# LIBYA

## USCIRF–RECOMMENDED FOR COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN (CPC)

### KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Libya continued to spiral downward as the internationally recognized Government of National Unity (GNU) intensified its perpetration and toleration of ongoing, systematic, and egregious violations. The country's ongoing political fragmentation and insecurity continued to broadly erode human rights protections, including freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Authorities affiliated with both the GNU in Tripoli and the Government of National Stability (GNS)—a rival, unrecognized government based in the eastern city of Benghazi—maintained restrictive environments for religious expression while upholding a rigid interpretation of Islamic law as the basis for governance. The GNU actively restricted religious freedom in a variety of ways, particularly through the state-affiliated Internal Security Agency (ISA), which carried out arrests, arbitrary and prolonged detention, interrogation, and torture of people suspected of apostasy from Islam and proselytization on behalf of other religions or beliefs.

In April, a Tripoli court convicted 10 Christians and one atheist on charges related to their peaceful religious beliefs, sentencing them to prison terms ranging from three to 15 years. The written judgment reportedly relied on the defendants' "confessions" to public prosecutors without access to legal representation. These statements followed their earlier, coerced confessions to ISA personnel who reportedly subjected the detainees to torture, including beatings and psychological abuse. The 11 defendants have reportedly faced similar prison abuses since their conviction, allegedly leading one of them to attempt suicide. In a separate case, a Christian remained imprisoned and awaiting the death penalty for a 2022 apostasy conviction in Misrata; his appeal was still awaiting review by the Tripoli-based Supreme Court at the end of the year, even as he reportedly faced attempts by prison officials to coerce him to renounce his faith.

Across the country, minority religious communities continued to face ongoing persecution at the hands of government authorities, including harassment, arbitrary detention, and societal discrimination against foreign and local Christians, disfavored Muslim groups (including Sufis and Ibadis), and suspected converts from Islam. Authorities have reportedly collaborated with GNU-allied militias to target individuals accused of atheism, proselytization, or "sorcery," in some cases subjecting detainees to torture and coerced confessions. The ISA monitored online activity and detained an unknown number of individuals on allegations of "insulting Islam" or "promoting secularism." In April, authorities in Tripoli prosecuted one social media user on related charges and sentenced him to an undisclosed prison term for criticizing the nation's religious institutions.

Both the GNU and the GNS failed to implement legal or institutional FoRB safeguards. Instead, they actively persisted in violating religious freedom while extending impunity to security forces and their respectively allied militias for committing abuses against those perceived to have contravened religious norms. Several key international and local human rights organizations spoke out on Libya's poor FoRB conditions as part of the United Nations 2025 Universal Periodic Review, urging the government to align its laws and institutions with international FoRB standards. Key recommendations include decriminalizing apostasy and blasphemy, ending ISA abuses, and establishing constitutional guarantees for religious freedom. Obtaining consistent or substantial documentation of FoRB violations in Libya remained a significant challenge throughout 2025 due to the country's ongoing political instability and fragmentation as well as the highly restrictive civil society environment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Designate Libya as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Implement targeted sanctions against nonstate actors and officials within both the GNU and the GNS who engage in or tolerate violations of FoRB;
- Condition any future extension of U.S. emergency funds to the Libyan government on its demonstrable progress toward improving religious freedom conditions, including safeguarding religious minorities and reining in the ISA's religiously repressive activities; and
- Amplify multilateral engagement with key U.S. allies who maintain close ties to either or both of Libya's rival governments to apply coordinated pressure for the release of, dismissal of charges against, and/or reversal of sentences for all individuals detained or convicted for exercising their religion or belief.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Introduce and pass legislation that directs U.S. policy to promote religious freedom in Libya, including advocating for the repeal of laws criminalizing apostasy and proselytization, and pressing for robust FoRB protections in Libyan institutions.

### KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Press Statement:** USCIRF Marks the 10th Anniversary of the Execution of 21 Christians in Libya
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief Victims List and Appendix 2**

## Background

Roughly 97 percent of the population in Libya is Muslim; most identify as Sunni Muslim, while a smaller Ibadi Muslim community—largely concentrated among the Amazigh ethnic minority—makes up an estimated 4.5 percent. Other, much smaller religious communities include Christians, Baha'is, Hindus, Buddhists, and Ahmadiyya Muslims.

The country's 2011 interim constitutional declaration, which remains in effect in the absence of a permanent constitution, designates Islam as the state religion and Shari'a as the principal source of legislation. Although the declaration nominally guarantees non-Muslims the freedom to practice their rituals, its lack of protections for other elements of FoRB such as conversion, proselytization, and religious expression systematically enables Libya's restrictive religious freedom environment.

Since 2011, Libya's political fragmentation has produced rival eastern and western authorities— along with their respective allied militias—to support policing and military operations, which have both severely undermined FoRB. Both the Tripoli-based GNU and the rival GNS in Benghazi restrict religious expression, enforce conservative interpretations of Shari'a law, and leave religious minorities vulnerable to arbitrary harassment, detention, and violence. Nonstate actors, including U.S.-designated terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in Libya (IS-L), have exploited Libya's governance gaps to attack political and civilian targets.

Libya's legal framework restricts FoRB through broad, vaguely worded criminal statutes. Article 291 of the Penal Code criminalizes "insulting Islam" and "public attacks" on religious institutions, while the Anti-Cybercrime Law (Law No. 5) of 2022 further criminalizes online content that "insults religious sanctities." The law also criminalizes conversion away from Islam and proselytization, providing the basis for the state to target individuals on related suspicions. In 2024, the GNS-affiliated House of Representatives also passed Law No. 6 criminalizing "witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and related practices," which authorities have used to detain Sufi and Ibadi Muslims. Enforcement of these laws largely falls to the ISA under its self-declared "guarding virtue" mandate, often resulting in arbitrary detention, torture, and coerced confession.

## Heightened Persecution of Religious Minorities and Migrants

FoRB conditions have worsened for non-Muslim and disfavored Muslim minorities in recent years due to Libya's legal framework and the brutal actions of the ISA to enforce it. Under the agency's self-declared mandate to "guard virtue" and growing influence from religiously restrictive Salafi/Madkhali ideology, the ISA has reportedly detained dozens of individuals accused of apostasy, atheism, sorcery, or vaguely defined "deviant" beliefs. These actions particularly impacted the Ibadi and Sufi communities. Reports of torture and coerced confessions, along with the destruction of Sufi shrines by state authorities and militias, further illustrate the active disdain of the ISA—and of the government more broadly—toward the principles and standards of FoRB.

Since the fall of the Qadhafi regime in 2011, Libya has been both a primary destination and a crossroads for migrant workers and displaced persons from elsewhere in North or Sub-Saharan Africa. Migrants from non-Muslim religious communities—including Coptic Christians, Baha'is, and others—are especially at acute risk of persecution, arbitrary detention, and other abuses due to their lack of legal status or ability to register places of worship. Reports indicate that the ISA regularly detains migrants suspected of converting from Islam or engaging in even private worship, often targeting them for torture or deportation.

## Morality Policing as a Rising FoRB Threat

Libya's Interior Ministry reinstated a formal "morality police" force in 2024, known as the Public Morality Protection Agency, with a mandate to enforce a strict state interpretation of Shari'a, including policing dress codes, gender segregation, and "acceptable" religious practices. As it operated throughout 2025, the ISA contributed its own authority to parallel moral policing efforts, worsening the country's already poor record of restricting FoRB and other personal freedoms for women, religious minorities, and dissenting Muslims. This policing perpetuated various forms of harassment and forced compliance throughout 2025—such as the use of arbitrary checkpoints and verbal intimidation—that fostered religious self-censorship and fear throughout the country. Human rights organizations have warned that these morality policing initiatives institutionalize systematic abuses, further eroding Libya's already fragile environment for FoRB, and place additional burdens on women, youth, and nonconforming religious groups.

## Key U.S. Policy

In 2025, longstanding concerns over the country's political fragmentation, weak central institutions, and the enduring threat of violence by nonstate actors continued to shape U.S. policy toward Libya. However, the administration of U.S. President Donald J. Trump has begun to press for constitutional and legislative reforms in Libya that enshrine greater personal freedoms, such as FoRB. In February, President Trump extended national emergency funds in Libya for another year, following consistent U.S. precedent since 2011. In November, the Trump administration hosted a delegation of senior Libyan officials to strengthen bilateral partnerships as well as to discuss opportunities for economic investment.

The U.S. Department of State did not designate Libya as a CPC in its most recent designations on December 29, 2023.