



WORLD WATCH LIST REPORT 2019

Paying the price twice: how religious persecution exacerbates
the vulnerabilities of marginalised groups



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Cover picture: On 19 February 2018, Boko Haram kidnapped more than 100 girls from a secondary school in the town of Dapchi, southern Yobe State, in Nigeria. At the sound of gunshots, Leah Sharibu, pictured left, ran towards the compound gate – not knowing that this was exactly where the Boko Haram fighters were waiting. Leah was bundled onto a truck and driven away. By 21 March 2018 all of the kidnapped girls had been returned – except for one. As the only Christian among them, Leah refused to convert to Islam, and it is this which has prevented her from returning home.

This story represents the plight of many Christian women around the world who are doubly vulnerable because of their gender as well as their faith. Perpetrators of religious persecution strategically target girls like Leah, knowing that it traumatises lives and destabilises families and communities. Through partnerships with local churches, Open Doors provides persecution survival training to families in Nigeria so as to build resilience in this hostile environment.

This report was authored by Dr Matthew Rees on the basis of the research material produced by the Open Doors International World Watch Research unit.

Introduction

The World Watch List combines Open Doors' field experience and on-the-ground intelligence with the year-round analysis of its research unit, providing insights into the trends, scale and dynamics of the persecution of Christians around the world.

The list presents the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to live as a Christian. However, this year an unprecedented trend has begun to reveal itself. Of the 50 countries, as many as 40 are now designated as places where Christians experience 'very high' or 'extreme' levels of persecution.¹ In 2014, only 22 countries were designated in this way – a number that has almost doubled in just five years. In real terms this means that approximately 245 million Christians are at risk of 'high', 'very high', or 'extreme' levels of persecution in 2019. An increase from 215 million in 2018.

The right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is central to human experience – from what you wear, to what you say publicly, to whom you associate with, to the environment in which your children are nurtured. But everywhere we look, violations of this right are wrapped up in some of the world's greatest challenges. From the rise of Daesh in the Middle East to Boko Haram in Nigeria, to the overspill of criminal activity into community life in Latin America and the growing Hindu nationalist rhetoric of the Indian government affecting Muslims, Christians and Sikhs alike. This has truly become the issue of our time.

FoRB intersects intimately with other key human rights. When Christians have their right to FoRB violated, their freedom of expression, their right to association and nationality as well as their right to a fair trial are regularly violated too. And of course, where Christians are under pressure, those from other religious minorities, and those of no faith, are also experiencing persecution. This is why it's key that we campaign for the right to FoRB for all, as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, a deeper analysis of the World Watch List research indicates that religious identity often exacerbates other marginalising factors such as gender, ethnicity, age and class. From minority ethnic communities such as the Christian Kachin people of Myanmar, to the high number of Christian Dalits in India, Pakistan and Nepal, to the children of Christian families targeted and forced to become child soldiers in Colombia – these people are paying the price twice.

I began my role as CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland on 11 July 2018. Coming from an international development background, and having seen the great strides that have been made in development terms in a range of countries over the past 20 years, it is with great sadness that I have learnt about the escalating violence aimed at Christians in many of these same countries. I therefore ask all Parliamentarians and the UK government to do what they can to make 2019 the year that this escalation is reversed. For instance, it is crucial that Parliamentarians work to ensure that the government takes action on the forthcoming recommendations of the independent review on whether the UK is doing all it can to support persecuted Christians worldwide.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. The situation for persecuted Christians around the world is extremely difficult, but things can change. The small number of churches given permits in Egypt this year is a glimmer of hope for the thousands of congregations waiting for permission from the government to worship together. We must stand with them, and the millions of persecuted Christians around the world who need change more than ever. Please read the recommendations on page 27 to see how you can take action.



Henrietta Blyth
CEO Open Doors UK & Ireland
January 2019

¹ 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:

- Persecution continues to escalate. In 2019, 40 of the 50 World Watch List countries have been designated as countries where Christians are at risk of **very high** or **extreme** levels of persecution
- Approximately 245 million Christians living in the top 50 countries experience **high** levels of persecution or worse
- A range of vulnerabilities such as gender, age, class and ethnicity are intersecting with religious identity to create a toxic cocktail of widespread persecution in the World Watch List top 50 countries
- Around the world a range of actors are finding ways to clamp down on religious identity and public worship by suppressing the right to association, freedom of expression, and the right to a fair trial, among other fundamental human rights
- The situation in Asia continues to escalate, as **China** climbs the World Watch List from 43 to 27 and **India** enters the top ten for the first time in the history of the World Watch List
- 2018's prediction that South East Asia was emerging as a hotbed of persecution is set to be fulfilled in 2019 as the situation in **Myanmar** and **Indonesia** worsens
- Once again, **Nigeria** saw the highest number of Christians killed for their faith, with approximately 3,731 killed in the reporting period of this year's World Watch List.

The key changes in this year's World Watch List are:

- For the first time since 2011, **Russia** enters the World Watch List
- **Morocco** is back on the World Watch List, for the first time since 2014, and is ranked at 35
- A considerable rise in persecution in **Algeria** means it has shot up the list from 42 to 22
- Hope is to be found in **Iraq** as its violence score improves. Iraq slips out of the top ten for the first time since 2010.

Persecution continues to escalate worldwide:

- Approximately 245 million Christians are at risk of high, very high or extreme levels of persecution
- Over 1,000 Christians in China have either been detained without trial or unfairly arrested
- 3,731 Christians have been killed in Nigeria for their faith.

The issue of our time

FoRB is the issue of our time. Violations of that right are not found in isolation or on a small scale, instead they are wrapped up in some of the world's greatest challenges. From the rise of Daesh in the Middle East to Boko Haram in Nigeria, to the overspill of criminal activity into community life in Latin America and the growing Hindu nationalist rhetoric of the Indian government affecting Muslims, Christians and Sikhs alike – violations against people's international right to FoRB are all too commonplace.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that FoRB is a right which individuals may practise alone or together in community, both in private or in public. Article 18 defends activities such as religious teaching, practice, worship and observance.² General comment 22 of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee crucially notes that FoRB includes the right to choose one's religion as well as to change one's religion.³

Michael Horowitz (Senior Advisor for the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism) has argued that vulnerable Christians are like canaries in a coal mine, serving as an early warning of 'whether freedom exists not only for them – but for all others in society'.⁴ Horowitz put his finger on just how key those Article 18 rights are for everyone. Indeed, the right to FoRB is central to human experience – from what you wear, to what you can say in public, to whom you associate with, to the environment in which your children are nurtured. When religious freedoms are under question or suppressed, we can be sure that the voices and actions of others are also being undermined.

The case studies that follow highlight the way in which FoRB intimately intersects with other key human rights. Each case study shows how the violation of FoRB is also leading to the widespread violation of other rights. When Christians face

the violation of their right to FoRB, their other key freedoms are regularly violated, too. These include their freedom of expression, their right to association and nationality, as well as their right to a fair trial. The case studies below are just some examples of how life for a Christian in a country in the top 50 of the World Watch List is debilitating, insecure and unjust on a number of levels.

Case study 1: National identity

The right to a nationality is a key human right. But national identity has always been a contentious issue in India. With the country's independence born out of a history of colonialism and nurtured by the ongoing tensions of inter-communal violence, the question of what makes one an Indian has been key to the development of the nation.

In 1923, Indian political leader VD Savarkar wrote a publication entitled 'Who is Hindu?' The purpose of this work was to bring together Indians under one nationality into one nation state, finding commonalities in Hindu identity. In the work, Savarkar combines geographical unity, common culture and racial features in his definition of a Hindu. On this basis, Indic religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism are considered 'Hindutva' because India is both their holy land and fatherland. However, Indian Christians and Muslims are considered to pose a threat to the unity of the nation because their love and allegiance allegedly lie outside India.

Drawing on this work, an environment where non-Hindus are denied their full rights has been carefully shaped by Hindu extremists in India over the decades and is increasingly visible in India today. For example, in 2017 former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson and now President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, famously described Christians and Muslims as 'foreigners of the nation'.⁵

² 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights', OHCHR, 1948. For a further discussion on FoRB see: 'Article 18: From rhetoric to reality', All Party Parliamentary Group on FoRB, November 2017, chapter 1.

³ 'General comment No. 22: The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art. 18) CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4', UN Human Rights Committee, United Nations, 30 July 1993.

⁴ Grim, B, Finke, R, 'The price of freedom denied', Cambridge University Press, 2011, p202.

⁵ Matthew, L, 'Ram Nath Kovind had opposed SC status for Dalit Christians, Muslims', Indian Express, 20 June 2017.

On the victory of the BJP-led alliance in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, Ashok Singhal, the leader of the Hindutva-based organisation Vishva Hindu Parishad, remarked that this was the beginning of a revolution which would see India entirely Hindu by 2020 and the entire world Hindu by 2030.⁶ In 2018, BJP politician Surendra Singh reportedly stated that ‘once India becomes a “Hindu rashtra” only those Muslims would stay in the country who assimilate in the Hindu culture.’⁷ UN special rapporteur, E Tendayi Achiume noted in September 2018 that the election of the Hindu nationalist BJP has been ‘linked to incidents of violence against members of Dalit, Muslim, tribal and Christian communities’ with the use of inflammatory remarks by BJP leaders a driving factor.⁸

For Christians living in India, their right to identify with their Indian nationality is made precarious as they are told they do not conform to the norms of village life.

These incidents of violence and discrimination are widespread. For instance, in five villages in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra in August 2018,⁹ Christians were ostracised and forced to leave the community, had their right to benefits and welfare questioned and experienced beatings by community members on the basis that their faith is seen as a threat to that community’s wider Hindu identity. This one example illuminates a wider trend.

For Christians living in this context, their right to identify with their Indian nationality is made precarious as they are told they do not conform to the norms of village life. This is further compounded when public figures and politicians actively undermine their identity as Indians and create an environment whereby others feel they

can legitimately question the rights Christians should enjoy under the constitution.



Those who leave Hinduism are often not afforded their full rights as Indian citizens. Preeti, pictured right, and her husband were tied up and beaten by their neighbours when they became Christians.

Case study 2: Kangaroo courts?

Arbitrary arrest, false accusation and fabricated evidence are a reality for Christians living in many of the World Watch List countries – practices which fundamentally undermine the international right to FoRB as well as the right to a fair trial.

Christians in Sudan regularly stand trial without the charges against them being fully published. ‘Summary trials’ are commonplace¹⁰ and Christians are often handed charges that are unjust. For instance, in April 2018, Azhari Tembra, Mina Mata, George Adem and Kodi Abdurraheem were charged with ‘causing physical harm to police and supporters of a Muslim businessman’, when in reality police and an armed mob attacked the church premises¹¹ stabbing two church members.¹²

Likewise, unjust and nebulous charges are used

⁶ ‘India will be a Hindu nation by 2020, world by 2030: VHP leader Ashok Singhal’, *Indian Express*, 20 July 2015.

⁷ ‘Lok Sabha polls will see “Islam vs Bhagwan, Pakistan vs India”: BJP MLA’, *Times of India*, 13 April 2018.

⁸ See: ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance’, *United Nations General Assembly*, August 2018, p10. The comment made was based on a Human Rights Watch submission to the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of India, 2016.

⁹ ‘We’ll close one church every week, Indian Christians told’, *World Watch Monitor*, 6 August 2018.

¹⁰ See: USCIRF, ‘Sudan’, *USCIRF Annual Report*, 2018.

¹¹ ‘Sudan: Four Christians charged, 36 others to stand trial’, *World Watch Monitor*, 19 April 2018.

¹² ‘Part of church compound in Sudan illegally occupied’, *World Watch Monitor*, 2 May 2017.

against Christian leaders in Iran. Priest Ebrahim Firouzi, who remains in prison at the time of writing, was originally arrested in March 2013 on allegations of 'promoting Christian Zionism'. At his trial he was also charged with 'attempting to launch a Christian website, contacting suspicious foreigners and running online church services' – allegations he claims are fabricated. Due for release in January 2015, Firouzi was kept in prison under new charges of 'acting against national security, gathering and collusion' and was sentenced to a further five years in jail.¹³ His continued imprisonment directly contradicts his international right to FoRB, with his right to a fair trial also seriously undermined.



Formerly imprisoned in Iran, for his Christian faith, Wahid is now a church leader and has participated in ex-prisoner trauma care training.

China has seen its World Watch List persecution score rise from 57/100 in 2018 to 65/100 in 2019. Reports indicate that police have been given quotas for the number of Christians they are required to arrest in Liaoning's Dalian city. In September 2018, police stations were given a 'new quarterly quota assessment plan' with 'particular requirements' in relation to the number of religious arrests. Those who arrest individuals from the Falun Gong religion score the highest number of 'points', while local church leaders also provide points for the police station that successfully makes the arrest.¹⁴ With the loss of the station chief's job if quotas are not fulfilled, there is no doubt that the arrest of Christians and other religious minorities has now become incentivised in Dalian city.¹⁵

¹³ 'Iran: staggering number of Christians arrested – 114 in a week', World Watch Monitor, 5 December 2018.

¹⁴ Junying, P, 'Arrest believers or get fired', Bitter Winter, 31 October 2018.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ 'Indonesia: Christian politician accused of blasphemy for opposing Sharia-based bylaws', World Watch Monitor, 22 November 2018.

¹⁷ 'Bangladesh PM says anyone who offends Islam will be prosecuted', World Watch Monitor, 7 November 2018.

Case study 3: Blasphemy

Religious practice has always relied on freedom of expression – the sharing of views, theological debate and the changing of one's mind. Furthermore, the freedom to give or hear an address or to sing in shared worship is a fundamental part of religious ritual and sacrament. When this right is removed, it also strips away the very core of religious practice and identity.



Former Jakarta Governor, and Christian, Basuki Cahaya Purnama (known as Ahok) was sent to jail for blasphemy because he accused his political opponents of using Quranic verses to stop Muslims from voting for him.

A growing number of World Watch List countries are legislating for blasphemy or tightening their blasphemy laws. This legislation often gags those who have different religious views from those of the state – and strips people of their right to openly discuss, criticise and debate religious ideas. In 2018, as the presence of Islamic fundamentalism has grown in Indonesia, accusations of blasphemy have increased with it. For instance, in 2018 a Christian politician was reported to the police by a conservative Muslim organisation for stating that her political party did not agree with Sharia (Islamic law).¹⁶ Likewise, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh stated in November 2018 that anyone who 'pronounces offensive comments' against Islam will be prosecuted.¹⁷

A growing number of World Watch List countries are legislating for blasphemy or tightening their blasphemy laws.

This heightening control over what non-Muslims can publicly say in Indonesia and Bangladesh has happened within the wider context of the continued misuse of blasphemy legislation in Pakistan. Since the insertion of a specific clause punishing blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad into Pakistan's penal code in 1986, at least 150 Christians, 564 Muslims, 459 Ahmadis and 21 Hindus have been jailed under blasphemy charges. Prior to the insertion of that 1986 clause, only 14 blasphemy cases had been reported.¹⁸ While 2018 saw the acquittal of the high profile case of Asia Bibi, who was sentenced to death on blasphemy charges in 2010,¹⁹ the law continues to impede upon Christians as they live in constant fear of accusations of blasphemy by their neighbours, colleagues or peers in school.

Case study 4: Attending a place of worship

Attending a designated space, building or home to worship is a fundamental part of practising a religion. As individuals come together, a 'congregation' is formed and believers find strength in praying, discussing and singing together. The right to form a religious congregation without interference is key to both the international right to FoRB as well as article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the right to association and peaceful assembly.

However, in a number of Central Asian countries the state is fearful of any groups which meet together and so they purposefully attempt to shrink the space in which civil society can operate. In relation to Christian worship this regularly manifests itself in raids on churches and attempts to hinder Christians from meeting together. It is because of

this that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan score 15/17 persecution points in the 'church life' persecution sphere.

Despite claiming increased 'religious tolerance' and 'religious dialogue',²⁰ the rights of Kazakhstan's Christians continued to be curtailed throughout 2018. For instance, in just the first six months of the year at least 79 individuals, religious communities or organisations were prosecuted in Kazak courts for religious activities. A Pentecostal Christian and 14 Baptists were sentenced²¹ and churches which do not have the correct government permits were regularly raided. This was the case in January 2018 when the Council of Churches' Baptist congregation in Oral was raided during a service. In line with its article 18 rights, the church chooses to meet without state permission. Six of its members were handed fines by police, which were only cancelled after numerous complaints were made.²²



Despite the dangers of meeting together, Christians in Central Asia continue to do so. Pictured is a secret woman's discipleship meeting on International Women's Day in March 2018.

With FoRB at the centre of the world's greatest crises and acting as a warning sign for a range of other rights, it really is the issue of our time and must be at the centre of all foreign policy and development decisions taken by the UK government.

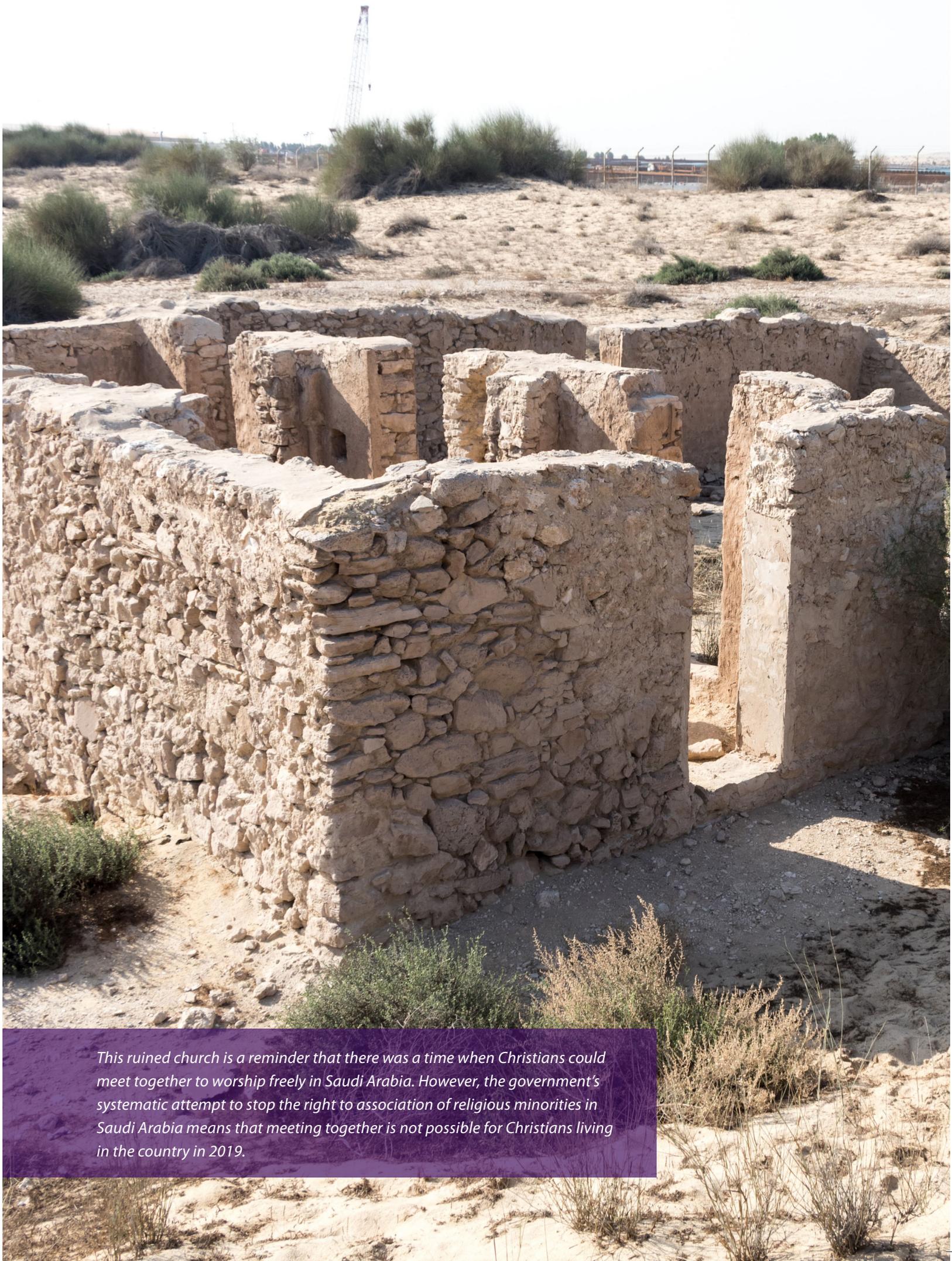
¹⁸ Lowry, L, 'Five things Christians need to know about Asia Bibi and the Church in Pakistan', Open Doors USA, 31 October 2018.

¹⁹ Asif, A, 'Pakistani Christian gets life for blasphemy despite learning difficulties', World Watch Monitor, 26 October 2018.

²⁰ Corley, F, Kinahan, J, 'Kazakhstan: Religious freedom survey 2018', Forum 18, 4 September 2018.

²¹ Corley, F, 'Kazakhstan: 79 known administrative prosecutions in six months', Forum 18, 4 July 2018.

²² *ibid.*



This ruined church is a reminder that there was a time when Christians could meet together to worship freely in Saudi Arabia. However, the government's systematic attempt to stop the right to association of religious minorities in Saudi Arabia means that meeting together is not possible for Christians living in the country in 2019.

The temperature is rising...

Once again, 11 of the World Watch List top 50 countries are designated as countries of extreme persecution. North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, India and Syria each have 81/100 persecution points or more. These are countries where Christians experience extreme levels of violence and hostility. Full and free exercise of the Christian faith is either extremely dangerous or prohibited within society, where churches may be banned or under government control, or where one's Christian identity can be enough to attract persecution.

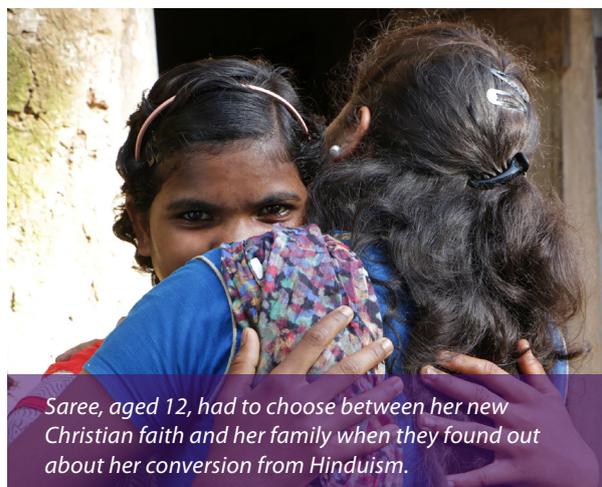
But persecution is also rising in countries well beyond the top 11. Christians living in the first 40 countries on the World Watch List are now at risk of either extreme or very high levels of persecution. If we look beyond the top 50 to the 150 countries analysed by Open Doors as part of its World Watch research, Christians living in more than a third of the world's countries, 73 out of 195,²³ are now facing high levels of persecution or worse. These are unprecedented levels of persecution and add weight to the case that pursuing the international right to FoRB must become a key concern for the UK government in 2019.

India

India has entered the top ten for the first time in World Watch List history. Just five years ago no one would have believed it possible. In 2014, India ranked at 28 with a persecution score of 55/100. Since then India has climbed up the ranking at an unprecedented pace. In 2019 India has a persecution score of 83/100. When it comes to religious freedom, India, the world's largest democracy and the country which taught the world the way of 'non-violence', now sits alongside Iran and Syria. As levels of violence have continued to rise, and false accusations and arrests of church leaders have multiplied, India has become almost unrecognisable for Christians living in the worst-offending regions.

²³ Countries recognised by the UN.

²⁴ Agenzia Fides, 'Africa/Somalia – A small community of Somali Christians live their faith by hiding', 28 February 2018.



Saree, aged 12, had to choose between her new Christian faith and her family when they found out about her conversion from Hinduism.

Somalia

Somalia's Christian community continues to exist in a context of great danger, with persecution from family, society and extremists a daily reality for this small group of Christians. Fr. Steffan Tollu, the military chaplain of the Italian contingent of the European Union training mission in Somalia, gave evidence of just how dangerous life has become for Christians. Elderly Christians in Mogadishu were experiencing high levels of persecution from their own grandchildren, who have been radicalised as Somalia has turned towards extremist Islam since the 1990s. Some were even reported to have been murdered by their grandchildren.²⁴

Libya

A lawless state, Libya is a dangerous country at the best of times. But with religious identity added to the mix, Libya can be lethal. Libya's Christian population remains invisible, hiding from the watchful eye of family, society, state and extremists who would, if they discovered Libya's Christian community, commit murder without hesitation. In 2018 trusted field sources reported the murder, slavery and abuse of scores of Christian migrants whose religious identity was discovered as they made their way through Libya.

Paying the price twice: class

India's Dalits have historically been known as 'untouchables' because they are considered to be impure.²⁵ Despite being outlawed in Article 17 of the Indian Constitution, the caste system is still a reality in India today.²⁶ As the lowest members of the Hindu class or 'caste' system, the Dalits are regularly abused and mistreated.

A high proportion of Indian Christians are also Dalits – some estimate up to 70 per cent. With the 2019 World Watch List indicating escalating levels of persecution against Christians in India, a high proportion of these Christians are doubly vulnerable on the basis of their class and religion.

For instance, in April 2018, neighbours reported the death of Daniel, an elderly pastor living in Andhra Pradesh. Daniel's family and fellow villagers found his death suspicious as it occurred only days after he complained to the police about money that was missing from his bank account. Villagers who knew Daniel believed he could easily be taken advantage of due to his status as both a Dalit and a Christian.²⁷ One villager, who did not wish to be named, said:

"They [the police] get bought for money easily. We challenge them by asking: 'Why has this happened to Pastor Daniel alone?' [It is] because he comes from the lower strata of society, and he is a good Christian whose voice they can ignore, and rob him of his money. They can enjoy his money and kill him brutally. This is what you get if you are a Dalit and a Christian in this country."²⁸

Daniel's fellow villagers complained that the inspector in charge of his case was a poor choice for the investigation because he would not act towards a Christian Dalit in a fair manner.²⁹

This disregard for the rights of Christian Dalits is compounded by the fact that they are denied the benefits and protection that other Dalits receive.

Under the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950, only Hindu Dalits were afforded certain privileges and concessions as Scheduled Castes. Dalit Sikhs and Dalit Buddhists were later included in 1956 and 1990. However, Christians and Muslims are denied affirmative action in employment and education, which this legislation provides for Dalits of other religious backgrounds.

Furthermore, since Dalit Christians and Muslims are not considered to be of the 'Scheduled Caste', they do not fall under the purview of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. This offers additional legal protection and rehabilitation for victims of caste-based violence.³⁰ Despite numerous recommendations in government reports such as the Mandal Commission in 1980, the Sachar Commission in 2006, and most recently the National Commission for Minorities in 2008, the law still denies this affirmative action to Dalit Christians and Muslims because of their religion.³¹

As the situation for Christians in India deteriorates, it is crucial that the most vulnerable among them are protected. If you are a parliamentarian, please see page 27 for how you can use your voice to support vulnerable Christians in India.

²⁵ 'India's Dalits still fighting untouchability', BBC News, 27 June 2012.

²⁶ The Sachar Commission, a report commissioned by the Prime Minister of India to ascertain the economic and social commission of Muslims in the country in 2006, stated that 'by all available evidence we do find the caste system to be an all-pervading social phenomenon of India shared by almost all Indian communities irrespective of religious persuasions'.

²⁷ Ravinder, T, 'India: case of murdered Dalit pastor not taken seriously, say victim's friends', World Watch Monitor, 27 April 2018.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Government of India (Ministry of Tribal Affairs), 'The Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Prevention of Atrocity Act 1989'.

³¹ Also see Akkara, A, 'India minister says no special caste status for Christians', World Watch Monitor, 27 October 2014.



Dalit children like these are discriminated against in India on the basis of their class. If you add the Christian faith into the equation, life becomes very difficult as demonstrated in the story of Daniel on page 11.

Image used for illustrative purposes

Paying the price twice: gender

With little economic, social or political agency within the societies in which they live, Christian women often find that they are specifically vulnerable to persecution because of their gender and their faith. Far from being gender-blind, persecution exploits all the available vulnerabilities specific to women.

The most obvious of these is sexual violence. Rape is a common characteristic in the persecution of Christian women in 17 World Watch List countries, with other forms of sexual assault listed for half the countries on the list.³²

Persecutors know that by violating a woman's body, the persecution runs deep. Not only does this bring shame on the woman, but it can also bring shame upon the husband. In doing this, the insidious nature of sexual violence undermines the family. Where a husband and wife are torn apart, tension is brought into the home and children can suffer gravely. When families suffer, the church suffers too. Sexual violence as a tool of persecution creates a ripple effect of persecuting factors that fracture families and communities.

Closely connected to sexual violence, is the issue of abduction, as it often includes forced marriage and rape. Seven of the countries analysed included abduction as a well-known way in which Christian women are targeted because of their faith. In Pakistan, abduction is a real and present danger for Christian women and families. A report by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan found that at least 1,000 girls from Hindu and Christian families are forced to marry Muslim men every year.³³

Another specific factor facing women of the persecuted church is house arrest. While men are more likely to be confined in government detention facilities, the confinement of women is more likely to be family enforced. That is, women who convert

to Christianity regularly find themselves confined to the house. While being confined to the home is not necessarily better or worse than being confined in a government detention centre, this trend is significant. Being confined to the home is an invisible constraint which women have to bear. When horrific acts are carried out on Christian men in government detention, the visibility of their arrest and detention means that they can benefit from advocacy. A Christian woman locked away by family members may go unnoticed for years. Placing women under house arrest is a tool of persecution in all Central Asian countries on the World Watch List as well as Somalia, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The following pages illustrate the specific vulnerabilities faced by Christian women in two World Watch List countries: Nigeria and the Central African Republic. It also highlights the way in which faith-based trauma care is key to their recovery.

³² This analysis of gender specific persecution was carried out by Open Doors' World Watch Research unit in 30 World Watch List countries in 2017.

³³ Pakistan: Events of 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2018.

Tackling trauma

Open Doors has found that faith-based trauma care is essential for overcoming the damage caused by gender-based violence. It can heal and restore the way individuals see themselves, the way husbands view their wives and the way communities treat those who have experienced trauma. In highly religious societies, it rebuilds cohesive communities.

VERLAINE AND PASTOR DANWAY*

Verlaine and her family live in the town of Bossangoa in the Central African Republic. When the Muslim Seleka Alliance came to their village, they fled to their piece of land deep in the bush.

The family were found by members of the Multinational Force for Central Africa, soldiers who were supposed to protect them. But they took Verlaine and her family to a camp where they tied up her husband.



They then took a can of kerosene and burnt him alive. As a traumatised widow, Verlaine was left in an extremely vulnerable state.

Open Doors was able to provide Verlaine with support through counselling and trauma care. But it's not just Verlaine who has been strengthened by the trauma counselling – her entire community has benefitted too. Pastor Danway*, who pastors the church in Bossangoa, is one of the three caregivers who regularly visits Verlaine. Open Doors has been able to provide mental health



training to Pastor Danway, who said:

"We thank God that Open Doors taught us how to talk to people like Verlaine. We started by listening to her, over and over again. Only later could we begin to counsel her... It is important for the healing process of traumatised people that we encourage them to be active again to start a small business... When they have something in their hands to take care of, it boosts their self-confidence and then it is easier for them to deal with what happened to them."



**name changed for security reasons*

ESTHER

Esther knew Boko Haram fighters were close and so her family began living in the caves beyond the village for safety. Feeling unwell, she returned to the village to buy food, the fever took hold and she lay down to rest. The next thing she heard was gunshots.

They took many captives, separating Muslims and Christians. Esther, along with the other 'infidels', were marched deep into the forest. She was forced to marry a Boko Haram militant, becoming his fourth wife and fell pregnant with his child.

When Esther was finally reunited with

her grandparents, they took her into their home. But knowing that Esther was pregnant with a Boko Haram fighter's child,



many in the village ostracised her. With constant humiliation inflicted on her by villagers, she gave birth to Rebecca.

Through Open Doors' local church partners in Nigeria, Esther has received trauma care and support, helping her to process what she has experienced. This has greatly

impacted the way she understands herself and her daughter. While the mockery she and Rebecca endured from villagers and even family members for being 'Boko Haram' was painful, Esther has learnt that they are not defined by Boko Haram or their past.

Esther said after receiving trauma care

that even when others call her baby 'baby Boko', she no longer feels the pain that she used to feel because, as she told an Open Doors staff member: "I know that's not who my baby is".



CHARITY

Charity was kidnapped by Boko Haram when she was out walking with her husband. While her husband managed to escape, Charity failed to get away. In captivity, the Boko Haram fighters refused to feed or clothe her properly. When she tried to escape they caught her and she was forcefully married and converted to Islam. Charity was raped and became pregnant, giving birth to a baby girl name Rahila.

After three years in captivity, the Nigerian military rescued Charity



and she returned to be with her husband. However, life wasn't easy and her husband beat her for returning with another man's child. Despite telling him that she had not fallen pregnant out of choice, he wouldn't listen.

Through the assistance of Open Doors, Charity has received trauma care to help her deal with the multiple devastating incidents she has experienced. Amongst other exercises this included art therapy, opportunities to share her experience in a safe environment and theological reflection.



Charity was the primary recipient of the trauma care. But the impact of the care has gone much further. Charity has seen a difference in her husband – as he began to read some of the trauma care material he stopped beating her. While he finds it hard to be a father to Rahila, he has begun to acknowledge her. Early signs of progress are becoming evident.



Around the world, religion matters. While religion and religious language might not be considered essential to everyday life in Western Europe, religion is an entry point to vulnerable communities elsewhere, such as those Esther, Charity and Verlaine belong to. When the UK government considers its development projects, and particularly trauma counselling, the language of faith and spirituality is vital because it is so engrained in the culture and the lives of the victims it serves. Victims often relate to religious imagery and concepts and gain strength from care which uses the lexicon of faith. Using faith leaders to facilitate this care is key because they are trusted and can go where others cannot.

Paying the price twice: ethnicity

Ethnic and religious identities are often intimately connected. As a result, when a person is persecuted because of their different ethnicity and faith, the impact of that persecution is often compounded.

Many will be familiar with the Rohingya community in Myanmar. This is an ethnic community which practises a different faith to the country's Buddhist majority. The Muslims of Rakhine state have been denied citizenship because their combined religious and ethnic identity is perceived by the state as a threat.³⁴

However, the Rohingya are not the only ethnic minority in Myanmar who are deemed as a threat because of their difference. Much less reported is the plight of the Kachin community in Myanmar's mountainous northerly region. This ethnic minority community is thought to be approximately 85 per cent Christian.³⁵

There is evidence that the Kachin people are mistreated by the Myanmar government and army because of their Christian faith, which stands in contrast to the country's majority Buddhist faith.

When Myanmar gained independence, the Kachin people were promised equality and self-determination, but conflict broke out when the military seized control of their territory in 1962. Since then, thousands have died and more than 120,000 Kachin people have been displaced. Myanmar's army has been accused of blocking aid from reaching civilians. This has prompted human rights activists to question whether the denial of humanitarian aid to this vulnerable group is being used as a weapon of war.³⁶

The National Ceasefire Agreement was brokered between the Myanmar government and eight 'rebel groups' in October 2015, but the Kachin Independence Army has been unwilling to lay down its arms while Kachin villages continue to be bombed.³⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council representative, Yanghee Lee, warned in March 2018 that the peace process with minority groups is losing momentum in Myanmar³⁸ and any future agreement with the Kachin people now looks unlikely.

There is evidence that the Kachin people are mistreated by the Myanmar government and army because of their Christian faith, which stands in contrast to the country's majority Buddhist faith. Reports are common of discriminatory acts being carried out against the Kachin people on the basis of their faith. Unless they convert to Buddhism, they can be taken for forced labour and denied access to education. It has also been reported that Myanmar soldiers have been encouraged to marry Kachin women to convert them to Buddhism.³⁹ Furthermore, a report in July 2018 stated that more than 60 churches in Kachin state had been destroyed in the previous 18 months, with a third turned into Buddhist pagodas.⁴⁰ This highlights that the systematic abuse of the Kachin people is connected not only to their ethnicity but also to their religion.

³⁴ 'Religion and the Persecution of Rohingya Muslims' The Berkley Centre, 24 October 2017 and Mufford, T., 'Rohingya Muslims Pay the Ultimate Price for Their Religious and Ethnic Identity', The Berkley Centre, 19 October 2017.

³⁵ Open Doors approximates that the Christian population in Kachin is 85 per cent, while others such as Minority Rights Group approximate between 66 per cent and 90 per cent.

³⁶ 'Myanmar: end restrictions on humanitarian aid in war-torn Kachin state' Fortify Rights, Yangon, 30 August 2018.

³⁷ Hogan, L., 'Slow genocide: Myanmar's invisible war on the Kachin Christian minority', The Guardian, 14 May 2018.

³⁸ 'Myanmar: UN expert calls for accountability over violence in Rakhine State' OHCHR, Geneva, 12 March 2018.

³⁹ 'Kachin' Minority Rights Group, undated.

⁴⁰ 'Myanmar: Army accused of destroying churches and turning them into Buddhist temples', World Watch Monitor, 6 July 2018.

It is hard being a Christian in an all Muslim people group, and even harder when the people group is disdained by the government.

As an ethnic community, the Rohingya Muslims have experienced violent persecution at the hands of the Myanmar state. But when a Rohingya person chooses to convert to Christianity, they also experience persecution within their own ethnic community. They become outcasts among outcasts.

Photo: Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh where Rohingya Christian converts are based.



Abraham, pictured here, lived at the Children's Centre supported by Open Doors in Colombia to protect him against recruitment by guerrilla groups.



Paying the price twice: age

That children are specifically targeted because of their faith can be hard to swallow. But the reality is that the perpetrators of religious persecution often look for the most vulnerable in a community and seek to take advantage of their innocence.

The children of the persecuted church are often targeted so as to threaten, scare and intimidate their parents. In regions of Colombia where armed guerrilla fighters⁴¹ are in control, Christian families are often mistreated and abused by the guerrilla groups. The abduction and murder of pastors whose religious faith runs contrary to the values of these groups is a stark reality.⁴² These guerrilla groups despise Christian pastors because they often refuse to become involved in their illegal activities and attempt to preach their Christian faith to their members.

Furthermore, these groups often target Christian children. There have been reports of guerrilla groups arriving at schools and demanding that the children of Christian leaders are handed over. Open Doors has received reports that Christian children are even specifically targeted for enlistment as a form of attack against Christian parents.

The children of the persecuted church are often targeted so as to threaten, scare and intimidate their parents.

For instance, Abraham had to move away from his home and family. As the child of a Christian family, he was at high risk of being recruited by the guerrillas. When he arrived at the Children's Centre run by Open Doors in Colombia, it became clear that the manipulation and indoctrination of the guerrilla group was taking hold. Abraham told the workers he wanted to join the fighters and drew pictures of men with guns shooting people. His arrival at the centre may have come just in time.

A course at the Children's Centre, entitled 'My Life Project', has been particularly beneficial to young adults who need guidance in thinking about what they might do with their lives. On this course the students are encouraged to think about their long-term goals. This gives perspective to those from turbulent backgrounds.

By housing Abraham in the Children's Centre he was protected from recruitment by the fighters, and his parents knew that he was safe. He no longer wishes to join the guerrillas and has gone to university. Even so, it is hard for children like Abraham as they may not see their families for more than a year at a time. They also worry about their parents who continue to be targeted by the guerrillas.

⁴¹ This can include a range of groups from ELN, FARC dissidents or criminal gangs.
⁴² Open Door USA, 'Stories of Christian persecution | Children of Colombia'; YouTube, 7 January 2013.

Countries of special concern

China

China's climb from 43 on the World Watch List in 2018 to 27 in 2019 is a serious cause for concern. In the five spheres analysed by World Watch Research, China's highest score is 'church life'. This is because President Xi believes that if the Communist Party can control the church it can be used as a tool to build a socialist society with Chinese characteristics. He is pursuing this through the government's 'active guidance' which encourages religious groups to 'adapt to socialist society'. For President Xi, a vibrant church undermines the Communist Party's authority while a conforming church only makes it stronger.



As sanctions on churches in China scale up, small groups of Chinese Christians continue to meet together for prayer.

The suppression of church life has been widespread in China. The new Regulations on Religious Affairs came into force in China in February. Since then, a focus on prohibiting children and youth from hearing religious teaching has seen nursery and Sunday schools closed down, summer camps banned, and churches forced to place signs at their entrances forbidding anyone under 18 to enter.⁴³ Some Chinese churches have been pressured to fly the national flag higher than the cross and sing the national anthem before services.⁴⁴

⁴³ 'China Government campaign in Henan stops minors from entering church', World Watch Monitor, 9 May 2018.

⁴⁴ 'China: clampdown reaches Christians in Henan', World Watch Monitor, 11 April 2018.

⁴⁵ 'Chinese Christians told to believe in President Xi, not Jesus' World Watch Monitor, 16 November 2017.

⁴⁶ 'China: 'For Christians, the "grey" area is shrinking', World Watch Monitor, 16 April 2018.

⁴⁷ 'Algerian pastor 'amazed' as three churches told they can reopen', World Watch Monitor, 13 June 2018.

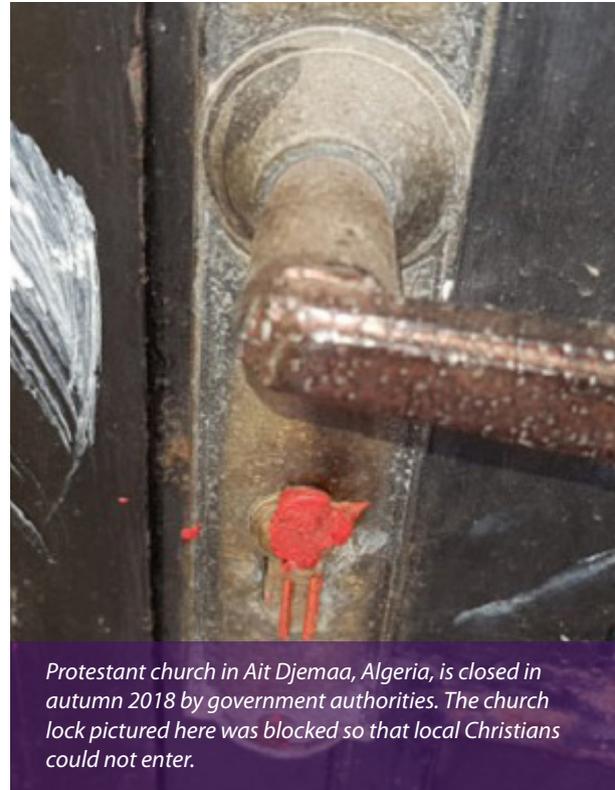
⁴⁸ 'Algerian government allows three churches to re-open in June, but now closes another', World Watch Monitor, 16 July 2018.

For President Xi, a vibrant church undermines the Communist Party's authority while a conforming church only makes it stronger.

In one area, a few Roman Catholic churches were told to replace pictures of Jesus with pictures of President Xi.⁴⁵ Reports in April 2018 also indicated that the online sale of Bibles had been banned.⁴⁶

Algeria

Algeria's rise on the World Watch List from 42 in 2018 to 22 in 2019 is mainly due to a crackdown on churches and Christian activity. While some previously closed churches were able to reopen in 2018⁴⁷ a number of other churches have been forced to close.⁴⁸ It is likely that this is because Christians in Algeria have become more open about their faith, raising alarm bells from the state.



Protestant church in Ait Djemaa, Algeria, is closed in autumn 2018 by government authorities. The church lock pictured here was blocked so that local Christians could not enter.

Russia

The situation for Christians living in Russia has worsened, particularly in the Chechnya and Dagestan regions of the country. Levels of violence, which were previously relatively low (2/17),⁴⁹ have increased (5/17). Five Orthodox Christian women were killed and five other Christians were injured in a church in Kizlyar, Dagestan, when it was attacked by a gunman thought to be linked to radical Islam.⁵⁰ Seven Christians were also killed in a church attack in Chechnya in May 2018.⁵¹ Islamic State has claimed responsibility.⁵²

The region to watch

South East Asia was heralded as the next big thing in 2018's World Watch List report, and it remains the region to watch in 2019. Indonesia's violence score has almost doubled as significant bomb attacks took place in May 2018 in three separate churches.⁵³ Police have connected the attack to an 'Islamic-State inspired network'.⁵⁴ These violent attacks have taken place in the context of growing repression against Christians in Indonesia whereby churches have been closed due to permit disputes⁵⁵ and Sunday schools may be required to register with the state.⁵⁶

Indonesia's violence score has almost doubled as significant bomb attacks took place in May 2018 in three separate churches. Police have connected the attack to an 'Islamic-State inspired network'.

Myanmar's violence score has also increased significantly as violent attacks against the country's Kachin and Shan people, who are predominantly Christian, continued throughout 2018.⁵⁷ In Shan

State the United Wa State Army has attacked and abducted Christians and has worked to see churches closed across the region in 2018.



Robby Pujianto, pictured here, is a victim of the May 2018 church bombings in Indonesia. He was thrown six metres when the first bomb exploded, injuring his face and back.

⁴⁹ The Russian Federation was not on the World Watch List in 2018, but analysts at Open Doors' World Watch Research recorded a score of 2/17 for violence when analysing the 150 countries in the study.

⁵⁰ 'Dagestan church attacker linked to militant group, as unlikely hero emerges', World Watch Monitor, 23 February 2018.

⁵¹ 'Chechnya: Seven killed in Orthodox church attack', World Watch Monitor, 21 May 2018.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ 'Surabaya church attacks: One family responsible, police say', BBC News, 13 May 2018.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ 'Indonesia: Three churches closed in permits dispute', World Watch Monitor, 3 October 2018.

⁵⁶ 'Indonesia: New religious education bill requires registration of Sunday schools', World Watch Monitor, 30 October 2018.

⁵⁷ Hogan, L., 'Slow genocide: Myanmar's invisible war on the Kachin Christian minority', The Guardian, 14 May 2018 and 'Churches destroyed, priests questioned in Myanmar's Shan state' World Watch Monitor, 20 September 2018.

Signs of hope

Iraq

Iraq has slipped out of the top ten on the World Watch List for the first time since 2010 – and is now ranked at 13. Its persecution score has dropped from 86/100 to 79/100 with a slight decrease in each persecution category. As Daesh has been pushed out of Iraq, fewer cases of discrimination and violence have been reported against Christians. For instance, in the once Daesh-occupied town of Karamles in the Nineveh plains, reports of the town slowly returning to normal have been received as Open Doors' partners have supported the local church to reconstruct houses and create employment opportunities.⁵⁸ Even so, Iraq remains high on the World Watch List at 13, and Christians in Iraq remain uneasy about their situation, with the sense that any future instability could wipe out the Christian community for good.⁵⁹

In the once Daesh-occupied town of Karamles in the Nineveh plains, reports of the town slowly returning to normal have been received as the local church works to reconstruct houses and create employment opportunities.

Malaysia

After a relatively peaceful year for Christians in Malaysia, the country's score has decreased from 65/100 to 60/100 – with Malaysia dropping from 23 to 42 on the World Watch List. Malaysia is no longer designated as a country with 'very high' persecution but has dropped to the 'high' persecution category. However, while any sense of peace and stability for Malaysian Christians is to be celebrated, it's important to remember that Pastor Raymond Koh,⁶⁰ allegedly kidnapped by individuals connected to senior Malaysian police officers, is still missing.⁶¹

⁵⁸ 'Nineveh Plains Christians 'slowly returning to normal' World Watch Monitor, 8 August 2018.

⁵⁹ 'If this is not genocide, then what is?' asks Iraqi archbishop, World Watch Monitor, 17 October 2018.

⁶⁰ See: 'Update: Son of abducted Malaysian pastor suspects he may have been murdered', World Watch Monitor, 2 March 2018.

⁶¹ 'Raymond Koh's wife 'expects justice' as inquiry into Malaysian pastor's abduction ends', World Watch Monitor, 10 December 2018.

Egypt

While there are 3,700 churches waiting to be registered in Egypt, some 340 churches received approval from the Egyptian state by the end of October 2018. This slow but significant move in permission being given for Christians to use public buildings as places of worship is a small but welcome development.



A newly built church in Upper Egypt.

Open Doors advocacy

Open Doors UK and Ireland is part of a global NGO network which has supported and strengthened persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries for upwards of 60 years. The organisation's UK Advocacy Department is well-known at Westminster. It is in regular contact with Ministers and civil servants 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 and at the European Union in Brussels and Strasbourg
- Nationally: in a number of key capitals, including London, Paris, Berlin 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. This is to ensure Open Doors can speak up for those most in need and can communicate 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, through its work with local partners and churches in more than 60 countries, Open Doors was able to identify the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women from within the persecuted church. This led to the commissioning

of research into the gender-dynamics of persecution, which has influenced changes in the field practices of Open Doors. This in turn will drive global advocacy in 2019 on the double vulnerability of women from religious minorities. The aim is to mainstream an understanding of this into government and international policies tackling sexual violence in conflict.



Open Doors CEO, Henrietta Blyth, discusses the portraits of Nigerian Christian women targeted for their faith and gender with the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief and Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and Canon Sarah Snyder at an exhibition organised by Open Doors and BRAC-UK at Lambeth Palace, November 2018.

If you are a member of parliament or a 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 and Ireland's Advocacy Department by emailing advocacy@opendoorsuk.org You can also see the recommendations for action on page 27.

Hope for the Middle East

The *Hope for the Middle East* campaign is a seven year campaign working to strengthen Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria. Open Doors presented the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign petition to the Prime Minister in December 2017. Since then, Open Doors has been working hard to take this awareness to the next level to bring about tangible change for Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria.

The wheels of change often turn slowly, but the campaign's impact is already becoming evident. In July, the Prime Minister announced the appointment of Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad to a newly created role as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on FoRB.⁶² Speaking about his new role, Lord Ahmad shared some of the Prime Minister's motivations as well as his own reflections. We were very pleased to hear him mention Father Daniel, the Open Doors partner in Iraq, who had presented the *Hope for the Middle East* petition to the Prime Minister.⁶³

Lord Ahmad said, "Father Daniel from the Nineveh Plains in Iraq, who met our Prime Minister Theresa May – what did he do? He handed her a Bible, retrieved from a church burnt to the ground by Daesh. That survival of the Holy Bible symbolised the hope that Christians in Iraq continue to hold in their hearts, that once again they will be allowed to freely practise their faith in safety in their homeland, in their country."⁶⁴

The wheels of change often turn slowly, but the campaign's impact is already becoming evident.

The UK government has also sought to involve Iraqi religious minorities in reconciliation programmes and has consulted with religious minorities in

Iraq in order to get their insight on policy. Open Doors was also greatly heartened to see His Royal Highness Prince Charles speak out on behalf of the Christian community in the Middle East at a Westminster Abbey service in December 2018.

The impact of the *Hope for the Middle East* petition can also be seen beyond the UK. After numerous meetings with Open Doors, the United States Government and UN Development Agency released \$55M to help religious minorities rebuild in Iraq.⁶⁵ The US has also created a Genocide and Recovery Response Program with an initial budget of \$10M.⁶⁶ The fund's preliminary focus will be on individual victims and households trying to re-establish themselves in Iraq post-Daesh. The UN Secretary General has also publicly expressed concern for Christians in Iraq and Syria.⁶⁷ And more than 40 Members of the European Parliament have supported accountability for crimes against Christians in Iraq through Open Doors and Middle East Concern's campaign for the creation of a 'National Accountability Mechanism'.⁶⁸



This family fled their home in Karamles when the town was invaded by Daesh in 2014. By the end of 2016, Daesh was driven out of Karamles and in 2018 the family were able to return to their restored home.

⁶² 'Lord Ahmad appointed as PM's Special Envoy to promote religious freedom', UK Government, 4 July 2018.

⁶³ 'Lord Ahmad's Human Rights speech', UK Government, 3 August 2018.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ 'US and UN strike \$55 million deal for Iraq's religious minorities', World Watch Monitor, 12 July 2018.

⁶⁶ 'US Agency for international development administrator Mark Green's remarks at the Genocide and Persecution Response Programme roundtable', USAID, 9 November 2018.

⁶⁷ 'UN chief 'personally concerned' about return of Christians to Iraq and Syria', World Watch Monitor, 21 June 2018.

⁶⁸ See: Open Doors, Served, Middle East Concern, 'National Accountability Mechanism for Iraq and Syria Proposal for EU parliament', published in World Watch Monitor, June 2017.

But the situation remains delicate and more action is needed in order to give stability and confidence to the Christian community in Iraq. When Father Daniel was recently interviewed by an Open Doors staff member at the trauma centre in which he works in Erbil, he reminded us of how much more there is still to do.

He said, “We feel that we don’t have any rights in our country. So we need the help of someone who has the power to make our voice heard in the Iraqi government. Whenever we have an issue, we go to the government, but there is no answer.”

Furthermore, Father Daniel still has concerns for the future of the church in Iraq: “Today the existence of Christianity is threatened. It’s one of the oldest communities in Iraq. Christianity started from these places. It’s a great pity to find today that Christians are shrinking from this country,” he said.

Church leaders such as Father Daniel often feel alone and forgotten. They strive to strengthen the Christian community in Iraq so that it can flourish once again, but are disheartened as Christians continue to leave the country.



Father Daniel with Open Doors President, Eddie Lyle in Erbil, September 2018.

The situation for Christians in Syria is also tense. The 2019 World Watch List highlights that despite some improvements, things have worsened once again, with Syria’s persecution score increasing from 76/100 to 82/100. With many still displaced in Syria, Open Doors’ commitment to keep supporting the most vulnerable who are left behind – the elderly, the chronically ill, those with young children – remains strong.

“We feel that we don’t have any rights in our country. So we need the help of someone who has the power to make our voice heard in the Iraqi government. Whenever we have an issue, we go to the government, but there is no answer.”

The campaign to bring real and tangible hope to Iraq and Syria continues into 2019.

If you are a parliamentarian, please read the recommendations on page 27 to see how you can play your part in supporting leaders like Daniel to bring about hope in the Middle East.

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.⁶⁹

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 is rarely the dominant reality for Christians who live in World Watch List countries. For each country surveyed, scores for the six categories are combined to create a total out of a possible hundred. Those 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 amongst other countries going unrecorded due to the difficulty in verifying reports in these places. It is therefore likely that the research findings underestimate 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, credibility and reliability.

Following 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 specialist knowledge on the countries surveyed are asked to comment and 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 the experience of the persecuted church is carefully triangulated with academic, expert and media analysis, leading to well-rounded, nuanced and accurate research findings.

⁶⁹ 150 countries are assessed for persecution levels in the overall study.

Recommendations

To combat escalating persecution...

We urge the **Department for International Development (DfID)** and the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)** to ensure that the double vulnerability of women from religious and ethnic minorities is mainstreamed throughout their work and strategies for tackling sexual violence in conflict.

In all of its development projects, but particularly its trauma counselling work, we urge **DfID** to recognise the religious identity of those it is working with, providing specific care for these needs. This could be done in many cases through the appropriate faith leaders who are trusted and can go where others cannot. Both **DfID** and the **FCO** should also ensure that all personnel are fully equipped to recognise the religious element of what are often perceived as simply ethnic conflicts.

We welcome the **FCO** review into UK support for persecuted Christians and encourage **DfID** to actively participate in the review.

With 24 of the 30 countries listed by the **FCO** as priority countries also featuring on the 2019 World Watch List, we urge the **FCO** to continue using the All Party Parliamentary Group on FoRB's 2018 'Commentary on the current state of Freedom of Religion or Belief' as a resource for understanding and acting on FoRB violations in these countries.

With India entering the World Watch List top 10...

The **UK government** should actively champion the full observance of article 18 in India. It should also encourage international bodies to speak out strongly against equating ethnic and/or national identity with an exclusive religion or belief system in India.

In doing this, the international community should encourage the Indian Government to amend the classification for Dalits as defined in the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950, to consider Christian and Muslim Dalits as Scheduled Castes, allowing them to benefit equally from affirmative action programmes and special legal protection and rehabilitation when facing caste-based discrimination and violence.

With the UK leaving the EU...

The **UK government** should take any potential opportunity presented by future trade negotiations with World Watch List countries such as China, India, Kazakhstan and Saudi Arabia to champion human rights, in particular the right to FoRB. This should be done by ensuring that human rights expertise is included in every trade delegation.

To parliamentarians...

We ask **parliamentarians** 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. We further encourage you to do all you can to ensure the government takes action on the forthcoming recommendations made by the independent review into the persecution of Christians worldwide, commissioned by the Foreign Secretary and set for publication in 2019.

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

THE 2019 OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST

This map illustrates the 2019 Open Doors World Watch List – a ranking of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.



- | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1 North Korea | 14 Maldives | 27 China | 39 Mexico |
| 2 Afghanistan | 15 Saudi Arabia | 28 Ethiopia | 40 Kenya |
| 3 Somalia | 16 Egypt | 29 Tajikistan | 41 Russian Federation |
| 4 Libya | 17 Uzbekistan | 30 Indonesia | 42 Malaysia |
| 5 Pakistan | 18 Myanmar | 31 Jordan | 43 Kuwait |
| 6 Sudan | 19 Laos | 32 Nepal | 44 Oman |
| 7 Eritrea | 20 Vietnam | 33 Bhutan | 45 United Arab Emirates |
| 8 Yemen | 21 Central African Republic | 34 Kazakhstan | 46 Sri Lanka |
| 9 Iran | 22 Algeria | 35 Morocco | 47 Colombia |
| 10 India | 23 Turkmenistan | 36 Brunei | 48 Bangladesh |
| 11 Syria | 24 Mali | 37 Tunisia | 49 Palestinian Territories |
| 12 Nigeria | 25 Mauritania | 38 Qatar | 50 Azerbaijan |
| 13 Iraq | 26 Turkey | | |

 Extreme levels of persecution

 Very high levels of persecution

 High levels of persecution