



# World Watch List 2015 – Part 1

World Watch Research

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## Foreword

It is my pleasure to present this report on the World Watch List 2015 (WWL), the annual ranking of countries where hostilities against Christians or churches are highest. I do so, on behalf of the team of the World Watch Research unit of Open Doors International.

Persecution of Christians is a subject that is often overlooked. Lots of studies look at conflict situations, situations of targeted violence against civilians or specific vulnerabilities involving civilians, but overlook the religious dimension. This is especially so when Christians are involved. Christians do not seem to attract the rightful attention, as a religious minority group, of human rights activists, political leaders or other professionals that care about human dignity and the observance of human rights.

This report tries to show that persecution of Christians is a reality, and that they deserve to be defended by anyone who takes human rights seriously.

The report has three parts. The first part (this document) opens with the WWL 2015 ranking table, including scores for five spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church) and violent acts against Christians or churches. The report then presents an explanation of the eight different persecution engines that constitute the essential building blocks of the analytical framework. Two articles give an overview of the most remarkable results of the WWL 2015 exercise, the first presenting a news background release, the second looking at trends unveiled by the research. This part of the report closes with the summaries of the Country Persecution Dynamics.

The second part of the report (separate document) presents the Country Persecution Dynamics. The score of each country on the list is explained according to a specific format: a country summary followed by seven sectors (position on the World Watch List; persecution engines; elements of context; types of Christianity affected; spheres of life; violence; future outlook).

The third part of the report (separate document) presents five other background documents to the WWL 2015. First, the executive summary of the methodology of the World Watch List. Second, an explanation of the concept of cultural marginalization of Christians by drivers of persecution. Third, statistics about violence against Christians in the WWL 2015 reporting period (Christians killed, churches attacked). Fourth, statistics about numbers of Christians in the WWL countries, compared to their total populations. Fifth, the Persecution Watch Countries, which are countries that didn't make it to the WWL 2015 but where persecution is a serious issue too.

The WWL 2015 is made under the responsibility of the persecution analysts of the World Watch Research unit of Open Doors International. They are dedicated researchers, all five of them having university degrees. One of the persecution analysts has successfully accomplished a PhD, while another analyst is a PhD student. The director of the team has a university degree too, and is a PhD student as well.

The persecution analysts collaborate closely with researchers and other experts operating at regional, national and subnational level. Part of them are Open Doors staff, part of them are external experts.

The team of World Watch Research welcomes critical comments on the results of the WWL 2015 or any other information added to this WWL 2015 report. This invitation extends also to the WWL methodology. Although this report only gives the executive summary of the methodology, the complete methodology can be found on [www.theanalytical.org](http://www.theanalytical.org).

On behalf of the World Watch Research team,

Frans Veerman (director).

# World Watch List 2015

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*(1 November 2013 - 31 October 2014)*

**World Watch Research (WWR) unit – Open Doors International**

**Part 1:**

- **Ranking table**
- **Persecution engines**
- **News background release on behalf of WWL 2015**
- **WWL 2015 trends**
- **Summaries of Country Persecution Dynamics**

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## Ranking Table

RANK WWL 2015		1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORES WWL 2015		RANK WWL 2014	TOTAL SCORES WWL 2014
1	North Korea	16.667	15.476	16.472	16.667	16.667	10.000	92		1	90
2	Somalia	16.667	16.228	16.667	16.256	16.667	7.037	90		2	80
3	Iraq	13.921	13.988	14.063	13.651	14.713	16.112	86		4	78
4	Syria	13.068	13.616	12.956	13.103	13.889	16.112	83		3	79
5	Afghanistan	15.909	15.923	14.974	13.706	15.799	5.185	81		5	78
6	Sudan	14.205	12.798	13.412	11.513	13.281	15.186	80		11	73
7	Iran	13.163	13.318	13.412	14.200	15.495	10.000	80		9	77
8	Pakistan	13.731	13.021	13.998	13.487	9.332	15.186	79		8	77
9	Eritrea	16.667	13.311	12.643	15.461	16.667	3.889	79		12	72
10	Nigeria	11.742	11.905	13.347	11.623	12.630	16.667	78		14	70
11	Maldives	16.099	14.881	13.151	16.228	15.885	1.482	78		7	77
12	Saudi Arabia	14.678	13.616	13.998	14.090	16.233	4.074	77		6	78
13	Libya	14.489	13.467	12.435	12.500	13.889	8.889	76		13	71
14	Yemen	14.205	13.914	13.867	14.035	14.453	2.407	73		10	74
15	Uzbekistan	15.152	10.938	11.458	12.062	15.364	4.074	69		15	68
16	Vietnam	13.324	6.257	11.836	14.205	14.149	7.963	68		18	65
17	Central African Republic	11.269	7.515	12.044	11.623	9.245	15.556	67		16	67
18	Qatar	13.258	12.723	11.719	12.336	13.542	0.185	64		19	63
19	Kenya	11.487	10.119	10.964	7.802	10.100	12.963	63		43	48
20	Turkmenistan	15.057	9.673	11.328	12.226	14.713	0.185	63		20	62
21	India	10.606	10.342	9.961	10.362	9.375	10.926	62		28	55
22	Ethiopia	11.970	10.938	10.130	8.553	11.102	8.704	61		17	65
23	Egypt	10.511	10.714	9.961	7.237	7.205	15.186	61		22	61
24	Djibouti	12.661	10.313	10.208	10.806	13.129	2.593	60		46	46
25	Myanmar	9.953	8.266	8.887	7.220	10.100	15.185	60		23	59
26	Palestinian Territories	11.174	12.574	10.547	10.855	12.500	0.741	58		34	53
27	Brunei	14.299	13.318	10.352	7.127	12.543	0	58		24	57
28	Laos	11.203	6.265	11.543	12.051	14.483	2.037	58		21	62
29	China	10.578	7.701	7.611	9.150	14.275	7.222	57		37	51
30	Jordan	11.648	11.756	9.570	8.991	10.894	3.519	56		26	56
31	Bhutan	9.886	10.037	11.218	10.176	13.932	1.111	56		31	54
32	Comoros	11.648	11.682	9.310	10.252	12.847	0.556	56		42	48
33	Tanzania	10.701	9.226	12.370	9.265	8.941	5.185	56		49	46
34	Algeria	12.879	13.170	8.854	9.814	9.288	1.482	55		32	54
35	Colombia	6.600	8.162	9.948	9.315	9.961	11.111	55		25	56
36	Tunisia	11.553	11.905	10.612	7.456	10.764	2.593	55		30	55
37	Malaysia	11.174	11.905	8.919	9.265	10.460	2.963	55		40	49
38	Mexico	8.277	6.369	9.961	6.716	9.818	13.519	55		(new)	(new)



<b>RANK WWL 2015</b>		<b>1. Private</b>	<b>2. Family</b>	<b>3. Community</b>	<b>4. National</b>	<b>5. Church</b>	<b>6. Violence</b>	<b>TOTAL SCORES WWL 2015</b>		<b>RANK WWL 2014</b>	<b>TOTAL SCORES WWL 2014</b>
<b>39</b>	Oman	13.352	11.161	8.333	9.594	12.153	0	<b>55</b>		<b>27</b>	56
<b>40</b>	Mali	11.458	11.830	9.050	8.059	9.505	2.593	<b>52</b>		<b>33</b>	54
<b>41</b>	Turkey	10.890	8.408	9.115	10.143	10.590	2.407	<b>52</b>		<b>(new)</b>	<b>(new)</b>
<b>42</b>	Kazakhstan	12.027	8.036	7.357	10.197	12.587	1.111	<b>51</b>		<b>39</b>	49
<b>43</b>	Bangladesh	10.303	8.542	10.020	8.262	6.615	7.407	<b>51</b>		<b>48</b>	46
<b>44</b>	Sri Lanka	9.233	5.915	8.763	9.699	9.700	7.408	<b>51</b>		<b>29</b>	55
<b>45</b>	Tajikistan	12.689	8.854	7.617	8.224	11.849	0.741	<b>50</b>		<b>45</b>	47
<b>46</b>	Azerbaijan	11.932	7.664	8.399	8.827	12.022	1.111	<b>50</b>		<b>(new)</b>	<b>(new)</b>
<b>47</b>	Indonesia	8.428	9.449	9.701	8.279	7.422	6.482	<b>50</b>		<b>47</b>	46
<b>48</b>	Mauritania	10.606	11.235	8.659	11.020	8.116	0	<b>50</b>		<b>36</b>	51
<b>49</b>	United Arab Emirates	13.258	10.193	8.594	8.608	8.420	0.185	<b>49</b>		<b>35</b>	51
<b>50</b>	Kuwait	13.352	10.342	6.250	7.785	10.807	0	<b>49</b>		<b>38</b>	50

## Persecution Engines

### *Changes, terminology and explanation*

WHAT ARE THE EIGHT MAIN PERSECUTION ENGINES AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

#### 1. What is a persecution engine?

A persecution engine reveals a **primary reason** why Christians are persecuted in a particular area or setting. As such, they represent the various sources of persecution that Christians experience and they usually occur in combination. This enables us to understand better the full dimensions of persecution and assists our strengthening response to it. An engine may not necessarily be anti-Christian in itself, such as Dictatorial Paranoia, or Organized Corruption, but it explains why - in certain circumstances - the Christian community becomes the target of persecution.

#### 2. Why is it important to name and know about them?

Because the strengthening work of Open Doors needs to be properly targeted. In order to strengthen a particular Christian community, we need to know more precisely why and how Christians are being persecuted, so that the assistance and even intervention we render is clearly keyed to the type of persecution being experienced.

This is a unique advantage of the engines, and it prevents us from doing more harm than good. For example, if you assume that a community is getting persecuted by Islamists when in fact the main attack is from Tribes, or we think the main persecution is coming from Communism when in fact it is coming from Corruption, then we (a) have failed in our first duty to understand what a persecuted community is going through and (b) will be less able to stand with them if we are unsure what enemy we are standing together against.

It is also vital to realize that persecution engines *rarely occur singly*. They cluster and overlap. Islamic extremism is often accompanied by Tribal Antagonism for example, and Organized Corruption can overlay on all other engines. This shows that persecution is profound and universal, and we believe, spiritual: "You will be hated by all because of my name" (Luke 21:17). Above all, it shows the causes of persecution are complex, not simple, and this rescues us from simplistic interventions. Whatever else the Open Doors World Watch List is, the engines show that persecution is complex, profound and here to stay.

#### 3. Currently, what are the main persecution engines?

Up till now we have said that there are eight primary sources of persecution in the world today for Christians. We are still holding to the eight, but we have changed the wording in some.

##### Islamic Extremism

Tries to bring the country or the world under the 'House of Islam' through violent or non-violent actions.

This is the organized attempt to make the world Islamic. Extremists in Islam must ensure that Sharia law is applicable over the state or territory for Islam to be properly observed, though not all Muslims aspire to this. Religious minorities may be tolerated, but strictly as second class citizens. Islamic extremists range from *extremist states* that require Sharia law, such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, to *extremist movements* that seek to impose Islam but through relatively peaceful means, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, to *extremist groups* that espouse violence to achieve their aims, such as Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and IS in Syria and Iraq, to *extremist households or individuals* that are the most effective in enforcing Islam's apostasy

laws. In many cases, all four layers may be involved, but there is no doubt that in 2014 it is the actions of the violent jihadists that have attracted the most attention. Still, it must not be forgotten that Islamic extremism is often more effective in stopping Christian witness through the squeeze of a strongly Islamic culture than the actions of violent jihadists, since state, tribe, family and neighborhood all combine to stifle the exercise of the Christian faith. Islamic extremism constitutes by far the most common engine in global terms to Christians.

### **Religious Nationalism (formerly Other Religious Militancy)**

Tries to conquer the nation for one's religion. Mainly Hinduism and Buddhism, but also Orthodox Judaism or other religions.

This refers to an ideology that seeks to make a territory or a state exclusively the province of a particular religion. It sees its religion as utterly supreme over other religions and traditions, and sets a very clear national boundary on its militancy. In this respect it is to be distinguished from Islamic extremism in that IE is always trans-national, for example the IS militants are not local Syrians who want to make Syria Islamic, but the whole world, which is why they moved into Iraq. But Islamic extremists often play the nationalist card, such as in Somalia. To be a good Somali, they say, is to be a good Muslim. So there is overlap. But the engine refers more specifically for example to the Hindu nationalists in India, who use the ideology of *Hindutva* to justify their vision of a Hindu India, or the nationalist Buddhists in Sri Lanka, who maintain all Sinhala people must be Buddhist or they are betrayers of their heritage and country. It results in Christians being accused of being unpatriotic and walking away from their primary and ancient identity.

### **Tribal Antagonism**

Tries to force the continuing influence of age-old norms and values shaped in tribal context. Often comes in the form of traditional religion or something similar.

This refers to the reality that when someone becomes a Christian they are often persecuted because they are seen to have turned their back on the traditions of their tribe. Sometimes the tribe may have its own religion, like animistic tribes in parts of Africa, or sometimes the tribe may simply be a social or blood obligation that can act as strongly as the religious ties. So there are two senses in which this applies. First a Christian may refuse to continue in the rituals of the tribe, especially the more animistic rituals which can involve immorality, blood sacrifices and idol worship. Or second, where the Christian proclaims that their deepest identity is "In Christ" which causes serious friction because the tribe demands that they see themselves and act purely as a Pashtun, or a Fulani, or a Lao. This is more marked in certain states where there is little sense of national identity. For example very few people in Afghanistan see themselves as "Afghans," but Pashtuns, or Tajiks. The tribe may or may not be religiously constituted (though it usually is), but it does have a distinct identity, and it is often harnessed by religious nationalists or Islamic extremists, making this engine relatively hidden and difficult to spot. One scholar wisely remarked of the Middle East, "Islam only goes back 1500 years here, but tribalism goes back 5000." But where tribalism ends and Islamic extremism begins can be difficult to discern in practice. We make the distinction because in many states Christians are persecuted out of tribal reasons. The most persecuted Christians of the Far East for example are tribal Christians, who often experience a double persecution, e.g. from the state and from their tribe, like the Chakma in Bangladesh or the Hmong in Vietnam.

### **Ecclesiastical Arrogance**

Tries to maintain one's Christian denomination as the only legitimate or dominant expression of Christianity in the country. In most cases this Christian denomination is the majority Christian denomination.

This is where a church tries to impose its version of Christianity on everyone, especially other Christians, and refuses to accept the validity of other traditions. This was a particular problem mainly in the Roman Catholic churches of Latin America, although they have improved in this respect. Orthodox churches have an unfortunate habit of becoming co-existent with the state, and see non-Orthodox Christians as unpatriotic. Thus in for example Russia, the Orthodox Church has often sought to marginalize and disempower those belonging to vibrant Christian communities, such as Baptists and Pentecostals. Today in Ethiopia Pentecostal Christians can sometimes expect their severest persecution to come from radical movements within the Orthodox Church.

### **Communist Oppression**

Tries to maintain communism as a prescriptive ideology and/or controls the church through a system of registration and oversight that has come from communism.

Communism is an ideology that seeks to bring about a classless paradise through the triumph of the proletariat and is utterly atheistic in its method. But it is also a system of control, where the state seeks to ensure the church is registered in order to control it. While the ideological drive of Communism is fatally wounded today, the Communist *system* of state control over the church remains especially in those post-Communist states such as Russia and the so called "Stans" of Central Asia. Now there are four countries left that are still formally communist: China, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba, though it is hard to say how much of the ideology remains and how much is just the system of control staying in place. But there are parts of the world where ideological communists persecute Christians, such as the Maoists in Nepal and the Naxalites in India, and indeed even in states like Venezuela communist rhetoric is far from dead.

### **Dictatorial Paranoia (formerly Totalitarian Paranoia)**

Does everything to maintain power, not specifically focused on realizing a vision.

Dictatorial paranoia is where a political leader and his clique seek to dominate every aspect of society. The dictator is seized by fear that someone, somewhere, is plotting to overthrow them. No one is allowed to organize outside state control. This desire to control can come from a variety of motives. It can originate from an ideology like Communism, but more commonly it emerges from an overbearing leader, who seeks to survive through control. The world is full of leaders who take more and more power to themselves. Africa particularly is plagued by leaders like this, so too Latin America. Christians are a threat to any totalitarian regime if they refuse to be dominated, and especially if they organize outside government control – the ultimate act of disloyalty. It is out of fear that Christians get persecuted because they cannot be controlled. Often Christians are tolerated if they allow themselves to be controlled through registration and laws. We have narrowed the engine down, as totalitarian paranoia proved too broad.

### Secular Intolerance (formerly Aggressive Secularism)

Tries to eradicate religion from the public domain, if possible even out of the hearts of people, and imposes an atheistic form of secularism as a new governing ideology.

Secularism can be understood two ways. First, positively, where it insists that the state stays neutral (or secular) in its refusal to prejudice one religion or denomination over another. Indeed, in this sense, state secularism is a legacy of the Reformation where the Anabaptists for example regarded themselves as aggressive secularists. This is why we are changing the descriptor. But it also has a negative use too, where atheists exploit secularism to insist that *all religion* be expunged from public life, also in crucial discussions about social issues such as sexuality, marriage, human dignity. This is what we mean by secular intolerance. These atheists call for the abandonment of the state's historical neutrality, and sponsor a humanistic secularism that regards religious expression and opinion as injurious to the public good. They do not tolerate another interpretation of how to run public life, and take stealth steps to ensure this takes place their way, often without seeking permission or approval. Often this is peddled by atheists who claim that all religious expression and opinion is by definition pathological. Richard Dawkins has said that the difference between scientists and religious people is that the former build planes whereas the latter crash them into buildings. It is in the Western world where this engine is strongest, but it is for export too.. This is a subtle engine because not all these secularists are always aware that they are being intolerant.

### Organized Corruption

Tries to create a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption as a means for self-enrichment.

Societies contain elites like mafias that run extensive economic rackets, and Christians can get targeted insofar as their ethics threaten these rackets. An obvious example would be those regions in Latin American that are run by guerrilla armies who get their funds through drug trafficking. Pastors or priests that stand out against this trade get threatened and killed with sickening frequency. Unfortunately this engine is perhaps the most global of them all, as each society – especially where the state is weak or complicit – contains very deliberate and organized schemes to direct riches to a pampered and often violent elite. In Africa for a pastor to speak out prophetically against a corrupt leader like Robert Mugabe who is fleecing the country for his own aggrandizement can result in instant death or flight. The world is getting more corrupt, and not all forms of organized corruption are officially disapproved of. Saint Augustine famously remarked that the only difference between a government and gang of bandits was that a government was a gang of bandits that had given themselves immunity. This has caused some geopolitical specialists to talk of “mafia states,” where legitimately elected leaders rule the country like giant godfathers, and refuse to encourage the rule of law and the separation of powers. It is not always easy to clearly notice organized corruption. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reports “that while the activities of organized criminal groups have grown significantly across the globe in the last decade, the nature of their organizational structures is much more complex and dynamic than was perhaps the case in the past”. The report continues, “One of the clearest examples of the fragmentation of organized crime is the break-up of the cartels involved in the trafficking of illicit narcotics from Colombia. They have been replaced by a large number of smaller and more loosely organized trafficking groups.”

## News background release

### African countries strongest risers on the World Watch List 2015

Even though violent Islamic jihadism in the Middle East has dominated the world's news headlines in 2014, the creeping pressure of Islamization in African countries is standing out on Open Doors' World Watch List 2015 (WWL 2015). The WWL tracks a marked increase in persecution for Christian communities in a large number of African states. This is a continuation of a trend Open Doors has been seeing over the last three years.

Since 2002 and also for the WWL 2015, North Korea remains the world's toughest state in which to practice Christianity. The country has gone through nationwide purges, in which over 10,000 people were banished, arrested, tortured and/or killed because of their supposed links with Kim Jong-Un's uncle Jang Song-Thaek. There has also been a campaign against people who possess illegal materials such as DVDs, CDs and books. In the wake of the kidnapping and arrest of South Korean missionary Kim Jeong-Wook dozens of people (presumably Christians) were caught and many tortured and murdered.

The top ten countries where Christians faced the most pressure and violence in the reporting period of the WWL 2015 were: North Korea, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran, Pakistan, Eritrea and Nigeria. Sudan, Eritrea and Nigeria make a new appearance in the Top 10, scoring significantly higher than the previous year. Saudi Arabia dropped out of the Top 10, even though the situation for Christians remained as bad as before. This also applies to the other two countries dropping out of the WWL Top 10: Maldives and Yemen. Both countries have received roughly the same score as the previous year.

In forty countries of the Top 50, Islamic extremism was a major source of persecution. It would be fair to say that the WWL 2015 again shows that the persecution of Christians seems to become more intense in more countries of the world, the overall score for all Top 50 countries has increased from 3019 to 3170.

Open Doors has noticed a clear deterioration in #7 Iran compared to the years before: the country received a higher score [from 77 to 80] which was a result of increased pressure especially on Christians detained. Interrogation methods have become much harsher. This is in addition to the increased prevalence of prison sentences and the use of very harsh charges on Christians - even if those are dropped as the victims are convicted on lesser charges.

Further showing the trend of rising African countries, Kenya and Djibouti have marked the steepest climb on the List, whereas Tanzania and Eritrea also scored significantly higher compared to last year. Entering the WWL 2015 are Mexico, Turkey and Azerbaijan, with Morocco, Bahrain and Niger dropping out of the Top 50. For the latter three countries, this did not mean an improvement in the situation for Christians. It remained virtually the same.

### Islamic State violence in #3 Iraq and #4 Syria

The violence of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has dominated international news headlines. In Syria, Christians' relative pre-civil war amount of freedom has virtually disappeared with the coming of violent Islamic jihadist groups, reaching an all-time low with the Islamic State caliphate. Already in February 2014, Christians in the city of Raqqa were forced to sign a 'dhimmi contract' violating their (religious) freedom. At the moment, most Christians have fled IS controlled areas. As a result of the increased influence of jihadist groups, the society is radicalizing especially in areas controlled by jihadist groups. Of the 1.8 million pre-war

Christian population, only 1.1 million has remained. This means that since the civil war began in 2011, 700,000 Christians have fled the country, of which 200,000 left in the past year.

Since Islamic State proclaimed a caliphate in parts of Iraq, a stream of Christians as well as Yazidis, Shia Muslims and Shabaq have been forced to flee their homes. Many Christians have become internally displaced and have fled to the Kurdish region. Nevertheless, the fear is growing that the Kurdish region will be next in line. Especially in regions controlled by Islamic State, virtually the whole Christian community has disappeared, such as Mosul and the Nineveh plain. It is reported that 140,000 Christians have fled from there, either to the Kurdish region or abroad. Those who stayed behind were forced to convert to Islam. Christians throughout Iraq are extremely worried over the rise of violent Islamic extremism. While all minorities suffer under the hands of Islamic State, especially Yazidi and Christian women bear the brunt of violence: a document was found indicating the prices for Yazidi and Christian women and children, who are abducted by Islamic State fighters. The highest prices are requested for children aged 1 to 9. The rising pressure and Islamic extremist violence account for Iraq's continuing high position on the WWL: it ranks #3, with a score of 86 - for the WWL 2014, Iraq scored 78.

## **Sudan new in the Top 10**

### *Pressure on Christian converts and collective violence against Nuba Christians*

For the first time in over a decade, Sudan is ranked in the WWL Top 10 on number 6. The country's score increased from 73 to 80 points. The increase is a result of a deteriorating position of Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers) and faith-related violence against Christians living in the Nuba mountains. Since Christian majority South Sudan broke away from Sudan, Sudan has become a distinctly Muslim majority country. Radical Islamic tendencies have been increasing, adding to the already existing pressure on Christian communities. As an Open Doors researcher shared: "The registration or celebration of Christian weddings is hindered and often almost impossible as Christians first have to prove that they are Christian by providing an official document from their Church. If this involves a Muslim Background Believer, it is a huge risk for them as they often have to keep their new religion a secret."

The widely published story of Meriam Ibrahim is a clear example of this. She was born from a Muslim father and a Christian mother, and always considered herself to be Christian. But because her father is a Muslim, the law considered her to be Muslim. She married a Christian man, was imprisoned on the charges of adultery and sentenced to death for allegedly committing apostasy from Islam. Only after serious international pressure was Meriam released and allowed to leave the country. Violence against Christians in Sudan has shifted from targeting individuals to indiscriminate attacks against groups of Christians. According to Open Doors research, there has been a variety of faith-related killings, attacks on at least ten Christian properties, including churches, schools and hospitals, particularly in South Kordofan and Blue Nile state. More than thirty Christians have been killed as a result of targeted government bombings.

## **Eritrea re-entering the Top 10**

### *Systematic pressure and added violence contribute to many Christians leaving the country*

Eritrea again is part of the WWL Top 10. Its score increased to 79 points and its rank climbed to #9 (for the WWL 2014, it ranked 12 with a score of 72 points). Over the reporting period, the pressure on Christians in Eritrea has been increasing, in particular on non-traditional

protestant Christian communities, Orthodox shifting towards non-traditional protestant churches, and Muslim Background Believers. This pressure is mainly coming from President Isaias Afewerki and his ruling government and ordinary members of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Added to the pressure, Christians also continue to be victims of levels of violence. A local Open Doors source reported that the Eritrean government intensified its crackdown on Christians, leading to more than 138 arrests of Christians and church leaders. According to the source, "Forty-seven of the detainees are released, and others continue languishing in jail without due process of law." Houses of Christians have been raided, attacked, and damaged. The high level of pressure and the added violence contributed to Eritrean Christians leaving their country search for better living circumstances. They are leaving the country via neighboring countries - Sudan, Ethiopia, and Egypt - and have become an easy prey for human traffickers, especially in Sinai desert.

### **Nigeria's first #10 position**

#### *Boko Haram caliphate, Fulani violence and pressure accounting for Top 10 ranking*

Another newcomer in the Top 10 is Nigeria, ranking 10, where pressure for Christians in Northern Nigeria is especially high. In the run up to the 2015 elections, religious tensions have risen, while scores of Christians are internally displaced, accounting for a higher pressure. While the world media focus on the Islamic State violence in Iraq and Syria and its caliphate, Boko Haram has actually proclaimed a similar and possibly even more violent caliphate in the city of Gwoza in Northern Nigeria, which has spread to the whole state of Borno State and parts of Adamawa. Boko Haram has been blamed for nearly 4,000 deaths in 2014, of which the majority involved Christians. Nevertheless, not only violence from Boko Haram against Christians has marked Nigeria's horror scene, but also non Boko Haram violence from Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. They descend on the villages in the night or in the day and carry out cruel attacks against innocent people including women and children. As a Nigerian researcher reports, there are moves by the governments of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba states to establish and gazette grazing fields for Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. This means that swaths of land from indigenous Christian communities are taken away for that purpose, depriving Christians of their land.

### **African countries Kenya and Djibouti highest risers**

Along with Mexico, the two other countries having increased more than ten points compared to last year are #19 Kenya and #24 Djibouti, resulting in a steep increase on the WWL from the forties right into the Top 25. This further highlights the intensification of persecution in African countries. Also, Tanzania is climbing on the WWL 2015, both in ranking and in scoring. Partly accounting for the rise of African countries is the increase in faith-related violence. However, the main cause is not the violence but the creeping Islamization which increases the pressure Christians are experiencing.

Kenya is a Christian majority country with about ten to fifteen per cent of the Kenyan population being Muslim, of which the majority are Sunni, while less than ten per cent are Shia. Kenyan Muslims seem to view politics and religion as related and two-thirds of them support the implementation of Sharia law. The Muslim population, mainly located in the coastal areas of Kenya, but also spread over other parts of the country, has begun to respond to perceived disenfranchisement in Kenyan society. Inspired by radical Islamic influences spilling over from Somalia, Muslim politicians, representing Muslim dominated constituencies in Kenya have an agenda to eliminate the church from their constituencies. Next to the church, government officials with a Christian background are forced to leave Muslim majority areas or systematically transferred from there. The northeastern part of the country is also highly



affected by Islamic extremism. Homegrown extremists and militants crossing the border from Somalia are severely persecuting Christians.

Djibouti is a small, poverty-stricken Muslim country, surrounded by WWL countries Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia as well as the Gulf of Aden. The constitution has declared Islam as being the state religion and the government's general attitude towards Christians and other non-Muslims is negative and attempts to control their activities. Pressure from Islamic extremism has been growing and has also become a concern for the government itself. Ultraconservative Islam in the form of Saudi Arabian Wahhabism has been rising in society more than ever before. Especially Christian converts with a Muslim background bear the brunt of persecution. "Christians are fearful to declare themselves openly as Christians. In such a situation, they do not feel they would win compassion," an Open Doors field worker said. Also violence against converts has increased. Two places known as gathering places for converts were attacked, converts are forced into marrying a Muslim, and looting and ransacking houses also occurred. According to the same worker: "One convert's house was looted by his relatives after he declined to return to Islam."

The position of Christians in Tanzania has significantly deteriorated, including not only that of Christians with a Muslim background but also that of Christians living on the Island of Zanzibar as well as in the coastal areas of mainland Tanzania. At the heart of persecution is Uamsho (the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation - also known as Awakening). It uses Zanzibar as a springboard to further its Islamist agenda in Tanzania. Uamsho and related groups aim to establish an Islamic state that includes Zanzibar and a significant section of Tanzanian mainland along the coast. In this state, there would be no place for Christians and people with other beliefs. During the reporting period, this idea has been gaining popularity among Muslims both in Zanzibar and the mainland. This has greatly enhanced the pressure Christians are living under. Also, the amount of violence (smash) on Christian minorities in Zanzibar increased. According to reports, attacks on Christians have been consistent, and those who are responsible have been doing it with impunity. On 23 February 2014, a bomb exploded close to the Evangelical Assemblies of God Zanzibar Church just outside Zanzibar City. On 24 February, a device was detonated outside the Christ Church Cathedral in Stone Town. As a result, sending children to school, operating business and socializing with fellow residents have become very risky. According to an Open Doors researcher: "Children are harassed in education and social recreation areas in the Islands and Muslim majority areas. Christian children are mistreated and abused."

### **Newcomers: #41 Turkey, #38 Mexico and #46 Azerbaijan**

Turkey re-enters the World Watch List after having dropped from the list for several years. It scored 52 points, ranking 41. The combination of the persistence of legal restrictions and negative comments of some government officials towards Christians, social hostilities and the rise of observant Islam, continue to restrict Christians. They have to deal with a great amount of social control. Especially converts to Christianity can be ostracized, with heavy pressure exerted to return to Islam. Occasionally, they experience physical abuse. At the church and national level, the state imposes restrictions on Christians. Only two church denominations have been recognized: the Greek Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church, that together form only seventy per cent of the country's Christian population. Nevertheless, Turkish legislation has banned Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic seminaries from training clergy. As far as violence is concerned, four churches in Turkey have been attacked in the reporting period. A plot to assassinate Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Bartholomew was uncovered in May 2014 and on 2 July 2014, a group of men entered St Stephanos Roman Catholic Church in Yeşilköy, Istanbul, and insulted and harassed Christians. A church official asked the police (who were nearby) for help but was ignored.

Mexico has been on the WWL before, dropped off the list in recent years and has now entered the World Watch List again at rank 38, scoring 55. With an increase in score of more than ten points, it is also amongst the highest risers of the WWL 2015. The high rise of the country is mostly a result of the progression of organized crime and the recording of more violent incidents against Christians. In recent years, the most important base of narcotic crime and its connection with drug traffickers has moved from Colombia to Central America and Mexico. Criminal organizations are targeting Christians because they are considered to be sources of revenue for extorting money and because Christianity provides alternatives to crime. In the reporting period (1 November 2013 to 31 October 2014), at least fifteen Christians have been killed for these reasons. In Matamoros, six Christian leaders were killed; in Monterrey and Michoacán, at least three Christian former cartel members were killed because they refused to return to organized crime. A Ugandan priest who came to Mexico as a missionary was found murdered and thrown into a fossa. In indigenous communities, converts from traditional religions have also been victims of violence. Often, their homes were destroyed and hundreds were forced to flee their homes. Around eighty cases of physical abuse have been reported in the Southern states of the country.

On the World Watch List 2015, Azerbaijan gets 50 points, ranking 46. In general, the position of Christians in the country remains as difficult as before, but this year Open Doors could make use of more and better information on persecution, accounting for a better insight into the persecution situation. Fewer and fewer churches can function legally. Unregistered religious activities are punishable by law, and the fines on breaking the law are high, but successful registration for churches is close to impossible. The country's authoritarian government seeks to restrict all public expressions of religion that could become a threat to the regime. Not only Christians are victims of persecution, but also other religious minorities or radical expressions of Islam. Many Christians are unable to find or keep jobs and are watched closely by the secret services.

### **Asian countries: deteriorating situation in India and once 'liberal' Malaysia**

With the election of Narendra Modi of the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to become Prime Minister of India in May 2014, the atmosphere in India for Christians and other religious minorities has taken a turn for the worse. Hindu fundamentalists who attack Muslims and Christians can do so with more impunity than previously was the case. Apart from Hindu fundamentalists, also Buddhist extremists in Ladakh and Neo Buddhists in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh and Sikh extremists in Punjab are adding to faith-related violence. Hindu radicals have started monitoring Christian activities. Moreover, several states implemented anti-conversion laws which are used to disrupt church services as well as to harass, beat up and accuse Christians, adding to the already existing pressure. This happened all over India, with increasing reports from the South. Even though the level of violence can be levelled out by the sheer number of Christians not facing violence in the country, there are weekly and even daily reports of Christian meetings being interrupted, pastors and Christians being abused and assaulted. This all resulted in India climbing on the WWL 2015, scoring 62 and ranking 21.

One a liberal Islamic country, Malaysia is rapidly becoming a tough place to be a Christian. It now ranks 37 (40 in 2014) and scores 55, compared to 49 in 2014. The government's stance towards Christians and other religious minorities has hardened and pressure in the private, family and church spheres of life have increased. Also, faith-related violence has seen an increase over the past year. Christian converts from a Muslim background especially are targeted. Family and community members will isolate them and use any means to pressure

them to recant their Christian faith. There have been cases where they have sent converts to a re-education center. Churches are monitored and new churches have encountered major difficulties to obtain a required registration. Observers of the country talk about a quick Islamization. Examples for that are the calls for introducing Sharia criminal law (Hudud), forced fasting upon religious minorities during Ramadan, the announced introduction of a Sharia Compliance Index in 2015, plans for setting Sharia courts on an equal footing with civil courts, the treatment of children's custody cases in mixed marriages and, last but not least, the decision by the Supreme Court to deny a Catholic newspaper the use of the word "Allah" for God as it may "confuse Muslims and might lead to conversions".

### **Tibetan and Uyghur Christians struggling in #29 China**

With a score of 57 points, China ranks 29 on the WWL 2015, an increase compared to last year. In 2014, the country ranked 37 with a score of 51 points. In recent years, the situation of Christians in China has improved considerably. Nevertheless, small groups of Christians from a Tibetan and Uyghur Islamic background and also numbers of other Christians throughout the country still faced more restrictions and serious limitations. This was the main cause for the country's increase in points and rank. Another increase can be seen in the church sphere of life; more churches were monitored and harassed, especially in the Zhejiang province. Here, local authorities started a campaign against religious structures, especially churches. Some were completely destroyed and allegedly more than three hundred crosses on church buildings and compounds were broken down.

In Tibet and Xinjiang, which is home to the Uyghur people, the situation is very volatile. Every change of religion – Buddhism or Islam – will be seen to be a disgrace to the family and treason to the community. If Christians are discovered, they run the risk of being disowned by their families and thrown out. There have been reports of family members destroying the agricultural fields of converts as a punishment for their choice to become Christian.

### **Fallers: #35 Colombia and #44 Sri Lanka**

Last year's main riser Colombia has dropped considerably in ranks, from 25 to 35. Nevertheless, the situation of Christians has remained virtually the same. Especially Christians living in indigenous territories, such as Cauca, Córdoba and Putumayo, as well as areas dominated by criminal gangs experience a high level of pressure and violence. Converts to Christianity within indigenous territories are seen as a threat to the local fiefs and indigenous ancestral traditions. Criminal organizations severely hamper Christians in their freedom of movement if they become too active and even commit violence against them. At least five Christians were killed for their faith in Guaviare, Meta, Atioquia and Córdoba by guerrillas. Numerous Christians have also been displaced from their lands and about twenty churches were ordered to close down.

With a score of 51 points, Sri Lanka ranks 44 on the WWL 2015. In 2014, the country ranked 29 with a score of 55 points. The strong drop in ranks should not be seen as a major improvement of the situation of the Christian minority. It is rather due to the fact that in several WWL countries, the situation got significantly worse and overtook Sri Lanka in ranking. Christians are suffering from pressure and violence mainly by Buddhist extremists and government dictatorial paranoia. Nevertheless, the highest pressure now seems to be on the Muslim minority and not the Christians.

## World Watch List: listing pressure and violence for Christians worldwide

The Open Doors World Watch List is the only annual survey of religious liberty conditions of Christians around the world. It measures the degree of freedom a Christian has to live out their faith in five spheres of life – private, family, community, national and church life, plus a sixth sphere measuring the degree of violence. The methodology counts each sphere as the same and is designed specifically to track the deep structures of persecution, and not merely incidents.

Each year, it ranks the fifty hardest states in which to practice Christianity, covering millions of Christians affected by persecution, defined as “any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ, [including] hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.”

In 2014, the countries where Christians experienced the most violence were, in this order, Nigeria, Iraq, Syria, Central African Republic, Sudan, Pakistan, Egypt, Myanmar, Mexico and Kenya. Important to note is that Iraq and Syria have scored the same in terms of violence, as well as Sudan, Pakistan and Egypt.

Following violence, many Christians have been forced to flee their homes, resulting in unprecedented Christian refugee movements and internal displacement. Syria has seen around forty per cent of the Christian population fleeing the country. Most of them ended up in Lebanon, either in refugee camps or whereas a part of them also fled farther away. Of the original 1.8 million pre-war Christians, around 700,000 Christians have left. As for Iraq, an Open Doors field worker stated, “Since August 20th till now; approximately 5,000 Christian families have emigrated. Most of them left for Jordan and Lebanon, and a few to Turkey. Most of these emigrants were not IDPs, but Christians that have been living in Ankawa (a mainly Christian suburb of Erbil in the Kurdish region of Iraq) for many years. Fortunately for them, they mostly have money to buy tickets, as well as passports, while most IDPs have lost everything, their papers, their money, as well as hope.”

But the internal displacement does not only occur in the Middle East, also Nigeria has seen a considerable refugee movement. Conservative estimates suggest that Boko Haram has killed over 10,000 people over the course of its campaign, the majority likely to be Christians. An estimated 15,000 people were displaced following a Boko Haram attack in Damboa, Borno State, on July 19 2014 that resulted in more than 100 people killed. On June 23, 2014, the UN High Commissioner for refugees announced that there were an estimated 650,000 internally displaced persons in the northeast of Nigeria. The daily killings and the intense security situation make for data to be collected. For instance, nearly all local government areas in Borno state are now firmly controlled by Boko Haram. The sect has also taken a number of towns in Adamawa State. Unconfirmed reports suggest most of the victims have been Christians, killed or displaced. There are also reports of the internal displacement of thousands of Christians, caused by harsh violence against Christians and their properties by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. States reportedly involved are Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, FCT (Abuja), Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba.

The countries that put the greatest squeeze on Christian activity in the reporting period of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2014 were: Somalia, North Korea, Afghanistan, Maldives, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Iran and Libya, where in most cases it can lead to serious problems if it is discovered you have a bible in the home.

## WWL 2015 Trends

*Ron Boyd-McMillan*

In this reporting period, persecution increased around the world, even in places where it has not been so marked in the past, such as parts of Asia, Latin America, and especially sub-Saharan Africa. However, as Li Tien En, a famous house church Christian in China used to say, “Persecution is two parts opportunity, one part crisis – God always brings opportunities out of a crisis.” There is a new unity occurring among ancient communities of faith, and we may see again that an exodus is not always bad for the spread of the Gospel.

There are three types of trend worth paying attention to. First, current trends that are highlighted in the WWL reporting period itself and are clear from the data gathered. Second, trends that are longer term and are hinted at but do not always emerge in stark relief in a single year, yet may be more vital over time. Third, there are good news trends that often get buried under the gruesome headlines, of which there has been a surfeit this year, and should be remembered.

We round up all three for your prayers and action, the last two more briefly.

### 1. Current trends: more persecution in more regions

- **The most rapidly growing area of persecution in the WWL is in the countries of Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa.**

Islamic extremism is the main source, but this extremism is not only from the violent jihadists like Boko Haram, but Islamists who seek to take over cultures by stealth. Twelve countries on the WWL had a significant points increase (6 points or more), and of that number eight were from Africa. The highest riser on the WWL is Kenya, up to #19 from #43, reflecting the only country that had a points increase of 15. For the third time in a row then, an African country has been the highest riser, following Mali in the 2013 list and CAR in the 2014 list. Second highest was Djibouti, with a points increase of 14, up to #24 from #46. Scoring over nine points was Tanzania, up to #33 from #49; Somalia, staying at #2, and over seven points was Comoros, up to #32 from #42. Sudan, Eritrea and Nigeria all had significant jumps in points also, with Sudan and Eritrea both re-entering the top 10 (#6 from #11 and #9 from #12), and Nigeria entering the top 10 for the first time in the WWL’s history (#10 from #14). It is fair to say that Islamic Extremism has two global centers of gravity. One in the Arab Middle East, but the other is in sub-Saharan Africa, and even Christian majority states are experiencing unprecedented levels of exclusion, discrimination and even violence. Many other countries in this region are boiling below the top 50 also, and may feature in the future.

- **Worldwide levels of persecution have risen, but this has not been primarily due to increased violence, but increased cultural marginalization.**

The average increase in points for the WWL 2015 is 3, and to get into the Top 50 the points total is now much higher 48.5 (WWL 2014, 44.7). But the increased scores have mainly come in the five spheres of life through which we track the more subtle “squeeze” dimensions of persecution - private, family, community, church and national life. We do have a category that also measures violence, but in most countries the violence level has stayed largely the same (though of course, often dreadfully high in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Nigeria). Violence always rates the greatest headlines, but often the experience of family exclusion, or the loss of a job, or even rejection from a church community, is more devastating to a Christian and

especially to a new convert. We can say that in most of the top fifty countries, daily life for the Christian is getting harder and harder.

- **Asia is getting harder again.**

It used to be that in the Far East especially, with the startling exception of North Korea, there was a noted improvement in conditions for Christians. However, this is reversing again. There are twelve countries from East Asia and the Far East in the Top 50, and with the exceptions of Laos and Sri Lanka, all have increased their points, and in the case of China, India and Malaysia, considerably. There are four Asian countries in the top twenty. North Korea remains #1, Afghanistan remains at #5, Pakistan at #8 and Vietnam rises to #16. India is the highest it has ever been on the WWL, at #21, Myanmar and Brunei both fall in the rankings though they have both had a slight rise in their scores, and China returns to the top thirty at #29. Malaysia has risen to #37 and Indonesia stays at #47. Many of these countries contain massive Christian churches. It is often been said that there are more people in church on a Sunday in China than in the whole of Europe. Governments often tend to be the main source of persecution in these regions, and they have become more worried about the dangers of religious extremism in the light of events in the Middle East. But there are also leaders of religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism who feel threatened by the Christian growth, and the big surprise of the year has been how much harder it has got for Malaysian Christians.

- **Latin America is back on the radar.**

Mexico is the highest entrant on the WWL this year at #38, and although Colombia has fallen from #25 to #35, its points loss is quite small. Other Latin American countries such as Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela remain causes for concern and may well enter a future top 50. The sources of persecution are complex and the most numerous in this most Christianized region, and Christians are caught in the crossfire between 'Organized corruption', 'Tribal antagonism', 'Dictatorial paranoia', and even rising 'Secular intolerance'. Weak states allow local forces, such as narco-trafficking groups, to hold sway, and when Christians stand up and stand out they are targeted with merciless violence.

- **Islamic extremism is by far the most numerous persecution engine.**

No less than 18 of the top 20 countries have 'Islamic extremism' as a main persecution engine. And this is also the case for forty of the top 50 countries. This reflects the trend that Christianity's most global persecutor is Islamic extremism, and not only of a violent kind. It is not merely concentrated in the Middle East (including Arabian Peninsula), since only six of the top twenty are from that region. However, it is also an engine that joins onto other engines, most commonly 'Tribal antagonism', 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Organized corruption'. The second most numerous main persecution engine is Dictatorial Paranoia, where leaders seek to control religious expression. It is a main persecution engine in ten countries, including North Korea, and shows up as a secondary persecution engine in sixteen more countries. Although Organized corruption is a main persecution engine in only two countries (Colombia and Mexico), it is the third most numerous (after Islamic extremism and Dictatorial paranoia) when its status as a secondary engine is taken into account, showing up 22 more times in the WWL top 50. Christians increasingly have to pay a heavy economic price to remain faithful to Christ.

- **Under the influence of Islamic State radical sentiments have increased in the Middle East region.**

IS cells (either sleeping or awake) are present in several countries, e.g. Jordan, Lebanon, West Bank and Gaza. This has led to increased levels of fear for local Christians (and also local non-Christians, who in some cases have started to arm themselves). In Syria, areas under IS or other jihadist control have radicalized. Former 'moderate' Muslims have become stricter as they do not want to give the impression they are heretics. This has clear implications for the situation of Christians (the pressure on them has increased). This is true for all Christians but especially Christians from a Muslim background.

## 2. Long term trends

- **What will happen in Asia and relatively liberal countries in the Middle East when the jihadists return?** Asian states and Middle Eastern countries like Jordan are bracing for the return of the jihadists who went to fight for IS. Many of them are battle hardened, and smart in organizing. They may also bring a new hatred of Christians into a region that traditionally has been more accepting.
- **Splitting states as 'Secular intolerance' is seen as an antidote to religious extremism.** States are splitting apart into those who espouse religious extremism, and those who feel the only adequate riposte is to become more robustly secular. There is a danger of splitting societies into believers and non-believers, whatever the religious background, instead of extremists and moderates.
- **Corruption is increasingly an intensifying factor in persecution.** Failed states are still significantly to the fore, and in the vacuum all sorts of rackets are run, with the result that Christians often find the only way to function in society is to join in some sort of economic exploitation racket. It can make the difference between having to flee or stay.
- **The season of impunity for anti-Christian action in India has started.** The world's largest democracy elected a Hindu extremist Prime Minister, who has declared open season on Christians before. It has not taken long for the cabinet to begin to signal that non-Hindus should keep their heads down. A church in Delhi has already been burned.
- **Never before have so many violent extremists been seen by so many as heroes.** The violent jihadists of the Middle East, and IS in particular, are the first extremists to be savvy with social media. Their global appeal is hard to stop, with a number of young people in Western and Asian societies enthralled with their bloodthirsty exploits. You might have to expect more violence on the street corner... where you live.

## 3. Good news trends

- **Ancient enmities between Christians in the Middle East are slowly dissolving in the white heat of violence and persecution.** Symbolically it was obvious, as Pope Francis visited the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the end of November in Istanbul, and pledged amidst expressing grave concern about the persecution of Christians in the region to begin to reconcile the two communions and undo a split that goes back to AD1054. But in fact, on the ground, especially in Syria, the historic faiths and the newer denominations have drawn together in a remarkable new unity under the

onslaught. There has never been so much unity among significant sections of the Middle East's Christians.

- **New co-operative relationships are being forged between Muslim and Christian in the Middle East caldron that could have wonderful long term benefits.** Although the headlines are on the dreadful violence and beheadings, yet in many localities Christians and Muslims have been thrown together in their need, and are forging a new respect as they work together and help each other. Some commentators have even gone so far as to say, "Muslim leaders have become so shaken by the actions of IS that they are seeking to work with the Christians and not ignoring them, and a new understanding of Christian-Muslim relations is being born."
- **China is still undecided about how to deal with the church.** This is actually good news. With the attacks on scores of churches, with some buildings being destroyed and about 300 crosses being removed, in the heartland of Wenzhou, many assume that China is setting its face against Christianity, but there is a surprising weight of counter-evidence that suggests a vigorous debate is going on in the Chinese government over whether it should restrict or free the church. If Christianity can sound, look and be Chinese enough, we might just see the church continuing to be invited to play a fuller role in the building of the new China. All this being said, it is the Tibetan and Muslim Uyghur Christian converts that bear the brunt of persecution in China.
- **Western governments are engaging with religious communities in working against extremists like never before.** This may be due to simple fear of the so-called "facebook jihadists," where a young Western Muslim decides to act violently in their own country in response to the bloodthirsty calls of the IS bloggers and returnees, as the Brussels attack showed in 2014. But there is in many government departments (though not all) a new sophistication in realizing that good religion has the best chance of driving out bad religion. At the very least, there is a new openness and thirst for the information and wisdom of Christians working in these regions among those who are tasked with ensuring national security. That has not happened before to the extent it has in 2014.



## Summaries of Country Persecution Dynamics

### 1. North Korea (score 92)

On the World Watch List 2015, North Korea gets 92 points (90 points in 2014). The persecution engine affecting Christians in North Korea is 'Dictatorial paranoia'. Kim Jong Un still has a lot of power, but it seems that he is not the absolute leader his father and his grandfather used to be. There is much speculation about who or which group of people might be the powerful men behind him and the leadership of the Party's Organizational Guidance Department (OGD) might be a safe bet for this. But in any case because of the personality cult, Kim Jong Un is much needed and at least from the outside his rule includes the Worker's Party, the Army, Administration and all strands of society. No one is allowed or able to challenge or question this rule. In each and every sphere of life (private, family, community, national and church), the pressure is on the highest level. For a Christian in North Korea it is very dangerous to keep a Bible for himself, to read it or to worship by himself. Sharing his faith with family members is rarely done as it can have grave consequences, if it comes to light. Christian parents hide their faith in front of their children. As social control and indoctrination are extremely high, Christians have to find other ways to keep strong. They are seen as enemies, not only of the state, but of the very society they live in. Not only Christians themselves will be punished in case of discovery, but likely also their families. Immediate family members will serve a sentence in a re-education camp if they are not discovered being Christians themselves. However, discovered, adult Christians are sent to political labor camps from which there is no release possible, meaning they will work there until they die. Meeting with other Christians under these circumstances is virtually impossible. North Korean police officials hunt down and vigorously prosecute North Koreans who convert to Christianity while in China or those who attempt to bring Christian literature, primarily Bible verses, back with them to North Korea. The regime will not loosen its tight grip and it will continue to control everyone. Christians cannot expect any relief or more space for their faith anytime soon.

### 2. Somalia (score 90)

With a score of 90 points, Somalia ranks 2 on the World Watch List 2015. In 2014, Somalia also ranked 2 with a score of 80 points. With no functioning government in Somalia, Christians are targeted by Islamic terrorists and clan authorities but as the government gains more control state actors are joining the vicious two to persecute Christians. The only type of Christianity in Somalia is Christian converts from a Muslim background. The main persecution engines in the country are 'Islamic extremism' and 'Tribal antagonism'. 'Organized corruption' is a secondary persecution engine. Persecution in the country is very severe. Islamic religious leaders maintain publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches in Somalia. This view is categorically expressed in the constitution and other laws of Somaliland, Somalia and Puntland where Islam is afforded the status of 'state religion', and Christianity is pushed away from public life. Islamic terrorists, in the form of al-Shabaab, as well as other radical Islamic groups, have intensified the persecution of Christians. The social structure underpinning the way in which Somalia is governed is tribal, and clans within this tribal system maintain their massive influence in the new government system. Radical Islamic groups like al-Shabaab, although not motivated by the tribe and clan politics, are using the clan structure to strengthen and deeply entrench their position inside the Somali society. Christians experience

very serious pressure in all spheres of life: private, family, community, national and church. They have to hide their conversion to Christianity from everyone, even the immediate and extended family or clan. The family is not only non-sympathetic towards Christianity, they also fear to be suspected of being converts. People risk targeted violence from their family, clan, authorities or militias when discovered being a Christian. The decision by the UN Security Council to extend the mandate of the African Union Force in the country and the defeat of al-Shabaab in major towns, have been the only positive aspects of the year. Finally, for how long the international community can protect and finance the Federal Government, a corrupt, impotent and tribal government that cannot stand by itself, also remains to be seen. If the international community decides to give up on Somalia once again, the future of the country in general and of Christians in particular will get worse.

### 3. Iraq (score 86)

Iraq continues to be high in the WWL top ten, scoring 86 points and ranking 3 (78 points in 2014). The situation of religious freedom for Christians has seriously deteriorated under influence of the establishment of Islamic State in large parts of Iraq. There are several persecution engines in Iraq, but the main one is 'Islamic extremism'. In June 2014, a strict version of Islamic law was implemented in the area the militants of Islamic State hold. Christians were forced to convert, flee or pay a tax for religious minorities. As a result many Christians fled. Moreover, the broader Iraqi society is turning more Islamic, with increased social control on women wearing the veil and observance of Ramadan. The role of Islam is growing within the Iraqi and Kurdish government as well, as the influence of strong neighbor Iran is increasing in the weak Iraqi state. Christians most affected by persecution are converts from Islam. However, in areas held by radical Islamic groups all Christians are under great pressure. As a result of the establishment of the Islamic State, the already high scores for all spheres of life of Christians in Iraq have further increased (private, family, community, national and church spheres of life). Of the five spheres, pressure especially increased in the spheres of community, national and church. In areas under control of IS, churches and monasteries are in general either demolished or used for other purposes. It is practically impossible to have any kind of church life in IS held areas. Many Christians but also other religious minorities like Yazidis and Shabaq have been killed, abducted and physically harmed. In areas held by IS, virtually the entire Christian community has disappeared. In total the number of Christians left in Iraq is not higher than 300,000 – compared to more than 1.2 million at the beginning of the 1990s. The loss of a plural religious society easily leads to lower levels of tolerance of those holding different views. A more hopeful scenario is that the different ethnic and religious groups unite against their mutual jihadist enemy. This might bring more stability to the country. However at this moment, that still is a pie in the sky.

### 4. Syria (score 83)

Like last year, Syria is high in the WWL 2015 Top Ten with a score that has further increased from 79 to 83 points. It now ranks 4 on the list. The main reason for Syria's increased score is the rise in influence of radical Islamic groups, reaching an all-time low with the establishment of the Islamic State (IS). The main persecution engine is 'Islamic extremism'. Secondary persecution engines are 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Organized corruption'. IS introduced the caliphate in large parts of Syria and Iraq at the end of June 2014. A strict version of Sharia law

was implemented. Syrian society is radicalizing especially in areas controlled by radical Islamic groups. In the meantime, most Christians have fled IS controlled areas. Another persecution engine is 'Dictatorial paranoia'. In pre-civil war Syria, Dictatorial paranoia mostly came from government officials but today, this is predominantly driven by armed groups who are willing to use any means to stay in power. Another persecution engine is 'Organized corruption', which takes place in the civil war situation of impunity and anarchy. It is a means for self-enrichment, e.g. kidnap for ransom. Christians are kidnapped out of financial, political and ideological motives. In the conflict, all Syrians are suffering greatly, but Christians are particularly vulnerable due to their concentration in strategic areas and their alleged support to the government. Though all Christians are affected by persecution, this is especially true for Christians from historical churches and converts from Islam (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs). Christians face increased faith-related pressure in all spheres of life: private, family, community, national and church. This is true for all Christians in IS controlled areas and for MBBs in the entire country. In Kurdish areas the situation for MBBs is somewhat less intense. In areas controlled by radical Islamic groups most churches are damaged, destroyed or used as Islamic centers. Public expressions of Christian faith are prohibited and church buildings or monasteries cannot be repaired or restored. Many Christians have been abducted, physically harmed and killed. An end to the violence does not seem near despite the increasingly exhausted state of the Syrian regime. It is likely that the war will turn into a free-for-all without clear winners – and in the end, there are only losers with an economy reliant on foreign aid and humanitarian support. The exodus of Christians – who constitute a neutral element in a society containing many different facets of Islam - will lead to less stability and increased levels of conflict. Amidst all violence and persecution, there are also sparks of hope, however. Though many Christians have left the country, a growing number of people are converting to Christ in the deplorable situation of civil war.

## 5. Afghanistan (score 81)

On the World Watch List 2015, Afghanistan gets 81 points (78 points in 2014). The main persecution engine in Afghanistan is 'Islamic extremism'. Secondary persecution engines are 'Tribal antagonism' and 'Organized corruption'. All Christians with an Afghan nationality come from a Muslim background (converts). If it becomes known that someone has converted to Christianity, he or she faces heavy societal and familial pressure. If Christians are discovered, they are subject to discrimination and hostility up to violence by their family, friends and community. Muslim clergy will most likely be the instigators and local authorities can be involved, too. Converts are put under heavy pressure to recant their faith. Additionally, the own tribe and people are more important than the country. People are deeply entrenched into their families, villages, tribes and own people. If someone dares to turn from his tribe and age-old values and to embrace something new and maybe even foreign, this results in high pressure to return to tradition. When this does not happen, such a person will be looked at as a traitor and excluded from the community. There is no public church no matter for which type of Christianity. Even expats do not have a place dedicated to Christian worship. Such a place would certainly be attacked by Taliban. In the past year, three expat Christians were killed because of their Christian faith. In April 2014, a US citizen working as medical doctor in Kabul motivated by Christian charity was shot by a guard. In July 2014, two aid workers from Finland, working for a Christian ministry, were also killed. In June 2014, a Catholic priest, working for

refugees, was abducted and has not been released at the time of writing. Finally, in April 2014, the Taliban launched an attack against a building they suspected being used as a hidden church. The presidential elections from April and June 2014 ended in a stalemate as both candidates declared that the process was marred with fraud and considered themselves to be winners. In the end, Ashraf Ghani was declared winner. After some negotiations, a government of national unity was built which now faces huge challenges. These are security as well as political challenges. Given these, the church will remain pushed deeply underground.

## 6. Sudan (score 80)

With a score of 80 points (73 points in 2014), Sudan ranks 6 on the World Watch List 2015. The persecution engines underpinning the persecution dynamics of Christians in Sudan are 'Islamic extremism' and 'Dictatorial paranoia'. These are main persecution engines. Islam is very well rooted in the Sudanese society. The overwhelming majority of the population in Sudan is Sunni Muslim, and Sharia law is the foundation of Sudan's legal system. The incumbent regime is authoritarian and wants to control the life of its citizens in toto. Blasphemy laws are used country-wide to persecute and prosecute Christians. Apostasy is criminalized, punishable by the death penalty, and it is very harsh especially on non-Arabs. In this regard, the case of Miriam Ibrahim - a Christian woman who was sentenced to death but later freed after massive international pressure, is a microcosm of the lives of Christians in the country. Regarding violence, in the reporting year, the modus operandi is indiscriminate bombardment of Christians around Nuba mountains (the policy is: kill them, round them up, starve them and then they will submit). Many have been killed. Churches and Christian buildings have been destroyed. Those who kill and abuse Christians commit the atrocities at will, and with impunity. On an individual level, Christians face severe pressure in their different spheres of lives (private, family, community, national and church), especially the Christian converts from Islam. Even though this is mainly driven by the extended family, religious leaders, and people from the broader society, the role of the government can also be seen. Due to a severe violation of freedom of religion, Sudan is one of the two African countries designated 'country of particular concern' by the US State Department. The country is also in a continuous war/civil war in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile State. The president's case for crimes committed in Darfur is also pending before the International Criminal Court. The symbiotic relationship between radical Islam and the authoritarian regime has become more intricate than ever. Considering the level of persecution in the reporting year, the life of Christians in the country will remain the same in the coming year(s).

## 7. Iran (score 80)

Iran ranks 7 with a score of 80 points (77 points in 2014). The increase of points for Iran is explained by a further deteriorated situation for Christians in Iran. The main persecution engine active in Iran is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Ecclesiastical arrogance' is a secondary persecution engine. Shia Islam is the official religion and all laws must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law. According to the Iranian state, only Armenians and Assyrians can be Christian. Ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, and, therefore, ethnic Persian Christians are considered apostates. This makes almost all Christian activity illegal, especially when it occurs in Persian languages - from evangelism to Bible training, to publishing Scripture and Christian books or preaching in Farsi. Ecclesiastical arrogance concerns efforts to

maintain one's Christian denomination as the only legitimate or dominant expression of Christianity in the country. Certain leaders of certain historical Christian communities exercise pressure on non-traditional Protestant communities. Apart from Christians, the rights of other religious minorities like Jews, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Sunni and Dervish Muslims are violated as well. Especially religions that are not recognized in the constitution, like Baha'i, are affected. Of all types of Christianity, mostly converts to Christianity from Islam are affected, as well as non-traditional Protestant Christian communities, especially those who evangelize Muslims or who are considered Muslims themselves (second generation converts). There is pressure on Christians in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). This pressure is increasing and comes particularly from authorities and family. In Iran, detentions of Christians are very common. During the current reporting period, at least 75 Christians were arrested. More Christians were sentenced to prison and pressure on those detained increased, including physical and mental abuse. Several Christians were forced to leave their homes or to flee the country. Expectations were high when President Rouhani took office in 2013. However, his powers are limited and on the short run no concrete changes are expected for religious minorities.

## **8. Pakistan (score 79)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Pakistan gets 79 points (77 points in 2014). The main persecution engine in Pakistan is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Organized corruption' is a secondary persecution engine. Pakistan's Christians are caught in the crossfire between Islamic militant organizations and mobs that routinely violently target Christians on the one hand, and an Islamizing culture on the other hand that results in Christians being isolated from the rest of the population. Many Christians who can afford to leave the country are leaving. Some observers are talking about the 'Talibanization' of the Pakistani society. The notorious blasphemy laws continue to have devastating consequences for minorities, including Christians. There were dozens of new cases filed in the reporting period and the government ignored any national or international calls for an amendment or even a ban of those laws. Christian converts from Islam, if discovered, face the strongest opposition and therefore, will keep their conversion secret or even relocate for security reasons. But if a rumor on blasphemy spreads, mobs frequently target Christians without caring about denominations. Suspicion and bias are high and it is always dangerous to keep Christian materials in one's house as allegations on proselytization can be raised on any occasion. Additionally, accusations of blasphemy are always a danger for Christians. Those allegations frequently turn out to be raised just for the sake of settling personal scores, but of course this results in Christians having to act with extreme caution. Church buildings often have to be hidden behind high walls and sometimes rather resemble fortresses. Congregations have to hire and pay guards. Pakistan has been used to violence against its religious minorities for a long time. Christians were killed and church buildings as well as houses where Christians lived were destroyed. Moreover, women and girls are experiencing violence every day. Especially those from minority groups are vulnerable and easy targets for rape and sexual abuse. They are easy prey and considered to be inferior people. The reporting period witnessed an increasing competition of radical Islamic groups and the raise of 'franchises' of international radical Islamic groups like Islamic State, Al Qaeda and of course the Taliban. If those announcements

would result in a competition of such groups, this could lead to a further radicalization of society and to deterioration for Christians.

### **9. Eritrea (score 79)**

With a score of 79 points (72 points in 2014), Eritrea ranks 9 on the World Watch List 2015. In recent years, there has been increasing pressure on Christians in Eritrea, in particular for non-traditional protestant Christian communities. The persecution engines in the country are 'Dictatorial paranoia', 'Islamic extremism', and 'Ecclesiastical arrogance'. These are main persecution engines. Eritrea has been suffering the authoritarian regime of Isaias Afewerki, which has been geared towards exercising extensive influence over the life of its citizens, for more than two decades. Islamic extremism is also rising, and the rule of the regime is creating favorable conditions for that. Well organized and with a long tradition and historic recognition, the Orthodox Church plays its own role in persecuting other types of Christianity in the form of Ecclesiastical arrogance, putting specific pressure on evangelical groups. Eritrean Christians face a lot of pressure and experience violence. The Eritrean government puts massive pressure on the Church and continuously targets individuals in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). This is closely related to the repressive nature of the Eritrean regime. Furthermore, Muslims converting to Christianity especially face intense pressure in the spheres of private, family and community life due to the rise of Islamic extremism. The government intensified its crackdown on the Christians, leading to more than 138 arrests of believers and church leaders without due process of law. The UN Human Rights Commission established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses in Eritrea in June 2014. Mass exodus of young (mostly) Christian people out of Eritrea continues, which in turn is creating space for Islam to grow in size and influence. There are no indications that show the better future for Christians in Eritrea, except the step taken by the UN Human Rights Commission.

### **10. Nigeria (score 78)**

The situation for Christians in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern provinces, has deteriorated since last year. With 78 points on the World Watch List 2015 (70 points on the World Watch List 2014), levels of pressure and violence against Christians are higher than ever. Nigeria now ranks 10 on the WWL 2015. In Nigeria, the main persecution dynamic is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Tribal antagonism' and 'Organized corruption' are secondary persecution engines. Although Boko Haram is most often associated with persecution of Christians in Northern Nigerian, the pattern of persecution is much more complex than only killing or wounding of Christians – as well as moderate Muslims – by an Islamic terrorist group. This is especially so in the twelve Northern Sharia states where local government and social groups leave hardly any space for Christians to live their own lives. Persecution is most pronounced in the Sharia states, but also partly extends into neighboring states, and plays heavily upon Christians in their different spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). Not only Christians from a Muslim Background but also other types of Christianity experience faith-related pressure and violence. The levels of violence in Nigeria remain extremely high. The abduction of the Chibok girls received substantial media coverage, but this is only the top of the iceberg, as physical aggression remains widespread. The current situation in Nigeria casts dark clouds ahead. The links between al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and Boko Haram as well as other Islamic terrorist

groups in the region, and especially the inspirational link with Islamic State (Iraq, Syria) which led to the declaration of the Caliphate in northeastern Nigeria, make it likely that the church will suffer more violent persecution in the near future. Non Boko Haram violence from Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria will add to this, as will the upcoming elections in 2015. All the violence has caused massive numbers of internally displaced Christians (IDPs). Many of them are not taken care of by national or international aid agencies. In the region they remain a strong, living witness of the supremacy of the persecutors and the high vulnerability of the persecuted, and as such encourage violence and impunity, and culmination of fear among the persecuted Christians. This vicious circle can only be broken when the international community intervenes by humanitarian aid and otherwise.

### **11. Maldives (score 78)**

On the World Watch List 2015, the Maldives get 78 points (77 points in 2014), ranking 11. The persecution engine in the Maldives is 'Islamic extremism'. The Islamic Government continues to see itself as the protector of Islam, instituting a set of laws that basically prohibits a Maldivian to convert to other religions than Islam, on the penalty of facing harsh consequences including losing citizenship. To be Maldivian is equated with being a Muslim, leaving no room for any deviation. Officially, there are no Maldivian Christians, only expatriate Christians. They are portrayed negatively in media and do not have any place in the public square. In February 2014, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs revealed key objectives for the year 2014, including blocking all religions except Islam in the nation, ensuring that all laws and regulations adhere to Islamic principles, strengthening Islamic education, building mosques and Islamic centers and broadening the role of mosques, and developing and strengthening the Islamic Fiqh Academy to issue fatwas. Moreover, publications and media content produced in Maldives or brought in from abroad will be monitored to ensure they are not conflicting with the Islamic creed. Even tourists have reported getting into trouble having a personal copy of the Bible with them. There are no church gatherings and buildings in the Maldives. The few Maldivian Christians have no room at all to meet and take all precautionary measures possible to avoid being discovered. The violence level is not very high. Christians are deeply underground as they know about the consequences once they are discovered. The current Maldivian government, led by president Yameen, reiterated its role as the protector and defender of Islam and the importance of Islamic values. Given the sternness of the government and the support it enjoys by Maldivian citizens, the situation for the Christian minority is likely to remain the same.

### **12. Saudi Arabia (score 77)**

Saudi Arabia received 77 points, only one point less than last year, but consequently falls six positions on the World Watch List 2015 (WWL) to rank 12. It is the first time that Saudi Arabia is outside the WWL Top Ten. The reason is the considerable increase in score of other countries. There are several persecution engines in Saudi Arabia, but the main one is 'Islamic extremism'. The desert kingdom is defined by Wahhabism, a purist and strict interpretation of Islam. It is forbidden to openly practice other religions. Apostasy – conversion to another religion – is punishable by death. Radical Islamic breeding ground is widely present in the kingdom and Saudi funding of terrorism abroad is the main source of Sunni terrorism in the world. PEW Research Forum labels government restrictions on religious freedom in general as

“very high” in Saudi Arabia and social hostilities are ranked as “high”. Apart from Christians, other religious minorities’ rights are violated as well: Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and all Muslims who do not adhere to Wahhabi Islam. The two types of Christianity present in the country are both affected by persecution: communities of expatriate or migrant Christians and communities of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background. These converts face most persecution: they run the risk of being killed and physically abused by their families. Christian migrant workers – who come from low and middle income countries - are often treated as slaves, due to their ethnicity and faith. In Saudi Arabia, there is severe pressure on Christians in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). Proselytism of Muslims, publishing and importing Christian materials in Arabic are illegal. There are no church buildings and Christians worship in compounds or at home. House churches – mostly of African and Asian migrant workers - are raided from time to time by police and religious police. Several tens of worshippers were detained and most of them were deported. Migrant Christians – mainly domestic maids – are vulnerable to physical abuse, including rape and sexual harassment. Though there are several elements in Saudi society that could lead to instability on the long run, no major changes are expected in the short term. This is also true for the level of religious freedom for Christians, though anti-Christian violence could increase as local Christians are growing bolder in expressing their faith.

### **13. Libya (score 76)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Libya receives 76 points, five more than on the World Watch List 2014. The country now ranks 13. The position of Christians was already extremely difficult, and has only deteriorated, making Libya the worst ranking country in North Africa. Within a context of anarchy and absent rule of law, Christians – both nationals and foreigners – are squeezed between fanatical religious groups and criminal gangs. The main persecution engine affecting Christians in Libya is ‘Islamic extremism’. ‘Organized corruption’ is a secondary persecution engine. As in most Muslim countries, converting from Islam brings social pressure. Christian converts from a Muslim background are always at risk from their families; there were some reported cases of beatings by family members. Most Libyan Christians are afraid to meet with other believers, as any kind of religious gathering (other than Islamic) for Libyans is forbidden. Migrant Christians are allowed to have their own churches, but Libyans are not allowed to attend. After the demise of Gadhafi’s regime, the source of persecution has changed, but Christians continue to experience high levels of pressure in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). During Gadhafi's reign, the main source of persecution was the government with its secret services. Now, Islamic fanatical movements such as the Salafists are responsible for most of the pressure on and violent incidents against Christians, in a country where there is no central government and where rule of law is absent. Violence against Christians in Libya has increased during the reporting period, with many violent incidents targeting both Libyan and migrant Christians. Salafists and other radical Islamic groups are responsible for most of the incidents.

### **14. Yemen (score 73)**

Yemen ranks 14 in the World Watch List (WWL) 2015, with a score of 73 points – one point less than last year. There are several persecution engines active in Yemen, but the two main persecution engines are ‘Islamic extremism’ and ‘Tribal antagonism’. The Constitution declares



that Islam is the state religion and Sharia is the source of all legislation. There is some religious freedom for foreigners but proselytization is prohibited. Muslims are forbidden to convert to another religion. Yemenis who leave Islam may face the death penalty. The Yemeni tribal society remains very strong, and the government is a secondary institution to the traditional ways of tribal governance. Tribal law and custom prohibit members of the tribe from leaving the tribe often with the punishment of death or banishment. Since the ousting of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2012, Yemen has seen political turmoil and sporadic violence. In the power vacuum, militants and tribal rebels – including Al Qaeda affiliated groups - are fighting to gain control of territory. In Yemen, there is pressure on Christians in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). Christian converts from Islam face persecution to such a degree that they would need to live in secret. Any impression to those around converts from Islam that they might be Christians can have serious consequences. As most Christians are foreigners, they are particularly susceptible to persecution since they are not only non-Muslims, but often seen as outside encroachers on the national and tribal identity. Foreign Christians are mostly free to worship in registered churches of which there are a few. Specific anti-Christian violence against converts from Islam occurred from the side of the family and authorities. Missionary activities by expatriates have led to detentions and deportations. As the authorities were focusing their attention on political events during the past years, radical Islamic groups had more space to operate. The increased situation of insecurity in Yemen has led to higher levels of violence and impunity and Christians are also suffering from this. On the short run, this is not expected to change, especially since the National Dialogue ended in September 2014. This can easily lead to more frustration and unrest. Islamic terrorists being an important driver of persecution in Yemen, this does not bode well for the situation of religious freedom of local and expatriate Christians in Yemen.

### **15. Uzbekistan (score 69)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Uzbekistan gets 69 points (68 points in 2014). The main persecution engines in Uzbekistan are ‘Dictatorial paranoia’ and ‘Islamic extremism’. ‘Organized corruption’ is a secondary persecution engine. The regime of President Islam Karimov continues to restrict the freedom of religion, and Christian converts from a Muslim background are facing many problems from their family, friends and community. Both forces explain to a large extent the country’s score on the World Watch List. The fear of an influx of Islamic jihadists, the terrible human rights situation and the succession of President Karimov will remain important environment settings. In the past year, the oppression of Christians has been constant. Both main persecution engines cause pressure on Christians in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). Islamic extremism does so primarily in the private, family and community spheres. There is evidence of violence against Christians even though the government tries to quell any news report about this. Frequently, houses of Christians are raided and books and other materials confiscated. Most often, the state monitors and heavily fines undue religious movements in order to control them. Other violent means used are severe pressure during interrogation and sometimes even rape. For the coming year, no serious improvements in the situation of Uzbekistan’s Christians are expected. The attitude of the government towards religion is negative and this is not likely to change soon. Pressure on and violence against converts from Islam from family, friends and community will continue, if not increase.

## 16. Vietnam (score 68)

On the World Watch List 2015, Vietnam gets 68 points (65 points in 2014). The main persecution engine in Vietnam is ‘Communist oppression’. ‘Tribal antagonism’ and ‘Dictatorial paranoia’ are secondary persecution engines. Vietnam is one of the few remaining countries in the world following a communist ideology. Consequently, authorities still perceive Christianity as a foreign influence and Christians as Western agents. The regime is based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh’s thoughts. The level of Communist control was recently shown when the visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief, Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt in July 2014 was not only monitored, but it also became clear that representatives of religious minority groups were intimidated and meetings cancelled and postponed. As by estimation, around two thirds of all Christians come from a tribal background, including eighty percent of all Protestant Christians, many of them being Hmong, pressure to return to traditional faith and to take part in rituals is very high, especially in rural areas. Even if Christians as ethnic minority members qualify for incentives given by the government, e.g. financial support for boarding schools, it very much depends on the local authorities if they really are allowed to benefit from it, which is often not the case. Churches are closely monitored and occasionally meetings are hindered or disturbed. The publication and distribution of Christian materials is difficult and highly restricted. Work among children and youth is not officially restricted, but monitored and youth camps and trainings can be disturbed. According to Decree 92 which took effect January 1st, 2013, but is not fully implemented yet, registrations must include the number of followers, places of worship, schedule, forms of practices, the religion's principles, and representatives' names and residences for the group. The level of violence increased during the reporting period. Several church buildings as well as houses of Christians were destroyed and more than ten Christians were sentenced to jail. Though recently the government took up talks with the Roman Catholic Church on instituting diplomatic relations and opening a Catholic university, the general approach towards Christians is likely to remain the same.

## 17. Central African Republic (score 67)

The Central African Republic (CAR) again scores 67 points, ranking 17 on the World Watch List 2015. The country entered the World Watch List in 2014 for the first time with 67 points as well. The high score of the country can be explained almost exclusively by the high degree of violence against Christians caused by the rebellion of the Séléka movement. The main persecution engine in CAR is ‘Islamic extremism’. ‘Organized corruption’ is a secondary persecution engine. The internal revolution which saw the victory of Séléka, a coalition of rebels dissatisfied with the regime, and the ouster of President François Bozizé, is responsible for the high degree of pressure and violence against Christians. The Séléka movement, with no formal Islamist agenda but composed in majority of (foreign) Muslims, has ravaged the country, specifically targeting Christian properties (houses and churches) and government buildings. Since the outbreak of the rebellion by the Séléka coalition predominantly composed of Muslims from CAR associated with Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries, these mercenaries have only attacked Christians and non-Muslims. The desecration of Christian churches and the violence towards Christians (rape, robbery, kidnapping, torture, murder, etc.) are evidence of this. The Christian population – all types of Christianity – is the most vulnerable group in the current crisis in CAR. Any church and property belonging to ordinary Christians is a target for

Séléka. For a Christian majority country such as CAR, the degree of pressure on Christians is surprising. Due to the uprising, the freedom of Christians is restricted heavily throughout all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church), though to a lesser extent in the family sphere of life. The levels of violence in CAR are unprecedented. In fact, CAR receives almost the highest possible score as far as faith-related violence is concerned. In the context of violence in CAR, ‘anti-Balaka’ is a controversial phenomenon. The name ‘anti-Balaka’ (which means ‘anti-machete’) is a collective name for a mosaic of self-defense groups. Their militias consist of former soldiers and farmers and organized initially to protect their communities against Séléka. They have been branded as “Christian” and have stated that they are fighting to preserve and protect Christians. However, the Christian majority and Christian leaders in CAR have officially and vehemently distanced themselves from the anti-Balaka violence that is (mostly) directed towards Muslims.

### **18. Qatar (score 64)**

Qatar ranks 18 on this year’s World Watch List, with a score of 64 points (63 points in 2014). The situation for Christians in the country remains the same, i.e. Christian converts from a Muslim Background and Christian migrant workers continue to be pressured. The main persecution engine in Qatar is ‘Islamic extremism’. ‘Dictatorial paranoia’ is a secondary persecution engine in the country. The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam. While Muslims are free to worship in public, non-Muslim religious groups are restricted to private houses or designated places. Proselytizing is outlawed and criticism of Islam is punished. Conversion from Islam to another religion constitutes apostasy, an offense which carries a capital punishment. Family law is controlled by Sharia, the Islamic legislation. The world’s richest country in GDP per capita is composed almost entirely of migrant laborers. Expatriates, including many migrant workers (mostly from Asia and Africa) are generally perceived and treated by Qataris as slaves. Forced labor and human trafficking are major problems. Qatar is one of the largest financial supporters of Islamic terrorism: it reportedly supports Islamic rebels in war zones. Both foreign migrant workers and converts from Islam to Christianity face persecution. The Christian faith of low skilled migrant workers can add to their already vulnerable and low status. Converts face the strongest persecution within their own families and their private life but also in all other spheres of life (community, national and church). Expatriate Christians are especially limited in their community, national and church spheres of life. They run a serious risk of being detained and deported if they are involved in missionary activities. The political, social and economic situation of Qatar seems quite stable. On the short run, this means that the level of religious freedom for Christians is not expected to change.

### **19. Kenya (score 63)**

With a score of 63 points, Kenya ranks 19 on the World Watch List 2015. It is the highest riser on the list by gaining 15 points. The main persecution engine affecting Christians in Kenya is ‘Islamic extremism’. ‘Secular intolerance’ and ‘Tribal antagonism’ are secondary persecution engines. The level of persecution related violence has increased in Nairobi, Northeast, and Coastal regions, and the squeeze related persecution processes in the different spheres of Christian life (private, family, community, national and church) intensified in the majority of the country. Homegrown radical Muslims and militants crossing the border from Somalia are

severely persecuting Christians. The government's approach to pushing for an unbalanced secularist agenda also has an impact on the Kenyan Church, as some of the agenda being pushed by the government contradicts with the values and principles of Christianity. In some parts of the country, there has been persecution as a result of Tribal antagonism. Persecution in the country affects expatriate churches, historical churches, the non-traditional Protestant churches, and the Christian converts from a Muslim background. Violence has increased in different parts of the country particularly where Islamic radicalism is vivid. The other emerging engines Secular intolerance and Tribal antagonism also resulted in an increase in squeeze. The overall picture related to the persecution of Christians in Kenya dramatically changed, and a jump in the score from 48 to 63 is testament to this. Lacking government capacity and unwillingness to take the issue seriously, let the perpetrators behind persecution get off scot-free. The media continue reporting biased issues about Christians and church leaders. The future of the Kenyan Christians will continue deteriorating as long as the underlying issues are not properly and adequately tackled.

## **20. Turkmenistan (score 63)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Turkmenistan gets 63 points (62 points in 2014), ranking 20. The main persecution engines in Turkmenistan are 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Islamic extremism'. 'Organized corruption' is a secondary persecution engine. The regime of President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov continues to restrict the freedom of religion, and Christian converts from a Muslim background are facing many problems from their family, friends and community. Both forces explain to a large extent the country's score on the World Watch List. The uncertain economic prospects, the fear of an influx of Islamic jihadists, and the almost total state control will remain important environment settings as well. In the past year, the oppression of Christians has been constant. Both main persecution engines cause pressure on Christians in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). Islamic extremism does so primarily in the private, family and community spheres, while Dictatorial paranoia is dominant in the national and church spheres. There are but few incidents on freedom of religion reported. As far as we know there currently is one religious prisoner in Turkmenistan: Umid Gajayev, a Protestant believer from Dashoguz, who was arrested in April 2012 on charges of hooliganism and sentenced the following month to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism. His arrest followed an argument with neighbors, and local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs. The attitude of the government towards religion is negative and this is not likely to change soon. Pressure on and violence against converts from Islam from family, friends and community will continue, if not increase.

## **21. India (score 62)**

On the World Watch List 2015, India gets 62 points (55 points in 2014), ranking 21. The main persecution engine is 'Religious nationalism', while other, secondary persecution engines are: 'Islamic extremism', 'Tribal antagonism', 'Communist oppression' and 'Organized corruption'. India has a population of more than 1.2 billion people. The oppressive caste system is blocking social mobility. Economic wealth is unevenly distributed. A new Hindu government (in power since May 2014 and led by Hindu hardliner Narendra Modi) is radicalizing society. All types of Christianity are affected by persecution in India, but Christian converts from a Hindu

Background and non-traditional Protestant groups are suffering most. India's Christians face pressure in all spheres of life, nearly equally distributed (private, family, community, national and church). At the top level the influence of fundamentalist Hindus has increased. A number of states have got anti-conversion legislation. Hindu radicals have started monitoring Christian activity in much detail. Many of them have planted spies in churches. Violence against Christians in India is rampant and occurs especially in the states where BJP is ruling. Reports on pastors and church members beaten up because of allegations of conversion are frequent, sometimes Christians are even killed. Church buildings as well as homes of Christians were destroyed in the reporting period; many converts had to flee their place of living, including Dalit Christians. Incidents of violence are increasing in number and occur almost daily. Under the current regime the Hindus who attack Christians and Muslims can do so with impunity.

## 22. Ethiopia (score 61)

With a score of 61 points (65 points in 2014), Ethiopia ranks 22 on the World Watch List 2015. At present, the main persecution engines affecting Christians in Ethiopia are 'Islamic extremism' and 'Ecclesiastical arrogance'. 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Tribal antagonism' are secondary persecution engines. These four persecution engines make up for a complex persecution dynamics in the country. They exert pressure on Christians in all spheres of lives: private, family, community, national and church. Even though there are several persecution engines present, the country remains silent on persecution of Christians: the persecutors don't speak loudly and Christians suffer in silence. Persecution due to the rise in Islamic extremism affects all types of Christianity. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) mainly orchestrates persecution of non-traditional Protestant churches and Christians who joined the renewal movements within the EOC. Furthermore, pressure from government and tribal leaders has made the life of Christian's difficult in the reporting period. These all cumulatively affect the life of all Christians in all fronts. There were many violent incidents orchestrated by Islamic extremism and Ecclesiastical arrogance. The future of Christians in Ethiopia will be shaped by many factors. Radical Islam is rising. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church keeps persecuting non-traditional Protestants and the reformists. The government is closing space for freedom of expression and association. Moreover, identity politics based on history, culture and language of different ethnic groups is dominating the life of the public and private spheres.

## 23. Egypt (score 61)

For the WWL 2015, Egypt scores 61 points, ranking 23. The country has the same score as for the World Watch List 2014. In recent years, the position of Christians in Egypt – not only Christian converts from a Muslim background, but also the large indigenous Coptic community – has become increasingly under pressure. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Egypt are 'Islamic extremism' (main engine), and to a lesser extent 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Organized corruption' (secondary engines). Former President Morsi's failure to adequately address the country's economic challenges was the main trigger for the massive protests in July 2013 which led to his ouster by the military backed by the majority of the Egyptians. Shortly after the ouster of Morsi, there was an upsurge in sectarian violence on Coptic Christians. During this reporting period, 65 churches, Christian bookshops, Christian schools and convents were completely burned down, destroyed or looted by mobs, which are often turned on by radical Islamic movements. In the case of Christian converts from a Muslim

background (MBBs), their family members are often a source of persecution. MBBs face severe limitations within their homes and extended families. Family members might punish converts to Christianity for abandoning the Islamic faith. In recent years, things have changed, causing the historical Christian communities to be targeted as well. In the church sphere of life, church autonomy is generally respected, although Copts do face administrative obstacles. As long as the political instability continues and the economic challenges are not addressed, social protests will not cease. As radical Islam is fervently trying to take over the country's culture, there is a growing sentiment to reject Christians.

## 24. Djibouti (score 60)

Djibouti, a small, poverty-stricken Muslim country, surrounded by Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Gulf of Aden, ranks 24 with a score of 60 on the World Watch List 2015 (46 points in 2014). The increase in the score with fourteen points shows that the situation for Christians in Djibouti is worsening. The dramatic increase in the pressure on Christians contributed to an increased total score. The main persecution engines underpinning the persecution of Christians in Djibouti are 'Islamic extremism' and 'Dictatorial paranoia'. 'Tribal antagonism' is also present in the country as a secondary persecution engine. Islamic radicalism is growing, and this is parallel to other East African Countries and other close by countries like Yemen and Somalia. This rise in Islamic radicalism has also become a concern for the government itself. As a result, the government has been monitoring and controlling the sermons and the activities in mosques. Located at a very strategic location of the Gulf of Aden, Djibouti has been a transit for many radical jihadists who leave their footprint behind. The country's regime is very autocratic in nature. Different types of Christianity face different levels of pressure. Expatriate Christians experience very minimal restriction. Tolerance towards Orthodox Christians originating from Ethiopia, and local Christian background believers is withering away. Life is more difficult for the non-traditional Protestant churches and Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs). MBBs face pressure in almost all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). Family life is one of the spheres where Christians face serious persecution. Hiding their faith was one of the means to protect themselves, but "the Somali culture makes it difficult to hide any change," according to a researcher. Also, (religious) leaders at the community level are exerting pressure. This year's violence against Christians also indicates a rising trend. Finally, with the general situation in Somalia always hostile to Christians and Djibouti and Somalia being very close in culture, language, and history, the animosity towards Christians in Djibouti might also increase. If there are any positive things to be taken from the reporting period, it is the fact that the government is also concerned about the rise of radical Islam in the country because it constitutes a threat to its power.

## 25. Myanmar (score 60)

On the World Watch List 2015 (WWL), Myanmar gets 60 points (59 points on WWL 2014), ranking 25. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Myanmar are 'Religious nationalism' (main engine) and to a lesser extent 'Dictatorial paranoia', 'Organized corruption' and 'Islamic extremism' (secondary engines). The majority of Myanmar's people are of Burmese ethnicity, also called 'Bama'. Being Bama is equated with being Buddhist. Everyone deviating from this heritage is labelled as being potentially dangerous. Pressure comes from

two sides: one side is society including the movement of radical Buddhist monks called '969', the other side is the government which tacitly supports such movements. One very visible sign of this support during the reporting period are the draft laws for the protection of religion and race, discussed in parliament and demanded by the '969'. These aim at restricting interfaith marriages, limit conversions, ban polygamy and introduce birth control. The draft was introduced by the radical Buddhist movement '969' in Spring 2014, but supported with more than one million signatures of citizens across the country. Though the government still is nominally communist, it mainly does everything necessary to keep control (Dictatorial paranoia). Buddhism is used as the main tool by the regime to unite the nation as Myanmar has strong ethnic minorities and Bama make up roughly two thirds of the people. Some larger minorities are predominantly Christian like the Chin, or have strong Christian groups like Kachin and Shan. Despite several ceasefire agreements with different ethnic groups including some Christian majority groups, the largest groups continue to be in clashes with the army. These clashes happen to be at the Chinese border and spilling over to Chinese territory. Notwithstanding the talks, at least twenty Kachin Christians have reportedly been killed and church buildings as well as homes have been destroyed. Rape and the selling of child brides are used as a tactic of war. In order to "protect the nation" and to preserve its religious heritage, religious nationalist movements in Myanmar are growing and are even fuelled by politicians, rather than curbed. This policy most likely will not cease.

## 26. Palestinian Territories (score 58)

On the World Watch List 2015, the Palestinian Territories ranks 26 with a score of 58 points (53 points in 2014). The increase in points is due to increased pressure on the Christian community, especially in Gaza. The number of Christians is diminishing and the influence of radical Islam is growing. The main persecution engine in the Palestinian Territories is 'Islamic extremism'. There are two other, secondary persecution engines in the Palestinian Territories: 'Tribal antagonism' and 'Ecclesiastical arrogance'. Generally speaking, persecution dynamics are comparable throughout the territories, though there is noticeably more pressure in Gaza than in the West Bank because of the presence of active Islamic fanatical movements. Partly as a result of their influence, Hamas takes Islamizing measures from time to time. Dynamics of Christian persecution in the Palestinian Territories are complex. Christians are squeezed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their ethnicity entailing many restrictions from the Israeli side and their religion putting them in a minority position within the Palestinian community. Of all types of Christianity present in the Palestinian Territories, Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs) are persecuted the most, followed by all local Christian background believers (historical Christians and non-traditional Protestants) in Gaza. Expatriate Christians do not face persecution, at most some restrictions. MBBs face pressure in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church), especially in the spheres of family and church. In Gaza, all other types of Christianity face restrictions in all spheres of life as well, but only slightly in the private sphere. Apart from enjoying a relatively higher level of religious freedom in the West bank, Christians are mostly discriminated in the spheres of community, national and church life. World Watch Research received a slightly lower number of anti-Christian violent incidents compared to last year. However, this does not necessarily mean that there has been less violence against Christians as very few are reported. In Gaza, the mental pressure on all types of Christianity to convert to Islam is always present. Several MBBs and

other Christians are known to have fled Gaza and relocated to the West bank, or relocated within the West bank. The situation for Christians is not expected to improve in the near future. The Islamic radicalization within the Palestinian society, both on the West Bank and in Gaza, is obviously a bad development for the Church in both areas.

## **27. Brunei (score 58)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Brunei gets 58 points, ranking 27 (57 points in 2014). The persecution engine affecting Christians in Brunei is 'Islamic extremism'. Brunei is an Islamic nation, based on an ideology called 'Malay Islamic Monarchy', presenting the monarchy as the defender of the faith. By decree, contact with Christians in other countries, the import of Bibles and the public celebration of Christmas are banned. Having in mind this position, the Sultan has recently favored Brunei government democratization and declared himself Prime Minister and President. In 2004, the Legislative Council, which had been dissolved since 1962, was reopened. Sharia law has been fully implemented since 2011 for all Muslims in the country. The government follows a plan of Islamization among the tribal people in supporting the so-called 'Dahkwa' movement (Islamic evangelism). On 1 May 2014, Sharia law was extended to penal law and will be introduced in three steps. The first step includes fines for indecent behavior or failure to attend Friday prayers. A second phase will include corporal punishment for theft and other crimes. The final phase, to be introduced in 2015, will see the capital punishment for crimes like adultery. Included in the first phase is that Christians testifying on their faith can be fined, imprisoned or sentenced to both. Several terms (like "Allah" for "God") are exclusively reserved for Muslims, according to a training a Sharia officer provided to government officials. Anglican and Roman Catholic churches are the only recognized Christian communities in the country, but even they have to be very careful. They are able to celebrate services, but apart from that, their functioning is restricted. Unregistered churches, which in most cases belong to the non-traditional Protestant Christians, are considered to be 'illegal sects' and consequently closed or at least restricted and monitored. Christian converts from Islam have to operate largely underground. Especially Christian converts with a Malay background face a high degree of pressure as it is not only illegal, but also a huge disgrace for the family and community, if a Malay Muslim leaves his or her faith in order to embrace another one. Given the growing adherence to conservative Islam, no improvements for the Christian minority can be expected for the coming year.

## **28. Laos (score 58)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Laos gets 58 points, ranking 28 (62 points in 2014). The persecution engines affecting Christians in Laos are 'Tribal antagonism' (main engine) and to a lesser extent 'Communist oppression' as well as 'Religious nationalism' and 'Organized corruption' (secondary engines). Especially in rural areas, Christians are affected by Tribal antagonism as animism is still strong in the country. Tribal leaders and villagers continue to preserve these practices and anyone who turns his back on this belief and converts to Christianity faces the risk of getting expelled from the community. Communities who practice animism see Christianity as a foreign element which may anger the spirits who protect the village. In one incident reported, authorities in one village tried to force Christians to worship ancestors and swear an oath to animist spirits, thereby proving their "loyalty, innocence, and submission" to local authorities. Refusal of this can lead to corporal punishment or to being



banned from the village. In order to keep everything under control, the country's communist party puts enormous pressure on the small Christian minority. It has a negative view on Christians and considers them to be 'foreign agents.' They also view Christianity to be a Western ideology that challenges communism. However, the main problem is the conduct of the local authorities who regard Christians as enemies. Christians must take extreme caution when talking about their faith. Pressure on the Church is extremely high. Only a limited number of registered Christian congregations are allowed to have services, as a result of the rule that non-Buddhist religious meetings are limited to registered congregations. Illegal church meetings can be raided and all Christian materials confiscated. Christian media like Bibles and training materials can neither be published in the country nor imported. There is also a lack of leadership and biblical training because most of the Christians are residing in remote areas and apart from the Lao Evangelical Church and the Roman Catholic Church no biblical training is allowed. As Laos is a Communist country, every movement of Christians will be monitored and if the state considers it necessary, hindered. Especially in rural areas, if converts from a Buddhist or animist background are identified, they are first put under pressure. For example, they face threats of their children being poisoned or of them being excluded from school and community resources. In case they stay loyal to their Christian faith, many are forced to leave their homes and expelled from the community.

## 29. China (score 57)

On the World Watch List 2015, China gets 57 points (51 points in 2014), now ranking 29. The persecution engines affecting Christians in China are 'Communist oppression' (main engine) and to a lesser extent 'Islamic extremism' and 'Religious nationalism' (secondary engines). The Communist government under China's new president Xi Jinping aims at controlling religious activities. While in most regions in China, Christian activities have rather been watched than controlled, especially the unregistered house churches could be affected by a program started to eradicate so-called "evil cults" as some of those cults have – contorted – Christian roots. Concerning the ethnic Han churches, some observers speak of three kinds of churches: the 'black' ones which are illegal and which the state is fighting against (for example Vatican loyal Roman Catholics), the 'red' ones which are state-approved and controlled and the 'grey' ones which are not registered, but tolerated, and which form the majority of the Christians. The situation in the northwestern Muslim minority state of Xinjiang, where the Uighur minority lives, deteriorated rapidly compared to last year and dozens of Uighurs, not Christians, have been killed. Tensions in this region rose and so the situation for the small number of Christian converts from a Muslim Background – most likely a few thousand – has become more complicated and even more limited than before. They suffer from the increased general pressure from the government as described above, but additionally face persecution from their own family, friends and neighbors. What has just been said on Islamic extremism also applies to the even smaller group of Christian converts from a Tibetan Buddhist background in the Chinese region of Tibet in the far Western part of the country, numbering only a few hundred. Whereas pressure and violence are not as high as in Xinjiang at the moment, it still is on a comparable level. For Han Chinese churches, the police in most cases refrains from violence, but orders pastors or church leaders to come, not necessarily to the police station, and invite them to 'have tea'. This is a euphemism for clarifying rules and limits of religious acts and meetings and is a very effective means in order to establish a 'harmonious society'.

Reports of violence regularly occurred in this reporting period, but virtually all were limited to the Southern province of Zhejiang, also known as “Jerusalem of China”. Here local authorities started a campaign against religious structures, especially churches. Some were completely destroyed and allegedly more than 300 crosses on church building or church compounds were broken down. Though it is difficult to figure out the details, it does not seem to be the beginning of a wider campaign, but rather served as a point of reference that churches should not become too visible.

### 30. Jordan (score 56)

On the World Watch List 2015 (WWL), Jordan ranks 30 and again received a score of 56. Religious freedom in Jordan has not improved. Especially Christian converts from Islam have experienced great pressure with violence against them being more prevalent. The main persecution engines are ‘Islamic extremism’ and ‘Tribal antagonism’. ‘Ecclesiastical arrogance’, ‘Dictatorial paranoia’ and ‘Organized corruption’ are secondary persecution engines. Tensions between moderate and radical Islamic elements in Jordanian society are on the increase, under influence of the Arab Uprisings and civil war in Syria. Tribal antagonism is clearly mixed with Islam. Jordanian society is multi ethnic - a phenomenon which is also reflected by the monarchy. Jordan hosts large groups of refugees, mostly from Iraq and Syria, which leads to economic, political and religious pressure and are a potential destabilizing factor. The number of Christians in the country has been declining for half a century. For long, Jordan has been one of the most liberal countries of the region in terms of freedom of religion. However, the tide seems to be turning for Christians – especially for Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs) who suffer most persecution. They face oppression in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church), but particularly in the areas of private, family and church life. Christians who evangelize Muslims or support MBBs are also under great pressure. World Watch Research received reports on Christians being killed, imprisoned, physically abused, abducted and forced to flee for faith related reasons. Most analysts expect King Abdullah II to remain in power for the next few years, despite regional and national unrest. The main trends at the moment are regional overspill from Syria and the emergence of East Bank discontent. For Christians, the growing power of radical Islam is an important warning sign. The development of the civil war in Syria is likely to influence their situation considerably, as is a possible further advance of Islamic State in the direction of Jordan.

### 31. Bhutan (score 56)

On the World Watch List 2015, Bhutan gets 56 points (54 points in 2014). The country now ranks 31. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Bhutan are ‘Religious nationalism’ (main engine) and to a lesser extent ‘Tribal antagonism’ (secondary engine). An increasingly strict emphasis on Buddhism as the country’s spiritual heritage makes it hard for the Christian minority to claim their space. Bhutan used to be a Buddhist kingdom for centuries. Even after introducing a constitutional monarchy and installing democratic elections, Buddhism continues to play the dominant role in the country. Especially in remote and rural areas, Buddhist monks resent and oppose the presence of Christians and authorities do nothing to protect them, on the contrary, they rather side with the monks. The general mindset still is shown by an interview then-Prime Minister Jigme Thinley gave in 2011. He stated that “democratic culture is gradually taking firm roots” in the country, but in an interview he absolutely denied the right

of the small Christian minority to testify about their faith. Expressing a commonly held belief in Bhutan, he said that there is no reason why Christians should seek to induce others to join their faith. Though the Church in Bhutan is no longer a country-wide underground church, since Christians are able to meet in private homes regularly on Sundays without any interference by authorities, there remain many challenges. Christians in remote villages still encounter many difficulties as church meetings continue to be monitored and disturbed. Registration of churches or to own a church building is not possible. Christian leaders enjoy certain freedoms to practice their faith in private homes, but since Buddhism is seen as the country's heritage and the government sees its duty in protecting Buddhism, it restricts construction of non-Buddhist worship buildings and the celebration of some non-Buddhist festivals and ignores applications for it. In March 2014, two pastors were detained and seven weeks later released on bail, without publishing formal charges. In September they were sentenced to four years and two years and four months, respectively, for allegedly committing a felony by raising funds for personal gain. Appeal procedures are on their way. Religion as part and parcel of cultural heritage will play a dominant role in securing public support for unpopular measures as it can be used to emphasize the country's uniqueness. The government will continue to fulfill the constitutional mandate referred to above of protecting Buddhism as the spiritual heritage of Bhutan.

### **32. Comoros (score 56)**

With a score of 56 points (48 points in 2014), Comoros ranks 32 on the World Watch List 2015. The significant increase of the score shows that that the country is slowly moving backward in terms of religious freedom. The main persecution engine affecting Christians in Comoros is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Dictatorial paranoia' is also very visible in the country (secondary persecution engine). The 2009 referendum led to the adoption of Islam as a state religion. This constitutional change severely curtails the existence of other religions. The rise of radical Islamic sympathies among the population at large, government officials, religious leaders and Muslim youth groups in particular caused anxiety among Christians. Christians on Comoros are facing severe pressure regarding their Christian walk of life. According to an Open Doors expert, "Islam and only Islam is effectively endorsed at the national level and converts are persecuted severely in their private lives. Foreigners are allowed to practice their Christian religion but must not proselytize at the threat of being deported." Contrary to the relative stability and a reportedly 'electoral democracy', the life of Christians in the Comoros is getting harder. There seems to be less space for Christian church life to develop and flourish. The rise in radical Islam in Comoros goes hand in hand with the rise of radical Islam in East Africa and other parts of the world. The Comorian government is highly inclined towards radical Islamic states in the Gulf and Middle East. Even if some of them are not too severe on Christians on their soil, they do not hesitate to support countries that want to have an Islamic government. Consequently, in the coming year(s), it is likely that radical Islam continues rising in the country, and in a way Christians might be pushed completely away from public life as well as put under heavy pressure in private life.

### **33. Tanzania (score 56)**

With a score of 56 points (46 in 2014), Tanzania ranks 33 on the World Watch List 2015. The main persecution engine affecting Christians is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Tribal antagonism' has

also been observed as a secondary persecution engine. Zanzibar has become the epicenter of Islamic radicalism in the country. A radical Islamic separatist group called Uamsho (a Swahili acronym for the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation, meaning Islamic Reawakening or Revolution) uses Zanzibar as a springboard to further its radical Islamic agenda in Tanzania. With more than 250 tribes, Tribal antagonism has also become visible in the country. Converts to Christianity from indigenous tribes may face pressure from their extended families to adhere to traditional practices. In the reporting year, the position of Christians has significantly deteriorated. In general, not only the situation of Christian converts with a Muslim background (MBBs) deteriorated, but also the circumstances of members of the other churches became worse within the Island of Zanzibar as well as the coastal areas of Mainland Tanzania. Persecution due to Islamic radicalism that was more or less limited to the Island of Zanzibar and the coastal part of the country has been felt in mainland Tanzania this year (expansion of radical Islam). As such, the level of pressure and violence has been significantly high in the reporting year. Even though persecution affects all Christians, in Muslim dominated areas, it appears that the MBBs are most affected by a squeeze type of persecution. As it stands, radical Islam has been growing, making Zanzibar a boiling point of Islamic radicalism in East Africa. There were targeted killings and destruction of churches. The Tanzanian Church withstood the pressure it has been under for the past, but as the persecution is going to another level, it could be challenging for the Church to withstand increasing pressure. According to an Open Doors expert, so far “a common national identity and the effect of animist religions in the country serve as a barrier for more Islamic radicalism and intolerance or pressure from radical Muslims.” This barrier might not resist forever. As it stands, radical Islam has been growing, and if this is left unaddressed properly and timely, it might eventually put the country (‘Union’) on the brink of collapse.

### **34. Algeria (score 55)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Algeria gets 55 points (54 points in 2014) and ranks 34. The main persecution engine in Algeria is ‘Islamic extremism’, but there are also secondary engines, ‘Dictatorial paranoia’ and ‘Organized corruption’. As Islam is becoming more and more visible in Algeria’s government, the freedom of Christians is becoming more and more restricted. Increasing pressure from radical Islamic movements on government and on society, in combination with pressure of family members on Christian converts from a Muslim background, explain Algeria’s score on the World Watch List. In the context of the growing role of radical Islam in the region, Algeria is increasingly the scene of more terror by radical Islamic movements. Church leaders indicate that there is an increase in pressure on Christians, who mostly consist of Christian converts from a Muslim Background. The law prohibits public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. Individual churches are often denied registration. At this stage of its development, Islamic extremism as a persecution engine is present throughout the whole country, and causes pressure on Christians in all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church). The number of reported incidents remained constant in comparison to last year. In spite of some positive developments, the overall trends regarding religious freedom are negative. Although no Christians were killed or imprisoned, threats to churches and Christian media organizations still occur, and newspapers report negatively about Christians. For the coming year, no serious improvements in the situation of Algerian Christians are expected.

### 35. Colombia (score 55)

Because of the overlap of distinct persecution engines and high levels of violence, Colombia obtains 55 points for the World Watch List 2015, ranking 35 (56 points in 2014). The main persecution engines ‘Organized corruption’ and ‘Tribal antagonism’, and the secondary persecution engines ‘Secular intolerance’ and ‘Ecclesiastical arrogance’, coexist in different parts of the territory of Colombia. All types of Christianity can become victims of Organized corruption by criminal groups, though it affects mostly the more outspoken Christians who play prominent roles in social or public life, or fulfill leadership positions, both at community and national levels. Tribal antagonism is expressed by the fact that local fiefs consider converts to Christianity within indigenous communities a threat to their power and to indigenous ancestral traditions. Because they are seen as a threat to the perpetuation of the indigenous culture and traditions, the rural Christian indigenous population of a number of autonomous territories of Colombia, such as the territories in the Cauca, Córdoba and Putumayo departments, experience hostilities. Falling under Secular intolerance are observed signs of repeated expressions of intolerance for the participation of Christians in the public sphere, particularly in public universities. Levels of faith-related violence in Colombia, attributable to both Organized corruption and Tribal antagonism, are high. Numerous Christians have been displaced from their lands, violence targeting Christian women is on the increase and church sermons are monitored. Besides the challenges of the current dialogue in Cuba between the Colombian government and FARC, violence in Colombia will remain a structural phenomenon. In areas where the government has lost control of public security, drug cartels and illegal armed groups still continue to operate with impunity. This means that Christians will continue to be targeted for persecution because of their presence as an alternative pillar of society and their witness through their involvement in social and political activities.

### 36. Tunisia (score 55)

Tunisia gets 55 points on the World Watch List 2015, and ranks 36 (also 55 points in 2014). Although the level of violence decreased slightly, structural pressure increased slightly. The main persecution engine in Tunisia is ‘Islamic extremism’. ‘Organized corruption’ is a secondary persecution engine. The very promising revolution in 2011, which started off the revolutionary wave in other countries, turned out to be a disappointment for both liberals and Christians in Tunisia. While expatriate Christians experience a relative amount of freedom, at least within the church walls, Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs) face a variety of pressures. In Tunisia, Christians particularly experience increasing pressure at the private and family level, though there are notable differences between the countryside and the country’s capital Tunis where the situation is comparatively better. Pressure is generalized throughout the private, family, community and church spheres of life, but less so in the national sphere. Reports from the field indicate that pressure on MBBs coming from their families, has increased. Violent incidents during this year’s reporting period include one case of a Christian being abducted for his faith, several cases of Christian women who suffered some form of sexual harassment (including at least one known case of forced marriage during this reporting period), and many cases of Christians being physically harmed and their houses and shops vandalized. Moreover, a number of Christians had to leave their homes and some even fled the country. Although the political situation in the country may have stabilized, there is no guarantee that the situation of the small Christian population in the country will improve.

### 37. Malaysia (score 55)

On the World Watch List 2015, Malaysia gets 55 points (49 points in 2014), ranking 37. The persecution engine in Malaysia is 'Islamic extremism', connected with 'Dictatorial paranoia' (both are main engines). On countless occasions, the ruling Prime Minister Najib Razak has publicly announced that Islam will always supersede politics, that the people should protect Islam, that pluralism, liberalism and other '-isms' are against Islam and that human rights must have limits as they should fall "within the boundaries of Islam". Observers of the country talk about a quick Islamization. Additionally, the government increasingly plays the religious card as being of Malay ethnicity is seen as being Muslim. The highest pressure in this sphere is put on Christian converts from Islam. They not only face the risk of being divorced, losing their children's custody rights and inheritance rights, but families will take every means to bring the convert back to the right faith. This may start with isolation and pressure to recant the Christian faith, but often will end in a re-education center. It is almost impossible for a Malay Muslim to convert to Christianity. All conversions have to be affirmed by a Sharia court and the process demands at least three months of time for reconsideration in a re-education center. Churches have been monitored and new churches have found it difficult to register. As many churches are meeting in business or office facilities, which are not dedicated for religious purposes, they are technically worshipping illegally. Pastors and church leaders closely watch their words and in several incidents Bibles and Sunday school materials were confiscated. The media increasingly slander the Christian minority and put them in a false light. Examples of faith-related violence were the fire-bombing of a Roman Catholic Church in January 2014 and vandalism against eight Christian graves in February 2014. More than ten Christian churches were notified by authorities to close their premises as they were meeting in structures not dedicated for religious purposes. In November 2014, plans occurred to put Sharia courts on equal footing with civil courts. This plan has been there apparently since 2011 but it now seems steps are taken to really implement it. Not only, but also for the Christian minority, Malaysia is at a crossroads and it will be a decisive year to watch which way it takes.

### 38. Mexico (score 55)

Mexico scores 55 points on the World Watch List 2015, entering the top 50 again at rank 38. The increase is explained mainly by the progression of organized crime in the country and the recording of more violent incidents targeting Christians. Four distinct persecution engines are present in Mexico: Organized corruption (main engine), Tribal antagonism, Secular intolerance and Ecclesiastical arrogance (secondary engines). These persecution engines coexist in different parts of the territory of Mexico. Criminal organizations and drug cartels have targeted Christians because they view churches as revenue centers (extortions) and because churches support programs for the rehabilitation of drug addicts and alcoholics. Local communities in the Southern States of Mexico are led by indigenous traditional 'law of uses and customs' to force all community members into a homogenous lifestyle. As soon as community members accept a different religion, the law of uses and customs becomes the noose that threatens their very existence. All types of Christianity are affected by the persecution dynamics, although there are differences between the persecution engines. Pressure caused by Organized corruption is experienced by Christians throughout all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church), but particularly in the community sphere. This engine can also be seen to affect the church sphere, as the intense violence and repeated extortions

of Christian leaders reduce freedom in this sphere as Christians are too afraid to gather at particular times. Tribal antagonism also expresses itself heavily in the community sphere, mainly by excluding Christians from basic social services. Extreme violence creates fear and pushes Christians and churches behind their front doors. The security situation in Mexico will continue to be dire in the future, as there are no signs of improvement.

### **39. Oman (score 55)**

Located at the confluence of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, Oman is one of the few countries with Islam as the state religion, but not criminalizing conversion from Islam to other religions. Oman scores 55 points on the World Watch List 2015, one point less than the score in 2014. The country now ranks 39. The main persecution engine in Oman is 'Islamic extremism', with 'Dictatorial paranoia' as a secondary persecution engine. As Islam is the state religion, legislation is based on Islamic laws. All public school curriculums include instruction in Islam. Apostasy is not a criminal offense, but it is not respected by the legal system either, which assumes that all citizens are Muslims. A Christian convert from a Muslim background (MBB) faces problems under the Personal Status and Family Legal Code, which prohibits a father from having custody over his children if he leaves Islam. Expatriate Christians are relatively free in exercising their freedom of religion. MBBs risk persecution from family and society. MBBs can lose their family, house, and job and could even be killed. Since the 2011 low-level protest, the regime has decided to concentrate on stabilizing and consolidating its power. There have been no violent persecution incidents in Oman recently. A positive development is that there is a tendency of tolerating Christians compared to the situations in some of the neighboring countries. As it stands, except the existing persecution issues, there are no developing situations that warrant special attention for the coming year. However, the growing in violence and dangerous Islamic radicalism in the region, especially from Yemen, might have a spillover effect on the country.

### **40. Mali (score 52)**

Mali gets a score of 52 points on the World Watch List 2015 (54 points in 2014), which reflects the continuing pressures on Christians in the country. The country ranks 40. The persecution engine in Mali is 'Islamic extremism'. After the French military intervention in January 2013, the threat of radical Islamic groups has been averted, at least temporarily, but in the North there is still no normal church life possible. Presence and infrastructure of Christianity have been largely destroyed and the Christians who fled are afraid to return. Those who do return, find their properties occupied by Muslims. Mali has always been a typical West-African state with a (mostly) moderate Islam, constitutionally secular, proscribing religious political parties, even though a high percentage of its population is Muslim. The situation changed with the proclamation of the creation of the independent state of Azawad in Northern Mali (April 2012). Among the less than five per cent of Malians who are Christians, the majority are Roman Catholic, while there is also a significant number of Protestants. There are also small communities of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background. Even though most Malian Christians live in the South of the country, they feel threatened by the radical Islamic groups in the North. All spheres of life are affected by the persecution dynamics (private, family, community, national and church), though the national sphere to a lesser extent because of the

relative freedom in the South. The levels of violence against Christians are not as high as the pressure (or squeeze). Christians have however received death threats by radical Muslims.

#### **41. Turkey (score 52)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Turkey gets 52 points (not in the list in 2014), ranking 41. The persecution engines in Turkey are 'Islamic extremism' and 'Religious nationalism' (both are main persecution engines). A very remarkable special feature in Turkey is the high level of nationalism. The general opinion is that a Turk is born a Muslim. Turkey lies on two continents: Europe and Asia. The country has many connections to both the western world but also to the Middle East. Turkey sees itself as the leading nation of the Turkic world (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), and wants to play a prominent role on the diplomatic scene in the Arab world. Europe has severely criticized Turkey on the restrictions it imposed on the media, human rights and freedom of religion. This has led to a very negative reaction from the Turkish government. In Turkey all four types of Christianity are affected by persecution at some point. Christians in Turkey experience problems in every sphere of life: private, family, community, national and church spheres. The level of violent incidents in Turkey is relatively low. Four churches have been attacked and damaged in Turkey over the past year. With President Erdoğan remaining at the helm of the Turkish government for the foreseeable future, Turkey is expected to continue on its current path of gradually enforcing Islamic influences, following an increasingly strongman ruler, and continued discrimination against its Christian and other religious minorities.

#### **42. Kazakhstan (score 51)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Kazakhstan gets 51 points (49 points in 2014), ranking 42. In general the position of Christians in the country remains as difficult as before, and has even worsened a little. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Kazakhstan are 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Islamic extremism' (main engines) and to a lesser extent 'Organized corruption' (secondary engine). The succession of president Nazarbayev is an important topic in Kazakh politics. The relations with Russia, Europe and the rest of the world are complicated by the huge Russian minority in the country. A growing problem is the activities of Islamic jihadists abroad who one day may return to Kazakhstan. All four types of Christianity are affected by persecution in Kazakhstan, but Christian converts from Islam and non-traditional Protestant groups are targeted most. While societal players like family, friends and community exert much pressure in the private, family and community spheres of life, pressure from the authorities at every level influences the national and church spheres of life. Though the violence is not very high, some violent incidents were reported for this period. Pastor Kashkumbayev was arrested in May 2013 (before this reporting period), and sentenced to two months pre-trial prison, but it was not until February 2014 that the state handed him a suspended four-year prison sentence and a fine. In November 2013, pastor Karim Kashkumbayev from Astana (the son of pastor Bakhytzhan Kashkumbayev) was forced to leave his family and he left the country for the United States. Protestant Christians are frequently fined precisely on account of their faith and for relatively arbitrary legal reasons. At least 71 people in 2014 alone have been fined for worshipping in unregistered, underground churches. The regime in Kazakhstan is constantly working to increase its control all over society. Radical Islam has already left its traces in Kazakhstan, and the government is anxiously awaiting what



is going to happen when the jihadists come to their country. The situation for the Christian minority is getting worse. More and more legal restrictions are imposed. There are no signs that this is going to change soon.

### **43. Bangladesh (score 51)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Bangladesh gets 51 points (46 points in 2014), ranking 43. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Bangladesh are 'Islamic extremism' (main engine) and to a lesser extent 'Religious nationalism', mixed with 'Tribal antagonism' (secondary engines). Bangladesh continues to be a secular country and its constitution is giving freedom to all religions to practice their own faith. The country does not have blasphemy laws or an anti-conversion bill. On the other hand, the constitution also states that state religion is Islam and the government is known to give in to Islamic pressure from the streets despite fighting the Islamic party by all means. Additionally, there are fatwas implemented all over the country, especially in rural areas. Several of the radical Islamic groups try to push the government to modify the constitution as they demand thirteen major changes. Among other things, they demand to establish the Sharia Islamic law, so that it becomes visible that the country belongs to the "House of Islam". As the Christian minority is growing, it faces more and more restrictions and challenges. This is not driven by the government, what is also shown by the fact that the president in July 2014 appointed a Catholic woman as her personal secretary. Pressure is driven by radical Islamic groups, local religious leaders, and families. The competition between the large political parties of the country is also an important factor, as the government may give in to demands from Islamic pressure groups, taking to the streets. Christian converts from Islam or Buddhism face strong pressure by their family, friends and neighbors to recant the Christian faith, though conversion is not forbidden by law. Christians are discriminated in their private lives as well as in their business lives. There were several reports that Christians had to give up their shops or other businesses due to the pressure by the Muslim majority. Children of converts are facing discrimination and bias by teachers and co-students in schools. Persecution in Bangladesh has become more violent over recent years. In January 2014, Monika Mridha and her son Sushil, both Roman Catholics, were shot dead. The Christian minority will remain vulnerable in the next year, both from the side of the radicals and from that of the government.

### **44. Sri Lanka (score 51)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Sri Lanka gets 51 points (55 points in 2014), ranking 44. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Sri Lanka are 'Religious nationalism' (main engine) and to a lesser extent 'Dictatorial paranoia' (secondary engine). Officially, as a socialist democratic republic, Sri Lanka is a secular state. However, its Constitution puts Buddhism first and evidently fosters Buddhism as state religion. This condition strengthens the Buddhist radicals' power over religious minorities in the country such as the Christians. The majority of Sri Lanka's population is Buddhist. Every Sinhalese is perceived to be a Buddhist, so not only the Tamil Christians are treated as second-class citizens, but also Sinhalese Christians are looked at with suspicion and frequently slandered and attacked. This is not only done by authorities, though the ministry responsible for religion has a telling name itself ('Ministry for Religious Affairs and Buddhist Sasana'), but also by radical Buddhist groups. These groups, namely the BBS (Bodu Bala Sena) and Sinhala Ravaya, led by Buddhist monks stir up mobs and

continue to attack the Christian minority. However, in the reporting period, the Muslim minority bore the brunt of persecution. Buddhist radicals are widely perceived as being tacitly supported by the government. Christians continue to be monitored and threatened by Buddhist monks, sometimes accompanied by mobs. That is also why Christians have become cautious in keeping Christian materials or meeting privately, let alone talk to others about their faith. Converts from Buddhist - and to some extent Hindu - background have to be very secret concerning their faith and will take every precautionary measure not to be discovered. Pressure comes from the local community and neighbors and monks do not only look at Christians with suspicion and discriminate them, but many will also get active against them, also turning violent. Thus, in this reporting period, at least sixty incidents across the country show Christian services and prayer meetings were disturbed and disrupted both in church buildings and private homes. Government forces are supporting the radical Buddhist groups rather open and help to shelter them from being held accountable for attacks and hate speech. This is seen as pleasing the electorate in order to raise political support. Given that the Supreme Court cleared the way for president Rajapaksa to seek a possible third term in the early call for presidential election on January 2015, coinciding with a papal visit to the country in the same month, the poll will be a litmus test to the president's popularity. Meanwhile, radical Buddhist groups have become divided as the campaign for the election kick started.

#### **45. Tajikistan (score 50)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Tajikistan gets 50 points (47 points in 2014), ranking 45. In recent years, the position of Christians in the country remained relatively stable in terms of persecution. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Tajikistan are 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Islamic extremism' (main engines) and to a lesser extent 'Tribal antagonism' and 'Organized corruption' (secondary engines). Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country with a Persian national language; culturally Tajikistan has more affinity with Iran and Afghanistan than the other countries in Central Asia because these are all Turkic speaking countries. Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in the region. Tajikistan relies heavily on remittances – up to twenty per cent of the whole population is estimated to work in Russia and Kazakhstan. All four types of Christianity are affected by persecution in Tajikistan, but Christian converts from Islam and non-traditional Protestant groups are targeted most. Tajikistan shares a 1,200-kilometer (750-mile) frontier with Afghanistan. This has several repercussions: a) there is a huge flow of drugs from Afghanistan via Tajikistan to the West; b) Tajiks (also living in Afghanistan) are involved in Islamic fighting; c) western forces have left Afghanistan. The government recently announced that 300 Tajik jihadists are fighting with Islamic State - half of them women. What will happen in Tajikistan when these radical Muslims return home?

#### **46. Azerbaijan (score 50)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Azerbaijan gets 50 points (not in the list in 2014 because the country only scored 44 points), ranking 46. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Azerbaijan are 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Islamic extremism' (main engines) and to a lesser extent 'Organized corruption' (secondary engine). The government has a negative attitude towards any form of religious fanaticism. They also have a negative attitude towards Christians. Official checks are becoming increasingly strict. The government has become more active in controlling religion. Persecution is worse in the countryside (especially in northern

areas around Aliabad, Sumgait and Kuba), and less in bigger cities. All four types of Christianity are affected by persecution in Azerbaijan, but Christian converts from Islam and non-traditional Protestant groups are targeted most. Pressure on Christians is constant throughout all spheres of life (private, family, community, national and church), but is strongest in the private sphere and the church sphere. While community pressure is fuelled by Islamic extremism, pressure on the church usually comes from state restrictions fuelled by Dictatorial paranoia. The number of reported incidents of violence against believers in Azerbaijan is limited. “Azerbaijan is likely to remain a place where fundamental human rights are violated with impunity, and the state tries to make exercising human rights conditional upon state permission”, according to news agency Forum 18.

#### **47. Indonesia (score 50)**

On the World Watch List 2015, Indonesia gets 50 points (46 points in 2014), ranking 47. The persecution engines affecting Christians in Indonesia are ‘Islamic extremism’ (main engine), and to a lesser extent ‘Religious nationalism’ and ‘Organized corruption’ (secondary engines). The situation Christians find themselves in is diverse. While there is much hope related to the newly elected president and his public statements concerning religious minorities, on the one hand, radical Islamic groups continue to act violently when it comes to minorities, especially Christians, and they put Christians in certain parts of the country under enormous pressure. Christian converts from Islam are especially affected by this. Many churches find the permission for being allowed to worship extremely hard to obtain, even if they have met all the necessary requirements. In strong Muslim areas in particular, getting permission is a long and cumbersome process. In contrast, Muslims can generally easily build mosques. Even if a church has a permit, the local regency can easily revoke it. The level of violence against Christians remains on a comparably high level and in this reporting period again more than 30 churches of different denominations have all been closed and partly attacked as well. It is rather unusual that Roman Catholic churches faced several attacks as well, especially in Sumatra and Java. For the coming year, there is hope for improvements. Indonesia is known for its rather tolerant interpretation of Islam and that different religions are able to live in one country. This track record was tainted in recent years as the outgoing president chose to remain silent on attacks against religious minorities. The new president ‘Jokowi’ has publically announced that minorities shall have a place to live and he will take care of that. First signs are promising: the new Home Minister announced that followers of indigenous beliefs should not be forced to state in their ID cards that they belong to one of the six officially recognized religions. So there is hope for the Christian minority as well. But backlashes and opposition may come from the radical Islamic groups.

#### **48. Mauritania (score 50)**

Mauritania scores 50 points on the World Watch List 2015, ranking 48 (51 points in 2014). The persecution engine affecting Christians in Mauritania is ‘Islamic extremism’, which is exacerbated by the country’s apostasy laws which are directed against the activities of non-Muslims and its cultural norms that strongly dissuade people from associating with non-Muslims. Mauritania is one of only four official “Islamic Republics” in the world, and its constitution recognizes Islam as the sole religion of the country’s estimated 3.5 million inhabitants and designates Sharia (Islamic law) as the only officially recognized source of

legislation. Moreover, the influence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mauritania is growing. The group is gaining support among local Mauritians and is also attempting to monitor Christian activity in the country. Because of harsh government restrictions, it is very difficult for Christian missions and Christians in general to operate in the country. Pressure on Christian converts from a Muslim background from family, tribe members and leaders of local mosques, is very high. There is some freedom for expatriate churches, but even for expatriates residing in the country, the situation is complicated. It remains completely impossible for all Mauritanian Christians to register their churches, so they must meet in secret. No violent incidents against Christians were recorded in Mauritania during the reporting period. This is not a sign of the absence of persecution. Pressure upon Christians is still present. The prospect of an increasingly powerful militant Salafist insurgency in Mauritania is the greatest threat to Christians in the country.

#### **49. United Arab Emirates (score 49)**

United Arab Emirates (UAE) ranks 49 with a score of 49 points on the World Watch List 2015 (51 points in 2014). The main persecution engine in UAE is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Dictatorial paranoia' is a secondary persecution engine. Islam dominates private, public life as well as the political discourse of the Kingdom. Consequently, all citizens are defined as Muslims. In addition to Islamic extremism, Dictatorial paranoia is present in the country, as the Emir continues to rule without considering the will of the people. Islamic extremism expresses itself in many forms. The constitution provides for religious freedom only on the condition that the established customs, public policy or public morals are not violated. The government further restricts the already restricted freedom in practice. Furthermore, the law of the Kingdom does not recognize conversion from Islam to Christianity, and the legal punishment is death. The government does not allow any formal or informal education that includes religious teachings other than Islam. Evangelism is prohibited, but non-Muslim groups can worship freely in dedicated buildings or private homes. Mostly Christian converts from a Muslim background (MBBs) suffer high level persecution, while expatriates relatively enjoy some freedom but also face restrictions. Pressure throughout the whole territory is considerably higher on MBBs and expat MBBs. African and Asian expatriates have a little more freedom, but not as much as Western expatriates. MBBs are under severe pressure from relatives, family and Muslim society due to the Islamic government, law, and culture. No significant violent incidents have been reported in the reporting period. Whether the anti-Christian sentiment propagated by radical Sunnis following the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq can affect the position of Christians in the UAE remains to be seen. Although the situation of Christians will continue to be difficult, Christians in the UAE will be tolerated to some extent.

#### **50. Kuwait (score 49)**

The position of Christians in Kuwait has not changed significantly during the reporting period. Having obtained a score of 49 points, Kuwait ranks 50 on the World Watch List 2015 (50 points in 2014). The persecution engines active in Kuwait are 'Islamic extremism' (main engine) and 'Dictatorial paranoia' (secondary engine). Islamic extremism is expressed mostly in the private and family spheres of life. Restrictions from the government can mostly be explained by Dictatorial paranoia as the country's ruler does not want any organized group to threaten his hegemony. Under the guise of implementing the laws of blasphemy, apostasy and

proselytizing, government officials harass and abuse Christians. In terms of the general population, a significant number of Kuwaitis are tolerant toward non-Muslim residents; however, there is a group of radical Muslims that does not want to see Christian in the country. The change in the political dynamics of the region is having an impact on the rise of Islamic radicalism in the country. Accordingly, the rise of Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq seems to have a resonance among some Kuwaitis. According to reports, there are hundreds of Kuwaiti fighters alongside IS. The government severely restricts freedom of expression, freedom of press and freedom of association, concepts that are fundamentally important and inseparable from freedom of religion. Most Christians in Kuwait are foreign migrant workers, who are relatively free to worship informally, while Christian converts from a Muslim background face serious restrictions in many forms. There was no violence reported in the reporting period. The development of IS in Iraq and Syria might have a negative impact on Christians in the country as its ideology is inspiring some radical Islamic groups in Kuwait.