

# FREEDOM *of* RELIGION *and the* PERSECUTION *of* CHRISTIANS

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*The Open Doors Report, 2016*



**OpenDoors**

60 years of serving persecuted Christians



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Brother Andrew, founder of Open Doors, wearing a "#weareN" t-shirt in support of Iraqi Christians.

In 2015 Open Doors celebrated 60 years of service to Christians facing persecution because of their faith. It began when a young Dutch missionary, now known as Brother Andrew, travelled to Poland and discovered the reality of persecution for the first time. Today, Open Doors works in over 60 countries, linking support bases in 23 countries in their provision for Christians under pressure. Open Doors provides practical support to persecuted Christians such as food, medicines, trauma care, legal assistance, safe houses and schools, as well as spiritual support through Christian literature, training and resources.

*Cover photo: on 25 October 2015, a Christian prayer gathering in India was attacked. A mob dragged everyone outside and beat them viciously. Some were left unconscious. This man was one of the victims and is pictured en route to hospital.*

## Introduction

The persecution of Christians is getting worse – in every region in which we work – and it’s getting worse fast. The number of ‘persecution points’ (see methodology) that were required for a country to get into the Open Doors World Watch List, have increased by over 50% in just three years. Many countries have dropped down the list, not because persecution there is decreasing, but simply because others are getting worse faster. And it wasn’t good three years ago.

There are many millions more Christians today who are afraid to go to church, or no longer have a church to go to; who have to choose between staying faithful to God or keeping their children safe; who have been brutalised, lost their dignity or their liberty because they share the same faith as many in our own country, but they do not share our freedom. There are many, many more today who are mourning over recently lost loved ones. The trend is stark, as are the consequences for people just like you and me.

So – it is not good news. It’s not good news, but there is hope. There is hope because in many parts of the world, despite the pressure and the often terrible cost, the church continues to grow. There is hope because in countries such as Syria, Christian communities are reaching out, caring for and providing for their Muslim neighbours. And there is hope because in places such as Mandera, Kenya, ordinary Muslims stood strong against anti-Christian attackers, saying, “You kill all of us or none of us.”

There is always hope, and yet we are in unmarked territory – the pace and scale of persecution of Christians is unprecedented and growing fast. We should not expect that to change unless we are part of changing the situation. This report is unique, as our research team has access to grass roots data right down to village level, thanks to the long-standing relationships and practical work that Open Doors has been involved in – in small and even underground communities over the last 60 years. It is solid, it’s externally audited – and it’s important.

We are not helpless, destined simply to watch in dismay from the side-lines. We can and must be strenuous in protecting Christians and all others facing persecution for their faith. I urge you to read what follows, and to do everything possible within your spheres of influence to affect what happens next.

Thank you.

**Lisa Pearce**

CEO, Open Doors UK and Ireland

January 2016

**We are not helpless, destined simply to watch in dismay from the side-lines. We can and must be strenuous in protecting Christians and all others facing persecution for their faith.**

*This report was written by Stephen Rand on the basis of the research material produced by the Open Doors International Research Unit.*

## Key findings

The **key findings** in this report are:

- The persecution of Christians has increased... across every region in which Open Doors works
- Religious extremism – Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist – is the greatest source of persecution of Christians
- As well as in the Middle East, Islamic extremism has a second and powerfully destructive hub in sub-Saharan Africa
- Daesh violence is radicalising Muslims and therefore increasing pressure on Christians in many countries
- The state is still a major source of persecution; but increasingly extremism is a cross-border phenomenon
- Conflict and failed nation states result in increased levels of persecution
- Never before have so many Christians been on the move
- Gender violence is a weapon of persecution: women and girls are on the frontline
- Eritrea, Pakistan, Libya, China, India, Burma, Niger and Bahrain are countries of special concern; Latin America and Central Asia are regions of special concern
- North Korea is still the most difficult place in the world to be a Christian.

### METHODOLOGY

The annual World Watch List, published by the Open Doors International Research Unit, highlights the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. This global survey is distributed through Open Doors networks and augmented by academic and media reports. It describes the degree of freedom Christians have to live out their faith in five spheres of life – private, family, community, national and church life – plus a sixth sphere measuring levels of violence. The methodology provides ‘persecution points’ for each sphere.



This church in central India was destroyed by Hindu extremists during Dusshera celebrations on 22 October 2015.

## The rising tide of persecution... across all regions in which Open Doors works

For millions of people around the world, 2015 was a 'year of fear'. And the fear was franchised and exported globally: events in Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Somalia have started to affect the West. Daesh - the self-proclaimed 'Islamic State' - and its affiliates took their barbarity across borders like never before, into Libya, Kenya, Egypt and beyond. Bombs in Paris, gunfights in California, mass shootings on a Tunisian beach: all added up to a global feeling that no one, nowhere, is safe from the reach of this new breed of jihadists who can recruit, convert and train anyone, anywhere, through the internet. In a globalised world, there is no such place as abroad anymore. Everywhere is on our doorstep.

Throughout the world, religious extremism has driven violence, discrimination and persecution, and Christians are among the prime targets. The 2016 Open Doors World Watch List reveals that again, as in the previous year, persecution of Christians worsened across all the regions in which Open Doors works.

The World Watch List highlights the 50 countries in the world where it is hardest to be a Christian.

It is based on a comprehensive scoring system that takes into account the reality of religious freedom in various spheres of life: the individual, the social, the communal, the legal, the national – as well as measuring levels of violence. The number of persecution points needed to enter the 2016 list has increased by 50% since 2013. The level of persecution increased even in countries that dropped out of the top 50.

This truth is reflected in a chilling headline statistic: last year verifiable records showed that, at the very minimum, 4,344 Christians were killed for directly faith-related reasons during the 2014 reporting period: double the 2013 figure of 2,123. In 2015 the equivalent figure rose to 7,100.

### The very minimum number of Christians killed for directly faith-related reasons:

<b>2013</b>	<b>2,123</b>
<b>2014</b>	<b>4,344</b>
<b>2015</b>	<b>7,100</b>

- In **six** countries the level of persecution **increased seriously** (by 7 points or more): Eritrea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Kuwait.
- In **nine** countries the level of persecution **increased significantly** (by 5 to 6 points): India, Ethiopia, UAE, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Yemen, Kenya, Indonesia and Niger.
- In **16** countries the level of persecution **increased slightly** (by 2 to 4 points): Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Palestinian Territories, Kazakhstan, Mali, Iran, Libya, Kazakhstan, Egypt, Brunei, Jordan, Malaysia, Tunisia, Turkey and Burma.
- In **13** countries the level of persecution stayed **about the same** (rising or falling by no more than 1 point): Uzbekistan, Qatar, Tanzania, Algeria, Mexico, North Korea, Nigeria, Bhutan, Laos, Comoros, Colombia, China and Saudi Arabia.
- In **five** countries the level of persecution **decreased slightly** (by 2 to 3 points): Maldives, Vietnam, Djibouti, Oman and Somalia.
- In the Central African Republic, the level of persecution decreased by 8 points - although killings of Christians remains worryingly high.

Governments are more worried than ever before about the impact of Islamic extremism, which is by far the most common driver of persecution on the 2016 Open Doors World Watch List: in 35 out of the top 50 countries, it is the primary engine of persecution.

As a result, countries in Central Asia have tightened their controls on all religious expression. In Buddhist Burma, where religious minorities have been violently oppressed for decades, the Muslim Rohingya people are a particularly persecuted minority. Under the guise of stopping Islamic extremism, a whole raft of severely restrictive legislation was recently passed, which further oppresses the Rohingya and catches Christian believers in its wake, thus raising the level of persecution.

The most oppressive regime in contemporary times, North Korea, tops this year's Open Doors World Watch List for the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Eritrea and Pakistan rise to their highest levels, to #3 and #6 respectively, and lawless Libya also enters the top 10 for the first time.

## Islamic extremism has another hub – sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest rate of population increase, the world's most rapid urbanisation, and the world's longest youth bulge – and the world's fastest-growing church. It is also the region where Arab and Islamic cultures come into sharp contact with African and Christian cultures. The result is deadly. The headlines focus on the Middle East, but there were more recorded killings of Christians due to their faith in northern Nigeria in 2015 than in the rest of the world put together: 4,028 out of a worldwide total of 7100 reported deaths. The top six countries where most Christians were killed for their faith in the World Watch List 2016 reporting period were all sub-Saharan African countries: Nigeria, Central African Republic Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Cameroon.

Sixteen countries in the top 50 are in Africa, seven in the top 20. Nine of the 15 between 51 and 65 are African, mainly sub-Saharan. In numerical terms at least, though not in degree, the persecution of Christians in this region dwarfs what is happening in the Middle East.

### THE MAIN ENGINES OF PERSECUTION

a) **Islamic extremism** – bringing the country/world under the 'House of Islam' through violent/non-violent actions

b) **Religious nationalism** – one religion is defined as the sole basis of national/ethnic identity, either by the state or by extremist groups eg Hindutva ideology in India

c) **Tribal antagonism** – the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in tribal context

d) **Denominational protectionism** – churches do not recognise or want to give room to Christians outside their structure or theological definition

e) **Communist oppression** – seeking to maintain communism (however defined) as the prescriptive national ideology

f) **Aggressive secularism** – attempting to eradicate the Christian faith from the public and private domain

g) **Organised corruption** – the creation of a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption as a means for getting rich

h) **Totalitarian paranoia** – in which religious freedoms suffer, alongside other freedoms, in the attempt to maintain power.



**“This pastor has 20 children: three of his own, and the rest from other pastors who have disappeared.”**

The words of a pastor from Laos, as he held up a photo of a fellow pastor. Laos has a vibrant if small church. But persecution is intense, and pastors disappear regularly. Pastor Mai, from the Hmong church, was told by his neighbours that they did not want a Christian in their village. But he continued to hold meetings in his home. On 7 March, he disappeared: his body was found in the forest three days later. He left a wife and four children. Other pastors look after the children of the ‘disappeared’.

*Photo: The Laotian man in this photo is in prison. When he converted to Christianity his village intimidated him to return to his old faith. When he refused, he was banished from the village. However, he could not afford to leave so they placed him under arrest.*

## The smash and squeeze: violence, repression and fear

Persecution of Christians is more than just physical violence. It is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that involves many aspects such as various forms of cultural marginalisation, government discrimination, hindrances on conversion, interferences on participation in public affairs and restrictions on church life. That is why the methodology behind the World Watch List distinguishes between **squeeze** (oppression) and **smash** (violence).

Violence is not the only aspect of persecution, but it is perhaps its sharpest edge and often more readily visible to the outside world.

It is always a challenge to document violent incidents targeting Christians, especially in countries where access to information is restricted, or where media reporting is insufficient. But research by the World Watch List team, assisted by Open Doors networks in the field and/or external experts, has enabled the following table to be drawn up. All incidents listed here occurred during the 2016 reporting period of 1 November 2014 to 31 October 2015. Note that some countries – those with very low numbers in both columns – have been left off the list, though their numbers are included in the totals.

Country	Minimum number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions)	Churches attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons
Nigeria	4,028	198
Central African Republic	1,269	131
Chad	750	10
Democratic Republic of Congo	467	13
Kenya	225	0
Cameroon	114	10
Libya	58	2
Pakistan	39	17
Syria	33	24
Burma	13	11
Egypt	12	69
Eritrea	11	0
Iraq	10	18
Mexico	10	13
Niger	10	115
India	9	23
Gambia	7	6
Colombia	6	14
Sudan	6	53
China	0	1,500
Sri Lanka	0	63
North Korea	No data possible	No data possible
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,100</b>	<b>2,406</b>

In the case of Nigeria, the figures are likely to be much higher, as many atrocities are underreported and religious affiliation is often not mentioned; our researchers have erred on the side of conservatism in assessing the evidence.

For the Central African Republic, the numbers of killings (1,269) and churches attacked (131) are for the period January-April 2015 alone, as it is notoriously difficult to document killings in the current crisis, so the actual numbers for the whole reporting period are likely to be much higher. Accurate reporting is also difficult in war-zones such as Syria and Iraq, where the incidents that were reported should not be considered as a complete record of violent acts affecting Christians during the reporting period. In both Syria and Iraq, Christian communities are affected by the continuing crisis in much of the country. Reports of the desecration of church buildings continued during this period, especially in areas controlled by Daesh.

In Libya, during this reporting period, three major violent incidents of persecution occurred, which are all part of a structural pattern of kidnapping and/or murdering of Christian migrants: in February 2015, 21 mainly Egyptian Coptic Christian migrant workers were murdered by jihadists affiliated to Daesh; in April, a similar incident occurred in which 79 Christian Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees were also kidnapped and more than 30 of them cruelly killed; in June 2015, 86 Christian Eritrean migrants (some reports mention 88), fleeing political repression in their home country, were kidnapped by Daesh militants in Libya.

It is important to understand that, perhaps even more than in the case of killings, attacks on churches are not just one-off events. A church attack may very well disrupt the Christian community around that church for a long time. Christians will fear to take their families to



Mothers of the school girls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Chibok, Nigeria, at an Open Doors trauma care seminar, August 2015.

church again. It will have a ripple effect on other communities too. A destroyed church that is never rebuilt will also be a continuous witness of the vulnerability of the Christian community and the impunity of the perpetrators. In 2014 we reported that a minimum of 1,062 churches were attacked; in 2015 that number more than doubled.

The smash of violence has clearly been in increasing evidence in 2015. But the World Watch List research also tracks how the exercise of the Christian faith gets squeezed in five distinct areas – private life, family life, community life, national life and church life. Much of the focus on persecution is dependent on incidents of violence; but effective policy-making must also recognise the reality of the squeeze: it is possible

for persecution to be so intense in all areas of life that Christians fear to witness at all, and the result is very low levels of violence – since incidents of persecution often result from acts of witness – but a very high level of persecution and the complete denial of Article 18.

In 2015, the countries where this squeeze was most intensive and effective were Somalia, North Korea, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Maldives, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Syria.

The highest levels of violence (smash) directed against Christians were in Nigeria, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Burma, Central African Republic, Egypt, Mexico, Sudan and India.

## RELIGIO-ETHNIC CLEANSING AND GENOCIDE

Lord Alton has described events in Syria and Iraq as ‘a genocide that dares not speak its name’. He continues, “Deep-rooted religious hatred, a hatred of difference, is driving on a systematic campaign of deportation and exodus, degrading treatment, including sexual violence, enslavement, barbaric executions, and attempts to systematically destroy all history and culture that is not their own.”

Ethnic cleansing is defined as ‘the expulsion of an “undesirable” population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations,

or a combination of these’. Killings are only one element of these dynamics. Rape, kidnappings, destruction of houses and shops, destruction of fields, and other forms of violence contribute to terrorising the ‘undesirable’ population.

The reality is that in parts of Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, Somalia and north-east Kenya, persecution is taking place in the context of what could be defined as religio-ethnic cleansing or genocide. It involves a pattern which is systematic and backed by the deliberate policy of state or non-state actors: the intent is to remove or exterminate Christians completely from specific areas.



**“This morning my village was attacked for the third time within a year.”**

The despairing cry of a church leader from Syria. Their choice is stark: “Either we take up arms and fight, knowing we may die, or we flee, knowing we may never return.” But the resilience of Syria’s Christians is astonishing. It takes a lot to make them leave, and even then most refuse to go too far from their home. A Syrian church leader told an international conference of concerned believers, “Don’t make it easy for us to leave, because we want to show we are part of the silent majority in the Middle East who wants peace.”

*Photo: Pastor Samuel, a Syrian church leader, has chosen to stay in Aleppo to support his congregation and the internally displaced.*

## The impact of Islamic extremism

Milad Makeen Zaky was a part of Egypt's Coptic Christian minority. "From his childhood he was going to Sunday School, reading the Holy Bible, attending the prayer meetings in the church community," his mother explained. He struggled to find work in Egypt; that prompted him to move to Libya. In February 2015 a video was released that showed Zaky as one of the 21 Coptic Christians taken to a beach in Libya, forced to their knees and then beheaded. The video had the title: A Message Signed With Blood to the Nation of the Cross.

This is just one example of the terror unleashed by Daesh. They have kidnapped, assaulted and killed thousands. They have disfigured women by pouring acid on them, used intellectually disabled children as suicide bombers and cut off the hands of women who were caught using their mobile phones. They have routinely recorded videos of mass beheadings and released them via social media for the public to see.

One very obvious impact has been fear. And fear has led to a massive displacement, not only of people on the move within countries but also of people attempting to escape the Middle East and the Horn of Africa altogether. Dramatically, and often tragically, more than one million migrants have taken the hazardous route to Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, many of them Christians, have given up on the possibility of ever returning to their war-torn homeland.

There is not only a displacement of people; there is also a displacement of persecution.

It begins in the refugee camps, where fear of persecution has kept most Christians outside the official refugee settlement system, a fact highlighted in oral evidence given by Open Doors to the International Development Select Committee on 29 October 2015.

The ripples spread further. The highly effective Daesh publicity machine has undoubtedly prompted extremists in other countries to adopt their ideology and copy their atrocities. Other long-standing extremist groups have also been active.

In the northern and coastal areas of Kenya, attacks from al-Shabaab adherents killed 28 Christians on a bus from Mandera on 22 November 2014. Thirty-six Christian quarry workers were killed on 2 December 2014, again in Mandera; 147 Christian university students in Garissa were killed on 2 April 2015, and 14 Christian quarry workers were killed in Mandera on 7 July 2015. Most of these were 'execution-style' killings and Christians were targeted specifically by separating them from Muslims.



A more subtle but nonetheless profound impact is the Islamisation of Muslims across the world. All over the Middle East especially, Muslims are outwardly at least becoming more fundamentalist. Daesh is radicalising the population even in countries where it has no presence, but especially where it is close by.

This radicalisation is occurring even in places such as Iraqi Kurdistan, normally a beacon of freedom. It is currently acting as a safe haven for thousands of Christian refugees from Mosul and the Nineveh Plain. Yet the government is ordering land to be sold to Muslim families in several predominantly Christian areas and towns. This 'demographic reversal process' in many majority-Christian areas is forcing Christians to live precariously in a minority situation – or leave.

At the same time many Muslims are searching for a new identity as they turn away in disgust from extremism. As an Egyptian journalist said earlier this year, "We woke up and looked into the mirror, and we saw the face of the Taliban instead of ourselves." Many are considering Christianity as a faith option – but for many this is a high-risk choice, as converts from Islam are regarded as apostates and therefore become vulnerable to violence and even death.

Inevitably governments are more concerned than ever before about the effects of Islamic extremism, which once again is by far the most common engine of persecution on the 2016 Open Doors World Watch List: it is the main driver of persecution in 35 of the top 50 states. One obvious reaction is for governments to seek to defend themselves by tightening their control of all religious expression. This is true in Central Asia, for example. But the loss of religious liberty impacts every minority religious group, and measures intended to control Islamic extremism can also have a very negative impact on Christian groups and individuals.

Other governments choose to promote a religious national identity to combat Islamic extremism, and again Christians can be impacted, sometimes unwittingly. Christians have been almost collateral damage in Burma as the fear of Islamic extremism and the systemic repression of the minority Rohingya Muslims resulted in a whole raft of restrictive legislation in 2015. There are some Christian converts among the Rohingya

Muslims: they experience a highly oppressive double layer of persecution – from the state because they are Rohingya, and from their own society because they are apostates.

## EXTREMISM IS WELL FINANCED

Extremist movements are adept at raising funds from organised corruption and crime, which means that their ability to persecute Christians and other religious minorities within their reach can continue unabated. Daesh, despite its oil revenues and reported international and personal backers, still kidnaps Christians for money, and in December 2015 more than 300 Christians were still missing in Syria. In parts of Latin America, drug gangs run entire regions, and even impose taxes on churches. In response to losing territory in Somalia, al-Shabaab have been hiring themselves out to tribes as enforcers in local disputes. Christians always suffer when these violent movements have plenty of cash. As one local Christian said gloomily, "Full coffers also mean full coffins."

## *The nation state, religious nationalism and cross-border terrorism*

The nation state is still an important factor in the mechanisms of persecution. The constitution may deny full rights to citizens who do not belong to the state religion. The legal system may do the same. In other countries it may be the operation of the law, where it is used specifically against minorities, which engenders persecution. In yet others, the sharpest persecution occurs when the authorities operate outside the law.

The dynamic of the nation state can also be harnessed to release religious nationalism as an engine of persecution. National identity is seen as inseparable from religious identity, and the goal of merging both completely can be pursued violently, as well as constitutionally, legally and socially. The religious identity may be Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish or Christian. In December 2015 President Yahya Jammeh declared Gambia an Islamic state, while insisting the rights of all citizens and non-citizens would be respected. In August 2015, Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf spoke against recommendations that the country should declare itself a Christian state.

It is worth highlighting again that the most dangerous place to be a Christian is North Korea: a horrific example of a nation state using its power to terrorise its own citizens and deny human rights. It is the most extreme example of the damaging outworking of totalitarian paranoia as an engine of persecution. Sadly, it is not the only one.

Many countries routinely deny the reality of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to their citizens, both in principle and in practice – and therefore break their obligations under international treaties they have signed. So there is clearly enormous scope for pursuing the

opportunities presented by the mechanisms of the United Nations, however flawed, and also using the traditional channels of diplomatic relations between nation states.

It is still vital to respond to the challenges to freedom of religion or belief in the context of the nation state. But it is equally vital to recognise that persecution can be sourced both locally and across international borders.



Church Elder Robert Tschoupsia was injured in a twin suicide bombing in North Cameroon on 22 July 2015. The bombers were two young girls.

### **International sources of persecution**

Most conspicuously, the Islamic extremist self-styled caliphates challenge and undermine responses on a simple national basis. Daesh has exploited its control of areas inside both Syria and Iraq very successfully, and has also expanded into Libya. It is reported to be preparing the Libyan town of Sirte as a possible new headquarters should it have to vacate the Syrian city of Raqqa due to Western bombing raids. It is also encouraging non-national

allegiances: Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has declared its link to Daesh and expanded its reign of terror to neighbouring Niger and Chad, just as al-Shabaab in Somalia has moved into Kenya.

These three self-defined caliphates drive persecution in four of the top ten countries on the World Watch List (Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Libya), and significantly now in a fifth, Afghanistan. Indeed, al-Shabaab was responsible for Kenya's worst act of terrorism in 15 years when extremists held 700 students hostage on 2 April 2015 at Garissa University College and slaughtered 147 Christian students, after carefully separating them from their Muslim colleagues. Many smaller extremist movements have also declared themselves part of this group of caliphates, reaching as far as the Democratic Republic of Congo. This new 'brand' of extremist behaviour and strategy requires an intelligent and strategic international response.

## Local sources of persecution

The local layer of persecution is often overlooked but can contain the more essential dynamics of persecution. The behaviour of local authorities may not reflect the norms of central government, or may be overlooked in the pursuit of stability. In Laos our researchers report that one district enacted a law that bans local people from believing in Christ so that, if anyone carries out any Christian activity publicly or privately, the village expels them. In the past, local leaders have refused Christians the right to conduct their own funerals.

In Central Asia too burial rites are a source of persecution: cemeteries are usually controlled by imams, and they frequently refuse to bury Christians who have converted from Islam. Not only that but they have been known to put pressure on family members, denying them a burial plot if they do not re-convert their deceased relative. In rural Egypt justice is often dispensed by local tribal courts, which operate a

parallel jurisdiction with government approval; Christians always lose in these forums. In China there are wide variations in the experience of Christians depending on where they live: it is clear, for example, that the campaign of removing crosses from churches in Zhejiang province is the product of local issues rather than a reflection of national policy and may be more concerned with building regulations than anti-Christian persecution.

These sources of persecution are either permitted by national governments, or indicate a reluctance to enforce the constitution or legal procedures on behalf of minorities. Christians in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh all complain that the police do not protect them, or actively connive in their persecution.

**“It is still vital to respond to the challenges to freedom of religion or belief in the context of the nation state. But it is equally vital to recognise that persecution can be sourced both locally and across international borders.”**

*Photo: Iraqi IDP boys watching Open Doors partners distribute food parcels to the disused shopping centre which is now their home.*



**“What’s so wrong with the darkness? We have to stay in the darkness with others so that we all see the light together!”**

A Jordanian Christian was asked, “Where is the light in the Middle East today?” This was his reply. He had learned to see darkness as a gift, in which insights may be glimpsed and unexpected resolutions found. For him, it was important that through this dark time, Christians, Muslims and other faith communities experience the same trials, and as they do they will come together with a new unity and understanding.



## Refugees: conflict and displacement

The conflict zones of the world are very often places where Christians are especially vulnerable, particularly where one or both of the warring protagonists either are unsympathetic to Christians or see them as hindrances to their military and/or religious objectives. This has been true in Syria, where many Christians did not want to fight on either side. Iraq continues to be three countries – the Kurdish area, the Daesh area and the Shia area. In all three, life is getting worse for Iraqi Christians.

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Iran are fighting a proxy war. Virtually all Western expatriates have fled, leaving just a few thousand Christian believers from a Muslim background in the country facing hostility from both sides: the Saudi-led forces are reportedly making life even harder for the few Christians remaining.

There are countries where the state is the main source of persecution; in others, sometimes called failed states, the complete lack of law and order means that Christians and other minorities are left unprotected and increasingly vulnerable. This is true in Libya, where there is not only conflict but also lawlessness. It is divided into three separate regions, with Daesh affiliates rapidly gaining more territory. The small groups of Christian believers from a Muslim background have to keep a very low profile to survive and migrant Christians, particularly from Sudan and Eritrea, are also targeted. Dozens have been killed this year, often in grisly beheading scenes videoed and broadcast by Daesh.

### Displaced people and refugees

Conflict produces refugees. Persecution produces refugees. Conflict and persecution together combine to produce even more refugees. Never before have so many Christians been on the move. Syria is the largest displacement crisis globally, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). More than half the

Syrian population of 20.5 million have left their homes; 7.6 million are internally displaced within the country and 4 million are refugees outside it. It is impossible to know how many of the 1.9 million Christians that were in Syria at the start of the civil war are among this group, but estimates are that between 600,000 and 900,000 remain in the country. Aleppo was Syria's most Christian city, but by the spring of 2015 the number of Christians in the city had gone down from 400,000 to less than 60,000 in the four years of the war. Many of these have sought sanctuary in nearby Lebanon, reluctant to register with UNHCR and reveal their religious identity. A Christian father from Syria said, "We are still a vulnerable minority in a very dangerous place." Others have joined the exodus to Europe, hoping to find refuge in a continent they regard as 'Christian'.

### "Never before have so many Christians been on the move."

Less well-known are the tens of thousands of Christians leaving the 12 Sharia states of northern Nigeria, where 27 million Christians remain second-class citizens, and now many thousands are fleeing the anti-Christian violence of Hausa-Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt region. This has created enormous numbers, with an estimated 2.1 million internally displaced people in northern Nigeria, many of whom are Christians.

In Kenya many Christians are fleeing from the Muslim-majority areas. Tens of thousands from Eritrea continue to brave the desert and the trafficking gangs, hoping to reach Europe. It is clear from the camps in Calais that a significant proportion of those leaving Eritrea are Christians.

Pakistani Christians are fleeing to countries in south-east Asia, claiming asylum on grounds of persecution: it is likely that 10,000 are in Thailand,

for example, where they are badly treated and are refused refugee status by the government. This means they are not allowed to work, are subject to police intimidation and are forced to rely on handouts and sporadic work. Sadly, Thai churches are wearying of the burden of supporting them.

In Burma the military authorities continue their war against Christian minority groups such as the Kachin and the Chin. There are thought to be 100,000 Christian refugees living precariously in China across the border, and even more are internally displaced. Their camps are cruel places, with young girls particularly exploited and married off. Abuse is rampant and drugs remain a major problem too.

In Latin America, war has also displaced millions. Colombia comes second only to Syria in the numbers of internally displaced – 6 million – many of these will be Christians forced out due to their conversion in indigenous areas or their opposition to armed groups. In Mexico, where there are just over 281,000 displaced, this is particularly the result of antagonism from animistic tribes, resentful of the Christians converting and rejecting the sometimes brutal traditions of these tribal groups.

One of the 120,000 Christians who fled the march of Daesh over the Nineveh plain in Iraq said, “Yes, we have to cope with the trauma of leaving, and

sometimes with the dreadful things we have seen, but the hardest thing I find is to keep hope alive that we will ever return. If you feel despair about the future then it is very hard to find the motivation to survive.”

**“The hardest thing I find is to keep hope alive that we will ever return.”**

Open Doors puts an emphasis on being physically present with persecuted Christians, praying with them and assuring them that they are not forgotten. From this basis practical help is also given, such as food, medicines, trauma care, legal assistance, safe houses and schools, as well as spiritual support through Christian literature, training and resources. This also includes advocacy on their behalf. An Iraqi refugee mother said, “You help to keep our hope alive.”



Syrian refugees receiving humanitarian aid from Open Doors.

## Gender violence: women and girls on the frontline of persecution

In many places across the world Christian women and girls face a double vulnerability: the disadvantage and repression prompted by their gender is overlaid by the hostility and persecution that comes from their minority Christian faith. The intersection between gender-based vulnerability and faith-based persecution is visible in both family and community life, with women and girls often facing severe domestic violence upon conversion and risking brutal community reprisals.

Two years ago in India, 15-year-old Roshni (name changed for security reasons) was raped in a locally organised punishment – with many women complicit – for sharing her Christian faith enthusiastically in her predominantly Hindu locality. Her assailant was released from jail after just two years; this news petrified Roshni to the extent she stopped eating and had to be admitted to hospital to recover.

Sexual violence against Christian women and girls because of their faith is all too common. Open Doors is training and supporting trauma carers in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, across North Africa and in the Horn of Africa, Colombia, Burma, Malaysia and Laos.

Open Doors commissioned research in Nigeria which revealed that rape is a deliberate tactic by Boko Haram, seen as a legitimate weapon of war designed to intimidate the population into accepting political-religious change. The use of rape was also justified by Boko Haram militants on the basis of 'sex as jizya', a reference to a tax that early Islamic rulers demanded from non-Muslim subjects in return for protection.

This report also revealed how effective it is to focus attacks on women and girls, as the knock-on effects are devastating to their communities. In April 2014 more than 200 girls were abducted

from Chibok State Secondary School in Nigeria. Eighteen months later, Yakubu Nkiki Maina, the chairman of the Chibok Abducted School Girls' Parents' Association, said "Some of the mothers have even developed ulcers. They cannot eat well... the mothers are always crying. Up to now, the parents, my colleagues and more especially our women, are in terrible conditions. They need medical care. We cannot afford to carry them to hospital. We've buried 18 parents of these girls due to these problems."

By targeting women, entire families and Christian communities are 'dishonoured', regularly leading husbands to reject wives who are victims of rape, with all the consequences for their children. In the Central African Republic, Open Doors is working with church leaders and families of victims specifically to counter this response.

Another report examined the reality for Christian women in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt. It concluded that the risks and inequalities faced by Muslim women are magnified exponentially in the lives of Christian women and children. A climate of explicit discrimination toward Christian minorities seeks to Islamise, intimidate, terrorise, drive out or neutralise Christian communities, and intensifies abuses.



Sarita, from India, suffered 13 years of physical and mental abuse from her husband due to her Christian faith.

### These abuses include:

1. Kidnapping and forced marriages, which compel Christian girls to convert to Islam
2. Honour killings, frequently due to a conversion from Islam to Christianity
3. Domestic violence
4. Rape, sometimes specifically used to take the virginity of young Christian women, and force them to convert and marry their Muslim rapists – or be killed

5. Physical abuse for Christian girls not covering their heads or otherwise wearing 'provocative' clothing in mixed neighbourhoods or communities. The consequences may include beating, rape or having acid thrown in their unveiled faces, which is becoming a common form of assault

6. Blasphemy accusations – bearing in mind that a woman's testimony is worth only half of a man's in many countries and therefore she has no defence.

## Countries of special concern

### Eritrea

Eritrea has been dubbed the 'North Korea of Africa' and ranks among the very worst countries in terms of freedom of religion, freedom of press, rule of law and other dimensions of human rights. It is #3 in the 2016 World Watch List. The primary driver of the persecution of Christians is President Afewerki's totalitarian paranoia. Any Christian who dares to speak up in Eritrea and protest against the treatment of Christians is jailed or arrested, no matter what their status. The former Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Abune Antonios, has been under house arrest since 2007 for speaking out. According to a UNHCR



The arm of a young Eritrean man who fled his country. His tattoo reads 'rely on the cross'.  
Photo credit: Ricci Shryock

report from November 2014, 22% of all refugees reaching Italy by boat are Eritrean. "Eritrean Christians, even though they know that there is a very high probability of falling into the hands of traffickers and ruthless radical groups like Daesh, are still desperate to escape from Eritrea," one researcher confirmed.

### Pakistan

The world's second-largest Muslim country, Pakistan, has risen to #6 and, registers highly in the violence category of the World Watch List research. Amongst other incidents a Christian couple were thrown into a brick kiln, and a twin bomb attack on two churches in Lahore in March 2015 left 25 dead and wounded many more. This overt violence can overshadow the everyday abuse of Christian girls – who are frequently abducted, raped, forced to marry and convert – and the ongoing abuse of the blasphemy laws. The country's 3.8 million Christians feel increasingly under threat in their daily lives. The persecution of religious minorities is in effect enabled rather than deterred by the state, and the alarming lack of condemnation of cases of persecution by government officials, combined with a weak judiciary and constabulary, has seen an increase in the number of those leaving the country to seek asylum abroad.

## Libya

The situation for Christians had already been extremely difficult and has now deteriorated, making Libya #10, the highest it has ever been on the World Watch List. Within a context of persistent anarchy, Christians – both nationals and foreigners – are squeezed between fanatical Islamist groups and criminal gangs.

The dependence of Libyan society on militia forces, and the pseudo-integration of these forces as paramilitary units attached to a 'national' Libyan defence force (with salaries paid by the Libyan government), has made protecting civil liberties, such as the freedom of religion, very difficult. Leaders of state security in Benghazi have made unhelpful statements: one asserted that Libya was a '100% Muslim country'; another indicated that while his forces will protect Christian churches, Christians in Libya could easily be considered a threat to national security and warned ominously that Christians should not rebuild destroyed churches or do anything that could be misinterpreted as proselytising.

Christians are the most numerous non-Muslim religious group and have been the target of intimidation campaigns, arrests and assassinations by militant Sunni Muslim organisations. The influence of groups related to Daesh, who have been responsible for beheadings and other atrocities, is also growing. Over the last years, hundreds of Christians are reported to have been abducted by paramilitary groups and imprisoned. Coptic churches have also come under attack. A report by Amnesty International released in May 2015 corroborates this, highlighting that 'in particular Christian migrants and refugees are persecuted and are at highest risk of abuse from armed groups that seek to enforce their own interpretation of Islamic law'.

## China

China remains one of the most difficult to understand countries on the World Watch List as it is so multi-faceted. It is #33, with a score very similar to last year. Church meetings continued to be disrupted and stopped, for example in Guangdong province. These interventions tended to occur when foreigners attended the gatherings, foreign media was involved or the gathering was perceived as too big. There is continuing pressure against Christians belonging to the Han Chinese majority, and the level of persecution against the relatively small number of converts from Muslim Uighur and Tibetan backgrounds remains high.

Churches can expect to have their freedoms further rolled back because of four new emphases of President Xi Jinping's new 'normal' society. The first is on social stability, and so if a church becomes a national network with too much power in the eyes of the Communist party, it becomes a rival. Second, there is a new emphasis on 'rule by law' – much Christian activity occurs in a 'grey' area that is not protected by law and these so-called grey areas will shrink. This is particularly worrying for house churches. Third, there is a new emphasis opposing non-governmental organisations, where NGOs are seen as rivals or threats to the Chinese Communist Party, and this greatly affects the charitable and social work of Christians. Finally, there is a new anti-Western rhetoric, and Christianity – unlike Buddhism and Confucianism – is seen as a foreign religion. One commentator says, "The church of China is going to end up in the crosshairs of Xi's new 'normal.' If you want to have a church, don't rock the boat. Don't protest about the exploitation of workers. Don't criticise the state for its poor record on human rights. Don't teach people from the Bible that they must obey God first. Don't organise nationally. And don't have foreign links. The Chinese government is issuing an ultimatum: play it safe, and we won't clamp down. Be radical, and we'll crash your walls down."

## India

At #17, India is higher on the World Watch List than ever before. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi made some speeches underlining that his government gives 'equal respect to all religions', attacks on churches and pastors rose even higher than in 2014. Christian and Muslim leaders are convinced that the election of the BJP has encouraged increased violence against minority religions, with less response from the authorities. Rev Dr Richard Howell of the Evangelical Fellowship of India says, "Political Hinduism has arrived and majoritarian persecution has begun... Every week there are three to four incidents of mobs attacking Christians."



The bereaved family of Purna Mallick, who was burnt alive by villagers on 6 July 2015 after refusing to re-convert from Christianity to Hinduism.

BJP parliamentarians have begun mounting efforts to impose anti-conversion legislation at the national level. At present, such legislation exists only at provincial level in five states. It targets only conversion away from Hinduism – Christians becoming Hindus is regarded, not as a conversion, but a 'home-coming'. Even in states where there is no anti-conversion law, such as Maharashtra (where an anti-conversion bill is being discussed) and Jharkhand, in reality it is deemed to be in force. Christians active in sharing their faith are monitored, their homes raided and their worship services attacked.

Converts from a Hindu background, and their children, are registered as Hindus during the census. It can be quite difficult for converts to hold a Christian wedding; baptisms have been hindered repeatedly in villages, small towns and occasionally even in cities. Cases have been reported from north and central India of Christian converts' funerals being targeted by radical Hindus. In some cases, families are forced to cremate the person according to Hindu rites even though a certificate of baptism is produced. Christians cannot adopt children by law and, under Hindu personal laws, conversion to another religion is a valid ground for divorce. In many areas Christians are discriminated against in terms of receiving benefits. Almost no one has been punished for crimes against the Christian community. Impunity seems to have become the norm: the paralysis of the criminal justice and police system is a matter of deep concern. Persecution in India is extremely violent – and the violence is increasing.

**“Persecution in India is extremely violent – and the violence is increasing.”**

## Burma

In November 2015 the first free and fair elections in 25 years saw a landslide win for the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) under Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Conversely, most ethnic parties fared badly and did not win many seats. Thus the new parliament will most likely see fewer Christian members than before.

Meanwhile the Burmese army continued – and even increased – its attacks against the largely Christian ethnic minorities in Kachin and Shan states unabated, despite ceasefire agreements. In addition, the radical Buddhist group Ma Ba Tha increased its campaigns against religious minorities, especially the Rohingya Muslims. Its

campaign peaked in the successful introduction of four laws for the 'Protection of Race and Religion' in August 2015, building insurmountable hurdles for conversions and complicating religiously mixed marriages. These will affect Christians significantly. Suu Kyi remained silent on both developments. Ma Ba Tha has indicated its support for the new government will depend on the government's backing for these four laws.

Rohingya Christians face a double layer of persecution. In addition to the restrictions placed on the Rohingya in general – for example, they are not allowed to leave their villages in Rakhine, so church leaders cannot attend training courses – they also face hostility from the Muslim community.

## Niger

Niger has entered the World Watch List at #49, with worrying signs of increasing oppression (squeeze) and plain violence (smash). More than 98% of the population are Muslim; the number of Christians is estimated at 52,000. For many years religion has been understood to be a private matter but there are now indications that the separation of religion and state is increasingly under pressure.

Muslim clerics of the Izala are present, who are a known radical group also in Nigeria. Other Islamic pressure groups such as Tariqa ('The way' in Arabic – the Sufi way of approaching Allah) are active in specific parts of the country (eg Maradi, Niamey). Izala and Tariqa create pressure on minority religions and on Muslims they consider to be deviating from Islam. In addition, the spread of Boko Haram into Niger territory has caused violence against Christians to rise sharply, and 45 churches were burned following western support for Paris after the Charlie Hebdo attacks.

## Bahrain

This mainly Shia-Islamic country is relatively tolerant in general because of its international position in banking and trade. A considerable number of expatriate Christians (mainly from South Asia) work and live in Bahrain and are relatively free to practise their faith in private places of worship, but proselytism is illegal. Bahrain has entered the World Watch List at #48.

The constitutional position regarding religious freedom is contradictory. It provides for religious freedom, but also states that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals. It declares Islam to be the state religion, and in effect Muslims are not allowed to change their religion. Nevertheless, since the restoration of the constitutional monarchy in 2002, Christians have been represented in the Upper House. Alice Samaan, the current Bahraini Ambassador to the UK, became the first Christian to chair a parliamentary session in Bahrain in 2005. For foreign Christians, Bahrain remains relatively tolerant. The status of Sharia as the principal source of legislation, however, seriously restricts the public witness of Christian faith in the country, and the fear is that the impact of Daesh may increase the pressure on Christians in the future.

## Regions of special concern

**While the focus of intense persecution is centred on the Middle East and Africa, it is a global phenomenon, and our research notes important trends in other areas.**

### Latin America

Latin America is arguably the most Christianised continent, yet persecution is on the rise. This is most apparent in countries where governments are unable to control all their territory. Drug-trafficking is the root of the problem. Once-powerful guerrilla movements such as the FARC in Colombia have morphed into drug-trafficking organisations, and mafia-style crime syndicates beside the continent with guns ready to kill anyone who stands in their way or money available to use corruptly to get their way.

Often the only group who will stand up against these violent racketeers are local church leaders. But being in charge of a wealthy church can make you a target for extortion. In one city in Mexico they came to the pastor and said, "We've counted 550 people in your church. That means you owe us \$10,000 dollars each month... Pay up and live." And those who dare to preach good ethics, to stand against corruption, or, worst of all, encourage people to leave the drug gangs, can expect a violent visit, and often a violent end. Mexico has reached its highest ranking in the



World Watch List – #40 – mainly due to its levels of anti-Christian violence, and Colombia is at #46. Trends such as these never stay in one area in a globalised world. West African countries are now the targets of the Latin American drug-traffickers who are actively making Guinea-Bissau their hub in the region. We can expect more persecution there.

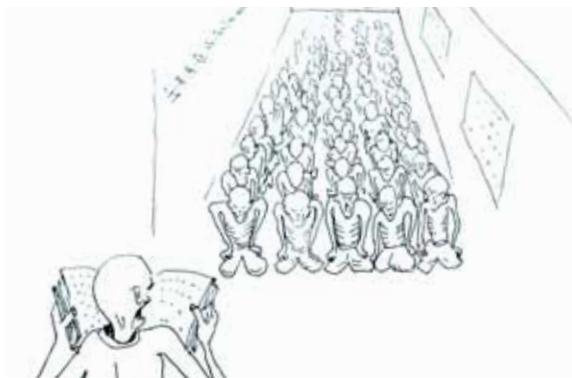
### Central Asia

Christians living in Central Asian states have seen a sharp deterioration in their religious freedom, especially as these governments increase their surveillance and control on all groups in society, often citing the need to crack down on Islamist inspired terror. Uzbekistan is a perennial occupant of the top 20 list at #15, with Turkmenistan joining it at #19, and Tajikistan (at #31 moving up from #45) and Azerbaijan (at #34 from #46) constituting some of this year's significant risers.

While sometimes brutal, the tactics of persecution can also be remarkably sophisticated. A well-known pastor, for example, inexplicably receives the gift of a house, or a luxury car. He does not know where it has come from. It is a gift from the state, and designed to sow suspicion and distrust among his congregation that he is compromised. In another scenario a pastor may be arrested, but left alone in jail, well treated, for a few days. When released back to his congregation un-harmed, the pastor is not believed when he says that he did not betray anyone. The seeds of disunity are sown successfully and the church is fatally weakened.

## North Korea: still the most difficult place in the world to be a Christian

North Korea heads the World Watch List for the fourteenth consecutive year. Kim Jong Un has continued to consolidate his power, and no changes or even improvements have been seen in the past year. Ideology again trumped everything as could be seen in the celebration of the ruling Korean Workers Party's 70th anniversary in October 2015.



A sketch by a former inmate of Chongori prison camp, North Korea, showing prisoners receiving ideological training in a labour camp.

No one is allowed or able to challenge or question Kim Jong Un's authority. The personality cult around the Kim family and the God-like worship of the rulers leaves no room for any religion. Anyone daring to revere anything or anybody besides the Kim dynasty is seen as dangerous and a threat to the state. Everyone has to attend weekly meetings where all citizens from every age are ideologically trained and indoctrinated. No one is able, let alone allowed, to develop deviating ideas, be they religious or other. The system of strict social control results in high self-censorship and self-control on what to say to whom, even in the most private and family relationships. Christianity is seen as deeply Western and despicable. Christians try to hide their faith as far as possible to avoid arrest and being sent to a labour camp. Being a Christian has to be a well-protected secret, even

within families, and most parents refrain from introducing their children to their Christian faith in order to make sure that their children do not inadvertently betray them.

In February 2015, North Korea detained Korean-Canadian pastor, Hyen Soo Lim, who had visited North Korea more than 100 times to distribute humanitarian aid for nursing homes, day-care centres and orphanages, and was in the country doing relief work. As North Korea from time to time detains foreign citizens, including Christian workers, this in itself was not surprising. Unusual, however, was that the authorities made him publically confess that his goal was to overturn the North Korean regime. This may point to an increasingly harsher approach towards the country's Christians; it certainly confirms the regime's perception of Christians. He was sentenced to life in prison with hard labour by the country's Supreme Court in December 2015. Lim joins an estimated 50-70,000 Christians in 'gulag-style' prison camps.

**“Christians try to hide their faith as far as possible to avoid arrest and being sent to a labour camp”**

## Signs of hope

For the first time in the modern history of Christianity, high-level leaders and representatives of the various church traditions gathered together to listen to, learn from and stand with persecuted Christians in the world today. The global gathering of 145 people took place in November 2015 in Tirana, Albania, and included representatives from the Roman Catholic church, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance and the World Council of Churches. Pope Francis sent a message hoping that the 'shedding of blood' would create a new unity among the world's churches. Leaders of the world's great Christian traditions pledged to 'listen more, pray more, speak up more, and do more' for the world's persecuted believers. Bishop Anastasias of Albania said, "The church is always a suffering church, or it is not a church."

In December 2015, a group of Kenyan Muslims travelling on a bus ambushed by Islamist gunmen protected Christian passengers by refusing to be split into groups, according to eyewitnesses. They told the militants 'to kill them together or leave them alone', a local governor told Kenyan media. An employee of the bus company, who had spoken to the driver involved in the attack, confirmed to the BBC that Muslims had refused to be separated from their Christian fellow-passengers.

While the church in the Middle East may face the possibility of almost complete destruction, Christians in the region do not see themselves as simply the victims of the current crisis. Many are doing more than just holding on: they are reaching out to those around them. In Iraq and Syria alone, Open Doors partners reach more than 24,000 families every month with basic necessities. Historic and academic evidence highlights

the substantial contribution of the Christian community to their countries, a contribution which has had a positive impact on many aspects of Middle Eastern society. By reaching out to those around them, Christians are providing much-needed hope in an otherwise hopeless landscape.

This highlights the role that Christians can play to ensure a peaceful future in their region. Pluralism is not just an end in itself: a growing body of quantitative research points to a strong positive correlation between religious freedom and social stability, political moderation and economic development.

The message of Christianity is about love, more than victimhood. Christians around the world have stood beside their persecuted brothers and sisters, providing practical aid, speaking up on their behalf, and demonstrating mercy, compassion and forgiveness, rather than hatred, exclusion and revenge.

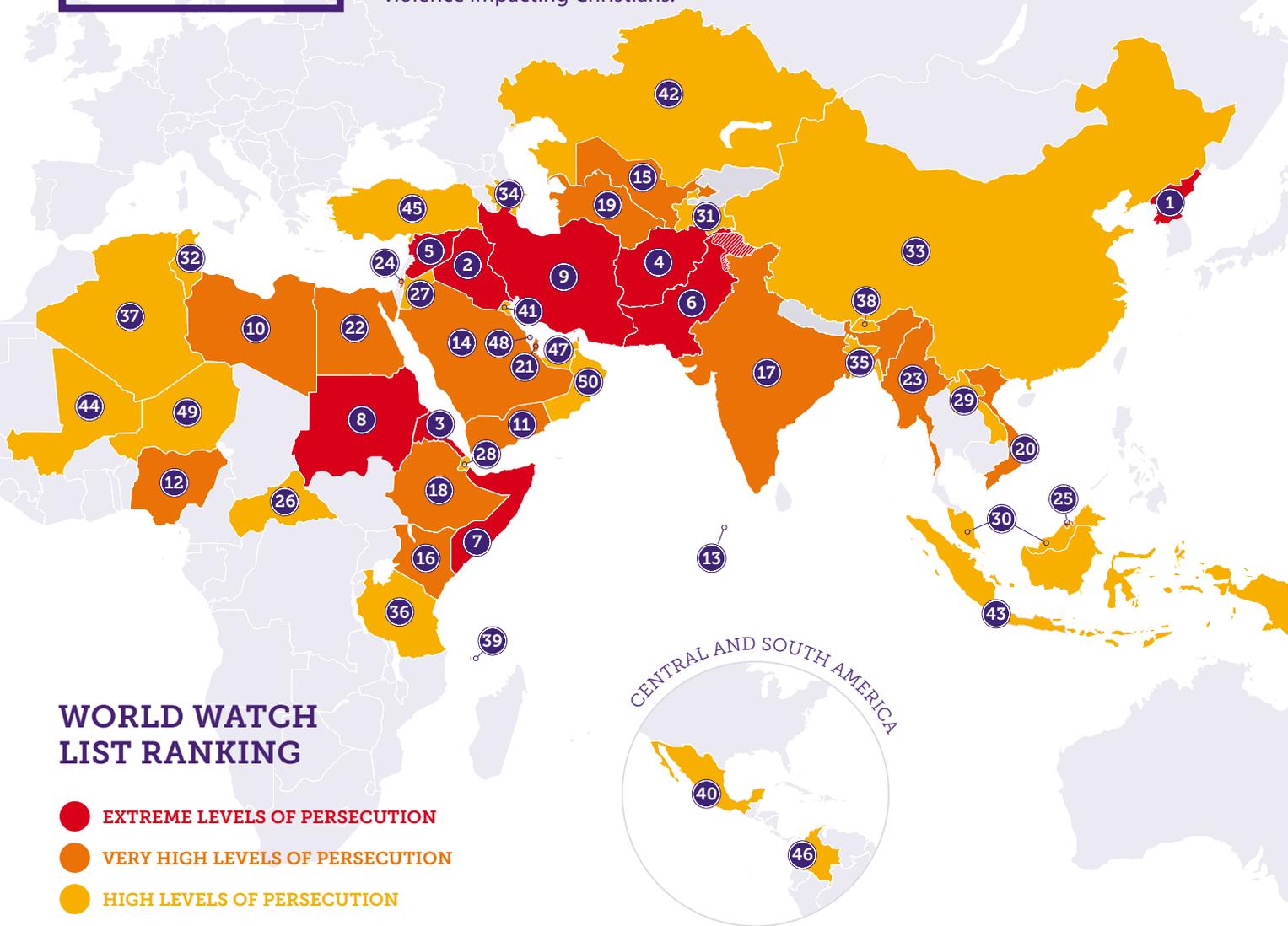
The World Watch List is a record of the places where faith costs the most. But the thing to remember is that, even in these places, there is faith to be found. The church may be persecuted, it may be suppressed, attacked, vilified, lied about. But it has not been, and will never be destroyed.

## Recommendations

- **Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) should be mainstreamed within the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with much greater attention given to developing an understanding of the issue among ambassadors, embassy staff and desk officers, and unequivocal commitment being stated by government ministers and acted on in their diplomatic interactions with other countries and at international forums.**
- The UK government's understanding of FoRB must go beyond a greater alertness to specific incidents of violence. A commitment to understanding how FoRB can contribute to countering extremism, encouraging economic development and assisting the poorest will lead to a greater willingness to argue for defending and promoting FoRB in principle through constitutional and legal frameworks, and in practice, particularly in terms of law enforcement.
- There should be more research done at an inter-governmental level to assess the relationship between the 'squeeze' and the 'smash' of persecution; in particular, this should examine the relationship between constitutional and legal barriers to FoRB and outbreaks of violence, to test whether habitual unwillingness to ensure FoRB is enshrined and promoted in the system of government is more or less likely to result in violence against minority religious groups.
- The Foreign Office should do everything possible to defend and promote FoRB through the UK membership of the Human Rights Council.
- The Department for International Development should give close attention to ensuring that relief and development aid reinforces rather than undermines FoRB; in particular, attention should be given to the circumstances in which an identifiable concern for Christians as a vulnerable minority is part of a legitimate attempt to assist the most vulnerable rather than an unjustifiable favouritism based solely on religious identity.
- The UK government has taken a positive and laudable lead in combating the issue of gender violence in conflict. There is considerable scope for this work to go further in embracing the reality of gender violence as a weapon of religious persecution.
- Much work needs to be done in communities to ensure women are recognised as victims of persecution who are in need of help and support, rather than guilty parties who should be cast out. Education – of both adults and children – is vital if women and girls are to be identified correctly as victims, and if communities are to be encouraged to support them after their ordeal.
- The UK government should take a lead not only in insisting that FoRB is a human right for all individuals of any faith or none, but also in highlighting that religious nationalism – when one religion is defined as the sole basis of national/ethnic identity – inevitably leads to persecution of religious minorities within that state.
- We welcome the increasing interaction between constituents and MPs on issues of FoRB, and the increasing attention being given by parliamentarians to this issue, as expressed in questions, debates and membership of the APPG for International Freedom of Religion or Belief; we urge and encourage parliamentarians to build on this within the UK parliament and through international parliamentary links.

# OpenDoors WORLD WATCH MAP 2016

This map illustrates the Open Doors World Watch List – a ranking of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The list is based on detailed information provided by Open Doors co-workers in more than 60 countries, as well as independent experts. Data is gathered on five spheres of life – private, family, community, national and church life – plus a sixth sphere measuring the degree of violence impacting Christians.



## WORLD WATCH LIST RANKING

- EXTREME LEVELS OF PERSECUTION
- VERY HIGH LEVELS OF PERSECUTION
- HIGH LEVELS OF PERSECUTION

1 - NORTH KOREA	14 - SAUDI ARABIA	27 - JORDAN	40 - MEXICO
2 - IRAQ	15 - UZBEKISTAN	28 - DJIBOUTI	41 - KUWAIT
3 - ERITREA	16 - KENYA	29 - LAOS	42 - KAZAKHSTAN
4 - AFGHANISTAN	17 - INDIA	30 - MALAYSIA	43 - INDONESIA
5 - SYRIA	18 - ETHIOPIA	31 - TAJIKISTAN	44 - MALI
6 - PAKISTAN	19 - TURKMENISTAN	32 - TUNISIA	45 - TURKEY
7 - SOMALIA	20 - VIETNAM	33 - CHINA	46 - COLOMBIA
8 - SUDAN	21 - QATAR	34 - AZERBAIJAN	47 - UAE
9 - IRAN	22 - EGYPT	35 - BANGLADESH	48 - BAHRAIN
10 - LIBYA	23 - MYANMAR (BURMA)	36 - TANZANIA	49 - NIGER
11 - YEMEN	24 - PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	37 - ALGERIA	50 - OMAN
12 - NIGERIA	25 - BRUNEI	38 - BHUTAN	
13 - MALDIVES	26 - CAR	39 - COMOROS	



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Open Doors UK, PO Box 6, Witney, OX29 6WG

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