



WORLD WATCH LIST REPORT 2018



**Death by a thousand cuts:
The rise of non-violent persecution as a tool of suppression**

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Cover picture: *Christian women in India, who have been left to fend for themselves and their families as their husbands have been arrested and imprisoned on the false charge of converting people to Christianity. Their story represents the plight of many Christians in India where false accusations, unfair arrests and imprisonment without trial are a growing phenomenon used to debilitate Christian communities and suppress church leaders and their congregations.¹*

Through partners in India, Open Doors offers women such as these both spiritual and practical support, as they are often taunted by those living around them and face financial hardship as the family bread winner is imprisoned. Open Doors' partners' Women to Women team in India is working to build resilience within Christian communities, ensuring that families can thrive despite living in an hostile environment.

This report was written by Dr Matthew Rees, Advocacy Policy Officer at Open Doors UK & Ireland, on the basis of research material produced by the Open Doors World Watch Research unit.

¹For example, see 'Indian carol singers arrested after conversion complaint'. BBC News, 15 December, 2017.

Introduction

The Open Doors World Watch List is the product of year-round field and desk research, providing insight into the trends, scale and stories of the persecution of Christians around the world. In identifying the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian, the research paints a picture of what it is like for a Christian to call one of these countries their home.

Christians are experiencing devastating levels of violence. From widows in Nigeria whose husbands have been killed by Boko Haram fighters, to girls in Pakistan who have been raped, forcefully converted and married against their will, to those caught up in the multiple bomb blasts and shootings in Egypt – the suffering continues.

But the suffering goes much deeper. Of the over 200 million Christians living in countries ranked on the 2018 World Watch List as experiencing a ‘high’ level of persecution or worse,² the majority are falling victim to non-violent persecution. This is in some ways far more dangerous and debilitating than the violence, because it is insidious and pervades every aspect of life. From the surveillance of Christians in North Korea, to the demolition of churches in Sudan, its aim is to stamp out the Christian faith wherever it is found. What is more, if left unchallenged, the *squeeze* of non-violent persecution can quickly turn into the *smash* of violent persecution.

Last year’s report put its finger on the rising threat of religious nationalism in Asia, where the practice of conflating national and religious identity was rapidly gaining momentum. One year later and the practice of defining ethnic and national identity, even citizenship, in terms of just one ‘acceptable’ religion has escalated further, leaving religious minorities across Asia marginalised and vulnerable. This upward trend is evident in India, where another year of Hindu nationalist rhetoric has embedded the culture of impunity for those who persecute Christians, leading to India’s rise from number 15 to number 11 on the list. Nepal has also sprung onto the World Watch List for the first time since 2007 – in at number 25.

But as always, where Christians are under pressure, those from other religious minorities, and of no faith, often are too. Open Doors’ mandate is to work with Christian communities around the world which are suffering for their faith, but in doing so we campaign for the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is a right which must be taken seriously. Speeches and conferences on Article 18 are important – but action is paramount.

And 2018 is a pivotal year. Of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s 30 priority countries, listed in its latest *Human Rights and Democracy Report*, 24 are ranked on the 2018 World Watch List. Persecution in these countries simply will not end without decisive action. It is vital that the UK government uses all its influence – through its foreign policy, aid and trade agreements, and its broader influence within the international community – to ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief is protected around the world. One opportunity unique to 2018 is the meeting of the Commonwealth heads of government in London. This is a chance for the United Kingdom to lead the way in reminding the nine Commonwealth countries found on Open Doors’ 2018 World Watch List of the importance of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. Parliamentarians, civil servants, government ministers and civil society actors all have the power to change the lives of persecuted Christians across the world in tangible ways. Please read the recommendations on page 27 – to see how you can take action.

Lisa Pearce
CEO Open Doors UK & Ireland
January 2018



² Open Doors’ World Watch Research unit designates a ‘high’ level of persecution as a country with a persecution score of 41-60/100; ‘very high’ accounts for countries with a persecution score of 61-80/100; and ‘extreme’ persecution countries have a score of 81-100/100.

Key findings

The key findings in this report are:

- While violence remains high, non-violent persecution is the daily reality for most persecuted Christians
- A range of actors worldwide use non-violent persecution to grind down Christian communities, with the ultimate aim of eliminating them from wider society
- The *squeeze* – or non-violent persecution – manifests itself in all areas of life. This report highlights its impact on gender, business, mental health and work life
- Religious nationalism in Asia has continued to create an environment of impunity in countries such as **India** and **Burma**, and has brought **Nepal** onto the World Watch List for the first time since 2007
- The situation has worsened in a number of Middle Eastern countries such as **Egypt**, **Turkey** and **Libya**. Daesh fighters being pushed out of **Iraq** and **Syria** also has the potential to worsen conditions further
- More than 200 million believers in the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian experience high levels of persecution because of their faith. **North Korea** is still the most difficult place in the world to be a Christian
- Over 3,000 Christians have been killed for their faith in the 2018 reporting period, more than twice as many as in the 2017 reporting period (1,200)
- **Nepal**, **India** and **Egypt** are countries of special concern.

The key changes in this year's World Watch

List are:

- **North Korea** (94/100 points) continues to be the most difficult place in the world to be a Christian, but worsening conditions in **Afghanistan** (93/100 points) mean that in 2018 it is not far behind
- Each of the top 11 World Watch List countries are now places of extreme persecution (with 81/100 persecution points or more) – this is more countries than ever before in 26 years of the World Watch List
- **Libya** has returned to the top ten
- **Eritrea** has moved up from ten to six
- **India** has risen from 15 to 11
- Hope is to be found in **Syria** as conditions in some areas improve, and as homes and lives begin to be rebuilt
- South-East Asia is an emerging hotbed of persecution, with the situation in **Malaysia** and **Indonesia** worsening, and majority-Christian country the **Philippines** facing increased tension.

Worldwide, persecution is rising:

- Over 200 million Christians in the top 50 countries experience high levels of persecution or worse
- 2,000 Christians were killed in Nigeria
- In Pakistan, 168 churches were attacked
- 635 Christians in India were detained without trial or unfairly arrested and imprisoned.

Feeling the pinch – the threat of non-violent persecution

Violence hits the headlines: it always does and it always will – and indeed it should. From the 20 Christians killed in an attack staged by Fulani herdsmen in Plateau State, Nigeria, on 7 September 2017³ to the Coptic priest murdered in Cairo on 12 October 2017⁴ – such attacks prove that we're living in alarming times.

But violence is not the only story. There is a less visible story, one that at times is hard to decipher because it develops in the shadows, out of sight. Nevertheless it is an important story that must be told. There are over 200 million Christians living in countries ranked on the 2018 World Watch List experiencing either a 'high', 'very high' or 'extreme' level of persecution.⁵ While many of these Christians will experience violent persecution, the majority fall victim to non-violent persecution – that is the daily pressure of persecution, the daily *squeeze*.

The *squeeze* is the pressure Christians experience in all areas of life and is used to underline the distinction between the brutal violence – or the *smash* – and the more common obstacles facing Christians across the world. However, do not believe for one moment that the *squeeze* is any less dangerous or debilitating than the violence. The *squeeze* is insidious and it pervades every aspect of life. Open Doors' analysis identifies five spheres of life to highlight just how all-consuming non-violent persecution is for Christians across the world:

1. **Private life:** the inner life of a Christian, the freedom of thought, conscience and belief
2. **Family life:** the way a Christian's faith is treated within the family and the freedom a Christian has to express the Christian faith to his or her family
3. **Community life:** the interaction of Christians with their respective local communities
4. **Church life:** the collective exercise by

Christians of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief

5. **National life:** the interaction between Christians and the nation in which they live.

The case studies that follow reveal that the most dangerous countries in the world in which to live as a Christian in 2018 specialise in the *squeeze*. When non-violent persecution is employed effectively, it can be much more successful than violence in restricting the freedom of the whole Christian community. For example, if a paranoid dictatorial government kills a number of Christian leaders, this could have the effect of inspiring local Christians to follow the example of those martyred for their faith by continuing their devotion and service even more intensely. It is easier to let those Christian leaders live but to ensure their Christian faith costs them their job, their child's education or their access to services in the hope that they will simply give up as life becomes increasingly harder.

Furthermore, a totalitarian regime looking to do a trade deal to sell its precious oil to countries in the West might lose its customers if it is seen to be killing Christians. Instead, it is better for this country to clamp down on a Christian's freedom to meet with other Christians, putting a Christian leader under pressure through surveillance and random house raids, or confiscating funds and refusing to register church buildings. This way it can continue to trade, while crushing a Christian's ability to enjoy their right to freedom of religion or belief as defined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The rising threat of the *squeeze* is also an important story to expose because it can be addressed. Through educating the persecutor, training police forces, challenging governments on their unjust practices and offering legal support and awareness training to the persecuted, the *squeeze* can be confronted and the lives of Christians and other minorities across the world can change.

³ John H, 'Christian leaders decry killings by Fulani herdsmen', Global Christian News, 11 September 2017.

⁴ 'Egyptian Coptic priest killed in Cairo attack', Associated Press in Crux, 12 October, 2017.

⁵ See footnote on p.3 for scoring explanation.

Case study 1: private life

Imagine a country where the state decides where you live, what profession you pursue, what sports you practise and what food you eat. Imagine a country where the 'Great Leader' has been dead for 24 years but is still president and where his citizens must worship him, his son and his grandson as gods. This is North Korea in 2018.

North Koreans do not have a private life. They are watched constantly, and live in fear of being reported to the authorities for activities perceived by the omnipresent state to be subversive. Practising Christianity is considered to be one of these subversive activities, and for the estimated 300,000 North Koreans who do so,⁶ the punishment can be severe. While violence against these Christians is extremely high, non-violent persecution is all pervasive.

The regime aims to make religious observance unsustainable.

The North Korean state apparatus takes a more intense multi-pronged approach to surveillance than any other country on earth. With all of the gathered information registered on a citizen's Resident Registration File, the State Security Department, the Ministry of People's Security and trained spies commissioned to infiltrate Christian networks are always watching.



The North Korean state makes it almost impossible for parents to share their faith with their children, in an attempt to suppress Christian worship.

The regime aims to make religious observance unsustainable. One way this is done is by making it almost impossible for parents to share their faith

with their children. Sang Hwa's^{*7} parents were Christians, but dared not tell their children. "One day, when I was 12," Sang Hwa says, "I discovered the family Bible by accident. I opened it and read the first words: 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...' My duty was to turn them in, but I also knew I would never see them again. So I told my father. He was shocked to find out I had discovered the book. Then he explained the gospel to me – but emphasised that I should never tell anyone."

Her parents' fear is the result of the state's constant invasion of privacy. Teachers will ask students to find out if their parents read from a black book. Spies are commissioned to set up fake, 'secret' prayer meetings to attract Christians. Informers who turn in Christian neighbours can enjoy considerable rewards. The slightest mistake can be lethal.

Constant work pressure is also used to ensure that citizens have neither the time nor the energy to practise their faith. In response to international pressure, Kim Jong-un regularly orders a 100-day mobilisation period. According to North Korean Christians, this added pressure is purposefully used to keep a stranglehold on people's lives.

Case study 2: family life

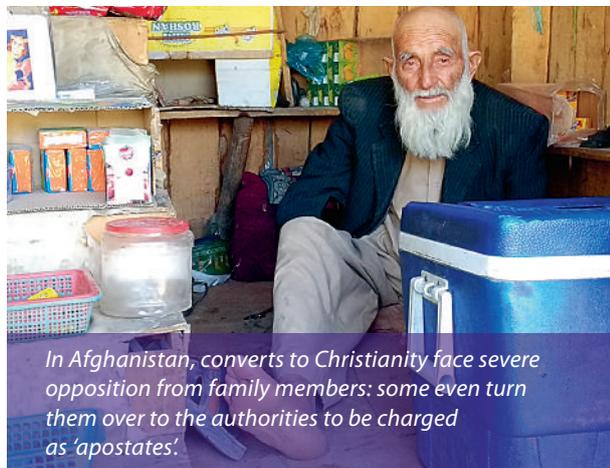
In the World Watch List 2018 reporting period, Afghanistan has seen an increase in scores for *squeeze*, bringing the country very close to North Korea's number one position. Although the situation for Christians in the two countries is very different, both reached the maximum score in all spheres of life, with North Korea only slightly more dangerous in terms of violent persecution (by just 0.6 points). While Afghanistan has a high score in each of the categories analysed as part of the World Watch List research, one particularly suffocating aspect of life for Christians in Afghanistan is found in the family sphere.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan does not allow conversion from Islam. It is seen as apostasy which can result in the death sentence and brings shame

⁶ Open Doors estimate, 2018.

⁷ The use of the asterisk (*) throughout this report indicates where a name has been changed to protect the identity of the person in question.

on the family. All Christians in Afghanistan with an Afghan nationality are converts from a Muslim background. The fear of discrimination and hostility at the hands of their family means they will do everything they can to keep their faith a secret.



In Afghanistan, converts to Christianity face severe opposition from family members: some even turn them over to the authorities to be charged as 'apostates'.

The family's aggressive reaction to conversion is the result of an honour and shame culture, reinforced by the stronghold enjoyed by Islamic clerics within Afghan society. According to a survey's findings released in November 2017, the Afghan people display the highest levels of confidence in their religious leaders – far ahead of their trust in any politician. More than 60 per cent of respondents would welcome religious leaders being more involved in politics. In the south-western and eastern parts of the country, this percentage was as high as 75 per cent.⁸ This level of trust in Islamic leaders may explain how, for many Afghan families, the shame of conversion far outweighs the love of family.

The fear of discrimination and hostility at the hands of their family means that Afghan Christians will do everything they can to keep their faith secret.

The threat posed by the family is not academic. One of the few reported converts in Afghanistan, Abdul Rahman, was sentenced to death by an Afghan judge when his own family reported him to the authorities for converting from Islam to Christianity.⁹ However, while the charges were ultimately dropped due to international pressure, Muslim clerics continued to publicly call for his

death. Rahman was fortunate to escape to Italy where he sought asylum.¹⁰ While the examples of Afghan Christians being murdered for their faith is small in reality, this is because it is so dangerous to publicly reveal yourself as a convert.

Case study 3: community life

With as many as 90 per cent of Mexicans identifying as Christian, it can be surprising to see the country ranked on the World Watch List. However, Christians from indigenous communities in Mexico are often banished from their homes and denied basic services.

In many cases, this persecution turns on the Christian's refusal to continue practising the same religious, social and cultural activities as the rest of the indigenous community. In April 2017 Christian converts from the town of Bolaños, in the western state of Jalisco, refused to participate in tribal religious rituals, or offer money towards them, and were forcibly ejected from the town.

Christians from indigenous communities in Mexico are often banished from their homes and denied basic services for choosing their Christian faith.



Candelaria Vázquez López from Jalisco state in Mexico was ejected from her home when she converted to Christianity.

According to the Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, there have been more than 287,000 cases of forced

⁸ Akseer, T, Warren, Z, Rieger, J, 'Afghanistan in 2017: a survey of the Afghan people', The Asia Foundation, 2017.

⁹ Cooney, D, 'Christian convert faces death penalty in Afghanistan', The Guardian, 20 March 2006.

¹⁰ 'Afghan Christian convert finds sanctuary', Associated Press in NBC News, 29 March 2006.

internal displacement in the last five years. However, according to Pedro Faro Navarro of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Centre, the official figures do not accurately reflect the large number of families who leave their homes. He argues that the real figure may actually be closer to one million.¹¹

The displacement of Christians from their communities is a travesty of justice for this small section of Mexico's indigenous community, and a travesty which often goes unseen. Open Doors' analyst Dennis Petri argues, "It's very important that the right to the preservation of the indigenous and rural traditions are protected, and the Mexican Constitution provides for that... but that shouldn't be used as an argument to violate the rights of individuals within those communities who decide to convert to another religion... It's essential that those rights are balanced."

Case study 4: church life

Christians in Uzbekistan experienced intense violations of their right to freedom of religion or belief in 2017, with their right to freely attend church coming under severe pressure.

The use of hidden microphones in places of worship, the presence of government agents at meetings and the recruitment of spies within Christian communities themselves are commonplace.

Dictatorial paranoia is rife in Uzbekistan, with state authorities aiming to gain control over every aspect of Uzbek life, including a Christian's church life. Churches in Uzbekistan must register with the state authorities, an obligation which not only violates international human rights law but serves to crush the Christian presence wherever it dares show its face. Churches must pass through a complex registration procedure, including having 100 adult Uzbek citizens willing both to be identified

as founders and to supply their personal details to the authorities. It goes without saying that being identified as one of these 'founders' is highly dangerous.¹²



In reality, not one church has been registered for 16 years. Many, such as churches in the Baptist denomination, choose not to apply for registration as it leads to the state interfering in both the mode and content of their worship. Those which refuse to register are subject to targeted raids and fines.

The National Security Service carries out surveillance of all religious communities. The use of hidden microphones in places of worship, the presence of government agents at meetings and the recruitment of spies within Christian communities themselves are commonplace.¹³

Azamat, a church leader in Uzbekistan, has been under constant police surveillance since his church began to grow in numbers. In 2017 his church was raided and all the attendees were forced to write statements about who they were and why they were at the church. When Azamat asked the police why this was happening, the Assistant Police Chief replied: "I will close your church..."

The Uzbek government continues to claim that its crackdown on religious communities is legitimate in the battle to counter religious extremism in the country. In reality, the systematic denial of freedom of religion or belief in Uzbekistan is part of a dictatorial agenda to clamp down on anything which might divert from what the government understands as the norms of Uzbek society.

¹¹ "Mexico "in denial" over Christians forced out of homes for their beliefs", World Watch Monitor, 4 December 2016.

¹² Kinahan, J, 'Uzbekistan: Religious freedom survey, September 2017', Forum 18 News Service, 11 September 2017.

¹³ Ibid.

Dr Ahmed Shaheed, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, said on his visit to the country in October 2017: “While Uzbekistan is a secular State, freedom of conscience, thought, religion or belief is over-regulated, if not restricted, in the country. Religious communities can only function within the given limits of registration and the authorities tend to stay watchful of all religious activities.”¹⁴

Case study 5: national life

It can sometimes be hard to believe stories of the rising level of persecution experienced by Christians and other religious minorities in India. But the numbers speak for themselves. In 2014, the year Narendra Modi of the Hindu nationalist BJP party came to power, India was the 28th most dangerous country in which to live as a Christian, scoring 55/100 points. After four years of Modi’s presidency India has jumped up the ranking, rising to number 11 with a chilling score of 81/100 points. In 2017, Open Doors’ partners registered more than 23,000 incidents of physical and mental abuse alone against Christians, and the reality is that this is only the tip of the iceberg, as most persecution goes unreported.



While violence remains extremely high in India, it is non-violent persecution which has pushed India’s score to new heights.

India was once a relatively tolerant country, with few cases of persecution against Christians reported in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. However, in 1996 the radical Hindu BJP gained its first taste of power. Its strength in Indian

politics grew slowly, but when it finally formed a majority government in 2014¹⁵ its toxic brand of Hindu nationalism was let loose.

This has had a huge effect on national life in India. The leader of an organisation linked to Hindu conversion programmes has said that India should be ‘free of Christians by 2021’.¹⁶ This is to come about through a five-step process to ‘bring Christians home’.¹⁷ On the ground, this move manifests itself in a number of ways, such as the church leader being chased out of the community, the social boycott of Christians from village life and resources, the indoctrination of Christians by Hindu priests, and finally if the Christian continues to resist, they are to be taken to a Hindu temple or procession to ‘cleanse them’.¹⁸ If they refuse to reconvert, this intentional *squeeze* can quickly turn into the *smash* of violent persecution.

This toxic rhetoric has been infused into every aspect of Indian life. When Mohan* and his family became Christians they experienced hostile resistance from Hindus in their village who asked the family to leave. When he came to marry a Christian from a neighbouring village, he experienced further resistance. The couple eventually married in the bride’s village. However, this upset Hindus in her village and the couple were ultimately forced to have a Hindu wedding. When Mohan’s father died, the family came up against persecution once again. Mohan’s Hindu relatives insisted that they bury his father in another village. In the end, the only real option was to take his body and bury him in the jungle.

The next day Mohan was called to a village meeting. Those present were drunk and carried sticks. Mohan said: “I was so scared of them. When they repeatedly asked me if I was going to follow Hinduism or Christianity, I said I was a Hindu.”

Mohan’s story is representative of life for many Christians in India who continue to live under increasing pressure as the toxic religious nationalism of the country’s politics finds fertile ground in villages all over India.

¹⁴ ‘Uzbekistan should “protect religious freedom, not see religion as a threat” – UN Special Rapporteur’, World Watch Monitor, 25 October 2017.

¹⁵ As the leading party within the wider National Democratic Alliance coalition.

¹⁶ Indian Christians faced almost as many attacks in the first half of 2017 as all of 2016’, World Watch Monitor, 8 August 2017.

¹⁷ That is, to Hinduism.

¹⁸ Indian Christians faced almost as many attacks in the first half of 2017 as all of 2016’, World Watch Monitor, 8 August 2017.

Wake up the world to extreme persecution

Of the 50 World Watch List countries, 11 are now designated as countries of extreme persecution. With 81/100 persecution points or more, North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Iran and India are all countries where Christians are experiencing extreme levels of persecution. These are countries where the full and free exercise of the Christian faith is either extremely dangerous or not allowed within society at large, where churches may be banned or under government control, or where one's Christian identity alone can be enough to attract severe persecution.

This is a big change. Just four years ago, North Korea stood out as the only country on the World Watch List where Christians were experiencing extreme persecution. Now there are 11. This highlights the way in which persecution is escalating year on year, and how the international right to freedom of religion or belief is becoming denied and neglected in more and more countries, particularly in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

North Korea: Christians face extreme torture in prisons in North Korea. Hannah* was imprisoned along with her mother, brother and father for being Christians. The torture was so brutal that when Hannah's family were finally reunited, her parents did not recognise each other. Hannah's mother said: "I didn't recognise my husband and he didn't recognise me. That's how horrendous we looked from all the torture. His ribs and collarbone were broken, so that he could not even stand up straight."



Hannah and her mother express their religious freedom by praying together in a safe third country.

Pakistan: Pakistan has the highest violence rating on the World Watch List. This is partly due to the abduction of at least 700 Christians every year. This figure for abduction is greater than all of the other World Watch List countries put together. As Pakistani Pastor Sabqat* comments: "Here we are... always afraid of the local Mullah's teaching at the Mosque. It inspires the young Muslim men to force our young people to convert to Islam." If conversion is the goal, kidnapping, rape, violence and threats are the means.

Sudan: Persecution in Sudan has manifested itself in a number of ways in recent years, from the government's aerial bombing campaign of Christians in the Nuba Mountains,¹⁹ to the incarceration and even murder of church leaders.²⁰ In May 2017, the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) wrote an open letter to the Sudanese Government to protest against the range of violations experienced by Christians in Sudan. In the letter the SCOC outlined these violations as including the demolition of churches, the confiscation of church properties, government failure to allocate land for the construction of new churches and travel restrictions on church leaders.²¹ Jan Figel, the EU Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, also raised similar issues with the government on his visit to the country in March 2017. He was told that the demolitions would temporarily stop.²² However, demolitions have since continued.²³



The Sudanese government attacked this church building after issuing a decree ordering over 20 such churches to be destroyed.

¹⁹ '360 view of forgotten war in Sudan's Nuba Mountains'. World Watch Monitor, 16 March 2017.

²⁰ 'Christianity not welcome in Sudan, warns jailed pastor's lawyer'. World Watch Monitor, 2 June 2017.

²¹ 'Sudan churches risk letter to government on 'systematic violations', including church demolition'. World Watch Monitor, 23 June 2017.

²² Ibid.

²³ 'Sudan demolishes another church, but MPs block school on Sundays'. World Watch Monitor, 4 August 2017.

The business of persecution

In the business sector the *squeeze* can have a real impact on the lives of not only the individual who is persecuted, but also his or her extended family, friends and community – leading to widespread economic and social deprivation.

Discrimination against Christian businesses is commonplace in Pakistan. Pakistan has for many years enforced the 'Respect for Ramadan' law, which enforces certain aspects of the fast on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. But in May 2017 the legislation went further. Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee on Religious Affairs approved an amendment that makes it illegal for businesses to sell or provide food to customers during Ramadan's fasting hours (usually between 4am and 7pm). The punishment for eateries that trade at this time is around \$250. Cinemas, which are expected to stay closed during fasting hours, can be fined as much as \$5,000. According to Peshawar's Anglican Bishop, Peter Humphrey, any violation of the law in Peshawar state could result in imprisonment.

In Pakistan, increased discriminatory employment practices and legislation which limits the Christian community's right to trade freely are extremely worrying.

These developments particularly affect Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan who do not follow the Islamic traditions of Ramadan, impinging on their ability to trade with non-Muslims during the fast.²⁴ Pakistani author Komal Ali has highlighted just how frustrating this legislation can be. He said: "I find this law extremely hypocritical and prejudiced – not only on a social level, but also on a religious level... My driver, who is a Christian, recently told me that he hadn't had lunch because all the restaurants were closed."²⁵

Furthermore, not all jobs are accessible to Christians in Pakistan. Often the only types of employment available are menial jobs such as sweeping or

carrying water. Access to these jobs is becoming more restricted as cleaning companies in the country are increasingly hiring only Muslims. In Pakistan, increased discriminatory employment practices and legislation which limits the Christian community's right to trade freely are extremely worrying.

British business has a part to play in ending persecution against Christians in the workplace. British companies operating in World Watch List countries should ensure that management practices in factories, headquarters and offices do not discriminate against workers on the basis of their religion. The UK government must also ensure that any future trade deals include human rights provisions, including Article 18 – the international right to freedom of religion or belief – and that the necessary checks and balances are in place to ensure its implementation is mainstreamed.

²⁴ Aqeel, A, 'Pakistan: 3 months in prison for eating, drinking in public during Ramadan, \$250 for providing food', World Watch Monitor, 26 May 2017.

²⁵ Ibid.



Through the work of Open Doors' local partners in India, hundreds of women have received resilience training to help them stay strong in the midst of continuing persecution.

Gendered persecution

When it comes to the persecution of Christians, an added burden falls on women, as it does in any conflict situation. Violence is often directed against women because of their perceived subordinate status in society. This includes any act by men or women (or by social institutions dominated by them) that inflicts physical or psychological harm on women or girls, including harmful traditional practices such as honour killings, acid-throwing, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.²⁶

Many World Watch List countries – from Egypt to Pakistan to India – illustrate the particular vulnerability of women to persecution. The abduction of women and girls is also common practice among both Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and Fulani herdsman in the Nigerian middle belt region.

Esther* was 17 when Boko Haram militants attacked her town, Gwoza, in October 2015. Up until then, her life had been quite normal. She went to school, and helped to look after her ailing father; her mother had died when she was younger. But when the militants attacked Gwoza, they struck down Esther's father, who later died, and carried Esther away into the Sambisa forest, along with several other young women.

When it comes to the persecution of Christians, an added burden falls on women, as it does in any conflict situation.

Esther's captors found her very beautiful and many of them wanted to forcibly convert her and have her as a wife. But Esther was determined not to give in. "If I perish, I perish, but I will not become a Muslim," she decided. It was a brave decision, but it had dire consequences. She tried to hide her tears as she told an Open Doors partner that she was continually raped. She said, "I cannot count how many men raped me. Every time they came back from their attacks, they would rape us, defile us."

Esther became pregnant. She doesn't know who the father is. "I had no idea how on earth I would ever be able to love this child," she said.

Esther's story highlights just how hard persecution can be for women in Nigeria. After having endured the most violent of persecution, her status as a 'shamed' woman meant that she did not receive the support she needed.

Esther was put in touch with Open Doors' partners through her church leaders, and she was invited to a trauma care seminar. Esther now works on a farm and she uses the grain she gets to provide for herself, baby Rebecca and her grandparents. However, this is not enough, so Esther has also received food aid to help support her and her family.²⁷



Nigerian Christian Esther with her baby Rebecca. After Esther was captured by Boko Haram militants, her status as a 'shamed' woman meant that she did not receive the support she needed from her family and community. However, Esther has been able to receive trauma care and livelihood support through Open Doors' partners.

²⁶ Open Doors World Watch Research unit definition, 2018.

²⁷ 'Nigerian teenager who became pregnant in Boko Haram captivity says her baby is her "joy and laughter amidst sadness"', Open Doors UK & Ireland, 22 November 2017.

From the cradle to the grave

Persecution is pervasive. In every sphere of life, Christians around the world come up against discrimination, harassment and debilitating pressure. This infographic demonstrates just how all-encompassing non-violent persecution can be for a Christian living in a country ranked on the 2018 World Watch List.



BIRTH

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underlines the right to choose – and change – one’s religion. However, in many World Watch List countries your religion is registered on your identity card at birth – and is almost impossible to change. Converts to Christianity often continue to have their family’s religion stated on their identity card after their conversion. This is then extended to their children when they decide to have a family. In the Maldives, those who convert from Islam lose their citizenship. In Bhutan, Christians are not provided with electronic identity cards, raising questions over their citizenship.



TEENAGE LIFE

The kidnapping of Christian teenage girls in Egypt is extremely worrying. Strategies can be subtle. A Muslim boy tells a Christian girl he loves her and wants to convert to Christianity for her. They start a romantic relationship until one day they decide to ‘escape’ together. What the girl does not know is that she is being kidnapped. In April 2017, a teenage girl was seduced by a recruit of a Salafi organisation who convinced her to run away with him. Kidnappers in instances such as this receive large sums of money and often receive support from the police in return for financial bribes.



UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Life is tough for Iraqi Christians displaced in Jordan. Not only do their needs include essentials such as food and shelter, but the educational needs of young people are yet to be addressed. Young adults who were forced out of the Nineveh Plains by Daesh are unable to continue their university studies. An entire generation of doctors, teachers, engineers and lawyers are on the verge of being lost. Nigerian pastor Aminu Sule,* who spoke at the 2017 World Watch List launch in the UK Parliament, also told MPs of his own son being denied the opportunity to study law in university because of his Christian faith.

SCHOOL

Schools in countries on the World Watch List are rarely neutral spaces, with the right to freedom of religion or belief rarely respected. Students in Pakistan are often exposed to extremist Islamic ideology through textbooks and the wider school ethos. In 2017, Punjab state’s education minister Syed Raza Ali Gilani announced in a public ceremony that wearing the hijab would be compulsory and female students would be awarded 5 per cent extra marks for doing so. This sort of educational environment makes school life very difficult for Christian students.





OCCUPATION

In Pakistan Christians and other religious minorities often experience significant discrimination in the workplace and may be forced to change their jobs multiple times rather than convert to Islam. Often the only employment opportunities available to Christians are menial jobs such as sweeping or carrying water. However, access to even these jobs is becoming more restricted as cleaning companies in the country increasingly hire only Muslims. This discrimination was recently highlighted when a Christian sewage worker was left to die because doctors refused to treat him as he was a Christian and filthy with dirt from his work.



HOUSING

It is estimated that since 2014 approximately 100,000 Christians have left Iraq, with many displaced internally within the country's borders. Many wish to return to their homes, but cannot because their houses are uninhabitable. Noah, a 12-year-old boy from Karamles in Iraq, is one of these Christians (see page 25). He fled his home with his family as Daesh invaded his town and set fire to his house in 2014. It is families such as these who desperately need help to rebuild their lives. The destruction of property is commonplace as a tool of persecution in many World Watch List countries.



COMMUNITY LIFE

A key facet of the Christian faith is meeting together in community on a regular basis to worship. In many parts of the world, Christians do this in church buildings. However, a persistent method of persecution in World Watch List countries is the refusal of planning permission for church buildings. In Algeria, the law prohibits public assembly for the purpose of practising a faith other than Islam with the exception of registered churches. However, individual church buildings are often denied registration. This is a sure way of isolating Christians with the ultimate intention of destroying any Christian presence in the country.

MARRIAGE

The fear of having one's daughters forcefully married and converted against their wishes is constant for many Christian parents living in World Watch List countries. In Nigeria, a 14-year-old Christian girl from Katsina state was forcefully married to a Muslim man, Jamilu Lawal. Her forced marriage was allegedly agreed by the leader of the Katsina region, Alhaji Abdulmumuni Usman, who was said to have collected 50,000 Naira [about US\$160] as a bribe from her 'husband'.

UTILITIES AND SERVICES

Withholding services and utilities is a persistent tactic against Christians in many World Watch List countries. In Mexico, those from indigenous communities who convert to Christianity are often dealt with in this way. Indigenous communal authorities will urge converts to renounce their new Christian faith and put pressure on them through fines and by depriving them of basic community services. Government authorities often refuse to intervene in these cases since they consider them to be a matter of disagreement between members of indigenous communities rather than a serious violation of human rights.

BURIAL RIGHTS

Death in a Christian family in Nepal brings not only sorrow but also a gruelling struggle to find land for burial. As local residents object to any Christian burial in their vicinity, churches in Kathmandu and surrounding areas have been forced to buy land on a secluded mountain to bury their dead. In death as in life, Nepal's Christian community continues to face relentless discrimination.



Lifting the lid on persecution and mental health

Trauma, abuse, isolation, discrimination, stigma, stress and social disadvantage are just some of the common causes of mental illness across the world.²⁸ They are also symptoms of persecution, and are commonplace among persecuted Christians living in countries on the World Watch List. However, as in the UK, the mental health of persecuted Christians around the world is often left hidden and unnoticed.

Shiden* was a church leader in Eritrea who was imprisoned for his faith. During his military service, he and about 40 others were caught worshipping in secret. The group was arrested and taken to a military prison in the southern city of Assab. It is a terrible place, located in the desert, so it becomes extremely hot during the day and very cold at night. After two years he was moved to the notorious Mai Serwa prison camp on the outskirts of Asmara. Here, Shiden shared a metal shipping container with 30 to 40 other people.

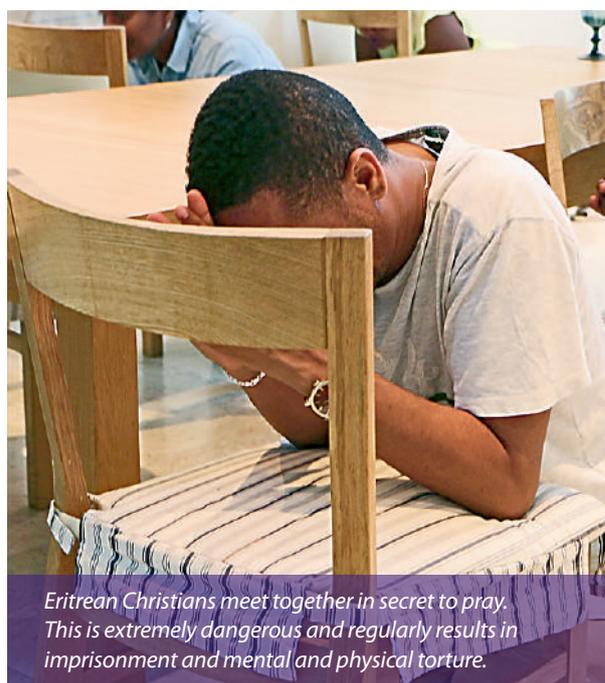
“Since his release we have seen him change in front of our eyes day-by-day. He has fallen into deep depression, and there are times when he is completely irrational...”

One day, after spending more than 13 years in prison, Shiden was sent home without explanation. His family was delighted to have him back and lavished care on him. But they could see all was not well and it soon dawned on them that for Shiden, returning to normal life after so many years in prison was not going to be easy.

Shiden entered prison as a young man. Now he was confronted by the fact he had missed out on education and a job that would enable him to make a living. His hope for the future had been completely eroded. His older brother explained: “Since his release we have seen him change in front of our eyes day by day. He has fallen into deep depression, and there are times when he is

completely irrational. We have to watch him all the time, even at night, to make sure that he does not harm himself. It is very upsetting.”

Sadly, his situation is not unique. There are thousands of Christians who have been in prison or in situations of immense pressure, whether for months or years, who face similar challenges when they are released.



Eritrean Christians meet together in secret to pray. This is extremely dangerous and regularly results in imprisonment and mental and physical torture.

²⁸ Mind, 'Mental health problems – an introduction', undated.



Open Doors works through partners in Syria and Iraq to help Christian children overcome their trauma. Over 320 children attend a Child Friendly Space in Homs in Syria where they can develop and grow through art, music, drama and psychosocial support. It is vital that trauma care is provided in Syria and Iraq to ensure that a mental health epidemic is not the future for an entire generation of children.

Many Pakistani Christians work as 'bonded labourers' - essentially modern-day slaves - in Pakistan's brick kilns.



Enslaved for their faith

In 2018 there are over 40 million people trapped in slavery. That is five times the population of London.²⁹ Slavery is also a tool of persecution used against Christians living in World Watch List countries.

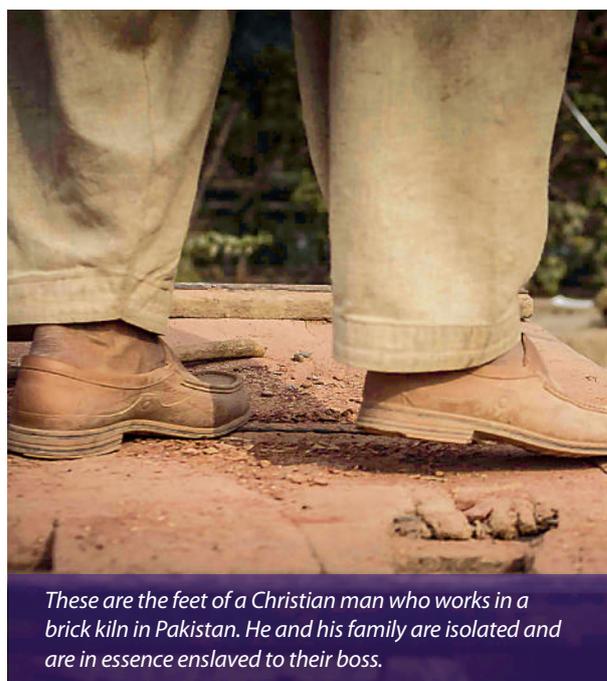
Slavery is the use of lies or violence to force another person to work for little or no pay. It is illegal almost everywhere, but slaves exist because there is no one to protect them. Where laws aren't enforced by the police or judicial processes, slaves-owners can act with impunity and continue to prey on the most vulnerable.³⁰

In Pakistan, many Christians work as 'bonded labourers' which in essence is modern-day slavery. Christians in Pakistan are often from historically poor communities. This, plus their unprotected status as a minority, makes them vulnerable to financial exploitation and slavery. Bonded labour comes about through the 'paishagee' system where an amount of money is given to the individual in advance. The individual then becomes an employee of the money lender, and must work for him until the worker can return the money.³¹

Often the money lender will enslave the bonded labourer by raising the loan and by charging exorbitant interest rates. With meagre salaries, unable to pay, bonded labourers are enslaved to the money lender. This can continue for generations. Any attempt to escape results in severe violence, humiliation, increased debt and even criminal cases. The 1992 Bonded Labour System Abolition Act orders that: 'No person shall make an advance' and that 'every obligation of a bonded labourer to repay any bonded debt... shall stand extinguished.' However, this practice of giving advance money continues unabated in Pakistan. It is nothing short of a trap to enslave vulnerable people.

Open Doors' partners support families enslaved in brick kilns in Pakistan. One family Open Doors'

partners support have worked as brick makers for two generations. These isolated Christians are unable to attend church or any other social gatherings as these are perceived as a threat to their employers.



These are the feet of a Christian man who works in a brick kiln in Pakistan. He and his family are isolated and are in essence enslaved to their boss.

While slavery often appears to be a problem in developing countries, the problem can originate in the West. There is a need to end the practice of bonded labour in the Global South, but there is also a need for a sophisticated strategy to challenge the global economic structures that maximise consumption and externalise cost by exploiting cheap resources and labour – the driving force behind modern slavery which predominantly targets vulnerable communities such as minority Christian communities. There is a responsibility for British businesses trading in the developing world to ensure that their supply chains are free from bonded labour.

²⁹ International Justice Mission, 'Modern-Day Slavery: The facts', undated.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See 'The hardships of life as a brick kiln worker in Pakistan', BBC News website, 17 December 2012, for an insight into the life of a bonded brick-kiln worker.

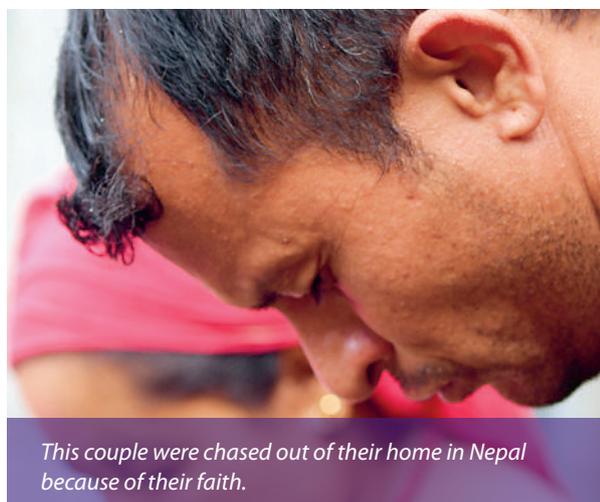
Countries of special concern

Nepal

The last time Nepal featured on the World Watch List was in 2007. However, the rise of Hindu nationalism in Nepal has meant it has leapt back onto the list at number 25 in 2018.

In August 2017, the Nepalese Parliament passed a Bill criminalising religious conversion and the 'hurting of religious sentiment'.

On 18 May 2006, Nepal's House of Representatives declared Nepal a secular state, ending two centuries of Nepal as a Hindu kingdom.³² This move lifted restrictions on Christian activity, and now there are 8,000 churches and over a million Christians living in Nepal.³³ However, this growth has prompted religious and ethnic antagonism against what is perceived as a foreign religion.



This couple were chased out of their home in Nepal because of their faith.

Legislation since 2015 has severely limited freedom of religion or belief in Nepal. While the new 2015 constitution preserved Nepal as a secular state, it also increased restrictions on religious conversion.³⁴ In December 2016, a Nepali court found four Christians who had prayed for a mentally ill woman guilty of 'violence' and 'witchcraft'. They were sentenced to five years in prison, even though the

woman testified in their favour.³⁵ In August 2017, the Nepalese Parliament passed a Bill criminalising religious conversion and the 'hurting of religious sentiment'. This came into law in October 2017, opening the way for those seeking to settle personal scores to abuse the system, as has been seen with neighbouring India's 'anti-conversion' laws and Pakistan's blasphemy laws.³⁶ Nepal's rise in the 2018 World Watch List is unsettling: this could just be the beginning of increasing squeeze on Christians in Nepal.

India

India has risen from 15 to 11 on the World Watch List. In the world's largest democracy, with a population of 1.3 billion people, not everyone is going to think or act the same way. Yet, this would appear to be the wish of Hindu nationalists who have been empowered in their anti-Christian activity since 2014 by the rhetoric of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other top officials.³⁷



Pastor Khel Prasad Kurre was visiting church members on 13 October 2017, when he was attacked and brutally beaten by Hindu extremists who accused him of trying to convert Hindus.

³² Letizia, C., 'Shaping Secularism in Nepal'. European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, Vol. 39, Autumn-Winter 2011.

³³ Mitchell, A., 'More people turning to Christ in Nepal, which now hosts over 1 Million believers and 8,000 churches'. Christian Today, 8 December 2016.

³⁴ European Parliament Intergroup on FoRB & RT, 'Annual Report on the State of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the World 2015'. June 2016.

³⁵ 'Nepali church leaders found guilty of 'witchcraft' and 'violence' for helping mentally ill woman'. World Watch Monitor, 22 December 2016.

³⁶ 'Religious freedom in Nepal 'teetering on the edge'. World Watch Monitor, 23 October 2017.

³⁷ See Fisher, M., 'Everything you need to know about Narendra Modi's 2014 rise'. Vox, 14 May 2015.

In the 2018 World Watch List reporting period, 635 Christians in India have been detained without trial, arrested and/or imprisoned for their faith, 336 Christians have been forced to leave their homes, while over 23,000 Christians have been either physically or mentally abused since November 2016. These are just the recorded incidents – in reality the figure could be significantly higher.

Egypt

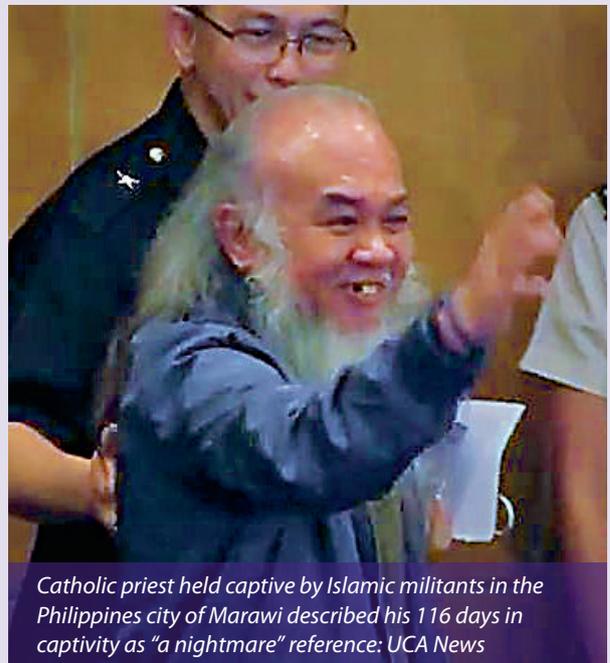
Egypt's move from 21 to 17 on the 2018 World Watch List is very concerning, not least because of the rise of Daesh in the country. In February 2017 the group released a propaganda video vowing to wipe out Egypt's Coptic community.³⁸ This followed the killing of 28 Christians by a suicide bomber in the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral of St Mark in Cairo in December 2016.³⁹ All but three of those who died were women and children. The kidnapping of Christian girls in Egypt is also alarming, with kidnappers receiving large sums of money from those who wish to forcefully convert and marry Christian girls.⁴⁰



The family of an Egyptian father and husband who was killed in a bus attack in Minya for refusing to deny his Christian faith.

The next big thing?

A trend to watch in 2018 and beyond is the rise in persecution across South-East Asia. This has been fuelled by Islamic extremism, with countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines experiencing growing hostility from extremists putting pressure on their governments to deny Christians the right to freedom of religion or belief. Malaysia now ranks at 23 on the World Watch List, compared with 40 in 2014. Indonesia now ranks at 38, having been at 47 in 2014.



Catholic priest held captive by Islamic militants in the Philippines city of Marawi described his 116 days in captivity as "a nightmare" reference: UCA News

In May 2017, the Christian former governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama – known as Ahok – was imprisoned for blasphemy in a politically-motivated attack and sentenced to two years in jail.⁴¹

Hostility for Christians is also on the rise in the Philippines, with the five-month siege of the island of Marawi by Daesh-affiliated group Abu Sayef in extremist-dominated Mindanao⁴² during 2017 sending shockwaves through the country.

³⁸ Islamic State threatens to wipe out Egypt's Copts. World Watch Monitor, 20 February 2017.

³⁹ Egypt's Copts mourn after 'deadliest attack in recent memory'. World Watch Monitor, 12 December 2016.

⁴⁰ Egypt: ex-kidnapper admits 'they get paid for every Coptic Christian girl they bring in'. World Watch Monitor, 14 September 2017.

⁴¹ Update: blasphemy appeal withdrawn 'for the sake of the people'. Open Doors UK & Ireland, 25 May 2017.

⁴² See 'Philippine City Marawi 'liberated' from Islamic State'. Open Doors UK and Ireland, 02 November 2017.

Signs of hope

Can any hope come out of Syria?

One of the more surprising outcomes of the 2018 World Watch List is Syria dropping out of the top ten. The drop is explained by looking at the violence category. There have been fewer reports of targeted violence against Christians in Syria, as Daesh-held areas have been re-captured, making Syria a somewhat more peaceful country for all, including Christians. But violence is still obviously very present in Syria and still affects the Christian population there: Christians were abducted, physically and sexually abused, and continued to flee their homes in the 2018 World Watch List reporting period.



Maha (left) and her husband have been able to return to their home in Homs

But as Christians continue to leave their homes, in other parts of the country they are making their return. Syrian Christians celebrated Easter at a special service at St Elias Cathedral in Aleppo. The service focused on encouraging families who had lost loved ones – emphasising the Easter message of resurrection. Syrian believer Sarah* said: “It was the first time in about five years that we were able to come together in freedom again. For many years we could only imagine returning to this place.”

While Syria remains a country with very high levels of persecution, and the war continues to devastate lives, the small-scale rebuilding is bringing about a sense of hope that Christians may have a place in a future Syrian society.

The seeds of reconciliation in Iraq?

Good news is also to be found amongst the destruction in Iraq. A church in an Iraqi district once terrorised by Daesh was restored in May 2017 with the help of local Muslims.⁴³ The Muslim volunteers who helped re-build the church said they did so because they wanted to show that Iraq still welcomes both Christians and Muslims. They said they wanted to show that “Mosul is yours as it’s ours” and “our differences are our strength”.⁴⁴ Peace and reconciliation between communities like this is key if religious minorities are to feel at home in Iraq going forward.

Cause for celebration in Tanzania?

Tanzania was ranked 33 on the 2017 World Watch List, but its persecution score has dropped down to just 6/100 points in 2018 – seeing it fall out of the top 50 ranking. While there is still persecution in Tanzania, things have been improving since the election of President John Magufuli in 2015. His administration has cracked down on radical Islamic groups, with many of their leaders imprisoned or forced into hiding.

⁴³Muslims clean up Mosul monastery desecrated by IS: World Watch Monitor, 31 May 2017.

⁴⁴White, C., ‘Christian church destroyed by ISIS rebuilt by Muslim residents’ Metro News, 29 May 2017.

Open Doors advocacy

Open Doors UK & Ireland is part of a global NGO network which has supported and strengthened persecuted Christians in over 60 countries for over 60 years. The organisation's UK Advocacy Department is well-known at Westminster and is in regular contact with ministers and desk officers at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development.

The Open Doors advocacy team is active in three main spheres:

- Internationally: at the United Nations in Geneva and New York and at the European Union in Brussels and Strasbourg.
- Nationally: in a number of key capitals, including London, Paris and Washington DC.
- Locally: at the grassroots Open Doors provides legal support and human rights training for persecuted Christians and has increasing numbers of advocacy field staff who provide an important link between the realities on the ground and the national and international advocacy teams.

As an NGO working with some of the most vulnerable communities around the world, Open Doors connects its field experience, on-the-ground intelligence and needs assessment expertise with its advocacy work in the UK Parliament to ensure it speaks up for those most in need and communicates growing and emerging trends to decision-makers.

The annual World Watch List plays an important role in Open Doors advocacy, highlighting countries of special concern and key emerging trends. For instance, Open Doors has been working through local partners and churches in Iraq for over 20 years to support the local Christians, collect data and advocate on their behalf, long before Daesh was ever a household name. The extensive World Watch List data made it possible to track the rise of

persecution in Iraq from a ranking at number 27 in 2002 to number 2 in 2016. This data, plus over 20 years' practical experience, prompted Open Doors to commission in-depth research into Iraq and Syria in 2015, leading to the beginning of the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign in 2016.

Likewise, the 2017 World Watch List highlighted the shocking rise of persecution in India. Its climb in the rankings from 32 in 2011 to 15 in 2017 led Open Doors to keep a close eye on the situation in India throughout 2017. Its subsequent climb to number 11 and its designation as a country of extreme persecution in 2018 has led Open Doors advocacy to identify India as a country of special concern for its work in 2018 and into 2019.

If you are a Member of Parliament or civil servant, or work for an NGO, and would like further information on what you have read, or require a briefing of any kind on the worldwide persecution of Christians, please contact Open Doors UK & Ireland's advocacy department by emailing advocacy@opendoorsuk.org You can also see the recommendations for action on p.27



Open Doors event at the European Parliament with panellists discussing the persecution of Christians in Central Asia, April 2017.

Hope for the Middle East

Between 1 September 2016 and 8 December 2017, 186,930 citizens of the UK and Ireland signed the *Hope for the Middle East* petition, contributing to a total of over 800,000 signatures from 143 countries worldwide. These voices came together to amplify those of Christians in the Middle East who are calling for:

1. The right to equal citizenship
2. Dignified living conditions
3. A prominent role in reconciling and rebuilding society.

And these voices have been heard.

The petition was addressed to the UN Secretary General. In December 2017 it was presented to senior officials in his team by Noeh, a 12-year-old boy from Karamles in Iraq, who fled his home with his family as Daesh invaded the town and set fire to his house. During the meeting, senior official Kyoko Shiotani said, "The UN Secretary-General is personally committed to recognising that any successful political outcome must include the minorities within the region."

This is the crucial support which the Christian community in Iraq and Syria must receive if their ancient communities are to survive, prosper and flourish in the region.

In the UK, the petition's calls were heard by the Prime Minister at a private meeting, when she was presented with an Arabic Bible, retrieved from a church in Iraq that had been burned by Daesh. The same day a public meeting in Parliament was attended by Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, Minister for the Middle East in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. He said that tolerance is the only answer for the Middle East, and emphasised the vital role of Open Doors and others who champion the cause.

Rt Hon Dame Caroline Spelman MP commented that 'the church in the Middle East is uniquely placed to bring hope to their wider communities' and Kate Green MP said, "I can feel confident in my support of the work that Open Doors does... This campaign provides concrete actions which we, as UK politicians, should act upon."

This is the next step – to take these concrete actions, backed by so many citizens of the UK and Ireland, and make them into a tangible reality for Christians in Iraq and Syria.

Open Doors' partners in the field are already rebuilding homes and lives in the region. So far they have reconstructed 601 houses in Iraq. In Syria, Open Doors' partners are feeding 17,000 families every month. Micheline is a 37-year-old mother, now living in Aleppo. She rents a room with her husband while her children are living with her mother. Micheline says, "Our children are struggling without us. So we thank you for helping us with paying the rent of our room and with food portions."

Open Doors' partners cannot ensure the survival of the Christian community in Iraq and Syria alone. If you are a parliamentarian, please read the recommendations on p.27 to see how you can play your part in bringing hope to the Middle East.



The Prime Minister hears the calls of the Hope for the Middle East petition and is presented with an Arabic Bible, burnt by Daesh. From left: Dame Caroline Spelman MP, Prime Minister Theresa May, Fr. Daniel and Open Doors UK & Ireland CEO Lisa Pearce.



Noeh - a 12-year-old Iraqi boy forced to flee his home by Daesh - presents the Hope for the Middle East petition to Kyoko Shiotani, Chief of Office for the Office of the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Methodology

The annual World Watch List is the product of year-round research conducted by Open Doors' World Watch Research unit. The unit analyses both primary and secondary data to ensure a rigorous and nuanced understanding of the persecution of Christians worldwide and to rank the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to live as a Christian in 2018.

The World Watch Research unit works closely with researchers in the field to collect survey data, designed to tease out the state of religious freedom for Christians in five areas of life: private, family, community, national, and within the church. These five areas comprise the *squeeze* (non-violent) element of persecution – the daily pressure of official discrimination, hostile attitudes and family rejection. Separately, the team measures violence against Christians. This is the *smash* (violent) element of persecution, one that often commands headlines but which rarely is the dominant reality for Christians who live in World Watch List countries. For each country surveyed, scores for each of the six categories are combined to create a total score out of a possible hundred. The scores determine the country's ranking on the World Watch List. Only verified accounts of persecution are analysed, with many incidents in North Korea, Libya and Myanmar going unrecorded due to the difficulty in verifying reports in these places. It is therefore likely that the research findings are below the real figures. However, Open Doors has consistently chosen to under-report rather than over-report in order to ensure the highest levels of accuracy and reliability.

Following this primary research, the survey data is analysed against secondary data. Researchers scour academic, NGO and news reports to ensure the survey data is as rigorous and reliable as possible. Further to this, academics and other external experts with expertise on the countries surveyed are asked to comment and to input into the findings. The research methods for arriving at country scores and comparisons have also been independently audited by the International Institute for Religious Freedom.

This three-pronged approach ensures that the experience of the persecuted church is carefully triangulated with academic, expert and media analysis, leading to well-rounded, nuanced and accurate research findings.

Recommendations

To combat the rising threat of non-violent persecution...

The Department for International Development (DfID) should review its education programmes around the world to ensure that they promote religious freedom. The department should also consider using its aid budget to provide training on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) to teachers in World Watch List countries.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Trade should work to ensure that British companies operating in World Watch List countries make certain that management practices in factories, headquarters and offices do not discriminate against workers on the basis of their religion and that their supply chains are free from bonded labour.

With the evident intersection between gender and persecution, the FCO should better integrate its work on gender and religious freedom to ensure that women from minority religious communities receive the appropriate support.

With the Commonwealth heads of government meeting in London in 2018...

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary should prioritise discussing the importance of the right to FoRB with the heads of government in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Brunei, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, each of which are listed on the 2018 World Watch List.

With the growing threat of religious nationalism in Asia...

The UK government should actively champion the full observance of Article 18, to increase global security and combat terrorism. It should encourage international bodies to speak out strongly against equating ethnic and/or national identity with an exclusive religion or belief system.

The FCO and DfID should also offer support as part of its countering hate strategy to help train

police and judiciaries, and to build awareness and capacity around Article 18 rights, in countries such as India and Nepal, where impunity after violent attacks leaves vulnerable Christian communities in constant fear of further attacks.

With the United Kingdom leaving the European Union...

The UK government should take the opportunity presented by future trade negotiations to champion human rights, in particular the right to FoRB. This is especially pertinent to countries such as China, India, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Turkey, all of which have featured in discussions around trade post-Brexit and rank on the 2018 World Watch List.

With 24 of the 30 countries listed by the FCO as priority countries also featuring on the 2018 World Watch List...

It is important the FCO recognises that Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the gauge by which human rights abuses can be identified. Where FoRB is denied, it is likely that a whole facet of other rights are also being denied. By tackling FoRB, the FCO can be sure it is investing its capacity and resources wisely.

In the case of the Middle East...

We appreciate the FCO and DfID's interest in coming together with faith leaders to discuss a range of policy issues relevant to the region, and look forward to developing this into a series of meetings organised in tandem with Lambeth Palace.

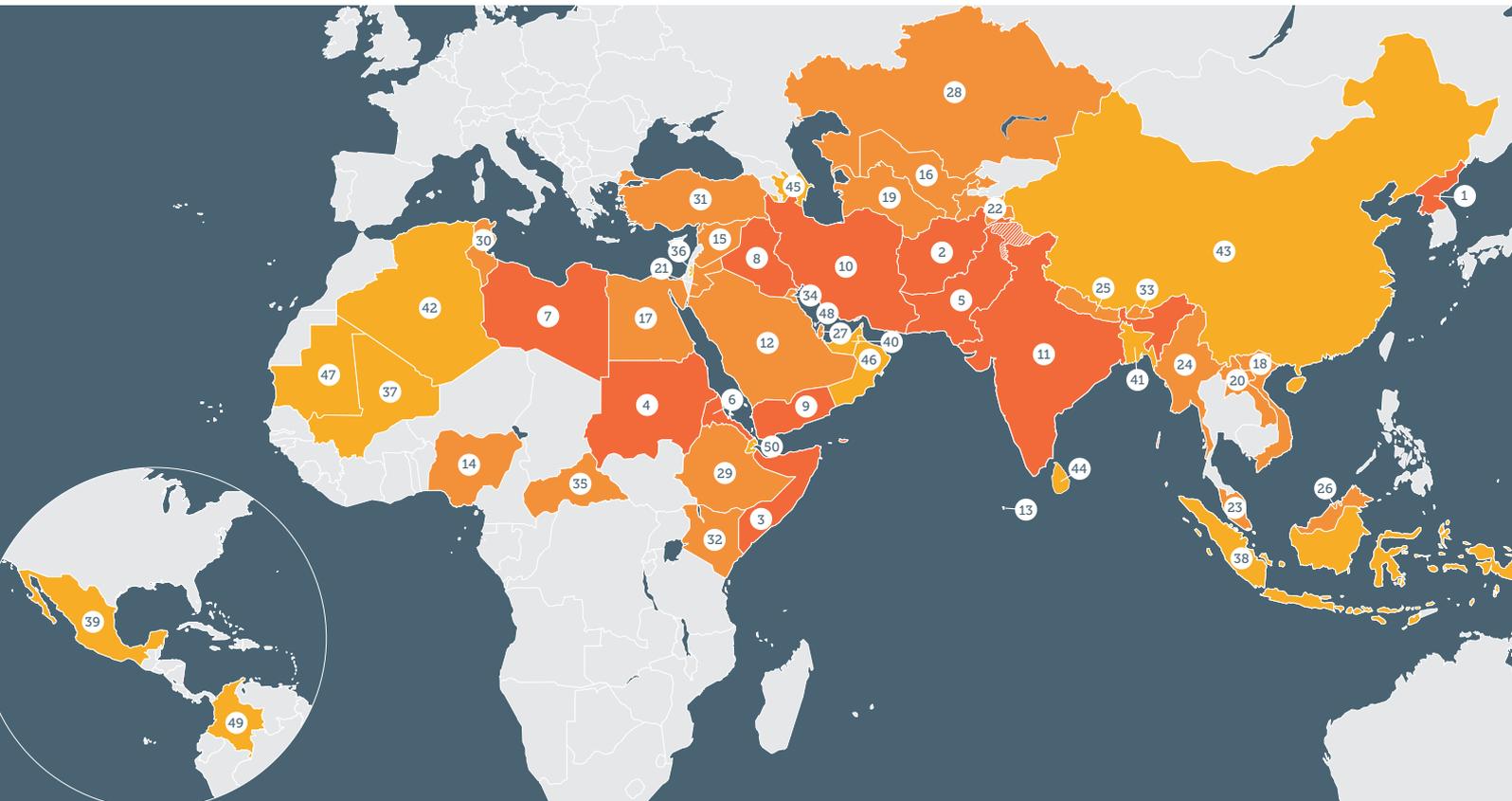
To parliamentarians...

We ask that MPs to write to the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for International Development and the Prime Minister to highlight the key findings of this report.

If you would like to find out how you can get involved with the campaign to combat the extreme persecution of Christians worldwide, contact advocacy@opendoorsuk.org today.

WORLD WATCH MAP 2018

This map illustrates the Open Doors World Watch List – a ranking of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.



Extreme levels of persecution

- 1 North Korea
- 2 Afghanistan
- 3 Somalia
- 4 Sudan
- 5 Pakistan
- 6 Eritrea
- 7 Libya
- 8 Iraq
- 9 Yemen
- 10 Iran
- 11 India

Very high levels of persecution

- 12 Saudi Arabia
- 13 Maldives
- 14 Nigeria
- 15 Syria
- 16 Uzbekistan
- 17 Egypt
- 18 Vietnam
- 19 Turkmenistan
- 20 Laos
- 21 Jordan
- 22 Tajikistan
- 23 Malaysia
- 24 Myanmar
- 25 Nepal
- 26 Brunei
- 27 Qatar
- 28 Kazakhstan
- 29 Ethiopia
- 30 Tunisia
- 31 Turkey
- 32 Kenya
- 33 Bhutan
- 34 Kuwait
- 35 CAR

High levels of persecution

- 36 Palestinian Territories
- 37 Mali
- 38 Indonesia
- 39 Mexico
- 40 UAE
- 41 Bangladesh
- 42 Algeria
- 43 China
- 44 Sri Lanka
- 45 Azerbaijan
- 46 Oman
- 47 Mauritania
- 48 Bahrain
- 49 Colombia
- 50 Djibouti



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