The 10 most dangerous places to be a Christian

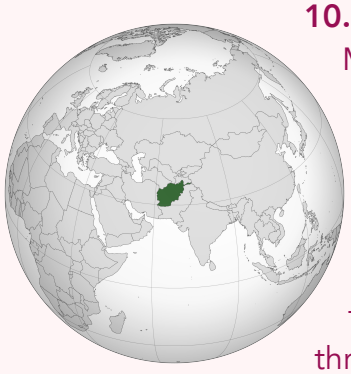
January 2025

https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/stories/10-most-dangerous-places-Christian/

For more than 30 years, the Open Doors World Watch List has reported the global scope of Christian persecution. The list ranks the top 50 places where faith costs the most—to understand the needs of and pray with persecuted Christians.

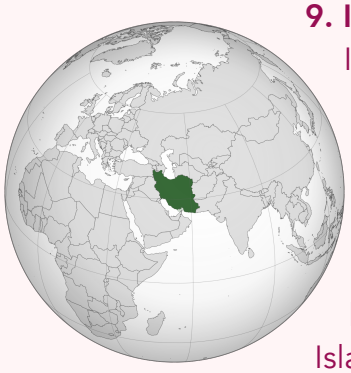
When you pray for your brothers and sisters living in the countries on the World Watch List, you're reminding them they're not alone, no matter how desperate the situation might seem. When Brother Andrew took Bibles behind the Iron Curtain 70 years ago, he was doing the same thing: listening to the needs of the persecuted church and then doing what he could to help.

But out of the top 50, there are 10 that stand out as the most extreme places where Christians experience persecution and discrimination for their faith. Here are those countries—will you pray with believers in these places as we enter into a new year?



10. AFGHANISTAN

Most Afghan Christians are converts from Islam; practicing their faith openly is basically impossible. In Afghanistan, leaving Islam is considered shameful by family and community, and conversion is punishable by death under Islamic law. This has been increasingly enforced since the Taliban took control of the country in 2021. If converts are discovered, the family, clan or tribe may try to preserve its "honor" and deal with the convert through pressure, violence or even murder. If a convert's faith is discovered by the government, many Afghan believers have no other option but to try to flee. Women and ethnic minorities experience additional oppression, so Christians among these groups live under unthinkable pressure.



9. IRAN

In Iran, the Christian community is divided between constitutionally recognized and unrecognized Christians. Unrecognized converts from Islam to Christianity face severe religious freedom violations, primarily from the government and, to a lesser extent, from society and their families. The government views these converts as a threat, believing they are influenced by Western countries to undermine Islam and the regime. Both leaders and ordinary members of Christian groups are often arrested, prosecuted and given long prison sentences for "crimes against national security."

Recognized historical communities such as Armenian and Assyrian Christians are state-protected but treated as second-class citizens. They face many discriminatory legal provisions and are not allowed to worship in Persian or interact with Christian converts. Those who support converts can also face imprisonment.

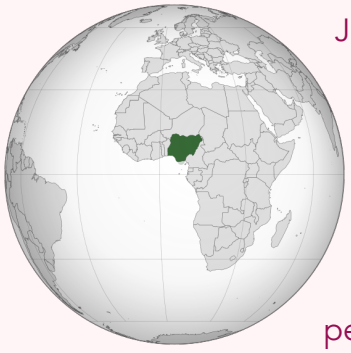
8. PAKISTAN



Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws are often used to target minority groups, but Christians are disproportionately affected. Indeed, roughly a quarter of all blasphemy accusations target Christians, who make up just 1.8 per cent of the population. Blasphemy laws carry a death sentence. While this is seldom carried out, people accused of blasphemy are vulnerable to attack or murder by mobs. In June 2024, an elderly man was killed by mob violence after being accused of desecrating the Quran. The 2023 attack on Christian homes and buildings in the town of Jaranwala continues to contribute to a climate of fear. Historical churches have relative freedom for worship and other activities. However, they are heavily monitored and have been targeted for bomb attacks.

The number of Christian girls (and those from other minority religions) abducted, abused and forcefully converted to Islam (frequently backed by lower courts) is growing. And churches that engage in outreach are particularly prone to opposition. All Christians suffer institutionalized discrimination. Occupations that are deemed low, dirty and degrading—such as cleaning sewers or working in brick kilns—are reserved for Christians by the authorities. Many are referred to as chura, a derogatory term meaning "filthy." Christians are also vulnerable to being trapped in bonded labor.

7. NIGERIA



Jihadist violence continues to escalate in Nigeria, and Christians are particularly at risk from targeted attacks by Islamist militants, including Fulani fighters, Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province). These attacks increased under the rule of former president Muhammadu Buhari, putting Nigeria at the epicenter of targeted violence against the church. The government's failure to protect Christians and punish perpetrators has only strengthened the militants' influence.

While Christians used to be vulnerable only in the Muslim-majority northern states, this violence continues to spread into the Middle Belt and even further south. The attacks are shockingly brutal. Many believers are killed, particularly men, while women are often kidnapped and targeted for sexual violence. Once again, more believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. These militants also destroy homes,

churches and livelihoods. More than 16.2 million Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, including high numbers from Nigeria, have been driven from their homes by violence and conflict. Millions now live in displacement camps.

Christians living in northern Nigerian states under Sharia (Islamic law) can also face discrimination and oppression as second-class citizens. Converts from Islam often experience rejection from their own families and pressure to renounce their new faith. They often have to flee their homes for fear of being killed.

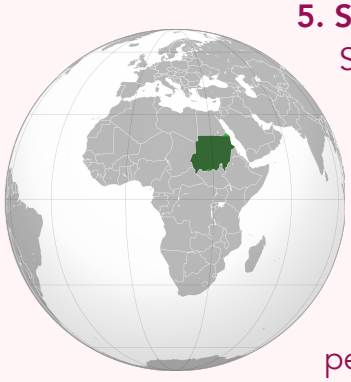
6. ERITREA



Eritrea's persecution landscape is complex. On the church front, the government recognizes only the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC), Catholic and Lutheran churches, and Islam. Converts from Islam or Orthodoxy to Protestantism risk severe mistreatment from their families and communities. Nontraditional churches face the harshest violations from both the government and the EOC. For many years, government security forces have conducted house-to-house raids, arresting hundreds of Christians.

In Eritrea, daily life is heavily monitored, with phone calls and internet usage under constant scrutiny. Eritrea is often called the "North Korea of Africa" due to extreme state control. Christians, especially those not recognized by the state, suffer the most. Extreme pressure, state-sanctioned violence and conscription are forcing some Christians to flee the country. Conscription presses young Christians into indefinite military service without the right to conscientious objection.

5. SUDAN

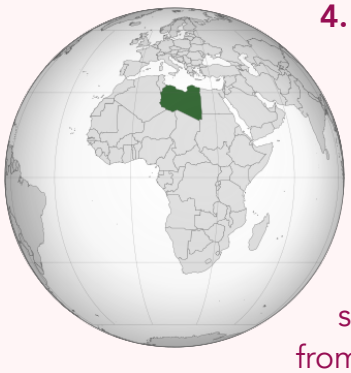


Sudan was on a path toward religious freedom, but a coup and devastating war dashed these hopes. Sudan rose three ranks on this year's World Watch List, and Christians are once again in danger.

After a year and a half of war, Sudan is now home to the world's largest displacement and hunger crises, with nearly 9 million people forced to flee their homes. Neither side is sympathetic to Christians, and the conflict has given Islamist extremists more opportunity to target them. More than 100 churches have been damaged so far, and Christians have been abducted and killed. Sudanese Christians who have come to faith from a Muslim background face severe backlash from their families and communities. These believers tend to keep their faith secret, even from their own children.

Christians are also experiencing exceptional hardship in the hunger crisis because local

communities discriminate against them and won't give them support. Much of the church in Sudan, which might have been able to help with aid distribution, is on the run.



4. LIBYA

In Libya, following Jesus is a huge risk for anyone. Libyan Christians with a Muslim background face violent pressure from their families and communities to renounce their faith. Foreign Christians, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa, are targeted by Islamist militant and criminal groups. These groups kidnap and sometimes brutally kill Christians. Even if they avoid such a fate, sub-Saharan Christians face harassment and threats from radical Muslims. Christians who openly express their faith or try to share it with others risk arrest and violent opposition. The lack of a central government to enforce law and order makes the situation even more precarious.



3. YEMEN

Torn apart by civil war, life is very hard for everybody in Yemen, and even harder for Christians. The country is now divided into territory ruled by three different powers, as well as some areas held by al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State. None of the powers involved are sympathetic to Christians, and the official constitution upholds Sharia (Islamic law) and no freedom of religion. The 1% of Yemenis from minority religions are severely marginalized. Relief aid is mostly distributed through local Muslim groups and mosques, which are alleged to be discriminating against anyone not considered a devout Muslim.

If someone is reported to be a Christian and or involved in Christian activities, they could face severe monitoring, arbitrary detention, torture, ill treatment and even murder. In Houthi-controlled areas, it's dangerous to possess a Bible or other Christian books. Leaving Islam to follow Christ is seen as a huge betrayal of your native tribe—punishment by the community can include being disowned, disinherited, divorced and losing custody of their children, being banished or even murdered.

Persecution has increased recently as the Houthis have gained more power. At least one Christian Yemenite has been killed for his faith and dozens of house churches can no longer meet. It's especially dangerous in areas controlled by Islamic extremist groups. Many have fled the country.

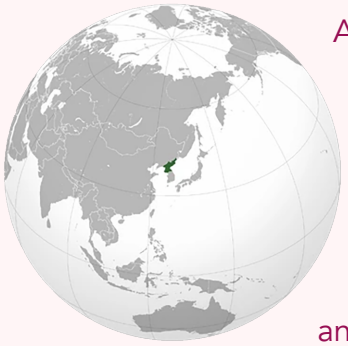
2. SOMALIA



In Somalia, following Jesus is a matter of life and death. Al-Shabab, a violent Islamist militant group, is at war with the government and controls large swathes of the country. This group enforces a strict form of Sharia (Islamic law) and is committed to eradicating Christianity from Somalia. They have often killed Somali Christians on the spot. The dangers have increased over the years, as the militants have increasingly focused on finding and eliminating Christian leaders.

But persecution for Christians also comes from within their own families and communities. The culture itself is very religiously conservative. Being Muslim is a huge part of Somali identity, and to reject this is seen as a major betrayal that affects the whole family. Even a suspicion that you might have converted from Islam to Christianity can put your life in great danger from your own community. You could face house arrest, forced marriage, forced Islamic rituals or even threats to your life. These factors make Somalia one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian.

1. NORTH KOREA



As it has been for nearly 30 years, North Korea is No. 1 on the 2025 World Watch List. If your Christian faith is discovered in North Korea, you could be killed on the spot. If you aren't killed, you will be deported to a labor camp and treated as a political criminal. You will be punished with years of hard labor that few survive. And it's not only you who will be punished: North Korean authorities are likely to round up your extended family and punish them too, even if your family members aren't Christians.

There is no church life in North Korea. It's impossible to gather for worship or prayer, and even secret worship and prayer put Christians at great risk. Official spies could inform on you, if they have any indication that you are a Christian, and so could your neighbors or teachers. Recognizing any deity beyond the Kim family is considered a threat to the country's leadership. “Anti-reactionary thought laws” were enacted in December 2020. These made it even clearer that being a Christian or owning a Bible is a serious crime and will be severely punished. While a handful of churches exist for visitors in the capital, Pyongyang, these serve for propaganda purposes, not as indicators of religious freedom.

Even North Korean citizens who have escaped the country are not safe. Refugees in other countries, particularly China, are at risk of being rounded up and sent back to face appalling punishments. Chinese spies work with North Korean authorities to return refugees, including Christians. If it is discovered that a North Korean has become a Christian, or has heard the gospel or come into contact with Christians, then they will be singled out for severe punishment.