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## **Religion repressed in third of all nations**

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AP (16.12.2009) / HRWF (17.12.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - In Indonesia, Muslim groups burn down a mosque belonging to the minority Ahmadiyya. In Singapore, the government refuses to recognize Jehovah's Witnesses. In Belgium, 68 religion-based hate crimes are reported in 2007 alone.

People living in a third of all countries are restricted from practicing religion freely, either because of government policies and laws or hostile acts by individuals or groups, according to a study released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center, "Global Restrictions on Religion."

That amounts to 70 percent of the globe's population, since some of the most restrictive countries are very populous.

Of the world's 25 most populous countries, citizens in Iran, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and India live with the most restrictions when both measures are taken into account, the study found.

"Where those two come together is where it's most intense," said Brian Grim, senior researcher at the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life.

The United States, Brazil, Japan, Italy, South Africa and the United Kingdom have the least amount of restrictions on religious practices when measured by both government infringement and religion-based violence or harassment, according to the study.

The study found that religious minorities suffer the brunt of the intolerance.

Timothy Shah, a senior research scholar at Boston University who is familiar with the study, said he was struck by the fact that more than 30 countries have high levels of both government and social restrictions on religion.

Shah pointed to Nigeria, where 12 majority-Muslim states adopted the Islamic Sharia criminal code after returning to civilian rule in 1999, resulting in hostilities against religious minorities.

"Where the state throws its weight around, that naturally creates a response of social hostility," he said.

The Pew Center sought answers to 20 questions it created related to government restrictions on religious practices, such as policies or laws, and on 13 questions on social restrictions, such as individual acts of violence.

The group then examined published public information sources, including reports by the U.S. State Department, the United Nations and various non-governmental organizations, to answer the questions on a county-by-country basis. Researchers analyzed information from July 1, 2006, to June 30, 2008.

The report found that the percentage of the world's countries with high or very high government restrictions is at about 20 percent, which amounts to 57 percent of the world's population. These countries include Saudi Arabia, Iran and former communist countries, such as Russia, Belarus and Bulgaria, where state atheism has been replaced by favored religions that are accorded special protections or privileges.

Grim pointed out that many countries have language in their constitutions or basic laws that ban infringements on religion. But the reality is that governments often place restrictions on religions in practice.

For example, 90 percent of countries require religious groups to register for reasons including obtaining tax-exempt status or import privileges. But in almost three in five countries, the registration requirements result in problems or discrimination against certain groups.

The Singapore's Societies Act, for example, requires all religious groups to register with the government but it doesn't recognize Jehovah's Witnesses or the Unification Church. In practice, only about a quarter of the world's countries implement constitutional language protecting religious freedom.

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## **20 missionaries killed in 2008**

Zenit (07.01.2009) / HRWF (12.01.2009) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - The list of missionaries killed on active duty in 2008 includes an archbishop, several priests, religious and laypeople, reported the Vatican's Fides agency.

This list, compiled by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, includes the names of missionaries as well as all pastoral workers who died violent deaths, sacrificing their lives as a result of hatred of the faith or other reasons. The list avoids using the term "martyrs," leaving this judgment of merit to the Church.

Nonetheless, Fides affirmed the need to recall and pray for the deceased who, "without any false heroism or solemn proclamations, [...] were not afraid to risk their own lives on a daily basis, often in situations of suffering, poverty and tensions, so as to offer all those around them the vital force of Christian hope."

Asia was the continent that saw the greatest number of violent deaths in 2008, including Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, who was killed in Iraq. As well, three priests and one layperson lost their lives in India, and one priest was murdered per country in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Nepal.

Five priests were killed on the continent of America: two in Mexico, one in Venezuela, one in Columbia and one in Brazil.

Africa lost five missionaries to violent deaths, including two priests in Kenya, one religious brother in Guinea Conakry, one priest in Nigeria and a layperson in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Two Jesuit priests lost their lives in Russia.

The number of slain missionaries decreased from the 21 violent deaths recorded in 2007. Though, the report clarified that this list is provisional, and does not include the long list of those whom Pope John Paul II called "unknown soldiers, as it were, of God's great cause."

Referring to the significance of the 2008-2009 Pauline Year for every missionary, Fides affirmed that "The same love that led Paul to endure so many circumstances that only as a euphemism could we describe as 'uncomfortable' [...] now continues to inspire men and women all over the globe to go to the encounter of their brethren, in the name of Christ, savior and redeemer of man."

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