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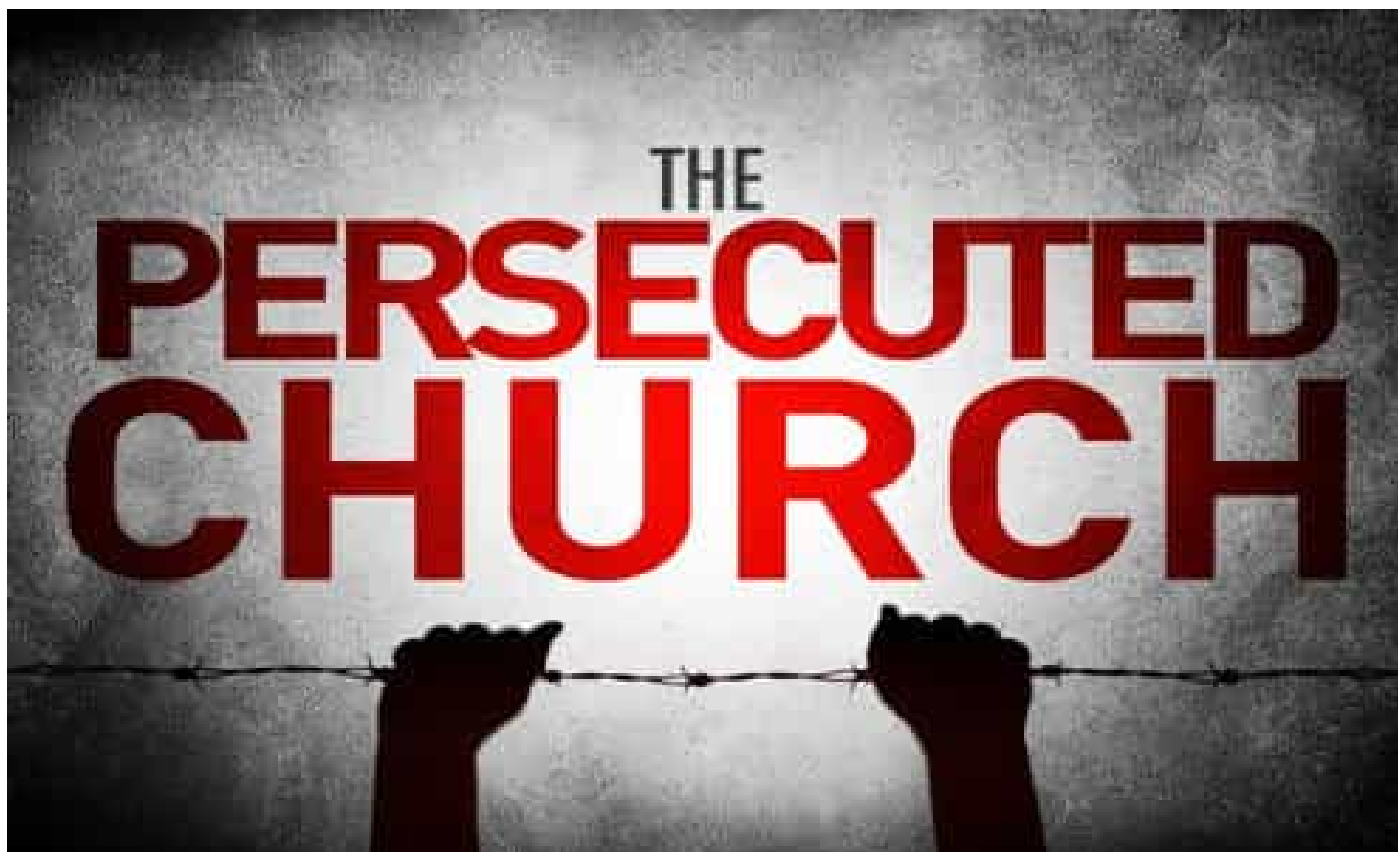
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ARTICLE

Open Doors 2026 Report Reveals Christian Persecution At Historic Highs



BY PNW STAFF JANUARY 16, 2026

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The latest World Watch List from Open Doors is not merely an annual report--it is a global alarm bell. According to the nonprofit's newly released findings, 388 million Christians worldwide now live under high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. That is more than one in seven believers across the globe, and the highest number ever recorded. Behind that staggering figure are stories of churches burned, families displaced, believers surveilled, imprisoned, beaten, or killed--often simply for gathering to pray.

Open Doors CEO Ryan Brown described the trend as both expanding and intensifying. Persecution is not only spreading to new regions, but growing more severe where it already exists. Sub-Saharan Africa remains a particular flashpoint, accounting for the majority of faith-related killings worldwide. Yet the report also highlights how persecution is evolving beyond visible violence into more subtle--but equally destructive--forms of repression through technology, law, and social pressure.

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At the top of the World Watch List are ten countries where following Christ is considered especially dangerous. Each represents a distinct face of persecution--and a sobering reminder of what faith can cost in today's world.

1. North Korea

For the 23rd consecutive year, North Korea ranks as the most dangerous place on earth to be a Christian. Faith in Christ is viewed as treason against the state and its supreme leader. Believers worship in absolute secrecy; discovery can mean imprisonment in brutal labor camps or execution. The regime has increasingly turned to surveillance technology and artificial intelligence to identify "suspicious" behavior--such as private prayer or refusal to venerate government idols--making even silent faith perilous.

2. Somalia

Somalia remains one of the deadliest environments for Christians, particularly converts from Islam. Al-Shabaab militants enforce a rigid form of Islamic law, and even suspicion of Christian belief can lead to immediate execution. One former Muslim cleric who converted to Christianity described living in constant fear, knowing that public discovery could mean beheading in broad daylight. There is virtually no church presence left--only isolated believers clinging to Christ in secrecy.

3. Libya

In Libya, lawlessness fuels persecution. Migrant Christians--particularly from sub-Saharan Africa--are frequent targets for kidnapping, forced labor, and execution by extremist groups. Libyan Christians face pressure from family, community, and militias, while the collapse of central authority has created fertile ground for Islamic extremists to operate with impunity.



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4. Eritrea

Often called the "North Korea of Africa," Eritrea strictly controls religious life. Only a handful of state-approved denominations are permitted, and unregistered churches are raided regularly. Hundreds of Christians remain imprisoned without charge, some held in shipping containers under extreme heat. Many are jailed simply for hosting prayer meetings in their homes.

5. Yemen

Years of civil war have devastated Yemen's tiny Christian population. Converts face threats from family members as well as Islamist groups like al-Qaeda. Humanitarian collapse has compounded persecution, leaving believers without access to aid if their faith becomes known. For Yemeni Christians, survival itself is often a daily miracle.

6. Nigeria

Nigeria stands at the epicenter of global Christian violence. According to the report, 3,490 of the 4,849 Christians killed worldwide for their faith last year were Nigerian. Islamist militants, Fulani extremists, and criminal gangs target Christian villages, churches, and pastors--often with little response from authorities. Entire communities have been wiped out, turning worship into an act of courage.

7. Pakistan

In Pakistan, harsh blasphemy laws are frequently weaponized against Christians. False accusations can lead to mob violence, lengthy prison sentences, or death. Christian families often live segregated lives, trapped in poverty and denied opportunity. Yet underground churches continue to grow, fueled by believers willing to endure suffering for the sake of Christ.

8. Iran

The Iranian regime views Christianity--especially house churches--as a threat to Islamic rule. Converts from Islam are routinely arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned on national security charges. Despite this, Iran has one of the fastest-growing underground Christian movements in the world, a quiet revival unfolding beneath relentless pressure.

9. Afghanistan

Since the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan has become nearly impossible for Christians. Converts are hunted relentlessly, often betrayed by neighbors or even family members. Many have fled the country; those who remain live in constant fear. Public Christian worship is nonexistent, yet faith persists in whispers and hidden prayers.

10. India

India's persecution is driven less by overt state violence and more by rising Hindu nationalism. Anti-conversion laws, church attacks, and social ostracization have surged in several states. Christians are frequently accused of betraying national identity, and pastors are arrested for "forced conversions" simply for sharing their faith.

Beyond the rankings, Open Doors warns of a troubling global shift from "smash persecution"--violent attacks--to "squeeze persecution," where governments quietly restrict worship through surveillance, censorship, and legal pressure. China exemplifies this trend, with churches shuttered, Bible apps banned, and online Christian expression tightly controlled.

The World Watch List is not only a record of suffering, but a call to action. It is also a prayer resource--crafted from the voices of persecuted believers themselves. These Christians are not asking for comfort or escape, but for faithfulness, courage, and endurance.

In a world increasingly hostile to biblical Christianity, their witness stands as both a warning and an inspiration. The question now is whether the global Church will listen--and respond.

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