

Call for Input: UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief's report on 'freedom of religion or belief and migrants, IDPs, and refugees'

To inform the Special Rapporteur's report to be presented at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly in October 2025.

Introduction

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). This submission seeks to bring to the Special Rapporteur's attention FoRB violations against migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers and refugees.
2. The legal protections for forcibly displaced religious and belief minorities are outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, with Article 1 recognising a well-founded fear of religious persecution as valid grounds for granting refugee status. Although refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and IDPs have varying legal statuses, each group is entitled to the right to non-discrimination and to exercise their religion or belief freely.

FoRB violations against migrants, IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees

3. When a government or regime commits severe FoRB violations that severely impact the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, mass displacement and migration, often forced, can occur.
4. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) describes a refugee as that, 'someone who has been compelled to leave their country and cannot return because of a serious threat to their life, physical integrity or freedom as a result of persecution, armed conflict, violence or serious public disorder. It is a legal status that provides an individual with certain rights and protections. An asylum-seeker is someone who has or intends to apply to be recognized as a refugee, but their application has yet to be processed.'¹
5. IDPs are those who are forced to leave their homes and communities, but do not cross a national border, and remain within their country of origin. IDPs may have been displaced by conflict, human rights violations, natural disasters or other issues. According to the UNHCR, 'at the end of June 2024, there were 72.1 million internally displaced people. They accounted for the majority of the world's forcibly displaced population

(59 per cent)'.²

6. The term 'migrant' is not legally defined in international law but is often used to describe those who 'move by choice rather than to escape conflict or persecution, usually across an international border. This can include finding work or pursuing an education, but also for reuniting with family or other reasons. People may also move to alleviate significant hardships that arise from natural disasters, famine, or extreme poverty.' Migrants who have left their countries of origin for these reasons would not be considered asylum seekers or refugees under international law.
7. IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees may encounter FoRB violations in two principal ways: they may be forced to flee because of FoRB violations, and/or face further religious discrimination as asylum seekers or refugees in host countries.

Country cases

Afghanistan

8. Since the 2021 retreat of the US military and Taliban takeover, minorities have experienced ongoing violations. During the first half of 2024, the number of attacks and targeting of Hazara Shi'a communities particularly increased. Hazara women and girls have been subjected to violence, assault, threats and intimidation. Hazara Christian minorities have also been targeted alongside Ahmadi Muslims. Minorities have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan.
9. In 2023, Pakistan hosted an estimated 3.1 million Afghans.³ Yet, asylum seekers and refugees in Pakistan face a range of challenges in accessing basic services such as healthcare and education. Hazara Christians live in fear of discrimination and violence for expressing and practicing their faith in majority-Muslim Pakistan. In recent weeks, the Pakistani government has ordered Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in Islamabad to resettle elsewhere in Pakistan by the 31 March or face deportation to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.⁴

Mexico

10. Studies on forced displacement in Mexico indicate that religious intolerance is one of a number of primary motivating factors in such cases. Forced displacement almost always takes place after a series of escalating FoRB and human rights violations have already occurred and the government has failed to intervene.
11. It is worth noting that children who have been forcibly displaced with their families because of their beliefs are often subsequently deprived of their right to an education. Due to the circumstances surrounding their

1 UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Asylum Seekers' <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/asylum-seekers>

2 UNHCR, 'Internally displaced people', <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/internally-displaced-people>

3 UNHCR, 'Pakistan: Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Dashboard,' December 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107878>.

4 Independent, M. Ahmed, 'UN agencies raise alarm over Pakistan's move to deport thousands of Afghans waiting to go to the US,' February 5, 2025, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/afghans-ap-pakistan-unhcr-islamabad-b2692806.html>.

forced displacement, which often involve destruction of property and violence, many are unable to obtain the paperwork necessary to enrol in a school in their new place of residence. School and government officials rarely make the process easy for the parents and sometimes turn the children away.

12. In April 2024, a group of over 150 minority Protestant Christians were forcibly displaced from the villages of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo in the Huejutla de Reyes Municipality of Hidalgo State.⁵ Human rights violations linked to FoRB have been ongoing and severe in the two neighbouring villages since 2015. The group faced increasing discrimination and violence which forced them to flee the area. They spent over 150 days in a sports complex without access to clean drinking water and with limited food. After five months an agreement was negotiated by state and local government officials and representatives of the displaced minorities which should have allowed them to return to their homes with guarantees of respect for their right to FoRB. Yet, the village authorities attempted to impose severe restrictions on the religious minority group almost immediately in violation of the agreement. For example, although the Protestants would not be forced to participate in Roman Catholic activities, those who returned to the villages would be obliged to contribute financially to the local Roman Catholic Church. They also would not be able to speak about their beliefs, nor access government benefits relating to health and education. Consequently, instead of returning home as planned, the Protestant Christians have relocated to the neighbouring state of Veracruz.

Myanmar

13. The current crisis in Myanmar has resulted in significant humanitarian challenges, including mass displacement, widespread repression, and grave human rights abuses, including severe restrictions on democratic freedoms, including the suppression of civil society, media, and dissenting voices. The situation for ethnic and religious minorities has worsened significantly, with the military conducting brutal airstrikes and ground offensives targeting ethnic minority regions, particularly Chin, Kachin, Karen, and Karenni states.
14. The crisis follows decades of severe persecution of the predominantly Muslim Rohingya community; Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law rendered Rohingyas stateless and stripped them of rights. This law is still in force, even though the Rohingyas have existed in

Myanmar for several centuries. The law has a serious impact on the Rohingya population, who continue to live in the country without citizenship rights, including the right to vote, to move freely, or to access basic services, such as healthcare, resulting in severe humanitarian conditions in IDP camps. In addition, in February 2024, the Myanmar military enacted the 2010 People's Military Service Law, enabling the conscription of men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 for up to five years during the current state of emergency.⁶ However, the military is reported to be forcibly recruiting citizens, including using the promise of citizenship and access to basic services to recruit Rohingyas. Human Rights Watch reported in 2020 that approximately 130,000 Rohingya Muslims were detained in camps in Rakhine State.⁷

15. Many members of the Rohingya community who have fled Myanmar have sought refuge in Bangladesh, settling in and around Kutupalong and Nayapara camps. However, the Rohingya have received little protection from the Bangladesh authorities, with documented cases of murder, torture and sexual assault highlighting the severe levels of criminal violence in the refugee camps.⁸ Tensions in these camps between Rohingya Christian and Rohingya Muslim communities is a serious but overlooked issue.⁹

Nigeria

16. There has been a long history of disputes between traditionally nomadic herders from the Fulani ethnic group and farming communities across the Sahel, which are often referred to as 'farmer-herder clashes'. However, current attack in central Nigeria by militia men of Fulani ethnicity are occurring with such frequency, organisation, and asymmetry that the characterisation as 'clashes; no longer suffices. Since 2010 the militia has persistently targeted farming communities in Middle Belt states, with a significant surge in 2015, resulting in a remorseless increase in displacement, loss of lives, and property destruction, particularly in rural areas. These attacks have caused mass displacement (around 10,000 IDPs) and a humanitarian crisis, with many forced to seek refuge in camps.¹⁰ In a region where ethnicity generally correlates with religion, ethnic minorities are invariably also religious ones. Consequently, the attacks by these non-state actors armed with sophisticated weaponry, assume an ethno-religious coloration and increasingly constitute forcible displacement, as the ancestral lands of indigenous communities are frequently occupied after communities flee to safer areas. The violence has displaced tens of thousands of members of the Christian

5 CSW, 'Mexico: Progress and setbacks for displaced families', January 23, 2025, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/01/23/feature/6417/article.htm>.

6 FoRB in Full, 'Citizenship and Conflict: how the militaries of Israel and Myanmar are taking advantage of displaced persons', 14 October 2024, <https://forbinfull.org/2024/10/14/citizenship-and-conflict-how-the-militaries-of-israel-and-myanmar-are-taking-advantage-of-displaced-persons>

7 Human Rights Watch, 'Myanmar: Mass Detention of Rohingya in Squalid Camps', October 8, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/08/myanmar-mass-detention-rohingya-squalid-camps>.

8 Human Rights Watch, 'Bangladesh: Spiralling Violence Against Rohingya Refugees', July 13, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/13/bangladesh-spiraling-violence-against-rohingya-refugees>.

9 FortifyRights, 'Bangladesh: Investigate Abductions, Protect Ethnic-Rohingya Christians - Fortify Rights', 6 March 2020, <https://www.fortifyrights.org/bgd-inv-2020-03-06/>

10 CSW, Interim report on Christmas Eve attacks in Plateau State, 31 January 2024, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/12/29/report/6137/article.htm>

rural communities who are either in IDP camps, or have been absorbed into the communities where they fled. While it is important to note that not all Fulani herders are involved in this violence, it is clear the activities of these well-armed factions have had a significantly negative impact on the region. In the northeast the terrorist organisations Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continue to cause devastation and displacement. Many members of the Christian community of Gwoza Local Government Area (LGA) in Borno State, which includes Chibok Town, have relocated to the state capital, Maiduguri, due to incessant targeting since 2014 by Boko Haram, including through forced conversions and the summary execution of those refusing to convert. There are currently 800-1000 Christian IDPs in Maiduguri City alone.¹¹

17. However, since 2019, when Babagana Umara Zulum's became the governor of Borno State, the authorities have neglected these camps while maintaining support for Muslim IDP camps. Despite having registered their camps with the state, Christian IDPs received no government assistance, with support coming primarily from churches, concerned individuals, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Their situation deteriorated further in December 2021, when the Borno State government banned NGOs from distributing food and non-food items (NFI's) to IDPs in Maiduguri, ostensibly in order to build their resilience. The ban compounded the hardship Christian IDPs were already experiencing, even as security concerns continue to prevent them from returning to their homes and farms. They lack adequate sanitation and consistent access to food, potable water and other essentials, while their children are falling behind in education.

Sudan

18. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continues to have a devastating impact on human rights. An estimated 12 million Sudanese have been forcibly displaced since April 2023, the majority of whom internally. UNHCR reports indicate that over 500,000 fled to neighbouring Egypt¹² where they are often held in cruel and inhuman conditions, and thousands are at risk of arbitrary detention and forcible return.¹³ ForB violations in Sudan, including the deliberate targeting of places of worship and arbitrary arrests, have also led to the forced displacement of members of minority religious communities. In October 2024, a group of 26 men, the majority of them Christians, were arrested arbitrarily

by the SAF Military Intelligence unit in Shendi, River Nile State. Most are members of the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) in Al Ezba, Khartoum North, and had been forced to flee as fighting between the SAF and RSF intensified in that city. The detained men were among 100 SCOC members who fled to Shendi, a small city in northern Sudan. They had travelled to Shendi with their families in a group that included at least 25 women and 54 children, who now face a dire humanitarian situation, having been obliged to stay in the SCOC church building in Shendi, which is overcrowded and is not designed to host displaced persons.¹⁴

19. SAF has amended the Constitutional Charter, also known as the Constitutional Document, adopting Sharia law as the primary source of legislation. It is feared that the amended document, which came into effect on 23 February, will worsen the situation. The amendments are considered to be a reaction to the RSF and its allies, who have declared Sudan a secular state, and is particularly aimed at the SPLM-N, which controls much of South Kordofan state where the majority of Christians in Sudan are from.

Türkiye

20. In Türkiye, the situation for Iranian Christian asylum seekers and refugees lacks clarity as their cases are handled directly by the Turkish authorities and not by the UNHCR. As a result, they do not enjoy the full protection of the UNHCR and are vulnerable to intimidation and exploitation by the police and employers. Many refugees work 16 hours per day for half the average earnings of a Turkish employee. Iranian and Syrian asylum seekers and refugees express desperation and frustration at their situation. Exploitation at workplaces and bullying at schools are common complaints, with many refugees reportedly obliged to hide their faith in order to keep their jobs, while others were sacked once their employers discovered they were Christians. In some cities, such as Konya, even Turkish Christians have been forced to leave due to the high level of societal hostility. Refugees also fear the threat of deportation. In 2023, the Iranian NGO Article 18 reported the case of Ninous Italiaee, an Iranian-Assyrian pastor whose refugee status was recognised by the UNHCR but subsequently overturned by the Turkish authorities.¹⁵ Christians who have converted from Islam are seen as apostates, and both fear and experience discrimination when the authorities decide on their refugee status.

11 Email report from CSW Nigeria following a fact finding mission, 20 August 2024

12 UNDP, 'As Sudan Conflict turns one, UN in Egypt appeals for more support,' April 17, 2024, <https://www.undp.org/egypt/press-releases/sudan-conflict-turns-one-un-egypt-appeals-more-support>.

13 Amnesty International, 'Egypt: Sudanese in Egypt risk detention and deportation,' <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/sudanese-egypt-risk-detention-and-deportation>.

14 CSW, Submission to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights' Fact Finding Mission on Sudan', February 2025, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/02/17/report/6436/article.htm>

15 Article 18, 'The Plight of Iranian Christians Claiming International Protection in Türkiye: A Joint Report 2023,' <https://articleeighteen.com/reports/13404/>.

FoRB and non-refoulement

21. Under the principle of non-refoulement an individual should not be returned to a country where they would face torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.¹⁶ Yet, cases often arise of refugees being sent back to home countries where danger and punishment waits them due to their religion or belief.

Refoulement of Afghans from Iran

22. Afghan refugees in Iran are increasingly being subjected to refoulement. The Danish Refugee Council has reported that an estimated 485,000 Afghan refugees were returned in 2022, and that this number rose to around 635,000 in 2023.¹⁷ More recent statistics by the Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute indicate that in 2024, Iran deported 750,000 Afghans and has announced the intention to deport up to 2 million by March 2025.¹⁸ Their findings also record that ‘fewer than 900 Afghans voluntarily repatriated annually between 2021 and 2024’.¹⁹ Those who remain in Iran increasingly experience anti-Afghan sentiments, discrimination and xenophobia.

Refoulement of North Koreans

23. North Koreans who escape to China are at heightened risk of forcible repatriation by the Chinese authorities. North Koreans citizens who express a religious or political belief contrary to the Kim regime face imprisonment, torture and execution.²⁰ According to Human Rights Watch the Chinese government has forcibly returned over 600 North Koreans since 2020.²¹ As a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, China is required to refrain from forcibly repatriating asylum seekers who face serious harm in their home country. Defectors who are forcibly returned to North Korea are charged with ‘treachery against the nation,’ sent to prison camps and face abuse, violence and even execution.

Refoulement of refugees and asylum seekers in Thailand

24. On 27 February 2025, t40 Uyghur men were forcibly deported from Thailand to China. The men had been detained for over a decade after escaping China. Thailand classified their detention as a matter of national security²², leaving the detainees unable to contact anyone outside of their detention facility or to access public services.²³

25. As UN experts warned prior to the deportation,²⁴ returning these individuals to China would consign them to arbitrary detention in one of several ‘political re-education’ camps where the Chinese Communist Party has imprisoned over one million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups since 2017. CSW is concerned the governemtn of Thailand may also deport the remaining eight Uyghurs.

26. A Vietnamese human rights activist, Y Quynh Bdap, is also threatened with refoulement from Thailand after being charged in absentia with terrorism-related crimes for which he is facing ten years in prison. If returned to Vietnam, Bdap, the founder of the organisation Montagnards Stand for Justice, is sure to be imprisoned and will likely face torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

27. In Vietnam, the Montagnard ethnic group has faced discrimination since the 1960s. The group is viewed with suspicion by Vietnamese authorities because of their Christian faith and historic support for US forces during the Vietnam war. In 2024, 11 UN Special Procedures highlighted the misuse of Vietnam’s counter-terrorism law against Montagnards through which members of the community are arbitrarily detained and face torture in custody.²⁵ As the Montagnard tribes speak several different languages, and many are not fluent in Vietnamese, they face barriers in applying for official documents with the UNHCR in Thailand, a situation that is exacerbated by the lack of available, trustworthy interpreters. The Montagnard population also faces

16 OHCHR, ‘The principle of non-refoulement under international human rights law,’ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Migration/GlobalCompactMigration/ThePrincipleNon-RefoulementUnderInternationalHumanRightsLaw.pdf>

17 Danish Refugee Council, ‘Afghans increasingly forced to return from Iran, an overlooked population in dire need of protection’, 7 May 2024, <https://drc.ngo/resources/news/afghans-increasingly-forced-to-return-from-iran-an-overlooked-population-in-dire-need-of-protection/>

18 Online journal of the Migration Policy Institute, M.Naseh (2025), ‘One of the World’s Largest Refugee Populations, Afghans have faced increasing restrictions in Iran’, <https://reliefweb.int/report/iran-islamic-republic/one-worlds-largest-refugee-populations-afghans-have-faced-increasing-restrictions-iran>

19 Ibid

20 Daily NK, ‘Daily NK acquires full text of the anti-reactionary thought laws’, 21 March 2023, <https://www.dailynk.com/english/daily-nk-acquires-full-text-of-the-anti-reactionary-thought-law/>

21 Human Rights Watch, ‘China Forcibly Returns 60 Refugees to North Korea, May 8, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/08/china-forcibly-returns-60-refugees-north-korea>

22 Their detention on national security grounds came three Uyghur men were charged with a terrorist attack at the Erawan shrine in Bangkok on 17 August 2016. No group claimed to being behind the bombing, but police stated that the three Uyghurs had initially admitted to the attack. However, one of the men’s lawyers has alleged that it was a false confession following torture in detention.

23 Freedom House, ‘After a Long Decade in Detention, Uyghur Men in Thailand Face Transnational Repression,’ 13 February 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/after-long-decade-detention-uyghur-men-thailand-face-transnational-repression>

24 OHCHR, ‘Thailand must immediately halt deportation of 48 Uyghurs to China: UN Experts’, 21 January 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/thailand-must-immediately-halt-deportation-48-uyghurs-china-un-experts>

25 OHCHR, ‘Experts condemn misuse of counter-terrorism law against Montagnards in Vietnam,’ August 28, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/experts-condemn-misuse-counter-terrorism-law-against-montagnards-viet-nam>

increased cyber surveillance and intimidation, and asylum seekers who have fled to Thailand, many via Cambodia, suffer transnational repression by the Vietnamese authorities.

28. Mr Bdap has been granted refugee status by the UN Refugee Agency in Bangkok, which draws into sharp focus the challenges of Thailand hosting a continental UNHCR office while not being a signatory to the Refugee Convention. Pressure exerted on Thailand by neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, China, Laos and Vietnam, increases the risk of refoulement of asylum seekers and those granted refugee status by the UNHCR.

Refoulement of Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees from Sudan, Turkey, Ethiopia and Egypt

29. Eritreans who have fled on account of their religion or belief are particularly at risk once refouled; a campaign of arbitrary arrests and indefinite detentions targeting unregistered religious communities which began in 2002 continues to date. Moreover, even the four government-sanctioned religious groups which were exempted from the registration process – the Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran and Orthodox Christian denominations and Sunni Islam – experience similar harassment and arbitrary detention, indicating that a government committed to controlling every aspect of the lives of Eritrean citizens may have designed the policy to augment its control of this sector of society. In June 2016 a UN Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea determined there were reasonable grounds to believe Eritrean officials have been committing crimes against humanity since 1991, including the crime of religious persecution.²⁶
30. Since 2000, Eritrean authorities have regularly kidnapped refugees from Sudan. With the outbreak of fighting in Sudan, Eritrea appears to have taken advantage of the conflict. Eritrean armed forces are implicated in forced returns of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers, including at least 95 activists and government opponents, who are likely to have faced indefinite detention, forced conscription, enforced disappearance or death. They have also conducted largescale forcible returns, amid allegations of over

3,500 refugees being forcibly returned in late April-early May 2023.²⁷ Several refugees were reportedly seized by Eritrean troops while fleeing to Kassala for safety.

31. Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia have also been refouled. Initially, the forced returns occurred early on during the war on Tigray, as Eritrean troops fighting alongside Ethiopian forces invaded the region, destroyed two refugee camps and forcibly returned between 6000 and 10,000 refugees.²⁸ Meanwhile Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers in Addis Ababa and the Oromia special zone were caught up in round ups targeting Tigrinya speakers during the nationwide state of emergency.²⁹
32. Subsequent forcible returns have taken place against the backdrop of deteriorating relations between the two states in the post-war period, as Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers continue to experience arbitrary detentions, societal hostility, and even kidnappings for ransom.³⁰ On 13 July 2023, a group of UN experts issued a condemnation of Ethiopia's 'summary expulsion of hundreds of Eritreans at the end of June 2023,' highlighting reports of families being separated 'following the mass deportations, with parents forced back to Eritrea and children left behind in Ethiopia. The experts also noted that there had been 'no information on the fate or whereabouts of those deported since their return to Eritrea.'³¹
33. In a letter dated 16 October 2024 three special rapporteurs expressed concern about the arbitrary detention and forcible return by Türkiye of around 300 Eritreans, and reports of the imminent risk of refoulement of around 50 more. They highlighted the fact that 'detention in Eritrea places individuals at a heightened risk of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.'³²
34. On 22 January 2025, security forces opened fire on 37 Eritrean detainees who were attempting to escape from Lafto Prison, Wereda 12, in Addis Ababa. Two young men were killed. Twelve others were injured, one of whom died from his injuries after reportedly having received no medical attention, while eleven others remain detained having also received no medical attention.³³ In March 2025 Amnesty International cited 'credible reports from Ethiopia' of the refoulement of over 600 Eritrean

26 OHCHR, 'Detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in Eritrea', 8 June 2016, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/ColEritrea/A_HRC_32_CRP.1_read-only.pdf

27 The Guardian, 'Eritrea accused of forcibly repatriating civilians caught up in Sudan fighting', 7 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/07/eritrea-accused-of-forcibly-repatriating-civilians-caught-up-in-sudan-fighting>

28 CSW, 'CSW and HRCE raise concerns regarding return of Eritrean refugees to a warzone' 11 Dec 2020, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/12/11/press/4914/article.htm>

29 Human Rights Concern Eritrea 'Mass Arrests of Tigrayans and Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia', 26 November 2021, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/mass-arrests-of-tigrayans-and-eritrean-refugees-in-ethiopia/>

30 Human Rights Concern Eritrea, Urgent Appeal: Eritrean Refugees Held for Ransom in Tigray, Ethiopia', 16 February 2024, <https://hrc-eritrea.org/urgent-appeal-eritrean-refugees-held-for-ransom-in-tigray-ethiopia/>

31 OHCHR, 'UN experts urge Ethiopia to halt mass deportation of Eritreans', 13 July 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/un-experts-urge-ethiopia-halt-mass-deportation-eritreans>

32 Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Ref.: UA TUR, 16 October 2024, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicationCommunicationFile?gld=29417>

33 Italia Libera, 'Ethiopia like Libya. Hanibal, 16, fleeing Eritrea: killed, six thousand dollars asked from family for the body', Emilio Drudi, 3 March 2025, <https://italialibera.online/esteri/diritti-umani/etiopia-come-la-libia-hanibal-16-anni-in-fuga-dalleritrea-ucciso-per-il-corpo-chiesti-seimila-dollari-alla-famiglia/>

refugees within the last three months alone.³⁴

35. In March 2025 credible reports also emerged of the mass refoulement of over 150 Eritreans, including several with UN refugee status, by the Egyptian authorities, reportedly working in conjunction with the Eritrean Embassy, which, allegedly, is supplying travel documents to facilitate forced returns.³⁵

Role of faith-based organisations

36. Faith-based organisations have often played an integral role in supporting migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs who have fled due to FoRB violations. Support can emerge from either an institutional level or grassroots efforts.
37. At a grassroots level, support and aid for migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs is often provided by local religious groups. As well as the case mentioned earlier of churches and individuals contributing whenever possible towards the humanitarian needs of IDPs in Borno State Nigeria, another notable example is the aforementioned group of internally displaced Protestants from the villages of Coamila and Rancho Nuevo Hidalgo State, Mexico. Whilst moving to a temporary location, local churches in Huejutla de los Reyes provided the group with humanitarian aid.³⁶ The government promised support, but none materialised; it provided one meal for less than half the group for a few days, then provision stopped completely. The auditorium where the community resided temporarily did not have a water supply, so the displaced families used water from a nearby river, although it turned out to be contaminated and made people sick. For more than five months local churches were the ones who provided the supplies and meals for all the families.
38. Another notable case is that of the “Mayflower Church”, so called for its commitment in seeking the freedom to practice their faith. The church, led by Pastor Pan Yongguang of Shenzhen Holy Reformed Church, originally fled the China in 2019 following increased pressure from the authorities on the church and its school. Since the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs came into effect on 1 February 2018, religious activities in China are subject to state control, including special provisions on national security and foreign connections. Church groups and Christian schools that engage in church activities independently of the state-sanctioned measures are subject to exorbitant fines, church building demolitions and the arbitrary detention of church leaders. The group fled to Jeju Island, Republic of Korea. After being denied asylum by South Korean immigration officials, the group voted to leave Jeju Island to seek UNHCR refugee status in Bangkok, Thailand. The group

submitted their first refugee applications to the UNHCR Bangkok office in September 2022. After being detained in Thailand for overstaying their tourist visas, and with increasing pressure on the Thai authorities to return the group to China, the US stepped in and granted the church special humanitarian status. A church in Tyler, Texas offered to provide the necessary support, funding and resources. According to China Aid, in late December 2023 the Mayflower Church moved to Midland/Odessa, Texas to build a permanent home and since the start of 2024, First Baptist Church Midland has opened its doors for the Mayflower to use.

Recommendations

39. ***Urge member states to guarantee the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, in law, in practice, and in accordance with Article 18 of the ICCPR, and to mainstream this right into daily life.***
40. ***Urge member states to formulate a comprehensive strategy to address root causes leading to refugee crises in a swift, decisive and unbiased manner, seeking international assistance where necessary, and ensuring that every vulnerable community receives adequate protection, regardless of the religion, belief or ethnicity of its inhabitants.***
41. ***Urge member states and UN bodies working alongside refugees and asylum seekers to increase efforts to ensure individuals who flee their country on account of discrimination or persecution– or fear thereof – on the basis of their religion or belief are protected and swiftly resettled.***
42. ***Encourage member states to guarantee access to and support in navigating clear asylum procedures and provide other forms of humanitarian assistance, including medical and psychosocial support.***
43. ***Urge the UN to establish greater continuity and communication between the various UN agencies and mechanisms, especially in situations where Special Procedures have issued communications on the violations against individuals who have peacefully exercised their fundamental rights or spoken up for the rights of others and have later had to seek asylum via the UNHCR.***
44. ***Provide comprehensive training to UNHCR staff and interpreters on the specific vulnerabilities faced by religious or belief minority asylum seekers, including sensitivity of religious concepts, ideas and language unique to individual religious or belief communities.***
45. ***Urge the UNHCR to increase its standard of vetting of staff, especially interpreters and local staff.***

34 Amnesty International, ‘The HRC Should Condemn Forced Return of Eritrean Refugees, Oral Statement, Item 2: Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, 27 February 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr64/9071/2025/en/>

35 Human Rights Concern Eritrea, ‘Egypt Secretly Deporting Eritrean Refugees to Persecution and Death’ <https://hrc-eritrea.org/egypt-secretly-deporting-eritrean-refugees-to-persecution-and-death/>

36 CSW, ‘Displaced Protestants pressured by government to accept illegal agreement,’ May 16, 2024, <https://www.csw.org.uk/2024/05/16/press/6227/article.htm>

46. *States should guarantee access to and support in navigating clear asylum procedures and provide other forms of humanitarian assistance, including medical and psycho-social support.*
47. *Ensure the right to a nationality for person belonging to minorities, through facilitation of birth registration, naturalisation and citizenship for stateless minorities.*
48. *Ensure that no refugee is returned until their safety upon return can be guaranteed.*
49. *Condemn the refoulment of refugees in all circumstances, recognising that the principle of non-refoulement is a fundamental international human rights law.*
50. *When UNHCR gives decision on case, asylum seeker only has 30 days to put an appeal together. Grant longer appeal process for applicants who have been denied status.*
51. *Request an official country visit to Thailand in your capacity as the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and to meet with asylum seekers and refugees in Thailand.*