

# THE OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST, 2010

## Explanation of the World Watch List

The reporting period for this version of the World Watch List is from **1 November 2008 to and including 31 October 2009**, meaning that the months of November and December 2009 are not included. This is due to the fact that the production date of the WWL has been moved forward six weeks.

The World Watch List is compiled from a specially-designed questionnaire of 50 questions covering various aspects of religious freedom. A point value is assigned depending on how each question is answered. The total number of points per country determines its position on the WWL.

The questions differentiate between the legal, official status of Christians (e.g. Does the constitution and/or national laws provide for freedom of religion?; Are individuals allowed to convert to Christianity by law?) and the actual situation of individual Christians (Are Christians being killed because of their faith?; Are Christians being sentenced to jail, labour camp or sent to a psychiatric hospital because of their faith?). Attention is paid to the role of the church in society (Do Christians have the freedom to print and distribute Christian literature? Are Christian publications censored/prohibited in this country?) and to factors that may obstruct the freedom of religion in a country (Are Christian meeting places and/or Christian homes attacked because of anti-Christian motives?).

The “variation” column gives an indication of how certain we are about the information obtained. Sometimes information is unconfirmed or incomplete. In that case, the “variation” will rise. Thus some countries may be ranked lower on the list because complete information is not available.

Please note that **Kazakhstan** has dropped off the list not because the situation has improved, but because other countries where the situation has become worse have ranked higher on the list. This may change again if Kazakhstan implements tougher legislation on religion in the future.

# WWL Report January 2010

	Severe persecution
	Oppression
	Severe limitations
	Some limitations
	Some problems

	Country Name	January 2010	January 2009	Trend	Variation
1.	Korea, North	90,5	90,5	0	0,0
2.	Iran	65,5	67,0	0	0,0
3.	Saudi Arabia	63,5	67,0	+	0,0
4.	Somalia	62,5	60,5	0	2,0
5.	Maldives	62,0	60,0	0	0,0
6.	Afghanistan	61,5	63,0	0	0,0
7.	Yemen	60,5	57,5	-	0,0
8.	Mauritania	59,5	48,0	-	0,0
9.	Laos	56,0	55,0	0	0,0
10.	Uzbekistan	56,0	54,5	0	0,0
11.	Eritrea	54,5	55,0	0	3,5
12.	Bhutan	53,5	53,5	0	0,0
13.	China	51,5	52,0	0	0,0
14.	Pakistan	51,5	51,0	0	0,0
15.	Turkmenistan	49,5	50,0	0	0,0
16.	Comoros	48,0	50,0	0	0,0
17.	Iraq	48,0	49,0	0	0,0
18.	Qatar	48,0	48,0	0	0,0
19.	Chechnya	47,0	46,0	0	3,0
20.	Egypt	47,0	45,5	0	0,0
21.	Vietnam	46,0	42,5	-	0,0
22.	Libya	42,5	41,0	0	0,0
23.	Burma/Myanmar	42,0	41,5	0	0,0
24.	Azerbaijan	42,0	39,5	-	0,0
25.	Algeria	41,0	46,5	+	0,0
26.	India	41,0	45,0	+	0,0
27.	Nigeria (North)	41,0	41,0	0	1,0
28.	Oman	40,0	39,5	0	1,0
29.	Brunei	38,5	38,5	0	1,5
30.	Sudan (North)	38,0	36,5	0	0,0
31.	Kuwait	38,0	36,0	0	0,0
32.	Tajikistan	38,0	35,0	-	0,0
33.	United Arab Emirates	37,0	35,0	0	2,5
34.	Zanzibar Islands (Tanzania)	36,0	36,0	0	0,0
35.	Turkey	36,0	33,0	-	5,0
36.	Djibouti	34,0	34,0	0	0,0
37.	Morocco	34,0	32,5	0	0,0
38.	Cuba	32,0	35,5	+	0,0
39.	Jordan	32,0	34,5	+	0,0
40.	Sri Lanka	30,0	34,5	+	0,0
41.	Syria	30,0	28,0	0	0,0
42.	Belarus	30,0	28,0	0	0,0
43.	Tunisia	30,0	26,5	-	0,0
44.	Ethiopia	29,5	28,0	0	1,0
45.	Bangladesh	29,0	29,0	0	0,0
46.	Palestinian Territory	27,5	29,5	0	1,5
47.	Bahrain	27,0	26,0	0	1,5
48.	Indonesia	26,5	30,5	+	0,0
49.	Kyrgyzstan <sup>1</sup>	26,5	-	-	0,0
50.	Kenya (North East)	23,0	24,5	0	0,0

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<sup>1</sup> Kyrgyzstan is new on the list, see explanation on page 9

## Focus on the Top Ten

### 1. North Korea

In first position on the World Watch List 2010 is again North Korea, the country where every religious activity is recognized as an insurrection to the North Korean socialist principles. The situation for Christians is extremely harsh at this moment, even though the North Korean regime is slowly and steadily losing her iron control on North Korean society, and Kim Jong Il's physical health worsened after his stroke. Through mobilizing every resource of power, North Korea is desperately trying to control society in order to eradicate Christian activities. By means of combat campaigns of 150 days and 100 days, the North Korean government is trying very hard to demolish the street market system. Furthermore, many Christian believers were exposed during North Korea's strict searches. During the mentioned campaigns, the North Korean regimes especially targeted secret Christians all over North Korea to arrest and kill them. They have used various horrible ways of torture against arrested Christians. Christians were sometimes used as a means of testing biological or chemical weapons. In spite of these inhuman circumstances, Christianity is growing and chances to hear the Gospel are growing, especially for those who live in cities nearby China.

### 2. Iran

This year, Iran passed Saudi Arabia and now holds the second position on the WWL. The total number of points decreased slightly due to the absence of reports of Christians being killed for their faith, which happened during the previous reporting period. The wave of arrests of Christians which started last year continued even stronger during 2009, resulting in at least 85 Christians arrested. It is suspected that the arrests are a way for the Iranian government to distract attention away from internal problems (such as the domestic turmoil after the re-election of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in June) and to show they are still in control. Most of those arrested were mistreated in prison. Although the majority of the arrested believers have been released, court cases are still pending and believers can be sentenced at any moment. Many released Christians are being monitored and threatened. The arrests caused great fear among Christians. Iranian authorities closed some churches during 2009. The primary reason for the church closures is the attendance of many newly converted Muslims in their services.

Islam is the official religion in Iran, and all laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law. Although ethnic (Armenian and Assyrian) Christians are a recognized religious minority who officially are guaranteed religious freedom, they have reported imprisonment, physical abuse, harassment and discrimination because of their faith. Armenian and Assyrian churches are allowed to teach fellow countrymen in their own language, but it is forbidden to minister to people with a Muslim background (speaking Farsi). Under the judicial interpretations of Sharia law, any Muslim who leaves Islam to embrace another religion faces the death penalty.

Many church services are being monitored by the secret police. Believers that are active in churches or the cell group movement are being pressured. They are questioned, arrested and put in jail and beaten. Individual believers are being oppressed by society, under pressure of the authorities.

### 3. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has moved from position 2 to 3. This does not mean the situation of religious freedom for Christians has improved. The minor loss of points is caused by the fact that contrary to the previous reporting period, we did not receive any reports of Christians killed or physically harmed for their faith and only one report of a Christian arrested. A foreign pastor felt forced to flee the country after he received death threats, some coming from the "Mutaween", the Saudi religious police.

Religious freedom does not exist in the Wahhabist kingdom where citizens are only allowed to adhere to one religion: Islam. No legal protection is provided for freedom of religion, nor does this protection exist in practice. The legal system is based on Islamic law (sharia). Apostasy --

conversion to another religion -- is punishable by death if the accused does not recant. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, the public practice of non-Muslim worship is prohibited. Non-Muslim worshippers who engage in such activities risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture. Believers from a Muslim background also run the great risk of honour killing if their family or social environment discover their new faith.

#### **4. Somalia**

During the reporting period, the situation in Somalia became worse. Ethiopian forces left the country in January 2009 and Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad of the Djibouti-based Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) opposition was sworn in as president by the Parliament of the Transitional Government. In April 2009 Parliament voted unanimously to institute Islamic law, hoping to strengthen popular support for the government and siphon it away from the Islamist militias fighting an insurgency here. These militias (al-Shabaab and rival Hizbul Islam) control most of southern Somalia and fight Sheikh Ahmad and his government situated in the capital Mogadishu. Christians are monitored by the government and the Islamic militias. Extremist Al-Shabaab is even hunting for Christians, and we received reports of at least 11 Christians killed for their faith; several others had to flee, were kidnapped, arrested or physically harmed. The Transitional Federal Charter provides for religious freedom, but in practice this right is little respected, because the Charter also establishes Islam as the national religion and the constitution states that laws cannot contradict Islam. Most Christians live in southern Somalia. They are small in number, heavily persecuted and practice their faith in secret, living under extremely dangerous conditions. There are an additional few Christians in Puntland and Somaliland. Other Somali Christians live as refugees in neighbouring countries.

#### **5. Maldives**

In the archipelago of the Maldives, Islam is the official state religion and all citizens must be Muslims. Persecution of Christians in the Maldives is systematic: legislation forbids the practice of any religion except Islam; the government regards itself as the protector and defender of Islam; churches are forbidden; importing Christian materials is prohibited; discrimination of non-Muslims is total; social control is enormous and the average Maldivian agrees with the prohibition of any religion other than Islam. In the country -- one of the least evangelized countries on earth -- there is only a handful of indigenous believers who practise their faith individually and in extreme secrecy for fear of being discovered. No converts have been killed for apostasy in the Maldives. There was no improvement in religious liberty in the reporting period. There were a couple of reports about foreign Christians who were deported from the country after Christian materials had been found in their luggage.

#### **6. Afghanistan**

To be a Christian in Afghanistan is still extremely difficult, particularly because the constitution is based on Islamic principles. Furthermore, Islam is the state religion and laws cannot contradict the beliefs and provisions of Islam. This reporting period was harsh for the Christians as the influence of Islam increased with the expansion of Taliban influence in many provinces. The Taliban threatened expat workers, Christian aid workers and local Christians. The social pressure from family and society is still immense for Christians. Local people who didn't hide their Christian conversion often received threats of violence and even death against themselves and their families. The threats were intended to produce anxiety, fear and to force believers to renounce their new faith. In some cases, new believers were harmed and Christians were kidnapped. Furthermore, Christians faced discrimination at school, at work and when working with authorities. Consequently, most Christians do not publicly express their belief or feel free to attend groups of believers coming together. As far as we know, contrary to last year, nobody has been killed for their faith. Despite all harshness, Christianity is still growing in Afghanistan.

#### **7. Yemen**

Yemen still holds position seven, but the total number of points increased. Last June nine expatriate Christian health workers were kidnapped by armed men. After a few days, the bodies of three of them were found, mutilated in a horrible way. The fate of the remaining six aid workers

remains unknown. During the reporting period, there was an increase in seizure of Christian materials.

The Yemeni Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but it also declares that Islam is the state religion and that sharia is the source of all legislation. The Yemeni government allows expatriates some freedom to live out their faith, but Yemeni citizens are not allowed to convert to Christianity (or other religions). Converts from an Islamic background may face the death penalty if their new faith is discovered. Proselytizing of Muslims is prohibited. Converts from Islam encounter opposition from the authorities and also extremist groups, who threaten "apostates" with death if they do not revert to Islam.

## 8. Mauritania

The situation in Mauritania deteriorated gravely in the reporting period due to the murder of a Christian aid worker in June 2009, the arrest and torture of 35 Mauritanian Christians in July 2009 and the arrest of a group of 150 of Sub-Saharan Christians in August 2009 for having their own church meeting (these meetings are only allowed in a few Catholic and Protestant churches). The murder was claimed by al-Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM), a terrorist group from Algerian origin recently linking up with al-Qaida and widening the scope of its activities to the whole of North Africa. However, local police were responsible for the arrest and torture of Mauritanian Christians and the arrest of the Sub-Saharan Christians. The Mauritanian Constitution defines the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. The government limits the freedom of religion by prohibiting the printing and distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytizing of Muslims. A military junta, conducted by General Aziz, toppled the country's elected president in 2008. Mauritanian pro-democratic parties urged the African Union to pressure the ruling junta to obey its directive to reinstate the toppled president. After many discussions and the dismissal of the former president, General Aziz was elected as new president in July 2009.

## 9. Laos

The church is relatively small but continues to grow (about 200,000 believers, mostly belonging to ethnic minorities). There was no improvement in religious liberty in the reporting period. Persecution in Laos includes a few restrictions in legislation. The government's attitude is very negative and restrictive towards Christians, and all believers are under strict surveillance because they are regarded as agents for the USA to bring political change in Laos towards 'democracy.' The church cannot operate freely and its activities in society are limited. Christians are restricted in their roles in the family and in the village. Christian converts who renounce evil spirit worship come under great societal pressure. From time to time believers are arrested, and many of them experience extreme physical and emotional pressure (torture) to renounce their (new) faith. In the reporting period two Christians were killed; two Christians were in jail while at least another 21 were arrested and held without trial. Christians were physically harassed on a regular basis and a small number of churches were destroyed or damaged. Despite the high level of persecution in Laos, there are many unregistered activities and the church seems to be growing.

## 10. Uzbekistan

The religious freedom in Uzbekistan has deteriorated during the last period. The atmosphere has become more anti-Protestant. This became apparent in an increase in raids and confiscation of literature. Many Christians were arrested and fined. Many Christian leaders were interrogated and physically and mentally harassed at police stations, where they were held for varying lengths of time. Furthermore, relatives of Christians used physical abuse to pressure Christians to convert to Islam. Another sign of the changing situation is that the authorities used the media to slander Christians. They showed a popular movie on television, which was *originally* broadcast in May 2008, named 'In the Clutches of Ignorance'. In that movie Christians were portrayed in a negative way and they were even identified with sects and described as Satanists. Active Christians were accused of using drugs and finances in order to win people to Christianity. The TV program also focused on how the Protestant 'sects' deceive children. The program was *repeated* several times (*most recently in September 2009*) and produced on DVD. The impact was very intimidating. This resulted in an active anti-Christian promotion. In spite of the persecution, the church in Uzbekistan continues to grow. Many Christians are actively looking for ways to reach others with the Gospel.

Uzbek Christians face many obstacles, as singing and preaching in the Uzbek language is prohibited and Uzbek Christian fellowships cannot obtain registration. Without registration their meetings are illegal. The situation for Christians remained difficult.

## Countries where the situation deteriorated

The status of religious freedom for Christians deteriorated in the reporting period in Somalia, Yemen, Mauritania, Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Tunisia and Kyrgyzstan.

### 4. Somalia

(See Focus on Top 10)

### 7. Yemen

(See Focus on Top 10)

### 8. Mauritania

(See Focus on Top 10)

### 21. Vietnam

The optimism about developments regarding religious freedom in **Vietnam** seems to have faded. A sharp contrast is discernible between the theoretic situation on (legal) paper and the actual situation on the streets. In the reporting period there have been large-scale confrontations between believers and the government over confiscated church property. Many believers were beaten and arrested during the protests. A number of churches and monasteries have been demolished. The state media have played a dirty role in reporting on the violence.

### 24. Azerbaijan

The level of persecution of Christians in **Azerbaijan** increased during the last period. A new repressive Religion Law was introduced on 31 May 2009 which grants more control to the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations. All religious organizations have to re-register by 1 January 2010. Some Christian groups did appeal in court because their registrations were denied, but the courts are well known for their corruptness and Islam-friendliness. The situation for Christians became more difficult when the authorities noticed that more people became Christians and churches were growing. This resulted in more complicated procedures for building new churches. Protestant churches are often considered as sectarian and a threat to stability. Furthermore, employers are often unwilling to keep Christians in their employment. Also censorship of Christian literature got tougher this year.

### 32. Tajikistan

A new religion law which was published in **Tajikistan** on 1 April 2009 severely restricts the rights of religious communities, including the rights of Christians. More control has been granted to the Religious Affairs Committee to regulate the affairs of congregations. All religious literature needs approval. During 2009, interest in Islam has grown significantly and with its increased influence, more pressure on Muslim background believers has developed. To publicly come together for worship services gets more and more difficult for Tajik Christians. People who openly evangelize run the risk of becoming a target of harassment and persecution. The main sources of oppression are relatives, local society and Islamic clergy. The growth of Christianity is decreasing. There is a growing fear among Christians to reach out openly. Also a significant economical fall increased the aggressiveness towards the Christians.

### 35. Turkey

There have been no big changes in **Turkey**. The total number of points is higher than last year. This is partly due to the death of Gregor Kerkeling, who was killed in Istanbul on 20 July. There was also an incident on 3 August in Istanbul where a Christian man was openly threatened because of his missionary activities. Likely this was to frighten new Christians who converted from

Islam. Some Christians experienced pressure from their families because they openly identify themselves with a church. Furthermore, there was also vandalism at some church buildings during the past period. The court case in the Malatya murders of April 2007 still continues without a verdict; so does the case of Turkish Christians Hakan Tastan and Turan Topal for “insulting Turkishness and Islam”. The situation of Christians in North Cyprus is included in the questionnaire for Turkey.

### **43. Tunisia**

For this reporting period, we received more information about the church in **Tunisia**. Due to openness to the Gospel and an increasing response to Christian media, the number of Christians is growing. President Ben Ali was re-elected for a fifth term with 89 percent of the vote in October 2009. But repressive acts and tight controls until presidential elections negatively influenced the situation for Christians and churches in the country. Authorities and police checked on all sorts of things, especially anything they saw as a danger to the stability of the country (e.g. radical Islamists and Muslim converts to Christianity). A number of Christians were questioned and some were beaten by the police. The local church cannot freely operate; it is limited in distributing literature and very restricted in outreach. The constitution provides for freedom of religion but stipulates the country's determination to adhere to the teachings of Islam. Efforts to proselytize Muslims are viewed as disturbing the public order and thus illegal. Visa applications of expatriate Christians suspected of proselytizing were not renewed or their employers were pressured not to extend their contracts. Consequently the country received considerably more points this year.

### **49. Kyrgyzstan**

**Kyrgyzstan** is a new-comer on the World Watch List. The country is bordered by Kazakhstan to the north, Uzbekistan to the west, Tajikistan to the southwest and China to the east. The population consists mostly of Muslims. Kyrgyzstan is a secular state, although Islam has a growing influence in politics and daily life. On January 12, 2009, Kyrgyzstan adopted a new religious law which increased restrictions on the activities of religious groups. Since the introduction of this new law, the situation for churches in the country has become more difficult. Re-registration of all religious groups is needed and a minimum of 200 people is required for registration. There is an increasing level of threats and harassments towards believers. Meeting places can no longer be used officially, the police visits pastors and churches, and there is ban on religious teaching and the distribution of religious literature. Social pressure on Kyrgyz Christians is especially strong in the Southern region of the country.

## **Countries where the situation improved**

**The total number of points decreased for Saudi Arabia, Algeria, India, Cuba, Jordan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.**

### **3. Saudi Arabia**

(See Focus on Top 10)

### **25. Algeria**

From the end of 2007 onwards, measures against the church in Algeria and pressure on the Christians began to increase significantly due to the enforcement of Ordinance 06-03, a law prohibiting efforts to convert Muslims to another religion and giving the government the right to regulate every aspect of Christian practice. The government closed 26 churches and at least 10 Christians were arrested and questioned and several of them received suspended jail sentences and fines. This crackdown against Christians, however, has eased off in the reporting period, a trend caused by the Algerian government bowing to negative international media attention, such as condemnations from the U.S. and foreign ministries from France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Spain. This pressure from outside has embarrassed the Algerian government very much. On the other hand, the Minister for Religious Affairs compared the 'evangelists' with the Salafist terrorists: they are a danger for the country! And so it seems that the government does not plan to improve the situation of the Christians. Church leaders in Algeria feel that for the moment the situation is

"sleeping" but that pressure can again breakouts at any time. They also think that the government is working on a re-enforcement of Ordinance 06-03. Perhaps the Algerian government is waiting until international pressure decreases and then it will increase pressure again.

## **26. India**

The fact that India has gone down in the list can be attributed purely to the absence of an event on the scale of the August/September 2008 riots in Orissa. This means fewer Christians have been killed, fewer have been physically harassed and fewer churches have been destroyed. However, physical harassment and attacks on prayer meetings still largely remain prevalent, especially in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh.

## **38. Cuba**

We have been able to make a much more detailed evaluation of the situation in **Cuba**, thanks to more thorough research in the country. In quite a few instances this has enabled us to do fine-tuning. In general, not much has changed in the island – the regime is still repressive. But Christians have become very inventive to make use of any opportunity they can find.

## **39. Jordan**

**Jordan** ranked lower on the World Watch List because reports of pressure on missionaries declined and there were no reports of Christians arrested or physically harmed for faith related reasons during this reporting period. The state religion of Jordan is Islam. Although Jordan is known as one of the most Western-orientated and free countries in the Middle East, conversion from Islam and evangelization of Muslims is prohibited. Converts from Islam face societal and sometimes governmental discrimination. Muslims who convert to another religion are still considered Muslims and fall under jurisdiction of sharia courts.

## **40. Sri Lanka**

During the reporting period, physical harassment of believers in **Sri Lanka** has decreased somewhat. And we have not come across reports which say that believers have been killed or that they have been arrested. In addition, the civil war with the Tamil Tigers ended in May 2009. The LTTE rebels were driven from their last stronghold and the civil war was over.

## **48. Indonesia**

During the reporting period we found no information that any Christians in **Indonesia** were arrested and/or kidnapped. Fewer Christians were physically harassed than in the previous period. The number of churches that were forced to close was less than before. The only major problem in the reporting period is the case of the SETIA students in Jakarta.