

Christian Churches Continue Expanding Globally Despite Rising Persecution

Watchdog organization International Christian Concern (ICC) released an updated report on Christian persecution around the world, finding that churches are expanding in the face of violent action against them.

The report detailed growing trends threatening religious freedom, including religious nationalism, state control of religious groups, and terrorism, while also acknowledging that discontent with repression and religious restrictions are increasing.

“Despite mounting repression, Christianity continues to grow in unexpected places,” the report says, describing the Iranian house church movement as “one of the fastest growing in the world,” propelled by underground networks and digital actions.

The Western world is also facing increasing persecution.

“While Christians in Western nations don’t experience the same horrific persecution that believers in other hot spots face, religious freedom in corners of the West is eroding,” ICC wrote, going on to list hindrances to freedom such as laws dictating where Christians can pray, educators losing their jobs or facing court battles due to their beliefs, and hate crimes against Christians in Europe.



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Iran faces some of the most intense Christian persecution, the report explains.

“Religious minorities face an increasingly lethal environment: converts from Islam are arrested, imprisoned, and executed under sweeping blasphemy and national-security laws that criminalize faith and dissent,” it reads. “The judiciary and security apparatus facilitate this assault, ensuring ideological conformity through sham trials and death sentences.”

Despite the opposition, the Church in Iran is “one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world.”

South Asia houses some of the “most virulent expressions of religious nationalism,” the report adds. Hindu nationalists have waged attacks on religious minorities in India, and blasphemy laws have been used to terrorize those in Pakistan. “This fusion of politics and faith – part religious revival, part authoritarian project – has become one of the defining threats to religious freedom in South Asia,” ICC noted.

North Korea is another major persecutor of Christians. Despite deepening repression and surveillance, the Church has created underground networks that “operate entirely in darkness, upheld by fellowship, radio broadcasts, smuggled materials, and courage.”

According to the World Watch List 2026 report released in January, 388 million Christians have faced great levels of persecution and discrimination, or 1 in 7 of all Christians worldwide. The number is up from 380 million Christians last year. The report details the top 50 countries leading Christian persecution, the top being North Korea for the 24th time. Other leading countries include Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, and Nigeria. Persecution sources are listed as “Communist and post-Communist oppression,” “Islamic oppression,” “Dictatorial paranoia,” and others.

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