



IRAN



IN DEFENSE
OF CHRISTIANS
IN THE MIDDLE EAST

BACKGROUND

- Iran's Constitution permits Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians protection to worship freely and to form religious societies, though proselytizing is strictly prohibited. Five parliamentary seats are reserved for these groups. However, Iran does not recognize the Baha'is as a protected religious minority, and the government discriminates against its citizens on the basis of religion or belief, as all laws and regulations are based on unique Shi'a Islamic criteria.
- Iran has been pursuing strategy of regional hegemony and attempting to carve a zone of control that surrounds Israel with hostile forces. Iran is funding Hezbollah in Lebanon and proxies in Iraq and Syria. Severe human rights violations by Iran's military proxies in Iraq have been documented by human rights organizations. These Iranian-proxy forces will represent a grave threat to stability and security in post-ISIS Iraq, including for Iraq's minority communities.
- Since Iran's 1979 revolution, many members of minority religious communities have fled in fear of persecution. Although Christians are allowed to practice their faith, they face arduous government regulations and harassment, which includes the monitoring of all Christian religious practice. Christians who attend liturgy are required to register with the authorities. These same authorities reportedly forbid Muslim converts to Christianity from entering Armenian or Assyrian churches.
- The Baha'i community, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran, has long been subject to particularly severe religious freedom violations. The government views Baha'is as heretics, and consequently they face repression on the grounds of apostasy. Since 1979, authorities have killed or executed more than 200 Baha'i leaders, and more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university jobs.
- Christians in Iran, the majority who are ethnic Armenians living in Tehran and Isfahan, have also faced discrimination and harassment. Iranian authorities have raided church services, threatened church members, and arbitrarily arrested hundreds of Christians throughout the country.

Population: 82,801,633

Muslim (official) 99.4%

- (Shia 90-95%)
- (Sunni 5-10%)
- (Others 1%)

Yarsan

(approximately one million)

Baha'is (more than 300,000)

Various Christian denominations (nearly 300,000)

Zoroastrians (30,000 to 35,000)

Jews (20,000)

Sabeen-Mandaeans (5,000 to 10,000)

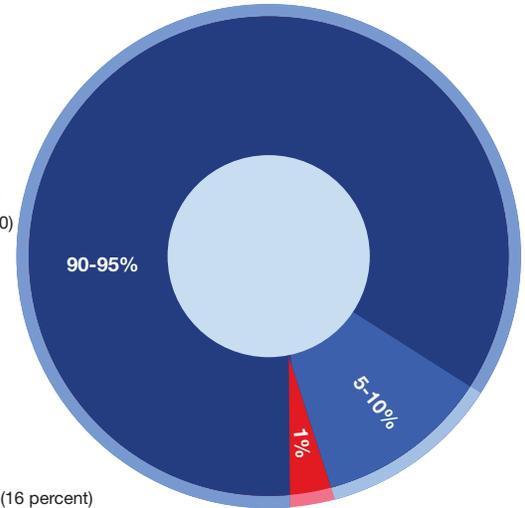
Ethnic Groups

Persian (65 percent), Azeri (16 percent)

Kurd (7 percent), Lur (6 percent), Arab (2 percent)

Balochi (2 percent), Turkmen (1 percent), Turkish (1 percent)

Armenian, Assyrian, and Georgian (less than 1 percent)



ASK YOUR REPRESENTATIVE TO:

- Ask the White House to pressure Iran to respect the right to religious freedom of all Christian, Bahai, and minority communities in Iran and to hold any perpetrators of discrimination or injustice against Christians and other minorities accountable.
- Ask the White House and Congress to pressure Iran to cease its funding of terrorist organizations including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria.

