

North Korea, Egypt and Pakistan all have a problem and it's affecting 215 million people.

For over 25 years, Open Doors have released the annual World Watch List. It shows the top 50 countries where it's hardest to follow Jesus. In these countries, it's estimated over 215 million Christians face high persecution for their faith. That's one in every 12 believers worldwide.

Where It's Most Dangerous To Follow Jesus

North Korea has ranked number one on the World Watch List for over a decade and this year was no exception. Since 2002, North Korea has been the worst place in the world to be a Christian.

However, the nation of Afghanistan has come in at a close second. It's the first country on the list with Islamic extremism as the main cause of persecution. With the Taliban and the Islamic State controlling over 40% of the country, it's incredibly difficult to be a believer. Christians are sometimes even thought to be insane for leaving Islam. They can end up in psychiatric wards.

Pakistan ranked fifth, but scored highest as the most violent place for Christians in the world. Nine Christians were killed recently in December when two gunmen wearing explosive vests stormed a church in Quetta City.

The Rise Of Persecution In The Muslim And Hindu World

Islamic Oppression is the main form of persecution for two-thirds of all countries on the World Watch List. Eight of them are from the top ten.

Iraq and Iran are included in the top ten hardest countries for Christians to live. And whilst many have returned to Iraq to rebuild, life is still far from easy for believers.

In the Hindu world, India has risen seven places in the last two years. A major increase in violence against Christians is set to continue. RSS, a Hindu radical group, has announced an end date for the church in the country. They have declared that by the end of 2021, they will remove Christianity from India.

Nepal didn't feature on the World Watch List in 2017. However, this year the country is ranked #25. Nepal is one of the only Hindu majority countries in the world. Radical Hindu's are striving to see Nepal reinstated as a completely Hindu kingdom again.

2017 In Persecution

The Islamic State has declared Egypt as its next target. Last year Egyptian churches were bombed on multiple occasions over Easter. There was also another attack during recent Christmas celebrations.

[Full Egypt Easter attack story here.](#)

Christians in Iraq were able to return home for the first time since the Islamic State took their homes in 2014.

[Full Iraq story here.](#)

Closer to home, Islamic extremists attacked the town of Marawi in the Philippines. Nine Christians were killed. Buildings and a chapel were also burnt down.

[Full Marawi story here.](#)

In the 2018 World Watch List, there were also other popular tourist destinations for Australians – Vietnam, Indonesia and the Maldives. A very prominent case of persecution in Indonesia in 2017 was the case in Jakarta, of former Christian governor Ahok. He was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in prison.

The Western World And Radical Atheism

The World Watch List was started in 1991 as a response to the fall of communism and the Berlin Wall. It was developed as a tool to discover where persecution was, and where it was growing. The first list defined the next focus for the ministry: the Middle East and the Muslim world. This was a decade before others turned their attention to the Middle East in 2001.

Since then, as a ministry we've seen the rise of radical Hinduism and radical Buddhism. Now there is a new trend emerging - an anti-Christian secular world.

The Western world does not experience persecution anything like the church faces in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. However, Open Doors have been collecting data and watching this new trend.

The Western church has never had more to learn from our persecuted brothers and sisters on how to be bold, unashamed of the gospel and quick to forgive.

The time has now come when the Australian church needs the persecuted church.

Continue to lift up the persecuted church. They need our support and prayers. We need to learn from and stand together in the Great Commission to see all people know Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

Open Doors is a Christian organisation that provides assistance to Christians in persecution. Open Doors began when Brother Andrew smuggled Bibles into Eastern Europe. Now we work in over 70 countries around the world, serving the persecuted church.

The full list of countries on the 2018 World Watch list is now available on Open Doors Australia's website www.opendoors.org.au