

STATEMENT OF CONSCIENCE
of the National Association of Evangelicals concerning
Worldwide Religious Persecution
January 23, 1996
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Foreword

This Statement of Conscience of the National Association of Evangelicals reflects our deep concern for the religious freedom of fellow believers, as well as people of every faith. We invite others to join us to work tirelessly to bring about action by our government to curb worldwide religious persecution.

Facts

The persecution of religious believers has become an increasingly tragic fact in today's world. In many countries, moreover, Evangelical Protestants and Catholics have become special targets of reigns of terror initiated by authorities who feel threatened by Christian faith and worship. Such authorities, often motivated by anti-Western, anti-democratic ideologies, also persecute Christians as a means of threatening the freedom of all persons subject to their authority.

Incidents of religious persecution are legion:

- In many Islamic countries, where militant and xenophobic Islamist movements seek to capture the soul of a historically tolerant Islamic faith, and where the demonization of Christians also serves to intimidate Muslims seeking freedom from repressive regimes.
- In China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam, where remnant Communist regimes feel threatened by persons whose Christian faith places them under an authority transcending governments, and where the persecution of Christians also serves to intimidate non-Christian dissenters.
- In other parts of the world, where persons of evil intent rightly understand that the survival of churches undermines their aims, because these churches affirm the human dignity of all persons created in God's image and acknowledge their ultimate accountability to a transcendent God.
- In countries and regions where the demonization of powerless Christian scapegoats often serves to vent, foment, and popularize hatred of the West and the United States.
- Imprisonment and torture of persons for simply attending Christian worship services or Bible studies.
- Establishment of government-controlled "religious associations" and criminal prosecution and torture of members of "unlicensed" Christian churches.
- Refusal to permit Vatican appointments of Catholic bishops and refusal to allow nonapproved bishops to appoint local priests.
- Encouragement and appeasement of unpunished mob violence against Christians conducting burial and other religious services.

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- Encouragement and appeasement of unpunished looting and burning of businesses and homes of practicing Christians.
- Church burnings and systematic official refusals to allow the building of new churches or church repairs.
- Encouragement and appeasement of systematic beatings of children who attend Christian schools.
- Literal sale into slavery of Christian children abducted by government forces.
- Refusal to distribute food to Christians in famine-stricken areas unless they agree to renounce their faith.
- Wide dissemination, often with government support, of scurrilously hateful, deliberately provocative, anti-Christian tapes, books and tracts.
- Imprisonment of Christians for the mere possession of Bibles.
- Prosecution, torture and even murder of practicing Christians under infamous and broadly construed "blasphemy" laws.
- Prosecution, torture and even murder of Christian converts and the children and grandchildren of such converts, under equally infamous and broadly construed "apostasy" laws.

Principles

If people are to fulfill the obligations of conscience, history teaches the urgent need to foster respect and protection for the right of all persons to practice their faith.

If people are to fulfill the obligations of conscience, history cries out for an end to today's wrongful silence, by Christians as well as others, in the face of mounting persecution of Christian believers.

If governments are to be worthy of the name, or responsive to their national interests and the interest of their people, lessons of history mandate uncompromising hostility to religious persecution.

If, though it is true, the United States government cannot end all evil throughout the world, it can nonetheless adopt policies that would limit religious persecution and ensure greater fulfillment of inalienable and internationally recognized rights to freedom of religious belief and practice.

Call to Action

It is lamentable that persecution of religious believers is pervasive around the world.

We are dismayed that the United States government has been indifferent to its obligation to speak out against reigns of terror now being plotted and waged against Christians. At the same time, we confess our own culpability in failing to do all within our power to alleviate the suffering of those persecuted for their religious beliefs.

We know that the United States government has within its power and discretion the capacity to adopt policies that would be dramatically effective in curbing such reigns of terror and protecting the rights of all religious dissidents. As a matter of conscience, therefore, we respectfully call for the following actions to be taken by the government of the United States:

- I. Public acknowledgment of today's widespread and mounting anti-Christian persecution and the adoption of policies condemning religious persecution whether it results from official policy or from unchecked terrorist activity.

To that end, we respectfully recommend that the following steps be taken:

- A major policy address by the President initiating a new *public* diplomacy commitment to openly condemn anti-Christian persecution wherever it occurs and further announcing a lesser reliance on today's private diplomacy and case-by-case appeals to curb such persecution.
- Issuance of instructions to all Ambassadors or surrogates to meet regularly with willing church leaders and dissidents in countries where religious persecution occurs.
- Appointment of a knowledgeable, experienced, and compassionate Special Advisor to the President for Religious Liberty charged with preparing a report indicating needed changes in policies dealing with religious persecution, and recommending remedial action.
- Issuance of instructions to the United States delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to regularly and forcefully raise the issue of anti-Christian and other religious persecution at all appropriate Commission sessions.
- Issuance of instructions to consular officials acknowledging the mounting evidence of religious persecution and instructing them to provide diligent assistance when the victims of religious persecution seek refugee status.
- Issuance of instructions to senior officials engaged in trade or other international negotiations, when dealing with officials of countries that engage in religious persecution, to vigorously object to such religious persecution and to link negotiations with the need for constructive change.

- II. Issuance by the State Department's Human Rights Bureau and related government agencies of more carefully researched, more fully documented and less politically edited reports of the facts and circumstances of anti-Christian and other religious persecution.

To that end, we respectfully recommend that the following steps be taken:

- Issuance of instructions to human rights officers to distinguish between the treatment of different Christian groups within countries and no longer to assume that all such groups are similarly dealt with.
- Issuance of instructions that Human Rights Bureau annual reports are to make explicit findings of whether anti-Christian or other religious persecutions occur, thereby eliminating from such reports any "option of silence" regarding such persecutions.
- Clarifying and upgrading the role of embassy human rights officers in countries where anti-Christian or other religious persecution is ongoing and pervasive, and ensuring that such officers carefully monitor religious liberty violations on an ongoing and prioritized basis.

- III. Cessation of the indifferent and occasionally hostile manner in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service often treats the petitions of escapees from anti-Christian persecution.

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To that end, we respectfully recommend that the following steps be taken:

- Issuance of an Attorney General's Bulletin to INS hearing officers acknowledging mounting anti-Christian persecutions in many parts of the world, and directing such officers to process the claims of escapees from such persecution with priority and diligence.
 - Issuance of instructions by the Attorney General and the Secretary of State directing preparation of annual INS reports describing its processing of religious refugee and asylum claims.
 - Issuance of regulations requiring access to written opinions from INS hearing officers clearly stating the grounds for any denial of religious refugee and asylum claims.
 - Establishment of INS listening posts in countries to which refugees from anti-Christian persecution frequently flee.
 - Cessation of INS and State Department delegation of complete responsibility for refugee processing functions to international and United Nations agencies.
 - Development and issuance of training guidelines for INS personnel on issues specifically related to religious persecution.
- IV. Termination of non-humanitarian foreign assistance to governments of countries that fail to take vigorous action to end anti-Christian or other religious persecution, with resumption of assistance to be permitted only after a written finding is made by the President that the countries have taken all reasonable steps to end such persecution, and arrangements are made to ensure that religious persecution is not resumed.

Conclusion

Religious liberty is not a privilege to be granted or denied by an all-powerful State, but a God-given human right. Indeed, religious liberty is the bedrock principle that animates our republic and defines us as a people. We must share our love of religious liberty with other peoples, who in the eyes of God are our neighbors. Hence, it is our responsibility, and that of the government that represents us, to do everything we can to secure the blessings of religious liberty to all those suffering from religious persecution.

We appeal not only to our own government, but to the governments of every nation that would be free, to treasure religious freedom. A people cannot be truly free where the elemental justice of religious freedom is abridged or denied. If justice is to "roll on like a river," religious persecution around the world must cease.

Therefore, before God, and because we *are* our brother's keeper, we solemnly pledge:

To end our own silence in the face of the suffering of all those persecuted for their religious faith.

To address religious persecution carried out by our Christian brothers and sisters whenever this occurs around the world.

To withhold assistance by our member denominations to those countries that fail to take action to end religious persecution.

PCA DIGEST

To do what is within our power to the end that the government of the United States will take appropriate action to combat the intolerable religious persecution now victimizing fellow believers and those of other faiths.

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