Open Doors works with the world’s most oppressive countries, strengthening Christians to stand strong in the face of persecution and equipping them to shine Christ’s light in these dark places.

The greatest challenge to Christians living under tyranny and oppression is isolation – from God’s Word and from the body of Christ. Where other Christian organizations cannot enter or have been forced to flee by oppressive governments or cultures, Open Doors can often be found – supplying Bibles, training Christian leaders, developing Christian communities and ensuring prayer, presence and advocacy for these suffering believers.

When these Christians are strengthened in the Lord, they begin to demonstrate God’s forgiveness and reach out in love, even to their oppressors.

**ABOUT THE LIST**

The World Watch List (WWL) is a ranking of 50 countries where persecution of Christians for religious reasons is worst. First of all, the list covers persecution of Christians of all denominations in the entire country. The focus is on persecution for their faith, not persecution for political, economic, social, ethnic or accidental reasons.
EXPLANATION OF THE WORLD WATCH LIST

The reporting period for this version of the World Watch List is from November 1, 2009, to and including October 31, 2010, meaning that the months of November and December 2010 are not included.

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

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

The “variation” column gives an indication of how certain we are about the information obtained. Sometimes information is unconfirmed or incomplete. In that case, the “variation” will rise. Thus some countries may be ranked lower on the list because complete information is not available.
### WWL Report January 2011

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FOCUS ON THE TOP TEN

1. NORTH KOREA

The situation in North Korea during this reporting period remains horrific. There is no change in the total number of points but that doesn’t mean it’s stabilized. On the contrary, during the last year general changes in the country adversely affected the entire population, including Christians. Due to currency reforms, two out of every ten people seem to have lost their homes. Next to the economic crisis, North Korea has been hit by natural disasters. Dozens of North Korean people died in floods and landslides which were caused by a typhoon. The situation for the Christians was even more terrible. The whole country is under the spell of the Juche ideology and the worship of the “Great Leader.” As a result Christians do not have even the right to exist, according to the government. Despite this persecution, Christianity is growing slowly. There are many risks for Christians, most of them deadly. In 2010 hundreds of Christians were arrested for various reasons. Some were killed and others sentenced to political camps. For example, a Christian house church in Pyungsung province was discovered by authorities in May 2010 and three Christians were immediately sentenced to death because of the meeting. The other 20 Christians were sent to a labor camp. Politically, things are changing as well. In September Kim Jong-Eun, the third son of Kim Jong Il, was officially appointed to general and elevated to second in command of the Central Military Commission. It confirms the intention of the present regime to make Kim Jong Eun the hereditary successor. Will the situation change for Christians when Kim Jong Eun becomes the new leader? Many people inside the country do not believe so but only God knows the total picture.

2. IRAN

The total number of points has increased somewhat for Iran. During the reporting period, Christians continued to be arrested in waves, especially during December 2009 and first three months of 2010. Many church services are being monitored by the secret police. Believers that are active in churches or the cell group movement are being pressured. They are questioned, arrested and put in jail and beaten. Individual believers are being oppressed by society, under pressure of the authorities.
During the reporting period, there were frequent demonstrations against the Iranian government. It is assumed that the Iranian government is in crisis with so many of its citizens continuing to openly protest against it. In an effort to distract attention away from these problems, the regime is lashing out against Christians. In total, a few hundred Christians were arrested. Many of the arrested Christians have been released on bail. However, they are often still monitored by the authorities and may face further court hearings. Also there is the risk of repercussions by Islamic extremists, especially when Christians are involved in sharing the gospel with Muslims. The violence can come from a source as close as one’s own family. A convert from Islam died as a result of injuries sustained when he was seriously beaten by a family member during the third quarter of 2010. In the meantime, the indigenous church continues to grow, numbering at least 450,000 Christians (indigenous and Assyrian/Armenian). There are indications pointing to a huge need for Bibles. Sadly during the first half of 2010, hundreds of Bibles were seized by security forces and burned. It has been quite a long time since such a harsh measure was taken to thwart the distribution of Bibles.

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

3. Afghanistan

The situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated during the last reporting period. The government intensified persecution of Muslim background believers. Afghanistan has a population of more than 28 million people. Among them are very few Christians. Afghan believers are not accepted by the predominantly Muslim society, and legislation is not clear about the religious rights of Christians. During 2010, there were many examples of intimidation and threats against Christians. In May and June 2010, the Afghan television network Noorin...
repeatedly showed footage of Muslim background believers who were being baptized. Christian aid organizations were also accused of evangelism. In response to the broadcast, the secretary of the Lower House during a session of parliament called for the execution of these Christian converts from Islam. The broadcast and response of the government caused protests on the streets of Kabul and in other Afghan cities. Hundreds of protesters shouted death threats against Christian converts and demanded the expulsion of Christian organizations because of their assumed Christian influence. Pressure on Afghan Christians intensified and dozens searched for safety in other neighborhoods or cities or fled the country. Several arrests and court cases of Christians have taken place in 2010. In August, Christian aid workers were killed by the Taliban. Afghan Christians continue to suffer persecution and even violence from their families and others. In a unique situation in the history of the country, there is now a public debate over allowing Afghans to be Christians and have rights.

4. SAUDI ARABIA

Despite the fact that the total number of points for Saudi Arabia increased slightly, the country descends from position 3 to 4. The reason for this minor shift is the considerable rise of Afghanistan. The increase in points for Saudi Arabia is explained by reports we received of several Christians being physically harmed for their faith during the past reporting period, which was not the case during the previous period. Presumably the total number of Christians facing this kind of persecution will be much higher, but it is hard to receive sufficient information on this from a closed country like the Wahhabist Kingdom. Also, 12 Filipino Christians and one priest were arrested while attending a religious service in a private home on October 1. They were charged with proselytizing and temporarily released (one of them on bail). In addition, a number of Christians fled the country because of oppression for faith-related reasons. In some cases their lives were at stake. Most Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates who live and work temporarily in the country. The majority of them are from the Philippines. These foreign workers, besides being exploited and poorly paid, are regularly exposed to verbal and physical violence because of their Christian faith. There are a number of converts from Islam who live their faith in deepest secret.
Religious freedom does not exist in this heartland of Islam where citizens are only allowed to adhere to one religion. No protection, legal or otherwise, is provided for non-Muslim residents. The legal system is based on Islamic law (sharia). Apostasy (conversion to another religion) is punishable by death if the accused does not recant. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, the religious police “the Muttawa” often does not respect this right. It was also this Muttawa which arrested the above mentioned 13 Christians in October. The public practice of non-Muslim worship is prohibited as well in Saudi Arabia. Worshippers who engage in such activities risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture. Believers from a Muslim background also run the risk of honor killing if their family or others in their social environment discover their new faith.

5. SOMALIA

The situation for Christians in Somalia worsened during this reporting period. A negative image of Christians was painted in the media, eight Christians were martyred and a quarter of the number of Christians fled the country. The republic of Somalia essentially has been in civil war since 1991, and can be divided into self-declared independent Somaliland (North-West), autonomous Puntland (North-East) and Southern Somalia with the capital Mogadishu. While Somaliland and Puntland are rather stable, Southern Somalia is not because of the Islamic militia’s al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam are fighting the Transitional Government of the Republic, its ally Ahlu Sunnah Jama’a and backed by 6,000 African Union soldiers. Islamist al-Sahbaab controls 90% of Southern Somalia while the Transitional Government is locked up in a small part of the capital. Authoritarian Al-Shabaab is enforcing a harsh interpretation of sharia in the territories it controls. This militia is extremely radical because of external influence by al-Qaeda during this reporting period. Hence its support among the local population is waning. At the same time, al-Shabaab is effectively working to wipe out Christianity from the country.
6. MALDIVES

The situation in the Maldives has not changed dramatically since the previous report. In the archipelago of the Maldives, Islam is the official state religion and all citizens must be Muslims. Persecution of Christians in the Maldives is systematic: legislation forbids the practice of any religion except Islam; the government regards itself as the protector and defender of Islam; churches are forbidden; importing Christian materials is prohibited; discrimination of non-Muslims is total; social control is enormous and the average Maldivian agrees with the prohibition of any religion other than Islam. In the country — one of the least evangelized countries on earth — there is only a handful of indigenous believers who practice their faith individually and in extreme secrecy for fear of being discovered. No converts have been killed for apostasy in the Maldives. There were a couple of reports about foreign Christians who were detained and deported from the country after Christian materials had been found in their luggage.

7. YEMEN

Yemen still holds position seven, but the total number of points decreased somewhat compared to last year’s WWL. This does not mean that the situation of religious freedom for Christians has improved. The main reason for the slight decrease in points is the fact that during this reporting period, we did not receive reports of Christians being killed for their faith, whereas this was the case during the previous reporting period. Several Christian expats, who had resided in the country for many years, were deported from the country without any reason given.

The Yemeni Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that sharia is the source of all legislation. As long as expatriates do not evangelize, the Yemeni government doesn’t intervene when they live out their faith, but Yemeni citizens are not allowed to convert to Christianity (or other religions). Converts from an Islamic background may face the death penalty if their new faith is discovered. Converts from Islam also encounter opposition from extremist groups, who threaten “apostates” with death if they do not revert to Islam. Proselytizing of Muslims is prohibited.
It is estimated that there are several thousand Christians throughout the country. Most of them are expatriates (Westerners, South and East Asians, Arabs) or refugees (mainly Ethiopian). There are a few converts from Islam. In Aden there are a few churches, but in the north of the country no church buildings are allowed.

8. IRAQ

Iraq had one of the biggest changes in this year’s WWL, moving up from position 17 to 8. The rise in points was caused by a high number of incidents of violence against Christians, which led to many injuries and deaths. Additionally, more information was received regarding the number of kidnapped Christians and the number of Christians injured in specific anti-Christian attacks. Bomb attacks on churches in December 2009 caused as many as half of the city’s Christian population to flee Mosul. Attacks against Christians increased clearly during the parliamentary elections; the violence started just before the expected elections of January 2010 and lasted until the actual elections at the beginning of March.

The two main acts of violence against Christians in 2010 were the bomb attack on the buses full of Christian students in May and the terrorist attack on the Syrian Catholic Church in Baghdad at the end of October. In the first incident, three Christian students were killed and 180 injured, many of whom are scarred or disabled for life. In the second, which has also been called “the deadliest attack against the local Christians since Islamic extremists began targeting them in 2003,” 58 Christians died and at least 60 were injured. At least 90 Christians have been killed throughout the reporting period, including several other targeted killings of Christians in Mosul, Baghdad and Kirkuk.

About 334,000 Christians are left in Iraq, less than half of their number in 1991. Most Christians are from traditional denominations such as Assyrian, Chaldean, Catholic, and Armenian, and there are several thousand evangelicals. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, their situation has deteriorated considerably. Violence against Christians is motivated by religious, political, financial and social reasons. Christians suffer from the anti-Western atmosphere in the country and are seen as collaborators with Westerners. As Western influence in the country is dwindling with the pulling out of many of their forces, extremists...
take their chance to terrorize Christians and force them out of the country. The violence has caused hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people, both Muslim and Christian, to leave the country, and many more are displaced inside Iraq, particularly in Kurdistan.

**9. Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan is again in the top 10 countries listed. The total number of points is almost the same as last year but the pressure on Uzbek Christians has increased since then. In the past, Christians were given fines as a penalty for breaking the law on religion, but currently short-term prison sentences (3-15 days) are given more frequently as punishment. In every town in Uzbekistan there is more pressure now than in the past. Almost no new registrations of churches have been issued; instead many churches have lost their registration and some have lost their buildings. Many times Protestant Christians are seen as a destabilizing influence in society. They experience pressure from various sides. The government arrests, fines, and imprisons them; society causes job loss and disconnects them from services; Islamic clergy and relatives pressure them with beatings, rejection, humiliation and often expulsion from the family home. The laws on religion are strict and proselytism is banned. Regularly, there is negative exposure on TV for Christians, and a hostile disposition of local authorities and court officials are factors that aggravate the situation for Christians in the country.

**10. Laos**

Laos is the only other Communist-ruled country in the top 10 of the WWL (with North Korea). Despite many people’s expectations, the situation in Laos has not improved much since the previous report. The church is relatively small but continues to grow (numbering about 200,000 believers, mostly belonging to ethnic minorities). There was no improvement in religious liberty in the reporting period. Persecution in Laos includes a few restrictions in legislation. The government’s attitude is very negative and restrictive towards Christians, and all believers are under strict surveillance because they are regarded as agents for the USA to bring political change in Laos towards “democracy.” The church cannot operate freely and its activities in society are limited. Christians
are restricted in their roles in the family and in the village. Christian converts who renounce evil spirit worship come under great societal pressure. From time to time believers are arrested, and many of them experience extreme physical and emotional pressure (torture) to renounce their (new) faith. In the reporting period at least 25 Christians were killed; at least another 20 were arrested and held without trial. Christians were physically harassed on a regular basis and a number of churches were destroyed or damaged. Thousands of (Christian) Hmong refugees are living in Thailand. Despite the high level of persecution in Laos, there are many unregistered activities and the Church seems to be growing.

**COUNTRIES THAT CLIMBED THE LIST**

The countries that climbed the list are: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Vietnam, Algeria, North Nigeria, Kuwait, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria and Kyrgyzstan.

**3. AFGHANISTAN**
(see Focus on Top 10)
(up 4.5 points; last year’s ranking: 6)

**8. IRAQ**
(see Focus on Top 10)
(up 10.5 points; last year’s ranking: 17)

**11. PAKISTAN**
(up 4 points; last year’s ranking: 14)

**18. VIETNAM**
(up 2 points; last year’s ranking: 21)
The situation in Vietnam deteriorated slightly. This was mainly due to the abduction of a Vietnamese tribal Christian on January 26, 2010, by two security police for unknown reasons. We also received more pertinent information from field experts on pressure from village members, family, Buddhist clergy and shamans.
22. ALGERIA
(up 4 points; last year’s ranking: 25)
The situation for Christians in Algeria deteriorated. No incidents were reported last period. In the present period an increasing number of incidents were reported. One Christian has been sentenced to prison for proselytism. Ten court cases of Christians are still pending from 2008. Eleven Christians were arrested for breaking Ramadan. A Protestant Church in Tizi Ouzou was attacked twice by a mob, its members were threatened and the pastor was physically abused and received death threats. The Protestant church of Larbaa Nath was accused of illegal Christian activity under the 2006 Ordinance 06-03 for gathering in a rented house. Its pastor and three elders were arrested. In other places Christians were beaten, threatened, fined or obstructed because of their faith. The Algerian government is concerned about the explosive growth of the number of Christians in the country. The gospel has reached the hearts of not only the Berber people but also the Arab people. Causes for this growth have to do with the deep trauma the people of Algeria experienced during the civil war between Muslims and the government (1991-1999). But at the same time the Spirit of God is moving in an amazing way in the country. Although the Algerian government is stressing its long history of religious acceptance, the Protestant Church of Algeria has not been recognized in spite of risen expectations. The influence of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) in the country is waning, but the influence of Salafists is growing. They apparently monitor the activity of Christians.

23. NORTH NIGERIA
(up 3 points; last year’s ranking: 27)
The situation for Christians in Northern Nigeria deteriorated in this reporting period. The Christian-Muslim violence in Plateau state led to the death of about 2,000 Christians, the destruction of 2,000 houses of Christians and forced 4,000 believers to flee. At the same time, an estimated 500 Muslims were killed. In other states such as Kano, Katsina and Zamfara, churches were destroyed, Christians were imprisoned and around a hundred children were kidnapped. Abduction of Christian boys is done to raise them as Muslims; kidnapping of girls is done to marry them off to Muslim men and to force them into Islam.
Persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria originates from the non-equality between Muslims and non-Muslims based upon certain interpretations of the holy scriptures of Islam. In the history of the region, the Hausa-Fulani Muslims of North Nigeria applied this notion of non-equality to all non-Muslims they conquered in their 19-century jihad. The economic backbone of the jihad-based Sokoto Caliphate was the enslavement of predominantly non-Muslims, most of whom were Christians because of missionary activity. British colonization in the 19th and 20th century abolished slavery, but Britain used the Northern Muslim power structure to govern the then Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (North and Middle Belt regions). During independence until the 1990s, this northern Muslim power structure was merely left intact. Nigeria’s civil war (1967-1970), which led to the creation of 36 states, endangered Muslim power in the former northern region. The adoption of sharia law in 12 northern states since 1999 can be seen as protection of Muslim identity and power in the region.

The seven northern non-sharia states with sizable Muslim and Christian majorities and minorities are yet to be sharia-dominated, delaying the full re-establishment of northern Muslim identity and power. Plateau state, with its Christian majority, is at the frontline of this power struggle and local Muslim interests are used as a pretext to advance this northern cause. The Plateau state case is obscured however by similar conflicts about power and privileges elsewhere in Nigeria, where ethnicity is the only difference marker. Moreover, legal definitions of “indigene” and “settler” for which Nigeria has to find a national and constitutional solution, play a major role. By its corruption Nigeria is a near failed state, which is definitely not bringing about a quick and lasting solution.

Christians in Plateau state are accused of using violence against Muslims. In response to this, they point out that in the seven crises in Plateau state since 1994, Muslims were always the initiators of atrocities, and that Christians merely defended themselves. Next to this, large groups of poor, jobless and illiterate youth – mostly Muslim, e.g. the Almajirai (Islamic education students), but also Christian (e.g. street gangs), are bought for a little money by powerful men so that they can realize their political objectives. At this moment Christians feel “enough is enough” and “we don’t have another cheek left to turn,” and pose the question: “Are we just about to be slaughtered?” Christian Ibo’s in the city of Jos stated their readiness to use
weapons when attacked by Muslims in the next crisis! In short, persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria, particularly in Plateau state, is a complex phenomenon in which political and economical dimensions form an integral part.

28. KUWAIT
(up 2 points; last year’s ranking: 31)
The situation in Kuwait deteriorated to some extent. We received reports of a Muslim background believer who fled for faith-related reasons and one Christian arrested on false accusations. Also, we received more information about the situation on schools: the government requires Islamic religious instruction in public and private schools for all students. Teaching Christianity is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christians.

30. TURKEY
(up 3.5 points; last year’s ranking: 35)
The situation in Turkey deteriorated compared to last year. Turkey is known as a secular state, but some laws are applied in discriminatory ways for Christians. Turkey has historically recognized only four religious minorities: Hanafi Sunni Islam, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church and Judaism. Syrian Orthodox are not a recognized religious minority, but have permission to operate churches. Protestant Christians can only meet to worship if they have received official association status. Turkey narrowly defines a small number of religious groups that it recognizes and effectively oppresses all others. During the last year there were arrests of Christians and also physical assaults. Two men were sentenced to seven months of imprisonment because they were accused of collecting citizen’s information without permission. The court ruled that they can pay a fine of 4500 lira (US$3,170) instead of serving time. Religious meetings in homes are strongly discouraged in some parts (for fear of Muslim extremists). Major structural issues remain concerning church property and the portrayal of Christians in the media. It is seen as a big disgrace if someone in Turkey leaves Islam for Christianity. Threats against non-Muslims created an atmosphere of pressure and diminished freedom for other Christian groups.
31. MOROCCO

(up 5.5 points; last year’s ranking: 37)

The situation in Morocco deteriorated substantially during this reporting period. In spite of its long history of religious tolerance, Moroccan authorities started to closely monitor, threaten and obstruct Christian groups in the country. Two small Christian gatherings were raided by security forces, the local Christians were arrested and the expatriate Christians were expelled for reasons of proselytism. In the first half of 2010, over 150 expatriate Christian workers were expelled for proselytism. Among them was an Egyptian Catholic priest and two women married with children to Moroccan believers. Local Christians are interrogated, intimidated, arrested and abused by the police in order to produce evidence to validate the expulsion of the expatriate Christians. Church leaders are thoroughly surveyed by the police and believers live under strong pressure. Home churches have cancelled their meetings so that they won’t be raided or their members exposed. Some fear a crackdown on the churches once the foreign Christians are gone.

A nationwide extremist-led campaign accused Christians of proselytism, usually seen as bribing a Muslim to leave their faith. Seven thousand Muslim religious leaders signed a document stating that Christians committed “moral rape” and “religious terrorism.” The Ministry of Justice in particular is painting a dark image of foreign Christians. As a result, local Christians experience more family pressure and discrimination in society. Reasons for this policy change against Christians in Morocco came after the Casablanca Islamist suicide attacks in 2003, because questions were posed about Moroccans religious identity. The response to these questions led to the monitoring, curtailing and obstruction of any religious groups (e.g. al-Qaeda affiliates, Salafists, Shia and also Evangelical Christians) endangering state-approved moderate Islam.

Another reason for the policy change is criticism from fellow Muslim countries who see Morocco becoming a “Bangkok of the Arab World” with its annual large number of sex tourists and many luxury real estate properties in foreign Western hands. Moroccan law permits foreigners considered to be “a threat to public order” to be expelled or denied re-entry without due process. The law however exempts foreigners from expulsion if they meet certain conditions of residency. Any foreigner can ask for annulment of his or her deportation within 48 hours after notification.
Voluntary conversion is not a crime in Moroccan law. A Moroccan Muslim who converts to Christianity however is treated as a criminal by the police. Although the expelled Christian foreigners saw Moroccans becoming converts of the Christian faith, they deny proselytizing (considered threatening public order). No foreigner expelled was given the chance to have his expulsion annulled in court, and those expelled, even though they met residence conditions, feel their rights were violated. The Moroccan church is facing the challenge of living its faith in a more hostile environment.

37. Tunisia
(up 5 points; last year’s ranking: 43)
Tunisia’s persecution index worsened substantially during the reporting period. We received more information about the situation of the church in Tunisia and the increased difficulty for Christians. There is some joyful news: there are more local Christians, which confirm our earlier estimates. However, the attitude of the authorities has changed. Foreign Christian residents experience more inspections and suspect their phones are tapped. Pastors of expat churches are monitored and the importation of Christian books, especially in the Arabic language, receives obstruction. National churches cannot register and local Christians are questioned and beaten once their conversion is known. There are reports of Christians being arrested, sentenced to prison, threatened because of their faith, or pressured to renounce his or her faith. Some houses of Christians were apparently broken into and searched for evidence. Although the constitution of Tunisia respects freedom of religion and conversion from Islam is not prohibited, representatives of the administration at every level often act differently. Since independence (1956), no new church has been granted official registration.
38. SYRIA
(up 4.5 points; last year’s ranking: 41)
Syria has long been known as one of the most tolerant countries in the Middle East regarding religious freedom for Christians, although Syria’s regime closely monitors all groups (religious and non-religious.) Traditional Christian churches used to experience considerable freedom and stability in this dictatorial state, as long as their religious activities did not disturb the public order and providing they didn’t evangelize.

However some Christian groups and churches began to evangelize among Muslims and nominal Christians in traditional churches a year ago with the result that Muslims converted to the Christian faith and nominal Christians came to a deeper and more personal level in their Christian beliefs. This has caused much annoyance among the local Muslim population and especially among the clergy of the traditional churches involved, who noticed that they were losing their members to these active churches. The Syrian government in turn also fears violent repercussions by Islamic fundamentalists in response to Muslims converting to Christianity. As a result, at least six buildings where Christian groups were gathering were closed, most of them during the third quarter of 2010. Several Christians were arrested and interrogated during the reporting period because of their Christian activities. Foreign Christians serving Protestant churches had to leave the country since their visas were no longer renewed. Church conferences and camps were cancelled during summer. This begs the question of how long Syria will continue to be known as a relatively tolerant state regarding religious freedom.

In Syria, the large group of Iraqi refugees includes tens of thousands of Christians and Christian converts. Hundreds of them are suffering from physical violence because of their faith. There are 1,900,000 Christians in Syria, mostly from Orthodox, Catholic or Apostolic groups, but including a group of 10,000 Protestants.

46. KYRGYZSTAN
(up 2.0 points; last year’s ranking: 49)
The situation in Kyrgyzstan has not really changed much since last year. This year, Muslim resistance against Christianity has grown, especially in the villages. Also, the law on religion was amended in 2009 and strict restrictions have been introduced regarding the possession of Christian literature.
COUNTRIES THAT DESCENDED THE LIST

The following countries descended the list: Mauritania, China, Comoros, Libya, Burma, India, North Sudan, Djibouti, Cuba and Sri Lanka.

13. MAURITANIA
(down 6 points; last year’s ranking: 8)
The situation for Christians in Mauritania improved substantially during the reporting period. There were no major incidents involving large numbers of Christians arrested or physically abused. However a 25-year-old woman from the north was cruelly beaten and burned by her father and brothers because her Christian faith was discovered. She died in the hospital from her injuries. Over 20 other Christians – some with little children – received death threats because of their faith, and most of them had to flee their homes to escape. The influence of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) in Mauritania is growing. The group is gaining support among local Mauritians and is also monitoring Christians in the country. The Mauritanian government is cooperating with France and Algeria in eradicating AQIM bases on its territory to prevent the emerging of a new land of jihad.

16. CHINA
(down 3 points; last year’s ranking: 13)
There are several signs that the government tolerates Christianity more than before. The difference compared to previous years is that the government may not take proactive and systematic action if no sensitive incident or Christian activity of high profile happens. Although the overall attitude of the government seems to be easing, there are still persecution-related incidents. Religious groups can do more social work, but only as long as the government doesn’t think it will endanger the harmony and stability of society. At the end of 2009, some Christians were being sent to jail for a long period, but during 2010 it happened fewer times than before. Likewise, there were fewer Christian meeting places and homes attacked for religious reasons compared to last year. The situation differs by region but the fact is that there are still two ways to look at China.
21. COMOROS
(down 1.5 points; last year’s ranking: 16)
The majority Muslim Union of the Comoros consists of three islands: Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli. The situation on the Comoros changed in this reporting period due to a constitutional referendum which passed in May 2009, stating that Islam is the state religion. Although the attitude of the state and society towards Christians did not change, the legal framework changed for non-Muslims. Applying the legal change in bylaws and regulations to Comorian reality will certainly affect the lives of Christians in a negative way. On the other hand, we discovered that the experiences of Christians being monitored by the police differed in degree on the three islands. On some islands Christians can simply move more freely.

25. LIBYA
(down 1.5 points; last year’s ranking: 22)
The situation for Christians in Libya deteriorated a little in the reporting period. There is no constitution regulating religious freedom, but the Khadafy Great Green Charter on Human rights does somewhat regulate it. If a Christian convert from Islam is harassed or arrested by the police, there’s not any legal recourse or address for violation of religious rights. Although there were less incidents of persecution in this period, Libyan Christians do live secret lives. Everyone has a general spirit of fear and distrust in the country, thinking they are being watched by security forces and intelligent services. Libya is an overwhelmingly Muslim country. The small Christian community consists of expatriate Christians of sub-Saharan African, Egyptian and Filipino origin. There are also some Western Christian expatriates and the few local Christians are from a Muslim background. A Libyan Christian was arrested and pressed to return to Islam. Another was pressed to leave the country. Meetings of Libyan Christians were difficult to continue.

27. BURMA
(down 2 points; last year’s ranking: 23)
The situation in Burma has not really changed so much since last year. This year, we received no reports about Christians being detained or being harassed for their faith. These small changes were enough to have Burma being overtaken by Algeria and Nigeria.
35. **NORTH SUDAN**

(down 1 point; last year’s ranking: 30)

Persecution decreased slightly for Christians in Muslim North Sudan compared to the last reporting period. This is due to more relative freedom for churches in the North in the period prior to the upcoming referendum in January 2011, in which Sudan's oil-rich Christian and Animist southern region will decide for secession or for unity of the Sudan. The referendum is part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement concluded in 2005 between the northern part led by the fundamentalist National Congress Party and the southern part led by the Southern Peoples Liberation Movement. Northern Christians fear that independence of the South will lead to the end of the Church in the sharia-dominated North. As the North reacts to the loss of the South, Christians might be forced to renounce their faith or to leave. The attempted murder of the Catholic Archbishop of Khartoum in November by an Arab Muslim from the troubled frontier between the North and the South is an indication of the stress possible secession of the South provokes. Incidents of persecution include the imprisonment of two Muslim Background believers, the assistance of the police to evict the staff of a Presbyterian church in Khartoum in order to help a Muslim businessman seize the building and the raid of a Christian clinic in Darfur.

39. **DJIBOUTI**

(down 0.5 points; last year’s ranking: 36)

The republic of Djibouti is a majority Muslim nation with a small predominantly expatriate Christian community. A small number of local Muslim background believers are persecuted by their family and their society. Although this societal animosity is increasing, no incident during this reporting period was recorded by us. So Djibouti’s persecution index improved a little. The attitude of the government towards non-Muslims in general is one of tolerance and respect.

41. **CUBA**

(up 1.5 points; last year’s ranking: 38)

Cuba is an example of what we call a “falling” climber. Falling climbers are countries where the situation regarding religious persecution actually got worse, but their ranking goes down on the WWL. This is caused exclusively by external factors, meaning what has happened in other countries. In the case of
Cuba, this is caused by the situation in Tunisia and Syria. Other examples of falling climbers are: Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives (due to Afghanistan), Eritrea (due to Pakistan), Kuwait, and UAE (due to Turkey and Morocco).

49. SRI LANKA
(down 4 points; last year’s ranking: 40)
The effects of the ending of the war with the Tamil Tigers continued to be noticeable in Sri Lanka. Christians are no longer in the crossfire between the Sinhalese government and the Tamil rebels. It also seems that the pressure from local Buddhist clergy and villagers has abated somewhat — far fewer incidents were reported. We have no reports on Christians being killed, sentenced or detained for their faith. The only kidnapped person on our list is Fr. Jim Brown who disappeared in 2006. We know of only a handful of Christians who were physically harmed, and only a very small number of attacks on churches.

NEW IN THE LIST

50. MALAYSIA AND RUSSIA

Malaysia has always been a divided country: the western part of the country is deeply Islamic with a number of states having sharia law. The eastern part of the country (i.e. the island of Borneo) is more animistic and Christian. Though officially there was no preference for any religion, reality proved a different story. Malaysia uses a long list of words that may not be used by any religion other than Islam. It is next to impossible for a Muslim to change his/her faith. The regime (and the people) has always claimed that an ethnic Malay can only be a Muslim – any form of outreach to Malays is strictly forbidden. Building churches is almost impossible.

Slowly, the country seems to be shifting towards more uniformity. More and more, the country’s secular legislation has been made subordinate to Islamic laws. Secular courts have handed over cases about religious issues to sharia courts. Islamization is taking place in the eastern part of the country.

Over the past year, there was a wide conflict between the government of Malaysia and the Catholic paper The Herald over the use by Christians of the word “Allah.” Christians have used this term in Malaysia for centuries.
Malaysia’s High Court ruled on December 31, 2009, that Christians could use the term after all. While Christians rejoiced, Muslims were infuriated, and the government immediately appealed the court’s decision. In January 2010 the situation led to an outburst of attacks on churches, quite unique in the history of the country. Nine churches were either damaged or destroyed, while there were no reports of casualties. Fortunately, there were no further attacks on churches and believers, but the atmosphere remains tense.

**Russia** has a history of persecution. Probably everyone remembers the time of the USSR and the harsh time for the Christians in Eastern Europe. After the fall of the USSR it is probably surprising that the special position of a shared 50th place belongs to the Russian Federation.

The legislation of Russia defines the basic principles of freedom of religion and confessions but the different confessions do not have equal rights. In the law of freedom of conscience (1997), only four “traditional” religions are acknowledged in Russia: Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. State officials are publicly supporting and protecting the Orthodox at the expense of the other denominations.

During 2010 some serious incidents happened in Russia. Ten Christians were arrested during this past period and three church leaders were killed because of their faith. Most of the time, Protestants face many more problems than the Orthodox, but of the three martyrs, one was an Orthodox priest in Moscow. Another was a Baptist pastor in St. Petersburg, and the third a Pentecostal pastor in Makhachkala (Dagestan). The main reason for killing these Christians was that they were “too active” in the work among converted Muslims.

Religious discrimination is growing and for that reason persecution is growing. There were several cases of stoning the homes of Christians and of writing graffiti words on church buildings (the word “SECT”). Persecution differs per region. The situation is more acute in the central and southern part of Russia and there is more freedom in Siberia and the Far East. Not only the state, which includes local authorities and FSB (the former KGB) and police, persecute Christians but also Muslims in Dagestan. Many converts to Christianity have to practice their faith in small, discreet home groups.
DROPPED OFF THE LIST

NORTH EAST KENYA
(down 1,0 point; last year’s ranking: 50)
The 80 percent Christian country of Kenya has some northern and eastern parts where Muslims are predominant. These are the North Eastern province where Muslim ethnic Somalis are living, the upper part of Eastern Province where Muslim Borana and Somali are living and the eastern part of Coastal Province where Muslim Swahili of mixed Bantu and Arab descent are living. In these areas, Christians and Muslim background believers are discriminated against and persecuted. Our index of persecution for this area changed for the better during the reporting period as only a few incidents were reported. In Moyale town, Muslims attacked, injured and threatened local Christians, all members of an evangelical church.

Three other developments are important for the future of Muslim-Christian relations in the country. In 2010, a new constitution was adopted in which the jurisdiction of sharia courts was extended to the whole country and its range widened. The Church’s opposition to this legal development was viewed negatively by the government, while the Muslim support of the needed new constitution was warmly welcomed. Kenya’s Muslim population (3.9 million) has also more than doubled in the last 20 years (2009 census). Its wealthy segment is changing the face of local economy as the market is ready to serve Muslim interests. The Muslim population in the country has also grown through the influx of Somali refugees (2.4 million). They presently concentrate in the northern and eastern part of the country and in Eastleigh, Nairobi. While the Somali rich join the Kenyan Muslim rich, al-Shabaab affiliates secretly recruit children of the poor for battle in Somalia, extremist Islam is taught and Somali apostates and Kenyan infidels are threatened with death. Kenyan Christians should pay attention to these developments and reflect upon the consequences!