

Why The Western Church Is Ignoring This Biblical Mandate

*Editors Note: This is a next in a series of speech texts from last Friday's conference at the United Nations titled, "Not Peace but a Sword: The Persecution of Christians in the Middle East as a Threat to International Peace and Security." Here's **Tom Mullins**, the founding pastor of Christ Fellowship Church.*

Recently, one of our team members came back from Kurdistan where he had an encounter with a refugee woman who had walked for over two days, trying to escape her persecutors. 27 members of her family had died at their hands, and here she was desperate, frightened, and homeless.

His story reminded me of a trip I took to Tirana (TEER-AH-NAH) Albania back in 1999 during the Kosovo crisis. Our team partnered with a local church there to feed 5,000 refugees and to build needed shelters.

These women's stories, experienced years apart, represent the ongoing battle of religious persecution our brothers and sisters around the world are waging every year. More than 100 million Christians are suffering today for their faith. Do we even comprehend the magnitude of that statistic? Literally, millions of people that are being displaced from their homes and are wandering in the wilderness looking for a way to survive – and for someone to rescue them.

They have no voice so that's why it's imperative that we lift up our voice.

In this hour, this grave hour, we are witnessing the persecution of men and women of faith globally around the

world at levels like we have never seen in the history of the world. It is absolutely imperative that we rise up and that we speak out.

Knox Thames, the Director of Policy and Research for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, recently stated that “75% of the global population lives in countries restricting the free and peaceful practice of religion. In this context, Christians suffer relentlessly from repression, violence, and persecution. But they are not alone – persons of different faiths, and no faith, are also targeted because of their religious beliefs or the lack thereof. Every day millions of people around the world face repression, violence, and possibly even death.”

And all of this is in the name of religion – the most basic of freedoms that should be afforded all of mankind.

So what are we doing? Where is our voice? What can we do to add value to these people being persecuted around the world for their faith? What can we do to bolster their hope in the midst of such a seemingly hopeless situation?

In 1966, the UN recognized these same injustices and passed the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. Specifically, in Article 18, it is stated that everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

So why is it that today, nearly 50 years later, 75% of the world still lives in oppressive, restrictive nations refusing religious freedom or expression. There is no tolerance of faith in these nations. People are being brutalized because of their faith.

We were all shocked when we witnessed the horror of the beheading of Coptic Christians in Libya just months ago. We were shocked recently when a young pilot from Jordan, held captive without nourishment for days, was set on fire in a

cage and burned to death in front of spectators. Each and every image we see on media shocks us and appalls us. But I ask you today, when will our shock move us to take up a steely resolve to end such atrocities? When will we, as brothers and sisters of a just and righteous God, take our place on the battle lines of our faith to be the voice for those who have no voice?

Psalm 82:3 says, "Stand up for those who are weak and for those whose fathers have died. See to it that those who are poor and those who are beaten down are treated fairly." The Psalmist does not suggest action; he insists upon it. We can and must do something. And I believe it begins by bringing a heightened awareness to every church in the West, the East, the North, and the South. We must circle the globe to join hands in unity to cry out against this injustice.

We need to engage in a modern day movement that will band us together to restore rights and freedoms to ALL PEOPLE. The mandate of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to love our neighbor as ourselves does not discriminate or divide on the lines of diversity. EVERY person, regardless of their faith affiliation, is worthy of the basic necessities being oppressively denied them. We must increase our humanitarian aid to ALL PEOPLE in need, regardless of their race, creed, color, or religion. Our Declaration of Independence, founded in 1776, declares that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..." This foundational declaration of our great nation should be the cry of this assembly today.

Along with humanitarian aid, we must increase our direct care for the children being housed in refugee camps. It is staggering to think that 60 to 70 % of the residents in these camps are children being denied education and a hope for their future. Let's declare together that we will not allow a whole generation to be lost to the brutality of religious

persecution!

We must come together to get ahead of this situation. We can no longer stand shocked. We can no longer settle for compassion alone. We can no longer stand on the side of reaction. Rather, we must be proactive by crafting a progressive plan that will create stability for each individual displaced by religious persecution. We must help them return to their home regions or help them find established refuge in regions where they are safe and supported.

We, as Christians, have a mandate to stretch beyond our reach, both by our faith in prayer and in practical ways, to care for those in need. We must reach to give water to those who are thirsty; we must reach to give food to those who are hungry; and we must reach to house those who are without shelter. Let us not forget this global mandate.

It energizes me to see the budding life of new initiatives to meet these needs and to support those suffering persecution. The international community, by way of the global church, is beginning to unite like never before. A fresh model of church-to-church partnership is sprouting up globally where healthy international churches are adopting needy church communities in proximal regions, rather than just caring for themselves.

As a result of this model, believers and people of faith here in the west are able to gain a better understanding of what is happening on the ground so we can maximize our assistance and resources. Rather than trying to help from the outside looking in, we now have partners on the inside, who can help us be helpful and spread relief that will have a tremendous impact. Subscribing to this model and allocating funding and other aid as it is needed is our responsibility as the Church.

In addition, I call upon all religious leaders, of all religions around the world, to stand with us for religious

freedom for all. A world free of religious persecution is a world free for all to worship as they believe. We must come together, arms and hearts linked, to express our indignation for what is happening to people of faith. We can and will make a difference when we insist on religious freedom for all mankind.

And finally, I beseech the United Nations, to do everything in your power to uphold Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. We cannot solely adopt an interest in and establish and enforce legislation for issues such as freedom of the press, free elections, and independent judiciaries. We must take up a mantle for those being denied the right to practice their religious convictions. It is imperative that our actions match our rhetoric. Anything less than the enforcement of the established declarations for freedom of religion around the world, will resound with a hollow and meaningless response from the perpetrators of religious persecution.

We cannot allow this to be a periphery issue. It must be a priority of our focus. Human rights, dignity and religious freedom are foundational to what makes every country great and prosperous.

Religious persecution around the globe will only be eradicated when people of compassion, conviction and opportunity, such as you and I, rise up to make a difference. Let your voices be heard here on earth and in the annals of heaven. And may it be said of us that we fought for dignity in our generation and that we secured a legacy of peace for our brothers and sisters around the world.

Tom Mullins is the founding pastor of Christ Fellowship Church. He is the author of *The Leadership Game* and *The Confidence Factor: Discovering the Winning Edge for Life*.