



PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

STATE SECRETARIAT FOR THE AID OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS
AND FOR THE HUNGARY HELPS PROGRAM

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

by

Congressman
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TLHRC Co-Chair

BEFORE

the

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
of the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

Hungary's Policy for the Aid of the World's Persecuted Christian Communities

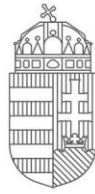
June 27, 2019
Washington, DC

The global phenomenon of the persecution of Christians

The persecution of Christians in the world is among the most severe and best concealed human rights crises of our time. Although Christianity will in the foreseeable future remain the world's largest religion it is seldom acknowledged as the most persecuted among the faiths. Spread across more than one hundred countries approximately 245 million people – one in nine – experience discrimination and outright persecution solely for their Christian faith.¹ According to the Open Doors World Watch List published earlier this year over 4100 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons in the year 2018 alone in the fifty countries most affected by persecution, added to this, 2600 Christians were detained without trial, sentenced and imprisoned. Nearly 1300 churches and other Christian buildings, including stores, schools, and homes were attacked and partially or fully destroyed in the past year across the world.

The persecution of Christians is a complex phenomenon for it entails tendencies of various magnitudes, levels of severity and nature; it generally includes the cultural isolation of Christians; discrimination of Christians on a government level; restrictions on the practice of religion; deprivation of the right of Christians to participate in the conduct of public affairs; acute intimidation; undermining and prohibition of the operation of Christian churches; expropriation without compensation of Christian private property;

¹ In December 2018 the Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP, HM Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs commissioned the Rt. Rev. Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Truro to conduct a formal inquiry into the extent and nature of the phenomenon of Christian persecution in the world. The report found that “one-third of the world’s population suffers from religious persecution in some form, with Christians being the most persecuted group” and the persecution of Christians is approaching “near genocide” levels in some parts of the world, above all in the Middle East. The Bishop stated that “evidence shows not only the geographic spread of anti-Christian persecution but also its increasing severity (...) in some regions, the level and nature of persecution is arguably coming close to meeting the international definition of genocide, according to that adopted by the UN.”



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destruction and eradication of material heritage; and physical violence against Christian individuals and communities.

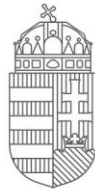
Whereas the last century was the era of the silenced victims and martyrs of Christian persecution pursued under the ideological banners of numerous dictatorial systems, the 21st century is seeing the spread of blatant violence, aggression, and even genocidal tendencies first and foremost as a consequence of the rise of religious nationalism and extremism. Radical Islam manifested in the breakthrough of the forces of among others the Islamic State, Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab has forced millions of Christians to flee their homelands in the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. In the cradle of Christianity and the site of the life of Jesus Christ on earth the number of Christians has been decimated by years of armed conflict and the ensuing outflow of refugees and migrants; an estimated 800 thousand Christians remain of the pre-war community of 2.2 million in Syria, while approximately 250 thousand Christians remain in Iraq out of the 1.2 million before the rise of ISIS. Meanwhile, Christian communities in South Asia are being uprooted by the extreme factions of Buddhism and Hinduism. Where faith-based persecution is coupled with ethnic and tribal antagonism, such as in the Lake Chad Basin, the agony of Christian communities is almost impossible to conceive.

This tragic fate that befalls an ever-larger portion of the world's Christian communities is aggravated by the blanket of political correctness that has concealed the scale and severity of the phenomenon in Western political debate. The international community bar a few exemplary countries stands idle and thereby seals the fate of millions of persecuted Christians for the sake of tolerance, radical secularism, value neutrality, and so-called open societies. Many Western governments outright encourage the extinction of autochthonous Christian communities in the affected regions through the encouragement of international migration out of economic considerations.

Hungary's humanitarian model and the Hungary Helps Program

The erosion of Western culture's Judeo-Christian roots risks destroying the foundations of our entire human civilization. Conscious of its millennial Christian heritage and its constitutional responsibility to defend Christian values and culture, Hungary was among the first nations in the world to acknowledge the perils of persecution faced by its Christian brethren around the world and to openly stand in their defense. In 2016 the Hungarian National Assembly passed a unanimous all-party resolution² that condemns the persecution of Christians, supports the Government in providing help, condemns the activities of the Islamic State, and calls upon the International Criminal Court to launch proceedings in response to the persecution, oppression and murder of Christians. In the same year the Government established the State Secretariat for the Aid of Persecuted Christians as the world's first governmental department tasked with the direct and local assistance of Christian communities facing persecution, and under its aegis the Hungary Helps Agency independent government agency that works as a charitable non-profit organization as of April 2019. The Hungarian humanitarian model is thus premised on providing help where it is needed rather than bringing the trouble to Europe. This model derived from considerations of common sense and the overarching need to stabilize the world's crisis regions stands in sharp contrast to the policy of facilitating and encouraging international migration which ultimately is itself a source of regional and international insecurity. Hungary's primary objective is to ensure that Christian communities remain in their homelands and that those who were forced to flee therefrom are able to return.

² Parliamentary Resolution 36/2016 (XII.19.)



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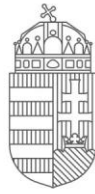
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The Hungary Helps Program was launched in 2017 as the country's project-based humanitarian effort for the aid of persecuted Christian communities. As of mid-June 2019, the Hungarian Government has provided \$29.3 million in aid to Middle Eastern and African churches for the implementation of their reconstruction, rehabilitation and development projects focused on medical, educational, infrastructural and community support projects. All project-related decisions and processes implemented within the framework of Hungary's targeted state aid policy are informed by careful consideration of all reasonable and relevant aspects to avoid counterproductive results and stigmatization of the beneficiaries, as well as to encourage peaceful cohabitation of peoples of all faiths. An estimated 40 thousand Christians have been able to return and/or remain in their homelands as a direct consequence of the Hungarian Government's intervention. In addition, a further \$5 million have been allocated through the Scholarship Program for Christian Young People for the support of severely discriminated or endangered young Christians' further studies at Hungarian institutes of higher education. To date, nearly 200 Christians who are barred from higher education in their countries due to their faith have begun their studies in Hungary. The aim of the scholarship is to equip Christians from vulnerable communities with cutting-edge knowledge and skills so that upon returning to their homelands they may play a proactive role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their communities. The Hungary Helps Program also aims to provide immediate assistance to people of all faiths under attack or who face natural disasters. Hungary has pledged rapid humanitarian relief for the survivors and families of the victims of the Islamist terrorist attacks in the Philippines and Sri Lanka in January and Easter 2019 respectively.

Major projects implemented through the Hungary Helps Program include the reconstruction of the Chaldean Christian town of Telesqof in the Nineveh plains of northern Iraq. Hungary financed the reconstruction of 900 severely damaged residential units and, as a result, nearly 80 percent of the families forced to flee the town have returned to their homes once ravaged by the Islamic State. The Riaya School in Damascus operated by the Melkite Greek Catholic Church is being restored through the Hungary Helps Program and will serve the war-torn Christian community in the region. Moreover, the Hungarian Government is the only government to date to have provided support for the Apostolic Nunciature's Open Hospitals initiative that includes financing the operation of three hospitals in Aleppo and Damascus, vital institutions in the devastated Syrian healthcare system. In Sub-Saharan Africa the Hungary Helps Program has enabled the reconstruction and development of the educational and healthcare infrastructure of the Catholic dioceses of Maiduguri and Sokoto in northern and north-eastern Nigeria devastated by Boko Haram, thereby fostering the return of Christian refugees to their homelands and the existential survival of their communities.

Converging humanitarian policies of the United States and Hungary in the Middle East

In 2017 the United States launched a new approach to humanitarian policy by its decision to support persecuted religious communities in the Middle East directly through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) rather than through the United Nations. The representatives of the State Department including Deputy Assistant Secretary Pete Marocco from the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and Deputy Assistant Secretary Andrew Veprek from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, as well as members of the Office of the Vice President and numerous congressmen have initiated and urged the implementation of this new policy approach. Mr. Sam Brownback, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom considers Hungary's humanitarian policy for the aid of persecuted Christians to be exemplary and has consistently highlighted the activities of Hungary as a best practice on many occasions, furthermore, he proposed to American



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leaders the implementation of the successful pilot program. As recognition of the Hungary Helps Program, the leaders of USAID initiated the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Hungarian Government. After the establishment of the framework on December 18, 2018 the preparation of concrete projects in the Middle East has begun, soon to be followed by direct cooperation in the field.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of security and stability in eastern Syria and Iraq if we are ever to envisage a safe and sustainable place for minorities in the future. State Department officials are working to reassure Christian and other religious minority communities in northern Iraq that the U.S. remains committed to its post-Islamic State reconstruction efforts in the region. In the Middle East, Christians play an important role in ensuring durable stability, the provision of medical and educational services, economic development, and in sustaining social cohesion and diversity.

Accountability is an essential element of the sustainable return of refugees and of a prosperous future in the Middle East and other affected regions. The impunity of the perpetrators of crimes against Christians contributes to an overall feeling that there is a lack of commitment from state authorities and the international community to address the suffering and loss they have experienced. Hungary offers to work with affected communities to document the crimes committed against them, allowing those communities to play a lead role in the development of information that may ultimately contribute to fair accountability mechanisms, thereby driving future decision-making on how to address the atrocities committed against these communities.

A call to action

Mankind has not surpassed the age of tyranny, inhumanity, and persecution committed on the grounds of faith and conviction. Indeed, the present agony of the Christian peoples is the ultimate testimony of the ignorance and grave shortcomings of the Western world in failing to put an end to the devastation and martyrdom of entire human communities.

Building on the example and experience of Hungary in standing up for and aiding persecuted Christians wherever they may live, the U.S. administration and other like-minded governments are called upon to maximize their efforts to prevent the escalation of the persecution of Christians and other human rights crises around the world, moreover; to play a proactive and responsible role in the reconstruction of Christian communities in their homelands; and to guarantee that justice is served and criminals held accountable for acts against the world's Christians and other peoples, as stipulated during the previous hearings of this Commission held on June 13, 2019 titled 'Pursuing Accountability for Atrocities', on November 14, 2018 titled 'Reducing the Risk of Mass Atrocities', and on April 19, 2016, titled 'Confronting the Genocide of Religious Minorities: A Way Forward'.