

# Christian persecution not just happening overseas — many in US targeted for their faith, too



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When it comes to religious persecution, it's easy to think that it's an issue far away from home. As Americans, we take for granted many freedoms that are still contested in other areas of the world.

Our founding fathers thought that the right to believe freely was so integral to a free society, that they codified it in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. This right serves as the cornerstone and bedrock of our Republic. By protecting one's right to believe, this right establishes the autonomous individual as the most fundamental embodiment of freedom.

We're so privileged by this law that we don't give the idea of religious oppression much thought. This was certainly the case with me until Lydia Pogu and Joy Bishara began attending Southeastern University and I heard their story.

Joy and Lydia were studying at a boarding school in the Chibok region of Nigeria.

On the night of April 14, 2014, their school was attacked by the Boko Haram—a rogue Islamic extremist group in Nigeria whose goal is to stop Christian and western education in the country. The insurgents kidnapped Joy and Lydia, along with several hundred other girls from the boarding school, loading them onto trucks at gunpoint. While the truck was driving off, Joy, Lydia, and several other girls jumped off the back of the truck and ran through the bush. They were picked up by a kind stranger and were driven back to their families in Chibok. With the help of a human rights group in Virginia, the Jubilee Campaign, Joy and Lydia and several other girls were able to come to the United States to finish high school and are now studying at different universities across America, including Southeastern University.

The truth is, persecution is more prevalent and geographically dispersed than any other time in history. Approximately 215 million Christians worldwide experience very high to extreme persecution. Newsweek reported in January 2018 that “the persecution and genocide of Christians across the world is worse today than at any time in history.”

In Egypt, Christian Coptic women are targeted, kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam and sold as domestic servants where they are sexually exploited and physically abused. Just last year, drug cartels killed 23 Christian leaders in Mexico and four in Colombia specifically for their faith and standing up against the cartel’s criminal activity in the country. On Mother’s Day in Indonesia, an Islamic family launched a suicide bombing attack on three churches, killing 10 people and severely injuring another 40. The Christian governor of Jakarta was found guilty of blasphemy, forced to step down from his office and sentenced to jail time for his faith.

Additionally, the Chinese government has started a systematic campaign to destroy church buildings and all Christianity-related structures, beginning with the demolition of one of the largest churches in China where over 50,000 Christians worshipped every week.

The ailments of religious persecution are especially troubling in Nigeria, home of Lydia and Joy.

In 2017 alone, the killings of Christians in Nigeria increased more than 62 percent. In the city of Onitsha in southern Nigeria, a radical gunman attacked a

church killing 12 of its members and injuring an additional 18. In the Nigerian state of Kebbi, church leaders were arrested and sentenced to three years in prison. This arrest happened after local Muslim vigilantes had violently disrupted worship at their church, claiming church leaders built it without a permit. Raids conducted by suspected Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen killed 45 people, mostly Christians.

Now, the threat of religious persecution is rearing its head in the United States. Recently, Sens. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, and Kamala Harris, D-Calif., posed snaring questions to Brian Buescher, an Omaha-based lawyer nominated by President Trump to sit on the United States District Court for the District of Nebraska. As a Catholic, Buescher adheres to traditional religious values. Yet, he was subjected to scrutiny and specifically targeted for his faith in order to cast doubt on his ability to serve in public office.

### **CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION CONTINUES TO RISE; WOMEN MOST EXPLOITED, GROUP SAYS**

At campuses throughout the country, outspoken Christians are regularly demeaned, debased and targeted for their beliefs. Academics, social groups, and college organizations regularly ridicule Christians by calling them hateful, bigoted, and privileged, among other labels. They conveniently forget that Christians have historically been among the most persecuted religious groups in the world and are still persecuted at ever-increasing levels throughout countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Incidents like these demonstrate how Christians are being targeted in the United States for adhering to their values. When will we realize that the threat of religious persecution isn't as "far away from home" as we may think? We need to take a stand and be vocal proponents of our rights, starting today.

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