

# North Korea

**No. 1 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

North Korea is the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Christians face arrest, torture, imprisonment and death for daring to believe there is a higher authority than the nation's leader, Kim Jong-un. Many follow Jesus in secret; parents often don't even tell their children about their faith for fear they will be revealed. Thousands of other Christians are trapped in horrific labour camps and isolated closed villages. But despite the risks, North Koreans are still choosing to follow Christ.

## Facts

- Christians are considered enemies of the state.
- Up to 70,000 Christians are in prison camps.
- The country has a 'three generations' punishment rule so, if your faith is found out, your children and their children will also be punished.
- Owning a Bible will get you arrested.
- If your Christian faith is discovered you will face arrest, disappearance, torture or public execution.
- North Korea is the place where you'll find more Bibles hidden in the ground (literally buried) than anywhere else in the world.
- There are an estimated 200,000-400,000 believers.

*"THEN I ASKED MYSELF: WHO IS THE MOST POWERFUL PERSON I CAN PRAY TO? I CAME TO THE CONCLUSION IT WAS GOD. SO I PRAYED FOR HIM TO RELEASE ME. I STILL WAS NOT A BELIEVER, BUT I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THANKS TO THOSE REMARKABLE PRAYERS IN THAT DARK PRISON CELL I HAVE BEEN BLESSED SO MUCH EVER SINCE."*

**Yong Sook became a Christian in a North Korean prison after being arrested when trying to flee to China**

## Pray

- Food is often scarce in North Korea. Pray for provision, and for protection for Open Doors partners who smuggle food and other basics into the country.
- For comfort and strength for those facing the daily horrors of life in labour camps.
- For protection for secret believers, and wisdom for them to know who to trust.
- For Kim Jong-un, that he would come to know the one true God. Pray for change within the regime and that the power of evil will be broken.
- For protection for secret Christians, and for strength and endurance for those in labour camps.
- Ask God to protect Open Doors secret workers as they smuggle food and Bibles into North Korea.



# Afghanistan

**No. 2 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

**It is illegal for an Afghan to be anything other than a Muslim. Discovered believers will sometimes be sent to a mental hospital, as families believe no sane person would leave Islam. Baptism is a crime punishable by death; several believers were killed in 2016 when their faith was discovered. The Taliban, an extremist Islamist group, remains active in Afghanistan and targets those who leave Islam.**

## Facts

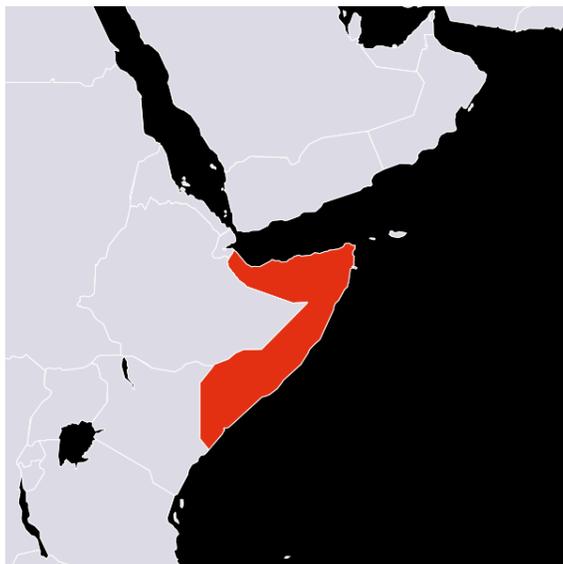
- Believers must keep their faith a secret. Most will have converted from Islam. In doing so they risk being known as traitors, facing threats, violence and worse for their choice.
- There are no public churches. Praying, singing or keeping Christian materials can be very dangerous.
- One Afghan MP has stated that all converts to Christianity should be executed.
- One of the only ways people hear the good news of Jesus is through Christian radio programmes.

*"I HAVE SEVEN CHILDREN. ONE OF THEM WAS DISABLED AND COULD NOT WALK. WHEN I BROUGHT THE NEW TESTAMENT INTO MY HOUSE, MY DAUGHTER STARTED TO MOVE. I BEGAN TO READ FROM THE BIBLE AND SHE STARTED TO WALK!"*

**Saif, a secret believer in Afghanistan**

## Pray

- For protection for believers as Islamic extremism increases – some militants have declared allegiance to the so-called Islamic State (IS) and announced a 'caliphate of Khorasan' in the northwest of the country.
- For wisdom for Christian parents, who do not wish to send their children to a madrassah (Islamic school) but fear being revealed if they share their faith with their children.
- For comfort and strength for isolated believers.
- For change to take place within the country, and for openness to religions outside of Islam.
- For stability and peace in Afghanistan.



# Somalia

**No. 3 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

**If you are even suspected of being a Christian in Somalia, you could be murdered on the spot. At least 12 Christians were killed last year when their faith was discovered. The militant Islamist group al-Shabaab has stated publicly that it 'wants Somalia free of all Christians', and they are able to persecute Christians with impunity, as Somalia is largely lawless. Somalia is a tribal society, and many tribal leaders see being Somali as being Muslim – leaving Islam is a betrayal of the tribe.**

## Facts

- The official state religion of Somalia is Islam.
- Militant Islamic group al-Shabaab has said it wants Somalia free of Christians – those thought to be Christians have been killed on the spot. At least 12 Christians were killed in 2016 when their faith was discovered.
- Converting to Christianity from Islam can carry a death sentence - there aren't more than several hundred Christians.
- Radio broadcasts are a key way people hear about the gospel.

*"IT APPEARS THAT I LIVE IN HELL ON EARTH. I WISH I COULD JUST STAND INSIDE A CHURCH AND CRY OUT IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST."*

**A secret Christian from Somalia**

## Pray

- For protection for secret believers, and wisdom for them to know who to trust.
- Owning a Bible could expose secret believers – pray that they will find other ways to access the Word of God and grow in their faith.
- Somalia has become a safe haven for Islamic radicalism – pray that a strong government will be formed that will stand against extremism and promote religious freedom.
- Praise God that, despite the terrible risks they face, there are men and women in Somalia following Jesus in secret. Pray for their protection – even reading about Christianity on the internet can be dangerous.
- That Somali Christians will find ways to grow in their faith in secret
- Many Muslims in Somalia are seeking God. Ask God to reveal Himself to them.



# Sudan

**No. 4 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

**At least five Sudanese Christians were killed and 12 were imprisoned for their faith in 2016. Sharia (Islamic law) is the foundation of Sudan's legal system, and leaving Islam is punishable by death; Christians are afraid even to talk about their faith. The government will often use inflammatory language against the West – Christianity is seen as Western. Believers are afraid to share their faith with their children or Muslim neighbours. Some disguise their identity even after death, being buried in Muslim cemeteries.**

## Facts

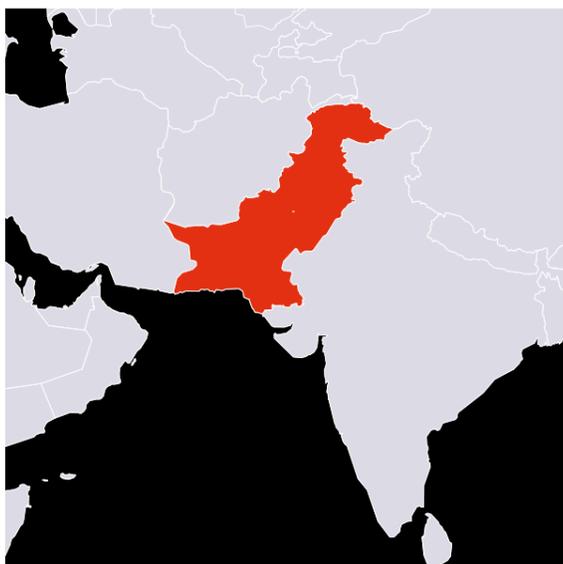
- The government is supported by radical Islamists; violence, murder and other threats to Christians often go unpunished.
- In October 2015, two churches were destroyed. One had existed for over 30 years until the government ordered it to be taken down for 'development reasons'.
- In 2013, a law was passed stating that no new licences for church buildings would be granted. Christianity is increasingly being outlawed.

*"THEY CAN BURN OUR CHURCH BUILDINGS, BUT THEY CANNOT BURN THE CHURCH FROM OUR HEARTS!"*

**Sudanese pastor**

## Pray

- For protection for secret believers, and for them to find fellowship with others they can trust.
- For courage for believers to stay faithful to Christ in the face of pressure and attack.
- For the leaders of Sudan, that the Holy Spirit will change their hearts and use them to bring justice and peace to the country.
- Churches face demolition and have been denied registration. Pray that Christians will still find ways to meet together.
- For protection for Christians, especially those from Muslim backgrounds who face the most intense pressure.



# Pakistan

**No. 5 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

Christians experience more violence in Pakistan than almost anywhere else. The nation's infamous blasphemy laws are abused to settle personal scores, particularly against minorities including Christians.

On Easter Sunday, 2016, a bomb exploded in a park in Lahore killing at least 69 people – they were largely Christian families. The Taliban claimed responsibility, targeting the Christian minority. Historic churches have been subject to bomb attacks. All Christians suffer from institutionalised discrimination, with occupations that are seen as low, dirty and derogatory being officially reserved for Christians, most of whom are from the poorer classes. At the start of the school year in 2017, seventeen year-old Sharoon Masih was killed by a classmate – indications were that Sharoon was being picked on because of his religion and caste.

## Facts

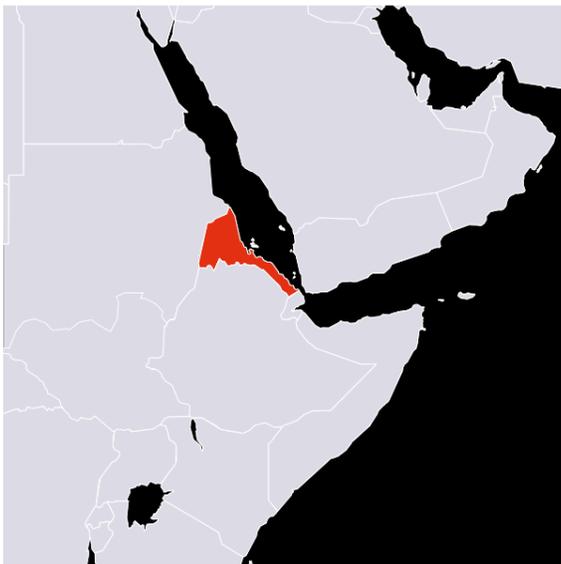
- Islamic extremism has led to intolerance of other beliefs.
- Insulting Islam can mean a death sentence.
- Allegations of insulting Islam can quickly escalate. Mobs take the law into their own hands.
- Christians still meet in church buildings, but services are monitored and sometimes attacked. Guards are hired to protect meetings.
- Christians are a minority and treated as second-class citizens.
- Estimates suggest up to 700 Christian girls are kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam every year.

*"YOU ARE CLEVER, YOU ARE GIFTED. BUT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN, SO YOU WILL BECOME A SWEEPER. WHY WOULDN'T YOU CONVERT TO ISLAM?"*

**Comment made to a Christian teenage girl**

## Pray

- For safety for Christians in Pakistan, and for particular protection for women and girls.
- For comfort and courage for Christian children, who are often bullied at school and sometimes even banned from using the same water fountain as other students as they will 'defile' the water source.
- For strength for Christians from a Muslim background, who are often physically attacked, rejected by their communities or even cursed using occult practices.
- For the Pakistani government to pass laws that will protect the Christians in the country.



# Eritrea

**No. 6 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

Three Christians died in prison in Eritrea in 2016. Others have been in prison for over 11 years in miserable conditions; some are kept in shipping containers in scorching temperatures. Christians are considered 'agents of the West' and a threat to the state. Eritrean Muslims are 'Muslim first', and leaving Islam is seen as a betrayal of their community. Many Christians would rather risk the deadly emigration routes via Sudan or Libya than stay in Eritrea. Arrests and forced disappearances are common, with more than 300 Christians arrested last year. Many believers are held in miserable conditions, some in shipping containers in scorching temperatures. Thousands have been imprisoned, some for over a decade.

## Facts

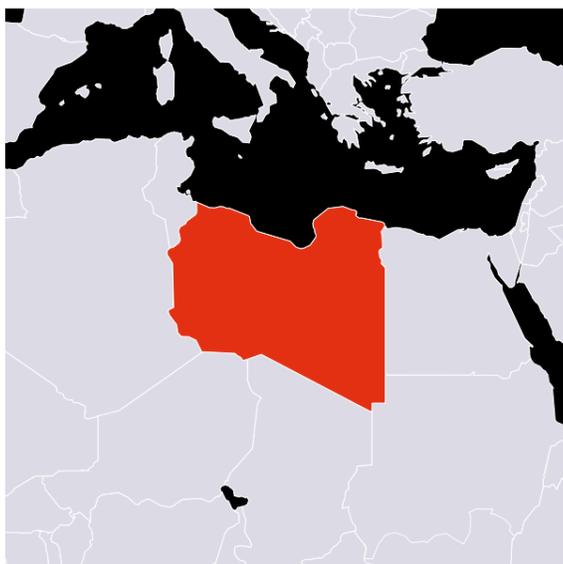
- Christians are considered enemies of the state.
- Followers of Jesus have faced beatings, imprisonment, harassment and torture.
- Eritrea is home to 5.4 million people, just under 50% are Christians.
- Islamic extremism is on the rise, and radical groups seem well connected.
- Christians are looked at suspiciously. The government encourages people to spy on followers of Jesus.
- Up to 20,000 people, including Christians, are being held without trial or contact with the outside world for opposing the government.

*"WE WERE SO TIGHTLY CRAMMED IN THAT WE COULD NOT SIT PROPERLY, LET ALONE LIE DOWN TO SLEEP. WE WERE FORCED TO WORK LONG HOURS WITHOUT REST. MY IMMEDIATE COMMANDER WAS ESPECIALLY CRUEL."*

**Senet was put in prison, in a small cell with over 50 other women, for refusing to put the state before her faith in Jesus**

## Pray

- For comfort for imprisoned Christians – many have now been in captivity for 11 years. Ask that God will use them as witnesses to their captors.
- For provision and protection for believers from Muslim backgrounds who are rejected by their communities and targeted by extremists.
- For the thousands of refugees who risk the dangerous journey to Europe – especially women and children, who are particularly vulnerable to human traffickers.
- Ask God to change the hearts of President Afewerki and his government and reveal Himself to them.



# Libya

No. 7 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List

Libya has descended into lawlessness since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, giving groups such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) free reign to attack Christians. Libya is a deeply Islamic culture, so Libyan Christians must keep their faith completely secret. Churches for Libyans, and Christian literature in Arabic, are forbidden. While migrant Christians are allowed to practise their faith in Libya, many have paid the ultimate price; In 2016, 79 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees were kidnapped by IS militants and 30 of them were killed. Believers who share their faith publicly risk arrest and violence.

## Facts

- Since the revolution in 2011 the situation for Christians has got worse and worse.
- The government says all Libyans are Sunni Muslims, though there are an estimated 42,000 Christians.
- It's illegal to take Arabic Bibles into Libya or to share the gospel.
- Police monitor Christian and church activity.
- Migrant workers from other countries are allowed churches, but churches for Libyans are forbidden.
- Libyan converts may be beaten by family members and Christian migrant workers can face severe violence.

*"THEY WERE MARTYRED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST. THEY KEPT THE FAITH UNTIL THE LAST MOMENT. THEY DIDN'T DENY THE NAME OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. WE ARE PROUD OF THEM."*

**The brother of one of 21 Egyptian migrant workers executed in Libya by Islamic State extremists**

## Pray

- For protection for Christians in Libya – hundreds are reported to have been abducted by paramilitaries and imprisoned.
- For Christians to find ways to meet together – religious gatherings are illegal for Libyans if they are not Islamic, which makes Libyan believers afraid to meet.
- For ongoing peace talks between different ruling factions to be fruitful, and for a stable and safe Libya to be formed.



# Iraq

**No. 8 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

Iraq was once home to one of the largest Christian communities in the Middle East; today, the church in Iraq is in danger of disappearing completely. Since 2014, the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) has forced thousands of Christians to flee their homes. IS are now largely driven back from most areas, and many Christians are beginning to return home, though the homes they left behind are largely in need of repair and rebuilding. Even in areas of Iraq that weren't controlled by IS, Sharia is the basis of the law, and Muslims are forbidden from leaving Islam. Converts from Islamic backgrounds risk harassment or discrimination at check-points, work places and government buildings; they may also lose jobs, inheritance rights, or the ability to marry.

## Facts

- In the 90s, there were 1.2 million Christians in Iraq. Now the number is less than 300,000.
- Wars, increasing persecution of Christians, and the rise of extremism are the reasons many have fled.
- In 2014, the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), an extremist Islamic militia, took control of large parts of Iraq, forcibly removing Christians.
- There is a massive need to rebuild many towns and cities now the fighting is decreasing.
- The fighting in Iraq means around 2.8 million people have fled home and are classified as internally displaced people. That is one tenth of the population. Millions more have fled the country.

*"OF COURSE I DESIRE TO GO BACK TO MY CHURCH, THE PLACE I GREW UP IN. BUT, IF I'M CALLED TO SERVE IN THE DESERT, I CAN STILL SERVE THERE. FROM SAND I CAN MAKE A CHURCH..."*

**Martin, a young church leader, who fled his town as IS approached.**

## Pray

- Thank God for Open Doors partners and local churches in Iraq who are supporting over 15,000 displaced Christian families with emergency relief. Ask for strength and provision for these refugees and those who serve them.
- For courage for believers from a Muslim background to keep following Jesus, despite the pressure to return to Islam.
- Many Christians have been abducted, attacked or sexually assaulted by IS militants. Ask God to protect Christians from attacks, and to change the hearts of IS members.
- Open Doors local partners have been supporting thousands of displaced families – pray for wisdom to know how best to support those who wish to return to their villages if and when it is safe to do so.
- A few Christians live secretly in IS held areas – pray for their safety.



# Yemen

**No. 9 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

Christians have become doubly vulnerable during the current conflict which has sparked the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Government officials continue to intimidate Christians, and Islamic organisations allegedly discriminate against non-Muslims when providing emergency relief. A growing number of Christian converts suffer violence and pressure from tribal and religious leaders, and extended family. Threats of death from radical Islamic groups, and detention from authorities, force many to conceal their faith. On top of this, migrant Christians experience harassment and discrimination from society.

## Facts

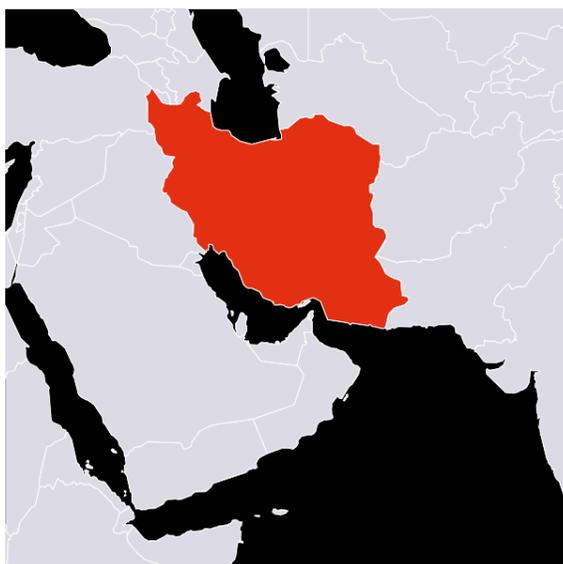
- There are only a few thousand Christians in Yemen, and most of these are migrants from other nations.
- It is estimated that there are just a few hundred secret indigenous Yemeni Christians.
- Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the basis of the law.
- Evangelism is prohibited, and Yemenis who leave Islam face the death penalty.
- Islam is part of the identity of Yemeni tribes, and tribal leaders are likely to enforce punishments for those who wish to leave Islam: this could mean honour killings, house arrest or, for women, forced marriage.

*"CONTACTS IN THE COUNTRY HAVE REPEATEDLY STATED THAT WHERE CITIZENS ARE KNOWN TO BE CHRISTIANS, THEY ARE REGULARLY BEING EXCLUDED FROM RECEIVING HUMANITARIAN AID."*

**Open Doors Researcher**

## Pray

- For encouragement and an increase in numbers of local Christians, who are estimated to be just a few hundred.
- For the protection of foreign Christian workers and charities.
- For the restoration of peace within a country that is deeply divided
- Members of extremist groups like the so-called Islamic State are able to move freely in Yemen, and actively target and kill Christians. Pray that God will change the hearts of radical Islamists, and protect Christians.
- Praise God for the Yemenis who have turned to Christ – ask God to help them grow in faith.
- 80 per cent of Yemenis currently rely on aid – pray for provision for them.



# Iran

**No. 10 on the 2018 Open Doors World Watch List**

**At least 52 Christians were arrested or imprisoned in Iran in 2017. Ethnic Persians are seen as being Muslim, and carrying out any Christian activities in the language of this group, Farsi, is strictly illegal. A Persian person who decides to leave Islam can be sentenced to death if male, and be given life imprisonment if female – although this sentence hasn't been carried out for over 20 years. Despite this, Christians from a Muslim background make up the largest group of Christians in Iran.**

## Facts

- Iran is governed by strict Islamic laws.
- In Iran, Muslims are not meant to shake hands with Christians, touch them, or eat their food.
- Muslims converting to Islam can face the death penalty.
- Christians are monitored by the secret police. In 2017, 52 Christians were arrested and this year sentences for Christians are getting harsher.
- Those arrested face intimidation, physical and mental abuse as well as threats of execution.
- Christians who try to speak to Muslims about Jesus can be imprisoned, face physical abuse and harassment.

*"IT IS FUNNY HOW GOD WORKS SOMETIMES. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO PASS THE BIG GATES OF PRISON TO BRING THE GOSPEL TO THOSE WHO NEEDED HIM SO BADLY INSIDE. BUT GOD JUST PLACED ME AND OTHER CHRISTIANS INSIDE THE PRISON AMONG THEM, TO SHINE HIS LIGHT."*

**Mojtaba, an Iranian Christian leader imprisoned for his faith**

## Pray

- For comfort and strength for the dozens of imprisoned Christians and their families.
- For wisdom for Christians to know who to trust, and for protection for secret believers and underground churches.
- As Iran begins to have more connections with Western nations, its leaders may try to prevent greater 'Western influence' within the nation by enforcing even stricter controls on religious activity. Pray this will not be the case.
- That the laws of Iran will change to allow for freedom of religion.
- For many Muslim families, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. Pray for protection and provision for Christians who have been cursed and disowned by their families.