

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2023

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30 YEARS OF RESEARCH

A close-up photograph of a young woman with light-colored eyes, looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a dark headscarf with a decorative gold and silver beaded band. The image is partially obscured by dark, draped fabric, creating a sense of being hidden or looking through a veil.

# TOP 10

THE COUNTRIES WHERE CHRISTIANS  
RISK EVERYTHING FOR CHRIST



**"The Bible is full of ordinary people who went to impossible places and did wondrous things simply because they decided to obey God."**

BROTHER ANDREW (1928-2022),  
FOUNDER OF OPEN DOORS

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Open Doors US is part of the global ministry of Open Doors, mobilizing prayer, support and advocacy in 22 countries and supporting Christians in the 70 countries where they face the greatest cost for their faith. If you have any questions please contact [info@opendoorsus.org](mailto:info@opendoorsus.org), or call +1-800-896-5285.

# PRAY FOR THE RISK- TAKERS

For most of us, going to church isn't a big risk. Owning a Bible isn't a big risk. Even sharing the gospel with our friends, family and neighbors isn't a big risk.

For millions of our brothers and sisters, that isn't true. In many countries, being known as a Christian could mean risking family, home, livelihood. It could even be a death sentence.

Around the world, more than 360 million Christians face persecution and discrimination for their faith – but continue to courageously follow Jesus. They know that it's worth every risk, and that God is with them.

This booklet can help you pray for Christians in the ten countries where following Jesus comes with the greatest risk. Thank you.



**"DO NOT BE AFRAID OR TERRIFIED  
BECAUSE OF THEM, FOR THE LORD YOUR  
GOD GOES WITH YOU; HE WILL NEVER  
LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU."**

**DEUTERONOMY 31:6**

## OUR COURAGEOUS PERSECUTED FAMILY

This is the 30<sup>th</sup> year that the Open Doors World Watch List has been compiled – using extensive, expert research on the ground. Six categories of persecution are assessed, covering private life, family life, community life, national life, church life and risk of violence. A ‘persecution score’ out of 100 is given to each country, giving you a deeper understanding of what life is like for our brothers and sisters – and helping to inform your prayers and support.

Because this research isn’t just about statistics, of course. It’s about people. It’s about our worldwide family.

## YOUR PRAYERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

“Thank you for praying for me and supporting the ministry,” says Charity in Nigeria (PICTURED ON PREVIOUS PAGE WITH HER CHILDREN) who survived an Islamic militant attack on her village. “You

have helped me and so many other believers.”

Your prayers can change the lives of our risk-taking global family. They are so happy and moved when they hear that their brothers and sisters across the world are praying for them.

You can use this booklet to help guide your prayers – whether you want to pray for a country a day, over ten days, or use it over a longer period. Please do keep standing with the persecuted church in prayer – thank you!

Don’t forget, you can get more detailed information and prayer points for the 50 countries where Christians risk the most to follow Christ – visit our website at [opendoorsus.org](https://www.opendoorsus.org).



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# NORTH KOREA



North Korean refugees at a secret Bible study in China, run by Open Doors underground fieldworkers



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SCORE

**“We have to take risks. But even though we know it is not safe, we still have to do it. God loves each of the women so much.” Those are the words of Sister J, a secret Open Doors fieldworker who supports North Korean refugees through underground networks in China.**

She is part of a team giving Bible study and practical help to courageous women who have fled North Korea. “The women are really ready for any risk,” she adds. “They are really full of joy in Christ. They give thanks for everything, even the small things they have. They also give thanks to all the supporters, though they have never met you.”

**“We have to take risks...  
God loves each of the  
women so much”**

**SISTER J**

Amazingly, many of these women choose to go back to North Korea to tell others about Jesus. And that’s the biggest risk of all.

If North Korean authorities discover somebody is a Christian, they’ll be sent to an appalling labor camp, or sentenced to death. Whole families are often given the same punishment.

North Korea is a brutally hostile place

to be a Christian. It’s the hardest place in the world to follow Jesus. And yet, every day, thousands of North Korean men, women and children are taking extraordinary risks to continue in their Christian faith.

There is no freedom – but there is endless hope.

Open Doors secret workers are keeping 80,000 North Korean believers alive with vital food and aid through secret networks in China, as well as providing shelter and discipleship training for North Korean refugees at safe houses in China.

Every \$70 could provide spiritual and financial support to three believers fleeing extreme persecution.

**PLEASE PRAY FOR:**

- ☐ **Believers in labour camps** to receive God’s supernatural peace and strength
- ☐ **Christians who take great risks** to gather to be protected from the prying eyes of the authorities
- ☐ **Open Doors secret fieldworkers in China** to be equipped with wisdom and strength in serving North Korean refugees.





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# SOMALIA



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**If a Christian is discovered in Somalia, they face great risk of murder. Violent attacks against Christians are increasing, and Islamic militants are intensifying their hunt.**

The risk isn't just from extremist groups. Christians face serious persecution from their community – and even their own family. That's what happened to Nala (name changed) when she converted from Islam.

"They beat me and locked me up," she says. "They tried different rituals to fix what was 'wrong' with me." Nala eventually fled, when her family tried to marry her to a Muslim leader. Despite what she's faced, Nala says: "Jesus has changed me. Now I have joy!".

Open Doors supports Somali believers across the Horn of Africa through discipleship training and equipping them to cope with severe persecution.

## PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- ☐ **Isolated Somali believers** to know God's comfort and find ways to grow in their faith
- ☐ **Violent Islamic militants** to turn from their evil ways, and for God's protection over His church
- ☐ **Open Doors partners in the Horn of Africa** to receive God's wisdom and strength, and for their work to bear much fruit.





**It's illegal to convert from Islam to Christianity in Yemen. Islamic extremist groups threaten 'apostates' with death if they don't re-convert. Many Christians are forced to practice their faith secretly, and it's extremely difficult to gather with other believers.**

Yemen is strongly tribal, and a new believer faces significant risk of being expelled or even killed by their tribe, if their new faith is known.

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is continuing, and anyone even suspected of being a Christian is particularly vulnerable, as they are deliberately overlooked when aid is distributed through local mosques.

Open Doors supports the body of Christ in Yemen by distributing relief aid and Christian literature, and offering shelter, protection and livelihood training to persecuted believers and their relatives.

**PLEASE PRAY FOR:**

- ☐ **Secret Christians**, who bravely still choose to follow Christ, despite the imminent dangers
- ☐ **Humanitarian aid** to reach all people in need, including those on the margins of society
- ☐ **Openness and freedom for all**, and that God would transform the atmosphere of scrutiny and mistrust.





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# LIBYA

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© ALAMY

**Libya is effectively a lawless land where all Christians risk extreme violence. Islamic militants and organized crime groups both wield power. They target and kidnap Christians, and some believers have been killed.**

Families and communities pressure new believers to make them renounce their faith. While a 2014 change in the law means it's no longer illegal to convert from Islam to Christianity, the law is ambiguous and this is abused. In 2022, a young Libyan man was sentenced to death for refusing to renounce his faith in Jesus. He was forced to put up a sign outside his house – as a deterrent for other potential Christians.

Open Doors works with local partners and churches in North Africa to provide leadership training, discipleship, livelihood support, Bibles and pastoral care.

## PLEASE PRAY FOR:

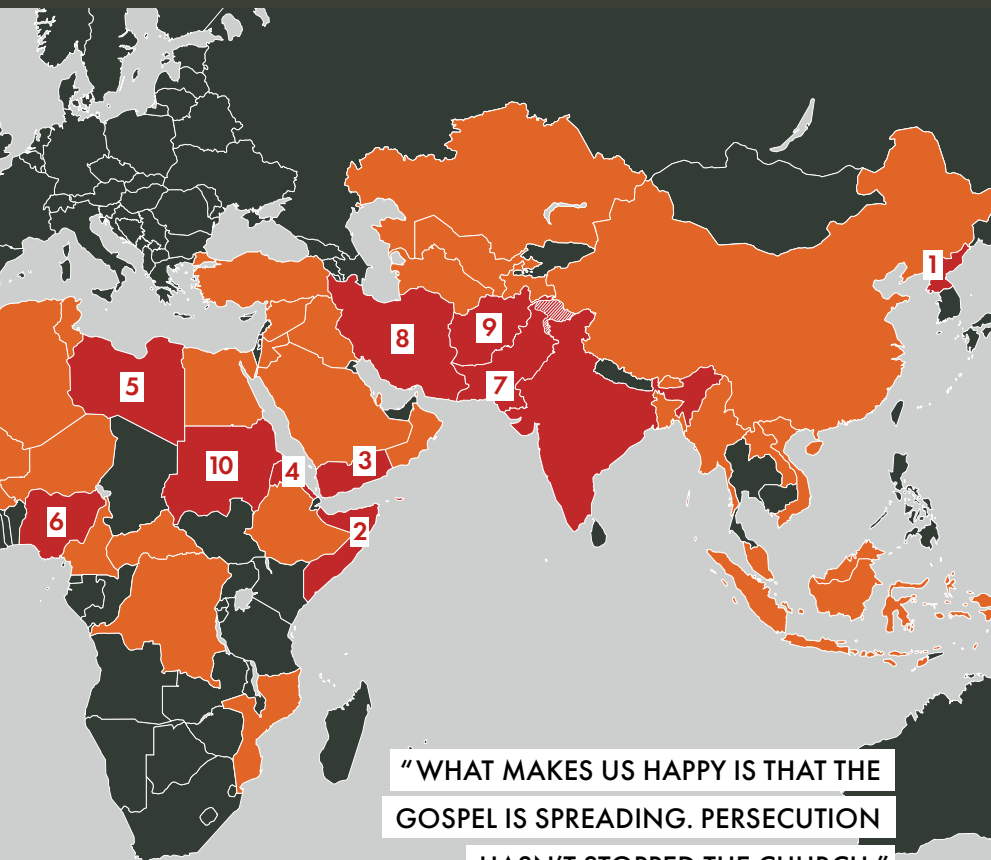
- ☐ **Christians in Libya** to be able to gather safely and encourage one another
- ☐ **Stability, law and order** to come quickly across the whole nation
- ☐ **Criminal gangs and Islamic militants** to be transformed by God's power, so that they no longer target or exploit vulnerable people.



OpenDoors

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2023

30 YEARS OF RESEARCH



"WHAT MAKES US HAPPY IS THAT THE  
GOSPEL IS SPREADING. PERSECUTION  
HASN'T STOPPED THE CHURCH."

PASTOR GIDEON (NAME CHANGED), ERITREA

## TOP 10

- 1 NORTH KOREA
- 2 SOMALIA
- 3 YEMEN
- 4 ERITREA
- 5 LIBYA
- 6 NIGERIA
- 7 PAKISTAN
- 8 IRAN
- 9 AFGHANISTAN
- 10 SUDAN

### PERSECUTION LEVELS:

■ EXTREME ■ VERY HIGH



TO SEE ALL 50 COUNTRIES, AND TO ORDER THE TOP 50 BOOKLET AND TO FIND OUT MORE, GO TO [OPENDOORSUS.ORG/EN-US/PERSECUTION/COUNTRIES](https://opendoorsus.org/en-us/persecution/countries)





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# NIGERIA



Christians at an IDP camp receive food and aid from Open Doors local partners



**Violence against Christians is getting worse and worse in Nigeria. Every year, more Christians are killed for their faith in Nigeria than the rest of the world combined. Islamic militant violence used to only be a threat in the north and central parts of the country, but it is spreading further south.**

“Fulani came and attacked our compound, and they killed my husband and his brother,” shares Veronica. “They killed four of them. So I ran to the IDP [internally displaced people] camp with my children.”

**“You gave us plenty of food, gave us money – we enjoyed that day”**

**VERONICA**

Christians face discrimination and exclusion as second-class citizens in some northern states of Nigeria, and those who’ve converted from Islam face rejection and extreme pressure from their families. But the main threat is violence at the hands of Islamic extremists – Fulani militants are just one of the groups targeting Christians.

In these attacks, believers are killed, maimed, abducted, suffer sexual violence and have entire villages burned down and destroyed. Many Christians, like Veronica, have had to

flee their homes and live as refugees in other countries or in IDP camps. Though there is more safety in these camps, they are very hard places to live. “We are suffering here,” says Veronica. “Suffering without housing, suffering without food, suffering without everything. Life is hard.”

Local Open Doors partners have been able to give some support, and will continue to do so. “You gave us plenty of food, gave us money – we enjoyed that day,” says Veronica. “Thank you. I send my greetings to all of you.”

Open Doors works through church partners to strengthen Christians in Nigeria with discipleship and persecution survival training, trauma care and economic empowerment projects.

#### **PLEASE PRAY FOR:**

- ☐ **Nigerian believers in IDP camps** to know God’s sustaining love and continue undaunted in their faith
- ☐ **Open Doors partners** to be able to reach more survivors of violence with trauma care and support
- ☐ **Islamic militants in Nigeria** to turn from their wickedness and choose peace instead of violence.





"I AM REALLY GRATEFUL TO GOD! TODAY,  
MY HEART IS FULL OF JOY. HE PROTECTS  
US, HE WIPES AWAY OUR TEARS, HE  
PROVIDES ALL OUR NEEDS. FOR THOSE  
WHO HAVE COME TO OUR AID, MAY  
GOD BLESS YOU ABUNDANTLY!"

**CHRISTIANA, NIGERIA**

Christiana (PICTURED, NAME CHANGED) is a persecuted Christian in northern Nigeria who received food and other essential aid from Open Doors partners. More than 12,700 Nigerian believers are receiving this care.

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# PAKISTAN

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© ALAMY

**Christians in Pakistan feel increasingly trapped between Islamic militants and a government that appeases them. Without a trusted authority to protect their rights, Christians are very vulnerable.**

Christians in Pakistan are considered second-class citizens and face discrimination in every aspect of life. Though there were no major attacks against churches last year, there are almost constant attacks against individuals. Believers do not feel safe to worship freely, particularly if they've converted from Islam.

The country's notorious anti-blasphemy laws continue to be abused to target Christians, often for unrelated

disputes. Believers can be held in prison for years with the threat of the death penalty looming over them.

**Open Doors is active in the Persian Gulf countries through a network of partner churches, but for security reasons, we cannot say what we do where.**

## PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- ☐ **Christians in prison** to know God's comfort and to receive justice
- ☐ **Peace and safety** – praise God that there were no major attacks against churches last year, and ask for believers to be protected from harm
- ☐ **Pakistani authorities** to ensure the rights and safety of all citizens.



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# IRAN

86

**Iran is ruled by an increasingly strict Islamic regime, which views house churches as an attempt by Western countries to undermine Islam and their authority.**

Christians who gather in house churches are at great risk of being monitored, harassed, arrested and prosecuted for 'crimes against national security' - an accusation that is notoriously poorly defined, and can be abused by people targeting Christians.

Some of these courageous believers have received long prison sentences – like Ali: “When we were in solitary confinement, the only thing that strengthened us was prayer,” he says. “Only God can go to those dark places

and dungeons and be strength for His children.”

**Open Doors partners support the church in Iran with online ministry presence, Christian multimedia initiatives and advocacy.**

## **PLEASE PRAY FOR:**

- ☐ **Iranian authorities** to recognise the rights and value of Iranian believers
- ☐ **Imprisoned Christians** to know God's strength, love and resilience
- ☐ **Iranian Christians meeting in secret** to be protected from harassment and prosecution, and to build one another up in faith.



"THANK YOU FOR THE HELP YOU HAVE  
PROVIDED. YOU'RE THE ONLY GROUP  
WHO CAME TO HELP US."

**AFGHAN REFUGEE**

Hadija (PICTURED, NAME CHANGED) is a refugee who fled Afghanistan and is now receiving help from Open Doors partners in a country neighbouring Afghanistan.

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# AFGHANISTAN





**“Please don’t forget us!” That’s the main message that Miranda (name changed), an Open Doors frontline partner, heard when she was visiting refugees in a country neighboring Afghanistan. Huge numbers of Afghans, including many Christians, fled their home after the Taliban takeover in 2021 – and it’s certainly not safe to return.**

“All of them had sold everything they owned in Afghanistan to come here,” Miranda says. “But life has been difficult for them as refugees. They are unable to get a permit to work and earn an income.”

## **“Please don’t forget us”**

### **AFGHAN REFUGEE**

Despite dropping from first place to ninth, Afghan Christians remain in grave danger and have been forced further underground. In the past year, the Taliban have turned their attention to consolidating power – and so there have been fewer violent incidents that can be clearly linked to someone’s faith. In this complex situation, persecution is affecting almost everyone in many different ways.

“The Taliban wanted me to work for them. I refused, so they sent me a letter threatening my life,” a doctor told Miranda. Another refugee shared:

“I sang Afghan songs for a living. My career is considered sinful by the Taliban. And I have three daughters. The Taliban would take them as wives.”

Being a Christian remains very, very risky in Afghanistan. Leaving Islam is considered shameful and punishable by death under Islamic law, and believers might even be attacked by their own family, to save so-called ‘honor’.

**Open Doors raises prayer for persecuted believers in Afghanistan, and provides practical support to Afghan Christians forced to flee to neighboring countries.**

### **PLEASE PRAY FOR:**

- ☐ **Secret believers** to be protected and for God’s close presence to bring peace, joy and hope to their hearts
- ☐ **Afghan refugees** to find places where their physical and spiritual needs can be met
- ☐ **Open Doors fieldworkers** like Miranda to be able to share the light of Christ with Afghan refugees.



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# SUDAN

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**Sudan was one of the good news stories for the persecuted church in recent years. Sadly, there has been another step back – and Sudan is, once again, in the top ten countries where Christians risk everything to follow Jesus.**

Unrest in Sudan continues and, after a transitional government that made steps towards religious freedom, power is back in the hands of the military. It's feared that positive steps will be further undone – for instance, the death penalty for leaving Islam was abolished, but there are concerns that it could be reinstated.

The past year has seen violence and pressure against Christians worsen.

Open Doors works through local church partners in Sudan to strengthen persecuted Christians through persecution survival training, discipleship training and economic empowerment projects.

## PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- ☐ **Peace in Sudan** and for God to establish rulers who enforce lasting respect for human rights
- ☐ **Church leaders** as they engage with their Muslim counterparts, to have fruitful and constructive dialogue
- ☐ **Believers who have converted from Islam** to grow in their knowledge of Christ and have wisdom to take risks in sharing the gospel.



**KEEP PRAYING WITH YOUR**

**OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST TOP 50**

Thank you for praying for our family in the ten countries where being a Christian is most dangerous. There are many other countries where choosing to follow Jesus comes with enormous risks – and you can keep praying for them with your *Open Doors World Watch List Top 50*.

**This free booklet includes:**

- detailed information about the 50 countries
- inspiring testimonies and stories from the persecuted church
- written prayers to help you pray



**You can order resources, and discover more about the top 50 countries on the Open Doors World Watch List 2023, at [opendoorsus.org](https://opendoorsus.org)**



# Extreme persecution calls for extraordinary risk

Christians across the world face extreme violence, abuse and discrimination every day. It's only getting worse. But these persecuted believers take extraordinary risks in response, and Open Doors fieldworkers like Rebecca\* risk everything to help. But for her work to continue, she needs you to stand with her.

**Your gift today of \$70 could help provide spiritual and financial support to three believers fleeing extreme persecution.**

Visit [opendoorsus.org](https://opendoorsus.org) to make a gift today.

Thank you.

\*Name changed for security reasons and image is representative



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