

Civil conflict, religious persecution and the church in some African countries

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Sub-Saharan Africa has been the stage of numerous violent civil conflicts, which have almost always affected the church in one way or another. In some cases, the church has been directly victim of targeted persecution; in others, the church has indirectly suffered from persecution because of its vulnerable position in the context of civil conflicts.⁴

The following table offers a historical overview of persecution of Christians in Sub-Saharan African countries, based on data from the World Watch List of Open Doors International. OD is a Christian mission agency which has been advocating for the persecuted for the last 59 years.

Figure 1. Sub-Saharan African countries on the World Watch List (2003-2014)

Country	Somali	Sudan	Eritrea	Nigeri	Central African Republic	Ethiopi	Mali	Como	Keny	Djibo	Tanzan
Score (0-100)*	a			a**		a		ros	a	uti	ia
2014	80	73	72	70	67	65	54	48	48	46	46
2013	74	70	72	68		63	73	45	47	44	55
2012	66.5	53.5	56	55		36		45.5		33.5	
2011	64	37	55	44		30		46.5		33.5	
2010	62.5	38	54.5	41		29.5		48		34	
2009	60.5	36.5	55	41		28		50		34	
2008	54.5	41.5	55	37		28		50		36	
2007	63	43.5	53	38		32		52		37	
2006	62	35	50.5	34.5		28.5		47.5		36.5	
2005	60	43.5	48.5	40.5		23.5		49.5		36	
2004	57	50.5	46.5	43		21		52		34	
2003	59.5	52.5	27.5	46		26		49.5		31	

* The methodology used for the World Watch List was comprehensively reviewed in 2012. In 2013 and

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2014, a new methodology was used. The scores given in the period 2003-2012 cannot be directly compared to the scores given in 2013-2014. Figures were published in January of the indicated year, and assess the situation of the preceding year (reporting period from November of the preceding year to October of the year before).

** Until 2012, Northern Nigeria was assessed a separate entity in the World Watch List.

Source: World Watch Research unit, Open Doors International.

The names of the countries on this table remind of places where there also are or were violent civil conflicts. It seems that the countries where persecution of Christians has been a reality are very often also countries that have been touched by violent civil conflicts, or that can be qualified as “failed states.” Indeed, there seems to be an empirical connection between the political situation of a country and the degree of respect for religious freedom.

Now, when trying to assess the levels of religious freedom (positively seen as an expression of peace) and persecution in a country, the issue arises whether detrimental effects on Christians actually emanate from degrees of persecution or from other adverse factors. One major such factor is civil unrest/war. Several countries that have a high level of religious persecution simultaneously suffer from wars. It is difficult to disentangle causes and effects. While the Christian Church is often a victim, it might also be an active role player in those conflicts.

This paper will explore the relationship between civil conflict and persecution, using the material of Open Doors' World Watch List as a starting point, in relation to further research. Through the examination of five case studies, the following research questions will be discussed:

- How do civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church in Africa?
- What role have the respective Christian communities played in those conflicts?
- Are they victims only or also perpetrators?
- What are they doing to defuse and help end these conflicts?

(1.) The first section of this paper will propose a general framework which offers an understanding of the relation of civil conflict and persecution. (2.) The nature of this relationship will then be explored empirically through five case studies: Central African Republic, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and Mali. (3.) The paper concludes with a synthesis of the main findings of these case studies.

1. COMPLEX REALITY: CIVIL CONFLICT AND PERSECUTION⁵

1.1 Civil conflict as an expression of “brokenness of the world”

According to a biblical worldview Christians and their communities live in a world that is often far from perfect. To a greater or lesser extent, they live in problematic circumstances, as all other

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Part of the content of this section was adapted from the Methodology of the World Watch List of Open Doors International. To obtain a copy of the full methodological framework of the World Watch List, please visit <http://www.worldwatchlist.us/about/ranking-methodology/> or send an email the authors. For a critical discussion of the methodology of the World Watch List cf. Sauer, Christof (2012), “Measuring persecution. The new questionnaire design of the World Watch List”, in *International Journal for Religious Freedom* Vol. 5:2 2012 (21-36).

inhabitants of the same areas do. This situation has been identified by theologians as the “brokenness of the world”: many issues, including civil conflicts, affect human’s well-being and well-fare. The civil conflicts in African countries are clearly an expression of 'brokenness.' Generally speaking, situations of 'brokenness' could include war, ethnic tensions, religious tensions, ideological tensions, political conflicts, social conflicts, corruption, environmental degradation and natural disasters, poverty, (severe) psychological problems, illness and domestic violence.

1.2 Persecution

Persecution is here defined as ‘*any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians*’.

Persecution often takes place in disturbed, difficult and de-stabilized contexts. However, not everything that can be categorized as “brokenness of the world” can necessarily be labeled “persecution”, even if it causes Christians to feel pressured or violated. In fact, specific persecution dynamics can be identified which are directly responsible for the suffering of Christians.

The researchers of the World Watch List have identified three major impulses that cause persecution: the *tribal impulse*, *secularist impulse* and *exploitative impulse*. The **tribal impulse** has to do with very exclusive group formation. The ‘other’ who is not part of one’s own group, is considered to be an inferior human being or infidel. It is legitimate to deal with such a person in bizarre, amoral ways that would never be allowed in one’s own group without compromising one’s own moral standards. The tribal impulse is always related to a strong religious presence. In Africa, the tribal impulse is a major source of conflict, often characterized by the interaction between tribal and Islamic factors.

The **secularist impulse** relates to suffocating people or groups that do not adhere to the dominant ideology which is always somehow anti-religious or skeptical of organized religion. The emphasis of the ideologies that are inspiring the secularist impulse can be rather different: from the ‘revolutionary potential of the working class’ to the launch of a very liberal sexual agenda. Humans are the sole source of norms and values, without divine inspiration or guidance. This impulse starts playing an increasing role in Africa.

The **exploitative impulse** relates to plain greed: getting as many resources as possible for oneself and one’s small, favorite social environment, legally or illegally. Everything is allowed. Power in the context of the exploitative impulse is more a means than a goal. While in the context of the tribal and secularist impulses power is actively sought as token of the supremacy of one’s religion or ideology, the exploitative impulse needs power to safeguard its interests. In Africa, the exploitative impulse is undoubtedly very present, either through organized crime or through government corruption.

These impulses manifest themselves in various phenomena, which in the terminology of the WWL are called “persecution engines”, ideological vehicles and power structures that bring about persecution. You will recognize many, when you glance at this table.

Figure 2. Impulses and persecution engines

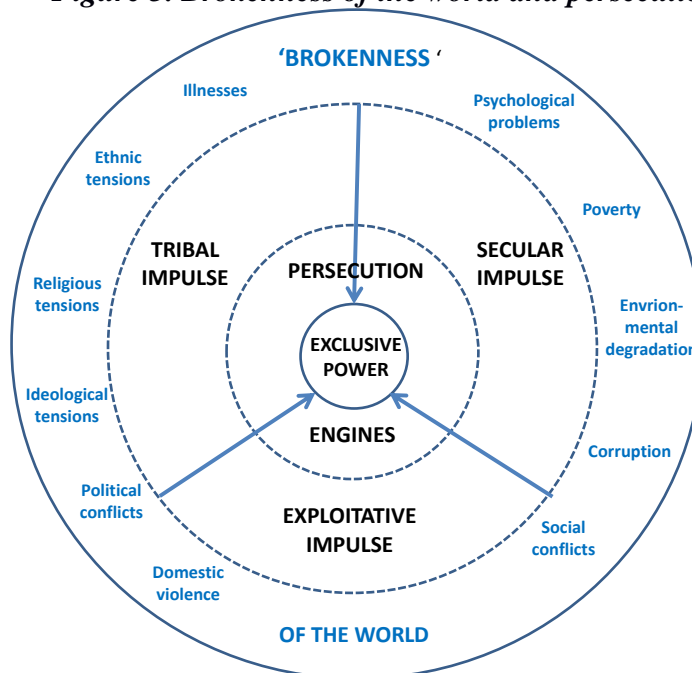
Underlying impulses	Persecution engine
Tribal impulse	Islamic extremism
	Other religious militancy
	Tribal antagonism
	Ecclesiastical arrogance
Secularist impulse	Communist oppression
	Aggressive secularism
Exploitative impulse	Totalitarian paranoia
	Organized corruption

Source: World Watch Research unit, Open Doors International.

These engines have drivers – persons, organizations or institutions – who are the agents of persecution. It is important to note that not only can the state and its institution be an agent of persecution, but equally civil society at all its levels and in all its manifestations.

All those impulses, persecution engines and drivers are driven by one common motive, namely absolute power, say the persecution analysts of the WWL. The issue of power might be an initial indication why civil conflict and persecution are related. The diagram shows the relation between impulses, persecution engines and the drive for exclusive power:

Figure 3. Brokenness of the world and persecution



Source: World Watch Research unit, Open Doors International.

So the thesis we propose, is: The ‘brokenness of the world’ operates as background to the persecution of Christians. We will speak of *persecution* when Christians and their communities experience specific pressure and/or violence in this situation of ‘brokenness’ that are related to persecution dynamics prevalent in their environments and are forcing them to comply with the drivers of these dynamics.

The main body of this paper is an initial exploration into the interaction between background suffering caused by ‘brokenness of the world’ – and particularly civil conflict or war – and suffering through active persecution engines. It looks at specific elements within the socio-political contexts of the countries studied which add to the vulnerability and suffering of Christians when they are also targeted by persecution. The civil conflicts in African countries are clearly an expression hereof.

2. EMPIRICAL EXPLORATIONS

2.1. Central African Republic

2.1.1 Brief Church history

Christianity is dominant in the Central African Republic (CAR). It was introduced by French colonizers in 1894 as an imperial religion. As such, it was re-appropriated by the population of the country through a process of hybridization with their pre-existing animist beliefs. Christianity was the religion of choice for many due to its close association with powerful and respected colonial officials. Missionary groups currently operating in CAR include Baptists (since 1921), followed by Lutherans and Pentecostals. Most of the country’s leaders so far have been Christians, without expressing any religious domination aspirations.

Constitutionally, CAR is a secular state, but in the past autocratic rulers have relied on support from religious organizations – mostly churches. According to the US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Reports, government favoritism of religion in the country has been low over the past decade. Fundamentalist and witchcraft practices, however, are considered a criminal offense. The Ministry of Territorial Administration, with which all religious groups have to register, can use legal measures in refusing registration to groups that are considered nefarious to social cohesion, political order or public morality.

2.1.2 Persecution dynamics⁶

The Central African Republic (CAR) entered the World Watch List in 2014 for the first time with 67 points. The high score of the country can be explained almost exclusively by the high degree of violence against Christians caused by the rebellion of the Séléka movement. The main persecution engine in the Central African Republic is Islamic extremism.

The Christian population – all types of Christianity – is the most vulnerable group in the current crisis in CAR. Any church and property belonging to ordinary Christians is a target for Séléka. For a Christian majority country such as CAR, the degree of pressure on Christians is surprising. Due to the uprising, the freedom of Christians is restricted heavily throughout all spheres of life, though to a lesser extent in the private and family spheres. The levels of violence in CAR are unprecedented. In fact, CAR receives the highest possible score as far as physical violence is concerned. The score of CAR on the WWL includes the killing of at least 13 pastors, and the rape of many women.

⁶ This section is based on the Central African Republic persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International.

2.1.3 Relation between persecution and civil unrest

How do civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church?

The internal revolution which saw the victory of Séléka, a coalition of rebels dissatisfied with the authoritarian and incompetent President Bozizé, widespread corruption and discrimination among large parts of the population, especially among Muslims is responsible for the high degree of pressure and violence against Christians. The Séléka movement, with no apparent Islamist agenda but composed in majority of (foreign) Muslims, has ravaged the country, specifically targeting Christian properties (houses and churches) and government buildings.

Rebel groups from the Central African Republic and Muslims from Chad and Sudan joined forces to form a militant coalition called Séléka ('alliance' in local Sangho language), which started conquering large parts of the Northeastern and Central parts of the Central African Republic in December 2012. Séléka took the capital of Central Africa Republic, Bangui, on 24 March 2013 and sent President Francois Bozizé into exile.

Bozizé was ousted, but the transitional government of rebel leader Djotodia was unable to provide security and stability in the country. The Séléka coalition fell apart and warlords with militia, all with an Islamist mentality, took control of every corner of the country. During the conquest and the transitional government's reign the Central African Republic turned into a failed state in which chaos and anarchy were paramount. Gross human right abuses on an immense scale were perpetrated by the rebels leaving the local population desperate.

The Séléka rebel movement consisted of about 90% Muslims (the local population is about 80% Christian). The high number of religious casualties that were caused by the conflict seems to indicate that Séléka has, at least in part, an Islamic agenda. Indeed, since the outbreak of the rebellion, the Séléka only attacked Christians and non-Muslims. The desecration of Christian churches and the violence towards Christians (rape, robbery, kidnapping, torture, murder, etc.) are evidence of this. Moreover, Djotodia has in two occasions called for support from the Organization of the Islamic Conference and promised to introduce Sharia law.

Although Séléka had been dissolved, Michel Djotodia's government was not capable (or not willing) to put an end to the violence of the rebels. Following strong international pressures to resign because of his inability to restore the rule of law, Michel Djotodia finally stepped down on 10 January 2014. He was replaced by Catherine Samba-Panza, then Mayor of Bangui and a member of the National Transitional Council (CNT) created by Djotodia. Samba-Panza will be interim-president of the country until general elections that will be organized in 2015.

In the *Vulnerability Assessment of Christians in the Central African Republic*, Pastoor (2013)⁷ made an effort to identify whether, in the context of the crisis in CAR, Christians are particularly vulnerable to suffer hostilities. As in any other civil conflict, all people can be expected to suffer, but the *Vulnerability Assessment* allows understanding to what degree Christians are pressured. If Christians

⁷ Dennis Pastoor, *Vulnerability Assessment of Christians in the Central African Republic*, World Watch Research unit, Open Doors International, 2013, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/2914097>.

are specifically and deliberately targeted, than this effectively makes the case that Christians are particularly vulnerable in the context of the civil conflict in the country.

The experts that were consulted in preparation for the report clearly indicate that Christians are deliberately targeted (76% of the population of CAR is Christian) and vulnerable because they have no defense and in many cases cannot return to their homes, houses and villages for insecurity and instability reasons. Moreover they are vulnerable because of impunity, lawlessness, absence of rule of law. Amnesty International also refers to the absence of a functioning judicial system, combined with a generalized lack of political will, explained in part by fear of reprisal, to address the human rights abuses as one of the agents of the CAR crisis (Amnesty International, 2014)⁸.

Role of Christian communities in the conflict

Church, State and society in CAR are caught up in a very traumatic experience. Whilst the Séléka fighters were, and still are, an important driver of “Islamic extremism”, the dominant persecution engine at this stage of the conflict can be best described as “Organized corruption”, an advanced state of impunity, anarchy and corruption. Indeed, resentment and retaliation by anti-Balaka militias have brought the country into a spiral of violence.

In such a context, Christians who are committed to social justice are always the most vulnerable. To some extent, these Christians are also suffering from anti-Balaka. The anti-Balaka has its own agenda, and when a church supports Muslims or acts in contradiction to its agenda, this church can face reprisals. There are some reports of attacked Christians and threatened Church leaders who have dared speak out against anti-Balaka.

In two declarations, the first in October 2013 and the second in February 2014, signed by the leaders of the main Christians denominations have joined hands to condemn the violence by both Séléka and anti-Balaka. In spite of the difficult situation, the civil conflict was instrumental in bringing unity to the church in CAR, who spoke out with one voice against the violence.

After months of violence by the Muslim dominated Séléka, self-defense groups have emerged that attack Muslims in unjustified revenge. More and more, groups of armed civilians have gotten involved in retaliation killings between vigilante groups vs. local disorganized remnants of the Séléka movement and local Muslims.

The name “anti-Balaka” (which means “anti-machete”) is a collective name for a mosaic of “Christian” self-defense groups. The anti-Balaka militias consist of former soldiers and farmers and organized initially to protect their communities against Séléka. The anti-Balaka started a revolt against Muslims because of two main reasons: (a) influx of fighters from neighboring countries and (b) the economic power of Muslim traders which is excluding non-Muslims. However, these groups do not simply protect themselves and their communities against Séléka but have begun attacking Muslim communities and committing egregious human rights violations themselves.

⁸ Amnesty International, *Central Africa Republic: Time for Accountability*, 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR19/006/2014/en/04291c70-7427-4d9e-b1b0-4bc639e50bd3/afr190062014en.pdf>.

The anti-Balaka militias call themselves Christians and state that they are fighting to preserve and protect Christians. Indeed, members of the local population who are pre-dominantly Christian, although with a strong animistic background, are effectively participating in these groups. Although it is true that most anti-Balaka members are formally considered Christians, it is questionable whether the term “Christian militia” is actually correct for at least three reasons. Firstly, the fight of the anti-Balaka is not of a religious nature. A large part of these militias are largely politically motivated and fight for the return of the deposed President François Bozizé. Secondly, the anti-Balaka use many African Traditional Religious rituals and practices which are contrary to the doctrines of the Christian faith. Finally, the Christian majority and Christian leaders in CAR have officially and vehemently distanced themselves from the anti-Balaka violence.

Christian leaders in CAR are humbled and ashamed of the violence against Muslims. Some of them see the conflict as a result of their own lack of commitment to the faith. The resentment of Muslims because of their treatment as second-class citizens, and the spiral of violence that followed was our fault, they say: “We are punished because we have not been true enough to the Christian faith.”

Through the two declarations, Christian leaders have been part of what could be the first step towards the resolution of the CAR crisis. Moreover, as part their involvement in the Interfaith Platform, formed of Christian and Muslim leaders, a ceasefire was agreed between the armed groups in CAR⁹.

Summary

The civil conflict in which CAR is embroiled since March 2013 has numerous explanatory factors, including frustrations with the socio-economic situation of the country and the high level of corruption; tribal divisions; and militant religious agendas. The complexity of the CAR crisis should not, however, obscure the real vulnerability of Christians to suffer hostilities, in particular those Christians who are committed to social justice and peace.

Christians are indeed killing Muslims at this stage of the conflict in CAR as revenge for acts committed by Séléka rebels before they were forced out of power. The fighting between Muslim Séléka and “Christian” anti-Balaka is one very real aspect of the conflict in CAR, and both parties are guilty of very severe human rights violations. Of course, the anti-Balaka can hardly be considered “true Christians” in a biblical sense for reasons evoked in the previous section, but they self-identify as Christians nevertheless. This being said, Christian leaders have worked hard to achieve peace in CAR, and have shown an unprecedented unity which gives hope for the future.

2.2. Nigeria

2.2.1 Brief Church history

Constitutionally Nigeria is a secular state with freedom of religion. For nearly 40 years, the Northern ruling elite have been giving preferential treatment to Muslims and discriminating against Christians. Little was done to stop the persecution of Christians in the North. The tragic result was the burning of churches and killing of Christians. Since 1999, Sharia law has been imposed in 12 northern States to

9 “CAR archbishop hopeful, cautious about cease-fire”, World Watch Monitor, 1 August 2014, https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/08/article_3245469.html/.

the resentment of Christians.

The number of Christians in Nigeria is high: Protestants (21.91%), Independents (15.16%), Anglicans (12.61%), Catholics (12.08%), Orthodox (<0.01%), Marginal (0.95%), Unaffiliated (1.18%). (Operation World, 2010).

Islam came to Northern Nigeria in the 1800s through the North mostly through caravan trade but later expanded through warfare. By the time Christianity came to the North in the 1900s, Islam was already well established with organised Islamic governance through Sharia. Islam established a culture that made it look as if it was native to the area. When Christianity came, it was looked upon as a stranger and a threat to Islam and, therefore, was to be fought and destroyed as an enemy. Islam and the caliphate sought ways to cripple the advancement of Christianity in the north. This resulted in the persecution of the church taking various forms: from denials of civil rights to open hostility and violent attacks that have continued for many years. The Sultan of Sokoto (Nigerian Muslims' spiritual leader), Mohammad Sa'ad Abubakar, is known for his extremist views. He has made some provocative statements, one of which is his encouragement to Muslims to "aggressively" proselytize Nigeria.

2.2.2 Persecution dynamics¹⁰

The situation for Christians in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern States, has deteriorated a little compared with 2013. With 70 points on the World Watch List 2014 (2 more points than in 2013), Nigeria remains a country to be watched. In Nigeria, the main persecution engine is Islamic extremism. Although Boko Haram is most often associated with persecution of Christians in Northern Nigerian, the pattern of persecution is much more complex than only killing or wounding of Christians – as well as moderate Muslims – by an Islamic terrorist group. This is especially so in the 12 Northern Sharia states where local government and social groups leave hardly any space for Christians to live their own lives. Persecution is most pronounced in the Sharia states, but also partly extended into neighboring states, and played heavily upon Christians in their family and community spheres of life.

Persecution, however, is not only focused on Christians of Muslim Background but on all types of Christians in many of the Northern States. Levels of violence in Nigeria remain extremely high. The current situation in Nigeria casts dark clouds ahead, notwithstanding good news about spiritual revitalization of the Church under the yoke of persecution. The emerging links between al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and Boko Haram, and other Islamist terrorist groups in the region, make it likely that the church will suffer more violent persecution in the near future.

2.2.3 Relation between persecution and civil unrest

How do civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church?

In recent years, Northern Nigeria has been the stage of numerous incidents of religion related violence, with serious implications for religious freedom. Understanding the true nature of the violence in Nigeria is nevertheless complex and subject to debate among commentators. Indeed, the nature of the conflict in Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, and contains various aspects and components of ethnic,

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This section is based on the Nigeria persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International.

political, economic, social and religious origin. The question that can therefore be asked is whether the conflict in Nigeria is really about religious persecution, or whether it is a classic example of civil unrest?

This is the topic that is broached in the paper “Nigeria: Persecution or Civil Unrest?”¹¹ Based on extensive field research in the country and numerous primary sources, the author explains that although it is true that struggles over power and resources are endemic in Nigeria, these “*have been used as vehicles to pursue the objectives of persecution.*” In other words, political and economic factors related to ongoing civil unrest overshadow and obscure the true nature of the violence in Nigeria and the reality of religious persecution.

To explain his argument, the author proposes an interesting concept: ‘persecution eclipse’ which the author defines as “*a situation whereby persecution and civil conflict overlap to the extent that the former is in a real or imaginative sense overshadowed or rendered almost invisible by the latter.*” The author asserts that “*persecution eclipse is a dangerous set of lenses that minimises, overlooks or denies the suffering of a victim of persecution; encourages a causal analysis that provides vicarious justifications for the perpetrators’ actions; shifts the focus of interrogation from religious freedom violations to conflict analysis; and embraces an instrumental view of conflict in which religion assumes an insignificant place in the analysis.*”

Not only does the civil unrest obscure religious persecution. In this article, the author shows that the civil unrest can in itself be a vehicle for persecution, through its negative impact on the stability of society and the way it encourages Islamist groups to violently pursue their religious agenda.

The author distinguishes two broad categories of persecution that Christians in northern Nigeria experience: *insidious persecution*, typified by the daily experiences of harassment, exclusion and discrimination many Christian minorities in the region and *elevated persecution*, which is a more lethal form of persecution, based on outright violence. The author shows that insidious persecution has in fact been going on for years, while the elevated persecution used to be sporadic. It has become entrenched very visibly in recent years.

Additionally, the author shows that the perpetrators of the persecution have conveniently used aspects of civil conflict to “*conceal the nexus between persecution and conflict and engage in propaganda using mainstream and social media*”, purposefully misinforming the outside world. Another dimension of the misinformation is the fact that “*the majority of the incidents of conflicts that have been reported in the international media as ‘clashes’ between Muslims and Christians in actual fact have been one-sided violence against Christians.*”

Role of Christian communities in the conflict

The incessant attacks and pressure on Christians in Northern Nigeria have boosted the spiritual muscles of many of the believers to organize cell group prayers, “seeking for the face of the Lord”. Many Northern churches are getting involved in evangelism among Muslims in new and innovative ways.

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“Nigeria: Persecution or civil unrest?” (author's name confidential). World Watch Research unit, Open Doors International, 2012, <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/research/2576904>

There is an increase in the number of ministries and organizations helping the growing number of Christians of Muslim background. A number of Christian leaders are involved with peace and reconciliation processes, but the Church leadership lacks a vision and a strategy to respond to the conflict.

In many cases, Christians are the primary victims of the conflict. Based on media research by the World Watch Unit, 612 Nigerian Christians were killed during the WWL 2014 reporting period, hundreds of cases of physical aggression were recorded and nearly 300 churches were destroyed.

At the same time, Christian communities are also increasingly organizing self-defense militias and even retaliation attacks. There are also reports of Muslims facing discrimination in Christian-majority areas, although the level of this discrimination is not comparable to the extreme pressures Christians experience in Northern Nigeria.

Summary

The incident that received substantial media coverage this year was the kidnapping of approximately 276 female students from the Government Secondary School in the primarily Christian town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria in the night of 14–15 April 2014.¹² The kidnappings were claimed by Boko Haram, an Islamic Jihadist and Takfiri terrorist organization based in northeast Nigeria (Zenn, 2014).¹³ This has been the largest single kidnapping incident so far, but Boko Haram has been blamed for nearly 4,000 deaths in 2014, of which the majority involved Christians.¹⁴

Nigeria is one of the most complex states in the continent. Considering its complexity, the report tried to unveil the situation. The situation is even more complex as the persecution of Christians overlaps with clashes over resource control in some states. According to human rights activists and reports the Nigerian government barely investigates the killings and abuses of Christians by the hands of extremist organizations and/or individuals. By doing so, the government has failed to fulfill its international obligation as enshrined under UNDHR and ICCPR. In addition, it has been widely reported that Boko Haram has been doing all it takes to incite what could be a total war between Muslim and Christian communities. The kidnapping of more than 200 girls from a school in the community of Chibok (Borno State) sheds light on how life for Christians is becoming very hard to comprehend.

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“Nigeria churches urge global prayer for 187 missing girls”, World Watch Monitor, 28 April 2014, https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/04/article_3117701.html/.

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Jacob Zenn, “Exposing and Defeating Boko Haram. Why the West must unite to help Nigeria defeat terrorism.”, The Bow Group, 22 July 2014, <http://www.bowgroup.org/sites/bowgroup.uat.pleasetest.co.uk/files/Jacob%20Zenn%20Bow%20Group%20Report%20for%2022.7.14.pdf>.

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Between 1 November 2012 and 31 March 2014, 2073 Christians were killed in Nigeria. Cf. “Nigeria Tops Christian Persecution Violence List: New Open Doors Report”, Open Doors USA, 3 June 2014, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/press/2014/june/nigeria-tops-christian-persecution-violence-list/>.

2.3 Sudan

2.3.1 Brief Church history¹⁵

Once, there was a strong Christian presence in northern Sudan, and for nearly a millennium the majority of the population was Christian. Until the fourth century CE, traditional African religions dominated across what is now Sudan.¹⁶ By the 6th century, the King of Nubia was converted to Christianity. In the process of Christianization, many events unfolded in the region: “Orthodox Christianity from Egypt found its way up the Nile. In the fifth century, Orthodoxy split between those who supported the Orthodox statement expounded at the Council of Chalcedon and the Monophysite perspective that dominated in Egypt. Both opinions gained a following in the Sudan. The following century, the Ethiopian Church (which favored the Monophysite position) was introduced from the east and found a following.”

The Christian Nubia Kingdoms became politically and military powerful and reached their peak in the 9th and 10th century. In the 1950s and 1960s, 59 archaeological expeditions to Nubia “uncovered an extraordinary Christian culture, in ruins, yet sufficiently well-preserved to allow a breath-taking impression of the glorious riches of this ancient Church.”¹⁷ During that period, “the king in Nubia was at the same time a high-ranking priest and the idea of sacred kingship had been transferred to the Church.” It has to be remembered that Faras Cathedral, one of the results of the international archeological campaign during 1950s and 1960s, was built in the seventh century by the Nubians.¹⁸

At the end of the 13th century, Muslims invaded the Nubia Kingdom, defeated the Christians and gradually islamized the area by the 15th Century. Many Christians were forced to convert to Islam. Yet, “a small Ethiopian Orthodox community has survived in Sudan, and Greek Christianity survives under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. The Monophysite perspective survives in the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, both of which have established dioceses in Sudan.”¹⁹

Following the defeat of the Mahdi forces by the British, many Christian missionaries started coming to Sudan. In 1899, the Church Missionary Society introduced the Church of England into the Sudan, the first center being at Omduman. In 1901, American Presbyterians from the United Presbyterian Church (now part of the Presbyterian Church of the United States) entered from their base in Egypt. The Anglican work is known under the name 'Church of the Province of the Sudan'. The Presbyterian mission has resulted in two churches: the Presbyterian Church of the Sudan (in the south) and the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church.

The Roman Catholic Church also entered Sudan following the British victory in 1898. The first

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This section is based on Werner, Jacob, e.a., *Day of devastation, day of contentment: The history of the Sudanese church across 2000 years (Faith in Sudan series)*, Paulines Publications Africa, 2000.

16 J. Gordon Melton & Martin Baumann (ed.), *Religions of the World* (Second Edition) (ABC-CLIO, LLCP. 2010), p. 2735

17 Bengt Sundkler & Christopher Seed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 30.

18 See <http://ccdlibraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/838>.

19 J. Gordon Melton & Martin Baumann (ed.), *Religions of the World* (Second Edition) (ABC-CLIO, LLCP. 2010), p. 2737

Sudanese priest was ordained in 1944, but growth was stymied by the war that followed independence. All of its seminaries and many church buildings were destroyed. However, with the reorganization that occurred at the beginning of the 1970s, including the elevation of the vicariates and prefectures into a diocese in 1972, Catholicism has grown into the largest Christian body in the country. It grew from 600,000 members in 1970 to 2.7 million by 1995. As with other Christian churches, its strength is in the southern region. One can only speculate as to the extent of growth had the continuing warfare of the last generation not occurred.

A variety of Christian groups attempted to work in the Sudan through the 20th century, among the most successful being the Sudan United Mission (1913), whose work led to the present Sudanese Church of Christ, the Africa Inland Mission (African Inland Church, 1936), and the Sudan Interior Mission (Sudan Interior Church, 1937). Several African initiated Churches have arisen, including the Eternal Life Church and the Evangelical Revival Church, both splits from the Anglicans.

2.3.2 Persecution dynamics²⁰

The most emblematic case of the pressure Christians are experiencing in Sudan is the case Meriam Yahia Ibrahim who was sentenced to death for alleged apostasy (leaving Islam) and 100 lashes for alleged adultery²¹. She was brought up as a Christian by her Ethiopian Orthodox mother. Her Sudanese Muslim father left the family when she was six. She testified to being a life long Christian. Her marriage certificate classifies her as a Christian, but obviously the judge considered her a Muslim²² and judged her according to Sudan's Penal Code (articles 146 and 126). After considerable international pressure on the government of Sudan, Meriam has been released²³, and after considerable delay allowed to leave the country²⁴.

This recent case has many historical precedents. Indeed, there has been persecution of the Church over the past 50 years. The country is known for its record of religious freedom violations, particularly since Omar al-Bashir seized power in 1989 and introduced Sharia law. Under the guise of modernization and reform the government of Sudan has done all it takes to ensure the Islamization and Arabization of the country *in toto*. This apparent policy by the government led to a planned and systematic persecution of Christians throughout the country. Persecution has been especially severe in the Nuba Mountains and in other parts of North Sudan.

20 This section is based on the Sudan persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International.

21

“Sudanese woman facing death for apostasy gives birth”, BBC News, 27 May 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27586067>.

22

“Sudan apostasy case: Meriam Ibrahim's marriage certificate shown to disprove adultery charges”, The Telegraph, 31 May 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/sudan/10867187/Sudan-apostasy-case-Meriam-Ibrahims-marriage-certificate-shown-to-disprove-adultery-charges.html>.

23

“Meriam Ibrahim: Sudan 'apostasy' woman freed again”, BBC News, 27 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28050753>.

24

“Meriam Ibrahim leaves Sudan for Rome: 'It was top secret until the plane took off', The Telegraph, 25 July 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/sudan/10990691/Meriam-Ibrahim-leaves-Sudan-for-Rome-It-was-top-secret-until-the-plane-took-off.html>.

Following the independence from the British in 1956, Sudan tried to impose Islam across the nation. This propelled the division of Sudanese society into south and north. In 1983, President Numeiri introduced Sharia law (Islamic law) in the midst of the breakout of a civil war with John Garang's Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM). To effectively inculcate an Islamic identity, especially among the youth, the school curriculum is designed based on Islamic ideology.

After the secession of the South on July 9, 2011, over 200,000 Christians emigrated to South Sudan. Since July 2011 and April 2012 migration intensified when the Southerners still living in the North were forced to relocate to South Sudan as Sudan vowed not to allow the southerners to continue as citizens or dual citizens. In fact, the government took some retaliatory measures that led to a mass atrocity in areas like Nuba Mountains.

Since the 2012 protest over an anti-Islam film, life of Christians in the country has become more dangerous. The number of Catholic Church members decreased significantly, seemingly leading to the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) becoming the largest denomination in the country. The Church has grown in the midst of suffering. Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and the Church of Christ in Sudan have seen significant growth in people turning to Christ. Khartoum has the biggest Christian presence compared to other northern cities, but remains dominated by Islam. The Church's hope rests in a pluralist democratic Sudan where Christians can play their full part as citizens. However, resurgent Islam finds that concept insufficient as an expression of Muslim political aspirations.

With a score of 73 points Sudan ranks 11 on the World Watch List 2014. In 2013, Sudan ranked 12 with a score of 70 points. Sudan has been among the highest ranking African countries on the annual World Watch List of Open Doors since its first publication in 2003. The deterioration of the position of Christians in 2013 can be attributed to a) the break away of Christian-oriented South Sudan from Sudan, b) efforts of the current regime to maintain its leading role and c) an increase of Islamic extremist tendencies within Sudan's society.

The main persecution engines in Sudan are 'Islamic extremism' and 'totalitarian paranoia'. However, there is a fine line between these two engines. The regime's leaders are mainly radical Islamist and the ruling National Congress Party is considered a means to further an Islamic agenda. This implies that the persecution of Christians is not primarily driven by totalitarian tendencies, but radical Islamist sympathies.

Next to a tiny remnant of an expatriate Christian community, other Christians affected by persecution belong to historical Christian communities, non-traditional protestant background communities, and Christians of Muslim background. The latter suffer severely in all spheres of life. Compared with 2013, violence has reduced. However, the situation is still bleak compared with most other countries on the WWL. A variety of incidents are reported, such as faith related killings, damaging Christian properties, detention and forced marriage. Christians fled the country for faith based reasons as well.

2.3.3 Relation between persecution and civil unrest

How do civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church?

Since its independence in 1956, Sudan has been afflicted by persistent and recurring violent conflicts, primarily driven by struggles between the central government in Khartoum and armed groups from the country's peripheries. The country is one of the African countries to witness coup after coup. Following the 1958 coup, the army officers introduced many measures designed to facilitate the spread of Islam and the Arabic language in the name of national unity. That led to formation of the Anya Nya, a southern Sudanese guerrilla organization, which later paved the way for the formation of the Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA). Successive regimes have faced difficulties and or unwillingness to address the issues that unsettled the country for many decades.

Between 1983 and 2005, Sudan was the scene of a long and extremely violent civil conflict which is known as the Second Sudanese Civil War opposing the Sudanese government and the SPLA. There are numerous causes for this war, including political (the central government marginalizing the inhabitants of the periphery), economic (access to natural resources) and ethnic causes (historical antagonism between Nuer, Dinka and other tribes). However, the conflict incontestably also had a religious component, as it was also a part of the Muslim central government's pursuits to impose sharia law on non-Muslim southerners.

During the Second Civil War, Christians suffered both from the widespread impunity that was caused by the conflict and from the targeted strategy of the Sudanese government to purge Christianity from the country. In 2005 the government of Sudan and SPLA signed a formal peace accord – the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Naivasha (Kenya), that formally ended the war between the North and the South, and led to the independence of the South in January 2011.

Despite the regime's formal commitment to remaking the political system between 2005-2011 as part of CPA, Sudan's traditional power structures are still dominated by an Islamist regime, headed by president Omar al-Bashir, who came to power by the 1989 coup. The Southern secession in January 2011 became the culmination of a painful and decades-long history of internal conflict between the powerful Muslim Arabs in the North and the Christian and indigenous Black Africans of the South. An overwhelming majority of voters backed Southern independence. Yet, despite this secession, armed conflicts over dwindling resources and political power positions, the principal markers of Sudan's post-independence trajectory, have persisted.

Role of Christian communities in the conflict

According to the Sudanese Culture and Information Ministry, 97% of the population is Muslim. Almost all Muslims are Sunni but significant distinctions exist, particularly among the Sufi orders. In addition, there are small Muslim minorities, including Shia and the Republican Brothers, based predominantly in Khartoum, and a growing, yet still small, percentage of Salafists. Unlike the main traditional Salafist group, Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna al-Mohammediya, which advocates peaceful means for achieving its objectives, the newer groups tend to be more militant and confrontational. They are suspected of attacking a Sufi shrine in Khartoum on 2 December 2011, Shia religious celebrations in Omdurman on 31 January 2012, and an Anglican Church in Khartoum on 21 April 2012. Sudan has been designated

for over a decade by the US State Department as a Country of Particular Concern for its serious and systematic violations of religious freedom.

Religious freedom, though guaranteed by the 2005 interim constitution, is not upheld in practice. Moreover, Sudan's criminal law based on Islamic law allowing the use of amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of "indecent" and "immorality," and the government continuing to make arrests for Christian proselytizing and for the capital offense of apostasy, and governmental and non-governmental attacks against the Christian community continue. The Culture and Information Ministry estimates that Christians make up 3 percent of the population and that they are primarily residing in Khartoum, the north, and the Nuba Mountains. Following the civil war in South Sudan, it has been alleged that al-Bashir has been helping one of the factions to the conflict Riek Machar.

In 2013, significant members of the ruling party, the National Congress Party (NCP) announced their plans to breakaway to form a formidable alliance with secularists and leftists. This was seen as the major split and blow to al-Bashir regime since the split of the party led by Hassan al-Turabi in 1999. This led to reshuffling of the cabinet by al-Bashir in which he dropped the vice-president from the cabinet.

Summary

The current regime will likely continue to persecute Christians, as part of an attempt to maintain its power-base. Within this context sources in the field expect that the position of the church in Sudan will worsen, in part due to diminished presence of the international community²⁵. Due to the current economic and political turmoil in the country, it is expected that the government would come up with reforms and a draft constitution. However, whether the reform includes freedom of religion or not, remains to be seen. Till then, the life of Christians, especially the converts, remains dangerous. The trial of Meriam Ibrahim, is a testament to the level of persecution that Christians could potentially and actually face. In the meantime, it is widely expected that the President of Sudan known for using a 'religious card' in a time of crises, a point which has resonance among the fundamentalists, would eventually lead to severe persecution of Churches in the country.

As discussed, the civil conflict in Sudan has many factors. However, getting rid of all Christians from the country has been a part of the agenda of various Islamic groups. The persecution of Christians can hardly be seen as a side effect of the conflict, instead, it has been one of the direct consequences of it. Sudan is also playing an important role in intensifying the civil war in South Sudan, which is having a great impact on the Christians. Moreover, beyond government pressure, the level of societal abuse in Sudan is also to be highlighted.

25 The Secretary of State of the United States re-designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) in August 2011 under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom which is not lifted in 2014 as well. Consequently, Sudan is ineligible for aid under Section 116 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

2.4 Somalia

2.4.1 Brief Church history²⁶

The number and proportion of Christians in Somalia is very low: Protestants (0.01%), Independents (0.04%), Anglicans (<0.01%), Catholics (<0.01%), Orthodox (0.28%). Somali Mission estimates (2012) the total number of Somali Protestants living in diaspora at 2.085 spread over 11 countries but does not have information about other Christian denominations.

Christianity was introduced into Somalia in 1881, but greatly expanded after the Italians took control of the southern coast, including Mogadishu.²⁷ Yet, it has to be underlined that the colonialist were at times against the work of missionaries among Somalis for fear of instability. This was the case both in British Somaliland as well as Italian Somaliland.

In 1886 a French Roman Catholic mission and the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Mission set up mission bases in the port town of Berbera in the then British protectorate of Somaliland, Mogadishu and Kismayo towns. Soon the harvest was plenty and the church was growing rapidly.

Lutheran missionaries from the Church of Sweden came to Somalia in 1898. They opened a set of Educational and medical facilities and engaged in evangelistic outreach, but they had their greatest success among a group of Bantu-speaking former slaves. The mission was disrupted when Italian authorities expelled the missionaries in 1935. The work was revived after World War II by Mennonites and the Sudan Interior Mission, but it was hurt by the same nationalization of church property that destroyed so much of the Catholic work in 1972. Most Sudan Interior Mission missionaries left soon afterward. By 1976 all foreign missionaries had left the country. Two groups of Somali nationals, one formerly associated with the Mennonites and one with the Sudan Interior Mission, continued to meet after the missionaries left. In the 1980s, a few Mennonites were able to return.

In 1972 the government nationalized all of the Catholic Church's property. However, in spite of the changes in the church's status and the resultant departure of much of its personnel, a Diocese of Mogadishu was created in 1975.

The road for Christianity was never smooth in Somalia since the beginning. Sheikh Sayid Mohammed aroused Muslim fundamentalism in Somaliland. A few decades later the church was declining. Its members were either martyred, had denied their faith and turned to Islam, or were exiled from the country. The church revived and slowly started to grow, but with more cautious and covert, organised in small house groups. As the church started to grow, so did persecution, murder and forced exile. During the 1950s several Christian missions arrived in Somalia. The Swedish Lutheran Mission, Mennonite Mission and Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) also left their footprints among the Somalis.

26

This section is based on Mohamed A. Gurhan, "The Persecuted Disciples of Jesus Christ. A research article on Somali Ecclesiology", report commissioned by the World Watch Research unit, Open Doors International, 2012.

27

J. Gordon Melton & Martin Baumann (ed.), *Religions of the World* (Second Edition) (ABC-CLIO, LLC. 2010), p. 2664.

International religious organizations did not surrender to the intense and hostile environment in Somalia. Since early 1990s, many international religious organizations have been working with Somalis living both inside Somalia and in neighbouring countries- Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. The International Aid Sweden (IAS), of the Swedish Pentecostal church, The Seventh Day Adventist Church, The Mennonite Mission, Sudan Interior Mission, The Nazarene church (a Wesleyan Holiness denomination), Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF), a conventional Lutheran missionary organization (affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), Africa Inland Church, the Anglican Church and the Baptist Church are among those which are working with Somali people within Somalia and neighboring countries.

2.4.2 Persecution dynamics²⁸

In 1969 President Mohamed Siad Barre's Socialist Military government came to power, and confiscated all the properties owned by Christian missions and churches including schools and clinics. When President Said Barre's government was ousted from power in 1991, Muslim fundamentalist organizations emerged in numbers. Let alone for Christian minorities, life became extremely tough even for Muslims in the lawless Somalia.

The emergence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a union of different Islamic forces that controlled Mogadishu in the mid of 2000s, created another hostile environment for Christians in Somalia. The defeat of the ICU by the forces of Transitional government backed by Ethiopian forces did bring little hope. But it was short lived as al-Shabaab, a more radical Islamist group, became another potent force in Somalia. As a result, today, only ruins of the old churches exist. Believers gather in small pockets spread over the country but with increasing boldness. They continue meeting in secret out of fear of discovery.

With a score of 80 points, Somalia ranks second on the WWL 2014. The main type of Christianity in Somalia is the Christian converts from a Muslim Background and there is a very tiny population of expatriate aid workers. The position of Christians in Somalia has deteriorated and Somalia is included in the category 'extreme persecution'.

In Somalia, the main persecution engine relates to 'Islamic extremism' and to a lesser extent to 'tribal antagonism' and 'organized corruption'. However, an OD researcher reports that in the case of Somalia the line between 'Islamic extremism' and 'organized corruption' is not easy to draw. Somalia is a Muslim majority country. Islamic religious leaders and government officials publicly maintain, uphold and reinforce that there is no room for Christians. Within this context, the militant Islamist terrorist group al-Shabaab uses its presence in various parts of the country to radicalize communities at the expense of Christianity in general and individual Muslim background believers within their midst in particular. Within this context pressures have increased at the expense of the tiny Christian community in Somalia.

28 This section is based on the Somalia persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International.

2.4.3 Relation between persecution and civil unrest

How do civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church?

Somalia declared its independence in 1960 when the British protectorate and Italian colony merged. In 1969, President Mohamed Siad Barre's Socialist Military government came to power; it introduced 'Scientific Socialism', a Maoist kind of cult. In the course of this process, properties owned by Christian missions and churches, including schools and clinics were seized. Moreover, Christians were expelled from the country. In 1974, a new law was introduced giving women the same inheritance rights as men. Religious leaders preaching against this new law were imprisoned or executed. The secular and reformist nature of the government undermined the Islamic identity of the Somali people. This resulted in a revival of Islamic extremism, leading to a growth of clan-based Muslim extremist organizations. They aimed to turn Somalia into an Islamic state. Said Barre's regime and Muslim extremists shared an enemy – Christians.

During Barre's rule, Muslim extremists used their influence to encourage the government to ban the printing, importing, distributing or selling of Christian literature in the country. Moreover, its National Security Services (NSS) threatened, arrested, tortured, and murdered Somali Christians. Other Christians lost their jobs and businesses. They abandoned their faith, emigrated to the West, or obtained jobs within Western organizations in Somalia's capital Mogadishu.

Said Barre's regime created a religious vacuum in which Islamic extremism could flourish – to the detriment of Christians and the Church. In 1991, when his regime was ousted, the Somalia government system fell apart. Islamic extremist organizations gained more influence. They formed a committee of sheikhs to search and identify all Somali Christians, whether they were inside or outside of Somalia. Moreover, this committee appointed an armed group to execute all Somali Christians, leading to many killings and wounded among Somali Christians in Somalia and neighbouring countries. Somali Christians were denied their faith, forced to live underground, or to become refugees. Subsequently, the visible church in Somalia disappeared; what is left are some old ruins of mostly Catholic Church buildings.

The actions of al-Shabaab, a Muslim terrorist group, linked to al-Qaeda are regularly mentioned in the media, and can color the understanding of the persecution of Christians. It is important to realize that al-Shabaab, although drawing fighters from outside, is in its core a clan-based Muslim terrorist group. Equally important to recognize is that Somalia is a patchwork of competing clans, containing clan-based militias and religious groups. They all pursue a strong Islamic identity, against the background of a strong tribal identity. Changing religion does not only mean a betrayal to Islam and the Muslim community, but also a break with the norms and values of the clan as well. In tribal societies, this is a very serious offense. So, even in case al-Shabaab is in (temporary) decline, it does not mean that the threat to Christians diminishes. An example is Somaliland; a self-declared separation from Somalia. It seems peaceful. However, Christians are equally persecuted here. Finally, the new Constitution affirms the absolute predominance of a strict interpretation of Sharia. Therefore, it can be expected that a better functioning Federal Government will lead to the continuation of persecution of Christians.

Relations between Somalia its neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya have been soured due to the claim by the Somalian government that all territories where Somalis live belong to Somalia-an agenda to form a 'Greater Somalia', as a result of which the country waged a major war with

Ethiopia in 1977.

After decades of ruling the country with a mixture of terror and guile, Said Barre's regime finally collapsed in 1991. The country was left without effective government. War between clans and drought threatened the lives of millions. The United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) sought to end the crisis. In 1992, The United Nations Security Council Adopted Resolution 751 by which a United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) was established. The task of UNOSOM was overtaken by Unified Task Force (UNITAF)-an American-led UN multitask force. As the situation was spinning out of control the UN Security Council passed a resolution to establish United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II) by Resolution 755. Following the unsuccessful attempts to help Somalis create central government, and the battle of Mogadishu where American Black Hawk was down by rebels, the United States withdrew its forces in 1994. Other contributing countries also followed the US decision. By UN Security Council Resolution 954, the UN decided to withdraw all its forces from Somalia. For the following two decades Somalia became a lawless state where extremists, local militias and warlords continued fighting. The country became a hub for extremists and terrorists.

In the meantime, even though not recognized by the international community, Somaliland declared a unilateral independence from Somalia by citing the colonial boundaries between British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Puntland also declared its autonomy without severing its ties from 'Somalia proper'.

After several attempts and mediation by international communities, the current federal government was eventually formed in 2012. Yet, the government only controls some cities and towns as the majority of rural Somalia remains in the hands of al-Shababa. Al-Shababe has been consistently propagating anti-Christians ideologies by labeling all the foreign forces in Somalia "Christians forces that have come to Somalia to spoil Islam."

Role of Christian communities in the conflict

Persecution of Christians in Somalia nearly always means extreme violence. In every sphere of life – private, family, community, and national – discovery of being a Christian means life threatening danger, often leading to on-the-spot executions. 'Church life' simply isn't possible. This persecution pattern is exceptional, and puts Somalia high in the top of the category of extreme persecution. An Open Doors Field staff member testifies about the perseverance of Somali believers, "Amid the hardest times of persecution and executions of Christians, they have remained steadfast holding on to their Christian faith secretly." The persecution is even severe on Muslim background believers. They usually face beheading in the hands of extremism. The Christian community is too small to be playing an active role in the conflict.

Summary

As a result of the civil conflict, Somalia has practically fallen apart into three separate countries: the Republic of Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland. As described, the position of Christians in all areas is extremely harsh, but especially in Somaliland where almost all residents are Sunni Muslims and Islam is the state religion. Proselytizing by members of other faiths is prohibited.

The Transitional Federal Charter and the Provisional Federal Constitution that replaced the former as of August 2012 has stipulated that freedom of religion is protected. Yet, seen from the contents of the two documents (the transitional charter and the provisional constitution), it can be said that the move is regressive rather than progressive. Under the transitional charter apostasy was not prohibited, while the provisional constitution clearly prohibits apostasy.

Christians are vulnerable in Somalia, because of the great degree of violence and impunity, the presence of extremely violent and radical Islamist groups such as al-Shabaab, and repressive government structures.

2.5 Mali

2.5.1 Brief Church history

Mali is a predominantly Muslim country, with about 95% of its citizens identifying as Muslim. There is, however, a small minority of Christians, as well as animists. Many of Mali's Muslims also synchronize traditional religious beliefs with Islam. Timbuktu, in particular, is well-known for its more than one millennium of Islamic history, which has largely been defined by religious tolerance and moderation, in contrast to the Salafist-Jihadists who took over the city in mid-2012 from the group Ansar al-Din, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Unity [Monotheism] and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA). The Dogon people of southern Mali are among the ethnic groups which have Christian believers or whose religious beliefs combine aspects of traditional religions and Islam or Christianity. There are also some Christians found among the sub-Saharan African Songhai tribes, but extremely few found among the Arabs or Tuaregs of northern Mali.

Among the less than 5% of Malians who are Christians, the majority are Roman Catholic, while there is also a significant number of Protestants. As with many of the Muslims in Mali, Malian Christians tend to combine their Christian beliefs with indigenous animist beliefs. Malian Christians also tend to be moderate and accepting of other religious beliefs. Even though most Malian Christians live in the south of the country, they have come under increasing pressure as a result of the threat from Islamists in the north. The French-led intervention has minimized the threat from the Islamists, however, by driving many of them out of the country and from the major northern cities.

2.5.2 Persecution dynamics²⁹

After the French military intervention in January 2013, the threat of Islamists has been averted, at least temporarily, but in the North there is still no normal church life possible and the Christians who fled are afraid to return. For this reason, Mali gets a score of 54 points in 2014, which is lower than the score of 2013, but still high to account for the continuing pressures on Christians in the country. The main persecution dynamic in Mali is Islamic extremism. Mali has always been a typical West-African state with a (mostly) moderate Islam, constitutionally secular proscribing religious political parties, even though a high percentage of its population is Muslim. The situation changed with the proclamation of the creation of the independent state of Azawad in Northern Mali (April 2012).

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This section is based on the Mali persecution profile, World Watch List 2014, Open Doors International.

Even though most Malian Christians live in the south of the country, they feel threatened by the Islamists in the north. All spheres of life are affected by the combination of both dynamics, though the national sphere to a lesser extent because of the relative freedom in the South. Church life is not yet possible in the North. The levels of violence against Christians are not as high as the squeeze. Christians have however received death threats by Islamists. Even though the Islamists have been driven out of Northern Mali, the presence and infrastructure of Christianity has been (largely) destroyed. It will take a long time to build it up again. Moreover, as the Islamists have not been fully vanquished, building up a Christian presence in the North again is difficult.

2.5.3 Relation between persecution and civil unrest

How do civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church in Africa?

Before the coup d'état that overthrew the democratically elected Malian government in March 2012, the country was considered exemplary among African countries for protecting civil liberties and political rights. The media, in particular, was vibrant and open and not subject to governmental pressure or restrictions. During the presidential election of 2007, the results were considered valid and there was little to no electoral violence. 70 parties ran in the election and the right to vote was extended to all citizens of Mali.

Belying Mali's positive record on civil liberties and political rights, there were, however, large inconsistencies on how these rights were applied in the northern two-thirds of the country, a reality which was often overlooked by foreign observers. Political power in Mali was concentrated in the southern one-third of the country, which is dominated by Muslim sub-Saharan African tribes, such as the Songhai and Zarma, while the more conservatively Muslim northern tribes, such as the Tuareg and the Arabs, were often left out of power. While discrimination against the Tuaregs and Arabs was not official policy, in practice they received the lesser of the government revenue and services, which has led the Tuaregs into open rebellion intermittently for the last several decades.

Following the civil war in Libya, a large number of Tuareg fighters returned to Mali, their original homeland, strongly equipped with sophisticated arms. While Niger disarmed those going to this country before allowing them in, the Mali government allowed those coming to Mali to enter with their arms. The rebels declared that they were coming back not to fight but to contribute to the building of their nation. At the great surprise of the government, on January 17, 2012, some Tuareg fractions launched an attack against the Malian regular army. They declared the intention they had in previous rebellions to liberate their fatherland and call it the Republic of Azawad. Their movement is called MNLA (National Movement of Liberation of Azawad). The government mobilized its troops, but unfortunately they were defeated in a place called Agel Hoc. The rebels slaughtered a large number of soldiers by cutting their throats like animals. Some say that about 70 soldiers lost their lives on this battlefield.

Most Muslims in Mali are Sunni, but have a strong tradition and influence from sufism. However, few Malians currently identify with a particular sufi order, such as the Qadiriya or Tijaniya. The influence of Sufism is apparent in the numerous shrines and saints that Malians worship and in their spiritual beliefs and daily rituals. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, there are salafists in Mali, many of whom have been influenced by religious trends from the Arab World since the 2000s. The salafists have little respect for sufi-influenced religious practices, as evidenced by the destruction of sufi shrines

from the 13th century in Timbuktu when Islamists controlled the city in 2012. Many leaders of these salafist groups traveled to Saudi Arabia or other Arab countries or received funding from them, including Qatar, and then pushed these salafist ideals on the members of their clans or tribes back in Mali. The majority of the salafists come from the Arab and Tuareg tribes in northern Mali. However, while the Islamists controlled northern Mali, they also indoctrinated sub-Saharan Africans in salafism, although it is questionable if these new recruits were motivated by financial incentives or by the sense of power they received from joining the militants.

Role of Christian communities in the conflict

Similarly to CAR, Mali was overtaken by Islamist rebels, which included the presence of foreign fighters. In the case of Mali, the fall of Gaddafi has also led to the rise of Islamists in the country because most of the Tuareg rebels and leaders came to the country after the removal of Gaddafi. The main difference with CAR, however, is that Mali's Christian population is too small to be in a position to actively influence the conflict. Christians were largely victims from the Islamist takeover, and most of them have fled the North of the country.

Summary

The main trend Mali is facing is the rising of militant Islam and Salafism in the country. This trend is clearly more pervasive in the north than in the south, but even some members of sub-Saharan African tribes joined the Islamist militants during the civil war in 2012, especially the group MUJWA, which was created by AQIM in an effort to appeal to sub-Saharan Africans. MUJWA's propaganda, for example, was geared toward venerating West African "black" jihadi leaders of the 19th century, such as Usman dan Fodio, as opposed to Arab or Northern African leaders who would appeal to AQIM members. Christians have greatly suffered because of the conflict, but are too few to be able to have an influence on the outcome of the conflict.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The relation between civil conflict and persecution is under-explored. In fact, conflict studies rarely take religion into account as an analytical factor, or simply dismiss it as an escalating factor of conflict. Studies on religious persecution, on the other hand, frequently look at religious freedom in isolation, i.e. without taking into account how contextual factors influence the position of religious minorities. However, the empirical data presented in this paper clearly shows that much can be learned from observing the interaction between civil conflict and persecution.

Often, the analysis of religious freedom is limited to the legal aspects of it or to the degree of freedom in the church sphere. Assessing and interpreting religious persecution is complex as many religious conflicts involve numerous variables. As was stated, a persecution situation presents a complex reality. Indeed, religious freedom is multidimensional phenomenon which requires an analytical framework that accounts for this multidimensionality. Limiting the assessment of religious freedom by describing the legal protection of religious freedom is insufficient to describe actual persecution dynamics.

As the case studies presented in this paper reveal, civil unrest and war affect the religious freedom situation of the church in Africa in many ways. The first way is that the impunity caused by a civil

conflict makes Christians vulnerable, particularly those Christians committed to social justice. Indeed, whenever Christians are caught in the crossfire between two fighting parties, or when Christians are not given sufficient protection from government security forces, Christians are an easy prey for looting and abuses.

The second way civil conflict affects religious freedom is targeted persecution. In the African context, this can be caused by Islamic governments which use state power to inflict harm upon Christians. The latter is the case in Sudan as well as in the Northern States of Nigeria where Sharia rule is implemented. Targeted persecution can also be caused by violent movements such as the Janjaweed in Sudan, Boko Haram in Nigeria or the Séléka in CAR. Transnational networks of militant Islamist groups play an increasing role in civil conflicts in Africa. The foreign composition of the Séléka in CAR, which are believed to include mercenaries from Chad and Sudan, are also believed to have been involved in the Islamist occupation of North Mali. The existence of ties between Boko Haram in West Africa and Al-Shabaab in Somalia have also been evoked recently.

Regarding the role the respective Christian communities played in those conflicts, the panorama is differentiated. In the cases of CAR and to some extent Nigeria, Christian leaders play an active role in peace building and reconciliation. In these two countries, Christians do however also get involved in vigilante justice when under attack, and are even involved in retaliation attacks. In the other African countries studied – Mali, Sudan and Somalia –, the Christian community is too small to be able to have a direct influence on the conflict. In Sudan, the larger Christian community was displaced as a result of the conflict.

In the cases presented in this paper, Christians are generally victims. Due to the civil conflict and more generally the structural situation of the countries, Somalia, Sudan and Nigeria have repeatedly obtained high scores on Open Doors' World Watch List; and Mali and CAR have entered it with high scores in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

Christians have also become perpetrators in the case of the anti-Balaka in CAR, and some militias in Nigeria show. These groups do, however, not operate under the blessing of church leaders, and can hardly be considered “true Christians.” In both countries, resentment and retaliation have created a vicious circle of violence. To some extent, one can even say the violence has led to a reversed persecution engine – “Christian extremism” – with Muslims now being targeted, instead of Christians. This vicious circle of violence and retaliation seems unstoppable, and is causing massive harm to both Christians and Muslims.

What are Christians doing to defuse and help end these conflicts? In prayer, many Christians all over Africa meet faithfully, often with danger for their own lives. As said, Christians also get involved in peace and reconciliation initiatives, although this has been most visible in CAR. The very large church of Nigeria, for example, has not yet provided a solid vision as a response to the years of violence in that country. Generally speaking, the involvement of African Christian communities in social transformation is generally limited as a result of a pietistic missionary legacy which has caused churches to be mostly pacifist and to some extent apathetic regarding social engagement. Increased social engagement of the church could make it more resilient when faced with civil conflict and persecution.