

OPEN DOORS GCSE LESSON:

# WHAT IS PERSECUTION? WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

- AIM:** To introduce the concepts of religious freedom and persecution, and to explore why this is an issue.
- AQA:** This lesson will meet these curriculum requirements:  
How Christian churches respond to persecution. Issues of equality, freedom of religion and belief including freedom of religious expression. Religion and belief as a cause of war and violence in the contemporary world.
- EDEXCEL:** The role and importance of the Church in the worldwide community: how and why it works for reconciliation and the problems faced by the persecuted Church
- OCR:** The way in which the Church is being persecuted in the 21st century.
- WJEC EDUQAS:** An example of conflict between personal conviction and the laws of a country. Censorship, freedom of religious expression

## LESSON EXPECTATIONS

Whether you are someone who teaches regularly or someone who is new to school's work, it is important to set expectations for your lesson from the start. This is particularly crucial when speaking about faith which some might find emotive.

You might want to start with a blurb like the one below to explicitly set out the kind of involvement you are expecting from your students.

Hello my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Today as part of your GCSE requirements we are going to be speaking about religious persecution.

Now I am aware that speaking about faith can be a sensitive topic as often we will all have different experiences and opinions. As part of today's session we are going to be asking for your thoughts and getting you to do some partner and group work.

Right at the start I want to be very clear about the expectations of this session. I am expecting every member of this class to:

- Listen to each other
- Respect each other – even if you have different opinions
- Be actively involved in the session – to take part in every element



## STARTER ACTIVITY

### FREEDOM OF RELIGION / 5 MINS

Introduce the topic of freedom of religion – ask students to write down their own definition of what they think this might mean. Ask students to feedback.

You might want to use the below statement from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to give a comprehensive definition.

Freedom of religion: *The right to practise whatever religion one chooses.*

*“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest (or practise) this religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance,”*

**The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

## ACTIVITY 1

### INTRODUCTION TO PERSECUTION / 5 MINS

Encourage your students to participate in this quiz by raising their hands, clapping or cheering for the right answer

#### QUIZ

**1. How much of the world’s population experience religious persecution?**

- a. 11%
- b. 22%
- c. 33%

According to a report\* done for the UK Foreign Office which was published in July 2019, around a third of the world experience religious persecution in some form.

\*The Bishop of Truro’s Independent Review for the UK Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians

**2. Which religion experiences the most persecution around the world?**

- a. Judaism
- b. Christianity
- c. Islam

According to the same report, of all religious persecution, most NGO’s estimate that 80% is directed towards Christians.

**3. Which country is the most dangerous place to be a Christian?**

- a. Afghanistan
- b. North Korea
- c. Syria

Finish this section by showing the [Open Doors World Watch List Top 10 video\\*](#)

\*This video has been made for a Christian audience so you might want to give a disclaimer at the start that this has been made by a Christian organisation to help Christians understand what persecution looks like.



## ACTIVITY 2

### FOCUS ON NORTH KOREA OR AFGHANISTAN / 20 MINS

Having watched the video, ask the students to write down at least 5 different ways that Christians might experience persecution.

- Violent attacks
- Churches bombed
- Homes destroyed
- Arrest/imprisonment
- Have to keep faith secret – no freedom
- Sent to a labour camp
- Have to sacrifice jobs, security, family
- Falsely accused of blasphemy
- Kidnap
- Forced conversion to another religion
- Sent to a labour camp
- Execution
- Seen as second-class citizens

#### Not on the video but may want to mention:

- Surveillance
- Denied education or employment
- Violence or hostility from your own family
- Denied basic rights like aid or medical treatment

Choose either Afghanistan or North Korea for students, in pairs, to read the information sheet about and then answer the following questions:



### AFGHANISTAN QUESTIONS

#### What religions are allowed in Afghanistan?

- Only Islam – all other religions are illegal.

#### Why are Christians persecuted in Afghanistan?

- To be Afghani is to be Muslim. The government and society are built on Islamic principles and there is no freedom to choose anything else. Leaving Islam is considered a rejection of what it means to be from Afghanistan and is seen as shameful. In Afghanistan, when Islam is shamed there must be consequences.

#### Who are the biggest risk to people who choose to be Christians secretly?

- Family – often immediate family are responsible for restoring honour by either enforcing conversion to Islam or through violence, even death.

#### How are Christians persecuted in Afghanistan?

- Christians have to keep their faith absolutely secret. They are unable to gather together with other Christians. If their faith is discovered they have to flee, or they will likely be killed.

### NORTH KOREA QUESTIONS

#### What religions are allowed in North Korea?

None – everyone must worship the Kim family.

#### Why are Christians persecuted in North Korea?

Because they choose to worship God, not the Kim family.

#### Who are the biggest risk to people who choose to be Christians secretly?

Neighbours – it is thought that up to a third of the population are government spies.

#### How are Christians persecuted in North Korea?

Spied on, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, sent to labour camps, killed.

If time allows watch either [Zabi's story from Afghanistan](#) or [Kim Sang Hwa's video on finding a hidden Bible](#).

Wrap this section up by asking students to reflect on whether they would be willing to risk practising a religion secretly in a place like Afghanistan or North Korea.



## ACTIVITY 3

### WHY DOES PERSECUTION HAPPEN TO CHRISTIANS? / 20 MINS

North Korea is one example, but there are many different reasons why Christians might be persecuted for their faith.

**MATCHING TASK:** Around the room have info sheets about six countries. Ask students to go around the room to read the information and then match the reasons why Christians are persecuted with the right countries.

You might want to do this in pairs or in small groups where they feed back to each other what they have learnt.

**In some countries, the leaders want to be treated like a God – Christians refuse to see them as this and so are seen to be enemies of the state.**

- North Korea

**Some countries insist that religion and national identity are the same thing. To be a Christian then is seen as rejecting your country and what it means to be from there. This is shameful and can make people angry.**

- India
- Afghanistan

**Christians can be seen as easy targets – often Christianity is seen as a Western religion, despite starting in the Middle East. In a number of countries being a Christian puts you at the bottom of the social ladder meaning you get a poorer education, less work opportunities and are seen as a lower class citizen.**

- Egypt

**Some governments try to hold onto power by promoting national unity and controlling all religions. This means Christians and Christian services can be monitored and anything said in contradiction to the government can be punished.**

- China

**If you convert it is a rejection of the accepted religion of your community/country – this can be seen as an aggressive decision and so is often received and responded to with more aggression.**

- Algeria

## REVIEW

### 5 MINS

- Ask students if they can remember the definition of “freedom of religion.”
- Finish the session by inviting students to write an answer to why freedom of religion is important.

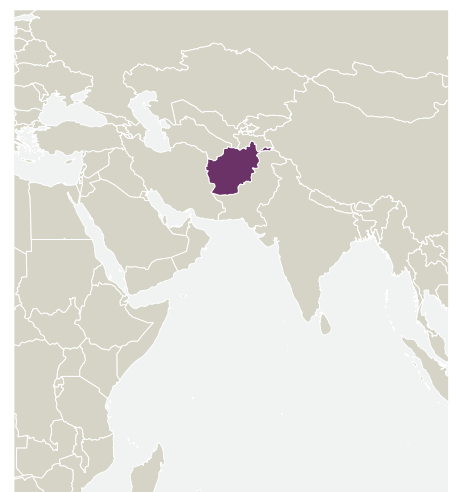


## AFGHANISTAN FACT SHEET

**Afghanistan is number one on the Open Doors World Watch List for the first time – persecution has increased since the Taliban took control in August 2021. Even before this year, it was impossible to live openly as a Christian in Afghanistan. All citizens are born Muslim; leaving Islam is considered shameful, and Christian converts face dire and violent consequences if their new faith is discovered. Either they have to flee the country or they will be killed. This was true before the Taliban takeover of the country: the situation has become even more dangerous for believers this year. The Taliban will make sure that Islamic rules and customs are implemented and kept. Christian converts do not have any option but to obey them.**

If a Christian's secret faith is discovered, their family, clan or tribe has to save its 'honour' by disowning the believer, or even killing them. This is widely considered to be a just reaction. Alternatively, since leaving Islam is considered a sign of insanity, a Christian who has converted from Islam may be forcibly sectioned in a psychiatric hospital.

If a woman converts from Islam to Christianity and her family do not, she is likely to face house arrest, sexual abuse and rape, violence, forced marriage to a Muslim or even an 'honour' killing. There is very little chance of legal justice for any woman, and women in Afghanistan have very little social or financial autonomy. Since the Taliban takeover in 2021 the position of women has become even more dangerous, and any progress that has been made in women's freedoms has been swiftly undone.





## NORTH KOREA FACT SHEET

**Until 2022 North Korea has been at the top of the Open Doors World Watch List since 2002. Despite moving to number 2 it's still an incredibly dangerous place to be a Christian. Many Christians have to keep their faith secret even from their own families.**



Open Doors estimates that there are approximately 400,000 Christians in North Korea, from a population of 25.7 million. It's very difficult to know exactly how many believers live in North Korea because they must keep their faith completely secret. From that 400,000, Open Doors estimates that 50,000-70,000 Christians are currently imprisoned in terrible labour camps for their faith. It is unlikely that they will ever be able to leave.

### Why are Christians persecuted?

Anybody who believes in a higher authority other than the dictatorial Kim family is considered an enemy of the state. Kim Jong-un and his family are worshipped as gods, and posters of Kim Jong-Un must be hung in all homes and schools. Followers of any faith are at great risk of being killed or imprisoned as political criminals – and, if discovered, their families are imprisoned too.

Many North Korean Christians can't even tell their families about their faith. Sang-Hwa didn't realise that her mother and father were believers until she was nearly a teenager. "My parents couldn't share any Christian stories with my siblings and me. It's too dangerous. A child may accidentally betray his or her parents' faith." Teachers sometimes even ask young children to inform on their parents. The consequences of being identified as a Christian in North Korea would be horrendous.

"We have a saying in North Korea," says Sang-Hwa. "When three of us are meeting, one of us is a spy and will report to the government." The North Korean authorities maintain control by engaging a huge network of spies. This means that there is very little time when people and their activities are not being monitored.

If the government finds out that you're a Christian, it's likely that you'll be sent to a labour camp. Most prisoners never leave, and the conditions are appalling with forced labour, torture and starvation being normal.

It's difficult to overstate the reach of North Korean authorities and the obedience and leader-worship they demand. Police raids to identify and arrest citizens with 'deviating thoughts' have increased, and the whole country is deliberately controlled through an atmosphere of intense fear.





## NORTH KOREA WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Christians are considered enemies of the state because they dare to believe in a higher authority than the Kim family. The North Korean regime demands absolute loyalty and obedience, and the Kim family are worshipped like gods. Portraits of the Kim family must be hung in all homes and schools. The first words parents must teach their children are 'Thank you, Father Kim Il-sung'.



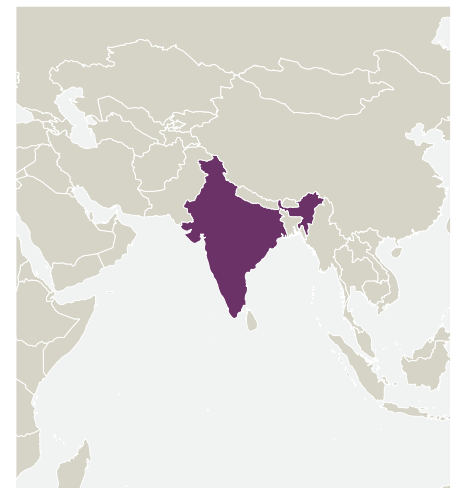




# INDIA

## WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

The Indian government is led by the Hindu nationalist BJP, who believe that being a Hindu is part of Indian identity, and frequently turn a blind eye to attacks on those of other faiths.





## AFGHANISTAN WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Afghanistan is a country controlled by the extremist Islamic group, the Taliban. Islamic principles dictate how the country is governed and what is allowed. To be Afghani is to be Muslim – there are no other options. Converts to Christianity are seen to be rejecting their national identity and so bringing shame on Islam.





## EGYPT

### WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Egypt is a strongly Islamic nation. Just under 90 per cent of the population of Egypt are Sunni Muslims.

President al-Sisi has called upon citizens to fight radicalism and introduce reforms in Islamic teaching. However, in rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are growing in prominence. Christians are seen as easy targets, being a minority and having less power. The government is making efforts to reverse this trend, but has not been very successful so far.





# CHINA

## WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

The goal of the Communist Party of China is to maintain its power through national unity- including the control of all religions. Since the Communist Party took over the implementation of the regulations on religion, the treatment of religious groups has become much harsher. Christians are a particular focus because they are the largest social force in China that isn't controlled by the state.





## ALGERIA

### WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

Christians from a Muslim background face pressure from their families and communities, making it difficult to live out their faith. The state adds to this pressure by restricting freedom of religion through legal and administrative bureaucracy. Persecution often comes from family members if a Christian from a Muslim background is discovered to have converted. Church leaders report that female Christians from Muslim backgrounds are sometimes placed under house-arrest by their families when their faith is discovered.

