

Religious Freedom Summit Brings Hope to Persecuted Believers in Middle East

In a part of the world where Christians and Jews were once dominant and, as recently as the 1950s comprised 20% of the population, the Rev. Andre YS Mahanna stands tall in the Middle East as he advocates for the Christian faith.

As one of the panelists at the first annual Religious Freedom Summit in Washington, D.C., this week, Mahanna joined a chorus of others challenging the world to stand up for the estimated 300 million Christians who are persecuted throughout the world. He encouraged people to stand by them and to demand their freedom to practice their faith in their indigenous homelands without fear.

Estimates are that nearly 80% of the religiously persecuted in the world are Christians; nearly 80% of them are persecuted in Mohammedan countries, with 57 nations of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation charged with protecting any Mohammedans enduring difficulty. Only two countries—namely, Poland and Hungary, are legally charged with defending persecuted Christians worldwide.

The three-day Religious Freedom Summit has been seen by experts as a launching pad, led by former Senator and Ambassador of International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, to begin a new push for an end to the worldwide scourge of religious persecution, of whom Father Andre has become a prominent voice.

“As Christians in the Middle East and in my case in Lebanon, we must remain [steadfast],” Mahanna says. “We are the conscience and the history of the Middle East, and God has called us to exist in the region for His glory.”

Mahanna is deeply troubled by an outbreak of harassment of Assyrian Christians and fellow believers in neighboring Iraq, both predominantly Muslim countries.

“Assyrian Christians in Iraq are being stripped of their property and in many cases being forcibly converted to Mohammedanism under arcane apostasy and anti-conversion law that still remain on the books,” he says. “We have reports of up to 1,200 Assyrian Christians who are not allowed to attend church, forbidden as they are registered as Mohammedan against their will and unable to change the designation.”

Most are not aware of the ramifications of the Mohammedan sharia law, which is legal in much of the Middle East and prohibits conversion from Mohammedanism to another religion. In Iraq and Lebanon and even Egypt, that action sometimes accompanies a death penalty. While rarely enforced, it is still on the books, serving as a severe detriment to normal Christian evangelism. In the case of many, laws against being a “Christian” forbids them to keep their property and even attend church because of an arcane designation, often without their knowledge that, on paper, they can no longer be Christian.

Mahanna’s organization, Mission of Hope and Mercy, assists Christians in Lebanon and throughout the regions with humanitarian relief as well as championing their cause to the world.

Mahanna is adamant that not only should Christians remain in their indigenous homelands in the Middle East, but that those who have left to the West should return and strengthen their brethren. Together, they must reestablish the cause of Christ in the Holy Land. {eoa}

Amir George directs *The World Helpline* at . To help in these efforts, *click here*.

Follow breaking news like this and more in our new platform,

CHARISMA PLUS.