

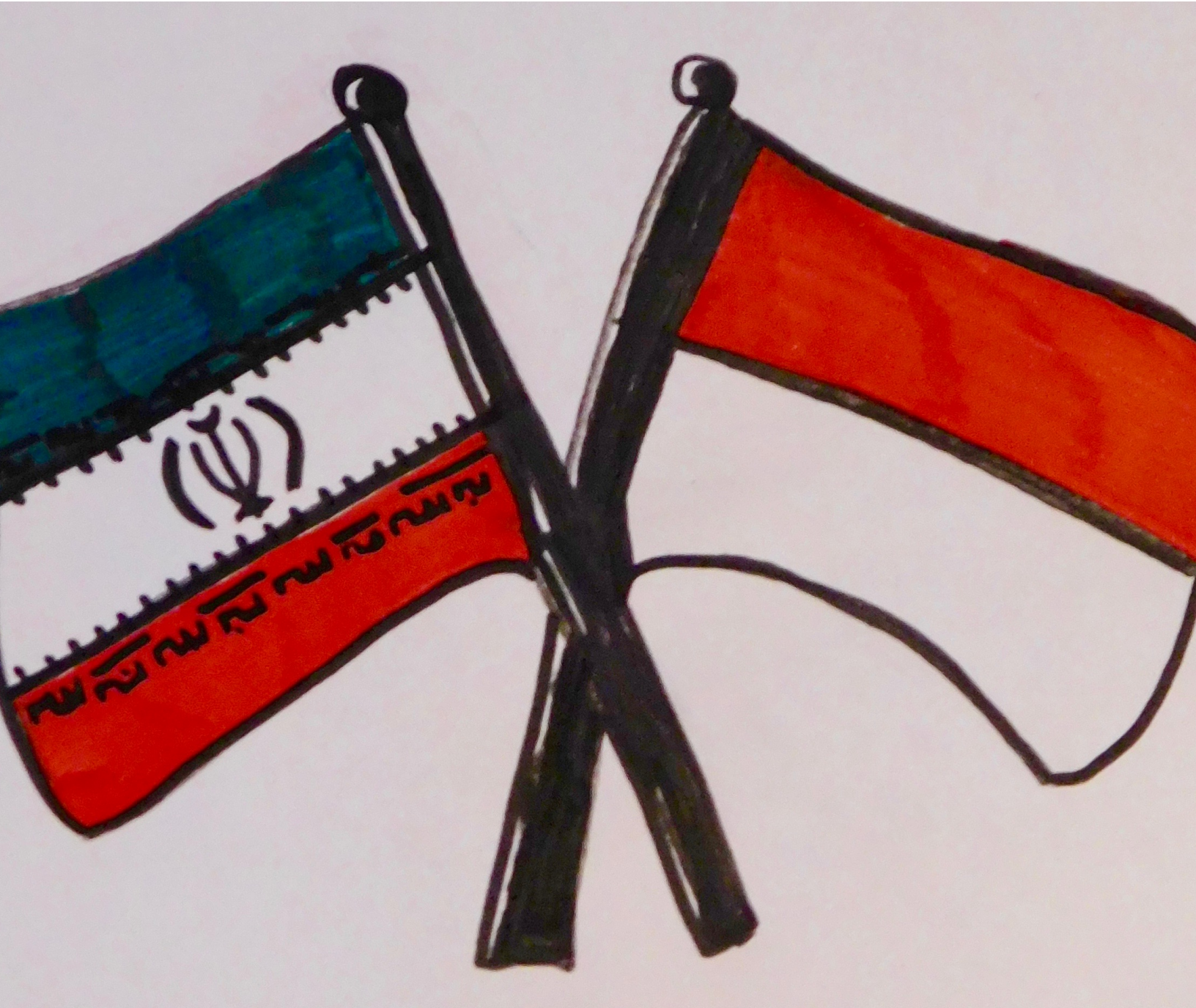


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# THE SOUNDING MEGAPHONE

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Issue 4, February 2018







Iran and Indonesia are two countries with a violent history. What foundation have they built their societies on? What has been the result of having such a foundation in these countries? What can be done to encourage a better way? I hope that you will read with interest this month's issue and become involved in calling for change.

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**THE SOUNDING MEGAPHONE MAGAZINE  
ISSUE 4**

**THE HISTORY AND PRESENT THREAT  
OF IRAN**

*I, a useless sinner, have believed in this beloved person [Jesus Christ] and His ways and miracles recorded in the Gospel, and I have committed my life into His hands. Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ. Therefore I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honor of His holy name, that I am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus, my Lord, and enter His kingdom sooner, the place where the elect of God enter everlasting life.*

*Mehdi Dibaj 1A*

The above quote was from the Iranian Christian Mehdi Dibaj as he spoke in his defence before an Islamic court in 1993. Dibaj was from a Muslim family but had converted to Christian faith. He was arrested in the early 1980s and was convicted of apostasy in December 1993. At that time, he was given a death sentence. Another Christian, Bishop Haik Hovsepian, was determined to spread news to the world of the injustice that had been done to Dibaj. His campaign to defend Dibaj resulted in Dibaj being released on January 16, 1994. Three weeks later, Hovsepian disappeared and, not long after, his death was reported to his family. Five months later, Dibaj was abducted and killed on his way to his daughter's birthday celebration. Hovsepian and Dibaj are two of many Christians who have been killed for practising their faith in Iran.

What is the history of Iran and what has its relationship been with Christians throughout the centuries? To understand Iran, it is helpful to know some things about the precursor civilization that it rose out of. In the early centuries of Christianity, many Christians migrated from the Roman Empire to Persia. Christianity spread rapidly and many thousands of Christians could be found throughout Persia. However, the dominant religion of this area was Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrian Persian kings sometimes allowed a measure of religious freedom and at other times enacted mass genocide against Christian believers. Some have estimated that as many as 190,000 Christians were slaughtered in Persia's great persecution. However, Persian monarchs could not stamp Christianity out of their empire. Realizing this, Shah Chosroes I, who reigned from 531 to 579 A.D., implemented a system which would bring Christians under servitude and this system was the *Melet*. Under the *Melet*, Christians were granted limited freedom but were relegated to a second-class status below that of Zoroastrians. They may even have been required to dress a certain way to show their demoted class.

The *Melet* system would not only be applied by Zoroastrian monarchs but, also, by their successors, the Muslims. Muslim Arab invaders swept the Persian Empire in a series of attacks, beginning in 633 and ending in 644, and quite easily conquered it. Muslims ruthlessly established Islam and Sharia law throughout Persia. In their system, they chose to keep the *Melet*. Christians, more than ever, were oppressed under the, now, Muslim *Melet* system. Christians were required to pay special taxes that Muslims were not required to pay. There are accounts of Christians having to pay these taxes in public while being struck on the head or

neck. In some areas, Christians were ordered to wear a certain type of girdle around their waists to distinguish them from Muslims. They were also required to have special haircuts and were required to ride their horses on the side of the roads, and not in the centre, which was reserved for Muslims. Over time, the heavy taxation of Christians led to them falling further and further down the social ladder into poverty.

Persia became a part of the much larger Ottoman Empire. The Empire was ruled by powerful Muslim Sultans who were feared throughout the world for their violent military conquests. Although the Ottoman Empire rose to a great height of power in the Dark and Middle Ages, by the time of the close of the 19th century it was collapsing. Corruption on a massive scale combined with weak rulership created a situation of great instability. As the Ottoman Empire was imploding, ruling authorities unleashed horrible genocides against non-Muslims, such as Christians. It is estimated that in 1915 the Turks murdered 600,000 people in a wave of persecution. Many Church leaders were arrested and charged with treason. Some had their heads squeezed by torture devices and thousands of children were buried alive in large ditches. Some Christians had red-hot iron crosses used to brand them on their chests and backs. Women and children were often raped before being murdered.

As the Ottoman Empire was collapsing, the presence of European powers, especially England, was felt throughout the region as these areas were largely brought under British rule. Great tensions arose between the traditional Muslim population and modern Persian leaders who were attempting to modernize Persia. Leaders, such as Muzaffar, enacted democratic reforms which gave more

control to the people and limited the power of the Shahs. Reforms were proposed which would grant equal rights to non-Muslim citizens, such as Christians. However, such a proposals infuriated large numbers of Muslims who were benefiting from their preferential status. A parliament was formed. In 1925, a new leader, Shah Reza, came to power and quickly began implementing a policy of westernization. He required that judges obtain a law degree from secular universities rather than from Islamic authorities. He also cut substantial revenue away from Muslim mullahs. The loss of financial support to the mullahs meant a greater equalization among all religions instead of promoting only Islam. Such reforms greatly angered large numbers of Persians. Reza Shah changed the name of Persia to Iran in 1935. In 1941, Reza resigned and his son, Mohammed Reza, took his place. He would be followed by Muhammed Mossedeq. Shah Mossedeq worked very hard to remove British influence from Iran. He was successful in pushing out Britain's Anglo-Iranian oil companies. However, Iranians were soon in a situation of crisis, not having the necessary skills and training to run the oil industry themselves. In response to this crisis, Mossedeq requested help from the United States and relations with the United States were strengthened. Sentiment against the United States was very strong among many Iranians and the country seemed to be a pressure cooker of tensions.

One man who represented the sentiments of traditional Iranian Muslims was Ruhollah Khomeini. A devout Muslim, and even a descendant of Mohammed himself, Khomeini dreamed of a forced Islamic state. He opposed the Shah's efforts of reform. The Shah had purchased portions of land from wealthy owners and resold it to

peasants at affordable rates. This upset some of the financial power base of the Muslim Sharia clergy. The Shah also tried to reform society through health care and by allowing women the right to vote. Khomeini opposed these reforms as being un-Islamic. As tensions rose, Khomeini was even arrested and, in 1964, was ordered into exile. From Turkey and France, Khomeini was very active. His sermons were brought back into Iran and distributed.

Khomeini was successful in inciting Iranians to strike and this paralyzed the economy. In 1979, the Shah was forced to leave the country. Mayhem resulted. Mob violence swept the streets and vigilantes raided police stations and even military bases. On February 1, 1979, Khomeini returned to Iran and declared; "This parliament and government are illegal. If they continue, we will arrest them. I will shut their mouths. And I will appoint a government with the support of the Iranian people." <sup>1</sup> B Elections were held and 90% of the vote went to elect a religious Islamic government. Khomeini wasted no time in creating an Islamic state with Islamic laws. Along with this came a wave of persecution upon the Christian Church. A number of Christian leaders were found having been shot or having had their throats slashed.

Khomeini and Iran faced a major challenge when they were attacked by Saddam Hussein. Hussein received military support from the United States and western powers. Countless Iranians died between 1980 and 1988 in years of war between Iran and Iraq. In this war, a new form of martyr arose. They were known as the *Basiji*. The *Basiji* were teenage boys who were recruited and sent to run across the war zone and detonate land mines as they ran. It was a suicide mission that they were on. The *Basiji* popularized suicidal *jihad*. Iran's battle with Iraq drained its resources significantly

and, in 1988, Khomeini accepted the United Nations ceasefire resolution to end the war.

Khomeini decided to launch a new Islamic world order. He and his clerics wrote into their constitution; "All Muslims shall be considered as one single nation and the Islamic Republic of Iran shall make its general policy on the basis of coalition and unity of all Muslim people and shall constantly make every endeavor to realize the political, economic and cultural unity of the world of Islam." <sup>2</sup> Khomeini has also said; "This movement is for the sake of Islam and cannot be limited to one country only. It cannot be limited solely to Islamic countries either." <sup>3</sup> These quotes together show Khomeini's determination for Iran to gain political, cultural and economic control of both Muslim lands and non-Islamic countries. These endeavours greatly threaten human rights and freedoms wherever they are implemented. Khomeini's rule led to a tremendous persecution of Christians in Iran.

Two important military arms of the Iranian government arose under Khomeini. The *Revolutionary Council* was a group of Muslim mullahs who were split off and became the *Revolutionary Guard Corps*. They are considered to be an elite military unit. The second military arm is *Hezbollah*. This is a terrorist organization based primarily in Lebanon but trained and organized by Iran's Revolutionary Guard. In 1985, Hezbollah published in a manifesto that listed its goal of "Israel's final departure from Lebanon as a prelude to its final obliteration." <sup>4</sup> Hezbollah leaders repeatedly called for the destruction of the state of Israel and for the spread of the rule of Islam. They have been successful in mobilizing demonstrations with hundreds of thousands



of participants. They receive financial support, military training and weapons from Iran. It is estimated that Iran has been funding Hezbollah with between 60 – 100 million U.S. dollars per year. Others have estimated that this could be as high as 200 million dollars a year. With this kind of backing, Hezbollah has created a network that stretches across the Middle East and into the Americas. Hezbollah is very much entrenched in the communist country of Venezuela. Somewhere between 2005 to 2011, Iran and Venezuela have conducted over forty billion dollars in trade. <sup>5</sup> Branching out of Venezuela, Hezbollah has a network which stretches throughout South America, Central America and Mexico. Intelligence reports indicate that Hezbollah has been involved in crossing the very permeable border between Mexico and the United States. The extent of their network in the United States is not fully known.

Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has publicly stated in an address to Khomeini:

*Our dear Iman (Khomeini) you stated that the arrogant powers of the world must be annihilated. Thanks for the continuity of your illuminating rule and thanks to God the countdown to America's sinister power has begun.* <sup>6</sup>

He also said of Islam; “It will conquer all the mountaintops of the world.” <sup>7</sup>

The world community is very concerned about Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology. Atomic inspections in Vienna have confirmed that Iran is enriching uranium. This may be used for the development of nuclear weapons. It is not only of concern that in the coming years Iran may have inter-continental ballistic missiles, armed with nuclear warheads, but also that they may

develop a suitcase-sized nuclear bomb which they could transport and plant by means of their well-established Hezbollah network. They have also tested firing scud missiles from a barge in the Caspian Sea. Many believe this is with the intention of firing missiles at America from barges off the American coast.

Presently, Iran continues to persecute Christian believers. Iran's former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, announced to thirty provincial governors; “I will stop Christianity in this country.” <sup>8</sup>

Iran's current President (at the time of the writing of this magazine) is [Hassan Rouhani](#), who came to power in 2013. The position of the United States for years was that Iran must give up its nuclear program. The U.S. and many other nations commenced crippling sanctions on Iran. President Obama eventually settled on a deal with Iran that the sanctions would be lifted in exchange for promises that Iran would make reductions to its nuclear program. Iran agreed that for a period of 10 years it would reduce its number of centrifuges and it would not [enrich uranium](#) above 3.67% purity. Iran also promised to reduce its stockpiles of enriched uranium. [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) and many other world leaders claimed that this was a bad deal. The Iran deal remains very unpopular with the current U.S. administration and we will see if the United States continues to hold to its terms.

Neither Ahmadinejad, [Rouhani](#), Khomeini, the Revolutionary Guard or Hezbollah will ever bring Christianity to an end in Iran. However, they may continue to inflict terrible persecution on Iran's Christians, terrible terrorist attacks on neighbouring countries and, potentially, future nuclear strikes on western nations. The Iranian

regime daily lives out its dream of Islamic jihad and is developing the technology to implement Islamic jihad on an unprecedentedly massive scale. The problem still exists and the regime's resolve hardens even more. All the while the Iranian government, at least so far, seems to get away with boasting of their dream of annihilating America.

Shawn Stevens

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1.A. Mehdi Dibaj quoted in Riley K. Smith, *Finding Hope in the Axis of Evil* (Bartlesville, Ok: Living Sacrifice Book Co., 2009), 89.

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2. Ibid., 80.

3. *Iranium*, Alex Traiman, Producer. Raskolnikov. Internet Video.

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## THE HISTORY AND PRESENT THREAT OF IRAN

### IRAN – HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

#### **IRAN – HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE**

In Jerusalem, a monument titled, “Yad Vashem,” honors the six million Jews and others who were murdered in the Nazi holocaust. It reminds us of the evil that is present and rampant in our world, which causes human beings to disregard other human beings. Today, the Jews face a threat every bit as great as that of Hitler's Nazi Germany. That threat is violent Islamic ideology. In many ways, at the head of this threat is the government of Iran.

Since the Islamic revolution, Iran has ended all diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel. It does not recognize Israel as a country and refers to Israel's government as the “Zionist Regime.” It calls Israel's land “Occupied Territories.” Iran has pursued a nuclear program and funds terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas which are openly hostile towards Israel. On February 2010, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said; “Israel is going downhill toward decline and fall and God is willing its obliteration is certain.”<sup>2</sup> Such words are merely an attempt to intimidate Israel.

Israelis are not the only ones threatened by Iran's regime. Christians within Iran have suffered greatly under the persecution of the government. In 2011, over seventy Christians were arrested in Iran as part of a well-coordinated strike. Most of these believers were part of a house church movement. Many, or all, have now been released. Iran's supreme

leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a speech on October 19, 2010, declared that house churches deceive youthful Muslims and threaten Muslim faith.<sup>2A</sup> He also said that house churches were Islam's enemies. In Iran, Christians are said to make up less than 1% of the population. Since Christmas 2010, two hundred Christians have been incarcerated in Iran. If an Iranian is found to have converted from Islam to Christianity, under Iranian law, he may be sentenced to death. In 2010, the Assize Court of the Iranian province of Gilan officially charged Pastor Youcef Nardarkhani with apostasy. Nardarkhani was born in a Muslim family but converted to Christian faith. He was sentenced to death. The sentence was appealed. On June 28, 2011, the Supreme Court in Iran upheld Nardarkhani's sentence of death by hanging. After 3 years of incarceration he has been freed.

On September 4, 2010, Iranian Pastor Vahik Abrahamian and his wife, Sonia, along with two other friends, were arrested. They have been held in solitary confinement, suffering physical and psychological abuse. They have been accused of propagating Christianity as well as having contact with exiled persons and opposing the Republic of Iran. They have endured intense interrogation. Vahik is a dual citizen, also holding citizenship of the Netherlands. Fortunately, Sonia was released first and, now, Vahik has been as well.

Saeed Abedini is a former Muslim who converted to Christian faith in 2000. He has been involved in orphanages in Iran. He was arrested in 2012 in Iran and charged with threatening national security. He was sentenced to eight years and was in Evan Prison. He has endured torture and separation from his wife and children. Fortunately he is now released.



Pray for Christians who today are suffering for their faith in Iran. Pray for the Christians in Iran, that they would be able to forgive their persecutors. It is challenging for any of us to forgive the smallest acts of injustice perpetrated upon us. How much more challenging would it be to forgive horrific human rights atrocities perpetrated upon oneself or one's family. Yet, Jesus Christ forgave even to this extent. Concerning Jesus as He was being crucified; "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots." (Luke 23.34 KJV). To follow Jesus in this kind of forgiveness is the greatest witness that a Christian can show to an unbelieving world. Forgiveness can be given but, with it, we must call for human rights reforms.

Canadian/Iranian relations have been deteriorating for years. In 1996, both countries exchanged ambassadors with each other. Since late 2007, both countries have reduced their representation in each other's capitals. Canada had limited its contact with Iran and disallowed direct air links between these countries. Canada has been deeply involved in the United Nations's handling of human rights abuses in Iran. In 2005, Canada had informed Iran that its official contact with Iran would be limited to four topics :

*1 - the human rights situation in Iran; 2 - Iran's nuclear program and its lack of respect for its non-proliferation obligations; 3 - the case of Mrs. Zahra Kazemi who was killed in an Iranian prison by regime officials in 2003 and; 4 - Iran's role in the region. 3*

Canada had broken diplomatic ties with Iran.

Canada was in compliance with the United Nations resolution 1803 which mandated enhanced sanctions against Iran. However Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has changed course and lifted most of

Canada's sanctions against Iran.

Canada's must return to a strong stand against Iran's regime. The regime in Iran permits little religious freedom and little opposition to this rule. The threat of the development of Iranian nuclear weapons is very real and demands international pressure being kept on this regime. Innocent, conscientious Christian believers are being persecuted and are enduring horrible treatments. Iranian officials are abusing the power they have and applying force to try to dissuade Christians from following their faith. Iran funds terrorism and, by doing so, perpetrates enormous suffering in our world. May Canada return to taking a hard line against Iran's regime and demand change.

Shawn Stevens

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[http://www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story\\_ID=MzMw](http://www.persecution.com/public/newsroom.aspx?story_ID=MzMw) "Iran :

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3. <http://www.canadianinternational.gc.ca> By posting this letter I am not claiming that the Canadian Government endorses this website.

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## INDONESIA – HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE

The Indonesian government has an embassy in Ottawa, as well as consulates in Toronto and Vancouver. Canada has worked towards the economic development of Indonesia through programs of developmental assistance. Canada considers Indonesia a valuable, growing trade market for goods, services and investments. Tens of thousands of Indonesians are employed by Canadian firms existing within their country. Canadian bilateral trade with Indonesia, in 2016, totalled 3.1 billion dollars. We have a trade deficit with Indonesia. Canadian imports from Indonesia in 2016 totalled 1.6 billion dollars.

The highest profile case of persecution of a Christian in Indonesia in recent years is that of *Basuki Tjahaja Purnama*, better known by his other name *Ahok*. *Ahok* is a devout Christian and served as a governor in Indonesia. In an election campaign *Ahok* accused his opponents of using the Koran to dissuade Muslims from voting for *Akok* based on his religious beliefs. Because of this accusation *Ahok* was accused of blasphemy and was sentenced to two years in prison in 2017.

Indonesia has strict anti-blasphemy laws which carry a penalty of a maximum of five years in prison.

For many years, Indonesian culture has been hostile towards the practice of Christian faith. One church in Bogor which had been attacked six times since 2008, was threatened by the local government, demanding that they must stop all religious activities. In 2008, local

authorities revoked the church's building permit and sealed the building. The fellowship responded by conducting its services outside the church. Islamic-backed groups have held protests against the church. The congregation has obtained the copy of a letter, written by neighbourhood residents, requesting that the authorities and the police stop the church's religious activities. Such persecution is common in Indonesia. The supreme court of Indonesia ruled that the church should be allowed back into their building but the local government still won't allow it. From what I can tell by our sources, since 2008 (time of this publication 2017) the church is still denied use of their building and have been told that they can reopen only if they allow a mosque to be put on the same property.

Is Canada is concerned about religious violence, whether it be in our country or abroad. Blasphemy laws have facilitated religious violence in Indonesia. It is time for Canada to begin applying diplomatic pressure to see blasphemy laws in Indonesia ended. Religious freedom will never truly be realized in Indonesia unless such laws are removed from their legal system.

Incidents like the one mentioned, of *Ahok* must be raised by our government with the government of Indonesia and intervention sought.

Canada has commended Indonesia for its commitment to fostering tolerance and protecting religious freedom. It may be time to revoke such a commendation.

Shawn Stevens

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^ [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) Al 'Afghani, Mohamad Mova (3 December 2007). "[Ruling against blasphemy unconstitutional](#)". [The Jakarta Post](#). Retrieved 2009-06-20.

^ [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#) [f](#) [g](#) [h](#) [i](#) [j](#) [k](#) [l](#) [m](#)

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