

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 403 – No. 08/2016

## Double Persecution Threat to Christian Women

### Women targeted because of faith and gender

(Bonn, 16 March 2016) An international conference has been held in Oxford to find solutions to the growing problem of violent persecution against Christian women.

'Increasing numbers of women face a double blow today – violent attacks against them because of their Christian faith, and because they are women,' said conference organiser 'Kate Ward' (whose identity is being protected).

The Marcham Conference, Women and Persecution, was held over three days. It was organised by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, the Religious Liberty Partnership and Release International, with a wide range of church agencies and networks.

Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer (IIRF Cape Town / ETF Leuven) as the co-convenor of the conference said: 'The Marcham Conference was a successful pilot case of concerned practitioners and academics jointly gathering around a burning issue engaging with Christians under pressure for their faith.'

Participants from around the world heard that women are being increasingly targeted as a deliberate strategy to rob them of their faith and their identity. Growing Islamic radicalisation was encouraging atrocities against women as a deliberate weapon of warfare and tactic of jihad.

Christian women in communities under pressure for their faith face many forms of discrimination and violence. These include rape, kidnapping, forced marriage, legal discrimination, reprisals for conversion, sexual harassment, restrictions on freedom of dress and movement, false charges, trafficking, and employment discrimination.

Radicals are also targeting wives and daughters as a way of intimidating and demoralising Christian pastors, most of whom are male, in areas of religious conflict.



'Kate Ward' Marcham Conference organiser



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'The greatest offence or violation one can bring to a community is to target their women and children,' said Kate Ward. 'We see this through the countless atrocities now being witnessed by many.'

'Some of these women are loved and accepted, but sadly not all. Others are victimised again by their own families for having been violated.'



Delegates discuss Women and Persecution

'We see this heartbreaking issue in the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Iraq. The rejection of their communities and their husbands extends the pain and suffering for women.'

Displacement by war has massively increased the risk for Christian women. The Syrian conflict has exposed the reality of organised trafficking and the enslaving of refugees on the move.

### Cultural and religious abuse

There is often a blurring of the lines between cultural and religious abuse. A British-born woman, who cannot be identified, told her story to the conference. 'Armina' had been abused as a child by her father, who was a leader in the Islamic community. When she was still a child, her father declared she was to be taken abroad for an arranged marriage. Immediately. 'My dad said I would be flying out the next day. It was the first I had heard about it. I wasn't ready to be anyone's wife.'

Armina ran away from home and lived on the streets for a week before she was taken in and cared for by a Christians. She was later found to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. 'I felt depressed and suicidal because of the shame I was carrying for betraying my family,' she said. 'I was named as a traitor.'

Through the love and acceptance of some Christians, she went on to embrace the Christian faith. Yet many other Christians who did not understand her situation considered her to blame for the abuse. Today Armina is helping other women from a Muslim background.

### Even within the church

But the problem of violent abuse against women also exists within the church, wherever prevailing cultures of inequality have yet to be replaced by a Biblical worldview that values women.

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The violence they face within their homes, families and churches includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal and spiritual abuse. Such violence is also experienced by the wives of Christian leaders.



Women and Persecution Marcham Conference 2016

Said Kate Ward: 'An experienced Bible teacher who travels to areas of persecution told me recently: **"How many times do I finish a session, to see a wife nudge a senior pastor, who then comes to me and says, 'I beat my wife. How can you help me?"**'

One of the conference speakers was Peter Grant of Restored, which recently launched its own report on violence

against women. He further illustrated the problem in the church worldwide: 'In Zimbabwe, a pastor said, "I expect my wife to bow down before me as I bow down before Christ." 'There are other examples which bring shame on the body of Christ,' he added.

Christian women become especially vulnerable in countries where both their faith and their gender are marginalised. In Pakistan, poor Christian women and their families fall into bonded labour. One woman told researchers: 'At factories, women are treated very badly. Many times brick kiln owners kill our women just to hide their crimes.' 'What grieves me the most,' said Kate Ward, 'are that the historical inequality issues of 19th century Britain are today's issues for Christian women all over the world.'

### Call to action

The Marcham Conference is preparing a call to action for the global church. This will include the demand that the church openly acknowledges 'the extent and severity of of violence against Christian women.' And it will seek to identify strategies for change that can be applied to situations around the world.

'The problem is vast. Churches, agencies and voluntary organisations will have to work together at every level,' said Kate Ward. 'We will have to find ways to cross cultural boundaries and challenge taboos. It will require the deepest levels of engagement and collaboration. I pray that many nations will be transformed as we take time out to think, pray, discuss, argue, consider – and go out and get on with it.'

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Liberty Partnership, Release International, Open Doors, Restored, Interserve, World Vision, Turkic Belt Ministries, ADF International, Voice of the Martyrs Canada, Voice of the Martyrs USA, All Nations Christian College, World Watch Monitor.

The Co-Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom, Prof. Dr. Christof Sauer announced: 'We will be happy to invite for a follow up event possibly hosted at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Leuven (Belgium) in 2017.'

The International Institute for Religious Freedom (Bonn – Cape Town – Colombo) was established in 2006 to further academic research on religious freedom and persecution.

## *Downloads and links:*

- Photos © Andrew Boyd Release Intl
- [Photo 1](#): 'Kate Ward' Marcham Conference organiser
- [Photo 2](#): Delegates discuss Women and Persecution
- [Photo 3](#): Women and Persecution Marcham Conference 2016
- International Institute for Religious Freedom: [www.iirf.eu](http://www.iirf.eu)
- Religious Liberty Partnership: [www.rlppartnership.org/](http://www.rlppartnership.org/)
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