



Bhutan – #30

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 61 / Position: 30

WWL 2016: Points: 56 / Position: 38

2. Main persecution engines:

The main persecution engine affecting Christians in Bhutan is *Religious Nationalism* blended with *Ethnic Antagonism*.

3. Context:

Bhutan has two giant neighbours: India and China. Democracy continues to develop firmer roots, albeit in a climate in which all parties agree with the dominance of Buddhism and treasure their king. After elections in 2013, the opposition took over power smoothly. Christians, who are a small minority among the Bhutanese, still lack any formal status and recognition.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

The very few expatriate Christians usually join the existing house churches and therefore the World Watch List (WWL) category “Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians” is not treated as a separate category in Bhutan. There are also no Historical Christian communities. Hence it is the communities of converts to Christianity (with converts from either a Buddhist, Hindu or tribal background) and Non-traditional Protestant Christian communities who are experiencing very high pressure in all spheres of life.

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

- The overall pressure on Christians increased considerably and is at a very high level. The government has been discriminating against Christians (e.g. in the exclusion of some Christians when the new electronic National Identity Cards were issued) and the pressure from society has increased as well.
- Pressure is strongest and at very high levels in the *church*, *community* and *national* spheres of life. This peculiar pattern points to the fact that basically all Christians come from a Buddhist, Hindu or ethnic background and are seen as alien to Bhutan.
- Pressure resulting from the persecution engines *Religious Nationalism* and *Ethnic Antagonism* is present in all spheres.
- There was a rise in the level of violence against Christians, but the score remains at a low level. One church was closed down and another attacked. Three Christians were arrested for giving out a Gospel tract.

6. Future outlook:

- Bhutan faces economic challenges and needs to give the younger generation a perspective.
- The country is strongly relying on tourism. Both the numbers of tourists and the revenue it earns with foreign currency cannot easily be increased.



- It is hoped that hydroelectric power will become a second source of income. Ambitious plans have been made to become operational by 2020.

Depending how these economic developments unfold, they may have repercussions for the Christian minority. If the country falls into serious economic difficulties, it may rely on placing greater emphasis on its Buddhist cultural heritage, so making any recognition of the growing Christian minority a far-off dream. If the economy develops positively, this may relax the country's emphasis on its Buddhist heritage and make recognition of the Christian community a possibility. Accordingly, *Religious Nationalism*, the country's main persecution engine, remains the decisive factor determining the situation of the Christian minority.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray for believers who violate the anti-conversion law by leaving the Buddhist faith. Pray that efforts to persecute Christians in Bhutan will actually strengthen and unite them.
- Buddhism is Bhutan's spiritual heritage and has been for centuries. Though Bhutan is officially a secular state, Christians continue to be rejected and persecuted. Pray that the Holy Spirit would loosen the hold of Buddhism on the country.
- Pray for Christian converts who face strong pressure from family, friends, and neighbours to recant their faith. Pray they might be strengthened when facing persecution. Pray that the Lord would soften the hearts of their communities and make them receptive to the Gospel.

8. Role of Open Doors

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors strengthens the Church in Bhutan in the following ways:

- Prayer support.
- Advocacy and awareness.
- Persecution preparedness programmes.
- Literature distribution.
- Discipleship.
- Literacy.