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The Danish European Mission was founded in 1964 and works in 16 countries. Christians at risk of persecution, discrimination and harassment receive legal aid, relief aid and self-help according to their need and are moreover empowered to bring development and make a positive change in their local communities, reaching out to marginalized in need.



*defending
the religious
freedom of
Christians*



Danish European Mission



Joint submission of:

Middle East Concern; The World Evangelical Alliance; ADF International; Jubilee Campaign; Open Doors; Stefanus Alliance International; The Baptist World Alliance; The Danish European Mission

Universal Periodic Review: Stakeholders' Report

LIBYA: Freedom of Religion or Belief

Joint submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council's
Universal Periodic Review Working Group; 50th session; 4th UPR Cycle

7 April 2025

Middle East Concern was founded in 1991, and seeks to promote freedom of religion or belief in the Middle East and North Africa, with a focus on the Christian communities.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) was founded in 1846 and is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance, and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

ADF International is a faith-based legal advocacy organization that protects fundamental freedoms and promotes the inherent dignity of all people.

Jubilee Campaign is a non-profit organization which promotes the human rights and religious liberty of ethnic and religious minorities. We assist individuals and families seeking asylum in the West from religious-based persecution as well as promoting the care and well-being of larger groups of refugees fleeing religious and ethnic persecution. Jubilee Campaign holds consultative status at the United Nations from the Economic and Social Council.

Open Doors supports communities of Christians in more than 60 countries where their fundamental rights are violated because of their faith.

Stefanus Alliance International is a human rights organization with a particular focus on freedom of religion or belief.

The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) was founded in 1905 in London, England. Today, the BWA is headquartered outside Washington D.C., USA and is a global network of 51 million Baptists in 134 countries and territories.

The Danish European Mission was founded in 1964 and works in 16 countries. Christians at risk of persecution, discrimination and harassment receive legal aid, relief aid and self-help according to their need and are moreover empowered to bring development and make a positive change in their local communities, reaching out to marginalized in need.

METHODOLOGY

1. The information herein was gathered by the above-named organisations from credible contacts including the victims of documented abuses or their lawyers, and partner organisations, as well as through research, and analysis of copies of official documents including court documents.
2. This report focuses on violations of human rights recognised under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ('ICCPR') (hereinafter referred to as violations) that are perpetrated wholly or partly due to the religious views or belief of the victims of the violations. The report concerns violations by State actors affiliated with the internationally recognised government based in Tripoli¹; by the authorities (not internationally recognised) based in eastern Libya; and groups affiliated with those authorities, including Islamic militias and other Islamist groups. It also concerns violations by members of victims' families and communities. The report focuses on violations across all religious or belief communities.
3. Amongst rights violations mentioned in this report are the right to freedom of religion or belief ('FoRB') (Article 18); freedom from arbitrary detention (Article 9); the right to be treated with humanity and respect for human dignity (Article 10); and those concerning the right to life (Article 6); due process (Article 14); discrimination (Article 2); equality before the law and equal protection of the law (Article 26); minority rights (Article 27); and the absolute prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 7).
4. This report, including its recommendations, recognises that the UPR will be conducted in dialogue with delegates of the internationally recognised government, i.e., the Government of National Unity (GNU) and that its governance does not extend across the entire country. Serious FoRB and related violations continue to prevail across Libya. In areas under the control of the said government, the situation is no better than elsewhere but is currently worse.
5. The actual number of individuals in Libya who experienced violations connected with their faith or belief within the reporting period extends considerably beyond those articulated in this report. It is believed many cases of such violations in Libya go unreported. Further, it is known many others are handled discreetly due to fear on the part of victims or their families or legal representatives that public exposure may worsen situations. Such concerns necessitate the omission from this document of the names of victims of these violations and of greater details known about the violations against them. In these circumstances our reporting on such violations does not capture the full extent of and total number of the violations. Our reporting should therefore be considered indicative of such violations.

BACKGROUND AND LEGAL OVERVIEW

6. More than 94% of Libya's population is identified as Sunni Muslim, while approximately 4.5% of its inhabitants are identified as adherents to Ibadi Islam.² The remainder of the population is mostly comprised of Christians, Baha'is, Hindus, Buddhists, and Ahmadi Muslims;³ these communities are mostly comprised of migrant workers and their families or other foreign nationals. Some of the Muslim population practice Sufism. As of 2002, there is no Jewish population in Libya.⁴ The number of Christians in Libya is estimated at 35,500, or roughly 0.5% of Libya's population.⁵ Amongst those Christians are approximately 150-180 Libyan nationals who are converts from Islam. Per its latest World Watch List, Open Doors ranks Libya the fourth worst country in the world for Christians to live

in.⁶ Buddhists are the second largest religious or belief minority group and are estimated to number approximately 20,000.⁷ A 2021-2022 survey by the Arab Barometer found 24% of Libyans surveyed were “not religious”.⁸

7. Libya is a State Party to the ICCPR, without any reservation limiting its commitment to FoRB. Libya is not a State Party to the ICCPR’s Second Optional Protocol which abolishes the death penalty. Libya “noted” the numerous recommendations to abolish the death penalty during the 3rd UPR cycle.
8. Libya is a State Party to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, but not to the Optional Protocol which allows the Subcommittee provided for under the protocol to visit places of detention. Amongst other international human rights treaties to which Libya is a State Party is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This is, however, with reservations that it is implemented in line with Sharia Law; the reservations are thus largely at odds with the objects and purpose of the treaty.⁹
9. The reporting period has not seen advancement as to a Constitution. A Constitutional Declaration adopted in 2011 (revised in 2012) functions as an interim Constitution. Article 1 states Islam is the state religion, and Sharia law is the “main source of legislation”.¹⁰ The same article provides: “The State shall guarantee for non-Muslims the freedom to practice their religious rituals.”¹¹ Article 6 provides for equality “without distinction on the grounds of religion, belief...”.¹² In practice, the provisions as to FoRB are disregarded across the country by the prevailing authorities, Islamist militias affiliated with them and other Islamist organisations.
10. The draft Constitution of 2017 is indicative of the worsening situation regarding FoRB. It does not feature any reference concerning freedom to practice religion. It does not expressly refer to religion or to belief as protected categories in terms of equality/against discrimination (Article 7). It refers to Sharia law as “the source of legislation” (Article 6).¹³
11. The authorities, across the country, do not recognise conversions from Islam. In practice, all Libyans are assumed to be Muslim, with no scope for changing religion. Personal status matters are determined according to Sharia law.
12. As conversion from Islam is not legally recognised, the children of converts are registered at birth by the authorities as Muslim. As noted by Open Doors International: “Libya is an Islamic country and Islamic teaching influences all school curricula. Even international schools have to follow the Islamic curriculum.”¹⁴
13. The marriage of a Muslim male to a female who is not of an Abrahamic faith is prohibited. Even if conducted abroad, such marriages are not recognised. Only Muslim males may marry Muslim females (a non-Muslim male would be required to convert to Islam); marriage between a Muslim female and a non-Muslim male is prohibited.
14. Five Christian denominations are afforded a level of recognition or tolerance, based on understandings and agreements made before the country’s independence in 1952. Foreign Christians are allowed to hold worship inside the few church buildings available in the country.¹⁵ Churches cannot attain legal registration and thus cannot own property, etc.

15. The reporting period has seen the enactment by the House of Representatives ('HoR') of a new law, which serves to repress, *inter alia*, FoRB and related expression: Law No. 5 of 2022, regarding cybercrimes.¹⁶ Article 42 states "Anyone who insults a sanctity or religious ritual using the international information network or any other electronic means or system shall be punished with imprisonment." The charge carries a minimum sentence of three years' imprisonment, but the law permits a shorter sentence in extenuating circumstances. Under this charge there is no limit in terms of a maximum prison term. Any devices used in cybercrime will be confiscated (Article 50) and any foreigner sentenced under this law will, in addition to the other penalties mentioned in the law, be deported (Article 51). Since its enactment, Law No. 5 of 2022 has been extensively used including to prosecute people for simply discussing religions or beliefs other than Islam or who are perceived to have criticised Islam.
16. Regarding Law No. 5 of 2022, per its March 2023 report the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya stated: it "is alarmed by the Anti-Cybercrime Law that came into effect in October 2022, which could exacerbate an already constricted and heavily monitored civic space online. The law affords the Libyan authorities extensive discretionary powers to restrict and criminalize online freedom of expression, opinion and belief on the basis of 'public order and morality'."^{17 18}
17. Article 206 of Libya's Penal Code criminalises "Unlawful Organizations and Formations". This law prescribes the death penalty for offenders. Article 207 of Libya's Penal Code criminalises "Promotion of Any Acts Against the System of the State". It also prescribes the death penalty. These Articles were enacted to combat organised crime and treason, but have been used to lay criminal charges in the reporting period in connection with the suspected spreading of views considered to undermine the Islamic nature of Libya.
18. Article 291 of Libya's Penal Code outlines what is essentially a blasphemy charge. It reads: "Anyone who publicly attacks the Islamic religion, which is the official religion of the State according to the Constitution of Libya, through expressions that are inappropriate for God, prophets, or messengers, shall be punished by a penalty of detention for a period not exceeding two years." The provision's lack of specificity ("expressions that are inappropriate for God, prophets or messengers") renders it wide open to abuse against Libyan Muslims and those of minority religions or beliefs. It continues to be so abused.
19. Per the aforementioned report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya: "Some of the vague terminology used in Libyan legislation is incompatible with the right to freedom of expression, which requires that laws must be sufficiently precise to enable an individual to regulate his or her behaviour."¹⁹ Libya's Penal Code, for example, stipulates the death penalty for any views or principles that aim to overthrow the political, social or economic order of the State [footnote in its report here refers to Article 207 of the Penal Code] and proscribes blasphemy [footnote in its report here refers to Article 291 of the Penal Code] ."²⁰
20. In 2012 a temporary legislative body, the General National Congress ('GNC'), amended Article 291 of the Penal Code (by way of Law No. 20 of 2016), to make it consistent with Sharia Law.²¹ Article 291 criminalises "insulting the state religion."²² The GNC passed Law 20 of 2016 "which amended the Penal Code by repealing the provisions contravening Islamic law and adding new provisions, including one stipulating the death penalty for apostasy."²³

21. In 2014 a new legislative body was elected, the HoR. After fighting broke out between different armed factions, the HoR moved from Tripoli (west) to Tobruk (east). It passed a law abolishing all the laws of the GNC. In 2015, the Tripoli-based Supreme Court (west), in a case on election laws, ruled that the HoR, based in Tobruk, is 'invalid' and therefore its decrees are not legally valid. However, a chamber of this same court ruled in a civil case in 2021 that all laws enacted by the GNC are void. In 2022, the Misrata Criminal Court (west) sentenced a Libyan national to death for apostasy (conversion to Christianity) under Article 291 of the Penal Code, which criminalises blasphemy, per the amendment of the GNC, even though the amendment had been in effect removed from the Penal Code by the HoR. It is understood that Islamist groups including the ISA pushed for the relevant authorities to prosecute the matter, and impose the death sentence. Further details on this case are outlined below under the heading Rights Violations.

Re 3rd UPR Cycle

22. The UN Compilation on Libya dated 12 March 2020²⁴ makes reference to violations suffered by migrant religious communities. Under the sub-heading Right to life, liberty and security of person, the report outlines:

*"The Committee on Migrant Workers was concerned about reports of acts of physical and verbal abuse, arbitrary detention, slavery and sexual violence committed against migrant workers and members of their families, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa and belonging to religious minorities, particularly Christians, by Libyan officials, including representatives of the Department for Combating Illegal Migration and the Libyan Coast Guard, armed and criminal groups and private citizens."*²⁵

23. Under the sub-heading Equality and non-discrimination, the report notes: "The Committee on Migrant Workers was concerned about reports of discriminatory treatment against migrant workers and members of their families, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa and belonging to religious minorities, particularly Christians."²⁶ Under the same sub-heading the report further reads: "It [the Committee] further recommended that Libya prevent and address violence and discrimination on racial and religious grounds by officials, armed and criminal groups and private citizens, and ensure that acts were recorded, investigated and sanctioned, and that victims received compensation."²⁷

24. The Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review on Libya, dated 5 January 2021²⁸ includes recommendations made by States to Libya that specify FoRB matters²⁹.

These recommendations are numbered and read therein as follows:

"148:98 Adopt a law against all forms of discrimination in order to prevent and address violence and discrimination on any grounds, including religion, and hold perpetrators of violent acts to account (Slovakia);"

"148.102 Redouble efforts to combat discrimination against women and against migrant workers belonging to religious minorities, in particular Christians, including through legislative reforms and awareness-raising campaigns (Brazil);"

"148.109 Adopt laws to fully end all forms of discrimination based on gender or religion, racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia and related intolerance, especially against migrant workers (Kenya);"

"148.175 Protect and promote religious freedom, so that people of all faiths can freely and openly practise their religion without fear of discrimination and/or retaliation (Holy See)."

None of those recommendations was accepted by Libya, as seen in its reply dated 8 March 2021.³⁰ Number 109 was marked "Not accepted," while numbers 98, 102 and 175 were marked "Noted."³¹

Escalation in FoRB related violations during current reporting period

25. There has been a marked increase in the repression and targeting of Muslims and members of civil society considered to be deviant, under the guise of morality or social interest. There has also been a marked increase in violations against members of minority religious or belief communities who are Libyan nationals. Typically they are targeted under accusations of apostasy from Islam and blasphemy. And against foreign nationals targeted under accusations of proselytising. During the reporting period there has been a substantial increase in violations based more squarely or solely on religion or belief.
26. The greater prevalence of FoRB violations is related to government maintenance of control over society. The Deputy-Director of the Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies ('CIHRS') stated in 2025: "instead of reining in the militias that terrorize Libyans, western and eastern authorities instrumentalize regressive religious discourse to tighten their grip on ordinary citizens"[....] Morality-based rhetoric has also been weaponized against civil society, in repeated efforts to discredit activists and further justify their repression."³²
27. Violations faced by minority religion or belief communities who are migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab world or Asia and their families have continued. Violations against them continue to be attributed to mixed reasons, such as racism and xenophobia along with religion or belief.
28. The prevalence of FoRB related violations is also attributable to the ongoing political and security crises and the lack of application of the rule of law. As the CIHRS stated in February 2025, "Western and eastern authorities have intermittently waged war against each other since 2014, and continue to vie for power; their protracted division has plunged the country into paralysis. The prolonged political deadlock has allowed armed groups to expand their influence, commit human rights abuses with impunity, and solidify their control over state institutions."³³
29. The Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya dated March 2023 outlines: "The rapid, deep and ongoing absorption of armed groups and their leadership into State-affiliated structures and institutions, including the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, and the spread of Salafist-leaning conservative ideologies are of significant concern to the Mission."³⁴
30. On 5 February 2025 the Internal Security Agency ('ISA'), held a press conference where they "refuted and condemned parts of the leaked (Arabic language version) UN Experts Panel Report on Libya."³⁵ The ISA is a militia that has been heavily involved in the reporting period in arrests, arbitrary detentions and in the background of prosecutions for "religious crimes". It has particular affiliation with the internationally recognised authorities in the west of Libya, but operates in both the west and the east. The Libya Herald outlined a summary of what the ISA said, which includes:
 - It deplored and condemned all that is stated in the report to undermine its resolve.
 - There are no arbitrarily detained prisoners, but they are legally detained prisoners.
 - We have taken it upon ourselves to confront the promotion of atheism and intelligence-backed homosexuality, which has angered some countries that support these activities.
 - We succeeded in monitoring and thwarting the settlement of migrants in southern Libya.
 - We were able to monitor a group called "Jama'at Allah" that practices Christian proselytizing within the country.[....]

- We monitored foreigners residing under the cover of teaching a foreign language who targeted teenagers to convince them to convert to apostasy [sic] and adopt Christianity in exchange for money and encourage them to facilitate travel and residence abroad.³⁶
31. It is feared the internationally recognised government in the west of Libya, and the authorities in the east will become even more reliant, to maintain power, on the Islamist militias and other Islamist or armed groups with which the authorities are allied. Thus becoming even more susceptible to their influence and demands, paving the way for further deterioration as to rights violations pertaining to religion or belief.

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Overview of forms of violations

32. Islamist militias, including the ISA,³⁷ arrest and arbitrarily detain suspected apostates from Islam, those suspected of proselytizing, and those, including Muslims, perceived as having criticised or acted contrary to Islam, and then pressure the authorities for the prosecution of harsh charges and application of harsh sentences against them. Libyan converts to Christianity, for example, are often targeted in this way in connection with posts or sharing Christian materials online. During the reporting period it has been common for those detained to be held for protracted periods – many months – without access to a lawyer, without being charged with an offence or being brought before a court. Physical and psychological abuse and the neglect of health conditions have also been common in the reporting period. We note the recommendations in the 3rd UPR cycle for Libya related to conditions of detention that have not been acted upon although they were supported by Libya.³⁸
33. Those who leave Islam, including those who become Christians or atheists, experience intense family and community pressure. They are commonly physically attacked and psychologically pressured by members of their family and community. They often lose their jobs and are made to leave their homes.
34. Women who leave Islam face sexual violence from their own families and communities and are unlikely to find recourse in the justice system. Indeed, they would face prosecution themselves concerning leaving Islam. Even women who are merely suspected of showing interest in leaving Islam face house arrest, forced marriage or even so-called “honour” killings.
35. The small number of converts from Islam to Christianity in Libya have become increasingly fearful of meeting with other Christians or posting online. They are forced to practice their faith secretly, for fear of being exposed and suffering the abuses mentioned above.
36. Per its March 2023 report: “The [Independent Fact-Finding] Mission [on Libya] found that persons were tortured, raped, arbitrarily detained and subjected to enforced disappearance after expressing their views on women’s rights and gender equality, sexual and gender diversity, the rights of indigenous groups and religion.”³⁹
37. Christian migrants and their families continue to face arrest, detention (stretching to several days or more) and extortion by Islamist militias or criminal gangs. Those targeted this way include individuals who have legal residency.

38. Migrant workers continue to face discrimination and mistreatment. As Open Doors' World Watch List 2025 states, "Christian migrants travelling through Libya describe their journey as a living hell. Both Christian and Muslim migrants are subject to forms of severe abuse."⁴⁰ In migrant detention centres run by militias, Christian migrants, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, suffer a particularly high prevalence of abuse including physical attacks. In the case of women, this abuse includes sexual assault and rape. It does not appear that Libya has acted on recommendation 148.257 regarding detention of migrants, which it supported in the 3rd UPR cycle.
39. Even before the GNU appointed the Special Deterrence Force ('SDF'; also known as RADA) as morality police on 14 November 2024 (see more in para. 53),⁴¹ groups such as the ISA and RADA were acting as self-appointed morality police, targeting those not meeting stringent Salafist interpretations of Islam. Muslim women are subjected to restrictions against behaviour deemed unislamic, including their attire and domestic and foreign travel. Muslim males are punished for views or behaviours deemed unislamic; prohibitions in place even include certain hairstyles.

Specific examples of violations by the authorities and affiliated actors

40. This section sets out a non-exhaustive number of specific religion or belief related violations in the reporting period. Details are limited due to security concerns.
41. Libyan national Dhiyaa ad-Din Ahmed Muftah Bala'ou is imprisoned under a death sentence for apostasy⁴² (accusation of converting from Islam to Christianity) in the west of the country. He has been detained since 2019. In September 2022 the Misrata Criminal Court sentenced him to death for apostasy, under Article 291 of the Penal Code as it was amended (see further details above under the heading Background and Legal Overview).⁴³ The Supreme Court (Tripoli-based) is to review the case. An initial listing before it proceeded in December 2022. No date for the substantive hearing of the review has since been scheduled. The court's file in this case is said to be "missing". Mr. Bala'ou has been continually pressured to return to Islam.
42. In 2023, at least 20 people were detained in connection with matters of religion or belief in the west and east of Libya. The ISA was the main actor. Those detained included Libyan nationals accused of converting from Islam to Christianity, atheism or defaming Islam, and foreign Christians. Most were forced to appear in videos, that were published on the ISA's website or Facebook, where they appear to make "confessions". A Parliamentary Committee of the HoR (east) demanded the prosecution of American citizens who were amongst those detained,⁴⁴ though they were released relatively quickly⁴⁵ and deported. The majority of those who were detained remain detained. All those who remain detained are in the west, with ongoing court proceedings against them. They were initially detained for months, in most cases for over nine months, before being brought before a court. Most of them have now been detained for over two years – the others amongst them, for almost two years – without any court finding of culpability against them. Of those who were detained in the east, the majority were detained for many months. One died soon after his release due to the neglect of a pre-existing medical condition while in detention.
43. In 2024, a group of Sub-Saharan Christian migrants were detained for up to a similar time (they were held for varying periods) in the west of Libya by an armed group. They were apprehended at a checkpoint installed at the road leading to a church on its day of the week for worship. Payments (unofficial) were required before they were released. Those detained included individuals who had valid residency permits. This was not the first time in the reporting period that on the road leading to

the same church such migrants were detained and extorted in such circumstances. Additionally, in February 2023, in Zawiya (west) armed men detained six Egyptian Coptic Christians at a checkpoint under the control of the Presidential Council-affiliated Stability Support Apparatus, then demanded ransom payments for their release, from their families.⁴⁶ The men were released after being detained for almost two weeks.⁴⁷

44. The ISA announced on social media in December 2023 that it had arrested teenagers and young adults under accusations including of insulting Islam and atheism.⁴⁸ The ISA posted videos online in which seven males and three females appear to “confess” to atheistic thoughts, with a number also referring to their sexuality as a reason for their arrest.⁴⁹
45. In June 2023, a number of Egyptian Coptic Christian migrants were arrested by the Municipal Guards (public order police) in Benghazi.⁵⁰ A video was published concerning the arrests which showed confiscated religious imagery (such as depict angels). The Copts were accused of proselytising. They were referred to the ISA and to the Ministry of Interior in Benghazi. A prominent Egyptian lawyer requested the intervention of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵¹
46. In 2022, at least six individuals detained by the ISA were forced to appear in videos and “confess” to having been atheists, agnostic, secular or feminist.
47. Nigerian pastor Femi Abraham Akinboye, arrested by an Islamic militia in July 2021 while seeking a permit for the church he had established, was released in March 2022.⁵²
48. In January 2022, a young Christian lady from sub-Saharan Africa was shot from behind when stopped at a checkpoint while on the way to church with others. She was asked to make a (unofficial) payment. She survived, but required lengthy treatment.⁵³
49. In January 2022, two church buildings in Sebha – one Roman Catholic⁵⁴ and one Protestant⁵⁵ – were demolished by a militia affiliated with the Libyan National Army. Although the church buildings were easily distinguishable, the militia proceeded to demolish them – without informing church officials or the owners. No form of compensation or alternative building was offered in either case following the destructions (while not confirmed, it is expected that remains the case to date).
50. Christians and non-Christians have been arrested in the west and east of Libya for celebrating Christmas and the New Year in recent years, on the basis that doing so is at odds with the State religion.

INCREASING ISLAMISM

51. This section sets out a small number of the statements and developments in the reporting period, additional to those of relevance outlined above, showing the rise of repressive Islamism and increased prominence and political influence of Islamists.
52. In December 2024, a campaign across east and west Libya to confiscate Christmas trees, decorations, toys and any items considered connected with Christmas or New Year was conducted. Shop owners were warned against trading in such items. The Municipal Guard in Benghazi stated that doing so is a “clear violation of Islamic law”.⁵⁶

53. In November 2024, the establishment of a “morality police” force was announced. The Telegraph reported that: “Emad Al-Trabelsi, the interior minister of Libya’s [...] Government of National Unity (GNU), warned the morality police would ensure strict adherence to the country’s Islamic “social values”. “Personal freedom does not exist here in Libya,” said Mr Al-Trabelsi, adding that those seeking it “should go to Europe.”⁵⁷ It also reported: “Libya will introduce morality police in the capital to enforce ‘modesty’ and clamp down on ‘strange’ haircuts, the country’s interior minister has said. Girls from the age of nine will have to wear veils, and women will be forbidden from travelling without a male companion or sitting ‘inappropriately’ with men in public after the crackdown begins [in December 2024].”⁵⁸ The Presidential Council assigned the Tripoli Protection Force, which is affiliated with the SDF, to oversee the force.⁵⁹
54. Also in November 2024, the Minister of Youth (GNU) Fathallah al-Zani announced the prohibition of young Libyans partaking in activities outside Libya without prior permission, including to “preserve the teachings of religion.”⁶⁰
55. In July 2024, the Tripoli-based Ministry for Endowments and Islamic Affairs (‘MEIA’) referred to the beliefs of Ibadi Muslims as “heresy”, described the community as a “sect” and urged the government (GNU) to reject their witness in courts.⁶¹
56. Sadiq al-Ghariani,⁶² former Grand Mufti of Libya and former head of Dar Al-Ifta published three videos in connection with the large-scale detentions involving the ISA in 2023 mentioned above. He boasted of acting as a “godfather” of the Islamic militias in Libya. He said the ISA consults with Dar Al-Ifta and Muslim leaders on cases of apostasy and blasphemy. He referred to death as the punishment for apostasy. He described Christianity as a religion of “profanity” and also verbally attacked other non-Islamic religions. He asked authorities to spy on and close social media accounts where faiths other than Islam are discussed or propagated. He urged the authorities to finance equipment needed to implement this surveillance. He also called for the closure of foreign language schools calling them “proselytising schools” and demanded a budget from the GNU to fight Christian proselytising.⁶³ Seemingly as a means to maintain power, the Prime Minister (GNU) Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, per a 2022 report, asked Mr. al-Ghariani for the military support of Islamic militias.⁶⁴
57. Both the MEIA (GNU) and the affiliated Dar Al-Ifta have been pushing for prosecutions and harsh punishments surrounding free speech and FoRB. In April 2023, in connection with the large-scale detentions involving the ISA in 2023 mentioned above, Dar Al-Ifta issued a statement that death is the Islamic punishment for conversion from Islam.
58. In 2022, permissions for a ship (the Logos Hope, a floating bookfair) operated by a German faith-related organisation to dock in Tripoli and Misrata were withdrawn by local authorities. The withdrawals followed outcry from prominent Muslims and Islamic groups, who stated the ship’s objective was Christian proselytism.⁶⁵
59. As summarised by the CIHRS, in March 2022, the MEIA (GNU) “ordered all imams across Libya to deliver Friday Sermons on the ‘dangers of atheism’ which smeared members of civil society and activists, accusing them of being atheists opposed to religion.”⁶⁶
60. In 2021, the MEIA (GNU) called on the General Authority for Communications and Information to shut down and prohibit several kinds of websites, including “websites about Satan [and] atheism.”⁶⁷

RECOMMENDATIONS

61. Middle East Concern; The World Evangelical Alliance; ADF International; Jubilee Campaign; Open Doors; Stefanus Alliance International; The Baptist World Alliance; and The Danish European Mission appeal for human rights violations in Libya to be raised with Libya and for the following recommendations to be made. For Libya to:

- Respect and protect the rights enshrined in the ICCPR, including the right to freedom of religion or belief under Article 18 ICCPR, for everyone;
- Ensure the right of all detained individuals, including prisoners of conscience, to be treated with humanity and respect for their dignity under Article 10 ICCPR is protected;
- Release immediately and unconditionally individuals charged with or imprisoned under a death sentence for apostasy. Drop the charges/set aside the convictions against them;
- Immediately release people detained under criminal charges or sentences related to the peaceful exercise of their religion or belief and drop criminal charges/set aside convictions against them;
- Combat abuse against women and against migrants, including those who are Christians or of other religious or belief communities;
- Apply the rule of law to those who commit crimes against others because of their religion or belief or related views;
- Amend the 2017 draft constitution to conform with the provisions of the ICCPR, including under Article 18 ICCPR. Include a provision that recognises the right to freedom of religion or belief, that is consistent with the full extent of the right as it is articulated under Article 18 ICCPR;
- Amend Article 7 of the 2017 draft Constitution to include religion and belief as categories afforded protection against discrimination;
- Ensure the cessation of the use of provisions such as those under Articles 206, 207 and 291 of the Penal Code, and under Law No. 5 of 2022 on Cybercrimes to unjustly prosecute Christians and adherents of other religions or beliefs;
- Repeal in full Article 291 of the Penal Code;
- Guarantee freedom of expression regarding religion or belief, and cease targeting people of minority religions or beliefs for peaceful expressions including as expressed online. Combat discrimination on the basis of religion or belief that violates the protections of the ICCPR, including such discrimination expressed through the media and online platforms;
- Ensure due process including as to arrest, detention and administration of formal judicial processes without undue delay;
- Ensure those detained/imprisoned while awaiting court proceedings, including appeals have reasonable access to their lawyers for consultations;
- Abolish the death penalty for matters of conscience, including for peaceful religion or belief-related practices, choices or views, and in the interim establish a moratorium on executions in such cases;

- Accede to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

¹ Government of National Unity.

² Religious Adherents: Libya, World Religion Database 2020. Available online: https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=132c#S_2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “Jews in Islamic Countries: Libya,” Jewish Virtual Library. Available online: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jews-of-libya>.

⁵ Religious Adherents: Libya, World Religion Database 2020 estimates that .52% of the population is Christian.

⁶ World Watch List 2025. The Country List is available online: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>.

⁷ Religious Adherents: Libya, World Religion Database 2020.

⁸ Arab Barometer, MENA Youth Lead Return to Religion, 23 March 2023. Available online: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2023/03/mena-youth-lead-return-to-religion/>.

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¹⁰ Constitution, Libya, 2011. Available online: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Libya_2012?lang=en.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ 2017 Proposal of a Draft Constitution. Available online: <https://security-legislation.ly/latest-laws/2017-proposal-of-a-consolidated-draft-constitution/> (English); and https://security-legislation.ly/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/229-2017-Draft-Constitution_AR.pdf (Arabic)

¹⁴ World Watch Research, Libya: Persecution Dynamics, December 2024, p. 16. Available online: https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Libya-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

¹⁵ These are noted in Religious Adherents: Libya, World Religion Database 2020.

¹⁶ The official Arabic text of the law can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/4dt93eep>.

¹⁷ May be found via this link under the heading Documentation: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index>

¹⁸ After the wording “public order and morality”, the report linked immediately above footnotes the following wording: Libya, Anti-Cybercrime Law No. 5 (2022), art. 4.

¹⁹ The relevant report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya adds a footnote re this point which reads: See Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 34 (2011).

²⁰ May be found via this link under the heading Documentation: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index>.

²¹ Reuters, Libyan assembly votes to follow Islamic law, 4 December 2013. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-law-idUSBRE9B30M220131204/>.

²² Libya Penal Code. Available in English online: <https://security-legislation.ly/latest-laws/penal-code/>.

²³ The Legal Agenda, Libyan Legislation and Islamic Law: Decades of Shifting Tides. Available online: <https://english.legal-agenda.com/libyan-legislation-and-islamic-law-decades-of-shifting-tides/>.

²⁴ <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/065/95/pdf/g2006595.pdf>.

²⁵ *Ibid* at page 3.

²⁶ *Ibid* at page 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/17>

²⁹ The report outlines additional matters, while not with specific reference to religion or belief, that are of relevance to religious or belief minority communities. Such as the extensive references, particularly in numerous recommendations of States to Libya concerning the rights of migrants and violations faced by them.

³⁰ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Libya, Addendum. Available online: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/17/Add.1>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Fourteen Years After Libya’s Revolution: Lawlessness, religious rhetoric and entrenched repression, 17 February 2025. Available online: <https://cihrs.org/fourteen-years-after-libyas-revolution-lawlessness-religious-rhetoric-and-entrenched-repression/?lang=en>.

³³ *Ibid.*

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³⁶ *Ibid*.

³⁷ Per the March 2023 report the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya: “The Mission’s investigations underscored that Libyan authorities, notably the Internal Security Agency, are curtailing the rights to assembly, association, expression and belief to ensure obedience, entrench self-serving values and norms, and punish criticism against authorities and their leadership.” May be found via this link under the heading Documentation: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index>.

³⁸ See recommendations 148.122, 148.123 and 148.124 in particular.

³⁹ May be found via this link under the heading Documentation: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index>.

⁴⁰ World Watch List 2025, p. 9.

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⁴³ The court also ordered him to cover the expenses to have the decision: published in a local newspaper; broadcast on a local radio station; and displayed at his residence and at the court building.

⁴⁴ Parliament Committee Demands US Defendants be Prosecuted for Preaching Christianity. The Libya Observer. 17 Apr 2023. Available online: <https://libyaobserver.ly/news/parliament-committee-demands-us-defendants-be-prosecuted-preaching-christianity>.

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⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Libya: Research briefing on the use of security and religious discourse to justify repression, 25 June 2024. Available online: <https://cihrs.org/libya-research-briefing-on-the-use-of-security-and-religious-discourse-to-justify-repression/?lang=en&ct=t>.

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⁵¹ Copts Today, Hani Ramses calls on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to intervene to rescue Coptic workers detained in Benghazi on charges of proselytizing. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/yn8xxfzp>.

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⁵⁴ Catholic World News, Militia destroys church in Libya, 18 February 2022. Available online: <https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=53931>.

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⁵⁹ Libya Now, The Presidential Council decides to establish a Public Morals Protection Agency and assigns this body to manage it, 13 November 2024. Available online: https://www.libyaakhbar.com/libya-news/2476357.html#google_vignette.

⁶⁰ Tunisie Telegraph, The Libyan Minister of Youth made this decision to “protect” young people from moral and religious deviation, 12 November 2024. Available online: <https://tinyurl.com/ejbtwzdc>.

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