



Afghanistan – #3

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 89 / Position: 3

WWL 2016: Points: 88 / Position: 4

2. Main persecution engines: The persecution engines affecting Christians in Afghanistan are *Islamic Oppression* (main) and to a lesser extent *Ethnic Antagonism* and *Organised Corruption and Crime*.

3. Context:

Afghanistan has been a volatile region for centuries. It was ruled by Persians and gained independence as a state in 1709. The north-western part of the country is also known as “Khorasan”, a term which gained prominence in January 2015 when militants pledged allegiance to the “Islamic State” (IS), announcing the introduction of a “caliphate of Khorasan”. Those militants are fighting Afghan government troops in the north-eastern part of the country and continue attacking Muslim minorities like the Shia Hazara. In a wave of attacks in July, August, and October 2016, both the Taliban and IS made displays of their power.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Communities of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (BMBs) are the only World Watch List (WWL) category of Christianity in Afghanistan. Shops and other family businesses have been destroyed just on the mere suspicion that someone might be a convert.

5. Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence:

- The overall pressure on Christians is at an extreme level and increased slightly in the WWL 2017 reporting period.
- Pressure is at an extreme level in all *spheres of life*. This pressure, resulting from *Islamic Oppression*, is exerted mostly by families, friends, and community, but also by local religious leaders. The state authorities are weak, and Islam is a welcome unifying factor, especially as society agrees that conversion away from Islam cannot be tolerated.
- The level of violence against Christians remains very high, just a fraction lower than in the WWL 2016 reporting period. There were several killings of BMBs after their conversion had been discovered by the wider family. In other families, Christian converts have been delivered to mental hospitals, on the opinion that no one with clear senses would ever leave Islam. If Christian converts are discovered, their property is destroyed or given away to others. This can occur even upon the mere suspicion of someone having become a Christian.

6. Future outlook:

The biggest challenges for Afghanistan in 2017 will be:

- The dire security situation.
- The huge influx of refugees sent back by Pakistan and Iran.



- The increase in opium production which is known to fund armed militant groups and foster corruption, thus, fuelling the persecution engines *Islamic Oppression* and *Organised Crime and Corruption*, which in turn affects the small and deeply hidden Christian communities.

7. Prayer Points:

- Christian converts from Islam face strong pressure from their family, friends, and neighbours to recant their Christian faith. Depending on the family, they may even fear for their lives. Living openly as a Christian is not possible. Pray for courage and protection over Afghan believers.
- The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan does not allow conversion from Islam. It is seen as apostasy and brings shame on the family and community. Please pray for change to take place within the country. Pray for openness to religions outside of Islam.
- The small number of Christian converts in the country must remain in hiding. The increasing level of violence creates a general sense of insecurity and there are no signs of improvement for the foreseeable future. Please pray for stability and peace in Afghanistan.

8. Role of Open Doors

In cooperation with local churches and other partnering ministries, Open Doors is supporting the church in Afghanistan through the following activities:

- Literacy training.
- Vocational projects.
- Emergency aid to victims of violent persecution.
- Women's ministry.
- Bible literacy.
- Pastor's training.
- Counselling and trauma therapy.