

**The
World
Watch
List
2025**

An Introduction to the World Watch List

What is Christian Persecution?

Open Doors has been producing its annual World Watch List for over 30 years. While the research methodology has evolved over time, our purpose remains the same – we want to help you understand where your Christian brothers and sisters are suffering for their faith and help you to stand with the parts of the body of Christ that are hurting the most. Across the world, more than 380 million Christians suffer high to extreme levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith in Jesus. That's 1 in 7 Christians.

Christian persecution is any hostility experienced because of one's identification with Christ. This definition covers not just violence but also the full range of pressure experienced by Christians because of their faith in Jesus including hostile attitudes, words, and actions. It can look different in every country, from rejection and isolation, to being denied access to basic needs. Some face violent abuse, imprisonment, and even death.

What is the World Watch List?

The World Watch List ranks the top 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The list is compiled by a group of experts, audited by an external organisation specialising in religious freedom, and checked for transparency. The World Watch List is the best and most authoritative list of its kind. Through on the ground interviews and data analysis, the List provides an accurate picture of the difficulties persecuted Christians face worldwide. For each country, the List looks at the pressure and violence persecuted Christians endure in their public and private lives.

What Makes the List Reliable?

The World Watch List is accepted as an authoritative study and is audited externally each year by the International Institute for Religious Freedom. The research for the World Watch List is undertaken by World Watch Research, the research department of Open Doors International. The research team consists of one managing director, seven persecution analysts, and one editor, all with university degrees. Three of the team have PhDs. Five are lawyers with experience in the field of human rights, constitutional law, or governance.

Why Does the World Watch List Matter?

In 1 Corinthians 12, we are reminded that when one part of the body of Christ suffers, all parts suffer with it (1 Cor 12:26). The World Watch List helps us to understand where the body of Christ is hurting most. It is the cornerstone of all our work, informing what countries we need to work in to strengthen the Church as they suffer persecution for following Jesus.



What do the scores mean?

Each country's score is determined by measuring the intensity of persecution across two categories: violence and pressure. Pressure is measured in five spheres of life: church, national, community, family, and private. Examples of each have been provided below but are not the only ways Christians experience these types of pressure.

Violence Violence is defined as the deprivation of physical freedom or as serious bodily or mental harm to Christians or serious damage to their property and can occur in all spheres of life.

Church Life The collective exercise by Christians of worship, life, service, and public expression of faith without undue interference. Persecution could involve requiring church registration, monitoring preaching material, harassment of leaders and their families, or restricting the printing or distribution of religious materials.

National Life The interaction between Christians and the nation they live in, including rights and laws, the justice system, and public life. Persecution in this sphere could look like blasphemy accusations, unequal treatment in court, toleration of public disrespect, travel restrictions, or discrimination by authorities.

Community Life Involves the workplace, business, health care, education, and local public life and civic order. Persecution in this sphere could include dress codes, monitoring, abduction, restricted access to community resources and/or health care, and employment or education discrimination or disadvantages.

Family Life How much freedom has been restricted to live out Christian convictions within the family circle. Persecution in this sphere could involve forced allocations of religious identity, weddings, baptisms, burials, adoptions, child rearing, separation of families, pressure to divorce, or inheritance rights.

Private Life How much freedom is restricted when relating to God one-on-one in their own private space. Persecution in this sphere could restrict private worship, possession of religious material, or freedom of expression.

Total persecution score = violence score + pressure score Each of the six types of persecution receive equal weighting and are added together to give a total score out of 100 (rounded to the nearest whole number after ranking).

**More than 380 million Christians
face high levels of persecution
and discrimination for their faith.**

Trends In Persecution 2025



**Names have been changed for security purposes.
Images are representative only.

The persecution of Christians can look different in every country, from rejection and isolation, to being denied basic needs such as water, food, and healthcare. Some face violent abuse, imprisonment, and even death. Through local interviews, data collection, and analysis, the World Watch List research team have identified the latest trends in Christian persecution.

Civil War In Yemen And Myanmar

Since 2015, **Yemen** has suffered a civil war between ethnic Houthi rebels and the government. A ceasefire remains elusive, and lawlessness permeates the country, creating space for oppression and the targeting of minorities, including Christians. Ranked #3, Yemen is only surpassed by North Korea (#1) and Somalia (#2) as more difficult places for Christians to live.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the 2021 military coup. The recent armed conflict in 2024 between the army and a host of opposition forces nudged the country up four places to #13 on the World Watch List 2025. Myanmar's Christians, about eight percent of the population, are caught in the ongoing unrest. In Kachin State alone (the northernmost state), more than 100,000 Christians are in displacement camps to avoid being killed or detained by regime forces or the Kachin rebels.

Authoritarianism In Central Asia

No other country in the World Watch List's top 50 has a greater score increase than **Kyrgyzstan**. Ranked 61st a year ago, the central Asian country has risen 14 places to now rank 47th. It is the biggest move on the list by far, caused by an uptick in violence against the Church. Targeted assaults on Christian organisations and religious groups have helped drive up Kyrgyzstan's historically low violence score faster than in any other country. This comes against a backdrop of a presidency that has been concentrating power for itself over several years.

Continued Violence Across Sub-Saharan Africa

More Christians live in Africa than on any other single continent. As the largest Christian population on Earth, they have been widely and persistently afflicted by targeted violence. Chronic government instability has created a vacuum filled by opportunistic Islamic extremists. Since publication of the World Watch List 2023, the violence score for the 15 Sub-Saharan countries in the List's top 50 has risen, on average, by one point. Violence in 13 of those 15 countries—including **Burkina Faso, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo**—is rated in the "extremely high" category.

Signs Of The Church Going Underground

Christian isolation and Church diminishment is a pattern found in several World Watch List countries. In **Algeria, Libya, Gaza, Afghanistan, and China**, for example, the Church has faced closure, surveillance, and targeted harassment. Christians are being forced to tread carefully, emigrate, or go deeper underground to avoid false arrests, violence, and discrimination. In China and elsewhere, World Watch List researchers report a growing caution among Christians to be open about their faith.

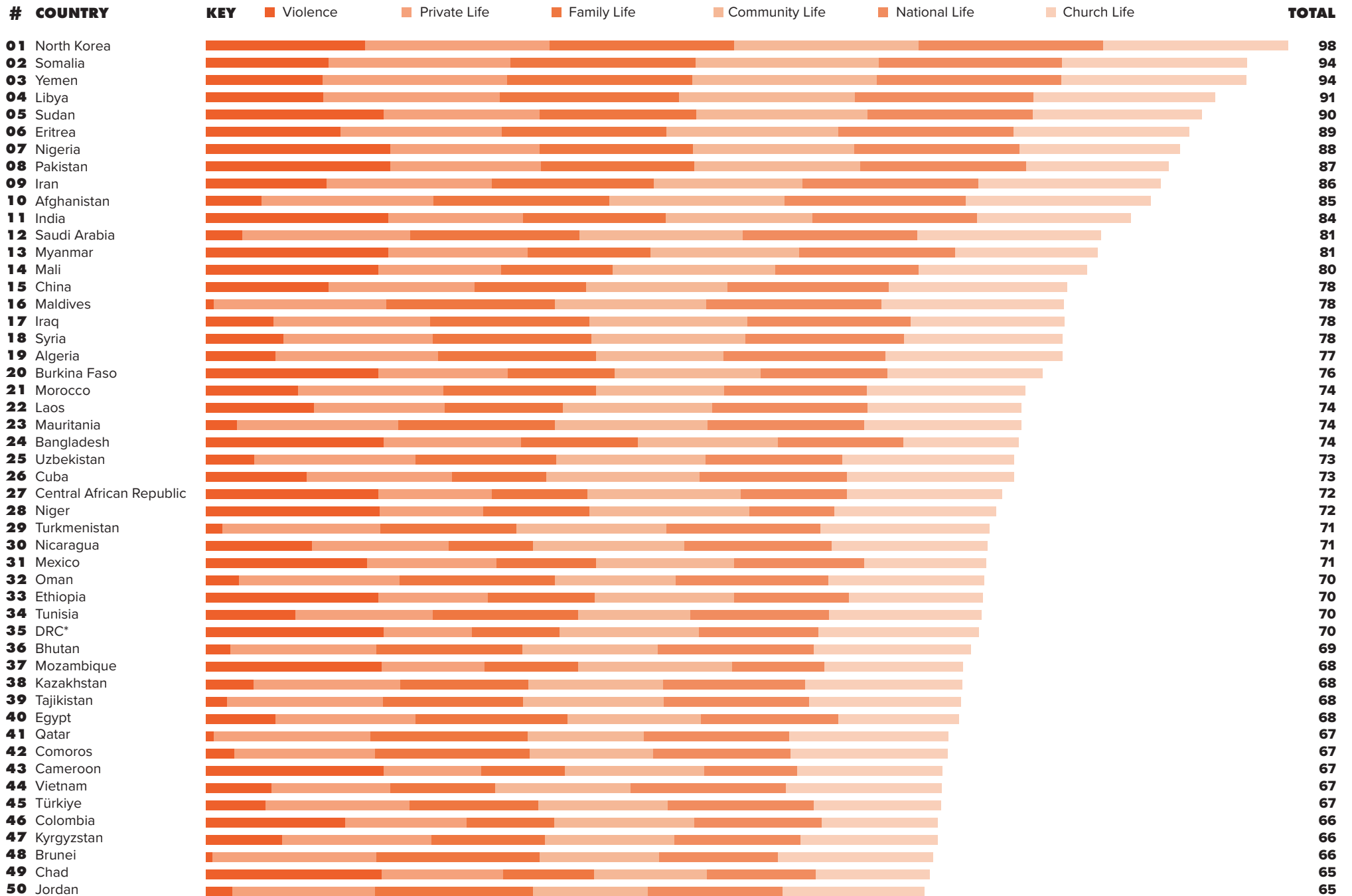
Mexico: A Standout In Latin America

The World Watch List 2025 assigned **Mexico** the highest violence score it has ever received. It is also the highest violence score received by any Latin American country on the List. Organised crime is a huge concern in Mexico.

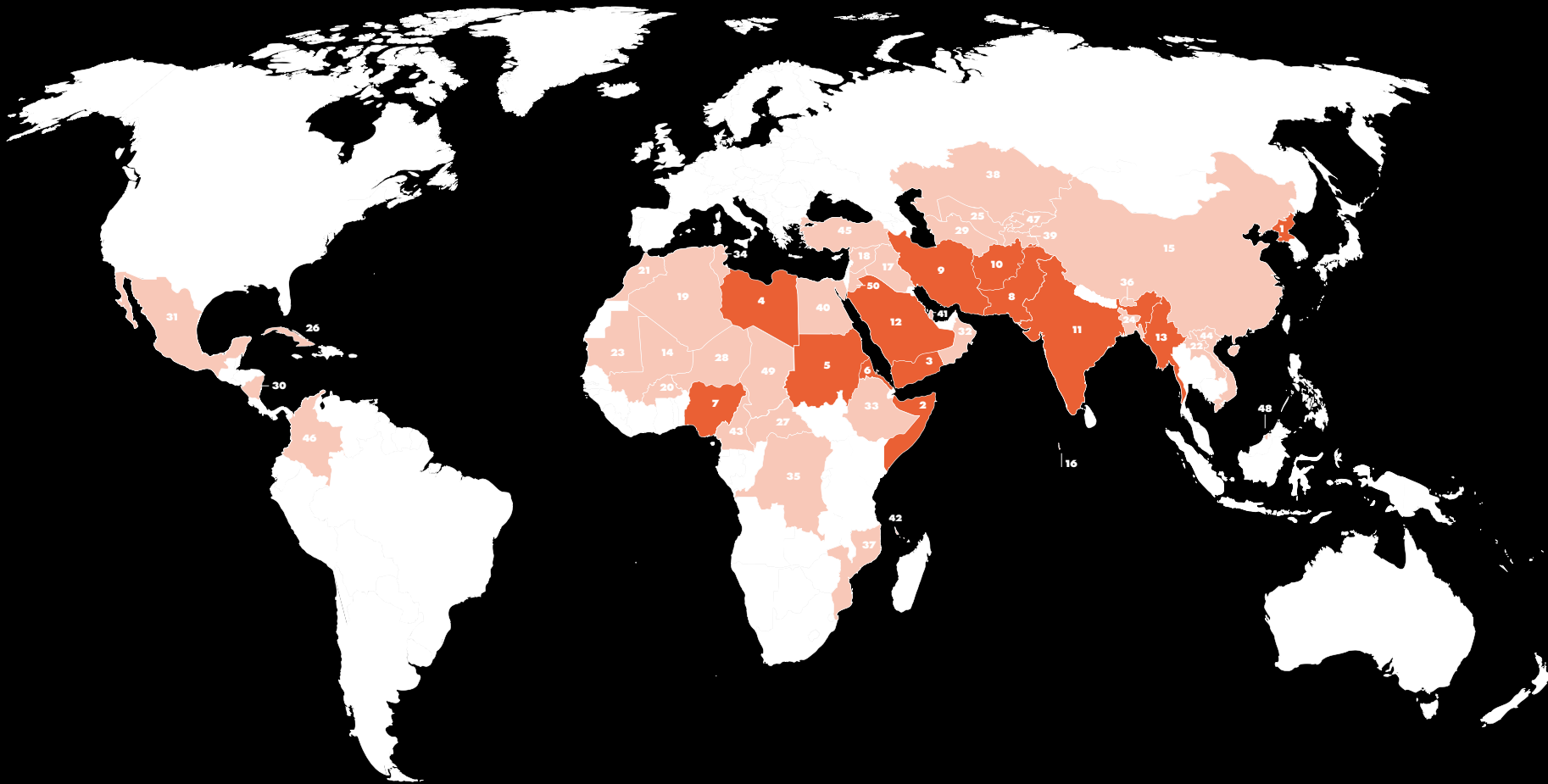
Rival cartels target church leaders and Christian organisations, particularly those attempting to broker peace or help victims of violence and intimidation. World Watch List researchers noted a jump in the number of Christians killed and abducted for their faith, and an increase in attacks on Christian homes and other property.

Graph of Total Persecution

Each country in the World Watch List is assessed across six areas to determine levels of persecution. The scores inform their overall persecution rating and subsequent ranking in the List. Visually represented here are scores for the top 50.



The Complete World Watch List 2025 Map



THE TOP 50

RANK COUNTRY

- 01 North Korea
- 02 Somalia
- 03 Yemen
- 04 Libya
- 05 Sudan
- 06 Eritrea
- 07 Nigeria
- 08 Pakistan
- 09 Iran
- 10 Afghanistan
- 11 India
- 12 Saudi Arabia
- 13 Myanmar
- 14 Mali
- 15 China
- 16 Maldives
- 17 Iraq
- 18 Syria
- 19 Algeria
- 20 Burkina Faso
- 21 Morocco
- 22 Laos
- 23 Mauritania
- 24 Bangladesh
- 25 Uzbekistan
- 26 Cuba
- 27 Central African Republic
- 28 Niger
- 29 Turkmenistan
- 30 Nicaragua
- 31 Mexico
- 32 Oman
- 33 Ethiopia
- 34 Tunisia
- 35 DRC*
- 36 Bhutan
- 37 Mozambique
- 38 Kazakhstan
- 39 Tajikistan
- 40 Egypt
- 41 Qatar
- 42 Comoros
- 43 Cameroon
- 44 Vietnam
- 45 Türkiye
- 46 Colombia
- 47 Kyrgyzstan
- 48 Brunei
- 49 Chad
- 50 Jordan

PERSECUTION LEVEL

- Extreme
- Very high

Please pray.

Your prayer checklist for the World Watch List 2025 is a simple guide to praying for the top 50 most dangerous countries to be a Christian. Once you have prayed for a country, tick the box and select another one.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 01 North Korea | <input type="checkbox"/> 26 Cuba |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 02 Somalia | <input type="checkbox"/> 27 Central African Republic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 03 Yemen | <input type="checkbox"/> 28 Niger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 04 Libya | <input type="checkbox"/> 29 Turkmenistan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 05 Sudan | <input type="checkbox"/> 30 Nicaragua |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 06 Eritrea | <input type="checkbox"/> 31 Mexico |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 07 Nigeria | <input type="checkbox"/> 32 Oman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 08 Pakistan | <input type="checkbox"/> 33 Ethiopia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 09 Iran | <input type="checkbox"/> 34 Tunisia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10 Afghanistan | <input type="checkbox"/> 35 Democratic Republic of the Congo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11 India | <input type="checkbox"/> 36 Bhutan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12 Saudi Arabia | <input type="checkbox"/> 37 Mozambique |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 13 Myanmar | <input type="checkbox"/> 38 Kazakhstan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 14 Mali | <input type="checkbox"/> 39 Tajikistan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15 China | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 Egypt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16 Maldives | <input type="checkbox"/> 41 Qatar |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> 23 Mauritania | <input type="checkbox"/> 48 Brunei |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 24 Bangladesh | <input type="checkbox"/> 49 Chad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 Uzbekistan | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 Jordan |



Faces of the World Watch List 2025

Faces of the World Watch List highlights real stories from six countries that stand out in the List for unique reasons, including the most dangerous for believers, the most violent, and the newest addition to the top 50 most hostile places.

North Korea: The Most Dangerous Place To Follow Jesus



Despite struggling to survive, North Korea's secret believers and church leaders devote their entire beings to ensure the Church can exist.



“When I was young, my father’s alcohol addiction led to violence, leaving me in constant fear,” Joo Min begins. “During those turbulent years, food shortages were increasingly a concern. Driven by necessity, I crossed the border in search of work.”

Joo Min waited until it was dark before making her way to the river, North Korea’s border with China. It took time for the guard on patrol to pass by, but at last the way was clear. She waded into the dark water, feeling for solid ground with each step. In a few heart-pounding minutes she was across. “I met someone there,” she says, grateful. “He introduced me to a safe place. While I was in the safe house, I heard the gospel for the first time.”

Growing up, Joo Min was taught to fear the Bible and missionaries. “They said missionaries were like wolves pretending to be sheep.” Yet the Christians at the safe

1 on the World Watch List 2025

It’s impossible for Christians to live freely in North Korea. If discovered, they are imprisoned, deported to labour camps that very few survive, or are killed on the spot. The deplorable treatment of Christians is driven by the authoritarian regime’s view that they are a particular threat to the country’s leadership and society. There are currently more than 400,000 secret believers in North Korea.

house didn’t frighten her. They were kind. More importantly, something about the Bible was changing her.

“As we delved into the teachings, I came across the idea of forgiveness,” Joo Min says. “I couldn’t forgive my father because I held a lot of anger and hatred inside. It was then I knew I had to start forgiving him.” **Joo Min was baptised, washed clean and renewed. “I felt like God was telling me ‘Go back to North Korea’. I felt a calling to share everything I’ve learnt with other secret believers,” she says confidently. “So, I made the decision to cross the river once again.”**

Today, Joo Min is a leader in one of North Korea’s underground churches. “If I am caught, I could end up in a labour camp paying a heavy price for being a Christian now,” she says. “Pray for protection and courage, so that I can be like salt and light in a land overshadowed by darkness.”

Pakistan: One Of The Most Violent Places

When it comes to persecution, Pakistan is as dangerous as Nigeria on almost every front — including violence.



“We are a lower class because we are Christians,” Rehana* explains. “It is an insult to Muslims to eat with us on the same plate. If we touch their plate, it becomes defiled. We have no right to any privileges and have no right to dignity.”

Rehana works night shifts at a factory. She is a single mother with an eight-year-old son and a sick father to care for. There is no safety for her or her family—not in their community or at work. Not even when they need care, like the day her son was born.

“When I had my son, I was put on a dirty bed that still had blood from the woman who had given birth before me,” Rehana says. “Other women were given a clean bed, but for me, the ‘Isai,’ the Urdu word for ‘Christian,’ there was only the option of a dirty bed.”

Rehana dreams of her son attending school, but she can barely afford

the basics. “Now I think my son will be like his mother—illiterate,” she says sadly.

Her thoughts shift to her cousin, tragically kidnapped when she was just eight and forced to marry a Muslim man. They were close, like sisters. Today, she and Rehana live very different lives. Her cousin has three children. They have enough to eat, and her children go to school. She teaches them Islamic prayers.

“I wonder if she still holds Jesus in her heart,” Rehana asks. “Does she still talk to Him secretly? Because someone who meets Jesus once can never forget Him.”

There’s no safety, comfort, or acceptance in being a believer. Rehana knows that and has made her choice. “My grandmother used to sing a hymn: ‘To whom shall we go? Jesus is the only way. And I have chosen already: Jesus, my Jesus.’ This is what I cling to.”

Chad: New To The World Watch List Top 50

For four years straight Chad’s violence score has risen, placing it in the World Watch List 2025 top 50 for the first time ever.



“When I read Matthew 5 where Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit for the kingdom of God is theirs, it comforts me.”

Aisha* sits on a woven mat with her wares arranged before her. Since fleeing her village with her children, her humble stall has been crucial to their survival. “I know that the afflicted will be comforted,” she continues. “And then the suffering of Job also encourages me. If Job suffered, so I say why not me? After the suffering of Job, I know that one day, I also will be set free.”

Aisha was a devout Muslim, married to a man of the same faith. But in early 2021 a local pastor introduced her to Jesus. She gave her life to Him, and Michael*, her 27-year-old son, became a Christian too. Suddenly the community that once accepted them as Muslims now threatened their safety. Aisha’s husband wanted nothing to do with her or his son.

As converts from Islam, they became targets of violence.

Aisha fled to an undisclosed location with Michael and her daughter. They met an Open Doors’ local partner who supported them with food aid. Aisha received a microloan to set up her stall.

“I bought flasks, okra, and many other things,” she says proudly sweeping a hand over her arrangement. “I sell them and gain profit out of them. I can buy food and soap for my children.”

Aisha rents a small home for her family. Her daughter attends school. Only God could have done this. She feels grateful and content.

“They nailed Jesus on the cross,” she says. “He suffered on the cross. I am also ready for that if it comes. It is life. It can happen. I am ready.”

8 on the World Watch List 2025 Pakistan ranks just below Nigeria at #8 on the World Watch List but is tied with Nigeria on almost every measure of Christian persecution including violence. The number of Christian girls (and those from other minority religions) abducted, abused, and forcefully converted to Islam is growing. Occupations deemed low, dirty, and degrading are reserved for Christians by the authorities. Many believers are referred to as “chura”, a derogatory term meaning “filthy.”

49 on the World Watch List 2025 Chad has risen from #56 in 2024 to #49 in 2025 due to an increase in violence against believers. Located in a region marked by tumultuous security dynamics, Chad is surrounded by countries grappling with severe challenges, including the presence of radical jihadist groups. In areas where Islam is the predominant religion, individuals converting to Christianity face significant danger and often practice their faith in secret.

Nigeria: The Most Violent Place To Follow Jesus

Nigeria remains a place of dangerous extremism, where radicalised Islamic groups terrorise the innocent without fear of punishment.



“We lived in peace for many years until Boko Haram came for the first time in 2022.” Salamatu sighs. “They killed nine people. I and other villagers ran to the forest to hide. After Boko Haram left, we found the nine bodies.”

Two years later, Boko Haram returned.

It was the darkest day of Salamatu’s life. They set fire to the church after killing the pastor.

“My husband told me we should pray,” Salamatu remembers. “We said a short prayer and then ‘Amen’. As soon as we said ‘Amen’, we heard people pulling the handles of our gate.”

Salamatu’s husband hurried her upstairs with their children and grandchildren. He told them to stay quiet and not to cry—even if they heard gunshots. At 4am, silence fell. One of Salamatu’s sons crept out to investigate. His car had been set on fire. A pharmacy and the shop next door, too. And then he discovered his father’s body.

7 on the World Watch List 2025

More believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria each year than everywhere else in the world combined. The attacks, often perpetrated by Islamic extremists, are brutal in nature and can involve property destruction, abduction, sexual violence, and death. Believers are stripped of their livelihoods and driven from their homes, leaving a trail of grief and trauma.

Salamatu remembered her husband’s last words asking her not to cry. She didn’t shed a tear. “But the grandchildren...” she says, pausing to brace against a rush of emotion. “They cried as if they were dying.”

Salamatu received no help when aid was distributed. “Everyone received coupons to collect food. But when they discovered we were Christians, we didn’t receive the coupon.” Like so many Christians in Nigeria, Salamatu’s family was forced to leave their home.

Fear would wake her at the same time each night—the time Boko Haram swept into her village and killed her husband. She is still traumatised. “Some days I can only sit [and do nothing],” she says.

Salamatu was invited to attend trauma counselling through an Open Doors’ local partner. “Before, I woke up every night at 2am. My heart would stop beating for a second, then it started to race,” she says. “But after my time with you, I can sleep soundly. My heart has been at peace. Thank you.”

Cuba: Most Persecuted In Latin America

The government's aim to control and reduce the Church's influence places Cuba at the forefront of Christian persecution in Latin America.



"When I was a child, we heard about people being imprisoned for owning a Bible," Pastor Miguel recalls. "Opposing the political system was illegal and any dissenting belief, including Christianity, was rejected."

At 16, while working to support his grandparents, Miguel was introduced to Jesus through his colleagues. Aware that Christianity attracted trouble, he accepted the Lord. "I became a Christian because I couldn't deny the existence of God," he shares.

He began attending secret meetings in the mountains with his friends. "God was awakening the youth of Cuba, and many began converting," he says. "Many of us became pastors."

But becoming a pastor was like pinning a target to his back. "The more successful a pastor is in preaching the gospel, the more he's watched and threatened. The government knows these pastors

have influence and the gospel changes lives."

Miguel faced increasing surveillance and threats. "They monitored every move I made and harassed my family. I was interrogated more than 50 times by state security, but this is normal for Christian leaders in Cuba. I knew pastors who had car accidents because someone tampered with their cars. I always told my family to pray and be prepared."

Eventually, the persecution became unbearable. Miguel and his family left Cuba. Today, he still works with the Church in Cuba from an undisclosed country, volunteering with Open Doors.

"We ask for prayer that the Lord's plans continue in our nation," he says. "We need strength, wisdom, and protection for our pastors and leaders. Despite the persecution, the gospel is spreading. **The more they try to suppress it, the more we see God's hand at work.**"

26 on the World Watch List 2025 After the Cuban Revolution (1953-1958), Cuba was structured as a Communist state. The country is still ruled according to that political and economic model, and anyone questioning the authority of its leaders – whether for reasons of faith or otherwise – is labelled an enemy of the regime. Churches are monitored and Christians face intimidation, hostility, repression, and harassment.

Kyrgyzstan: The Biggest Riser On The List

This is Kyrgyzstan's first appearance in the World Watch List top 50 since 2013, due entirely to a pronounced increase in violence against Christians.



One Sunday, as Khasan* led a house church in worship, the police, secret service, state religious officials, and community officials, all burst through the door.

"They stopped our service," Khasan remembers. "They divided all of us who were there and put us in different rooms so we couldn't speak to each other. They searched the place while filming everything. They also took our phones and checked them. Then they called us one by one for interrogation."

Khasan was told their meeting was forbidden. Their church wasn't registered. They had no right to hold a religious gathering in a private house.

For two weeks following the raid, church members were individually summoned to the police station and intimidated. "It was a hard time for us," Khasan says. "They threatened, frightened, and insulted us. But I thank God

because we were able to testify about our faith in Jesus Christ."

Khasan is particularly inspired by how resolute the women were. "They were surprised when they tried to force several female believers to cooperate with them and betray the church, but **they saw these women's resolve to stand strong. We have nothing to hide, so we shared that we believe in Jesus Christ.**"

After two weeks everything suddenly went quiet. No more questioning, no more summons.

Some believers went underground after that. Khasan now gathers with others in a registered church, but they haven't given up meeting in secret small groups.

"We are very careful because we know they are watching us—where we're going and what we're doing," he says. "We continue to share the gospel with our relatives, friends, and neighbours."

47 on the World Watch List 2025 Kyrgyzstan is the biggest riser due to an increase in violence against the Church and a light increase in persecution across all spheres of life. Local authorities have considerable power and tend to be under the influence of the Muslim community. Some Muslim converts to Christianity are locked up for long periods by their families and beaten. Local Islamic teachers may cause them to be expelled from their communities.



Partner with the most persecuted.



If you'd like your church to partner with the persecuted church, please visit opendoors.org.au/partner



If you'd like information on specific projects and how you can support persecuted Christians, please visit opendoors.org.au/projects