The World Bank and Religious Persecution

Funding governments that support or condone violent repression of religion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Religious Persecution Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>$9.8 billion</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>$4.8 billion</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>China</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4.7 billion</strong></td>
<td>High—deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>$4.4 billion</td>
<td>Of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>$3.2 billion</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>$3.1 billion</td>
<td>High—significantly deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>$2.2 billion</td>
<td>High—significantly deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>$2.1 billion</td>
<td>Medium—deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>$2.0 billion</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>$1.9 billion</td>
<td>Medium—deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>$1.6 billion</td>
<td>Medium—deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>$1.6 billion</td>
<td>Of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>$1.4 billion</td>
<td>Of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>$1.3 billion</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>$1.3 billion</td>
<td>Of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>$1.1 billion</td>
<td>Medium—deteriorated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>$1.0 billion</td>
<td>High—deteriorated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: World Bank Group annual reports (includes private sector financing)  
Source: Aid to the Church in Need Religious Freedom in the World Report 2014
In the past five years, the World Bank provided more than $17 billion in funding to these countries. All of them have governments that support or allow religious persecution.

These are some of the governments that not only infringed on freedom of religion themselves, but also often created a permissive environment for broader human rights abuses.

Cover photo: At least eight Christians burned to death in what became known as the Gojra massacre in India.
In Pakistan, authorities continue to enforce blasphemy laws and laws designed to marginalize the Ahmadiyya Muslim community; these laws continued to restrict religious freedom, and remained the most visible symbols of religious intolerance.

Meanwhile, the government took some limited steps in response to major incidents of violence against members of religious minority communities, such as condemning attacks against Shia and Christian worshipers and adding some additional security measures, but generally failed to take adequate steps to hold accountable those responsible for the attacks. There were continued reports of law enforcement personnel abusing members of religious minorities and persons accused of blasphemy while in custody."*

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**Human Rights Watch. World Report 2015
In China, police detained students, monks, laypersons, and others in many Tibetan areas who called for freedom, human rights, including respect for freedom of religion... In April seven house church Christians were sentenced in Ye County, Henan Province, to prison terms ranging from three to seven-and-a-half years reportedly for recording and copying sermons.... China prosecuted family members of self-immolators, imprisoned and tortured Falun Gong practitioners, continued its harassment of members of house churches and unregistered Catholic bishops and priests, and sought the forcible return of ethnic Uighurs who were seeking asylum overseas**

World Bank Loans
2010—$1.4 billion
2011—$1.8 billion
2012—$1.3 billion
2013—$1.6 billion
2014—$1.7 billion

In China’s constitution, freedom of religion is allowed, but in practice the government restricts any religious congregation that is not given official approval. In 2014, the government concentrated its attacks on Christian churches. **

**Human Rights Watch. World Report 2015
"We’ve seen examples of anti-Muslim propaganda in Mon state, Shan state, Kachin state and Karen state, where people are distributing anti-Muslim leaflets," [Mark Farmaner of human rights group Burma Campaign UK] told the Guardian. "It may not be directly linked to violence in Rakhine state in an obvious way but … an incident like this [an argument in a gold shop] wouldn’t normally lead to deaths and thousands of people trying to flee, if there weren’t already incredibly high tensions in the first place. That means it’s been organised and that no action has been taken to put a lid on it"

President Tun Khin of the UK-based Burmese Rohingya Organisation described the violence in Meiktila as a state sponsored attack, and said: "These are not communal clashes; this is not equal sides fighting. These are organized attacks to cleanse [Burma] of Muslims where the vast majority of those killed and displaced are Muslims" (Source: The Guardian 22 March 2013)

Anti-Muslim violence in Meiktila, Burma, led to up to 100 deaths and an estimated 12,000 displaced residents from the area in early 2013. This event showed that mob violence against Muslims was no longer confined to western Rakhine State, where over 140,000 persons have also been displaced since 2012. Although the government’s overall human rights record continued to improve, organized anti-Muslim hate speech, harassment, and discrimination against Muslims continued, exploited by those seeking to divide and pit Buddhist and Muslim communities against one another, often for political gain.

World Bank Loans
2013—$520 million
2014—$282 million

“In Burma (Myanmar), there were reports of violence against Christians and the destruction of religious buildings in Kachin State. Local government officials reportedly participated in anti-Muslim discrimination and failed to stop violence in Rakhine State, and local officials were slow to respond to anti-Muslim violence in Meiktila, Mandalay Division...
In October 2014 the private home of mother and son Durdona Abdullayeva and Ulugbek Kenzhayev was raided. Both belong to the Full Gospel Church. They were each fined about 1,060 Euros, or 1,330 US Dollars - thirty times the minimum monthly salary, for "illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials."

The judge also ordered the destruction of thirty Christian books, including three New Testaments (one in Russian and two in Uzbek) and other material.

"In Uzbekistan, 10,000 to 12,000 people reportedly remain imprisoned on vague charges of religious extremism due to their religious beliefs or practice. There are reports of deaths in custody, torture, beatings, and other harsh treatment of prisoners the government considered religious extremists."

Harassment of people who exercise religion not permitted by the government is common. Religious literature seized from individuals – whether Muslims, Christians, Jehovah’s Witnesses or of other faiths – is frequently ordered destroyed by the courts.

World Bank Loans
2010—$146 million
2011—$291 million
2012—$180 million
2013—$328 million
2014—$411 million

**Human Rights Watch. World Report 2015
***Forum 18 News Service, Norway, Nov.2014
In Russia, the government changed laws to further restrict the activities of members of minority religious groups. Police across the country raided private homes and places of worship of minority religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and followers of Sunni theologian Said Nursi. In the North Caucasus, members of Muslim ethnic groups were physically attacked, and social discrimination and violence against moderate religious leaders continued.

World Bank Loans
2011—$125 million
2012—$0
2013—$60 million
2014—$111 million

On 6 September 2011, a criminal case was initiated against Aleksey Nikolayev, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses from Cheboksary. He was charged with inciting hatred and denigrating human dignity simply for sharing his beliefs with others.

On 7 September 2011, Aleksey Nikolayev and two other Jehovah’s Witnesses, including Oleg Marchenko, were put in a detention facility where they spent 48 hours. In addition, four premises used for worship services were searched. Between October 2011–April 2012, 16 searches were conducted of the apartments of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

*European Association of Jehovah’s Christian Witnesses. Religious freedom concerns in Russia.
TAJIKISTAN

Police in Vahdat, 18 kilometers (11 miles) east of Dushanbe, have arrested and taken into custody two Muslim men after raids on their homes on 15 December 2014. Criminal cases have been opened against them for teaching school-aged children the Koran and Islam in their homes.

The Interior Ministry claimed on 16 December that 37-year old Komiljon Akhrorov and 40-year old Sayidmumin Rashidov “illegally” taught religion to children. Akhrorov was claimed to have taught five children of between 13 and 17 years old for six years, and Rashidov was claimed to have taught 12 children of between six and 15 years old for five years.

World Bank Loans

2010—$76 million
2011—$48 million
2012—$50 million
2013—$64 million
2014—$57 million

(Plus $60 million in private sector funding as of 2014)
$294 million total

“Tajikistan is the only country in the world in which the law prohibits persons under the age of 18 from participating in public religious activities. Muslim women are also effectively barred from attending mosques under a religious edict enforced by the government. Authorities prohibited the operation of some unregistered religious groups, and raided, monitored, and harassed members of both registered and unregistered groups.”*

The World Bank refuses to acknowledge any obligation to abide by the human rights convention of the United Nations.

The loans and grants from the World Bank come with no check to make sure there is no violation of accepted standards of human rights, or with the treaties on human rights that countries have adopted. This is despite the repeated calls for explicit human rights standards and the support for a human rights policy by most governments and civil society groups.

**Would a human rights policy mean sanctioning governments that violate rights?**

No. It would mean adopting a rights-based approach to development that “seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress… Under a human-rights based approach, the plans, policies, and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law. This helps to promote the sustainability of development work, empowering people themselves—especially the most marginalized—to participate in policy formulation and hold accountable those who have a duty to act.”

(from a definition by the UN High Commission on Human Rights)

“The [World] Bank’s failure to engage with human rights law in any meaningful way disables it from encouraging the governments with which it works to design projects which achieve these objectives in accordance with standards that they have already accepted...

[Human] rights language recognizes the dignity and agency of all individuals (regardless of race, gender, social status, age, disability or any other distinguishing factor) and it is intentionally empowering. Whether in the home, the village, school or workplace, or in the political marketplace of ideas, it makes a difference if one is calling for the realization of agreed human rights to equality or to water rather than merely making a general request or demand. And human rights are inseparable from the notion of accountability. Where rights are ignored or violated, there must be accountability. Let me apply this to the plight of those living in extreme poverty who continue in most societies to be marginalized, stigmatized, and the objects of condescension and charity. Recognition of their human rights does not guarantee them food, education, or health care, but it does acknowledge their dignity and agency, empower them and their advocates, and provide a starting point for a meaningful debate over the allocation of societal resources in contexts in which their interests have been systematically ignored.”

We urge the World Bank to consider international human rights standards, including freedom of religion, when allocating funds for development.

The World Bank, as the world’s leading institution for development finance, should acknowledge its obligations under international law and work for a more consistent respect of human rights in the fight against poverty.