



Maldives – #13

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 76 / Position: 13

WWL 2016: Points: 75 / Position: 13

2. Main persecution engine:

The persecution engine affecting Christians in the Maldives is *Islamic Oppression* blended with *Dictatorial Paranoia*.

3. Context:

Internationally, the Maldives still have the image of being a holiday paradise, however, the country follows a strict form of Islam and is struggling with unrest and many political challenges. In September 2015, the defence minister was sacked and Vice-President Abdullah Adeeab was charged with treason for trying to assassinate the president. President Yameen brought about an exit from the Commonwealth in October 2016. Political freedoms continue to be restricted as shown by the new “Defamation Law”, ratified in August 2016. Freedom of religion is restricted still further since the “protection of religion” is purely understood to mean the protection of Islam. The protection against destroying “religious unity” is also worrying, as this wording indicates that the authorities will oppose any perceived deviation from their understanding of Islam.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Two types of Christianity exist in the Maldives and are experiencing persecution: Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians are closely monitored and have meeting restrictions. Communities of converts to Christianity (in this case Believers from a Muslim Background – BMBs) bear the brunt of persecution. They are not officially recognised as existing in the country and cannot have contact with the (mostly Indian and Sri Lankan) expatriates.

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

- The overall pressure on Christians remains at an extreme level. The authorities have not shown any signs of granting freedom to religious minorities or to any other perceived deviation.
- Pressure is strongest in the *national, church, family* and *private* spheres of life, which all received extremely high scores. While pressure in the *national* and *church* spheres is typical for countries suffering from *Dictatorial Paranoia*, the pressure in the *private* and *family* spheres points to the difficulties BMBs is facing.
- Pressure mainly results from *Islamic Oppression*, which is active in all *spheres of life* and is linked to the understanding that every Maldivian must be Muslim.
- Finally, the score for violence against Christians has always been very low. Pressure is so all-encompassing that additional violence is simply not needed. Some converts have decided to move abroad in order to avoid persecution.

6. Future outlook:



Two worrying trends are apparent: 1) The government continues to restrict public opinion and closed down the main newspaper Haveeru in March 2016. 2) Huge social challenges (especially in relation to a lack of perspective for the island's youth) translate into a growing Islamic radicalisation. The Maldives have the highest per capita rate of terrorists fighting abroad. In June 2016, Maldivian fighters even threatened the government with attacks since the country's leaders are seen as "evil powers they are at war with".

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray that God would lead secret believers to find fellowship. Pray they might have access to the Bible which is considered contraband under Maldivian law.
- To be Maldivian is to be Muslim. Pray for every Maldivian to have a dream or see a vision of Jesus, that they will be led to believers who will be bold enough to share the Gospel with them.
- Many Maldivians want to leave the country because of restrictions on freedom. They often seek solace in smoking or drugs. Local media reports that drug abuse has become the biggest societal issue in the country. Pray that Maldivians will turn to Jesus to experience true freedom.
- Pray for the discipleship of secret believers in the country. It continues to be very challenging because of security and unity issues. Pray for God to provide the answers and solutions on how to overcome these hindrances so that the secret believers can be spiritually nourished and daily grow into Christlikeness.

8. Role of Open Doors

Practicing Islamic conservatism, Maldives claims their population is 100 percent Muslim, and takes pride in it. Any attempts to change the statistics are punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine. Open Doors calls for prayers from worldwide Christians for the few Maldivian believers on the island and in neighbouring countries. Given their scarcity and the strict government monitoring, they cannot come into contact with other believers and therefore long for spiritual nourishment and fellowship.

Open Doors is dedicated to supporting persecuted Christians in Southeast Asia through the following:

- Advocacy and awareness.
- Prayer support.