

WHAT YOU BELIEVE MAY KILL YOU!

The world quite often decides to pay attention to something that usually goes by unnoticed. This is just as true of the unimportant –Paris Hilton is a good example; the more significant but picked from a thousand others like it for no good reason – the disappearance of Natalee Holloway in Aruba and the resulting media circus; and finally, major tragedies that are somehow more publicized than others that are as tragic -. Darfur is the cause of the moment; Somalia and Ethiopia were of great concern not so long ago, each dwarfing the attention paid to ongoing mass murders in Uganda, Sierra Leone, Congo, Burundi and all those other hellish places in godforsaken Africa.

And so it is with Abdul Rahman – an Afghan Christian who was tried and sentenced to death for the crime of abandoning Islam for Christianity. His apostasy is not unique, not even in Afghanistan. What is unique is the attention his case had attracted internationally and the efforts that eventually resulted in his being allowed to leave Afghanistan and be given asylum in Italy. During the same time period, however, several other converts to Christianity have been arrested without anyone paying much attention – a number of Christian convert homes were raided by police in February and March and at least five Christian converts were murdered by Islamist fanatics during the last two years. There is little available information about the details of the raids or the fate of the converts; it is quite possible – even likely - that there were more raids that went unreported.

The persecution of converts to Christianity is an accepted and lawful aspect of many Moslem states. In Saudi Arabia alone dozens of people have been executed during the last decade for the crimes of apostasy, heresy and blasphemy. The legal codes of Iran, Sudan, Mauritania and the Comoros Islands mandate the death sentence for conversion from Islam. In countries where the law does not provide for lawful executions of converts the sentence is usually carried out by lynch mobs.

In President Ahmadinejad's Iran the situation has grown worse since the 1990s when death squads were used to eliminate Protestant leaders. According to the Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom, there is at present an ongoing

systematic campaign to track down and kill or reconvert those who have changed their religion from Islam.

Iran has also been active in the persecution of other religious minorities. Iran's Baha'is are regarded as heretics from Islam even though the Baha'i faith has come into being in Iran over 150 years ago, and has since spread globally to over 5 million followers on all continents including about 700,000 in Iran and about 150,000 in the U.S. Baha'is have no legal rights in Iran – there is no penalty for killing a Baha'!

Egypt is one of the countries that does not have specific laws against apostasy. Instead, laws against “insulting Islam” or “creating sectarian strife” are used to persecute converts. In 2003, Egyptian security forces have arrested 22 converts and people who helped them. The fate of most of them is not known – one, Isam Abdul Fathr, died in prison, another, Gaseer Mohamed Mahmoud, was whipped, had his toenails pulled out by the police and was told that he would be imprisoned until he recanted his Christian conversion.

The human rights organizations admit that it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of victimized converts since actual state-ordered executions are rarer than killings by vigilantes, family members and mobs who often enjoy covert governmental cooperation.

In Pakistan, Turkey, Nigeria, Somalia, Indonesia, Kenya, Gaza and the West Bank Christian converts have been killed, beaten and terrorized by Islamist fanatics. Just last December a Nigerian pastor was attacked and beaten for allegedly hiding a convert, and in January, a Turkish convert was beaten unconscious for refusing to renounce his Christianity.

On March 21, the Algerian parliament approved a new law requiring a 2- to 5-year imprisonment and a 5000 Euro fine for anyone “trying to call on a Muslim to embrace another religion” or who “stores or distributes information, by any means, that attempts to destabilize attachment to Islam”.

Even questioning some of the Islamic restrictions by Moslems is not tolerated. In relatively moderate Indonesia, a man is currently serving a two-year term in prison for leading prayers in both Indonesian and Arabic instead of only Arabic!

The Western world in general and Christians in particular do not appear to care about oppression by Moslems – it appears to be taken for granted and ignored. The major churches, universities and mass media are much more comfortable concentrating on “Palestinian victimhood” at the hands of Israelis than on the persecution of Christians and other non-Moslems in the Moslem world. It might be added that this is also true of the Western gay activists who turn a blind eye to the persecution of homosexuals in the Moslem world; the fact that thousands of Moslem gays have sought refuge and safety – illegally - in Israel should have resonated within the American politically active gay community. It didn't.

Western indifference to Moslem intolerance is tragic. It is also inexplicable, inexcusable and shameful.