



A man cries during a funeral Mass in the parish hall of St. Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Nigeria, June 17, 2022. The Mass was for some of the 40 victims killed in a June 5 attack by gunmen during Mass at the church. Over the last 14 years in Nigeria, 52,250 people have been killed only for being Christians, according to an April 10 report. (OSV News/Reuters/Temilade Adelaja)

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Religious freedom violations are an early warning sign of where mass atrocities could occur around the globe, a new report from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said.

The report, issued Sept. 9, drew a link between the promotion of international religious freedom and efforts to prevent atrocities.

"Mass atrocities are preceded by a range of early warning signs, such as religious freedom violations," the report said. "When religious freedom is systematically denied or religious identities targeted, the risk of atrocity crimes may increase."

Stephen Schneck, USCIRF commissioner, told OSV News that USCIRF cross-referenced its reports "on the situation for religious freedom in countries around the world with the Holocaust Museum's Early Warning Project, which looks for places where genocide might occur."

"In cross-referencing them, what we found was an incredible amount of overlap between the countries where we see the greatest dangers for religious freedom," he said, "or where we in fact see actual religious persecution taking place, and those countries that are on the the watch list for a potential genocide as determined by the Holocaust Museum."

Comparing the Early Warning Project's list of 21 ongoing state and nonstate-led killings revealed significant overlap with countries in which USCIRF has also identified concern, including Burma, Burkina Faso, Syria, Nigeria, Somalia, North Korea, Pakistan and Iraq.

Efforts to marginalize or dehumanize religious minorities can also "lead to mass atrocities," the report said, as regimes or nonstate actors who would commit such atrocities "at times exploit religion to justify violence and incite hatred against religious communities" by "making them targets of discrimination and

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