility to faith. North Korea is at the top of the list, followed by Somalia and Iraq. Most of the 50 countries listed as the top persecutors are either in the Middle East or Africa.

As Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, wrote in March, “Religious liberty is the canary in the mine for civil and personal liberties. Lands filled with people willing to persecute, harass, discriminate, kill, denigrate, and more to those with whom they disagree spiritually, and (containing) even more people willing to overlook or excuse such crimes, are potential hothouses for the most virulent forms of violence.”

And what is the most virulent form of violence?

Pope Francis said it: genocide.

