

Symposium: The Muslim Persecution of Christians

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The widespread persecution of Christians is an increasing phenomenon in the Islamic world. Aside from its obvious tragic and horrifying ingredients, what is the significance and meaning of this persecution? Why is it almost never mentioned in the Western media? How is it connected to the conflict between the West and militant Islam? Why should America be concerned?

To discuss these and other issues with Frontpage Symposium today, Frontpage Magazine welcomes Bat Ye'or, the author of three major books on dhimmis, jihad, and dhimmitude (www.dhimmitude.org and www.dhimmi.org). On May 1, 1997-- after the publication of *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam. From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (1996) -- she testified at a Hearing of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs on 'Religious Persecution in the Middle East' ("An Historical Overview of the Persecution of Christians under Islam. PAST IS PROLOGUE: The Challenge of Islamism Today"). Her latest study is [Islam and Dhimmitude. Where Civilizations Collide](#) (2002); see "[Eurabia: The Road to Munich.](#)" National Review Online, October 9, 2002; "European Fears of the Gathering Jihad." FPM, Feb. 21 2003; Paul Marshall, a Senior Fellow at Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom. He is the author and editor of twenty books, including *Religious Freedom in the World: A Global Survey*, and the best-selling *Their Blood Cries Out*. His latest books are *Islam at the Crossroads* (2002) and *God and the Constitution: Christianity and American Politics* (2002); Habib Malik, who holds a doctorate in modern European intellectual history from Harvard and currently teaches history and cultural studies at the Lebanese American University in Lebanon. He has published a book on the early reception of Kierkegaard's thought and another book entitled *Between Damascus and Jerusalem: Lebanon and Middle East Peace*. He has also written widely in both English and Arabic on the Christians of Lebanon and the Middle East, on human rights in the region, and on Islam's relations with non-Muslim minority communities native to Muslim-majority countries; and Walid Phares, Professor of Middle East Studies and Religious Conflict at Florida Atlantic University and a Senior Fellow with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. He is an analyst with MSNBC and a board member of the Human Rights Coalition in the Muslim World. He testified to the US Senate on the "Christians in the Middle East: The policies of Ethnic Cleansing," (1997) and conducts congressional briefings on "Jihad and Human rights," (1998-2003).

Interlocutor: Welcome to Frontpage Symposium ladies and gentlemen. Let's begin with the question that will build a foundation to this discussion: how widespread is the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world?

Marshall: Very widespread, there are few Muslim countries where it does not occur.

It takes four forms. First. there are direct, violent attacks by extremists on Christian communities. These occur in Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Phillipines, Nigeria, Indonesia (the list is not exhaustive). In most of these cases the Government is either unable or unwilling to stop the attacks.

Second, there is civil war and communal violence where the Christian community has resisted the spread of radical varieties of Islam. Since the National Islamic Front (formerly the Muslim Brotherhood) took power in Sudan in the late 1980's two million people have been killed, mostly Christians and animists. In Nigeria some 11,000 people have been killed in the last three years over the introduction of Islamic sharia law. There is a similar death toll in eastern Indonesia, where paramilitary militant organizations such as Laskar Jihad, allied to international terrorists, have slaughtered local populations.

Third, there is widespread discrimination against Christians in Muslim countries. They are frequently at a disadvantage in marriage, custody and inheritance cases, are forced to subsidize Islam through taxes, are severely restricted in building and repairing churches, and are often excluded from government positions. This happens in most Muslim countries. In some cases, as in Pakistan or Iran or Nigeria, the testimony of a Christian counts less in a court case.

Fourthly, blasphemy and apostasy laws disproportionately target minorities.

In Saudi Arabia, Christianity is entirely forbidden.

Bat Ye'or: The persecution is difficult to assess for several reasons. (1) The situation is not the same in all the Muslim countries, there are more dramatic cases in countries that apply the shariah, like Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iran, etc.-- or acknowledge, like Egypt, that the shariah is the source of jurisdiction. Sometimes the government is more liberal, but the population is intolerant and harass the Christians. (2) The Christians themselves are reluctant to speak either because, as dhimmis, they are not conscious of being discriminated against, since it is the only condition they have known for centuries (dhimmitude); or because they fear Muslim reprisals.(3) The Western media and Western governments usually overlook the discrimination against Christians to avoid irritating Muslim governments, but also to protect Christians from more attacks, since they were often massacred by Muslim mobs under the pretext that they were protected by the infidels.

Phares: Let's refine our definitions. First we're addressing the cases of persecution of Christians in the Muslim world, which specifically means the countries with either a Muslim majority or under an Islamist regime. So, we are addressing all cases where Christian communities or individuals are under any form of suppression as a result of their identification as non-Muslims -and in this case as "Christians"- by regimes or organizations within the confines of these above countries. Second, there are two types of persecution of Christians in the countries with Muslim majority or regimes. One is religious persecution of Christians per se, which would be the most severe, the other is political oppression of Christian communities.

Both types are against Human Rights and should be sanctioned by international law. a) Religious persecution was obviously practiced in Afghanistan, but is now institutionalized in Saudi Arabia for example, where by law you cannot be Christian to start with, nor convert to the Christian faith. Following the Wahabi teachings, Islamists around the Muslim world have conducted a variety of documented aggressions against Christians (and other Muslims as well) such as in: Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia, etc. b) Community persecution is a wide spread phenomenon. It takes the shape of ethnic oppression, examples: Lebanon, Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Iran, etc. but also Egypt and Indonesia. In sum, the suppression of Christians in the Muslim world is an international problem.

Malik: In very few spots throughout the Islamic world where Christians live in Muslim-majority states do we find them enjoying an equal status with their Muslim counterparts. They are more often than not reduced to second-class status, or dhimmi status. In the Arab world, for example, the only place where native Christians have managed for centuries to avoid the dhimmi humiliation is in Lebanon. But even here matters have been deteriorating since the war in the country, which began in 1975 and since Syrian occupation and Islamist resurgence. All other Middle Eastern Christian communities (Copts, Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, etc.) are quintessential dhimmis. So if dhimmitude represents a recipe for slow and gradual liquidation of the targeted community, then this is the most subtle and most insidious form of persecution and it is quite widespread.

Interlocutor: Is Muslim persecution of Christians something new or the continuation of an old pattern and Islamic tradition?

Marshall: There has nearly always been discrimination, and often violence, but we are now seeing an upsurge of persecution in the Islamic world.

Bat Ye'or: It is certainly not new. Jews and Christians ('People of the Book') in Muslim countries shared a same destiny: that of dhimmis, - native populations conquered and subjected to the laws of jihad. Islamic laws regulating their status were the same, whereas other native populations like the Zoroastrians in Persia were more discriminated against. The oppression of Christians started from the beginning of the Muslim conquest of their lands. It is attested in the narratives before these rules became codified in laws from the 8th century. It covers all aspect of life and imposes vilification and insecurity. It has often included slavery, deportations, forced conversions and mass killings, although Christians like Jews are 'protected' by Islamic law providing their submit to their inferior and humiliating status. Those rules are inscribed in the shariah, and with the re-Islamization of the Muslim state, the traditional thirteen-century-old pattern is being reactivated, after its suppression by the European colonization of Muslim countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. Christians are persecuted also because they are secularists and oppose the return of the shariah.

Phares: First let's understand that there is a battle over this History. While many Muslim historians and a number of sympathetic historians in the West affirm that persecution has never (or almost never) existed, most Middle East Christian Historians and a growing number of Muslim humanist intellectuals affirm clearly that this oppression has existed since the 7th century. But facts from the history of the Middle East are difficult to deny. One, there is a whole debate about the real attitude of the theology of Islam towards the infidels (or Kafir).

The answer varies between moderates and radicals. It will remain a debate in the realm of theology and linguistics till a reform occurs. On the other hand, historical accounts of persecution are undeniable. Since the establishment of the Dhimmi status as of the 7th century AD/CE the Caliphate and the various other Islamic states have discriminated against Christians and Jews. Other powers -including Christians- throughout history have been discriminatory as well but later on, future generations have admitted this behavior. The problem nowadays lies in the fact that most mainstream historians of Islamic Politics still deny the past -and worse the present-existence of these discriminations.

Malik: Ever since the earliest Islamic conquests dating back to the 7th century AD when Invading Muslim armies overran neighboring communities, many of them Christian, there has been systematic persecution of

Christians. Setting aside the anecdotes of tolerance that adorn so much of the specialized (and romanticized) literature on Islamic history, the real story is a sordid one of the systematic reduction of vanquished peoples and members of other religions to second-class status at best—mainly reserved for Christians and Jews—and physical elimination at worst. So this is quite an old story indeed.

Interlocutor: Is there an ingredient within Islam itself that makes it an oppressor of other religions? Is it possible for Islam to be tolerant of a religion like Christianity?

Marshall: Dhimmi status has led to continuing discrimination against Christians into the modern age, and in the last century, Christian rebellion against Dhimmi status has led to mass murder.

Apostasy and blasphemy laws have often required that any Muslim who wants to change his religion, or any Christian who talks to them about Christianity, be executed.

Bat Ye'or: The Qur'an and the hadiths, the sacred Scriptures for the Muslims, make the jihad and the domination of Islam over all other religions, mandatory. Muslims invokes some verses which call for tolerance and pluralism. However according to the classical views of Muslim jurists and theologians, these verses have been abrogated by later ones that are more intransigent. In relation to Christianity and to Judaism, Muslim doctrine preaches that all the biblical persons from Adam, including Jesus, were Muslim prophets who preaches Islam. Hence, the theological conflict goes to the very heart of the three religions. Islam does not recognise the link between Christianity and Judaism, since Jesus is considered to be a Muslim. Moreover, according to some hadith, at the end of time the Muslim Jesus will return and destroy Christianity.

Phares: All religions make a distinction between believers and non-believers. The issue is about the "treatment" of the others not their theological identification. That the texts of Islam divide humanity in two groups is not the question at hands. It is about the stipulations in the text that prescribes a legal and political behavior vis-a-vis the infidels, and particularly Christians. As most experts in Islamic politics have concluded, you can find verses that allows collective punitive action against them as well as verses that calls for special treatment. The ingredient you're looking for would be the use of these collective action texts from the 7th century, by political forces in modern times, to promote oppression of Christians nowadays. Any religion can be used for oppression and any religion can be used with tolerance. The Jihadists of the 21st century -in the absence of a historical reformation- are using those references from the texts to perpetuate the state of mind of the original conquests and Caliphate in the present context of international relations.

Malik: The Koran contains verses about members of other religions, specifically the People of the Book (Christians and Jews), that lend themselves to adverse interpretations possibly leading to violence. As the undisputed very words of Allah (God), there is little room to ameliorate some of the more outspokenly violent verses. Schools of interpretation within the broad Islamic traditions have often differed on the emphases and nuances and on when and how to apply an extreme antagonistic interpretation to any particular verse. Regarding Christianity, for instance, the problem of shirk arises—i.e. the accusation that Christians associate two other figures with the one supreme deity to produce the Trinity. This is condemned in the Koran as a form of idolatry. It is difficult to see how Islam can peacefully coexist with a religion like Christianity that is perceived as idolatrous in its essence.

Interlocutor: Why do you think the persecution of Christians by Muslims in Arab countries is almost never spoken about in the Western media?

Marshall: It's not only Arab countries, but in non-Arab Muslim countries as well. It's hard to cover--it often happens in remoter areas too far from the bars and receptions where journalists and diplomats like to hang out. The question of persecution of anybody outside the west gets little coverage anyway. But beyond these general reasons, I think journalists are often unsympathetic to third world Christians, assuming they are going to be little Jerry Falwells. They also tend not to take religion seriously and so don't examine it closely: they assume it's 'economic' or 'political' or 'ethnic' or whatever is the flavor du jour in American social science thinking.

Finally, there is little knowledge of history, hence an attitude that sees Christians in these countries as foreigners, American offshoots, imperialist transplants and the like, often in stark ignorance of the fact that Christian communities in most of these countries are far older than the Muslim communities I had an international correspondent ask me what Christians were doing in Egypt "don't they know it's a Muslim country." I had to explain that the Egyptian church dates from about the year 54, and that the Bible says Jesus grew up there.

Bat Ye'or: The Western media is obsessed by the Palestinian problem and prefers to ignore most of the other dramatic situations in the Muslim world. This is a deliberated policy. We didn't hear too much of the horrors perpetrated by Saddam Hussein and his sons against the Iraqi people before the destruction of his regime. The media contributes to project a falsified picture of the Muslim world by focusing only on Israel. Criticizing Muslim countries might involve many dangers, both physical and professional. There is also an ignorance on this subject, deliberately maintained. In recent articles, I have examined the European Union's policy with the Mediterranean Arab world over the past 30 years, leading to a future "Eurabia", that is the spreading of a culture of dhimmitude.

Phares: There is a myriad of reasons. One is ignorance. Western media has an educated membership but little knowledge of the oppression of minorities in general and Christians in particular in the Muslim world. It has even skipped the struggle of humanist, liberal and democratic individuals and forces from Morocco to Afghanistan. Who should you blame? Obviously those in charge of the education, i.e, university scholars. Which brings us to the second reason. As of the 1970s a flow of funding coming from the oil producing regimes in the Arab and Muslim world -mostly authoritarian ones- sunk on Western campuses, paralysing the process of information and education. These regimes blocked the circulation of knowledge as a way to avoid an international investigation of human rights and religious freedom in these countries. The direct result was that an army of scholars in the West participated directly in hiding the truth of persecutions, not only against Christians, but also against enlightened Muslim intellectuals.

Malik: For nearly 30 years now I have been writing and speaking out and trying hard to awaken Western sensitivities to the plight of Middle Eastern Christians, specifically those of Lebanon, the Sudan, and the Copts, but with very little by way of concrete results. The reasons, I think, have to do with a number of related factors. Europe, which traditionally was intimately involved in the affairs of the Near and Middle East, is no longer the influential player it used to be historically. Also, the general secularizing trend in the West has

lessened the sensitivity there to questions pertaining to the persecution of specific religious groups in the Islamic world. Moreover, oil and other strategic interests compel policy makers in the West, particularly in Washington, to overlook such violations so as not to displease or embarrass their Arab friends. Israel's bittersweet experience in 1982 in Lebanon also has caused the Israelis to distance themselves from Lebanon's Christians and look to an accommodation with Damascus. All these factors have come together to make it difficult for such issues as Muslim persecution of Christians to hit the headlines and stir sympathetic sentiments.

Interlocutor: Well, the Muslim persecution of Christians is clearly a widespread and horrifying phenomenon. Can anything even close be said in reverse? Please tell me, where in our modern world do Christians persecute Muslims for their faith? Where are Muslims persecuted and live in fear because Christians are trying to force the New Testament on them? And what does the answer to this question mean?

Malik: Frankly, I can't think of a situation around the world today where Christians are actively persecuting Muslims. Perhaps an argument can be made about the misbehavior of the Serbs towards Balkan Muslims in the 1990s, or the Russians towards the Chechens, but this sort of thing has been widely condemned by the international community including other Christians. Crusading against the Muslim "infidels" is no longer part of the worldview of Christians, and in fact never was since it was Christendom (essentially a political entity), not Christianity, that perpetrated such abuses in the past. Christian theocracies are not in evidence any more.

The combination of church and state violates Christ's insistence that what is Caesar's should be left to Caesar and what is God's to God, i.e. separation of the two realms. Besides, in the case of the Serbs or Russians, the issues were mostly political and nationalistic, not religious. That is to say no one was trying to forcefully convert Muslims to Christianity by forcing the New Testament upon them. Forcing the Islamic shari'a on Christians, however, is happening all the time in places like Sudan, Nigeria, the southern Philippines, Sabah Island in Indonesia, and elsewhere. If Christians in the modern world have largely desisted from such practices, the same unfortunately cannot be said about Muslims.

Marshall: There are no examples that I know of of Christians actually "trying to force the New Testament" in any explicit way, but there are examples where Christians have targeted Muslims as Muslims. When Milosevic ruled Serbia he (a former communist apparatchik) wrapped himself in the cloak of Orthodox Cas a means of whipping up a religious Serbian national identity against Muslims. He succeeded and thousands of Bosnian Muslims were killed because they were Muslims.

In Russia, the war in Chechnya is often portrayed by officials as a war of Christianity against Islam, or Wahhabism and Russia's brutal conduct of that war is often seen by Muslims as oppression by Christians.

There is discrimination against Greece's Muslim minority, largely used as a bargaining chip by Greece to get parallel concessions from Turkey in its treatment of its Christian minority. Muslims have also suffered discrimination in the Philippines.

So Christian persecution of Muslims does exist, but sporadically. There is no parallel to the widespread pattern in the Muslim world.

Bat Ye'or: Muslims are not persecuted by Christians for their faith, but there are bloody political conflicts like in ex-Yugoslavia and in Chechnya. This is the legacy of a past, when for centuries Muslims were filling their harems, their troops, and their civil administration with Islamized Christian children abducted in the Balkans, particularly Serbia, and the Caucasian region. In Western Europe, where millions of Muslims have legally emigrated in the last 30 years, they enjoy the same rights as others. European politicians have welcomed this immigration, vaunted the superiority of the Islamic civilization over their own, and the greatness of its religion. European glorification of Islam is such that conversions to Islam from Christianity abound. What does this mean? The European Union hopes to keep its good relations with the Muslim countries at any cost -- for economic and political reasons and for fear of terrorism. In a wider perspective, one can say that Western states have secular institutions which impose equality of rights, of gender and civil liberties, while Muslim countries often have the shariah law which rejects equality between men and women, and between Muslims and non-Muslims -- and link religion with politics.

Phares: Many Muslim and a number of Western scholars nowadays raise the issue of past persecutions of Muslims at the hands of Christian powers as an equivalent to the oppression by today's Islamist regimes and organizations of Christian communities. This comparison is academically inaccurate. For in comparative methods you either compare in diachronic, that is the same institution or culture over time, or synchronic, i.e. two institutions or cultures at one time. That is not the case. Indeed, Crusaders and Spanish inquisition persecuted Muslims in Palestine and Spain. That should be compared to the global persecution of Christians under the Caliphate from the Atlantic to the Indian oceans. Such comparison is sound and should be analyzed.

In recent, Islamist scholars identify the "ethnic cleansing" of Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo as an example of contemporary Christian persecution of Muslims, assuming that the Milosevitch regime was "Christian." The latter regime was not claiming "Christian" identity in the same way the regimes in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and others were either claiming or referencing to religious law, in their suppression of Christians in their midst. Although all repressions are reprehensible and must be stopped, there is no such thing as "Christian-based" persecution of Muslims as a doctrine nowadays. Muslim ethnic communities are in uprising against Governments in several countries where Christians form a majority. But to be academically correct, on the other hand, there are many cases nowadays where Christians are persecuted on the basis of religion (i.e Sharia), in addition to ethnic oppression. As for the numbers, statistics are clear: Roughly more than a 120 million Christians live under various forms of oppression versus 15 million Muslims enduring political suppression.

Interlocutor: In light of these realities, it appears that there truly is a War of Civilizations taking place, does it not?

Malik: I'm always struck by a fascinating phrase in Samuel Huntington's famous book: Islam's "Bloody Borders." I do have serious reservations about the Huntington thesis of civilizational clashes, but when it comes to Islam's bloody borders I have to pause and reflect. It appears that wherever Islam meets non-Islam there is blood being spilled: Kashmir, Mindanao, Chechnya, the Balkans, Sudan, Nigeria, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and many other places of contact. Is the blood Huntington talks about purely the result of anti-Muslim conspiracies from the outside directed at the Muslim world? Part of it may be that. But I suspect a deeper analysis will reveal serious problems Islam as a creed has with the different other, the inhabitant of the

House or Abode of Islam, also referred to by Muslims as the abode of war and confusion. There is today a war taking place between the radical Islamists a la Bin Laden who have hijacked Islam and intimidated any voices of moderation on the one hand, and the rest of the civilized world on the other. You can't really call this a clash of civilizations; it is more like a war between civilization at large and barbarism or piracy (we call it terrorism). Muslims are often as much the victims of this barbarism as non-Muslims.

Marshall: I would not say a "war of civilizations." The world is too varied. I think Huntington's phrase 'a clash of civilizations' (which he wants to avoid becoming a war) is more accurate. We have a 'clash,' 'tension,' that has erupted into war or lower level violence in several places, which may get more widespread.

Bat Ye'or: It has always been there, although it is politically incorrect to say it. It is a fight of ideas, of ideologies, with many Muslims on the Western side. It encompasses the character of the society: secular, open and modernist, or religious and jihadist; equality of gender; universal human rights, civil and political freedoms; independence of the judiciary; due process replacing individual retribution; respect for pluralism, political and moral accountability, self-criticism. And in international relations, the confrontation between the jihad ideology and the legitimacy of sovereign non-Muslim states. Because of an unofficial censorship with political-correctness criteria, the West is not prepared for this ideological war whose basic components involving the very nature of human rights have been obfuscated.

Phares: I have authored back in 1979 three books dealing with the "Clash of Civilizations." Two were about a "fault line," that is Lebanon and one was about the worldwide encounter of Civilizations. This book, "al-Taadudiya al-Hadariya fil aalam" (Civilizational Pluralism in the World) was out 14 years before the famous article by Professor Samuel Huntington in Foreign Affairs in 1993. In that essay, I argued that Civilizations collide and co-exist as states do. They have international relations and internal affairs. I proposed a categorization of their membership etc. And one of my findings was that wars between Civilizations are as frequent as wars between nation-states. There were two problems with my book. One was time: It was under the Cold War and no one paid attention to that theory. Two was language" It was in Arabic, therefore not bale to make it through the international press. In a sum, yes, there is a clash of civilization taking place. It is so obvious and clear, at least in the mind of one party: The Jihadists. The latter have declared that war, are conducting it and think in its terms. However, clashes of civilizations is not always in a form of military war, and doesn't have to engulf all civilizations, nor does it mobilize the entirety of a particular civilization. The Jihadists are waging a war of Civilizations even if the overwhelming majority of Muslims are not.

Interlocutor: What is the best tactic that we can employ in helping persecuted Christians in the Islamic world?

Malik: Shine the spotlight of publicity on their plight. Get the mainstream media in the West to become interested. Insist on the principle of reciprocity with the Muslim world, i.e. Islamic states ought to offer non-Muslims living in their midst at least the same civil and political benefits that Muslims enjoy when they go to live in the West. Pointing to the Patriot Act and the policies of John Ashcroft as being anti-Muslim and a rejection of Western freedoms is really no argument because these exceptional measures are nowhere as severe as some of the mistreatment and grave abuses that non-Muslims are exposed to in Muslim-majority states. Active political, moral, and material aid to beleaguered Christians enduring Islamic persecution ought

to be seriously contemplated, as well as sanctions imposed on abusing states or regimes that condone persecution or simply look the other way.

Marshall: The tactics will vary from situation to situation. First is making people aware of what is happening. Even apart from anybody else, the American Christian community is largely asleep on this issue.

The war on terrorism will also help. In the shorter term it may lead to increased attacks on Christians, as in Pakistan--6 massacres last year. But if the US succeeds in defeating or severely weakening Islamist terrorists, then this will ease the plight of these communities. We have already seen this in Indonesia: after the crackdown following the Bali bombing, Laskar Jihad, which had been slaughtering and forcibly converting Christians in the eastern areas, largely disbanded.

In other cases we need to support governments fighting the growth of radical Islam, and support moderate Muslims throughout the world, who are themselves often attacked, and who are frequently intimidated. Look at what has happened to Irshad Manji--and she lives in Canada. Imagine the difficulty of raising critiques of reactionary Islam while in Sudan or Pakistan.

The United States should also not be afraid of voicing its support for these communities around the world. It is often more reticent to speak about them than it is oppressed Muslims.

Bat Ye'or: None are good because their situation is very insecure. The culture of jihad and hate which is developing increases the dangers. But certainly the worst tactic is just to hide the truth and remain silent. It is bad for the victims and bad for the oppressors who will continue with impunity. It is, in fact, the continuation of the old ways, when the life of Jews and Christians was cheap and could be shed without retribution, their possessions stolen, their testimony refused, and insecurity prevailed. We ought to rediscover the rights of the indigenous peoples, Jews and Christians, eliminated in their own Islamized countries by the ethnic and religious cleansing institutionalized through the laws of jihad and dhimmitude.

As long as this subject will remain taboo, the jihadist culture of terror and impunity will prevail. Europe has decided to ignore it and prefers to promote jihad values in funding the Palestinian Authority, supporting the delegitimization of Israel and by deflecting the causes of terrorism onto America and Israel. In this sense, Europe -- or rather its official political bodies -- are financially allied with, and morally responsible for jihadist terror, and are eroding the very principles of Europe's freedoms. This policy initiated by France three decades ago through the European Community has had a snowball effect and would now appear irreversible.

Phares: Actually, before adopting tactics, allow me to suggest a strategy. At first the international community must acknowledge that there is a "problem of persecution" of a particular type, in the same way anti-Semitism, Apartheid and Ethnic Cleansing have been recognized. The persecution of millions of Christians is and should not be a "Christian" problem, but a human one. The United Nations must move on that level in the same way it did in South Africa and in the Balkans. But in order to get the issue in front of the UN, it must become a Foreign policy issue here in the US. There are some significant legislation in Congress and the executive branch has developed some initiatives over the past few years. But it is not yet an "American issue in Foreign Policy." After September 11, one can see that the capacity of the American public to understand that persecution and identify with it has reached a level allowing national mobilization. So, time is ripe. But it

is also important to solicit the endorsement of Muslim intellectuals, seculars and humanists. Their contribution to the acknowledgment of this problem is highly important. And on that level as well, we can see the emergence of intellectual dissidence around the world at slow pace, but nevertheless significant.

Interlocutor: What does the Muslim persecution of Christians mean to you? If someone were to ask you why this issue is important, what would you say?

Malik: As a Christian, I find such persecution to be revolting and utterly unacceptable. But as a human being and a human rights activist, I cannot sit silently while any form of persecution against any group is going on. No group should have to endure persecution because of the creed to which they adhere. This is a direct violation of the UN Charter, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in the formulation of which my late father, Charles Malik, had a major hand), and of all accepted norms of decency, not to mention that the major religions of this world all abhor such behaviour in their teachings—at least the moderate interpretations of such teachings. What can be more important than the freedom of belief and conscience that Article 18 in the UDHR speaks about?

Marshall: First it is a major human rights issue, the widest pattern of religious persecution in the world. It affects over a hundred million people

Second, it is a marker of Islamic radicalism--many of the groups now in the news I have known for years not because I am a terrorism expert but because they have been engaged in domestic terrorism against Christians and other minorities for years. The groups who carried out the Bali bombings had already bombed dozens of churches at Christmas eve 2000 (with many bombs wrapped as Christmas present so that children would pick them up). Where this persecution occurs you will usually find terrorism associated or following. It is the canary in the midshaft.

Third, The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has, on the Palestinian side, moved from largely nationalist to largely Islamist rhetoric giving the conflict a religious caste that makes it even more intractable. if persecution continues to drive out Christians from the Middle East (where they were a quarter of the population a century ago) then conflict will be largely Israeli/Jew vs Arab/Muslim with no intermediates.

Fourth, while there are exceptions, Christians throughout the world tend to be agents of free markets and democracy (Huntington believes that changes in the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council were a major factor in democratization in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Portugal, Spain and the Philippines. Hence defending Christian communities also help promote democracy.

Bat Ye'or: It means a lot to me. First, because as a Jew, I have myself been persecuted in Egypt, and have, therefore, experienced the trials of the Christians -- hence I strongly identify with them. The recent jihadist terror attack in Haifa deliberately targeted both Israeli Jews and Maronite Christians together. Families were wiped out. This illustrates our historical common destiny as "the People of the Book" (the Bible) in the civilization of dhimmitude. Besides, there is something terribly abject and revolting to see people persecuted for their faith, their color or what they are; to see their identity, their history usurped and their dignity denied. It is also a Jewish history. I have read extensively on these Christians trials throughout dhimmitude. I think that the denial of human dignity and the gratuitous suppression of life are the most revolting aggression, against a

fellow human being and on the values on which civilization rests. This dehumanisation is at the very core of dhimmitude.

Phares: Obviously it is first and foremost an issue of Human Rights. Christians do not suffer differently from others. Ironically, one can say: They are human too, no? On that ground alone, there must be a serious address of that crisis. Second, not acknowledging the reality of the persecuted leads to human tragedies such as in Sudan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, Lebanon and Egypt, to name some. Thirdly, those living outside the realm of this persecution are not eternally safe from it. For the very permissive attitude by the West which lead to these persecutions is the most encouraging phenomenon to Jihad Terrorists to proceed to the "Infidel world" (dar el Harb) after the elimination of the "minorities" within what they perceive as the "Muslim world" (dar el-Islam). If you thoroughly study the historical reasons behind September 11, you'd understand that the Usama Bin laden of this world have interpreted the abandonment of the Christians by the West as a signal of moral decline. All you have to do is to watch the famous/infamous al-Jazeera aired video tapes of al-Qaida and realized why you were paid visits in New York and Washington. Then you'll understand the importance of addressing all oppression worldwide, and of course Christian persecution included.

Interlocutor: Thank you Mr. Phares. So, in terms of your last point, we see that the persecution of Christians by Muslims is very much connected to 9/11 and the War on Terror. So let's finish the discussion with this question: why should America be concerned about the fate of Christians in the Islamic world?

Malik: As a first principle, America should be concerned about the persecution of any group in the world and, given its vast resources and power, it ought in every instance to try and put a stop to such persecution if it can. When America and the world were not paying attention in 1915, nearly 2 million Armenians were brutally massacred, or rendered homeless, by Turks and Kurds.

Again during the Second World War America and the world did little to stop Hitler's systematic destruction of European Jewry--six million of them perished in the Holocaust. More recently we witnessed the horrifying atrocities of Pol Pot in Cambodia, those of the Serbs in Bosnia, and the carnage in Rwanda. America cannot be the world's policeman, but as the only superpower it can certainly demonstrate greater sensitivity in its foreign policy to such persecutions on a grand scale.

It is particularly crucial that religious persecution be acknowledged and faced head on wherever it occurs. This is because such persecution runs counter to the deepest and most cherished values of personal liberty upon which America was founded. In the current world climate defined after 9/11 by the ongoing war against Islamist terrorism ignoring the persecution of Christians or any other religious group by Muslims simply conveys to the terrorists the impression that the West, especially America, is weak, irreligious, decadent, and ultimately vulnerable to similar terror.

Looking the other way while Christians around the world are subjugated, robbed of their freedoms, tortured, dispossessed, and killed by fanatical Muslim groups or regimes feeds the warped ambitions of the forces of terror and emboldens them to attempt other outrages against Western, specifically American, targets. Allowing such religious persecutions to happen, or remaining silent about them when they do occur, are clearly not in the national interests of the United States or the freedom-loving civilized world. Such irresponsible neglect will come back to haunt those guilty of it.

Marshall: This needs to be a major concern for Americans, not because we value the life of one type of believer above any other, or any non-believer, but because religious freedom is the first right mentioned in the first amendment of the Bill of Rights. It is often, and properly, called "The First Freedom," the right from which historically and analytically, other rights have sprung. If the U.S. cares, as it does and as it should, about human rights, then a major component of our human rights policy must be religious freedom.

This is also an issue that effects our policies on Islamist terrorism, conflicts in the Middle East, and the promotion of democracy. A defense of religious freedom, especially for the most beleaguered religious community, can advance our goals in these areas as well. Phares: America should be concerned with the persecution of Christians under Islamic regimes or by Jihadist organizations for a variety of reasons. First, on the level of principles. The US have shown tremendous concerns for abuse of Human Rights around the world under the cold war and since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It intervened in many cases. 1) Christians suppressed by Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR, Christians oppressed by military regimes in Latin America, Muslims under threats in mostly Christian countries such as in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as Muslims oppressed by other Muslims such as the Kurds of Iraq. But one single category remained untouched by our Foreign Policy, that is precisely Christians oppressed or persecuted under Islamic regimes. And that is wrong. Singling out the persecution of Christians as the only category that will be allowed to suffer endlessly under Islamic regimes is not just. Another reason is Terrorism. If the US doesn't help to stop that persecution it would be sending a message to the Jihad Terrorists to escalate their ethnic cleansing of Christians worldwide, which has been happening increasingly in the 1990s. The logical next step would be to strike at what the Jihadists perceive as Judeo-Christian societies and hence conduct Terror attacks in the West. We've seen this happening on September 11. Bat Ye'or: The persecution of Christians in Muslim lands should concern America for several reasons. The main one is human solidarity and the alleviation of suffering for all; another is the enforcement of universal human rights in Muslim countries. Here we have two conflictual interpretations of human rights: one is found in the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 'International Bill of Human Rights'; the other is the 1990 'Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam', approved by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which conforms to Islam and the Shariah. This ambiguity derails the UN's so-called "international legality" since 56 Muslim member states abide to Muslim, and therefore to religious-political principles-- in contradiction to Western secular laws. But certainly the most important element relates to the meaning revealed by this persecution, solidly entrenched in thirteen centuries of traditional practice, for it confirms the persistence of a religious pattern that discriminates and demonizes the infidels as a collectivity. In this sense, it threatens all non-Muslim countries. Eastern Christians sometimes think that the West's alignment on Arab/Muslim policies will help them. They are used as a channel for the Islamization of the West and to bring it to legitimise jihadist ideologies. This policy has been successful in Europe in many ways and is the source of the West's weakness, of the subversion of Europe's values, and of an Atlantic drift.