

# Christians in the Mirror Reveals Reality of Persecution Overseas

by [Guest Writer](#)

Share

Tweet

Pocket

On June 10th a new film on Christian persecution [premiered](#) in Washington, D.C. [Christians in the Mirror](#), a documentary written and filmed by Jordan Allott [[In Altum Productions](#)] and co-produced by Allott, Patrick Carberry and Paul Jallo [[Joshuacord](#)], tells the courageous stories of persecuted Christians in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, India, and Egypt. In the following *Q&A* with contributor Sheryl Henderson Blunt, Allott talks about what he hopes Americans will learn from these stories of intense suffering and unimaginable persecution, and how viewers can be moved to act on behalf of the persecuted church.

***Q: What has been the response to the film so far?***

**A:** People are definitely excited about the film and are helping to get it out to as many viewers as possible. Unfortunately, films on Christian persecution are really needed right now, and there's not a lot out there, so the film fills a void.

We're seeing it being used in many different ways, not only to raise awareness, but also to connect people. It's connecting people in the U.S. with those Christians who are being persecuted around the world. I also thought it was important to break the stereotypes of how we think about Christians in different parts of the world—their backgrounds, ethnicities, races, geographic locations and challenges—because when we hear their stories and see their lives in the film, we feel connected to them. If we can take away some of the barriers of language, ethnicity, and things like that, we can build bridges with these very vulnerable communities.

***Q: Talk about how the film came about.***

**A:** I'd done a previous film, *Our Last Stand*, that focused on a similar topic—the persecution of Christian communities in Iraq and Syria. It was a project that I really felt was important and timely. Pat Carberry, founder of the Tampa-based Christian nonprofit Joshuacord, had the idea for this film. He approached me and Paul [Jallo], also with Joshuacord, and we all got involved.

We all felt a similar calling to make this film a reality. Joshuacord is a very diverse organization and those who worked on the film and those who are highlighted in the film are from different denominations. This was intentional. The film is Christ-centered and that's the most important thing. We wanted the film to help persecuted Christians of all denominations and to inform and inspire American Christians of all denominations. Denominational differences are important, but we have to remember that Christians are being persecuted because they are believers in Christ, regardless of their denomination.

***Q: What was the time frame?***

**A:** We spent about two-and-a-half years working on it. But I know Patrick had the idea for creating awareness through a film for longer than that. I believe the documentary has an evergreen quality that will allow it to educate and inspire for many years to come.

***Q: Did you have any problems filming in these countries?***

**A:** The most difficult country to enter was Syria. I had been to Syria three other times in the last five years, but on those occasions I traveled in from either Iraq or Turkey. The Christian militias there helped during those trips. On this occasion I wanted to highlight Aleppo and the Damascus area, so I needed to enter via Beirut, Lebanon. Once I was in the country, I felt relatively safe thanks to the Syriac Orthodox Church which made sure I was assisted throughout my stay. The year before I was in Damascus and the road from Aleppo to Damascus was very dangerous as the Battle of Aleppo, which claimed the lives of over 100,000 Syrians, was still raging. It's a four-hour journey from Damascus to Aleppo. This time I traveled this road with a deacon who was wearing clerical clothing. There were dozens of checkpoints along the road from Damascus to Aleppo. When the government police officers stationed at the check points would see the deacon, they would smile and say, "Hello, how's it going Father?" These police officers were Muslim, but they had a lot of respect for members of the clergy, even though he was Christian. This might surprise many Americans.

When I was filming in rural Egypt my fixer said to me, "Look, people are coming out of Mosque now. We should leave; this isn't the ideal time to be shooting." Not that anything would have necessarily happened, but often times groups coming out of the Mosque could respond negatively to a westerner with a camera, so we put the camera down and decided to keep shooting later.

***Q: You interviewed a young Syrian photographer in the film who decided to stay with his family in their home despite intense persecution in Aleppo, the city that experienced the most devastation during Syria's civil war. What was it like interacting with him?***

**A:** Yes, Antione. He can joke around and has a bit of dramatic flair which is energizing, but he's also very sincere and incredibly articulate and likable. He's sort of the everyman in a way. He represents the thousands of Christians who stayed in Aleppo during years of war. They stayed and suffered, but persevered. Like Antoine said at the end of the interview, "We're fighting the jihadists, not with guns ... but with civilization." He and his family made the decision to stay. They had enough faith and optimism to stay, and they are doing heroic things just by not giving up.

***Q: You also spoke with the widow of one of the 21 Coptic Christians beheaded by ISIS on the beach in Tripoli in 2015. She actually says that she and others were "flooded by joy" that those who were beheaded did not deny Christ when they sacrificed themselves "in the name of Jesus."***

**A:** Yes, and watching her facial expressions—the way she said it with a sincere, joyful smile on her face—you see that she is so genuine and full of faith. It's beautiful.

It's also interesting because these people are very poor and they look differently and dress differently than a lot of us here, but I think that message of joy resonates. It takes us back to the core of Christianity and the joy and peace that come with giving your life to Christ—even her message about how the community has come together after the killings reveals this. I could really sense peace when I was visiting these families. Yes, it's beautiful.

***Q: In the film you say the United States government has been silent. Are there any specific actions you'd like the U.S. government take?***

**A:** Our goal is to try to be nonpartisan and we want to make sure that our elected officials, State Department, embassies, and diplomats, are taking religious freedom into consideration when shaping or implementing our foreign policy. Every country is very different of course, and sometimes we are dealing with complicated situations to the point where there isn't one bad choice and one good choice, but two bad choices to choose from. In some areas you have a lot of ethnic and religious or tribal complexities along with outside groups with different motivations. That can make it hard to untangle.

Then there are countries with emerging economies like India, with governments that are not doing enough to combat religious-based persecution. Unfortunately, western countries are often hesitant to speak out against these governments because of the potential economic implications. International religious freedom has not always been a priority for this country, even though it is at the core of who we are as a nation in the United States. But in most places in the world, it's often assumed that communities are not going to be treated equally

because of their religious identity. For example, if you talk to Chaldean Christians in Iraq about their security or about the access to humanitarian aid, they just assume that they'll be treated like second-class citizens.

So we need to make sure that religious freedom is a priority and not just assume that everyone is being treated equally when aid and security, etc., are being given. Listening to different minority groups is really important because they can show us what their specific challenges and needs are. So that very broad, long-term goal of advancing religious freedom and freedom of conscience is something that needs to be reflected in our relationships with other nations.

***Q: What do you hope the documentary will accomplish?***

***A:*** Well, awareness is the first step to anything, and then spurring people to action. Action takes on many different forms. We try to direct Christians to pray and to become spiritually involved.

Secondarily, whether we like it or not, our elected officials have a lot of power throughout the world. But one thing I've learned is that we often assume people at high levels of government know what's going on in every country in the world, when often they don't. On a positive note, I'm always surprised to see how open our elected officials are to learning more and taking an interest. Even one constituent raising an issue can get a lot done.

Third, our resources—time, money, etc.—can also affect people's lives. A little goes a long way. There are some experienced, trusted organizations that are helping persecuted Christians. So the film aims to inform and inspire Christians to act in large and small ways.

Everyone has a role to play. I hope that those who see the film will remember the words and the faces of the people we highlight for a lifetime. I believe they will then see the world and their faith in a new way.

*Sheryl Henderson Blunt is a former senior writer for Christianity Today and a Robert Novak Journalism Fellowship Alumnus whose articles and reporting have appeared in Congressional Quarterly, The Philanthropy Roundtable, The American Spectator, The Weekly Standard, and other publications.*

---

Tagged with: [Christians in the Mirror](#) • [Institute on Religion and Democracy](#) • [Jordan Allott](#) • [Sheryl Henderson Blunt](#)