

**WORLD REPORT SUMMARY
REGIONS AND SELECTED COUNTRIES**

AFRICA

- **ALGERIA:** Major conflict between government and Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). FIS won municipal elections and 25% of National People's Assembly seats in 1992 and was then outlawed by government. Thousands of people murdered and tortured in struggle between French style political-legal governmental system and Islamic fundamentalist movement.
- **EGYPT:** Secular government. Constitution states official religion is Islam and the principles of *shariah* are the primary source of law. Population mainly Sunni Muslim. Islamist violence against government and other beliefs prevalent. 70 Islamic militants sentenced to death by military courts, 25,000 in prison since 1992. Religious-based parties banned from running for public office. Coptic Christian's discriminated against by government with police raids and identity cards. Few (14 of 600 deputies) government appointments. Torture, murder, rape of Coptics by Islamic militants. Bahai's not recognized as a religion in Egypt. Atheist intellectuals persecuted (Farq Foda, 1992). UN Special Rapporteur reports religious extremism manifest in schools. Egyptian universities lack courses related to Coptic era.
- **SUDAN:** Coup in 1989 by National Islamic Front implemented *shariah* as basis for legal system and authoritarian regime. 73 % of population Sunni Muslim, 9 % Christian (Coptic in the North, Catholic, Protestant, other in the South). Major North-South civil-religious conflict since 1983. No churches allowed to be built in Khartoum since 1989. Active support for Christians in South from international community. Some small improvements since Pope John Paul II visit in 1993 (government sponsored human rights council formed to cover on-going human rights abuses).
- **NIGERIA:** Independence in 1960. 102 million population, 52% literacy. Approximately 50% Muslim, 35% Christian, the rest indigenous or tribal believers often holding one of the two dominant religions as well. Polls show large percent of Christians still believe in witchcraft. Muslims see separation of church-state in Constitution and British common law as a "Western" concept unacceptable to Islam. Christians accuse government of propping up political and economic power of Muslims. Advisory Council on Religious Affairs formed, could not decide on chair because they voted as a bloc, half Christian, half Muslim. Approximately 15,000 Nigerians have died in religious incited violence since 1980. All schools taken over by government in 1970's. Christianity and Islam are only religions in school curricula. Indigenous beliefs beginning to lobby for change. Some inter-faith initiatives have been started (Lutheran conference, 1993) to build tolerance, understanding and respect for diversity of belief.
- **SOUTH AFRICA:** Religion and belief played a crucial role in creating and maintaining a system of racial apartheid, as well as resisting it and influencing human rights. Predominant religion is Christian brought to South Africa in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company. Hindus and Muslims were brought as indentured slaves and forbade to practice their religious beliefs. Dutch Reformed Church found biblical support in the "curse of Ham" (book of Genesis) as a reason

for Apartheid similar to caste system of "untouchables" in India. Constitutions of 1961 and 1983 acknowledge the sovereignty of Almighty God. WCRP-SA in a Declaration on Religious Rights and Responsibilities advised the new constitution eliminate references to God in keeping with more modern approaches. This was defeated by the new parliament. The Provisional Constitution of 1993 includes the language "humble submission to Almighty God." In 1996 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up, headed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It is a very important experiment in forgiveness of hate crimes committed in the name of apartheid.

AMERICAS

- **ARGENTINA:** Anti-Semitism still the big issue in Argentina. Terrorist attacks have taken place against the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires (1992) and the Israeli Mutual Society of Buenos Aires (1994) in which over 120 people died.
- **GUATEMALA:** Peace Treaty signed in Oslo in 1996 between government and rebels with help from Norwegian government. Ended a long period of violence, especially against Mayan Indians, over 50% of population. From 1978-83 period known as *la violencia*. General Rios Montt, known for brutality, was an evangelical preacher and elder of the Church of the Word. Truth Commission now formed to find human rights abusers such as killers of Rev Troyer, a Mennonite missionary, assassinated in front of his wife and five children. He had worked in an area where over 1,500 indigenous people had been murdered by death squads and regular army units.
- **UNITED STATES:** The Supreme Court nullification of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, ruling that doctor-assisted suicide is not a constitutional right leads a list in 1997 of on-going religious-secular cultural debates over values in the United States. Other religious-ethical-legal issues continue over abortion, prayer in the schools and school vouchers. In Alabama, a federal judge refused to take the 10 commandments off the wall behind his bench in respect for Judeo-Christian values, but disrespect of other beliefs. The United States is one of the most religious countries in the world and at the same time one of the most secular. The struggle for balance between religious and secular world views continues to find expression in ethics, politics and esthetics. Evangelical movements such as the Christian Coalition and Promise Keepers reflect desire to influence public ethics and politics. Minority religions such as indigenous people's rights to sacred lands and use of eagle feathers and peyote for religious purposes, continues a long line of discrimination against Native Americans going back to the Christian theocracy proposed in Massachusetts in the 1600's and the spiritual genocide by the US Army against the Plains Indians in the 1890's. Anti-Semitism may have resided somewhat. Discrimination against Islam seems to be on the rise.
- **MEXICO:** Mexican government is taking belated by important steps to recognize and review legal framework that affects indigenous people's religion in the midst of unrest. According to the 1995 UN Special Rapporteur's report, at least 454 indigenous people--Protestants and Catholics--were evicted from the area of San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, because they had converted from Mayan religion to Christianity. Chiapas is nearly 30% indigenous Mayans. Reconciliation meetings to discuss principles of conversion have been held between Protestants and indigenous Mayan leadership who are in a civil struggle with the Mexican government.

- **COLUMBIA:** In 1886 the Colombian Constitution outlawed any religious observance other than that of Roman Catholicism. Catholicism had been called a "cultural dictatorship" by some insensitive observers. In 1991, new legislation was passed to guarantee religious liberty. Statutory Law 133 is the only legitimated human right in Columbia and safeguards the individual rights of the believer. The Constitutional Court in 1991 declared invalid some articles of the Concordat between the State of Columbia and the Vatican, in particular the state's "dedication to the sacred heart of Jesus" and the sole recognition of Catholic marriages. There is a great deal of violence having an influence on upcoming elections in 1997.

ASIA-PACIFIC

- **AFGHANISTAN:** Afghanistan has been in a continuing civil war dating back to the conflicts between a Communist secular government and Islam. Currently, the conflict is between the Taliban, a rural extremist Islamic movement and more moderate Islamic forces. Afghanistan stated the Taliban are the most "retrograde, obscurist and backward forms ever known in Afghanistan or the region."
- **CHINA:** Marxist-Leninist ideology, God an illusion created by human fantasy. Taoist, Buddhist, Muslim repression widespread. Christian "underground" church leaders suffer repression and jail. Conflict is between individual spiritual freedom and authoritarian socialist ideology. Capitalist-Confucian ideology (Singapore style) admired for authoritarian system of social control. One million Tibetans have died in genocide land based ideological dispute. Religious Affairs Bureau defines what is "normal" religious activity.
- **VIETNAM:** Ideological-religious struggle continues between Marxist-Leninist government and Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV). Vietnam Buddhist Church (UBC) government sponsored. Buddhist leaders from UBCV jailed recently. Tension exists between Vatican and Communist party (6 million Catholics in Vietnam).
- **INDIA:** Secular government with dominate Hindu (82% of population) economic-religious system (over 2,000 castes and sub-castes). 10,000 female infanticide deaths a year. Inter-community violence (Hind-Muslim, Hindu-Sikh) cause of many thousands of deaths a year. 62,000 cases of rape, torture, murder against untouchables and indigenous in 1994. Fights over sacred sites in 1992 (Ayodya-Babri mosque) left 1,200 dead. Hindu-Sikh violence in Punjab. Shiva Sena in Bombay (Hindu nationalism party) uses violent methods to convert Christians (mainly Dalit untouchables) back to Hinduism. Pakistan and Sri Lanka must be mentioned in this section.
- **PAKISTAN:** 120,000 million people, 35% literacy and 28% working population. 3.5 % non-Muslim. Horrendous communal violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims in many parts of Pakistan. Penal Code (298B) subject Ahmadis to three years imprisonment for practicing their beliefs. Blasphemy laws used to sentence many innocent people to death sometimes on personal vendetta's other times by mob violence. Some Christians do not enter inter-faith dialogue with Muslims for fear a simple statement of their faith would be held as slander against Mohammed.

- **SRI LANKA:** Ethnic-religious civil war between Sinhalese (Buddhist) and Tamil (Hindu) since 1956. 600,000 mostly women and children victims of war and refugees. National coalition government formed by influence of "bhikkhus" (monks) and dominant Buddhist population. Tamil Tigers (LLTE) committed to violent overthrow of government commit random terror killings in Northern Sri Lanka of anyone not for their cause.
- **INDONESIA:** Fourth largest nation, 190 million people, 2/3rds ethnic Javanese. 88% Muslim. Christian minority dominates private sector economy, target of discrimination. Secular government established in 1945. Pancasila, "Unity in Diversity," became official ideology of the nation. Ministry of Religion oversees religious life. After 1965 coup attempt atheism was equated with communism. Chinese Confucians persecuted. Identity Cards must be carried with religious affiliation. 400 organizations prohibited as being contrary to Indonesian culture, including Bahai's and Jehovah's Witnesses. Major conflict on-going between Catholic East Timor and Indonesian (Pancasila-Muslim) government since 1976. Bishop Belo and Jose Ramos Horta recipients of Nobel Peace Prize in 1996 for non-violent efforts to end conflict. One million Melanesians in Irian Jaya and West Papua repressed for economic exploitation. 43,000 indigenous people killed defending sacred sites and mountains, ancestral spiritual home of the Amungme people.

EUROPE

- **ALBANIA:** Most vivid example of transition in the former communist world on the issues of freedom of conscience. Enver Hoxha in 1967 circular "On the Fight Against Religion, Religious Prejudices and Customs" declared war on religion in a way similar to the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In 1991 change came in the form of constitutional amendments declaring Albania a secular state but allowing freedom of religious faith and conditions to exercise it. Albania's recent civil disorder threatens gains made.
- **FMR. YUGOSLAVIA:** Most horrendous example of ethnic-religious conflict in the 1990's. Representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia and the Islamic religious community in Bosnia-Herzegovina have met on several occasions to appeal for peace and reconciliation. Unfortunately, all major churches in former Yugoslavia, and in particular some of their high dignitaries and theologians as well as many priests, have been guilty of unpardonable acts of supporting and condoning intolerance, atrocities and ethnic cleansing, if committed by 'their' side.
- **GERMANY:** Most recent example of struggle to define religious freedom is the declaration of the Church of Scientology as a dangerous "sect" subjected to far reaching measures by the state. The state denies Scientology identification as a religion or belief system, official policy maintaining that religion is simply a cover for a purely commercial organization. History of the growth of the Nazi party seems to be driving the state's concern.
- **GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND:** In the past twenty-five years, over 3,000 men, women and children have died violent deaths in Northern Ireland. It is the longest standing national-religious conflict in Europe, with no

sense of abatement despite on-going peace and reconciliation talks between the IRA and British government in recent years.

- **GREECE:** Greece is the only Orthodox state in the world. Article 3.1 of the constitution states that the Eastern Orthodox Church is the 'prevailing religion.' European Court of Human Rights in 1993 made an historic ruling in Kokkinakis case (a Jehovah's Witness man accused of proselytizing) on freedom of religion or belief as indispensable for 'the pluralism indissociable from a democratic society.' Defining proper and improper forms of proselytizing remains a perplexing problem in Europe and around the world. UN Special Rapporteur's report on Greece notes intolerance and discrimination by Greece against Muslims in Western Thrace on the borders of Turkey.
- **TURKEY:** The history of relations between the state and Islam in Turkey can be traced back to the Islamic theocratic state, from the thirteenth to the mid-nineteenth century when the Ottoman Empire rapidly declined. A Westernisation reform process was launched in 1839; secular movements gained momentum while Islam remained the official, dominant religion. The secular period began with the establishment of the Republic in 1923 when the state assumed control over religion. The latest on-going dispute has been the forced resignation of the head of the Welfare Party (Islamic) as Prime Minister by the military generals committed to secularism. Documentation of torture and abuse by the military against the Kurdish separatist movement has been widely reported by human rights organizations.
- **RUSSIA:** The Russian Orthodox Church and Islam are the two major faith groups of Russia comprising, respectively, around 75% and 15% of its people. Religious nominalism is the rule today, the result of over 70 years of communist rule. The population shows a hunger for spiritual values, but ignorance about what new religious denominations and major religions demand. Radio Free Europe survey in 1994 revealed that 39% of Russians considered themselves religious, although only 6% attend church and only 4% said they had strong beliefs. The Soviet States Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) was dissolved in 1991 in accordance with a new 1990 Law on Freedom of Conscience. The Russian Parliament, with the backing of the Russian Orthodox Church, recently passed restrictive laws revising the 1990 law and constitutional clauses on freedom of religion or belief. President Yeltsin, under severe international pressure, vetoed the legislation but the struggle continues. New laws proposed by the Parliament and supported by the Russian Orthodox Church are extremely intolerant of minority religious growth throughout the Russian Federation. The recent war between the Russian army and Muslim backed factions in Chechnya has recently abated.

MIDDLE EAST

- **ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY:** The issue of freedom of religion or belief in Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) territories is complex because it is inseparable from the underlying Arab-Jewish conflict, even though in general terms, freedom of religion or belief for members of all faiths in Israel is safeguarded. The assassination of President Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by a *yeshiva*, a student at a Jewish religious seminary, slowed positive developments in the peace process negotiated in Oslo, Norway between Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Yassir Arafat. The renewal of suicide bombings in Israeli cities in 1996 by members of the Palestinian group Hamas and Islamic Jihad (financed by Iran)

continued the confrontation on-going since the founding of Israel in 1948. Israeli troops withdrew from Hebron in January, 1997 as part of the peace process agreement, but confrontation between Palestinian youth and the Israeli army continues. There is a growing rift between Orthodox Jews and secular Jews over numerous issues concerning the expression of freedom of religion or belief in the country.

- **IRAN:** Judging by annual reports of human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the repressiveness of regimes prior to the Islamic revolution of 1979 pales in comparison. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in June, 1994 stated "The Islamic Republic is accused of violating human rights, by which they mean [we implement] Islamic laws. We certainly prefer the text of the Holy Qur'an to the products of the failing minds of western lawyers." The Islamic Republic of Iran seems to value its membership of the United Nations, but excoriates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is often denounced as a charter for the criminal and the corrupt by claiming that Islam, the principles of which rule all their counsels, has a morally superior and intellectually more valid system of rights for humankind. As a result, Iranian officials are not offended when charged with being totalitarian. The most important cases of total intolerance and discrimination in Iran is against the Baha'is. The Baha'i community in Iran has now been virtually eliminated. Over two hundred of its leaders are known to have been executed in government prisons after long periods of torture.
- **SAUDI ARABIA:** Saudi Arabia is the centre of the Islamic faith worldwide. The holy cities of Meca--the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammed, the seat of the Great Mosque and the Shrine of Ka'ba--and of Medina, the burial place of Prophet Mohammed and the second sacred city of Islam, are located there. *Shariah* is the fundamental law of the country as interpreted by the Hanbali school of thought. The official creed of Saudi Arabia is the Wahhabi doctrine of Islam, the central tenant of which is belief in emulating the purity of the early Islamic community, the oneness of God (tawhid) and the strong condemnation of polytheism (shirk). This leads to extreme forms of intolerance and discrimination against the practice of all other religions in the Kingdom. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932, when King Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud unified all the areas he ruled under one political system. Its dominant position in world oil markets had led to economic and financial influence worldwide.
- **IRAQ:** Since the Arab Ba'ath Party seized power in 1968, Iraq has been a single-party state under tight security control. The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Max van der Stoep, came to the conclusion that there are no freedoms of opinion, expression and association in Iraq. Freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief is meaningless in such an environment and religious persecution a constant reality. A majority of Iraqis (65%) are Shia Muslims and a minority (32%) are Sunni. The Ba'ath Party is essentially secular, on paper committed in 1968 to socialism and a pan-Arabist movement. Ruling members of the party are Sunni by family tradition and persecuted Shia Muslims in the eight year war against Iran and in the attempted obliteration of the Shia "marsh Arabs" in Iraq.