

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all.
2. CSW has widely documented the experiences of religious and belief minorities in situations of conflict and insecurity. This submission focuses on the situation in Myanmar, Nigeria, and the steps the international community can take to prevent, mitigate and respond to the human rights challenges experienced by persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in conflict situations.

Violence against religious or belief minorities

3. In her report to the 16th session of the Human Rights Council, the first independent expert on minority issues, Gay McDougall, stated: *“Minorities are often the targets, rather than the perpetrators, of violence. When minority rights are violated, members of minorities may be at greater risk of being subject to systematic violence, even if they’re bystanders to a conflict involving other parties.”*¹
4. In Myanmar, continued human rights scrutiny is crucial while the country remains in the grip of a military already accused of decades of war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of humanitarian law. CSW remains deeply concerned by the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the military’s continued campaign of violent force against dissidents, and ethnic and religious minority groups since the coup on 1 February 2021.
5. Chin State, Myanmar, has faced an onslaught of rocket attacks and deliberate arson by soldiers, causing devastation to homes, businesses, churches. Many have been killed or injured and thousands have been forced to flee. CSW specifically condemns the killing of a Baptist pastor who was shot dead in Chin State on 18 September 2021 amid continued attacks by the Myanmar military on civilians in the state. Pastor Cung Biak Hum, 31, was shot by soldiers as he tried to help extinguish a blaze caused by artillery fire, which destroyed 19 homes in the Thantlang township. Soldiers proceeded to remove the pastor’s finger and steal his wedding ring. The pastor, his community, and many others like it continue to suffer violence and grave human rights violations at the hands of the Myanmar military.
6. In Kayah (Karenni) State, thousands have been displaced and many have been killed by the military. At least 35 civilians were burned alive on 24 December 2021 in Kayah State, with CSW sources also reporting the use of human shields and the placing of landmines around villages.
7. In Nigeria, CSW is perturbed by governmental inefficacy and seeming reluctance in the face of unabated deadly attacks by resurgent terrorists and diverse armed gangs primarily of Fulani origin. Violations have increased

exponentially under the current administration. Since 2015 thousands have died and tens of thousands have been displaced in a campaign of attacks on predominantly Christian communities in central Nigeria by assailants of Fulani origin for whom religion is either a recruitment factor or a governing ethos.

8. Predominantly Christian ethnic minority communities in central Nigeria have endured lethal violence and abductions since 2010 which have now spread southwards. In southern Kaduna state these attacks have displaced at least 143 communities and over 160,000 persons, while IDPs in Benue state number 1.7 million. Yet there are no official camps in states like Kaduna, and IDPs rely on churches, charities and local communities. Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP), breakaway Boko Haram factions, and al Qaeda affiliate Ansaru have extended operations through alliances with armed gangs in the northwest, who largely terrorise Hausa Muslim communities. In April 2021 Boko Haram raised its flag in a part of Niger state, two hours away from the capital, Abuja, and its factions recently sent fighters and bomb makers to a southern Kaduna forest.
9. The violent non-State actors operating in northwest and central Nigeria have finally been designated terrorist entities. However, the Nigerian government is yet to recalibrate military strategy to address the sources of violence that has had space to evolve into an existential threat more effectively and comprehensively.
10. Christian women and girls from ethnic minority tribes in northeast Nigeria have been specifically targeted for abduction and subjected to sexual and gender-based violence by terrorist factions, while minors in Nigeria’s Shari’a states are often abduction, forcibly conversion and married without parental consent within the context of an enabling environment that militates against justice.

Protecting religion or belief minorities against human rights violations and atrocities

11. UN Member States, the UN human rights system, international organisations and non-State actors – including humanitarian and security actors, private companies, civil society and religious or belief leaders – can take a number of steps to prevent, mitigate and respond to the human rights challenges experienced by persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in conflict situations.
12. Strengthening inter-agency frameworks, the creation of mandates such as the Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention, the role of UN experts and National Human Rights Institutions and maximising initiatives such as Pathways for Peace and Faith for Rights, are important. However, greater emphasis must be made on protecting minority rights in conflict prevention. The development

¹ UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/16/45, ‘Report of the independent expert on minority issues’, 16 December 2010 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/178/14/PDF/G1017814.pdf?OpenElement>

of such practices and institutional frameworks must also accommodate diversity and ensure a gender perspective; all must be given an equal voice.

13. Note must also be taken of the importance of early warning signs and systems and the need to monitor risk factors, all of which are essential tools in conflict prevention. Adopting proactive measures rather than reactive ones remains key to sustaining peace.
14. It is not enough for the international community to act only when a conflict has begun to escalate and violence has begun; action must be taken immediately when risk factors are initially identified.
15. The international community has long failed to respond swiftly to warning signs. As the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide indicated during the 2021 Forum on Minority Issues, other bodies, such as the Human Rights Council (HRC), have tried to fill the gaps caused by the inability of the Security Council to take unified action. The HRC held four Special Sessions in 2021, on Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sudan and Ethiopia. However, it is regrettable that, as the human rights situation in each country deteriorated, documented violations and the warning cries of civil society organisations, grassroots human rights defenders, UN experts and academics were ignored until too late. CSW is particularly concerned by the impact such failings have had on the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in each of these countries. Furthermore, we are troubled by the inaction of UN Member States in other situations of grave insecurity, including in Nigeria.
16. Impunity for the targeting of religious or belief minorities in conflict situations remains rife. As the Special Rapporteur on FoRB stated in his 2017 report to the GA, *“although violent extremism perpetrated by non-State actors, often in the name of religion or belief, is a real threat that must be confronted, what is often overlooked is the role many governments play in exacerbating, fuelling and enabling an environment in which such extremism can flourish.”*²
17. Among civilians affected by situations of conflict or insecurity, religious or belief minorities often face challenges in accessing remedies, or suffer uniquely where there are protection gaps. Frequently in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and post-conflict settings, there are challenges to protecting the human rights of religious or belief minorities. These include being faced with prejudice when seeking justice for violations. Impunity in many conflict situations means there is a lack of accountability and justice for victims

from minority religious or belief communities.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council:

18. Prioritise early warning mechanisms and address the root causes of conflict early on, including reports of official and societal discrimination, harassment, and violent actions against religious and ethnic minorities.
19. Ensure full and equal participation in political life for religious or belief minorities without tokenism in participation and representation.
20. Increase FoRB literacy and training for policy makers and law enforcement officers, including those working on conflict prevention.
21. Support capacity building programmes and inter-religious dialogues, and activities to prevent, mitigate and respond to human rights challenges experienced by religious or belief minorities in conflict situations and in situations of insecurity.
22. Take into account the specific injustices suffered by religious or belief minorities in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and post-conflict settings, including in situations of transitional justice where the international community is providing post-conflict support, including reparation and reconciliation.
23. Adopt a gendered approach, especially in situations where sexual violence has occurred.
24. Ensure the humanitarian needs and human rights of religious or belief minorities are protected in accordance with international standards.
25. Provide for the welfare and safety of religious or belief minorities in IDP camps and in instances of voluntary repatriation. Any repatriation must be voluntary, safe and dignified.

2 UN General Assembly A/72/365, ‘Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance’, 28 August 2017 <https://undocs.org/A/72/365>

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