

# WORLD WATCH LIST



*THE TOP 50 COUNTRIES WHERE IT'S  
MOST DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW JESUS*

# 2021





AS YOU READ THROUGH THE 2021 WORLD WATCH LIST, YOU'LL SEE THEMES AND STORIES FROM THE 50 COUNTRIES WHERE IT IS MOST DIFFICULT TO BE A CHRISTIAN, IN ADDITION TO INFORMATION ABOUT HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR EACH COUNTRY.

WE HOPE THESE DETAILS WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THE SITUATIONS YOUR CHRISTIAN FAMILY FACES ACROSS THE GLOBE AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE HOPE THESE CRITICAL INSIGHTS WILL HELP FUEL YOUR PRAYERS FOR THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH.

BECAUSE WE ARE ONE CHURCH, AND ONE FAMILY.



# The World Watch List

is the foremost report of its kind—a document, updated every year, of how many followers of Jesus are targeted, discriminated against, persecuted and attacked for their faith.

You might think the World Watch List is all about oppression. And, to some extent, it is. More than 340 million of our Christian brothers and sisters live in places where they experience high levels of persecution and discrimination. That's 1 in 8 Christians, worldwide.

But the World Watch List is really all about resilience.

The numbers of God's people who are suffering should mean the Church is dying—that Christians are keeping quiet, losing their faith and turning away from one another.

But that's not what's happening. Instead, in living color, we see the words of God recorded in the prophet Isaiah: "I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19, ESV)

When our sisters and brothers are persecuted for their faith, and they still choose Jesus, the Living Water—this is a miracle in front of our eyes.

As you read through the 2021 World Watch List, keep that perspective in mind. The facts and figures will tell you about the problem—but the resilience of God's people will inspire you to see what God is doing in our midst.



**David Curry**  
CHAIRMAN & CEO OF OPEN DOORS USA



*Throughout this booklet, names in quotation marks are pseudonyms, used to ensure security.*

## ABOUT US

For more than 60 years, Open Doors has served persecuted Christians. Now in more than 60 countries, Open Doors supports God's people with what they need—Bibles, emergency relief aid, trauma counseling, advocacy, training and much more. We're committed to those who suffer for following Jesus, and we believe the persecuted church is part of the DNA of every Christian. No matter where they live, we believe God's people are one Church, one Family.



**TREND 1:**

# COVID-19 exposes persecution ...

The coronavirus pandemic was the event of a generation. And in addition to the pain felt by people all over the world, it also exposed the ugliness of Christian persecution in a new way. In India, more than 100,000 Christians received relief aid from Open Doors partners to help them through the pandemic. Of these believers, 80 percent reported to World Watch List researchers that they were dismissed from food distribution points. Some walked miles and hid their Christian identity to get food elsewhere. Another 15 percent received food aid, but reported other discrimination, such as being passed over for employment.

It wasn't just in India. In Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Central Asia, Malaysia, North Africa, Yemen and Sudan, there are reports of Christians in rural areas being denied aid. Sometimes, this denial was at the hands of government officials, but more often, it was from village heads, committees or other local leaders. Some Christians even reported that their food ration cards were torn up or waved away.

In southern Kaduna, Nigeria, families from several villages said they received one-sixth of the rations allocated to Muslim families. In Guinea-Bissau, when a state of emergency was imposed, some Christians said Muslim neighbors "complained" to the government about them, while in Guinea, one leader said church closures prompted followers of local animist religions to mock pastors.

The global pandemic made persecution more obvious than ever—simply because so many people needed help. The clear discrimination and oppression suffered by Christians in 2020 must not be forgotten, even after the COVID-19 crisis fades into our collective memory.

## TREND 2:

# ... And vulnerability

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the persecution of Christians. But it's also shown how vulnerable so many of our sisters and brothers are in the places where they live. Christians who abandon a majority faith to follow Christ know they risk losing all support from spouses, families, tribes and communities, as well as local and national authorities. If they lose income due to COVID-19, they can't fall back on customary networks for survival.

For church leaders, the pandemic also exposed how difficult daily life is. Many are not paid salaries, but depend on financial support from community donations. When church services stop, donations drop—by about 40 percent, said leaders ranging from Egypt to Latin America. This also affects humanitarian assistance to their own communities, both inside and outside churches.

Some Christians—in regions across the globe—said the pandemic meant there was less pressure to participate



**80%**  
**OF INDIAN CHRISTIANS**  
**HELPED by OPEN DOORS**  
*say they were passed  
over for food distribution  
during the COVID-19  
pandemic*

in local rituals and festivals. However, most converts from majority faiths said confinement due to a COVID-19 quarantine locked them in with those most antagonistic to their faith in Jesus. This especially affected minority women and children. For millions of Christians, work, education and other outside interests provide a brief time of calm from regular persecution. So when the lockdowns occurred, it meant this respite was no longer available.

We have also received reports that the kidnapping, forcible conversion and forced marriage of women and girls increased during the pandemic because of increased vulnerability. Additionally, places in Latin America that are vulnerable to drug gangs have become even more dangerous for Christians, since the pandemic has decreased the presence of official authorities who try to maintain order.

# About the World Watch List

## What is the World Watch List?

The World Watch List is an annual report on the global persecution of Christians ranking the top 50 countries where Christians are persecuted for their faith. Released at the beginning of each year, the list uses data from Open Doors field workers and external experts to quantify and analyze persecution worldwide.

## How are the countries ranked?

Countries are ranked by the severity of persecution of Christians, calculated by analyzing the level of violent persecution plus the pressure experienced in five spheres of life. For the detailed methodology, visit [ODUSA.org/WWLMethodology](https://ODUSA.org/WWLMethodology).

## How do I use the World Watch List?

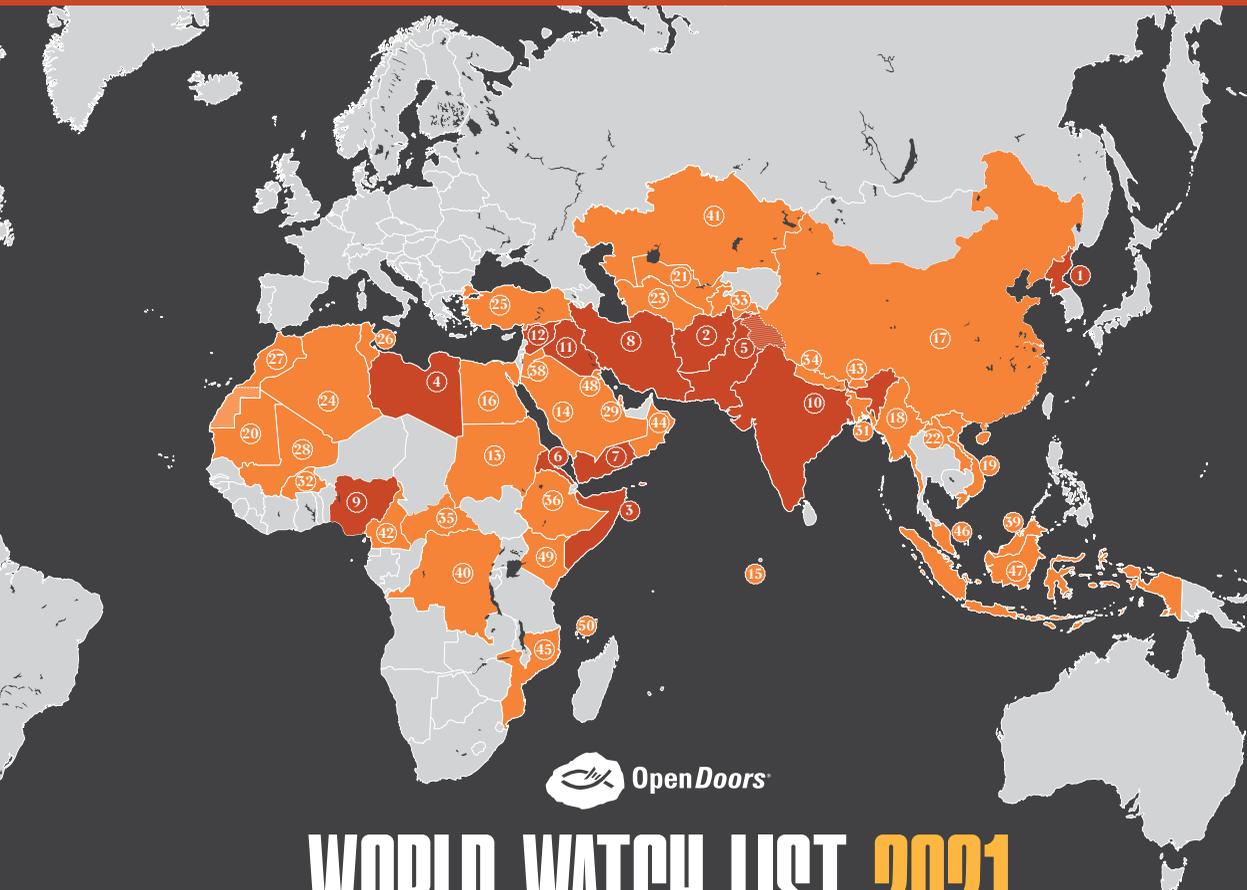
- 1. See and learn.** Read the World Watch List to find out how your sisters and brothers around the world are persecuted because they follow Jesus. Learn about the reality they face each day—and see how God is strengthening His Church to be resilient for Him.
- 2. Pray.** Throughout 2021, pray through the World Watch List. Download the Open Doors Prayer App and get requests from all over the world. No matter how you do it, let the reality of persecution into your heart, and let it drive you to prayer.
- 3. Share.** Tell other people about the 2021 World Watch List, and how the persecution of Christians is one of the biggest issues in the world. Share with your church, your Facebook friends, your small group, your neighbors, your Twitter followers—make them aware of the problem, and then invite them to be a part of the solution through prayer and support of Open Doors.

*Throughout, unless otherwise indicated, population data source: Johnson, T.M. and Zurlo, G.A., eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)*



### EXTREME PERSECUTION

- 1 North Korea
- 2 Afghanistan
- 3 Somalia
- 4 Libya
- 5 Pakistan
- 6 Eritrea
- 7 Yemen
- 8 Iran
- 9 Nigeria
- 10 India



# WORLD WATCH LIST 2021

## VERY HIGH PERSECUTION

- |    |              |    |              |    |                          |    |            |
|----|--------------|----|--------------|----|--------------------------|----|------------|
| 11 | Iraq         | 21 | Uzbekistan   | 31 | Bangladesh               | 41 | Kazakhstan |
| 12 | Syria        | 22 | Laos         | 32 | Burkina Faso             | 42 | Cameroon   |
| 13 | Sudan        | 23 | Turkmenistan | 33 | Tajikistan               | 43 | Bhutan     |
| 14 | Saudi Arabia | 24 | Algeria      | 34 | Nepal                    | 44 | Oman       |
| 15 | Maldives     | 25 | Turkey       | 35 | Central African Republic | 45 | Mozambique |
| 16 | Egypt        | 26 | Tunisia      | 36 | Ethiopia                 | 46 | Malaysia   |
| 17 | China        | 27 | Morocco      | 37 | Mexico                   | 47 | Indonesia  |
| 18 | Myanmar      | 28 | Mali         | 38 | Jordan                   | 48 | Kuwait     |
| 19 | Vietnam      | 29 | Qatar        | 39 | Brunei                   | 49 | Kenya      |
| 20 | Mauritania   | 30 | Colombia     | 40 | Dem. Rep. of the Congo   | 50 | Comoros    |

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# North Korea

**SOURCE OF PERSECUTION**  
**Communist and post-communist oppression**

**LEADER**  
**Kim Jong-un**

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**TOTAL POPULATION**  
**25,841,000**

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
**400,000 (1.5%)<sup>1</sup>**

**MAIN RELIGION**  
**Agnosticism**



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***This is North Korea's  
20th year as No. 1 on the  
World Watch List.***



Being discovered as a Christian is a death sentence in North Korea. If you aren't killed instantly, you will be taken to a labor camp as a political criminal. These inhumane prisons have horrific conditions, and few believers make it out alive. Everyone in your family will share the same punishment. Kim Jong-un is reported to have expanded the system of prison camps, in which an estimated 50,000-70,000 Christians are currently imprisoned.

## **PRAYER POINTS**

- Pray for North Korea's secret believers, that God will continue to strengthen them, provide for their needs and keep them safe.
- Pray for the believers who are imprisoned.
- Despite the risks, we have heard stories of believers sharing the gospel with others, even in North Korean prison camps. Pray that North Korean believers will shine as lights in the darkest places on earth.

<sup>1</sup>Open Doors' estimate



# North Korea: Hee-Yol's story

## **'Please save me from here!'**

In the 1990s, a famine devastated North Korea, so "Hee-Yol" fled to China for food and money. While there, she visited church and heard the gospel for the first time. She gave her life to Jesus.

A few years later, she was caught by Chinese police, who sent her back to North Korea. Her churchmates in China tried to help her, but they couldn't do much. She wondered why God would let her be caught.

Hee-Yol faced a trial and was sentenced to a four-year imprisonment. "I went inside the prison cell and I cried with all my voice to God. I was blaming God before, but I started to plead to God, 'Please save me from here!'"

The prison was worse than she expected. "About two prisoners died from starvation every day. Starvation in prison cannot be

described with any words," Hee-Yol says. "I was malnourished then. It was a hard time." After two years, she was released.

Hee-Yol waited a few more years, and then escaped once more to China—and then eventually to South Korea. Looking back on her life, Hee-Yol says, "In the most difficult time in my life, I found God through the suffering. I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18) I praise and worship our God who will reveal Himself in suffering."

She asks for our continuing prayers. "I ask those who have been praying for North Korea from all around the world, to pray for North Korea to be able to come to the gospel. The North Korean citizens are like slaves. With the light of the Lord, they would be freed."

2

# Afghanistan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Clan oppression**

LEADER  
**President Ashraf Ghani**

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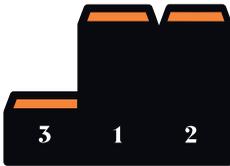
TOTAL POPULATION  
**38,055,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**A small number<sup>1</sup>**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



Photo by IMB



*For the last three years, Afghanistan has almost tied with North Korea for the No. 1 spot on the World Watch List.*

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN AFGHANISTAN?

In Afghanistan, living openly as a Christian is impossible. Christian converts face dire consequences if their new faith is discovered. Essentially, converts have two options: flee the country or risk being killed. If their family discovers their conversion, the family, clan or tribe must save its “honor” by disowning the believer, or even killing them. Christians from a Muslim background can also be sent to a psychiatric hospital, because leaving Islam is considered a sign of insanity.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for protection for the small percentage of Afghani believers. Pray that anyone who might be hunting down secret Afghan Christians would not discover them.
- Pray that despite their isolation, Afghan believers would be strengthened in their faith and that they would find safe ways to access God’s Word and communicate with other believers.
- Pray that God would be at work in the hearts of Islamic extremists—such as the Taliban and ISIS.

<sup>1</sup>Open Doors’ estimate

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# Somalia

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Clan oppression**

LEADER  
**President Mohamed  
Abdullahi Mohamed**

TOTAL POPULATION  
**16,105,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**Hundreds<sup>1</sup>**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



*In Somalia, Christians are a “high-value target” for the Islamic terrorist group al-Shabab, known for its deadly insurgency.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOMALIA?

In Somalia, Islam is considered a crucial part of Somali identity. Just being suspected of converting to Christianity is a death warrant. Members of a believer’s family, clan or community will harass, intimidate or even kill them. Female converts are at high risk for rape and forced marriage. And if a Christian man is killed or abducted, he leaves his whole family unprotected and “marked” by his conversion.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the families of believers who have been murdered for their faith—pray for God’s comfort and that they would be healed from any bitterness.
- Pray for a strong church to grow among Somali people, relying on Jesus and with a hunger and thirst for the Word of God.
- Pray that those who have killed Christians will see the Truth and be convicted.

4

# Libya

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Prime Minister  
Fayez Sarraj**

TOTAL POPULATION  
**6,662,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**34,500 (0.5%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN LIBYA?

In Libya, there's no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion and very limited possibility of public church life. Christians from a Muslim background face violent pressure from their family and community to renounce their faith. They—as well as foreign Christians—are also vulnerable to abduction or murder by Islamic militants and crime groups. Sharing your faith publicly is illegal; those who do try, risk violent opposition and arrest.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Libyan believers under immense pressure, particularly those in jail because of their faith. Pray for protection and release.
- Pray for peace and stability. Years of anarchy and power struggles have taken many lives and eroded hope. Christians and other minorities have become very vulnerable in such a situation of lawlessness.
- Pray for new converts who have been baptized. Rejoice that they have found Jesus, and pray they will find a group of believers.



*Only an estimated  
150 Christians in Libya  
are indigenous—the  
majority are expatriate  
and migrant workers.*

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# Pakistan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Prime Minister  
Imran Khan**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**208,362,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**4,052,000 (1.9%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



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***Pakistan is internationally known for its unfair blasphemy laws that often target Christians.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN?

Christians in Pakistan face extreme persecution in every area of their lives, with converts from Islam facing the highest levels. However, all Christians are considered second-class citizens, inferior to Muslims. Often, they are given jobs perceived as low, dirty and dishonorable, and can even be victims of bonded labor. Increasingly, Christian girls are at risk of abduction and rape, often forced to marry their attackers and coerced into converting to Islam.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for courage for Christians in Pakistan to speak about their faith, despite fears that their words will be used against them.
- Pray for protection over Pakistan's churches, especially around holidays such as Christmas and Easter, when terrorist attacks have happened in the past.
- Pray for protection for young Christian women and girls. Pray for those who have been abducted and forced to convert and marry, that God will comfort them and give them strength.



# Eritrea

**SOURCE OF PERSECUTION**  
**Denominational**  
**protectionism (from other**  
**Christian denominations)**

**LEADER**  
**President Isaias Afwerki**

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**TOTAL POPULATION**

**5,432,000**

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**

**2,552,000 (47%)**

**MAIN RELIGIONS**

**Islam and**  
**Christianity**



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***Eritrea is known***  
***as the “North Korea***  
***of East Africa.”***



## **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN ERITREA?**

Christians from non-traditional denominations face the harshest persecution in Eritrea, both from the government and from the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC—the only Christian denomination recognized by the government). Government forces monitor phone calls and conduct countless raids that target Christians and can lead to arrest and imprisonment without trial. Many Christians are held in the country’s intricate tunnel system of inhumane prisons. Their loved ones may not know where they are or even if they’re still alive.

## **PRAYER POINTS**

- Pray that believers’ faith would grow, that their love would increase, and that their faith would be steadfast in affliction.
- Pray for wisdom and opportunities for Eritrean Christians and church leaders to engage their government on religious freedom.
- Pray for those suffering terrible conditions in prison, held because of their faith. Ask the Lord to show His grace to these families and provide for their spiritual and physical needs.



# Eritrea: Shiden's story

“Shiden” became a Christian in his late teens. He knew the risks of following Christ in Eritrea. Sure enough, several years after he began following Christ, he was caught at a secret worship service and arrested. He spent more than a decade in three different prisons—all part of Eritrea’s notorious prison system.

Shiden faced exposure to severe temperatures and a lack of basic sanitation. He was regularly taunted by others, told he could end his suffering by renouncing his faith in Jesus. Shiden refused—and for that, he endured regular, extended solitary confinement in a space like a coffin.

Once, he was briefly “released” into military service, but when spies found a few sections of the Bible on him, he was sent back to solitary confinement for another three months.

Shiden was eventually sent home without any explanation. His family was delighted to have him back, but they quickly realized all was not well. After all the physical and emotional torture, Shiden was a broken man.

## **‘I will serve the Lord until I die.’**

Shiden struggled to come to grips with the fact he had missed out on so much: education, career, marriage and fatherhood. His brother “John” and their mother feared Shiden might harm himself.

But though things feel overwhelming at times, John remains hopeful because of the progress he has seen in his brother. “God’s grace is limitless,” John says. “Although it has not been easy for him, Shiden has come so far. And these days, he often encourages me by reminding me of the story about the fathers of faith in Hebrews 11. He says, ‘I will serve the Lord until I die; I want to be a hero of the faith, too, and one day in the future claim the crown of righteousness.’”

The importance of prayer cannot be overstated. “The prayers of righteous people have availed much,” John says. “Please continue to pray for Shiden. I believe God will continue to help.”

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# Yemen

**SOURCE OF PERSECUTION**  
**Islamic oppression**

**LEADER**  
**President Abdrabbuh**  
**Mansour Hadi**

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**TOTAL POPULATION**  
**30,245,000**

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
**A few thousand<sup>1</sup>**

**MAIN RELIGION**  
**Islam**



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***Yemeni Christians  
can face the death penalty  
for leaving Islam to  
follow Jesus.***



## **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN YEMEN?**

In Yemen, Christians usually keep their faith secret. Leaving Islam is forbidden, and all Yemenis are considered Muslims by the state. It's not just the authorities who persecute Christians. Islamic extremists and tribes may kill anyone who converts to Christianity. Christians are additionally vulnerable in the ongoing war, humanitarian crisis and now the COVID-19 pandemic, because emergency relief is mostly distributed through local Islamic leaders who often discriminate against anyone not considered to be a devout Muslim.

## **PRAYER POINTS**

- Pray for wisdom and safety for secret house churches as they support believers.
- The past year brought floods, locusts and COVID-19—in the midst of ongoing war. Pray that peace will come and that people can start rebuilding their lives.
- Pray for those taking great risks to provide seekers and new believers with discipleship support. Pray for their travel safety through conflict areas, and that God would use them to raise up new and gifted leaders.



# Iran

**SOURCE OF PERSECUTION**

**Islamic oppression**

**LEADER**

**Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**

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**TOTAL POPULATION**

**83,587,000**

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**

**800,000 (<1%)<sup>1</sup>**

**MAIN RELIGION**

**Islam**



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***Christians jailed for their faith in Iran are often sent to Evin Prison, known as the country's "torture factory."***



## **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN IRAN?**

The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine the Islamic rule of Iran. Christians from a Muslim background are persecuted the most, primarily by the government. Secret churches are often raided, leading to arrests and long prison sentences for “crimes against national security.” Domestically, some new Christians in nominal Muslim families find acceptance, but converts from stricter Muslim families face more persecution at home.

## **PRAYER POINTS**

- Pray for isolated believers. Many Christians don't know any other believers. They depend on online resources to learn more about God.
- Pray for Christians who are currently locked up in prison for their faith. The pandemic has only made prison conditions worse.
- Pray for those who advocate for the rights of Christians in Iran, both within and outside the country, that they would be listened to and that God would protect them.



# Nigeria

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President  
Muhammadu Buhari**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**206,153,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**95,358,000 (46.3%)**

MAIN RELIGIONS  
**Islam and  
Christianity**



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***More Christians are  
murdered for their faith  
in Nigeria than in any  
other country.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA?

Violent attacks from Islamic extremist groups (Boko Haram, Hausa-Fulani Muslim militant herdsman, ISIS affiliate ISWAP) are common in the north and Middle Belt of Nigeria—and they're becoming more common farther south. Militants often murder Christians or destroy their property and means of livelihood. Men and boys are particularly vulnerable to being killed. The women and children they leave behind are often displaced to informal camps, face sexual violence, and are even at risk of abduction and forced marriage.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the Lord's grace and comfort for believers who are displaced, have lost loved ones and their homes, and are struggling with trauma.
- Ask the Lord to be near to abducted believers. Pray for their release or rescue.
- Pray for President Muhammadu Buhari and his government—pray they will take decisive actions to protect all citizens.
- Pray that Open Doors partners will strengthen the church to testify and share the gospel in very difficult circumstances.

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## India

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Religious nationalism**

LEADER  
**Prime Minister  
Narendra Modi**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**1,383,198,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**67,356,000 (4.9%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Hinduism**



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***This is the third year since  
2019 that India has ranked  
in the top 10 of the World  
Watch List.***



Photo by IMB

### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN INDIA?

Hindu extremists believe that all Indians should be Hindus, and that the country should be rid of Christianity and Islam. To achieve this goal, they use extensive violence, particularly targeting Christians from a Hindu background. In their villages, Christians are accused of following a “foreign faith” and often physically attacked. If they don’t “re-convert,” their community may boycott them, with a devastating effect on their ability to earn income and buy food.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Praise God that many are coming to faith in India through miraculous healings and the witness of India’s Christians. Pray many more will come to know Jesus.
- Pray for protection for our brothers and sisters, especially new Christians and those in rural areas living in isolation.
- Ask God to continue to work through Open Doors’ partners to bring practical support. Pray for their wisdom and energy, particularly during the pandemic.



# India

## Digital Bibles for Christians

In India, ranked No. 10 on the 2021 World Watch List, it can be difficult for some Christians to gain access to the Bible. Some Christians cannot read, and others live in places where reading a Bible publicly can lead to attacks or heavy persecution. And yet, Indian Christians know they need to read God's Word in order to grow in their faith and learn about the love of Jesus.

In order to meet this need, Open Doors distributes digital Bibles in India, which contains an audio version of the Bible that can be listened to by people who are unable to read. "The digital Bible device also contains movies related to the Bible, and stories and testimonies of people which encourage the faith of people who are persecuted because of their faith," shares an Open Doors local partner. "This proved to be in great demand amongst the Christians in the rural areas."

"I am so glad to receive this digital Bible," says "Deepa," a Christian who was given one of the Bibles provided by Open Doors partners. "I am really blessed because of this, since I cannot read properly. It is also very handy, and I can easily listen to the Word of God whenever I want, wherever I am. I belong to a very remote village which is very isolated from cities and towns. Sometimes, I have to go out to the woods to collect firewood and other things from the forest. I am so thankful to everyone who helped to provide it to me."

These digital Bibles are also a vital tool for believers who have to be discreet when they read the Bible because of the risks they face for their faith. "I listen to the digital Bible secretly," Deepa says.

Thanks to supporters, over 3,000 digital Bibles were distributed during the 2021 World Watch List reporting period.

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## Iraq

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Barham Salih**

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TOTAL POPULATION

**41,503,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**175,000 (0.4%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



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***In Iraq, Christian converts from Islam are not allowed to marry Christians—the law still considers them Muslim.***



### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ?

After years of violence, an uncertain peace has come to Iraq—but 2020 saw recurrent violent protests against the government. The instability is a catalyst for the ongoing persecution of Christians. Believers from a Muslim background often keep their faith secret, because of the pressure and threats they're likely to receive from extended family members, clan leaders and the wider society. Additionally, Islamic extremists remain active in Iraq, attacking and kidnapping Christians.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for a breakthrough in Iraq and an end to the waves of violence. Ask God to instill peace in the hearts and lives of Christians.
- Pray that God would turn the hearts of Iraq's leaders to Him. Pray for wisdom as they lead their country.
- Praise God for the amazing opportunities Christians have initiated to share the gospel. Pray for a holy thirst and hunger among the people of Iraq for God.

12

# Syria

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Bashar al-Assad**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**18,924,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**677,000 (3.6%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



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***Syria's civil war  
marks its 10th year  
in March 2021.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA?

Syria's ongoing civil war has turned the country into a breeding ground for the persecution of Christians. The economic crisis caused by COVID-19 has exacerbated the unrest, which was beginning to lessen until the pandemic hit. Many Christians are still internally displaced or remain as refugees in other countries as a result of war and rising Islamic extremism. In areas controlled by Islamic extremist groups, public expressions of Christianity are banned; most churches have been seized or destroyed.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for displaced Syrian Christians to return to their homes and livelihoods. Ask God for continued restoration for those who have already returned.
- Pray that Syrian believers would be the light of hope in Syria, providing comfort to those suffering from trauma or from a lack of food and resources.
- Pray for the Word of God to saturate the land of Syria and that people will find new joy, strength and hope through Scripture.

13

# Sudan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Lieutenant-General  
Abdel Fattah al-Burhan**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**43,541,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**1,970,000 (4.5%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**

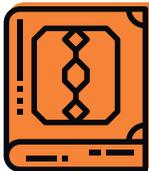


## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SUDAN?

Although Sudan has taken significant steps towards religious freedom in the past year, Christians from a Muslim background still face extreme persecution from their families and communities. While they no longer face the death penalty for leaving Islam, they may be attacked, ostracized or otherwise discriminated against if their faith is discovered. Believers still keep their faith secret, for the safety of them and their family.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Praise God for these steps towards religious freedom in Sudan, answering years of desperate prayers by Sudanese believers and many others. Ask God that those in power would continue to make strides in this direction.
- Pray for protection for Sudanese Christians from a Muslim background—that they would be able to withstand opposition from their families and communities.
- Pray that Christian women in Sudan would be protected from sexual violence.



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***In September 2020,  
Sudan abolished 30  
years of Islamic law.***

14

# Saudi Arabia

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Islamic oppression**

LEADER

**King Salman bin  
Abdulaziz al-Saud**

TOTAL POPULATION

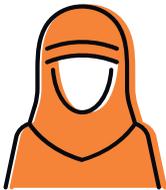
**34,710,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**1,200,000 (3.5%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



*The small number of Saudi Christians has been slowly increasing, as believers take great risks to share their faith.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SAUDI ARABIA?

The majority of Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates with most coming from low/middle income countries in Asia and Africa. The few Saudi Christians from a Muslim background face the greatest pressure, especially from their families. Expatriate Muslims converting to the Christian faith also face strong persecution, likely similar to the levels they would experience in their home country. Whether Saudi or otherwise, most converts are forced to practice their faith in secrecy.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that the Lord will continue to use the Internet to strengthen and unite believers, and grow the Saudi church.
- Pray that the Lord will reveal Himself to both Christians and non-Christians in dreams and visions.
- Pray for the protection of all Christians in Saudi Arabia, and for them to be given continued wisdom and discernment as they seek to follow and share Jesus.

15

# Maldives

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Islamic oppression**

LEADER

**President Ibrahim**

**Mohamed Solih**

TOTAL POPULATION

**459,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**A small number<sup>1</sup>**

MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



*In this beautiful island nation, Christian persecution takes place away from the eyes of international tourists.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE MALDIVES?

While many see the Maldives as a luxury holiday destination, behind the beauty of this island paradise lies a strict Islamic regime. This chain of nearly 1,200 islands has one of the highest population densities worldwide, especially on its main island, Malé. The close-knit, homogeneous communities keep a close watch on their members for any sign of deviation—which naturally includes religious choice. Conversion to Christianity can easily result in a report to Muslim authorities.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for opportunities for believers to gather safely.
- Pray that God will use the Bible to powerfully strengthen, encourage and nurture the lives of believers.
- Pray that attitudes among government officials, especially President Solih, will soften towards Christians and other religious minorities.
- Pray for the Christians among expatriate migrant workers, that they can be strong witnesses of the hope they have in Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Open Doors' estimate

16

## Egypt

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Dictatorial paranoia**

LEADER  
**President Abdel  
Fattah al-Sisi**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**102,941,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**16,250,000 (15.8%)<sup>1</sup>**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



---

***In Egypt, kidnappings  
and forced marriages of  
Christian women and girls  
to their Muslim abductors  
has reached record levels.***



### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT?

Persecution against Christians in Egypt happens mostly at the community level and most frequently in Upper Egypt. Incidents may vary from Christian women being harassed on the street, to Christian communities being driven out of their homes by extremist mobs. Although Egypt's government speaks positively about the country's Christian community, the lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians leave believers vulnerable to attack.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the safety of all Christians as they go about their daily lives.
- Pray for an end to false accusations and senseless attacks against Christians, and that there will be an urgency in local police forces to seek justice for all wrongdoing.
- Pray for boldness and discernment for Christians in Egypt, as they seek ways to shine the light of Christ brightly in their communities.

17

## China

**SOURCE OF PERSECUTION**  
**Communist and post-communist oppression**

**LEADER**  
**President Xi Jinping**

---

**TOTAL POPULATION**  
**1,424,548,000**

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**  
**97,200,000 (6.8%)<sup>1</sup>**

**MAIN RELIGION**  
**Agnosticism**



---

***China has installed more than 415 million facial recognition surveillance cameras that track people's whereabouts.***



### **WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN CHINA?**

The church in China continues to enjoy strong growth; however, life for Christians is anything but straightforward. The policy of “Sinicizing” the church has been implemented nationwide, as the Communist Party limits whatever it perceives as a threat to its rule and ideology. Thousands of churches have been damaged or closed. In some parts of China, children under the age of 18 aren’t allowed to attend church—part of the country’s efforts to stunt future growth.

### **PRAYER POINTS**

- Ask the Lord to give church leaders wisdom, discernment and guidance as they lead congregations in light of increased restrictions and surveillance.
- Lift up in prayer all who have left their former religion to follow Jesus. Pray they will be protected from harm, strengthened in their faith and empowered in their witness.
- Ask the Lord to open the eyes of those in authority to the unequalled power and beauty of the gospel.



# China

## An awakening in the church

“Ruth Zhao” was a performer in the Chinese military’s Cultural and Performance Division. She was famous for her performances, winning awards year after year.

But recently, everything changed. Ruth’s boss told her she had to stop going to church meetings—and that she couldn’t be both a military performer and a Christian, since military personnel in China are not allowed to be Christians.

Ruth was faced with a life-changing decision: Deny her faith and keep her job, or declare her unchanging love for the Lord and risk everything. Ruth knew she could not deny Jesus. So, she quit her job.

Her resignation infuriated her boss. He punished her by stripping her of all awards and accolades, and drastically reduced her retirement benefits. Ruth lost her job, her reputation and her financial security.

She had paid the price of standing strong in her faith in Jesus in China.

Ruth is just one of the believers in China whose lives have been completely changed by the persecution against Christians. Restrictions, pressure, warnings, and sometimes surprise raids on churches—these are all part of Christian life for Chinese Christians in 2020.

Chinese churches have responded by asking Open Doors to journey with them—they want to understand the biblical foundations of persecution, and they want training and resources.

“This is awakening! Thank you so much for this great learning opportunity,” one sister shared, after attending training from Open Doors. Her husband had been imprisoned for distributing Bibles in the past, and she had experienced persecution on many occasions. “I used to experience a lot of persecution. While my life has become stable, my spirit has become less alert. It’s time for us to prepare, as persecution is escalating in different areas in China. I will pass on my learning to other brothers and sisters.”

## TREND 3:

# Creeping surveillance endangers religious freedom



In India, religious minorities fear contact-tracing apps will have “function creep” and will be used to keep an eye on them and their movements. Another app, already in use, can predict age, gender and race. India’s data protection bill does not cover surveillance. Indeed, it has provisions to allow the government to bypass protection standards and even consent in circumstances such as national security or crime investigation.

China maintains it moved decisively to contain COVID-19 after the virus took flight in Wuhan, but for its 97 million Christians, the cost in heavy restrictions—as surveillance reached into their homes, online and off-line interactions were tracked and their faces were scanned into the Public Security database—is high.

Reports from counties in Henan and Jiangxi provinces say cameras with facial recognition software are now in all state-approved religious

venues. Many of these cameras are reported to be installed next to standard CCTV cameras, but they link to the Public Security Bureau, meaning artificial intelligence can instantly connect with other government databases. The facial recognition software will eventually link to the “Social Credit System” in China, which monitors the loyalty of citizens with regards to the tenets of communism.

Communist Party officials in Shanxi, Henan, Jiangxi, Shandong and other provinces have threatened to withdraw social welfare benefits, including pensions, if Christians refuse to replace Christian imagery, such as crosses, with pictures of President Xi Jinping. One Christian on welfare apparently reported that officials told him that since he believed in God, he should ask Him for food instead of living off the Communist Party.

Churches that resort to online services are vulnerable to monitoring; even officially registered churches were ordered to stop online services. “The government monitors people across the country,” said the director of a government-approved church in the eastern province of Shandong. In this same city, when a woman took her child into a registered church, she was captured on CCTV—officials immediately reprimanded the church since minors are forbidden from attending church. Many churches have experienced the confiscation of property and Christian materials including Bibles, as well as raids, fines and arrests of church leaders.

As China’s global influence spreads, it exports its all-pervasive systems for “protection” and “security”—which can be seen now to brutally oppress the Uighur population in Xinjiang. Chinese companies are supported by the government to supply AI surveillance technology to 63 countries, including countries on the 2021 World Watch List like Myanmar, Laos, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

**570M**  
 THE ESTIMATED  
 NUMBER of CCTV  
 CAMERAS in CHINA

18

# Myanmar

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Religious nationalism**

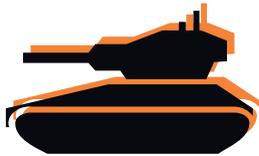
LEADER  
**President U Win Myint**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**54,808,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**4,362,000 (8%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Buddhism**



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*Myanmar is the scene of the world's longest civil war, which has made Christians increasingly vulnerable to insurgent groups.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MYANMAR?

Religious nationalism is especially strong in Myanmar and drives much of the persecution of Christians. There is an increasing emphasis on Buddhism, to the exclusion of all other religions. Converts to Christianity often face persecution from their families and communities who aim to stay “Buddhist only.” They make life for Christian families impossible by not allowing them to use community resources, such as water. Churches have been attacked, and in the distribution of COVID-19 government aid, Christians have been deliberately overlooked.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray with those who have left Buddhism to follow Jesus—that God will strengthen, encourage and protect them.
- Ask that all believers in Myanmar will receive and enjoy fruitful fellowship with other Christians.
- Pray that the Lord will intervene and bring a peaceful resolution to the ongoing civil war.
- Pray for protection for church leaders who are often targeted by Buddhist extremists and insurgents. Ask God to guide their steps as they make disciples.

19

# Vietnam

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Communist and post-communist oppression**

LEADER

**President Nguyen Phu Trong**

---

TOTAL POPULATION

**98,360,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**8,924,000 (9.1%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Buddhism**



---

***In remote Vietnam, a woman who leaves her tribe's beliefs to follow Jesus often loses any rights to see her children.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN VIETNAM?

In Vietnam, the most intense persecution is reserved for non-traditional Protestants and converts from indigenous religions, especially in the remote areas of central and northern Vietnam. The majority of the population in these areas belong to the country's ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, and face social exclusion, discrimination and attacks. Homes are sometimes destroyed, forcing Christians to leave their villages. In several cases, Christians fled abroad and claimed asylum only to be sent back due to Vietnamese pressure.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that local authorities' suspicion against Christians will ease and be replaced with an appreciation of their value to society.
- Ask God to strengthen believers who are under pressure to renounce their faith as they cling to Jesus and follow Him.
- Pray that young Christians will grow in their love for Jesus, their understanding of the gospel and their appreciation for the Bible, giving them a foundation for life.

20

# Mauritania

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Mohamed Ould  
Abdel Aziz**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**4,784,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**10,800 (0.2%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



Photo by Mark Fischer



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***In Mauritania, leaving  
Islam is illegal; converts  
can be prosecuted.***

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MAURITANIA?

Mauritania's restrictive environment makes it impossible for Christians to gather openly. This is especially true for converts from Islam, who face enormous pressure from their families and communities. In Mauritania's tribal culture, leaving Islam is not only seen as religious betrayal, but also as a betrayal of the tribe and family. When anyone leaves Islam, they're isolated and forced to live on their own—a difficult trial in North Africa where survival often relies on community.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Ask God for strength and protection for all converts. Pray that families will increasingly honor and respect their decision to follow Jesus.
- Pray for comfort and encouragement for isolated Christians who have been excommunicated from their families. Ask God to make a way to meet other believers.
- Pray that opportunities will open up for believers to safely share the gospel with others.

21

# Uzbekistan

## SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Dictatorial paranoia**

## LEADER

**President Shavkat  
Mirziyoyev**

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## TOTAL POPULATION

**33,236,000**

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**345,000 (1%)**

## MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



---

***Uzbek believers can be fined for possessing Christian literature or even having worship songs on a smartphone.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN UZBEKISTAN?

In the former Soviet republic, the government sees Christians in unregistered churches as a threat to its power. The Uzbek government allows no religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions. If they are found meeting together, believers may have their meetings raided and be arrested or fined for taking part in “illegal” religious activities. Church leaders are especially targeted—in an effort to cause a ripple effect of fear and anxiety among their congregations.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that the new leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev would bring welcome changes and protection for the country’s Christian population.
- Pray for our family who, right now, are behind bars for their faith. Ask God to provide powerful ways to encourage them and bring them His hope and peace.
- Ask God to guide and spiritually nourish church leaders in Uzbekistan, who face immense pressure for their role in discipling God’s people.

A close-up portrait of an elderly man with short, graying hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark blue jacket. The background is blurred, showing another person in a dark uniform.

# Uzbekistan: Aziz's story

## **'I don't want anything to do with you!'**

**Uzbekistan, No. 21 on the 2021 World Watch List, is the most dangerous country in Central Asia to be a Christian.**

**No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed. And if an Uzbek person leaves Islam to follow Jesus, they face rejection and attack by their neighbors, and even their own family members.**

**Here, one Christian, "Aziz," tells his story:**

"After my conversion to Christianity, my brother wanted to have nothing to do with me. Again and again, he became very angry as soon as he saw me and said: 'Go away, what are you doing here? I don't want anything to do with you!' For 20 years, we did not have contact with each other.

"About four years ago, my nephew, the son of my brother, became a believer. Because he was so afraid of how his father would respond, he came to my house with his wife and children. Not long after, I got a phone call from my brother: 'If my son is in your house, I will set your house on fire, with everything and everyone in it!'

"That was a serious threat. So, my nephew and his family fled to another place. But one day, his father caught him and wanted to kill his son. He didn't succeed, but

he beat him up terribly. My nephew was taken to the hospital. He had to be operated on, and his nose was broken.

"Surprisingly, about a year ago, it seemed [my brother's] attitude changed a bit. He was so ill that he could only lie in bed. I visited him and asked if I could pray for him. And for the very first time, I was able to tell him about the gospel.

"The heart of my oldest brother is becoming softer and softer. And he is in contact again with both his son and me."

**Please pray for Aziz and his family and for the salvation of his brother.**

22

## Laos

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Clan oppression**

LEADER

**President Bounhang  
Vorachit**

---

TOTAL POPULATION

**7,165,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**199,000 (2.8%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Buddhism**



---

***In rural areas, Laotian house churches meet underground because they are considered “illegal gatherings.”***



### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN LAOS?

In Laos, the communist authorities heavily monitor any Christian activities, including those of registered churches. Both church leaders and believers have been detained or imprisoned. Life is especially difficult for converts to the Christian faith, who are at risk of persecution from their family and the local authorities. This can involve damage to property, confiscation of possessions, and fines. When a convert's family stir up the local community against them, opposition may become violent.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Give thanks for the growth of the church in Laos; pray that God will continue to use His people to bring them greater knowledge of Jesus' love.
- Pray that believers under pressure to recant their faith will have strength to stand firm.
- Pray for families and churches left without the support and leadership of a husband and/or leader; pray that all their needs would be met and that it would be an opportunity for others to grow and thrive.

23

# Turkmenistan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Dictatorial paranoia**

LEADER  
**President Gurbanguly  
Berdimukhamedov**

---

TOTAL POPULATION

**6,031,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**68,000 (1.1%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



---

***In Turkmenistan,  
church leaders are  
attacked in places where  
the church is growing  
through evangelism.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN TURKMENISTAN?

Persecution against Christians in this repressive Islamic state comes largely from the government and from society. The government imposes many restrictions on church life. Unless their churches are registered, Christians are highly susceptible to police raids, threats, arrests and fines. The printing or importing of Christian materials is also restricted. Believers who come from Muslim backgrounds experience intense pressure from families, friends and villagers to deny their faith.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for an easing of heavy restrictions on churches in Turkmenistan.
- Pray for the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of church leaders, who live and lead under intense government pressure.
- Ask that believers who come to Christ from Muslim backgrounds will be guarded from harm, and that families, friends and villagers will be powerfully impacted by the transformation in their lives.

24

# Algeria

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Abdelmadjid  
Tebboune**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**43,333,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**129,000 (0.3%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



Photo by IM/PH

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN ALGERIA?

In Algeria, Christian converts are most at risk of persecution, not just from their family and extended family, but also from local ethnic leaders and elders. Laws regulating non-Muslim worship prohibit anything that would “shake the faith of a Muslim.” In the past three years, authorities in Algeria have engaged in a systematic campaign against EPA churches (Protestant Church of Algeria), which has seen 13 churches forcibly closed by authorities. Others have received orders to cease all activities.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that all recently closed churches will reopen, and the 2006 law regulating worship will be repealed.
- Request that converts who have counted the cost for following Jesus will have access to a community of Christians to support and build them up.
- Pray for the establishment of strategic relationships between Christians and local leaders of influence, which will inspire greater respect among communities towards Christianity.



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*The majority  
of Christians in Algeria  
are converts from Islam.*

25

# Turkey

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Recep  
Tayyip Erdogan**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**83,836,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**171,000 (0.2%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



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***In Turkey, one's religious affiliation is recorded on the electronic chip of identity cards, making it easy to discriminate against Christians.***



Photo by IM/PH

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN TURKEY?

In Turkey, religious nationalism is very strong and is growing, placing enormous pressure on Christians. In contrast with previous years, the government has not only targeted foreign Christians, but has also deported foreign Christians who are married to Turkish citizens—and who have children who are Turkish citizens. While converting to Christianity from Islam is not illegal, converts will likely face opposition and pressure from their family and the local community—sometimes leading to divorce or disinheritance.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that the stifling and suspicious atmosphere for Christians in Turkey will change.
- Pray that foreign Christians will be granted favor in their residency applications and in ongoing appeals against residency bans.
- Pray that all converts will stand firm in their faith, grow in their love for Jesus, and be guarded from all harm.
- Pray for church leaders as they face increasing pressure in a society that's growing increasingly hostile to Christians.

## TREND 4:

# When citizenship is tied to faith

In countries like India and Turkey, religious identity is increasingly tied to national identity—meaning, to be a “real” Indian or a good Turk, you must be a Hindu or a Muslim, respectively. This is often implicitly—if not explicitly—encouraged by the ruling government.

Amidst a surge of Hindu nationalism, Indian Christians are constantly pressured by strident propaganda. The message “to be Indian, you must be Hindu” means mobs continue to attack and harass Christians, as well as Muslims. The belief that Christians are not truly Indian means widespread discrimination and persecution is often conducted with impunity. India also continues to block the flow of foreign funds to many Christian-run hospitals, schools and church organizations, all under the guise of protecting the Indian national identity.

LAST YEAR,  
**4,488**  
 CHURCHES  
 OR CHRISTIAN  
 BUILDINGS  
 WERE ATTACKED

In Turkey, the Turkish government has also assumed the role of nationalist protector of Islam. The Hagia Sophia was originally a cathedral and then a



mosque, until modern Turkey decided it should be a museum. But in July 2020, the Turkish president persuaded a court to make it a mosque again, strengthening Turkish nationalism.

Near Turkey’s southeast border in January 2020, a Chaldean Christian couple was abducted from their isolated village, whose centuries-long Christian history had been destroyed by Turkish army attacks and Kurdish discrimination. The couple returned to their home a decade ago. Having resisted the authorities’ repeated intimidation to leave, they were the last Christians left. The wife’s body was found in March; the husband is still missing.

Turkish influence and nationalist aims extend beyond its borders, most notably in its backing of Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia. During the conflict, Armenians and Chaldean Christians in the Turkish capital, Ankara, were beaten, while others in Istanbul were threatened by right-wing mobs, showing how centuries-long, inter-religious animosity can be stirred up.

In other countries on the World Watch List, religious identity is closely tied to national identity, and anyone who follows Jesus risks being seen—and persecuted—as a bad citizen.

26

# Tunisia

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Prime Minister  
Hichem Mechichi**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**11,903,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**23,100 (0.2%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



---

***Violent Islamic extremists  
are active in the border  
areas in southern  
Tunisia—they will target  
any Christian.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN TUNISIA?

The average pressure on Christians is at a very high level. Although every aspect of life for a believer involves very high levels of pressure, persecution is highest in family and church life. This is particularly apparent for those Christians who have converted from Islam, because often their new faith is opposed—sometimes violently—by both family and community. Additionally, it is difficult, if not impossible, for converts from Islam to live out their faith openly.

## PRAYER POINTS

- There are many lonely believers in Tunisia. Pray for them to find other believers around them to connect with, and pray for strong and fruitful fellowships.
- Please pray that the light, peace and love of Christ would overcome a spirit of intimidation and fear that some Tunisian believers are feeling.
- Pray for female believers in Tunisia struggling with trauma. Pray for God to bless them.

27

# Morocco

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**King Mohammed VI**

---

TOTAL POPULATION

**37,071,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**31,500 (0.1%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



***A handful of Christian men in Morocco were reportedly arrested because they had a Bible in their possession.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MOROCCO?

The average pressure on Christians in Morocco remains high. And for converts from Islam, the pressure is even higher. They can lose their inheritance rights, or even custody of their children. Converts face opposition from family members, who do not want them to practice their new faith publicly. Particularly in rural areas, these followers of Jesus also face significant hostility from their local community and government. It is also a criminal act to “shake the faith of a Muslim.”

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for unity in the Moroccan church. Believers are scattered around the country and don't know each other well.
- Pray for children in local schools. Islam is taught in many different subjects at school. Christian children say this is confusing, as they hear different teaching at home.
- Pray for Christian converts from Islam in Morocco. Pray they will be protected from harm or discrimination from their families.

28

# Mali

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Interim President Bah Ndaw**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**20,284,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**467,000 (2.3%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



---

***There was a coup in Mali in late summer 2020, leaving the door open for extremist elements to take root.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MALI?

When Islamic extremist groups took control of the northern part of the country in 2012, churches were burned down and Christians were forced to flee. The displacement that happened still affects Christians. Although some Christians have returned, they still live under the threat of attack by Islamic militants. If conversion from Islam to Christianity is discovered, Christians risk violence and pressure from their relatives and family. Even in the south of the country, where Christians enjoy more religious freedom, threats from Islamic extremist groups have increased.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians still trying to rebuild their homes, churches and lives after being forced to flee in 2012.
- Pray for the interim government that took over the country in mid-2020. Pray the new leaders will fight for and advocate for religious freedom for people of all faiths.
- Pray for the Islamic extremist groups targeting Christians in Mali. Pray God will soften their hearts.

29

# Qatar

## SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Clan oppression**

## LEADER

**Sheikh Tamim bin  
Hamad al-Thani**

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## TOTAL POPULATION

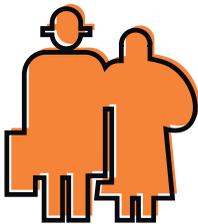
**2,792,000**

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**367,000 (2.3%)**

## MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



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*Qatar has a massive population of migrant workers—a recent estimate indicates only 12 percent of the population are indigenous Qataris.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN QATAR?

Life for Christians in Qatar can look very different depending on what type of Christian you are. There are two general categories: Christian foreigners, most of whom are migrant workers, and Christians who have converted from Islam. Foreign workers who are Christians are much freer to worship. Muslims who convert to Christianity face much more significant persecution. Converts from both indigenous and migrant backgrounds bear the brunt of persecution, and Qatari converts face very high pressure from their Muslim families.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray God works powerfully in Qatar. Ask that God's people will be brought into contact with those willing to hear the gospel.
- Pray migrant workers are protected from the abuse and discrimination of their employers and not additionally targeted for their faith in Jesus.
- Pray for secret Christians in Qatar who have accepted Jesus but cannot be open about their new faith.

30

# Colombia

## SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Clan oppression**

## LEADER

**President Ivan Duque**

---

## TOTAL POPULATION

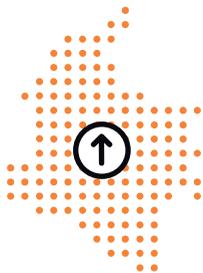
**50,220,000**

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**47,706,000 (95%)**

## MAIN RELIGION

**Christianity**



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***Colombia's rank on the 2021 World Watch List rose by 11 spots over last year's list.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN COLOMBIA?

In Colombia, a largely Christian country, persecution is localized—and violent. Church leaders are threatened, harassed, extorted and even murdered as a result of the violence perpetrated by guerrillas and other criminal groups, especially in the country's more remote areas. In indigenous communities, significant opposition and persecution exists toward Christian missionaries and indigenous converts. In addition, there seems to be an increasing intolerance for Christians in the public sphere and an emphasis on secularism over pluralism.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians in indigenous communities in Colombia.
- Pray for Christians living in areas controlled by rebel and criminal groups. Pray God would keep them safe and give them courage to continue to live out and preach His gospel.
- Pray for the families of church leaders who have been killed in Colombia this year.

31

# Bangladesh

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Prime Minister  
Sheikh Hasina**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**169,775,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**903,000 (0.5%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



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*Christians were left out of COVID-19 government relief in Bangladesh, often facing starvation or severe health issues.*



Photo by MW

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN BANGLADESH?

Bangladeshi society is growing increasingly Islamic, with the government doing more to appease concerns from Muslim extremists. Evangelistic churches—many of them Pentecostal—that work among the Muslim majority face the most persecution, but even historical churches are increasingly faced with attacks and death threats. Converts from a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or an ethnic/tribal background suffer the most. They often gather in small house churches or secret groups due to fear of attack.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for trainings for Christians from different tribes and cultures, that they would be equipped to take back what they have learned to strengthen their communities.
- Pray for Christians who are discriminated against in government aid distributions during COVID-19 and cyclone relief.
- Pray for the small group of Rohingya Christians, as they seek to follow Jesus in the refugee camps in Bangladesh.

32

# Burkina Faso

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Roch Marc Kabore**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**20,903,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**4,965,000 (23.8%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



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***Burkina Faso has long had a reputation for religious tolerance, but that reputation is increasingly at risk.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN BURKINA FASO?

Open Doors estimates there are over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burkina Faso, and many are Christians. Extremist attacks have driven followers of Jesus from their homes and villages, with many being forced into refugee camps, and there are no open churches in parts of northeastern Burkina Faso. Low rainfall and the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened the situation. Christians who have converted from Islam also face significant pressure and opposition from their families and communities.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the Lord's provision in the lives of our displaced brothers and sisters in Burkina Faso.
- From a pastor in Burkina Faso: "Pray for Burkina Faso, so that the peace of God will reign in the country, and our people will be able to go back to their villages and continue their daily activities."
- Pray for grace for Christians to remain firm in the faith as they face increased hostility.

33

# Tajikistan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Dictatorial paranoia**

LEADER  
**President Emomali Rahmon**

---

TOTAL POPULATION

**9,475,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**66,300 (0.7%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



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***The government in Tajikistan prohibits the use of religious clothes or symbols.***



Photo by IM/PH

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN TAJIKISTAN?

In Tajikistan, all religious activities must be approved by the government, and it is common for churches—particularly Protestant—to be raided by authorities. Christians can be detained if they are found to have any Christian materials that aren't government-approved. Additionally, the Tajik ethnic identity is directly tied to Islam. That is why Christians who have converted from Islam bear the brunt of persecution at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for pastors and church leaders in Tajikistan, especially those who are monitored and detained by the government.
- Pray for converts to Christianity from Islam who live in areas of Tajikistan where conversion means severe pressure.
- Pray for the government of Tajikistan, that their hearts would be softened toward Christians and other religious minorities.

34

# Nepal

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Clan oppression**

LEADER  
**Prime Minister Khadga  
Prasad Sharma Oli**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**30,260,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**1,285,000 (4.2%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Hinduism**



Photo by AP Photo/Dan Harlow

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN NEPAL?

In Nepal, converts from Hinduism are put under the most pressure; they are viewed as deviating from the faith of the ancestors, and therefore breaking with their culture and their national identity. Converts—and members of Protestant churches—experience pressure from family, friends, community and local authorities. In some areas, Christians were also left out of government COVID-19 relief, re-emphasizing their status as second-class citizens.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that Christians in Nepal will have the wisdom to know how to share their faith safely, and the boldness to continue sharing the gospel.
- Pray for Christian women in Nepal who face persecution from their family members. Many are beaten, threatened, not allowed to go to church, rejected and left alone.
- Pray for believers who live in very remote villages. It is difficult for our local partners to contact them.



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**All Christians  
in Nepal are at risk  
of accusations under an  
anti-conversion law.**

# Nepal: Bhumika and Deepak's story



## ‘I always felt God near us.’

“Bhumika” and “Deepak” are a young couple from Nepal. They accepted Jesus recently, and their new faith has led to persecution. There are a few believers in other villages in the area where Bhumika and her family live, but the rest of the villagers are mainly Hindus. Most are against Christianity, as they see it as a foreign religion and a betrayal of the indigenous beliefs, culture and traditions.

“In my village, they do not allow me to fetch water from the village well, and we are not allowed to even touch the handle of the water pump,” Bhumika says. “Often, I went secretly at night to fetch water.”

Whenever there was a prayer or worship gathering at Bhumika’s house, their neighbors would

cause disturbances and try to disrupt their meeting. Bhumika also faced persecution from her in-laws. Whenever someone from the family was ill, they blamed Bhumika and Deepak’s faith for it.

When Open Doors local partners heard about the family, they were able to help through the local church. The prayers and gifts from Open Doors supporters provided a water pump, installed outside the family’s house, and a few goats to help the family support themselves.

“When my family was despised by our family and relatives and isolated from our village, my family came together and prayed, and as a result, God filled us with His joy and gave us strength to face this kind of persecution,” Bhumika says. “He also provided for our needs whenever we prayed. I always felt God near us in the storms we faced.”

*Photo above is representative*

35

# Central African Republic

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Islamic oppression**

LEADER

**President Faustin-Archange Touadera**

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TOTAL POPULATION

**4,921,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**3,691,000 (75%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Christianity**



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***CAR fell 10 spots from the 2020 World Watch List—although violence remains extreme.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN CAR?

The Central African Republic has seen near-constant conflict and fighting since 2013. Much of the country is occupied by various armed militia groups, who—whether Islamic extremist or otherwise—specifically target Christians, so life is constantly uncertain for believers in areas under militia control. Christian leaders who have publicly denounced the violence have been threatened; church buildings have been burned and ransacked. Additionally, converts to Christianity from Islam also face persecution from their immediate family and community.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians in Central African Republic, as they endure violence and conflict that seem to never end.
- Pray for followers of Jesus who are targeted by various groups in violent attacks.
- Pray for peace in CAR, and that God would touch the hearts of leaders of every group.
- Pray for converts from Islam, that they would be protected from oppression.

36

# Ethiopia

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Denominational  
protectionism**

LEADER

**Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed**

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TOTAL POPULATION

**112,759,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**67,491,000 (59.9%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Christianity**



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***During the COVID-19  
pandemic, some  
Christians in Ethiopia  
were discriminated  
against when government  
aid was distributed.***

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN ETHIOPIA?

In Ethiopia, persecution is often dependent on what kind of Christian you are or where you live. Because of the government's special relationship with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, other denominations are persecuted by the state and by the Orthodox community. The other major factor for persecution in Ethiopia is Islamic extremism. Particularly in the eastern and southeastern parts of the country, converts to Christianity from Islam can be oppressed by their families and communities, and targeted by Islamic extremists.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the Christian denominations in Ethiopia, particularly for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Pray they would see the unity that's possible in Jesus.
- Pray for Christians living in areas where Islamic extremists are active. Pray for protection and that they would not be discriminated against or oppressed.
- Pray for Christians who leave Islam. Pray also for those who leave the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to follow Jesus in a closer way than they could find in their previous church.

37

## Mexico

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Organized corruption  
and crime**

LEADER  
**President Andres Manuel  
López Obrador**

---

TOTAL POPULATION

**133,870,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**128,229,000 (95.8%)**

MAIN RELIGION

**Christianity**



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*Although there are still two main drug cartels in Mexico, there are also at least 17 criminal groups that have a significant presence there.*



### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MEXICO?

Christians who are outspoken about the hope of Jesus in the face of drug-trafficking and violence are often targeted by gangs to remove any obstacle in their quest for control. In indigenous communities, anyone who decides to abandon the community's religious beliefs or syncretistic practices often faces rejection and punishment. Finally, there has been an increase in violent and discriminatory acts against Christians by people who believe Christians are bigoted.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christian leaders who risk so much to serve their church communities in places where they are the targets of organized criminals.
- Pray for Christians who convert out of their community's belief system.
- Pray for Christians struggling to see how they fit into Mexican society. Ask God to give them compassion and courage, as they risk their lives and livelihood to walk in faith.

38

# Jordan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**King Abdullah II**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**10,209,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**180,000 (1.8%)<sup>1</sup>**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



---

***Jordan fell by five rankings on the World Watch List, but its persecution levels have remained largely stable.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN JORDAN?

Compared to Christians living in other Middle Eastern countries, most Christians in Jordan live a safe and stable life, and enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom. However, Christians still experience discrimination in employment and restrictions against public preaching. Unrecognized churches can face harassment by public authorities, particularly those that actively evangelize. Open testimony of faith by a Christian who converted from Islam can lead to beatings, arrest and even death.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians who worship in unregistered churches. Pray they would be able to continue to worship.
- Pray for followers of Jesus who left Islam. Pray they wouldn't be oppressed or ostracized by their families.
- Pray for leaders in Jordan, that they would be increasingly open to religious freedom.

39

# Brunei

**SOURCE OF PERSECUTION**

**Dictatorial paranoia**

**LEADER**

**Sultan Sir Hassanal Bolkiah**

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**TOTAL POPULATION**

**445,000**

**CHRISTIAN POPULATION**

**52,000 (11.7%)**

**MAIN RELIGION**

**Islam**



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*Some Christian communities in Brunei cannot be registered as churches and have to register as companies, organizations or family centers.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN BRUNEI?

In Brunei, leaving Islam for another religion is illegal—so converts from Islam who follow Jesus encounter significant persecution from both local and national sources. Converts can be disowned by their families, and be forced to divorce their spouse and to leave the family home. Married converts to Christianity from Islam also lose custody of their children. Additionally, every level of society in Brunei is affected by the continuing introduction of Shariah law.

## PRAYER POINTS

- The believers of Brunei face many challenges in living out their faith for Christ. As Islam grows, pray that God will strengthen the church there.
- Please pray for God to open the doors of this country, so that many will come to faith in Christ, for only He can create such a miracle.
- Pray also for the church in Brunei, that God would bless them and use them for His kingdom.

40

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Félix Tshisekedi**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**89,505,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**85,120,000 (95.1%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Christianity**



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*The DRC wasn't on the World Watch List last year —its spike in persecution reflects the extreme violence suffered by Christians.*



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE DRC?

The Islamic extremist group Alliance for Democratic Forces (ADF) is responsible for the persecution of Christians in the eastern part of the country, attacking Christians and churches. The violence has resulted in more than a million internally displaced people. Additionally, followers of Jesus are at risk for kidnappings and having their homes destroyed. Converts, both from Islam and from tribal religions, also face pressure to take part in non-Christian religious activities and ceremonies.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Attacks by Islamic extremists have brought great suffering to the general population, including large numbers of Christians. Please pray for the Lord's provision, strength and hope.
- Pray that those coming to terms with the loss of loved ones would experience the Lord's comfort to them.
- Pray God would touch the hearts of the ADF militants.

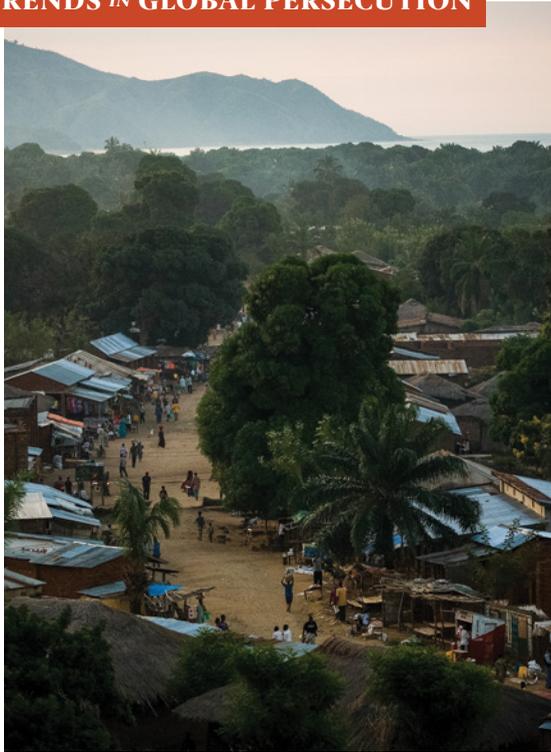


Photo: AP/Wide World

## TREND 5:

# Where violence spiked despite lockdowns

In much of the world, violence against Christians actually decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic. But across sub-Saharan Africa, that wasn't the case. Christians there faced up to 30 percent *higher* levels of violence than the previous year. Several hundred mostly Christian villages in Nigeria were either occupied or ransacked by armed Hausa-Fulani Muslim militant herdsman; sometimes, fields and crops

were destroyed as well. Boko Haram—and splinter group Islamic State of West Africa Province, an ISIS affiliate—continue to plague Nigeria and northern Cameroon.

In the Sahel region just south of the Sahara Desert, Islamic extremism is fueled by injustice and poverty. These extremist groups exploit governmental failures, and armed jihadists spread propaganda, push recruitment and conduct regular attacks. This year, some groups pledged to wage war against “infidels” like Christians—they claim “Allah punishes us all” with the pandemic because of the infidels.

LAST YEAR,  
**4,761**  
 CHRISTIANS *were KILLED*  
 for THEIR FAITH

A United Nations official recently said countries in the central Sahel—Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger—are home to the world's fastest-growing displacement and protection crisis. In Burkina Faso, until recently known for its inter-religious harmony between Muslims and Christians, 1 million people—1 in 20 of the population—are displaced (and millions more are hungry) as a result of drought and violence. Last year, Burkina Faso dramatically entered the World Watch List Top 50 for the first time. This year, Islamic extremists continue to target churches (14 killed in one attack, 24 in another). In Mali, Western Christian hostages are still held and killed.

In East Africa, Mozambique faces violence by a branch of ISIS that wants to impose Shariah law across the northern province bordering Tanzania. Another group has already attacked Christian villages across the border in Tanzania, where the autocratic President John Magufuli won a landslide election victory in October.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is plagued by its own ISIS-linked group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). ADF has almost total control over vast rural areas, and for years it has attacked Christian-run schools and clinics, burned down churches and killed community leaders.

Even in the midst of a pandemic that caused lockdowns and stay-at-home orders around the world, violence still rose across sub-Saharan Africa. It is a troubling development for sisters and brothers trying to follow Jesus in this environment.

41

# Kazakhstan

## SOURCE OF PERSECUTION

**Dictatorial paranoia**

## LEADER

**President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev**

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## TOTAL POPULATION

**18,777,000**

## CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**4,852,000 (25.8%)**

## MAIN RELIGION

**Islam**



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***Even though Kazakhstan fell six spots on the World Watch List, its persecution level remains largely the same.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN KAZAKHSTAN?

Persecution in Kazakhstan hasn't changed much over the years. Legislation dating back to September 2011 restricts the ability to worship freely. Kazakhstan's government has steadily increased its control over religious expression in the country, which means increased surveillance, raids on church meetings, and arrests. Kazakh Christians from a Muslim background bear the worst persecution at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians—and particularly for church leaders—in Kazakhstan who endure government suspicion and interference in their lives and faith.
- Pray for converts from Islam, that they would be protected from oppression and discrimination from their family, friends and community.
- Pray God would work through the hearts of the leaders of Kazakhstan. The country has been a single-party government for decades, and control is tight.

42

# Cameroon

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Paul Biya**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**25,958,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**15,922,000 (61.3%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Christianity**



---

***Cameroon rose six spots on the 2021 World Watch List from last year, with persecution and violence on the rise.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN CAMEROON?

The Islamic extremist group Boko Haram is active in northern Cameroon and has created a hostile environment for Christians. Christians have been kidnapped and killed, and churches were targeted and attacked. Because the government is often focused elsewhere, it's given an opening for Boko Haram to expand and continue attacks that target Christians. In Cameroon, it is also very difficult for Muslims who want to convert to Christianity.

## PRAYER POINTS

- In the north of Cameroon, people's lives have been disrupted by Boko Haram violence that has spilled across the border from Nigeria. Pray for peace in the storm.
- Pray for converts from Islam, that they would be protected from violence.
- Pray God would protect Christian women in Cameroon, who are at constant risk of abduction, forced marriage and sexual violence at the hands of Boko Haram.

43

# Bhutan

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Religious nationalism**

LEADER  
**King Jigme Khesar  
Namgyel Wangchuck**

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TOTAL POPULATION

**835,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION

**30,000 (3.6%)<sup>1</sup>**

MAIN RELIGION

**Buddhism**



---

***Government officials  
will do whatever is  
necessary to preserve  
Bhutan's Buddhist  
heritage.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN BHUTAN?

In Bhutan, the government assumes that all citizens are Buddhist. Anyone who converts to Christianity is watched with suspicion, and efforts are usually made to bring them back to their former religion. Religious leaders, the local community and family often cooperate in this. No Christian church in Bhutan has official government recognition—all Christians who worship together are technically worshipping illegally.

## PRAYER POINTS

- The Bhutanese church is divided. Please pray for unity, peace and understanding among the churches in Bhutan.
- Pray for the Christians in Bhutan to remain true and strong in their faith, in the face of Buddhism's strong influence in the country.
- Please pray for churches in central-south Bhutan. Most are constantly monitored by authorities, hindering or even preventing worship and fellowship gatherings.

44

# Oman

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Clan oppression**

LEADER  
**Sultan Haitham bin  
Tariq Al Said**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**5,150,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**185,000 (3.6%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



---

***No Omani family will allow their daughter to marry a Christian man, because he is seen as disrespectful to his own family by rejecting them.***

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN OMAN?

All Omani citizens are assumed to be Muslim. Islam is the state religion, so the level of persecution for Christians in Oman depends on if they are migrant workers or Omani. Local converts from Islam are under the most pressure—their families and communities press them to return to Islam. Converts can be expelled from their families and lose their jobs and children. The government largely tolerates foreign Christian communities, but greatly restricts and monitors their gatherings.

## PRAYER POINTS

- In the Arabian Peninsula, fear is a barrier to the growth of Christ's Church. Please pray this bondage of fear will be broken.
- Many believers who convert from Islam live in secret and isolation from other followers of Jesus. Ask God to bring these isolated secret believers into fellowship with other believers.
- Pray for whole families to come to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

45

# Mozambique

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Filipe Nyusi**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**32,309,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**17,448,000 (54%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Christianity**



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*This is Mozambique's  
first time on the World  
Watch List.*



Photo by WWL

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MOZAMBIQUE?

Christians face extreme violence in the northern part of the country. Christians have been forced to flee their homes. Islamic extremists have looted and destroyed many Christian places of worship, Christian schools and businesses owned by Christians. Christian aid workers have also been targeted. Because of this, it is difficult for Christians to gather—either inside or outside of churches—and it can be risky for believers to speak against persecution.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians who lost loved ones and survived the jihadist attacks in Mozambique's northern region.
- Pray for the Lord to strengthen the church in Mozambique and to give Christians unity in the face of Islamic extremist threats.
- Pray for wisdom and discernment for pastors and church leaders, as they shepherd their people and train them to be prepared for persecution.

46

# Malaysia

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Sultan Abdullah of Pahang**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**32,869,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**2,991,000 (9.1%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN MALAYSIA?

In Malaysia, the government and religious groups monitor churches, and it is illegal to share the gospel with Malay Muslims. Converts from Islam to Christianity experience the most persecution, as every ethnic Malay is expected to be Muslim. These believers are often forced to hide their faith and meet in secret. If discovered, they could face divorce from their spouse, rejection from their family—or even risk being sent to a re-education camp.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for believers who seek to meet in secret. Ask God to give them meaningful times of worship and fellowship.
- Pray for religious freedom across Malaysia. Today, it is illegal to share the gospel with Malay Muslims—and it is also unlawful for Malay Muslims to leave Islam for Christianity.
- Pray for Malay believers who have left Islam and are often isolated and cut off from their family members.



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*After he was kidnapped in broad daylight, Pastor Raymond Koh has been missing for over three years.*

47

# Indonesia

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

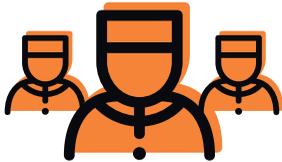
LEADER  
**President Joko Widodo**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**272,223,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**33,192,000 (12.2%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



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***Indonesia has a higher population of Muslims than any country in the world.***



## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN INDONESIA?

In Indonesia, Christians who grew up in a Muslim home often experience persecution from their families. However, persecution intensity varies given the individual family and location. In many homes, families will verbally abuse their Christian family members and isolate them. Only a small percentage of converts face physical violence for their Christian faith. In certain hot spots, like West Java or Aceh, extremist Islamic groups are strong and heavily influence society and politics. If they catch Christians evangelizing, believers could run into problems.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians who leave Islam and are heavily pressured by family and community to renounce their new faith in Jesus.
- Pray that churches trying to obtain locations for worship would find favor with the government and be granted freedom to gather and worship in peace.
- Pray that God would give ministry leaders and volunteers the boldness and perseverance they need to both lead and serve the church in Indonesia.

48

## Kuwait

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**Amir Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jabir Al-Sabah**

---

TOTAL POPULATION  
**4,303,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**513,000 (11.9%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



---

***Non-Western Christians with lower levels of skills are more likely to face discrimination and abuse in Kuwait.***



### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN KUWAIT?

In Kuwait, expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship informally. However, the existing places registered for worship are very small for the number of people gathering. Local converts from Islam face the most extreme persecution, as they face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their faith. These believers risk discrimination, harassment, monitoring of their activities by the police, and even intimidation by vigilante groups.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for the many expatriate Christians who work and live in Kuwait. Ask God to give these believers fellowship, vocations and renewed hope.
- Pray for the government of Kuwait to provide more freedom for Christians—especially Christians from a Muslim background—to meet, pray and share their faith freely.
- Kuwaiti Christians who come from a Muslim background are sometimes detained and interrogated by the authorities. Ask God to give them boldness and perseverance to stand strong in Christ.

49

# Kenya

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

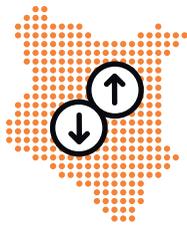
LEADER  
**President Uhuru Kenyatta**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**53,492,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**43,991,000 (82%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Christianity**



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***While Kenya moved down five spots from the 2020 World Watch List, violence actually increased significantly.***



Photo by MW/Agood

## WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN KENYA?

In Kenya, Christianity is the majority religion, but that hasn't stopped the spread of persecution. Particularly, Christians with a Muslim background in the northeast and coastal regions live under constant threat of attack. Christians were attacked and forced to flee their villages, and Islamic extremist group al-Shabab has infiltrated the local population to monitor Christians in those areas. Additionally, church and community life are very difficult. Organized crime is also a serious problem.

## PRAYER POINTS

- Please pray for the Lord's continued grace for new believers in Kenya.
- Pray for Christians in the northeast who face threats of deadly attacks from al-Shabab. Ask God to protect them.
- Pray the church in Kenya would be equipped to disciple believers, to train godly leaders and to effectively share the gospel with their neighbors.

50

## Comoros

SOURCE OF PERSECUTION  
**Islamic oppression**

LEADER  
**President Azali Assoumani**

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TOTAL POPULATION  
**870,000**

CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
**4,200 (0.5%)**

MAIN RELIGION  
**Islam**



\*Photo by Alamy



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***This is Comoros' first appearance on the World Watch List since 2017.***

### WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN COMOROS?

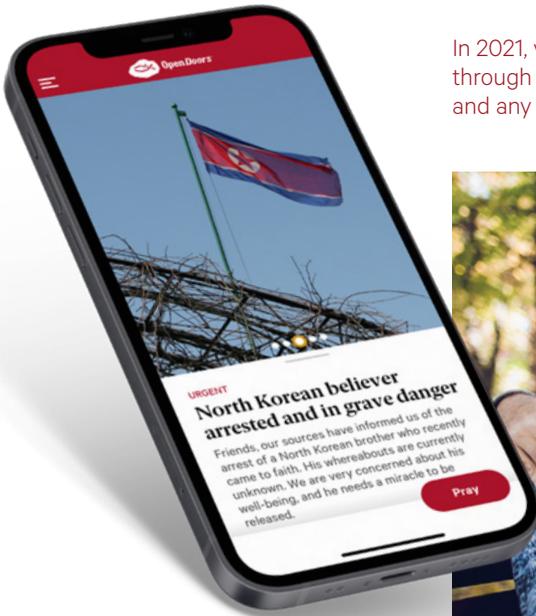
Christians in Comoros are not able to share their faith freely in public. If they do, they face legal consequences. In some parts of the country, extremist groups threaten Christians with violence. Converts from a Muslim background face the most severe difficulties. They are often pressured to keep their faith private—leaving them no option but to live out their faith in secret.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for Christians in Comoros to be faithful and fruitful in their work, keeping in mind Colossians 3:23-24.
- Pray for Christians in Comoros to live joyfully and blamelessly, so that others will ask them about their lives and open a door for the gospel.
- Pray for Christians who left Islam to follow Jesus. Ask God to give them wisdom, courage and support—so they know they are never alone.

# Take the 2021 prayer pledge

In 2021, you have the opportunity to stand with your persecuted family through prayer—your prayers with them can reach into any situation and any country, no matter how closed to the gospel.



**“Our prayers go where we cannot.”**

—Brother Andrew



**Here’s how to take the 2021 prayer pledge:**

## 1. Download.

Download the Open Doors Prayer App, and get up-to-the-minute prayer requests from your brothers and sisters around the world. Visit [OpenDoorsUSA.org/PrayerApp](https://OpenDoorsUSA.org/PrayerApp) or text PRAYER to 32500 to download the app.

## 2. Pray.

Make a commitment to pray every week for a certain number of requests from the Prayer App. Your prayers do more than you will ever know!

## 3. Share.

Share your pledge—and encourage others to join you in prayer! Write **“#IWillPray2021”** on your hand or on some paper, take a picture and share on social media with the same hashtag. Help start a movement of prayer that will change the world in 2021!



**BEHOLD, I AM DOING  
A *new* THING; NOW IT  
SPRINGS FORTH, DO YOU  
NOT PERCEIVE IT?**

**I WILL MAKE A WAY  
*in* THE WILDERNESS *and*  
RIVERS *in* THE DESERT.**



[OpenDoorsUSA.org/WWL](https://OpenDoorsUSA.org/WWL)

ISAIAH 43:19 (ESV)