



**Submission for the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief's thematic report  
for the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council**

**Advocacy of Hatred Based on Religion or Belief**

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**Open Doors International** is a non-governmental organisation that supports communities of Christians of all denominations in more than 60 countries where their fundamental rights are violated on the basis of their faith.

**Instances and effects of advocacy of religious hatred**

*For adherents to various religions and beliefs, individually and collectively*

1. In Türkiye, there has been a steep surge in the use of biased, prejudiced and discriminatory language against religious minorities and refugees in recent years by Turkish media,<sup>1</sup> politicians<sup>2</sup> and officials<sup>3</sup>. Christians and Jews are mostly the targets of inciting speech for religious identity related reason<sup>4</sup>, and ethnic minorities are labeled using a variety of words that have negative attributes.<sup>5</sup> Such discourses have increased hostility against religious minorities and refugees, making them vulnerable targets of hate crimes.<sup>6</sup>
2. In Indonesia, reports indicate that prominent male figures like Christian pastors and activists are the primary targets for public religious discrimination. They can face accusations or interrogations and may have to stand trial for charges such as "inciting religious hatred." Blasphemy laws in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/turkish-medias-hate-speech-manifests-violence-against-communities/news>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.1.1.04.pdf>. FF

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/turkiye-police-and-gendarmerie-commit-abuses-in-earthquake-zone/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Turkey: Country Dossier", Open Doors International, 2023, pp. 17. Available at:

<https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Turkey-2023.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://iafor.org/archives/journals/iafor-journal-of-media-communication-and-film/10.22492.ijmcf.1.1.04.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.freiheit.org/ost-und-sudosteuropa/hate-speech-monitoring-turkish-media>.

country are reportedly misused to incite religious intolerance and silence critics, although pastors rarely stand trial.<sup>7</sup>

*As crystallised into systemic and structural disadvantage against some target groups*

3. In Pakistan, Christian and other minority religion men and boys are often compelled to take lower status and dangerous jobs. They are often referred to as "Chura," a derogatory word meaning "filthy", which is used for road sweepers and sewage cleaners. Cultural practices encourage employers not to hire Christians and other minority religion adherents or put them forward for senior positions. This can result into a lack of employment opportunities or discrimination in the workplace. For children belonging to religious minorities, discrimination at school (and elsewhere) is a daily experience. At school, children of Christian parents are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as their Muslim classmates to avoid 'defiling' the drinking-water, and they are often bullied. Many Christian children are asked to clean the latrines or sweep the floor as Christians are commonly perceived as being sweepers.<sup>8</sup>

### **Particular times, actors, or objects and symbols associated with manifestations of religious hatred**

*Particular times*

4. In Türkiye inciting speech against Christians and other minorities has ramped up since the failed coup in 2016. Anti-minority conspiracy theories have spread across the country, becoming an effective tool for propaganda. State-run media outlets play a key role in smearing and scapegoating religious minorities, using state funds for incitement, especially against Christians and Jews.<sup>9</sup>

*Particular times: Advocacy of Religious Hatred and COVID-19*

5. In India, Open Doors gathered evidence to suggest that while numbers of Christians and Muslims have participated whole-heartedly in relief work both in separate organizations and alongside some Hindu and Sikh peers, the volume and types of disinformation against these communities continued to rise and multiply during the COVID-19 crisis. Images and tropes involving the denigration of Muslims and Christians, particularly a refusal to have blood transfusions given by them, a connection of them and their faith habits of prayer and worship with the spread of the virus, economic boycotts of goods and products sold by religious minorities, and the accusation that they deliberately infected Hindus, appeared repeatedly on mainstream and social media platforms and apps, and only a small number of these were ever retracted or taken down.
6. Against a backdrop of super-spreader events run by Hindu and Hindutva groups and organizations for the BJP's Assembly election campaigns in five states and for various Hindu religious festivals, the primary targets of COVID-related disinformation in India remained Human Rights Defenders,

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<sup>7</sup> "Indonesia: Full Country Dossier", 2023, Open Doors International, p. 53. Available at:

<https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Indonesia-2023.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> "Pakistan: Full Country Dossier", 2023, Open Doors International, p. 51. Available at:

<https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Pakistan-2023.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> "Turkey: Country Dossier", *ibid*, p. 17.

Muslims and Christians, in particular those working as journalists, medics or engaging in relief work and political dissidence. On 25 April 2021, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh threatened to confiscate the property and attack the workplaces of those medics and ordinary citizens appealing for oxygen or medicines online, characterizing such appeals as the spread of false information about the state. Hospitals were likewise under surveillance in case they publicize their dire need. Almost uniformly, research found, those who were prosecuted for these “crimes” tended to be from Christian or Muslim backgrounds.

7. In Myanmar, disinformation was used to discredit Christians and incite hatred against them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, stories of Christians and other religious minorities being the harbinger of the coronavirus were spreading rampantly. Meanwhile, stories of Christians directly receiving foreign aid were also circulated, legitimising the view that they ought not to receive government aid. Following the military coup in Myanmar in February 2012, the junta used such disinformation to fuel ethnic tensions and violence.<sup>10</sup>
8. In other countries, religious minorities have been blamed for the spread of COVID-19 through fake news spread on media and online. Open Doors received reports of Christians being accused of being responsible for the spread of COVID-19 from Uganda and Niger. Equally, the BBC reported that in Somalia, the Islamic extremist al-Shabaab group warned Muslims that Christians were transmitters of the disease.<sup>11</sup>

*Particular actors (e.g. political, religious, social influencers)*

9. There has been a considerable increase in the number of inciting speech incidences in the last few years in India. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau of India shows<sup>12</sup> more than a four-fold increase in the number of cases registered for inciting speech between 2015 and 2020.<sup>13</sup> Hindutva extremist group leaders have openly urged their followers to attack minorities and their militant messages call for actions which are tantamount to genocide.<sup>14</sup> Many members of the BJP, some also holding government portfolios, have made public statements inciting communal disharmony through calls for violence against minorities.<sup>15</sup> Law enforcement officials are often sympathetic to the ideals of the Hindutva extremists and either join them or are reluctant to exercise their powers against them, perpetuating a culture of impunity.<sup>16</sup> Social media is also used to humiliate and harass

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<sup>10</sup> “Digital Persecution, The New Frontier for Freedom of Religion or Belief”, Open Doors Parliamentary Report, 2022, available at, <https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/Open%20Doors%20Digital%20Persecution%20Report.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “Coronavirus and Persecution: an Additional Vulnerability”, Open Doors UK & Ireland, 2020. Available at: [https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/2020\\_The%20Last%20in%20Line.pdf](https://media.opendoorsuk.org/document/pdf/2020_The%20Last%20in%20Line.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> “Crime In India Report”, 2020. Available at <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CI%202020%20Volume%201.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> The number of cases registered under sections 153A & 153AA (i.e. promoting enmity between groups) of the Indian Penal Code, 1860. Available at <https://factly.in/data-more-than-a-four-fold-increase-in-the-number-of-cases-registered-for-hate-speech-between-2015-2020/>.

<sup>14</sup> “As Officials Look Away, Hate Speech in India Nears Dangerous Levels”, New York Times, February 2022. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/asia/india-hate-speech-muslims.html>.

<sup>15</sup> “BJP Tops India's 'VIP' Hate Pandemic”, January 2022. Available at <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/bjp-tops-indias-vip-hate-pandemic-ndtv-finds-2703827>.

<sup>16</sup> “The Crime Vanishes: Mob Lynching, Hate Crime and Police Discretion in India”, Bhat, Bajaj and Kumar, 11(1) Jindal Global Law Review (2020).

women from minority groups by “auctioning” them on mobile applications such as Sulli Deal and Bulli Bai without their knowledge or consent.<sup>17</sup>

10. In Nicaragua, due to the government's control of the media, biased information has frequently been spread, with Christians and church leaders being portrayed as terrorists and traitors planning a coup or promoting social unrest. The president and vice-president have repeatedly insulted Christians in such ways and have encouraged others to do so too, thus creating a climate of intolerance towards churches, especially against priests and bishops.<sup>18</sup>
11. In Nigeria, former-Governor of Kaduna State Nasir El-Rufai has been accused of using inciting language, such as a tweet that says that 'anyone, soldier or not that kills the Fulani takes a loan repayable one day', or his statement that those who try and intervene in Nigeria 'will go back in body bags'. He has also been accused of spreading divisive disinformation by alleging that some attacks on churches are perpetrated by Christians, posing as Boko Haram insurgents, to 'tarnish the name of Islam'.<sup>19</sup>

#### *School Curricula associated with Advocacy of Religious Hatred*

12. In Iraq, the curriculum for elementary school students contains elements that might incite hatred towards Christians and social division. For instance, Christian women who do not wear a hijab are particularly affected by statements referring to them as being “sick”.<sup>20</sup> Another disadvantage that Christians face in education is the Islamic focus of the religious education syllabus and the overall disregard of the contribution of minorities to the history of Iraq. This fosters a narrative that “others” minority religions and portrays them as aliens and not part of the history and Iraqi cultural heritage. Some of the official teaching materials in governmental schools and universities define Christians as infidels and enemies, and incite to jihad against them.<sup>21</sup>
13. Intolerant content against religious minorities has been included in textbooks used in Saudi schools for years, perpetuating the idea that those who follow a religion other than Wahabi Islam – such as Christians and Jews – are infidels and should be condemned or even killed. After 9/11 and because of international pressure, the Saudi Government started reviewing school textbooks and removing intolerant content.<sup>22</sup> A review of Saudi textbooks since 2016 by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Education in School Textbooks (IMPACT-se) shows that some progress has been made, for example, references to Christianity as a “perverted religion” have been removed, and terrorism perpetrated by Muslims strongly criticized.<sup>23</sup> However, intolerant content is still present in recent schoolbooks. For example, schoolbooks for the 2017-2018 academic year still encouraged the killing of Jews and “apostates”, and to avoid Christians and

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<sup>17</sup> “Bulli Bai: Sulli Deals 2.0? All You Need To Know About The Online 'Auction' Of Muslim Women”, Outlook India, January 2022. Available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-bulli-bai-sulli-deals-20-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-online-auction-of-muslim-women/408040>.

<sup>18</sup> “Nicaragua: Full Country Dossier”, 2023, Open Doors International, p. 38. Available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Nicaragua-2023.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide? Three Years On, All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), p. 16. Available at: <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/Unfolding-Genocide-three-years-on.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> “Iraq: Full Country Dossier”, 2023, Open Doors International, p. 35. Available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Iraq-2023.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/03/saudi-textbooks-revised-but-still-incite-hate.php>.

Jews unless they convert to Islam.<sup>24</sup> As much as the Saudi Government's efforts to tackle this serious issue should be welcomed, there is still a long way to go to ensure that students in school are not taught intolerance and hatred towards different religions and groups, as well as educating Saudi citizens on values of religious tolerance.

### **Laws and regulations aimed at countering hatred inconsistent with international human rights standards**

14. Article 15 of the constitution of Jordan guarantees freedom of opinion and expression by speech, writing, photography, and other means of expression. According to the constitution, the right to freedom of expression is subject to limitations set forth in the country's national laws. However, the constitution goes on to state that any such law should not affect the core principles of the right to freedom of expression which includes an individual's right to hold an opinion and the freedom to express it without interference by the state if it does not harm a person's reputation or is not a threat to national security. Nonetheless, the Cybercrimes Law No. 27 of 2015 is used by government authorities to impose arbitrary restrictions on online and offline expression by illegally collecting personal data, processing electronic data without permission, and disclosing personal data unlawfully. The 2019 amendment to this law sought to extend its reach even to applications used on personal computers and mobile phone devices.<sup>25</sup> Under Article 11 of the same law, online defamation can lead to a fine and prison sentence of at least three months.<sup>26</sup> This has allowed the authorities to increasingly censor critical coverage or spread misinformation in recent years. Minorities in Jordan are forced to self-censor and are gradually turning more anxious in expressing themselves on social media about the royal family, Islam, the military and in sharing opinions that could be construed as proselytizing. Additionally, converts from Islam to other religions must maintain caution when expressing their opinions due to potential backlash or pressure from their local community and for fear of potentially being ostracized.
15. In October 2022, in its efforts to counter inciting speech, the Government of Türkiye, passed Law No. 7418, ("New Press Law") containing forty articles amending several laws such as the Internet law, the Press law and the Turkish Penal Code.<sup>27</sup> However, the New Press Law penalizes journalists and social media users for spreading "disinformation".<sup>28</sup> Article 29 of the New Press Law sets imprisonment term for up to three years for those who spread "false or misleading information".<sup>29</sup> While the intentions of the Turkish Government is to restrict the flow of "false and misleading information", the new law gives sweeping powers to the government-controlled Information and Communication Technologies Authority (Bilgi Teknolojileri ve İletişim Kurumu, BTK) to regulate the internet and compel social media companies to adhere to requests to take

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<sup>24</sup> "Special Report: Study Revealed Numerous Passages in Saudi Textbooks Advocating Intolerance and Violence", *USCIRF*, May 2018. Available at: [https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Special%20Report%20-%20Saudi%20textbooks%205-16-18\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Special%20Report%20-%20Saudi%20textbooks%205-16-18_0.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> The right to freedom of expression online in Jordan, International Center for Not-for profit Law. Available at: <https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Guide-to-Internet-freedoms-in-Jordan-English.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> *Refworld | Freedom on the Net 2018 - Jordan*. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5be16b0dc.html>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/14/turkey-dangerous-dystopian-new-legal-amendments>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/turkey-dark-day-for-online-free-expression-as-new-disinformation-law-is-passed/>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/law-that-would-jail-those-spreading-disinformation-progresses-turkey-2022-10-13/>.

down online content and hand over user data.<sup>30</sup> Journalists and citizens have to self-censor to avoid being critical of the government and risking imprisonment.<sup>31</sup>

16. Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Penal Code criminalizes the propagation of “*extremist thoughts with the aim of instigating sedition and division or disdain and contempt of any of the heavenly religions*” and “*prejudicing national unity or social peace*”.<sup>32</sup> Under this law, blasphemy charges are very common against Christians and other religious minorities, and they are often used as a pretext for mobilization and attacks against faith communities. For example, a Coptic Christian was sentenced to three years in prison for a “blasphemous” Facebook post, and a Coptic teacher was charged with blasphemy for a set of questions about Mohammed at school.<sup>33</sup> Although the Egyptian blasphemy law requires the accused to manifest a specific intent to blaspheme, which is uncommon in existing blasphemy laws in other countries,<sup>34</sup> its primary aim is to protect religions and is thus contrary to international human rights standards which protect the rights of the individual.<sup>35</sup> Article 176 of the Penal Code addresses incendiary speech and incitement to religious hatred and violence, thus making article 98(f) unnecessary in its current form and in any other revised forms.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/gni-statement-on-turkiyes-push-to-regulate-digitalcontent/>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/turkish-lawmakers-adopt-new-disinformation-law-/6790659.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Egypt’s Criminal Code, Art. 98(f), 1937, available at:

[https://sherloc.unodc.org/res/cld/document/criminal\\_code\\_of\\_egypt\\_english\\_html/Egypt\\_Criminal\\_Code\\_English.pdf](https://sherloc.unodc.org/res/cld/document/criminal_code_of_egypt_english_html/Egypt_Criminal_Code_English.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> See “Egypt cracks down on blasphemy in wave of arrest” at <https://www.copticsolidarity.org/2020/11/20/egypt-cracks-down-on-blasphemy-in-wave-of-arrests/>; <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=13112020&id=579b8e69-5a51-477b-99cc-f66184f56410&fbclid=IwAR0OgfeHSGmXzMlxbRehD9SbiBYGEPFS7VOWPpo1APBvNnJR3UHbjjZBwhs>

(Arabic); “Egypt: Copt sentenced to three years in prison for ‘blasphemous’ Facebook post” and “Coptic teacher charged with contempt of religion for questions about Muhammad”, *World Watch Monitor*, available respectively at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/12/%C2%AD%C2%AD%C2%ADegypt-copt-sentenced-to-three-years-in-prison-for-blasphemous-facebook-post/>, and <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/03/coptic-teacher-charged-with-contempt-of-religion-for-questions-about-muhammad/>.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, the Pakistan’s blasphemy law, which doesn’t require a specific intent for the offence: *Pakistan Penal Code*, Section 295(c), available at: <https://www.oecd.org/site/adboecdanti-corruptioninitiative/46816797.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> “General Comment No. 34”, *Human Rights Committee*, Geneva, July 2011, Para. 48.