

Shining a light into dark corners of persecution

As voices cry out for
human rights, persecution
of Christians increases

“While killings often command international attention, many of the most chilling tactics used to suppress religious freedom unfold quietly—through arrests, detentions, and abductions. In authoritarian regimes and lawless regions alike, these acts of intimidation serve as sharp-edged tools to fracture communities, silence dissent, and remind the faithful of the invisible lines they must not cross. —Kyle Wisdom in the International Journal of Religious Freedom

A BRIEF READER ON persecution of Christians today.

1 in 7

Christians today face persecution through acts of **violence, intimidation, deprivation, and discrimination.**

In 2024, nearly
4,476

Christians were killed
for their faith.

4,700

were **detained**
or **imprisoned.**

59 countries

have “**high**” or “**very high**” religious restrictions, including China and India, showing the biggest surge in **religious hostility** in over a decade.

In 2022 and 2023, **713**

were arrested in **China**,
364 in **Eritrea**, and
almost a **hundred** in **Nicaragua.**

From Nigeria to Yemen to North Korea, and in many other countries,

380 million

Christians are subject to **high levels of persecution** each year.

Faith under fire.

Kyle Wisdom, WEA’s Director of Global Advocacy, points out that these arrests of Christians are rarely about justice. Instead, arrest is used as an instrument of psychological control. When arrests are unpredictable, the very threat of arrest creates trauma, not only for those arrested but for all Christians in the geographic area.

“No matter who drives persecution or the motives behind it, converts to Christianity are bearing the brunt of persecution all over the world, across all categories of drivers and engines. People are converting to Christianity in countries where religion plays a major role in daily life...Often in these countries, established churches...do not dare to support converts or even have contact with them, since they are perceived as apostates and enemies of society.”

—International Journal for Religious Freedom

Persecution of
Christians is
higher than it
has been at any
time since Jesus
launched his
church.



Why is WEA’s Office of Advocacy at the forefront?

Of the 2.5 billion Christians in the world today, the evangelical community comprises one-quarter. Since 1960, our community has grown from 90 million to over 650 million, giving it both size and global presence to be a representative.

- Formed in 1846, the WEA is the largest world association of Evangelicals.
- Its global network includes over 140 National Alliances in 9 Regional Alliances.
- Linked to major denominations, evangelical NGOs, mission agencies and schools of learning, WEA is often a global voice speaking on their behalf.

Advocacy with Impact

Evangelicals have no other central organization to represent them as the WEA does, offering its voice, connections, understanding and courage to defend, advocate, and engage.

In 1997, WEA was granted **Special Consultative Status** at the UN, giving WEA’s Office of Advocacy a rightful place at the global table, respecting the role our advocacy plays in securing human rights.

Even though WEA recognizes the challenges and missteps of the United Nations it matters that Evangelicals be at the global table dealing with persecution.

- The UN is the only place in the world where 193 sovereign states come together.
- It is where independent experts – as mandated by the UN’s Human Rights Council – report and advise on human rights.
- Every 4 ½ years, the human rights record of each country is reviewed. This is called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Here WEA speaks out, working with our National Alliances, raising human rights issues of concern.
- In both New York and Geneva, we meet face to face with ambassadors.
- There is no other place in the world where we can meet, both privately and publicly, with high-level government leaders regarding serious violations of human rights and religious liberty.



Here is how it works

- A.** Geneva is the hub for the United Nations focus on human rights where its Human Rights Council holds three sessions a year, each one lasting about a month. WEA makes oral and written statements to delegates from all UN member states, and it also hosts side events, inviting speakers to highlight their experiences of persecution.
- B.** Every member country is reviewed on their human rights record every 4.5 years, in what is called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Here we submit our concerns, working closely with national alliances where persecution is taking place. The goal is to get countries to agree to end persecution.
- C.** We engage directly with diplomats. Our key diplomat, Gaetan Roy, works one-to-one with ambassadors finding solutions. Janet Epp Buckingham, director of the Office of Advocacy, engages with human rights officers in Western embassies, working on strategies to press countries violating religious freedom.
- D.** We train national alliances in countries where violations are taking place, including the documenting of violations and making known those issues to government and the public.

3-Year Plan

- **Train National Alliances** on how to do advocacy: documenting, connecting with government officials and going public.
- **Expand our presence** in Geneva, alerting governments that when they close churches, marginalize or persecute Christians, this will be made public.
- **Bring fresh and credible solutions** from the field to UN staff and diplomatic missions.
- **Invest in younger and emerging leaders:** The Geneva Human Rights Experience brings emerging advocacy leaders from national alliances to Geneva for two weeks to shadow staff, meet key UN leaders and return to their countries better equipped.



Budget

The Office of Advocacy has currently a budget of US\$270,000. It is underwritten by churches and missions in Switzerland and by two family Canadian donors. The plan is to increase the budget to \$350,000 to expand the role of the communication specialist to full-time and add a part-time administrative assistant.

Does it work?

This is long-term work, and while some results may come quickly, this is a marathon and, most of all, a work of the Spirit. It is difficult to draw direct lines from our work to its success. We are also careful not to claim we alone were responsible for the change, for our work is collaborative.

We do look for specific results, but this is a process of building trust and gaining opportunities within the UN and among country representatives. And we find ways to build confidence within National Alliances to engage their governments as they advocate for religious freedom.

How it works in practice:

Examples of current files

Rohingya Christian granted refugee status

Our report on the plight of Rohingya Christians helped a refugee go free. In early 2025, The Geneva Advocacy Office presented the Special Rapporteur with an advocacy submission called “Freedom of religion or belief and migrants, IDPs, and refugees.” This included a report on the persecution of Rohingya Christians in Myanmar, where most Rohingya are Muslims.

In June, a Christian Rohingya refugee in the US was detained by ICE. His asylum application was in process, so he was given an opportunity to have a hearing. Our report was instrumental in the decision to grant him refugee status in the US so he will not be deported to Bangladesh or Myanmar, where he would face serious persecution.

Rwanda

Rwanda has cracked down on and closed churches. In 2024, the government closed 70% of churches, citing regulatory violations. Our staff recently met with the leaders of the Rwanda alliance to work out a practical strategy to get churches re-opened, and that strategy is an important first step in reversing government policy.

The WEA regional alliance leaders went with the Rwanda alliance leaders to meet government officials in Rwanda. We drafted a submission to the upcoming UN Universal Periodic Review process to put external pressure on the government. In our partnering with the Rwandan alliance, this two-edged approach is pressing the government to reconsider its alarming and destructive policies.

Nepal

Nepal is officially secular but with a strong Hindu presence, including the Hindutva nationalism of India which spills over the borders into Nepal, resulting in Hindus in Nepal regularly trying to restrict Christians. This includes an anti-conversion law, resulting in Christian Nepalese regularly reported to police, harassed or arrested.

Our strategy was to help write a “Standard Operating Procedure” document that would be used to train police in Nepal on what the government allows pastors and missionaries to do. This strategy involved the Nepal evangelical alliance leaders drafting the SOP. We are working with Nepalese diplomats to get this adopted by the government.



How it works in practice:

Examples of current files (continued)

Eritrea

Since 2002, the Eritrean government (which is about equally split between Muslims and Christians) recognizes only four religious groups, excluding evangelicals, which has resulted in the leadership of the Eritrea evangelical alliance being detained and held without charges. Without legal standing Christians are detained and released months or years later, usually for holding “illegal meetings.”

We co-sponsored with the Pentecostal World Fellowship a submission (in late 2023) pointing out seven imprisoned evangelical leaders. Eritrea denied this, so our submission was moved to our African regional secretary for north-east Africa, Elias Taban, based in South Sudan. The South Sudan government gave Taban a diplomatic passport to elevate his status, opening doors which otherwise may be closed.

Pakistan

In a terrible riot in August 2023, 25 churches were burned in Jaranwala, Pakistan along with many Christian homes. The WEA's Geneva Advocacy Office engaged the Pakistani ambassador in Geneva, presenting photos and videos and asking the chief Imam in Lahore and the ambassador for assistance. Following this, Gaetan Roy, our ambassador, made three visits to Pakistan, first to help the Pakistan national alliance build a unifying body by assembling 75 Pakistani leaders.

Then, along with the Imam, he formed “peace committees” made up of Christians and Muslims in some 21 communities, training them how to diffuse tensions before they erupt into violence. In addition, Ambassador Roy met with and addressed 700 Muslim leaders as part of our work to help mitigate violence against Christians in Pakistan, proposing ways to reduce persecution and violence.

To build on this national plan, he gained support from the Pakistan Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony for the creation of peace committees. This initiative has also been supported by European ambassadors to Pakistan, an important step as the EU has a trade agreement with Pakistan which is dependent on Pakistan ensuring human rights compliance. Behind the scenes, these ambassadors put quiet pressure on Pakistan to ensure implementation of processes to protect the Christian minority.



Budget for the Office of Advocacy in Geneva

SPECIAL NOTE TO THE MOULTON FAMILY, REQUESTING SUPPORT

Since 2012, when the WEA established the Geneva Office to the United Nations, it has been generally funded by churches and mission agencies in Switzerland. As persecution increased and Islamic militancy and secular opposition fueled a rise in persecution, WEA took on a more public role on persecution, building its expertise in advocacy.

This special calling of advocacy requires specialized staff, schooled in the law, communications, means of advocacy and diplomacy. Remarkably this global initiative is built around a small staff in Geneva.

In 2022, you, the Moulton family, graciously agreed to underwrite a communication and advocacy specialist, a move that allowed us to increase public awareness and drive home the message that Evangelicals care about people living under persecution. This also gave some backup to the Director so that he/she could engage more with advocacy training and capacity building for national alliances, making our advocacy more effective.

As we look to the coming three years, we envision increasing our competence and effectiveness.

Currently the budget of \$270,000 is largely underwritten by

- \$140,000 by churches and missions in Switzerland
- \$102,000 from Canada.

The new budget includes:

- Expanding the role of the communication and advocacy specialist to full time
- Adding a part-time administrative assistant

2025: \$270,000

2026: \$350,000

2027: \$353,000

2028: \$360,000

Our request to the Mouton family is that we partner together, for the coming three years, with an annual contribution of 125,000. The balance will be obtained through a special campaign to secure the additional funds.

