

## Introduction

Persecution of religious minorities in an increasing number of countries is a matter about which there has been a growing awareness and international concern.

Given its history and experience, the Jewish people, understandably, have a particular sensitivity and empathy for people persecuted for their faith, and zero tolerance for persecution. Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), as part of its general mandate, advocates for this and other human rights causes, fights against prejudice, and strives to promote inter-faith and inter-ethnic understanding.

With the situation for many religious communities growing worse, we at the Religious and Interreligious Affairs Committee of CJC believed the time was right to assemble a roundtable to address the topic of religious persecution.

A roundtable would provide an excellent opportunity for different groups – including faith groups and human rights NGOs - to share information and to possibly form strategic coalitions. We have learned that building coalitions is an excellent method for effecting change and a forum such as this could act as a catalyst. This roundtable was set up to be the beginning of a process and a springboard for other follow-up activities. We were fortunate to be able to secure some of the foremost experts in the field as speakers and panellists.

The process took on added significance when the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development agreed to participate and support the initiative. That the Minister of Foreign Affairs himself addressed the roundtable further attests to the fact that he and officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs view this matter seriously.

We are therefore confident that this report, complete with its recommendations, will be given its due consideration. CJC is grateful for the assistance of the Centre, financial and otherwise, without which the roundtable could not have taken place.

Certainly the definition of religious persecution stretches over a long continuum but this roundtable focused primarily on countries wherein persecution is of a gross systematic nature. That includes widespread acts of torture, imprisonment, abduction, rape, enslavement and killing.

Keeping in mind that the purpose of the roundtable was to develop policy recommendations for the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, the discussion centred on instances of state-sanctioned persecution. By definition, this occurs in countries where it is the government and government authorities that are committing the atrocities or, in other cases, where the government is not making a serious or sustained effort to prevent these practices.