



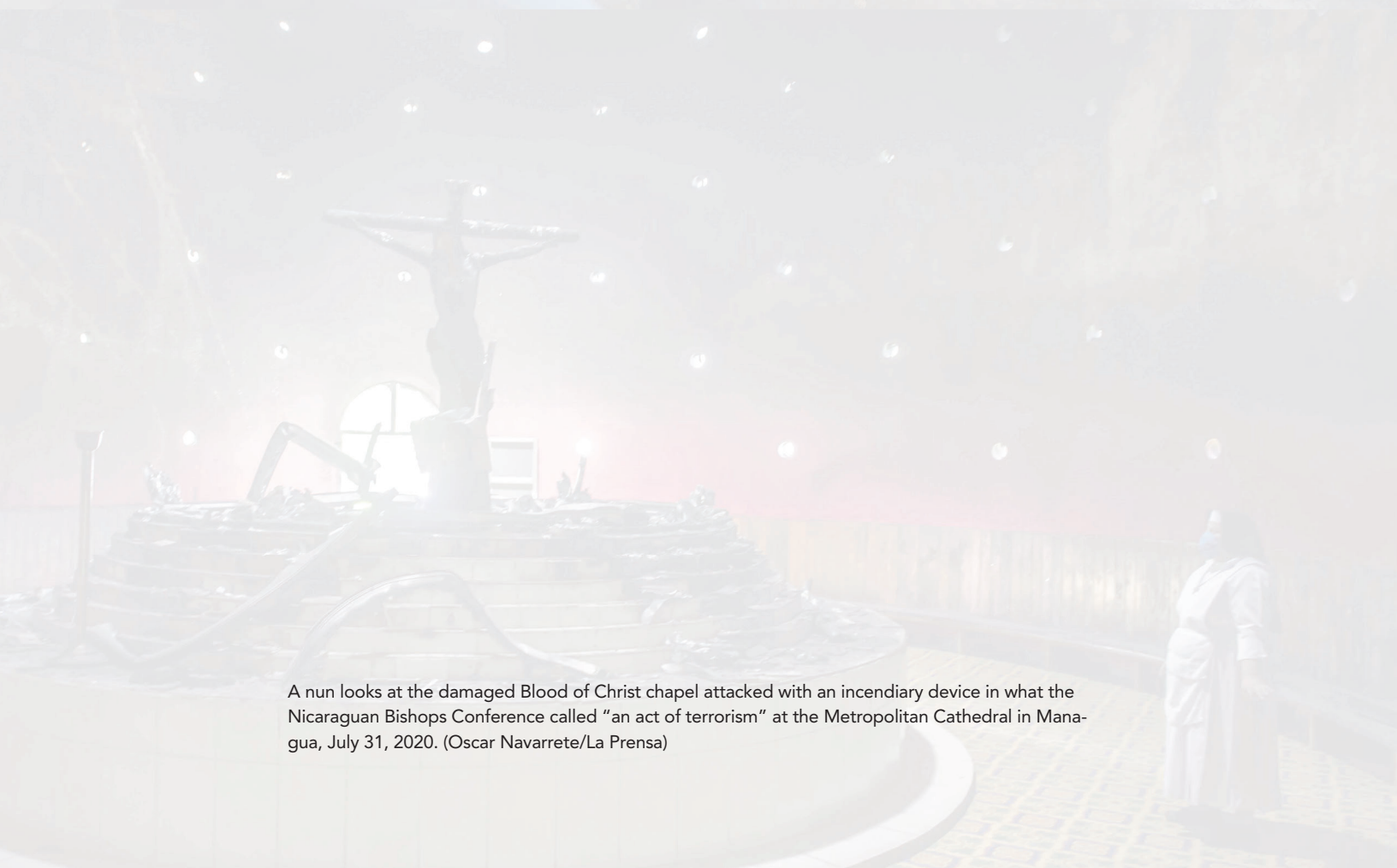
UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
**INTERNATIONAL
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM**

2 0 2 5 A N N U A L R E P O R T





Nicaraguan exile Francisco Alvicio, right, a deacon of Nicaragua's Moravian Church, prays in his rented room alongside fellow exile and Miskito leader Salomon Martinez Ocampo in San Jose, Costa Rica, Sunday, Sept. 22, 2024. (AP Photo/Carlos Herrera)



A nun looks at the damaged Blood of Christ chapel attacked with an incendiary device in what the Nicaraguan Bishops Conference called "an act of terrorism" at the Metropolitan Cathedral in Managua, July 31, 2020. (Oscar Navarrete/La Prensa)

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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The government dismissed the killing as a suicide and did not launch a formal investigation. In August, President Maduro promoted the antisemitic trope of Jewish political control by blaming “international Zionism” which “controls all the social networks, the satellites and all the power” for supporting his political opposition.

Nepal

Nepal continued to experience an increase in Hindu nationalist sentiment, marked by several protests advocating for the restoration of a Hindu monarchy. In April, hundreds of protesters in Kathmandu under the direction of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) clashed with police. Additionally, Christians faced increasing levels of harassment and arrest throughout the year. Most notably, in January, Nepal’s Supreme Court sentenced Pastor Keshab Acharya to one year in prison for proselytization. Similarly, in March, police detained four Christians for 24 days for allegedly engaging in forced conversions and carrying Bibles.

Belarus

Religious organizations in Belarus began reregistering with the government following the 2023 passage of a new religion law requiring them to reregister by July 2025 or face liquidation. The law recycled and modified several restrictive articles found in the previous law and introduced new requirements and restrictions for religious communities. In February, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Nazila Ghanea and two other Special Rapporteurs [criticized](#) the law for failing to meet the country’s international legal obligations. Other concerning developments in recent years have included the banning of religious and FoRB-related content as “extremist” and the detention of religious clergy for their perceived political activities.

Georgia

In August, Georgia’s law On Transparency on Foreign Influence went into effect despite international condemnation. The new law [requires](#) nongovernmental organizations and media outlets receiving more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign sources—including religious charities and groups working on religious freedom-related issues—to register as organizations “pursuing the interest of a foreign power.” Several UN [Special Rapporteurs](#) and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [Volker Türk](#) condemned the law for undermining the freedoms of expression and association. Civil society activists have raised concerns the law could also impact Georgia’s registered religious communities.

Hungary

Hungary’s legal framework continued to arbitrarily restrict religious freedom. Article 9 of the constitution provides that freedom of expression may not be “exercised with the aim of violating the dignity . . . of religious communities.” It further provides that members of religious communities are “entitled to enforce their claims in court against the expression of an opinion which violates their community.” In addition, the Church Law [permitted](#) the government to deny religious groups legal personality for a variety of arbitrary reasons, including too few community members and failure to prove a historical presence in Hungary. Following her visit to Hungary in October, UN Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea [acknowledged](#) that the government had

responded to criticism of the Church Law by introducing reforms six years prior, but she noted that they “fell short of addressing the broader concerns about discrimination.” Furthermore, in January, the Pásztó District Court convicted 21 people of the misdemeanor of “quackery,” reportedly for providing medical alternative and drug withdrawal services through a Scientology-affiliated non-profit organization. However, the government showed a willingness to engage with international efforts to combat antisemitism by [welcoming](#) then U.S. Special Envoy on Antisemitism Deborah Lipstadt for a visit in May and hosting a two-day meeting in September of the European Commission’s working group on the implementation of the European Union strategy on combating antisemitism.

Increased Targeting of Muslims in European Society

A rise in anti-Muslim hatred generated pervasive fears among Muslims across Europe despite some governmental condemnation and investigation, threatening the ability of members of that community to practice their religion and express their religious identity in safety and security. In Italy, the mayor of Monfalcone prohibited worship in the city’s two Muslim cultural centers in May, forcing worshipers to pray in makeshift spaces or outside. In August, rioters in the United Kingdom shouted anti-Muslim hate speech and attacked a number of mosques following the spread across social media of [misinformation](#) about the murder of three girls in Southport. British leaders condemned these comments, and police arrested over 1,000 people, many of whom have appeared in court facing charges for their participation. In Sweden, assailants attacked a mosque in Norrköping in September, breaking windows and writing neo-Nazi slogans on the walls. Swedish police began an investigation after unidentified attackers threw a severed boar’s head—an animal that Islamic tradition widely considers unclean—at a mosque in Skövde. Similar attacks involving boars’ heads occurred in France in the cities of Contrexeville and Pas-de-Calais in April, prompting a police investigation and condemnation from France’s interior minister.

Muslim women wearing the hijab also faced harassment and assault for their choice of religious garb. On a bus in Bremen, Germany, in August, a woman shouted anti-Muslim statements at an 18-year-old wearing a hijab. At a train station in Langenfeld-Rhineland train station that same month, a man assaulted an 18-year-old Muslim woman and ripped off her hijab. In November, assailants in France attacked a Muslim woman, ripping off her hijab. During the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, the French government prohibited Muslim women on the French Olympic team from wearing the hijab during competition.

Antisemitism Targeting Jews and Jewish Sites

Jews and Jewish sites continued to face an alarming rate of targeting, harassment, and violence around the world, including in Western and Eastern Europe. Despite government condemnation and investigation of these attacks, members of many Jewish communities continued to express growing fears for their safety. Jewish sources reported a spike in antisemitic incidents across the continent throughout the year—ongoing since the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023 and Israel’s subsequent military operations in Gaza—and a pervasive sense of fear among their communities. In November, assailants in Amsterdam planned a so-called “Jew hunt” via Snapchat, WhatsApp,

and Telegram to follow a soccer match between a Dutch and Israeli team. The following night, police conducted a series of arrests after assailants in the city set a train on fire while shouting “cancer Jews.” Throughout the year in Weimar, Germany, police investigated the vandalism of at least seven Holocaust memorial stones with antisemitic messages including “Jews are criminals.” In early 2024, police investigated on “suspicion of discrimination and a call to hatred” a ski shop at the Pischasch mountain resort in Davos that posted a sign saying, “we no longer rent skis to our Jewish brothers.” In Lithuania, in April, the Vilnius Regional Prosecutor’s Office announced their conclusion that Member of Parliament Remigijus Žemaitaitis had incited hatred against Jews via antisemitic posts on social media.

Elsewhere, in Australia, unknown assailants firebombed a Melbourne synagogue while worshipers were inside, resulting in one injury and extensive damage to the building. Shortly thereafter, vandals spraypainted antisemitic graffiti in a Sydney suburb that is home to Australia’s largest Jewish community. Dozens of Jewish institutions across Canada received anonymous bomb threats in August, leading to an investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Gunmen fired at a Jewish elementary school in Toronto on three separate occasions throughout the year, prompting a police investigation and the arrest in October of two people connected to the shootings. In addition, police opened an investigation after an unidentified arsonist firebombed a Montreal synagogue in December. In February, rioters in Tunisia set fire to a synagogue courtyard in Sfax, prompting police to arrest a suspect the following month. European governments have condemned and investigated a spate of antisemitic physical assaults, antisemitic hate speech, desecration of property, and vandalism at Holocaust memorial sites across the continent.

In February, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva engaged in Holocaust distortion and inversion, comparing Israel’s military campaign against Hamas to the Nazi extermination of Jews in World War II. Despite this disinformation, the provinces of Goias and Sao Paulo endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s Working Definition of Antisemitism. In May, Colombian President Gustavo Petro severed the country’s diplomatic relations with Israel, after describing Israeli officials as “neo-Nazis” during the previous year. In April, Chilean Jewish community leaders instructed Jewish students to change out of their school uniforms, which feature logos with Jewish symbols, to avoid harassment and intimidation while outside of school grounds. In March, protesters organized an anti-Israel rally outside a Santiago Jewish community center and threw stones at Jewish individuals attending a wedding there. Chilean Jews wearing kippahs in public faced harassment throughout the year, and vandals targeted a number of Jewish community sites with antisemitic graffiti and other damage.

Transnational Repression Affecting FoRB

A growing number of countries have engaged in FoRB repression [beyond their borders](#) in recent years, including in 2024. In August, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer accused Russia of amplifying misinformation on social media to stoke ongoing anti-Muslim riots in the United Kingdom. Several countries, including Russia, China, Belarus, and Turkey, exploited the International Criminal Police Organization’s (INTERPOL) Red Notice system to target dissidents on the basis of their religious identity. Central Asian countries, including Tajikistan, have also increased their abuse of INTERPOL mechanisms, leveling fabricated

extremism charges against those who fled the country due to state persecution for their peaceful religious activities.

Several governments also continued to target religious dissidents abroad with violence. India targeted a Sikh activist for assassination in New York, while Canadian police arrested three men in May for their connection to an alleged Indian government assassination of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey, British Columbia in 2023. Countries also pursued family members of dissidents to silence their relatives living in-country. For example, in July, the sister of Saudi dissident [Manahel al-Otaibi](#) reported near-daily harassment, from individuals linked to the Saudi government, over her social media posts in support of her sister who is serving an 11-year prison sentence in Saudi Arabia for advocating for reforms to that country’s male guardianship system. Media outlets alleged in August that Saudi government agents had abducted a Saudi woman in Melbourne who had fled the male guardianship system, forcibly repatriating her to Saudi Arabia.

Artificial Intelligence and New Technologies Threatening FoRB

States continued to harness new and emerging technologies to target disfavored religious communities throughout the year. As USCIRF previously [reported](#), the Chinese government regularly uses artificial intelligence (AI); big data; and facial, voice, and gait recognition to conduct mass surveillance against Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, and ethno-religious groups like Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. Moreover, China has [exported](#) its “smart city” products and services—which employ such technologies—and its underlying techno-authoritarian governance to over 100 countries, posing threats to human rights and religious freedom beyond China’s borders. In addition, various governments, including India, have [used](#) online platforms, including social media, to spread misinformation and disinformation about religious groups. This messaging amplifies intolerance and leads to harassment, intimidation, and threats against those groups. The Russian government [increased](#) its use of AI technologies to repress dissent, surveil citizens, and strengthen censorship and narrative control online. The Iranian government also began to [employ](#) AI-based technologies to monitor internet traffic and apply its interpretation of Islamic moral standards to digital content. In Egypt, the government, too, has reportedly [used](#) AI in conjunction with its 2018 cybercrime law to further political repression and surveillance of dissidents.

In response to such trends, U.S. policy has begun to incrementally address the current and emerging threats that AI poses to international religious freedom and broader human rights. In December, for example, the administration of then President Joseph R. Biden further [tightened](#) export control of advanced semiconductors used in AI, in an effort to restrict China’s development and use of such technologies for repressing human rights and advancing military capabilities.

Positive FoRB Related Developments

Supported by bipartisan advocacy from members of Congress, the U.S. government worked throughout the year to release individuals detained or otherwise persecuted on religious grounds. In December, the Biden administration announced the [resettlement](#) in the

United States of three Chinese Uyghurs that included Ayshem Mamut, mother of former USCIRF Commissioner Nury Turkel. In September, the administration secured the release of American Pastor David Lin, who Chinese authorities had imprisoned for nearly two decades. That same month, the administration negotiated the [release](#) of 135 prisoners in Nicaragua, including 13 members of the Mountain Gateway ministry, members of the Catholic laity, and others.

In Nigeria, in August, the authorities [released](#) from prison Mubarak Bala, president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, more than four years after his 2020 arrest on blasphemy charges. In late December, a court in Bauchi State [acquitted](#) Christian nurse Rhoda Jatau, more than two years after her arrest on allegations of blasphemy for reportedly sharing a message on social media condemning the murder of a Christian student. USCIRF had engaged in extended advocacy for her release.

In July, on the 30th anniversary of the terrorist attack against the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the U.S. government joined more than 30 countries in launching the [Global Guidelines for Countering Antisemitism](#). The Guidelines identify practical actions that governments, international bodies, and civil society organizations can take to combat antisemitism.

In August, Houthi authorities in Yemen [released](#) all remaining Baha'is who the group had detained after their gunmen raided a private gathering of that community in Sana'a in May 2023. Until the release of each detainee, USCIRF had repeatedly [called](#) on the U.S. government to pressure Houthi authorities and ensure the unconditional and immediate release of all 17 detainees.