THE WAR ON CHRISTIANS
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We hear so often about Muslims as victims of abuse in the West and combatants in the Arab Spring’s fight against tyranny. But, in fact, a wholly different kind of war is underway—an unrecognized battle costing thousands of lives. Christians are being killed in the Islamic world because of their religion. It is a rising genocide that ought to provoke global alarm.

The portrayal of Muslims as victims or heroes is at best partially accurate. In recent years the violent oppression of Christian minorities has become the norm in Muslim-majority nations stretching from West Africa and the Middle East to South Asia and Oceania. In some countries it is governments and their agents that have burned churches and imprisoned parishioners. In others, rebel groups and vigilantes have taken matters into their own hands, murdering Christians and driving them from regions where their roots go back centuries.

The media’s reticence on the subject no doubt has several sources. One may be fear of provoking additional violence. Another is most likely the influence of lobbying groups such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation—a kind of United Nations of Islam centered in Saudi Arabia—and the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Over the past decade, these and similar groups have been remarkably successful in persuading leading public figures and journalists in the West to think of each and every example of perceived anti-Muslim discrimination as an expression of a systematic and sinister derangement called “Islamophobia”—a term that is meant to elicit the same moral disapproval as xenophobia or homophobia.

But a fair-minded assessment of recent events and trends leads to the conclusion that the scale and severity of Islamophobia pales in comparison with the bloody Christophobia currently coursing through Muslim-majority nations from one end of the globe to the other. The conspiracy of silence surrounding this violent expression of religious intolerance has to stop. Nothing less than the fate of Christianity—and ultimately of all religious minorities—in the Islamic world is at stake.

From blasphemy laws to brutal murders to bombings to mutilations and the burning of holy sites, Christians in so many nations live in fear. In Nigeria many have suffered all of these forms of persecution. The nation has the largest Christian minority (40 percent) in proportion to its population (160 million) of any majority-Muslim country. For years, Muslims and Christians in Nigeria have lived on the edge of civil war. Islamist radicals provoke much if not most of the tension. The newest such organization is an outfit that calls itself Boko Haram, which means “Western education is sacrilege.” Its aim is to establish Sharia in Nigeria. To this end it has stated that it will kill all Christians in the country.

In the month of January 2012 alone, Boko Haram was responsible for 54 deaths. In 2011 its members killed at least 510 people and burned down or destroyed more than 350 churches in 10 northern states. They use guns, gasoline bombs, and even machetes, shouting “Allahu akbar” (“God is great”) while launching attacks on unsuspecting citizens. They have attacked churches, a Christmas Day gathering (killing 42 Catholics), beer parlors, a town hall, beauty salons, and banks. They have so far focused on killing Christian clerics, politicians, students, policemen, and soldiers, as well as Muslim clerics who condemn their mayhem. While they started out by using crude methods like hit-and-run assassinations from the back of motorbikes in 2009, the latest AP reports indicate that the group’s recent attacks show a new level of potency and sophistication.

The Christophobia that has plagued Sudan for years takes a very different form. The authoritarian government of the Sunni Muslim north of the country has for decades tormented Christian and animist minorities in the south. What has often been described as a civil war is in practice the Sudanese government’s sustained persecution of religious minorities. This persecution culminated in the infamous genocide in Darfur that began in 2003. Even though Sudan’s Muslim president, Omar al-Bashir, has been indicted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which charged him with three counts of genocide, and despite the euphoria that greeted the semi-independence he granted to South Sudan in July of last year, the violence has not ended. In South Kordofan, Christians are still subjected to aerial bombardment, targeted killings, the kidnapping of children, and other atrocities. Reports from the United Nations indicate that between 53,000 and 75,000 innocent civilians have been displaced from their resi

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