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Africa: Restrictions on Religion in Global Perspective

Good morning. I would like to begin by thanking Chairman Smith and Ranking Democratic Member Payne for the opportunity to testify this morning. I have been asked to speak specifically on the situation in Africa, and I will summarize relevant findings from an ongoing study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life on global restrictions on religion, generously funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the John Templeton Foundation.¹ The study covers 198 countries and territories, representing more than 99% of the world's population, for the three-year period of July 2006 through June 2009. The study finds that approximately 70% of the world's population lives in countries with high or very high restrictions on religion.

Across the continent of Africa, however, the situation varies.² Restrictions are high or very high in all seven countries³ in North Africa (100%), where a series of popular uprisings are still playing out. In contrast, only nine of the 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (19%) have high or very high restrictions. However, because many of these countries are populous, nearly half of sub-Saharan Africa's population (about 48%) lives in countries with high restrictions. An additional 22% live in the 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa with moderate restrictions, and 30% live in the 26 countries with low restrictions. Some of these restrictions come from the actions or policies of governments, while others come from the hostile actions of people or groups in society.

The 10 countries on the African continent with the highest levels of government restrictions include all seven North African countries plus Eritrea, Mauritania and Somalia. Government restrictions come in various forms, including detentions or imprisonments for religious reasons, which occurred in approximately two-in-five countries globally between mid-2006 and mid-2009. Such detentions, however, were routine in the East African country of Eritrea, where Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, are frequently imprisoned or detained for refusing to do compulsory military service, which is against their religious convictions. Eritrea has the highest

¹ See <http://pewforum.org/Government/Global-Restrictions-on-Religion.aspx>

² See attached Appendix.

³ The seven countries in North Africa are Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco and Western Sahara.

level of government restrictions on the African continent aside from Egypt. Prior to the recent uprising in Egypt, government restrictions on religion were already very high there. By mid-2009, Egypt also joined the 5% of countries with the most intense social hostilities involving religion.

Indeed, restrictions on religion also arise from the hostile actions of people and nongovernmental groups in society.⁴ In Nigeria, for instance, hostilities between Christians and Muslims were on the rise well before the April 2011 presidential election that saw Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the South, defeat Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the North. A series of fatal clashes left hundreds dead and many thousands displaced from their homes. While the conflicts in Nigeria are often triggered by socio-economic or political tensions, in many situations the enemy is identified by his or her religion. Indeed, Nigeria is among the 10 countries in the world with the highest levels of social hostilities involving religion. On the continent of Africa, social hostilities in Nigeria are second only to those in Somalia. In addition to these two countries, social hostilities also are high in Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Comoros, Kenya, Ethiopia, (the Democratic Republic of) Congo and Ghana.

In many cases, religious minorities in a country bear the brunt of abuses associated with government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion. But adherents of the world's two largest religious groups, Christians and Muslims, who together comprise more than half of the global population, were harassed in the largest number of countries around the world.⁵ It is important to note, however, that these data do not measure the severity of the harassment or persecution, so it is not possible to say whether one religious group is harassed or persecuted to a greater or lesser extent than other religious or ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the data are revealing. Over the three-year period studied, incidents of either governmental or social harassment were reported against Christians in a total of 130 countries (66%) and against Muslims in 117 countries (59%). Buddhists and Hindus, who together account for roughly one-fifth of the world's population, faced hostility in fewer places; harassment was reported against Buddhists in 16 countries (8%) and against Hindus in 27 countries (14%).

In proportion to their numbers, some smaller religious groups faced especially widespread hostility. Although Jews comprise less than 1% of the world's population, governmental or social harassment of Jews was reported in 75 countries (38%). Members of other world religions – including ancient faiths such as Zoroastrianism, newer faith groups such as Baha'is and Rastafarians, and localized groups that practice tribal or folk religions – reportedly faced

⁴ There has also been a slight uptick in the level of religion-related terrorism in Africa, with violence occurring in 11 countries (20%), and recruiting activities occurring in an additional 9 countries (17%).

⁵ As of 2010, Muslims made up nearly a quarter (23.4%) of the world's population, according to the Pew Forum's January 2011 report [The Future of the Global Muslim Population](#). The Pew Forum is currently compiling population data on other world religions and intends to publish a series of reports on the demography of religion in 2011-2012. In the meantime, the population figures used here are from the [World Religion Database](#) at Boston University, which estimates that Christians comprise about a third (32.9%) of the world's population.

incidents of harassment in approximately 84 countries (42%), far higher than their share of the global population, estimated to be less than 15%.

Between mid-2006 and mid-2009 on the continent of Africa, one religion or another faced harassment in the majority of countries (47 of the 54, 87%). Government harassment occurred in 41 countries, slightly more than social harassment, which occurred in 37 countries. As with the global situation, Christians and Muslims in Africa were harassed in more countries than other religious groups (39 and 34 countries, respectively). The next most commonly harassed group included members of localized groups that practice tribal or folk religions (23 countries), such as traditional African religions. Also, throughout sub-Saharan Africa there were numerous reports of people being abused by members of society when accused (often wrongly) of practicing black magic or witchcraft. By comparison, Jews were harassed in eight countries in Africa, Hindus in two and Buddhists in one.

Finally, while my testimony has focused on countries in Africa where restrictions on religion and abuses of religious groups are high, more than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa (55%) have low overall restrictions. In Europe, by comparison, 42% of countries have low overall restrictions. And in the Asia-Pacific region, just a third of countries fall in this category. Only the Americas have a larger proportion of countries (86%) with low overall restrictions on religion.

Appendix: Restrictions on Religion in Continental Africa, mid-2009

Country/Territory	Overall Restrictions	Government Restrictions on Religion	Social Hostilities Involving Religion	Region
Egypt	High	Very High	Very High	North Africa
Eritrea	High	Very High	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Algeria	High	High	High	North Africa
Libya	High	High	Moderate	North Africa
Mauritania	High	High	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Sudan	High	High	High	North Africa
Tunisia	High	High	Moderate	North Africa
Somalia	High	High	Very High	Sub-Saharan Africa
Morocco	High	High	Moderate	North Africa
Western Sahara	High	High	Low	North Africa
Nigeria	High	Moderate	Very High	Sub-Saharan Africa
Comoros	High	Moderate	High	Sub-Saharan Africa
Chad	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Zimbabwe	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Uganda	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Kenya	High	Moderate	High	Sub-Saharan Africa
Central African Republic	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Angola	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Ethiopia	High	Moderate	High	Sub-Saharan Africa

Country/Territory	Overall Restrictions	Government Restrictions on Religion	Social Hostilities Involving Religion	Region
Tanzania	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Rwanda	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Madagascar	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Ivory Coast	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Niger	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Equatorial Guinea	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Swaziland	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Zambia	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Congo (D.R.C.)	High	Low	High	Sub-Saharan Africa
Guinea	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Gabon	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Seychelles	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Mauritius	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Djibouti	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Gambia	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
South Africa	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Togo	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Mozambique	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Senegal	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Burkina Faso	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Malawi	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Cameroon	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Mali	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Botswana	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Ghana	High	Low	High	Sub-Saharan Africa
Republic of Congo	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Lesotho	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Liberia	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa
Benin	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Guinea Bissau	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Cape Verde	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Namibia	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Burundi	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Sao Tome and Principe	Low	Low	Low	Sub-Saharan Africa
Sierra Leone	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Sub-Saharan Africa

Source: Preliminary data from a forthcoming report by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011