



Protecting freedom of religion

Strengthening international cooperation



adoption of the motion “Protect Religious Freedom Worldwide” by the Bundestag (Parliamentary Motion 17/2334).

The Faction’s special commitment is also shown in the establishment of a group of parliamentarians in April 2010 – the so-called Stephanus Group. The work of this group, named after the first Christian martyr, focuses on the freedom of religion. It is dedicated in particular to the situation of persecuted Christians all over the world.

Why does the CDU/CSU Faction in the German Bundestag care so much about religious freedom?

Freedom of religion is one of the most important human rights. It is protected by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by the German constitution. Many people consider their faith as a foundation of their lives. They must be able to live according to their faith, free from coercion and prejudice.

For the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, the “C” in its name is a programmatic key. Its political practice is based on the Christian image of humanity. Therefore it is concerned with the situation of persecuted and harried Christians all over the world. But its commitment also applies to other religions.

The chairman of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, Volker Kauder, emphasises: “For a long time, religious freedom was not an issue in German politics. Wrongly so: unfortunately, persecution and violence for religious reasons are increasing. The terror by the so-called Islamic State is a new tragic climax of this development.”

What is the Union Faction doing on behalf of religious freedom?

For the Union Faction, religious freedom has been high on the agenda for a long time. In 2010, it pursued the

In order to raise public awareness, the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group initiated a series of events entitled “The ‘C’ is our key” („Das ‚C‘ ist für uns Programm“) in 2012. There the Group discusses with representatives of the church and society how to defend the human right of religious freedom.

On the initiative of the CDU and CSU, their 2013 coalition agreement with the SPD emphasized the importance of religious freedom. It states: “We uphold freedom of religion as a fundamental human right. This also applies to the right to have no religious affiliation and to change one’s religion.”

How severely are Christians threatened or persecuted?

Of all religious groups worldwide, Christians are most strongly harried or persecuted. According to estimates, around 100 million Christians are affected. In recent years, unfortunately the extent of persecution has increased.

There are many forms of persecution. They range from inadequate protection, state discrimination and public humiliation to the open use of violence. Christians are often forced to renounce their religion. In some areas, converting to Christianity is even considered a crime worthy of the death penalty.

However, Christians are not just persecuted by the state, but are also attacked by other ethnic groups. This can be observed in Africa and the Middle East in particular. Here, they are primarily subject to Islamic extremism. In Central Africa, by contrast, violence is also perpetrated by Christians.

Why are Christians discriminated against?

Christians often invoke messages of the Holy Scriptures such as justice and solidarity. Sometimes, other parts of the population may interpret this as a threat to traditional social values and structures. This is one explanation for attacks that have taken place in India.

By contrast, dictatorships like the one in North Korea challenge the ideal of freedom arising from Christianity. In North Korea, the mere possession of the Bible is punishable by death.

In Islamic states, the state religion serves as a bracket for national unity. People of a different faith are thus discriminated against for political reasons. In countries such as Nigeria, members of other religions try to oust Christians from their traditional regions in order to dominate these themselves.

Particularly in the northern provinces of Nigeria, in which the Islamic group Boko Haram is rampant, the situation of Christians has deteriorated.

Where are Christians particularly endangered?

There are many hot spots. From Iraq to Nigeria, from North Korea to Somalia – Christians are persecuted, threatened and marginalised in numerous countries worldwide. Especially in countries where the growing self-assertiveness of the population majority expresses itself in a closer embrace of their

Persecution Index 2015

Where Christians are persecuted most



Once a year the Christian relief organization Open Doors publishes a so-called Persecution Index in which it illustrates particularly the situation of Christians worldwide. The deeper the colour of a country on the map, the more problematic is the situation of Christians in this country. Accordingly, the situation of Christians in North Korea is the most difficult.

Source: www.opendoors.de

religion, Christian minorities are under threat. This exaggerated religiosity of the population majority often switches to an extremism that is targeted at Christians.

But Christians are also under threat in areas where state authority has collapsed. For example in northern Nigeria, or in parts of Iraq where the terror group “Islamic State” is wreaking havoc, all those who do not submit to the radicals are existentially threatened. Christians in civil war areas are also often caught in the crossfire – for example in Syria.

What is the situation of Christians in Northern Iraq?

The CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group leader Volker Kauder gained a personal impression of the dramatic situation of refugees in Northern Iraq when he visited the Kurdish regional capital Erbil in the summer of 2014. On the initiative of the CDU/CSU Faction, Germany provides humanitarian aid to the refugees. Also, the German Defense Force supplies weapons and training on weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga. In this respect Germany supports the international coalition in its fight against the terror network “Islamic State”.

How has the situation in Egypt developed?

The situation of Coptic Christians in Egypt, who have long been a focal concern of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group, remains fragile. However, the Copts, who consider themselves to be the original native population of Egypt, may begin to breathe easier again under the leadership of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Under President Hosni Mubarak, they were often insufficiently protected by the state. They were not infrequently the target of hatred by extremist Muslims. Following the Arab Spring in 2012, President Mohammed Mursi and his Muslim Brotherhood wanted to turn Egypt into an Islamic theocracy.



What about members of other religions?

All over the world, members of many other religions besides the Christians suffer from discrimination and persecution, such as the Baha'i in Iran or members of the Jewish faith.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Muslims who resist the terror of the “Islamic State” are also affected. In addition, thousands of Yazidis in Northern Iraq have been displaced, enslaved and murdered by the so-called Islamic State.

This terror in the name of religion has now also reached America, Asia and Europe, particularly France. A series of major attacks in Paris in January and November shows that Islamic extremists target the Christian based human rights and the democratic values of the western world.

What is the role of the United Nations?

In the United Nations General Assembly, a resolution condemning the persecution of Christians, has not yet come about. Nevertheless, in late March 2015, the UN Security Council addressed for the first time the persecution of Christians and other minorities by the “Islamic State”.

On the initiative of the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group a conference by parliamentarians of all nations took place in the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 2015. The parliamentarians urged the United Nations to engage more strongly in defending religious freedom.

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Title: Christians who have fled from the "Islamic State" near Mosul find refuge in a church in a Christian district in Erbil/Northern Iraq, August 2014 (picture alliance/dpa)

Inside cover: Fleeing Muslim women and children find refuge in St. Pierre Church in Bangui/Central African Republic, January 2014 (picture alliance/dpa)

Outer cover: Kauder talking with priests in the Coptic-Orthodox monastery at Bachomeus/Egypt, March 2015 (Ulrich Scharlack)

Graphics: Open Doors

Parliamentary Motions

17/2334 Protect Religious Freedom Worldwide, 30/6/2010;
17/9185 Ensure the continued existence of the Mor Gabriel Monastery, 27/3/2012

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