

Persecution of Christians Still Strong in North Korea One Year After Leadership Change

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un allows women to wear pants in public, likes to see Mickey Mouse and his friends perform, and experiments with light agricultural reform, but he hasn't made any essential changes in the first year after his father Kim Jong-Il's death.

In fact, he has been preoccupied with building his image and tightening security. He increased the number of spies in China who search for Christians and organizations helping North Korean refugees. The use of television, radio and cellphones by North Koreans has also been thoroughly investigated and Christians report no changes in their situation of being isolated from the outside world.

2012 must have been a busy year for North Korea's "propaganda department." The "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-Il announced three years ago that in 2012 North Korea would once again be a strong and prosperous country. He died on Dec. 17, 2011, and left the country to Kim Jong Un, who most likely is in his late 20s.

The regime tried to model its new leader after his grandfather, Kim Il Sung. His appearance and his public speeches mirror North Korea's "eternal president." There are differences. Kim Jong-Un's attendance of performances with Disney figures, female musicians in miniskirts and an orchestra playing music from a Rocky movie were widely televised. However, the dream of a strong and prosperous nation is still far from reality.

The number of trained North Korean spies in China is growing. They are searching for human rights activists and Christians helping North Korean refugees. Border patrols have been taken over by the National Security Agency, which put pressure on captured smugglers to disclose information about Christians helping defectors.

In at least one region in North Korea, but possibly more, citizens are pressured to confess their crimes. A North Korean person told a reporter from , "They are gathering people by factory, school and people's units and telling them to write letters confessing precisely what foreign media they have viewed. When they give you the paper they warn you, saying they know everything anyway so just write it down—when, where and what you saw, where and from whom you got it and your impression of it."

Open Doors' Christian contacts inside North Korea have reported no changes in their circumstances, indicating there are no signs that Kim Jong Un will improve freedom of religion in the communist country. In fact, some arrested Christians were tortured and then released in order to betray their brothers and sisters or to serve as bait.

"This is extremely tragic," says a Open Doors co-worker involved in ministry among North Koreans. "It's so dangerous to help Christians who have been released by the government. Some have been tortured so severely they cannot walk anymore. Often we cannot help them because that would bring too much risk to us. We can pray for them. We know that Jesus will not leave them, nor forsake them."

Jerry Dykstra, Open Doors USA media relations director, states: "Scrutiny of the estimated 200,000 to 400,000 brave underground Christians inside North Korea has increased during the last year. Of the estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people living under horrific conditions in prisons, there are 50,000 to 70,000 Christians. Also, many North Koreans are chronically

malnourished and unemployed.

“Christians who escape to China from North Korea are hunted down and expatriated to their country where they face prison and often death. Christian groups which help the refugees are also under more scrutiny. But we know that Christians living under the most brutal regime in the world will be celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ this Christmas—most of them only in their hearts.”

Open Doors’ focus has been to strengthen and support believers inside North Korea, which has topped the Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 worst persecutors of Christians for 10 years in a row. Open Doors’ ministry in North Korea is carried out in secrecy under highly dangerous conditions.