

A background image showing a group of children, with a young girl in the foreground holding a lit candle. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting a solemn or memorial occasion.

Protecting Vulnerable Minorities in the Middle East

While many religious and ethnic communities are subjected to prejudice in various countries, many observers have noted in recent years that Christians have experienced religious persecution more than any other faith group on a global scale and in absolute numbers. Reports indicate that between 200 million and 230 million Christians face daily threats of murder, beating, imprisonment and torture, with an additional 350 to 400 million encountering discrimination in areas like jobs and housing.

Observing how Christians are being persecuted throughout the Middle East, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, in a speech to the British House of Lords on July 16, 2015, called on “people of all faiths and of none” to “stand together ... for we are all at risk.” Both Rabbi Sacks and Pope Francis have described the persecution of Christians in parts of the Middle East and Africa as genocide.

In the years following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, nearly one million Jewish residents of the Middle East and North Africa were forced to flee their homes as refugees. This meant,

in many cases, the destruction of communities that had been firmly rooted for millennia.

Today there is a shocking parallel. From Egypt to Iran and from Iraq to Nigeria, Christians are being persecuted. In some countries, this has resulted in the exodus of local communities, many of which have existed since the birth of Christianity in this region some 2000 years ago. Sadly, Christian communities are not alone in this regard. Other longstanding ethnic and religious minority communities face genocidal onslaughts that are driving them from their homes. This phenomenon is perhaps most horrific with regard to the Yazidis, who continue to endure untold suffering at the hands of ISIL.

On December 15, 2015, the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus (a CIJA affiliate) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops jointly called on Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs to “make a priority of advocating for at-risk Christians throughout the Middle

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East and Africa.” Canada can play an important role in advocating for these at-risk communities, exploring ways to effectively provide diplomatic and hu-

manitarian support to help them find safety and alleviate their suffering.

KEY POINTS

- Reports indicate that between 200 million and 230 million Christians face daily threats of murder, beating, imprisonment and torture, with an additional 350 to 400 million encountering discrimination in areas like jobs and housing.
- There is a shocking parallel between Jewish expulsion from the Middle East and North Africa following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the exodus of ethnic and religious minorities from the region today.
- Canada can play an important role in advancing diplomatic and humanitarian support for at-risk minorities in the Middle East.