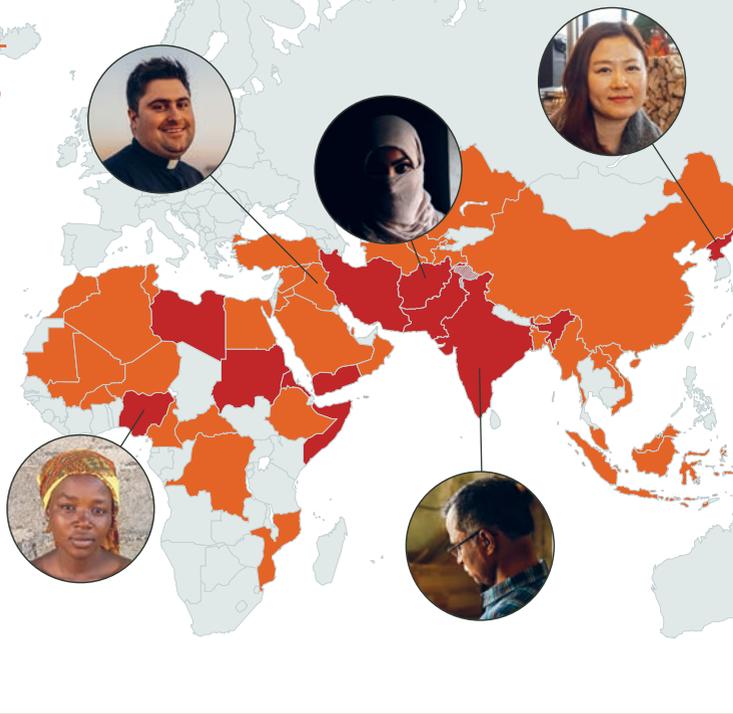




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AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANS VEERMAN,  
MANAGING DIRECTOR, WORLD WATCH RESEARCH

**WE SUPPORT PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN ANY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD WHERE NEEDED, REGARDLESS OF THE SOURCE OF PERSECUTION.**



## WHY WAS THE WORLD WATCH LIST CREATED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

The World Watch List was created in 1993 for strategic planning purposes. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, in November 1989, resources were freed up to expand the work into other countries where Christians were persecuted.

Open Doors leadership appointed someone 1) to do research into Open Door's involvement in countries where they were already active to see whether they should step up their activities; 2) to do research to see if Open Doors was missing countries, where persecution was high, and where they had no involvement yet.

The researcher who was appointed developed a simple questionnaire to assess persecution levels in the world, leading to the production of the first World Watch List in January 1993.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE HAS THE WORLD WATCH LIST MADE?

The outcomes since that first World Watch List 30 years ago have been a crucial factor in changing the work of Open Doors for and with persecuted Christians in Communist countries, and later Islamic countries. It has made a difference in how we support persecuted Christians in any country in the world where needed, regardless of the source of persecution.

# WHAT DID IT REVEAL ABOUT PERSECUTION THAT WE DIDN'T ALREADY KNOW?

Apart from persecution in communist and Islamic countries, the World Watch List revealed persecution of Christians in dominant Buddhist and Hindu countries, like Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India and Nepal.

*MORE GENERALLY SPEAKING, IT SHOWED HOW COMPLEX PERSECUTION IS:*





# WHICH COUNTRIES HAVE SCORED *HIGHEST* ACROSS THE DECADES?

## WHY?

Over the last 3 decades, three countries have appeared the most often in the top ten, North Korea, Somalia and Afghanistan.

The reason is that these are countries where ideology or religion sees Christianity as a competitor, or even a threat to its existence. Be it that it is a Communist / personality cult-driven country like North Korea or countries where political Islam claims full authority over the territory.





# WHAT HAS THE WORLD WATCH LIST SHOWN US ABOUT CHANGES IN PERSECUTION?

Generally speaking, the World Watch List has shown us that religious persecution can flow from many sources. We distinguish 9 different religious or ideological sources of persecution. Each source of persecution has its own characteristics.

Well-known examples are Communist and post-communist oppression, Islamic oppression and Religious nationalism.

How much they lead to persecution of Christians in their countries does not only depend on their specific characteristics but also on their evolution. Their evolution can be slow or quick, it can be halfway or fully accomplished. It can decrease and increase again.

What is the 'evolution of persecution'? Persecution normally starts with a small, radical societal group representing a specific religion or ideology spreading their ideas at the expense of others. This can be by violent and non-violent means. Often a social or political vacuum presents an excellent breeding ground for such ideas and actions. To make a long story short: In the end the radical societal group has accomplished the buy-in of society and State into their agenda, and all together pressurize dissidents to the point of nearly suffocating them. Culture as a whole is then taken over by the agenda of this radical societal group and their worldview becomes a main cultural source.

To mention a few concrete points:

- » China was bad, became better but now returns to very serious persecution again;
- » Persecution in India has increased over the last decade.
- » The Islamist Movement has gradually been expanding itself in Sub-Saharan Africa through violence by an astounding variety of terrorist groups, and also through non-violent means.



## WHAT STORY DOES IT TELL US ABOUT THE PAST 30 YEARS?

Over the last 30 years, the World Watch List has shown us that persecution is **GROWING**. We can see this by the number of countries that score at least a minimum threshold value for persecution, according to our methodology.

Persecution has also **INTENSIFIED**. The average score for the Top 50 countries for the first WWL 1993 and the most recent WWL 2022, has increased by more than 25%.

## WHAT ARE WE MEASURING NOW THAT WE DIDN'T BEFORE AND WHY?

We are still measuring the same things we did at the inception of the WWL but have increasingly fine-tuned the tool with which we measure, improved the data we get, and amplified the use of the data.

As for the tool, we have professionalized the WWL methodology by adding 4 variable answer elements to the questions in the questionnaire, and by ordering the questions according to different spheres of life.

As for the data, we developed criteria for the input of Open Doors Field operations and their in-country networks, and for the input of experts external to OD. **MORE THAN 4000 DIFFERENT PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED** in the production of the WWL, in different degrees of intensity.

As for the use of the data, apart from producing the annual WWL, with Full Country Dossiers for all countries with High, Very High or Extreme persecution, we now also produce Specific Religious Persecution (SRP) reports: Gender-SRP, Children/Youth-SRP, IDPs/Refugees-SRP.



*Over the last 30 years, the World Watch List has shown us that persecution is growing.*



**FURTHER 'GLOBALIZATION' OF ISLAMIC OPPRESSION:** That means, the Islamist Movement knows no boundaries. Be it by direct or indirect connections of many smaller terrorist groups with the big ones like al-Qaida and Islamic State. Be it by financing an abundance of Mosques and Islamic NGOs in the framework of radical Islamic teaching. Be it by Islamic businesses that directly or indirectly coerce their employees into such radical Islamic context.

**ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME:** Another global source of persecution, directly by violence, and by putting high pressure on the Church in their areas of operation. Indirectly by co-optation of the State, and by co-optation of the political system. Societal disruption, even by destructive laws, serves their purposes.

**'DIGITAL PERSECUTION':** Information Technology (IT) will increasingly be used to control and to put pressure on Christians and their church communities. China is the Big Brother here, but authoritarian regimes will increasingly follow them.

**REVIVAL OF INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS:** This will not only entice Christians into their ranks but may

also coerce (or force) them into it, making it increasingly difficult to convert from such traditional religions to Christianity. A very clear example is what is happening in West Africa, with Benin as the centre (they are building a "Voodoo University" in Porto-Novo, the capital of Benin).

**'AGGRESSIVE SECULARISM':** The Church will be pushed more and more to keep their beliefs behind their front doors. *Freedom of Religion* will be restricted to *Freedom of Worship*. No place for Christian teachings in the public domain.

**'CULTURAL MARXISM':** Cultural Marxism builds on aggressive secularism. It requires complete acceptance of secular ideology. This is about the deconstruction of Christian values in society. There will be less and less space for Christians to biblically resist this deconstruction process, and doing so is often perceived as religion being used to discriminate against others. Expression of non-conforming religious beliefs will be limited even if those religious expressions should be protected rights under *Freedom of Expression* and *Freedom of Religion or Belief*.





## WHY CAN I TRUST THE WORLD WATCH LIST?

You can trust the World Watch List because the WWL methodology shows how seriously and deeply research is carried out. The methodology is open for academic inspection and all scoring is audited via the highly respected expertise of the International Institute of Religious Freedom. The institute was founded in 2007 with the mission to promote religious freedom for all faiths from an academic perspective.

## HOW HAS THE WORLD WATCH LIST IMPACTED THE EXPERIENCE OF PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS?

The World Watch List contributes to Open Doors' mission of ensuring that no one suffers persecution alone, by standing with them and being the voice of the voiceless, in many places, and on many platforms.

In a special way we trust that our work encourages persecuted Christians, when they learn that their plight does not go unnoticed by many around the world.

## WHO IS BEHIND THE WORLD WATCH LIST? HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE WORKING ON IT?

There is a vast array of dedicated country contacts, field researchers and external experts which the team of 15 World Watch Research analysts (10 full time employees) tap into. The aim is for as much grass-roots research as possible.

## HOW DO WE GET THE INFORMATION ABOUT COUNTRIES WITH HIGH SECURITY ISSUES?

We always find ways to get information. I prefer to keep that confidential.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST THREAT TO CHRISTIANITY IN THE COUNTRIES ON THE WORLD WATCH LIST?

The biggest threat to Christianity in the World Watch List is that persecution brings isolation, and when it keeps going on incessantly it may cause loss of hope. This applies for violence; violence can lead to heavy personal trauma and loss of everything one needs to survive. It also applies for continuous pressure such as bullying in schools and loss of employment; this can also be traumatic, and lead to serious economic decline.

Having said that, remarkably many respondents to our questionnaires keep on saying that the biggest threat does not come from the outside but from within the church: "Will the next generation be prepared for the kind of persecution we are witnessing?" "Are they strong in their faith and in knowing Christ and the gospel?" This shows that the level of resilience of the Church is as defining for the future of the Church in a country as is the level of persecution.

So the biggest threat to the Church in countries with persecution, is decrease of resilience caused by incessant persecution and the feeling of being forsaken by the rest of the Body of Christ.



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# WHAT *LESSONS* HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH OVER 30 YEARS?

We have learnt several lessons from the persecuted church over the last 30 years:

- » The truth of 1 Corinthians 12:26: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."
- » To stand strong in persecution, it is important to be anchored in the Word of God and in prayer.
- » Be courageous. It is especially the church that is active in spreading the gospel that suffers from persecution, but also seems to be the one which is vital and growing against the odds.





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[research@od.org](mailto:research@od.org)

<https://opendoorsanalytical.org>  
(password: freedom)