

WORLD: One in three Christians face persecution in Asia, report finds

Threat levels rise in China amid crackdown and India enters top 10 for first time

By Harriet Sherwood

The Guardian (16.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2ARc7bX> – The persecution of Christians in China is the worst it has been for more than a decade, with at least 50 million people expected to experience some form of repression this year as the government tightens its controls over religious worship, according to a global monitoring body.

The crackdown on religion in China is part of a pattern of increasing Christian persecution across Asia over the past five years, Open Doors said in its 2019 World Watch List, which ranks 50 countries. One in three Christians face high levels of persecution in Asia, with India entering the top 10 for the first time.

Open Doors estimates that 245 million Christians worldwide face high levels of persecution this year, up from 215 million last year.

The publication of its annual league table comes three weeks

after Jeremy Hunt, the UK foreign secretary, ordered an independent, global review of the persecution of Christians of all nationalities. The review will make recommendations on the practical steps the UK government can take to support those under threat.

Persecution against Christians is rising across Asia, with India and Pakistan among countries with extreme levels of repression

North Korea tops the World Watch List for the 18th year in a row, with 10 other countries categorised as having “extreme” levels of persecution. Countries that have moved up more than 10 places in the list in the past year include China, Algeria, Central African Republic, Mali and Mauritania.

China has risen from no 43 on last year’s list to 27 in 2019. Henrietta Blyth, the chief executive of Open Doors UK and Ireland, said: “In China, our figures indicate persecution is the worst it’s been in more than a decade – alarmingly, some church leaders are saying it’s the worst since the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976.”

There are an estimated 93 million to 115 million Protestants in China and about 10 million to 12 million Catholics. Most belong to unregistered churches. If the rate of growth continues, China is expected to have the world’s largest Christian population by 2030.

In the past year, the Chinese government has tightened its control on religious worship, shutting down hundreds of unofficial churches, detaining pastors and worshippers, removing crosses from buildings, banning the online sale of

bibles and increasing the surveillance of congregations. Last month, the celebration of Christmas was banned in some schools and cities.

“There is a very strong control agenda combined with a new era of digital surveillance,” said Ronald Boyd-Macmillan, the head of strategy and research at Open Doors.

He said persecution was being driven by three factors: the strong ideological leadership of China’s president, Xi Jinping, the government’s unease over the growth of Christianity, and the harnessing of technology as a repressive tool.

In September, the Vatican signed a provisional deal with Beijing on the appointment of Catholic bishops, aimed at a rapprochement in diplomatic relations. However, critics denounced it as a betrayal, with Cardinal Joseph Zen, the former archbishop of Hong Kong, saying the consequences would be “tragic and long lasting, not only for the church in China but for the whole church because it damages credibility”.

India, the world’s largest democracy, rose to 10th place on the list, having been 28th five years ago. Open Doors said ultra-nationalism was behind the increase in violent attacks by Hindu extremists on Christians and churches.

“It’s shocking that India – the country which taught the world the way of ‘non-violence’ – now sits alongside the likes of Iran on our World Watch List. For many Christians in India,

daily life is now full of fear – totally different from just four or five years ago,” Blyth said.

The report also highlights the rise in gender-specific persecution, saying Christian women are subjected to sexual violence, rape and forced marriage in the top five countries on the list.

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SUDAN: Sudan releases 13 Christians arrested in Darfur

after torture, threats

One church member said to be in critical condition.

Morning Star News (23.10.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2zhJqn2> – After torturing them and threatening to charge them with serious crimes, authorities in Sudan have released 13 Christians arrested in the Darfur Region, sources said.

Personnel from Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) released 12 of the Christians by Sunday (Oct. 21) and freed church leader Tajaldin Idriss Yousif on Monday, all without charges, but they threatened to charge the native Darfur evangelist and others with apostasy, public disturbance and crimes against the state, sources said.

"All of them were said to be tortured by NISS and are in bad shape," a source said. "One of them is said to be in critical condition owing to torture. He is said to have been vomiting and bleeding. He was rushed to a hospital, but he was not attended to by the physicians in that hospital."

The 13 Christians from four different house churches were worshipping together on Oct. 10 in Nyala, capital of South Darfur state in western Sudan's Darfur Region, when NISS officers disrupted the service and arrested them, sources said.

NISS authorities did not give any reason for the arrests, but sources said they are targeting converts from Islam from Darfur and, in south-eastern Sudan, South Kordofan state.

Three of the Christians were said to be from the Nuba Mountains area in the country's southeast.

The Christians were not taken to any court of law during their nearly two weeks of jail and interrogation.

Along with team leader Yousif, arrested were members of his church Alfadil Ismail Alnil, Ahmed Mohammed Hassan, Neseraldin Osman, Shemen Ahmed Shemen and Abubaker Biri.

Other Christians arrested were identified only as Kamal, Abdullah, Mutasim, Mujahid, El Sadik Afendi, Bolis Suliman and Abdel Maseh. NISS, widely known as a notorious agency staffed by hard-line Islamists, may hold people in detention for up to four and a half months without charges.

Following the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan President Omar al-Bashir vowed to adopt a stricter version of sharia (Islamic law) and recognize only Islamic culture and the Arabic language. Church leaders said Sudanese authorities have demolished or confiscated churches and limited Christian literature on the pretext that most Christians have left the country following South Sudan's secession.

The Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced in April 2013 that no new licenses would be granted for building new churches in Sudan, citing a decrease in the South Sudanese population.

Sudan since 2012 has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings on the pretext that they belonged to South Sudanese. Besides raiding Christian bookstores and arresting Christians, authorities threatened to kill South Sudanese Christians who do not leave or cooperate with them in their effort to find other Christians.

Sudan fought a civil war with the south Sudanese from 1983 to 2005, and in June 2011, shortly before the secession of South Sudan the following month, the government began fighting a rebel group in the Nuba Mountains that has its roots in South Sudan.

Due to its treatment of Christians and other human rights violations, Sudan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern by the U.S. State Department since 1999.

Sudan ranked fourth on Christian support organization Open Doors' 2018 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian.

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st/](http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/)

GERMANY: Open Doors report about the lack of protection of religious minorities in Germany

*Religiously motivated attacks on 743 Christian refugees in
German refugee shelters*

Open Doors (11.2016) – *Open Doors* has just published a 65-page report in English and in German (<http://bit.ly/1rs8y4j>) about religiously motivated attacks against religious minorities in Germany. Here is the table of contents:

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Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

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1.2 Completed questionnaire in Arabic

1.3 Translation of completed questionnaire into English

Appendix 2 – Handling of attacks: Experiences of the ZOCD-Staff

About Open Doors

Other organisations involved