

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT IS REVEALING

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the apostolic nuncio who leads the Holy See's Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations, recently addressed the U.N. General Assembly stating that Christians suffer more than anyone from religious freedom violations. The archbishop's address came on the eve of the 2009 U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom Report.

In his address, Archbishop Migliore stated, "There is unfortunately no religion on the planet which is free from discrimination. Acts of intolerance, and violations of religious freedom, continue to be perpetrated in many forms." He continued, "Christians are the religious group most discriminated against as there may well be more than 200 million of them, of different confessions, who are in situations of difficulty because of legal and cultural structures that lead to their discrimination."

In calling on the General Assembly to revise or repeal anti-blasphemy laws—due to abuse of these laws leading to discrimination—the archbishop said, "Such laws have been used to foster injustice, sectarian violence and violence between religions," and stated that the laws serve as "instruments of abuse."

He also noted that there had recently been some Christian communities in Asia and the Middle East that had been attacked because they were thought to have violated anti-blasphemy laws: "Such actions were committed by extremists in response to accusations against individuals, perceived—according to anti-blasphemy laws—as being disrespectful of the beliefs of others."

Soon after Archbishop Migliore's address, the U.S. State Department published its International Religious Freedom Report for 2009. In that report the archbishop's concerns were validated.

In its executive summary, the report reveals that its "primary focus is on the actions of governments, including those that contribute to religious repression or tolerate violence against religious minorities as well as those that protect and promote religious freedom."

According to the report, there were more cases of discrimination (23) against Christians than any other religion, and in more than half of those cases the perpetrators were Muslim (not including Turkey, which is not considered a Muslim country, even though it is overwhelmingly populated by Muslims). The religion that has the second most cases of discrimination against it is Islam (16). But in these countries, most of the discrimination is the Muslim majority in the country attacking the Muslim minority.

This is a sad commentary on religious persecution. What is most disturbing, however, is the fact that Islam, a religion whose leaders often justify oppression on the basis of the Koran, leads the way in persecuting not only Christians and Jews, but also their own people. Kudos to Archbishop Migliore for his leadership in this matter.

Findings from the Report

The report found cases of discrimination against Christians in the following countries (Muslim countries are bolded). In 12 of the 23 countries, Muslims are the perpetrators:

- **Afghanistan**
- **Azerbaijan**
- **Brunei**
- Burma
- China

- **Egypt**
- Eritrea
- India
- **Indonesia**
- **Iran**
- **Iraq**
- Israel
- Laos
- North Korea
- **Palestine**
- Russia
- **Saudi Arabia**
- **Sudan**
- Turkey
- **Uzbekistan**
- Vietnam
- Venezuela
- **Yemen**

The report found cases of discrimination against Muslims in the following countries (Muslim countries are bolded). In 11 of the 16 countries, Muslim majorities attacked the Muslim minority:

- **Afghanistan**
- **Azerbaijan**
- Burma
- China
- **Egypt**
- Fiji
- **Indonesia**
- **Iran**
- **Iraq**
- **Palestine**
- **Pakistan**
- **Saudi Arabia**
- **Somalia**

- Tajikistan
- Turkey
- **Yemen**