Survey on language use regarding 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom'

International Institute for Religious Freedom

Abstract

Discrimination, persecution and martyrdom are a widespread reality. This documentation introduces a survey on how terminology is used and understood by various Christian groups. The readers are invited to complete the questionnaire electronically at www.iirf.eu. Why is the language used to describe these phenomena a problem? How does it affect ecumenical relations? See the commentary in the appendix for further explanations.

Keywords   language, terminology, discrimination, persecution, martyrdom.

This questionnaire serves as part of the preparations for an international inter-church consultation of the Global Christian Forum on 'Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together' and is to result in a glossary and further reflections on language use. Your response will help to discern what language and terminology different Christian churches and groups find helpful in which context, regarding discrimination, persecution and martyrdom.

Elements of the survey

This survey form consists of three parts
1. It requests your assessment of commonly used terms;
2. It provides a grid to collate further terms and your assessment of these terms;
3. It requests that you send us policies and guidelines on language use re. discrimination, persecution and martyrdom. Alternatively send statements that your church/organization might have issued on the topic, so we can analyse them for the terminology used.

   If you are short of time, and can only contribute on one of the three parts, we would still value your contribution!

Part 1: Structured survey

This survey contains a sample of the most commonly used terms. These most common terms were supplied through brainstorming by members of the planning team. The following questions need to be responded to in the various columns:
1. What is your opinion on the following common terms?

2. What are the equivalent terms in your language?

3. How do you understand this term?

4. Are these terms very helpful, less helpful, unhelpful?

5. In which context is the term being used?

6. What is a typical sample phrase containing that term?

7. Why do you consider this term as you do? / Differentiations: You might want to qualify your assessment regarding derivatives of this term.

8. This column contains the opinion of the surveyor which is meant to stimulate your own response in disagreement, agreement or modification.

Please provide us with basic information, so we can properly interpret your responses and contact you if we have questions.

Name	
Position	
Church and denominational family or Organization	
Country (or larger region)	
Date	
Contact details	
Do we need to keep your name confidential?	
What is your mother tongue? (refered to in column 2 of the survey)	

(Part 1) Survey on twelve very common terms (with examples of responses already inserted)

Instructions: Fill in your evaluation by completing the blank boxes or overwriting the comments or by confirming them, e.g. by adding YES, or your comment.

Term in English	Equivalent in your language	How do you understand this term?	Sample phrase	Helpfulness – very helpful – less helpful – unhelpful	Context – Inner-Christian – Politics – Academia – Other: …………	Enter your comments here (Why do you consider the term as you do? – Does your opinon vary on derivatives of this term?)	Surveyors' comment/ differentiations (to which you are invited to react)
1. discrimination			Christians might suffer the same discrimination as other citizens.		x Politics x Academia		
2. persecution			Christians are facing different degrees of persecution at different times and in different places.				The term "Christian persecution" is unhelpful, because it does not clarify who persecutes whom
3. the persecuted church			Christians in the West can learn a lot from the persecuted church.	Less helpful			This term tends to promote a dichotomy between "the persecuted church" elsewhere and "the free church" "here", undermining the idea of the unity of the body of Christ
4. church in need			The organization "Aid for the Church in need" appeals: Please support the church in need.				

Term in English	Equivalent in your language	How do you understand this term?	Sample phrase	Helpfulness – very helpful – less helpful – unhelpful	Context – Inner-Christian – Politics – Academia – Other: ………………	Enter your comments here (Why do you consider the term as you do? – Does your opinon vary on derivatives of this term?)	Surveyors' comment/ differentiations (to which you are invited to react)
5. martyrdom			Church leaders are more likely to face martyrdom than other Christians.		x Politics x Academia		Do not use for the suffering someone goes through, but for losing one's life in relation to faith. Best to specify as "Christian martyrdom" due to very different Islamic concept of martyrdom.
6. martyr			The Early Church differentiated martyrs and confessors.				Only for people who actually lost their lives in relation to their faith. Best specify as "Christian martyr"
7. church of the martyrs / martyr church			The organization "Voice of the Martyrs" seeks to assist the martyr church.	Inner Christian			Term tends to blur the distinction between persecution and martyrdom, and to widen the term martyrdom beyond death for faith to any type of persecution
8. oppression			Christians can face oppression from the government or from civil society.				

Term in English	Equivalent in your language	How do you understand this term?	Sample phrase	Helpfulness – very helpful – less helpful – unhelpful	Context – Inner-Christian – Politics – Academia – Other.	Enter your comments here (Why do you consider the term as you do? – Does your opinon vary on derivatives of this term?)	Surveyors' comment/ differentiations (to which you are invited to react)
9. Religious intolerance			Religious intolerance tends to lead to acts of aggression.				
10. Christiano–phobia			Christianophobia, as the fear of anything Christian, is leading to discrimination of Christians.				
11. Christian-Muslim clashes			Last week 30 people died in Christian-Muslim clashes in Nigeria.	Most often unhelpful	Press/ politics		It covers up that often the aggression is unilateral
12. suffering			Christians face a lot of suffering in this country.	Less helpful			Ambiguous if not specified as "suffering for Christ, etc."

Part 2: Survey on your own additional commonly used or avoided terms regarding discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom

This form is similar in structure to the one above.

You are requested to supply your own additional terminology (not mentioned above) in your own language with a translation into English. Start with terms you consider helpful, continue with those that you find less helpful, and close with those you reject as unhelpful.

Term in your language	Equivalent in English	How do you understand this term?	Sample phrase	Helpfulness – very helpful – less helpful – unhelpful	Context – Inner-Christian – Politics – Academia – Other:	Enter your comments here (Why do you consider the term as you do? – Does your opinon vary on derivatives of this term?)	Surveyors' comment/ differentiations (leave blank)

Part 3: Policies/ Guidelines / Sample texts

1. Policies/ guidelines

Does your church/agency have policies or guidelines on language use re discrimination, persecution and martyrdom? Please supply them to us in electronic form (or on paper if that is not possible) . Please list the details of these documents here for better identification.

Exact title of document	Author / Authoring body	Year of origin or publication

2. Sample texts

If your church/ group does not have such policies or guidelines, please provide us with some statements that your church/group might have issued on the topic, so we can analyse them for the language used. Please list the details of these documents here for better identification.

Exact title of document	Author / Authoring body	Year of origin or publication

End of survey. Thank you very much for your assistance!

Please submit by email to: Christof@iirf.eu
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Appendix

Commentary on survey about language use

Christof Sauer[1]

1. Discrimination, persecution and martyrdom – a widespread reality linked to Christian mission

Discrimination, persecution and martyrdom of Christians are widespread realities around the globe. But they are often too little recognized. And they are under-reported in the media. These realities are also closely linked to Christian mission. Faithfully following Christ and suffering for Christ's sake go hand in hand. Witnessing to Christ at times elicits hostile reactions. The fact that people are choosing to follow Christ, leaving behind there inherited religions and world views, often makes angry those that are left behind and challenged in their perceptions. Mission and persecution go together. There are always those who want to stop Christian mission.

The hostilies can emanate from the state using legal and administrative restrictions of religious freedom. They can as well be perpetrated by civil society. They start with hostile attitudes resulting in verbal aggressions and finding their expression in harmful deeds. The degree of hostility and the level of harm caused both can operate on a scale from minimal to extreme.

The topic of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom has been under-researched in missiology.

2. Why is language a problem?

Christians of various traditions an different theological persuasions use diverging language when interpreting the phenomena described. They might use the same terms, but fill them differently. They use different terms and they often don't consider the terms used by others helpful. Some use a highly differentiating or soft spoken language in their concern not to engender further hostilities or not to harm inter-religious dialogue or cooperation. They are routinely accused by others of downplaying the intensity and the scope of the tragedy. Others use very straightforward terms. They in turn are being accused of exaggerating, lack of differentiation, and a too emotionally loaded language. These are just some typical examples.

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[1]   Christof Sauer (* 1963) is Professor for Religious Studies and Missiology at the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven. He is part of the planning team for the conference referred to in this paper. Contact: christof@iirf.eu.

The problem lies in the fact, that a lack of understanding of the respective language used, or disagreements about the appropriate language to be used are related to the lack of unity among Christians in their response to persecution.

3. What does the Global Christian Forum want to do about it?

The Global Christian Forum (GCF), which started as a trust building initiative between leaders of all streams of world Christianity – Catholic, Evangelical, Independent, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Protestant/Anglican – is now also venturing into topical challenges facing the global church. Its representatives have observed that there are gaps and definite potential for improvement in global Christian solidarity when it comes to persecution of Christians. A global inter-church consultation on "Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together" pursues a fourfold goal:

1. To better listen to, learn from, and accompany churches in situations of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom;
2. To inform one another of our activities in support of churches in situations of conflict, discrimination, persecution, or martyrdom;
3. To seek a common understanding of the facts of the situations as well as a more common framework and language for the development of appropriate Christian responses to them;
4. To encourage GCF participant churches and organisations to speak and work together in response to these situations."

4. The survey on language use regarding discrimination, persecution and martyrdom

Within this framework, the International Institute for Religious Freedom has been commissioned to undertake a research project on behalf of the Global Christian Forum prior to the consultation.

4.1 Goals

This research on language used to describe situations of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom pursues the following goals subservient to the consultation:

➢ The reflections aim at listening to and learning from churches which in their day-to-day life face challenges of discrimination, persecution and/or martyrdom. Understanding their choice of language in response to these situations is important for gaining a better understanding of their plight and standing.

➢ The reflections at the same time serve to come to a better understanding of the language used by the various GCF member bodies, churches and their affiliated agencies and organizations in their responses to discrimination, persecution, or martyrdom elsewhere.

➢ The results of the reflections will therefore serve as important input for the planned team visits, the anticipated documentation, the consultation itself and further follow-up by GCF participant churches and organisations.

4.2 Purpose

The purpose of the reflections on language is to:
➢ Document the de facto use of different concepts and terms used regarding discimination, persecution and martyrdom in various contexts.
➢ Sensitise high-level church leaders to language used that is different from their own as well as to perceptions on advantages and disadvantages of various language use.
➢ Listen to and learn from the use of language by churches directly affected and by others accompanying churches in such contexts.
➢ Seek a more common language where necessary in order to speak with a common Christian voice in responding to the realities of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom.
➢ Demonstrate to suffering churches that the whole Church desires to stand with them in their time of duress by sensitive and appropriate language usage.

4.3 Anticipated outcome

The anticipated outcome of this research project is:
➢ a comparative glossary, initially mainly in English[2], which describes the main concepts and terms related to the realities of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom – terms and concepts that churches and agencies consider helpful, less helpful and unhelpful.
➢ The glossary will show how these terms are differently understood as well as why and in which contexts they are used or avoided. It will include comment on advantages and disadvantages of the various terms as perceived by the different groups.
➢ The initial outcome will be a database with unedited contributions.
➢ A later outcome will be an edited glossary both in electronic and paper form.

5. The questionnaire

If the readers agree that this is a useful project, they are invited to add their voices to those completing the survey.

5.1 Elements of the survey

This survey form consists of three parts
1. It requests an assessment of commonly used terms;

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[2]   The readers are welcome to adapt the questionnaire for use in their own language.

2. It provides a grid to collate further terms and an assessment of these terms;
3. It requests that respondents send policies and guidelines on language use re. discrimination, persecution and martyrdom. Alternatively to send statements that their church/organization might have issued on the topic, so they can be analysed for the terminology used.

5.2 Part 1: Structured survey

This section of the survey contains a sample of the most commonly used terms. These most common terms were supplied through brainstorming by members of the planning team.

A number of questions need to be responded to in the various columns. They all boil down to the one question: What is your opinion on the following common terms?

Example: Let us take the example of the term persecution.

➢ Column 3: How do you understand this term?
➢ Column 4: Here is a sample phrase: Christians are facing different degrees of persecution at different times and in different places.
➢ Column 5: Are these terms very helpful, less helpful, unhelpful?
➢ Column 6: In which context is the term being used? (Inner-Christian, politics, academia, other?)
➢ Column 7. Comments (Rationale)
   - Why do you consider the term as you do?
   - Does your opinion vary on derivatives of this term?
➢ Column 8. … contains the opinion of the surveyor which is meant to stimulate your own response in disagreement, agreement or modification.

Here the surveyor gives an opinion about a derivative or composite term of persecution:

The term "Christian persecution" is unhelpful, because it does not clarify who persecutes whom. (What do you think about that, and does that trigger your response?)

The same patterns of survey applies to the further 11 terms.

5.3 Part 2: Open Survey

The second part of the survey is an open survey. It solicits the respondents own additional commonly used or avoided terms regarding discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom (which was not mentioned in part 1). This form is similar in structure to the one above for part 1.

The benefit of this two part structure is to strike a balance between the need to explain the survey, and to make it easy to respond to (for which the pre-populated

part 1 serves) and the challenge not to influence the responses by guiding questions (for which the open survey in part 2 serves).

5.4 Part 3: Policies/ Guidelines / Sample texts

The third part serves to supply the surveyors with source material for analysis, as an alternative base for an assessment of the language use. The request it for policies, guidelines and sample texts.

Policies/ guidelines: Does your church/agency have policies or guidelines on language use re discrimination, persecution and martyrdom?

Sample texts: If your church/ group does not have such policies or guidelines, please provide us with some statements that your church/group might have issued on the topic

May we invite you to take some time to fill in the survey? It is best done electronically and can be found at www.iirf.eu. Send completed form to christof@iirf.eu.