



## ***Persecution of minorities factsheet***

### ***Synopsis***

Promo - <https://vimeo.com/130871852>

Faithkeepers is an upcoming documentary film about the violent persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East.

The film features exclusive footage and testimonials of Christians, Baha'i, Yezidis, Jews, and other minority refugees, and a historical context of the persecution in the region.

Due to be released next year, the film also follows the story of a 24-year-old Christian student from North Carolina on her journey of understanding, discovery and solidarity with persecuted brothers and sisters in the Middle East.

Faithkeepers - the movie and the movement - will awaken, enlighten and inspire all people of faith to stand up and take action.

### ***Statistics on the persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East***

#### **Statistics on Minority Persecution the Middle East**

##### ***Global Religious Freedom***

In 2015, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom designated 17 countries of with the worst level of religious persecution.

**11** out of **17** of the countries with high levels of religious persecution have a majority Muslim population.<sup>1</sup>

##### ***Christians Persecution***

Since the beginning of World War I, the the Christian population in the Middle East has been in steady decline. Christians at the turn of the 20th century were 20 percent of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Annual Report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom: 2015" *The US Commission on International Religious Freedom*  
<http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf> pg. 6; Population stats are taken from the CIA factbook.

Middle East. They are now 3-5 percent. That number is supposed to be cut in half in the next 8 -10 years.<sup>2</sup> According to a most recent Pew study, in 2050, Christians will be 3 percent or less of the population of the Middle East with Muslims becoming 94% of the region.<sup>3</sup> While This decline began with the Armenian genocide.

### *Armenian Genocide*

From 1914-1922, a total of over 3.5 million (Greek, Armenian, Assyrian) Christians were killed by the Ottoman empire in what was one of the first genocides of the 20th century. As a result, Turkey's Christian population remains at a pitiful 1 percent of the population from a former 20 percent before World War I.<sup>4</sup>

The survivors scattered across the world with some moving overseas and others resettling in parts of the Middle East like Syria and Iraq.

### *Egypt*

Over the last 30 years, over 1 million Coptic Christians have left Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Over 93,000 Copts fled Egypt in 2011 as they faced widespread attack from the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi extremists.<sup>6</sup> There have been over 550 cases of kidnapping and abduction of Coptic Christian girls since 2011. The girls are often forcibly converted and married to a Muslim man.<sup>7</sup> While attacks on churches and official state persecution has decreased under President Al-Sisi, kidnapping has actually increased.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Facing Uncertainty, Middle East Christians are increasingly emigrating", *PBS News Hour*, September 17th, 2012, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/religion-july-dec12-christians\\_09-17/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/religion-july-dec12-christians_09-17/); Alissa Scheller & Antonia Blumberg, "How Christianity is disappearing in the Middle East in One Chart", *Huffington Post*, April 23rd, 2014 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/23/chart-christianity-middle-east\\_n\\_5378582.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/23/chart-christianity-middle-east_n_5378582.html)

<sup>3</sup> "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050", *Pew Forum*, April 2nd, 2015 <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

<sup>4</sup> "The Genocide of Ottoman Greeks, 1914-1923", Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights (Rutgers University) <http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/center-study-genocide-conflict-resolution-and-human-rights/genocide-ottoman-greeks-1914-1923> ), "Factbox, Christians in Turkey", *Reuters*, January 21st, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/01/22/us-religion-turkey-christians-factbox-idUSTRE50L08Q20090122>

<sup>5</sup> Paul Marshall, "Egypt's endangered Christians" in *Copts in Egypt: a Christian minority* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) pg. 24

<sup>6</sup> Philip Jenkins, "What Egypt's history suggests about its nightmarish future", *Australian Broadcasting Company*, August 21, 2013 <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/08/21/3831045.htm>; Samuel Tadros, "The Coptic Church in peril: The Islamization of Egypt and the end of Egyptian Christianity", *Australian Broadcasting Company*, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/09/15/3848945.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Alex Murashko, "More than 550 Coptic Christian schoolgirls in Egypt Kidnapped since 2011", *CHRISTIAN POST*, June 18th, 2014 <http://www.christianpost.com/news/more-than-550-coptic-christian-schoolgirls-in-egypt-kidnapped-since-2011-121724/#73rHD9xEIrtPH4.99>

<sup>8</sup> "International Religious Freedom Report for 2014: Egypt", *State Department: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor*, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

## *Saudi Arabia*

In Saudi Arabia, all churches are officially banned. This is true even though there are thousands of Christian migrant workers in the country. Home churches and bible meetings are routinely broken up and its members are either arrested or disappear.<sup>9</sup>

## *Lebanon*

Although established largely as a Christian stronghold in the Middle East, the Christian have declined from around 78% to some say around 34%.<sup>10</sup>

## *Syria*

In the 1920's, Syria was a third Christian. By the start of the civil war, only 10 percent of the population was Christian.<sup>11</sup>

An estimated 700,000 Christians have fled from Syria due to civil war and attacks by extremists. Many of those who fled are descendants of the survivors of the Armenian genocide.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the civil war, the Christian community has been subject to kidnappings, expulsion, rape, and pillage.<sup>13</sup>

## *Iraq*

Iraqi Christians numbered in 2003 around 1.5 million (5% of the population) and there are now only around 200,000-400,000 left (less than one percent). There is a larger Iraqi Christian community in Chicago and Michigan than there is in Iraq itself.<sup>14</sup> When ISIS invaded Mosul, over 200,000 people fled their homes as

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<sup>9</sup> Mathew Blake, "Dozens of Christians 'including women and children' are arrested in Saudi Arabia after tip-off to state's Islamist police force"; *Daily Mail*, September 14th, 2014  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2756134/Dozens-Christians-including-women-children-arrested-Saudi-Arabia-tip-state-s-Islamist-police-force.html>

<sup>10</sup> Eliza Griswold, "Is This the End of Christianity in the Middle East?", *New York Times*, July 22nd, 2015  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/magazine/is-this-the-end-of-christianity-in-the-middle-east.html>

<sup>11</sup> Walter Russel Mead, "The Plight of Middle East Christians", *Wall Street Journal*, May 15th, 2015,  
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-plight-of-the-middle-east-christians-1431700075>

<sup>12</sup> JANINE DI GIOVANNI AND CONOR GAFFEY, "The New Exodus: Christians flee ISIS in the Middleeast", *Newsweek*, March 26th, 2015,

<http://www.newsweek.com/2015/04/03/new-exodus-christians-flee-isis-middle-east-316785.html>. Nicole Crowder, "Rebuilding a life in Armenia after fleeing Syrian conflict", *Washington Post*, September 25th, 2014,  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-sight/wp/2014/09/25/returning-home-syrian-armenians-look-to-rebuild/>

<sup>13</sup> "Syria's beleaguered Christians", *BBC news*, February 25th, 2015,  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22270455>

<sup>14</sup> Drew Bowling and Andrew Doran, "Church Bells Fall Silent in Mosul as Iraq's Christians Flee", *Daily Beast*, June 29th, 2014

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/29/church-bells-fall-silent-in-mosul-as-iraq-s-christians-flee.html> ; Daniel Williams, "Christianity in Iraq is finished", *Washington Post*, September 19th, 2014,  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/christianity-in-iraq-is-finished/2014/09/19/21feaa7c-3f2f-11e4-b0ea-8141>

ISIS launched a campaign of murder, rape, robbery, sexual enslavement, and rape<sup>15</sup>

### *Iran*

In 2015, dozens of Christians were arrested and tortured. Since 2010, over 500 Christians have been arbitrarily arrested. Saeed Abedini, an American/Iranian convert to Christianity, has been sentenced to jail for 8 years and has been beaten and tortured several times.<sup>16</sup>

If the trends continue, many feel that Christianity will be pushed out of the region entirely. These statistics point to a systematic campaign to discriminate and persecute Christians and other minorities.<sup>17</sup>

While a variety of issues may lead to Christian decline in the region (instability, economic hardship, violence, etc.), many point to a rise in Islamic extremism as a major catalyst to Christian emigration over the last century. In fact, a recent study found that the biggest persecutor of Christians worldwide is radical Islamists and that 9 out of 10 countries rated as most dangerous for Christians are Muslim majority countries.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Other Minorities***

#### *Jewish Community*

An estimated 850,000 Jews were expelled or fled from their homes (Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Algeria etc.) since 1947.<sup>19</sup>

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[703bbf6f\\_story.html](#); "Iraqi Christians and the West: A rock and a hard place", *The Economist*, July 14th, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2014/07/iraqi-christians-and-west>; "Iraq: Overview", *Minority Rights International*, October 2014, <http://www.minorityrights.org/5726/iraq/iraq-overview.html>

<sup>15</sup> "State of the World's Minorities- 2015", *Minority Rights International*, pg. 213-214

<http://www.minorityrights.org/13061/attachments/MRG-state-of-the-worlds-minorities-2015-FULL-TEXT.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> "Annual Report: 2015", *The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, 2015 pg. 46-47

<http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Jane Corbin, "Could Christianity be driven from the Middle East?", *BBC*, April 15th, 2015,

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32287806>; Nicolas Kristof, "Religious Freedom in the Peril", *New York Times*, July 10th, 2014

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/10/opinion/nicholas-kristof-religious-freedom-in-peril.html?emc=eta1&r=0>; Ron Prosor, "The Middle East War on Christians", *Wall Street Journal*, April 16th, 2014,

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303630904579417482632439814>; Rubert Shortt,

"Christianophobia", *Civitas*, December 2012, [http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/Shortt\\_Christianophobia.pdf](http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/Shortt_Christianophobia.pdf); Rubert Shortt,

"Christians persecuted throughout the world", *Telegraph*, October 29th,

2012 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9640825/Christians-persecuted-throughout-the-world.html>; Nina

Shea, "The Salafi war on Christians and U.S. Indifference", *Hudson Institute*, April 12th, 2012.

[http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication\\_details&id=8862](http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=8862)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.worldwatchlist.us/>; Tom Heneghan, "Christian Persecution Doubled In 2013, Reports Annual Survey

By Open Doors", *Reuters*, January 23rd, 2014,

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/09/christian-persecution\\_n\\_4568286.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/09/christian-persecution_n_4568286.html)

<sup>19</sup> Hoge, Warren. "Group seeks justice for 'forgotten' Jews". *The New York Times*. November 5th, 2007

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/world/americas/04iht-nations.4.8182206.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/world/americas/04iht-nations.4.8182206.html?_r=0)

The Jewish community in Baghdad numbered close to half by the start of World War I by some estimates. There are about a dozen Jews left in all of Iraq- some say 6 in total.<sup>20</sup> In Egypt, the population has dropped from 80,000 to less than 20.<sup>21</sup> Lebanon's Jewish population was around 25,000 in 1948. There are now around 200.<sup>22</sup> In Syria, there were 30,000 Jews around 1948. There are around 50 Jews living there.<sup>23</sup>

### *Yazidi*

Under Saddam Hussein they were forced to identify as Arabs or otherwise be attacked as Kurds. After 2003, they have been subject to assassinations, bombings and discrimination. In 2007, an Al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the one of their villages left 215 people dead.<sup>24</sup>

Now, nearly every Yazidi family has been affected by the horrors of ISIS. 200,000 Yazidis fled from their homes when they were given a 24 hour ultimatum by ISIS to leave or die.<sup>25</sup> Over 5,000 Yazidi women have been captured, raped and are being sold as sex slaves by ISIS. Some have been sold for as little as 50 cents.<sup>26</sup>

### *Mandaeans*

Mandaeans are one of the oldest Christian groups in existence. From 2003, the number of Mandaeans or Baptists in Iraq have dwindled from 50,000 to 5,000.<sup>27</sup>

### *Baha'i*

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Z. Chesnoff, "By the Rivers of Babylon; What Happened to the Jews of Iraq", *Huffington Post*, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-z-chesnoff/post\\_7560\\_b\\_5306017.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-z-chesnoff/post_7560_b_5306017.html)

<sup>21</sup> "Egypt's Jewish community buries deputy leader", *Al-Jazeera*, March 12th, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/03/egypt-jewish-community-buries-deputy-leader-201431295947206212.html>

<sup>22</sup> Ash Galagher, "Lebanon's last synagogue", *Al-Monitor*, May 15th, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/lebanon-israel-beirut-jew-synagogue-coexistence-palestine.html#>

<sup>23</sup> Ruth Gledhill "About 50 Jews left in Syria", *Christianity Today*, July 9th, 2015 <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/there.are.only.about.50.jews.left.in.syria/58537.htm>

<sup>24</sup> "Yezidis", *Minority Rights International*, October 2014, <http://www.minorityrights.org/5742/iraq/yezidis.html>

<sup>25</sup> John Hall, 'I've been raped 30 times and it's not even lunchtime': Desperate plight of Yazidi woman who begged West to bomb her brothel after ISIS militants sold her into sex slavery", *Daily Mail Online*, October 21st, 2014 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2801353/i-ve-raped-30-times-s-not-lunchtime-desperate-plight-yazidi-woman-begged-west-bomb-brothel-isis-militants-sold-sex-slavery.html> ; "Yezidis", *Minority Rights International*, October 2014, <http://www.minorityrights.org/5742/iraq/yezidis.html>

<sup>26</sup> John Hall, 'I've been raped 30 times and it's not even lunchtime': Desperate plight of Yazidi woman who begged West to bomb her brothel after ISIS militants sold her into sex slavery", *Daily Mail Online*, October 21st, 2014 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2801353/i-ve-raped-30-times-s-not-lunchtime-desperate-plight-yazidi-woman-begged-west-bomb-brothel-isis-militants-sold-sex-slavery.html>

<sup>27</sup> "Sabian Mandaeans", *Minority Rights International*, October 2014, <http://www.minorityrights.org/5746/iraq/sabian-mandaeans.html>

After the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, hundreds of Baha'i were arrested, assassinated or simply disappeared. After international pressure forced Iran to stop killing Baha'is, the government developed a policy of job discrimination, random arrests, forced closure of businesses, confiscation of property, denial of passports, and disappearances. It is illegal to openly practice the Baha'i religion in Iran and Baha'i are not allowed to attend university.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Current situation of Baha'is in Iran", Baha'i International Community, September 8th, 2014  
<http://www.bic.org/media/Current-situation-Bahais-in-Iran>