

# COVID-19 and Christian Persecution

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*The Voice of the Martyrs Canada* (VOMC) has received reports that Christians living in nations classified as hostile or restrictive to the Gospel of Jesus Christ are facing an increase in persecution as a result of the COVID-19 virus. (These reports are available at <https://vomcanada.com/vomc-2020-04-09.htm> and <https://vomcanada.com/from-vomc/video/covid-response.html>).

As the pandemic lingers, claims of COVID-19 persecution is expected to intensify. Therefore, increasing our understanding of the complex issues involved, and developing a credible means of verification, will assist us in responding effectively.

For more information, and to review a study on why Christians are persecuted, you may download the document, *Why are Christians Persecuted?* (<https://vomcanada.com/download/whypers.pdf>)

The International Ministry of VOMC, therefore, seeks to find answers for the following:

- How is COVID-19 linked to the persecution of Christians?
- Does COVID-19 lead to Christian persecution?
- In regions where VOMC ministers, are Christians more vulnerable than others during COVID-19?
- How should VOMC respond to COVID-19-based persecution?

Answering these questions will require ongoing research, both during the pandemic and after it has been resolved.

## ***How is COVID-19 linked to the persecution of Christians?***

By way of review, it is helpful to understand how VOMC defines persecution.

Persecution exists in situations where Christians are repetitively, persistently and systematically inflicted with grave or severe suffering, harm, and/or significant threat or deprivation of their fundamental human rights. Such acts are perpetrated because of the differences that result when a Christian surrenders to God's will rather than the ways of the world – something that their persecutors will not tolerate. Jesus explained this to His disciples in John 15:18-19 (ESV):

*“If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”*

Persecution – or in other words, “hatred from the world” – is based on ways not aligned with God's purposes and perpetrated against all those who seek to live in obedience to His will. Being a Christian means being “set apart.” And in the process of being *in* the world but not *of* it, persecution will arise.

When distinguishing religious persecution from other types of oppression, one must ask, "*If a person had other religious beliefs, or would change their religion to the majority religion of the country, would things get better for them?*" If the answer is "yes," then there is a good chance that the persecution predicated on religious grounds becomes the prime motive of the persecutor.

COVID-19-based persecution would then be considered a situation where those opposed to the Gospel use circumstances of the pandemic to further marginalize and oppress Christians because of their faith and witness. Further on the definition of persecution can be found at <https://vomcanada.com/whats-persecution.htm>.

### ***Does COVID-19 lead to the persecution of Christians?***

No, the direct effects of COVID-19 have caused the large-scale humanitarian crisis. Yet, suffering in areas already rampant with poverty is increasing, as those most vulnerable are being pushed to the brink of destruction because of social distancing and other restrictions.

*The Global Report on Food Crises 2020*, which was referenced in an article published by *The Christian Post*, states: "While COVID-19 does not discriminate, the 55 countries and territories that are home to 135 million acutely food-insecure people in need of urgent humanitarian food and nutrition assistance are the most vulnerable to the consequences of this pandemic, as they have very limited or no capacity to cope with either the health or socioeconomic aspects of the shock."

The report goes on to state that governments may implement measures to save such people from the COVID-19 virus, only to see them die of starvation. It is in these conditions that profound consequences of the virus contribute to persecution. As in any humanitarian crisis (sickness, famine, storms, earthquakes, etc.), it has become predictable for persecutors to exploit the situation by inflicting additional suffering on those they already oppose – our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ and other religious minorities. Marginalized and oppressed individuals are especially vulnerable to mistreatment during calamities. So, while these humanitarian crises do not always lead directly to the persecution of Christians, they are far too often precursors to higher levels of persecution.

### ***In regions where VOMC ministers, are Christians more vulnerable than others during COVID-19?***

Yes, millions of Christians live in countries where hostile governments or religious leaders persistently endorse persecution through the denial of rights, services (including healthcare), and economic opportunities. Examples of this are most vividly seen in countries with large, readily identifiable Christian populations such as Pakistan, India and China. VOMC is aware of, and has verified, many cases of COVID-19-related persecution in these nations. And the examples we do know about are indicative of the multiplied thousands of unknown cases represented among the

millions of Christians residing within these nations who are likewise at risk of being persecuted during the crisis.

Converts to Christianity are especially vulnerable as they face even greater pressures to reconvert and be restored to their families and communities. They are promised the immediate care needed should they comply. These Christians, having experienced the pain and trauma of social isolation because of their conversion, find yet another level of suffering.

### ***How should VOMC respond to COVID-19-based persecution?***

Our first response must be that of prayer. Download VOMC's "How to Pray" guide and learn how you can effectively pray for our persecuted family

(<https://vomcanada.com/images/download/how-to-pray.pdf>).

Our second response reflects the urgent need for persecuted believers to receive physical support through relief initiatives. As VOMC cannot alone respond to all of the critical needs resulting from this global pandemic (the same applies to other humanitarian organizations), open communication and coordination with our international ministry partners is vital in achieving effective solutions to specific cases in the persecuted world. As requests for emergency aid become evident, VOMC's international team is prayerfully considering to what degree relief can be provided in areas where credible partners are readily mobilized for commissioned service. Information on VOMC's *Relief and Development Fund* can be found at <https://vomcanada.com/special-funds.htm>.

### ***A final word on COVID-19-based persecution...***

As persecution does not take a back seat to COVID-19, we believe that it's necessary for VOMC to continue raising a voice on behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. We, who reside in western nations, cannot allow COVID-19 to turn our eyes inward. For ways in which you can participate in God's ministry by raising a voice for the persecuted, download VOMC's *Advocacy Guide*: <https://vomcanada.com/images/download/advocacyguide.pdf>.

In the words of a persecuted Christian from Afghanistan, "COVID-19 is just another difficulty on our plate to deal with...." The mission of VOMC has not changed with the onset of COVID-19. We aim to glorify God by serving those who are suffering for righteousness, and thus fulfill His call for all Christians to remember the persecuted. COVID-19 is not a unique form of persecution, but yet another means in which the enemy seeks to devour His church. Let us, therefore, continue to live out Hebrews 13:3:

*"Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them,  
and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body."*