

Open Doors Reveals Annual List of Countries Where Believers Brave Harsh Persecution

Read Time: 3 Minutes 39 Seconds

Today, over 360 million Christians face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith around the world. This number represents one in seven Christians worldwide.

Persecution of Christians can often feel like the best kept secret of the church. Many believers are simply unaware of the level of persecution that exists today—persecution that ranges from discrimination to imprisonment and even violence and death. It's persecution that is perpetuated by government authorities, extremist groups and even family members and society itself.

Open Doors publishes a World Watch List, which provides an annual ranking of the top 50 countries where following Jesus comes at the highest price. Their recently released 2023 World Watch List provides some shocking truth about the reality of persecution today. While the list was originally created by one man, today there are over 4,000 people involved in collecting information to build the list.

In 1993, the first year of the World Watch List, Christians faced high levels of persecution in 40 countries. Today, 30 years later, it is now the reality in 76 countries. Last year, the total number of Christians killed for their faith was 5,621 and 5,259 Christians were abducted for faith-related reasons.

Although persecution has continued through barbaric violence and imprisonment in places like Iran and North Korea, it has also grown in sophistication with technological advances in places like China.

China, number 16 on the 2023 World Watch List, is a central hub of advances in persecution of Christians with the help of technology. China has re-purposed tracking apps and data collected for COVID to further increase already high levels of digital surveillance. Unfortunately, the increase in technological measures has led to less access for Christians online, where they can find Bibles, discipleship materials and key resources, including fellowship.

The Chinese government traces and follows where its citizens go online and evidence has been discovered showing how the government has come after Chinese citizens who accessed Christian materials online as much as three years earlier. All of this technological tyranny is carried out with the full help and support of Western technology companies, who have little interest in protecting freedom of religion.

Persecution in China had improved over recent years, but it is now getting more serious once again. This increase is likely because the church has grown to over 100 million Christians in China, which is even bigger than the Chinese Communist Party. Perhaps not surprisingly, China is redefining human rights away from traditionally recognized rights to more subjective ideas like subsistence, development and security. They have also defined a citizen as one who is fully aligned with and devoted to the CCP, which by definition excludes Christians.

Number one on the 2023 World Watch List is North Korea. If government authorities learn that even one person in a household is a Christian, several generations can be sent to prison, including parents, children and grandchildren. Citizens are under constant pressure to turn in their neighbors who have given their lives to Christ. In school,

children are taught to play a game called, “Can you spot the black book?” where they are encouraged to turn in their own parents for owning a Bible. Many Christians face the difficulty of deciding when to share their faith with their family.

North Korea is also enforcing a new “Anti-reactionary thought law,” which criminalizes the Bible and any published materials of foreign origin. The law has been used to imprison and execute teenage boys for watching South Korea shows and has been used to track down Bibles and Christian materials, both printed and electronic.

In Egypt and Qatar, the state persecutes people who convert from Islam to Christianity. In places like Iran and India, Christians also suffer violence. Christians may not receive treatment at a hospital, and may be denied education or employment.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic militants have destabilized the region using extreme violence. According to the 2023 World Watch List, extreme militants in Nigeria have conducted raids on Christian communities, where they kill, maim, rape and kidnap Christians for ransom or sexual slavery.

 While persecution is growing, there is hope. God is sovereign and He is doing mighty works through His growing church, even in the midst of hardship. Open Doors continues to support persecuted Christians by helping them to courageously follow Jesus.

To learn more and hear powerful testimonies of how God is moving, listen to my interview on Cutting Edge Faith with Lisa Pierce, Interim CEO of Open Doors and Wybo Nicolai, Founder of the World Watch List.

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podcast that shares the truth behind the headlines and equips Christians to live out their faith in the cultural chaos of today. Ryan has worked in global purchasing for more than 15 years and has visited over 20 countries. Ryan is the author of "21 Days to a Spirit-Led Life," a devotional available as a free download. He lives in Iowa with his wife, Bruna and their son, John. Learn more at .