



Brunei – #25

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 64 / Position: 25

WWL 2016: Points: 61 / Position: 25

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Brunei are *Islamic Oppression* (main), blended with *Dictatorial Paranoia*.

3. Context:

For more than 600 years Brunei has been a sultanate and all important political posts are still held by the sultan himself. On 1 May 2014, Sultan Hassanal introduced the first of three phases in the adoption of a penal code based on sharia law. The first set of regulations allows fines and prison sentences for “crimes” such as pregnancies outside of wedlock, propagating religions other than Islam, and not attending mandatory Friday prayers. The second phase, which will introduce harsher punishments such as floggings and amputations for property offenses, was supposed to be introduced in May 2015 but has been delayed and rescheduled for implementation in June 2017. Since parts of these laws will also apply to non-Muslims (who account for roughly 33% of Brunei’s population), it is feared that many better-educated Bruneians – including Christians – will opt to migrate.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Of the three World Watch List (WWL) categories of Christianity existing in Brunei, all Christians from Historical Church communities, communities of converts to Christianity (here from a Muslim background – BMBs) and non-traditional Protestant Christian communities are affected by persecution to varying degrees.

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

- The overall pressure on Christians in Brunei is at a very high level, increasing considerably compared to WWL 2016.
- The pressure is strongest in the *private* and *family* spheres (with extreme scores) and is next highest in the *church* sphere (with a very high score). This pattern is typical for the persecution engine *Islamic Oppression*, given that conversion from Islam is prohibited and seen as a shame by families.
- The score for violence was the same as in WWL 2016, staying at a very low level.
- The overall persecution situation in Brunei has worsened due to the introduction of Sharia Penal Code which applies to Muslims and non-Muslims alike (with some exemptions). Persecution has never been very violent in Brunei and yet it causes some Christians to leave the country.

6. Future outlook:

The government still provides free medical services and subsidises housing. There are no state



school fees and citizens do not have to pay income tax. But since the oil and gas reserves are finite and may only last for just one more generation, the government needs to start thinking about alternatives. This may lead to increasing insecurity and even unrest, and it seems that by pushing for the introduction of sharia law, the sultan is relying on the conservative brand of Islam. The country's main persecution engine, *Islamic Oppression*, will thus get stronger. This is challenging for Christians who are anyway facing a changing church situation with young Christians leaving the country in large numbers.

7. Prayer Points:

- Every day in the local newspapers, there are reports of converts to Islam who were given gifts and financial support. In contrast, Christians are not allowed to evangelise at all. Pray that, on such an unfair playing field, God will grant His Church wisdom and boldness in sharing Jesus.
- Pray for the underground believers. Persecution is felt strongly because the country is so small that there is nowhere to run if their faith in Christ is exposed. That is why they choose to remain as secret believers.
- Pray for Muslims who turn to Christ and now face strict punishment under sharia law.

8. Role of Open Doors

The implementation of sharia law in May of 2014 has increased the fear that believers in this country feel. Open Doors urges prayer support for believers in Brunei and for the local churches as they are experiencing mounting pressure from the government. Pray also for church leaders who are in great need of biblical equipping, particularly in dealing with growing religious restrictions.

Currently, Open Doors serves persecuted believers in the region with the following activities:

- Prayer support.
- Persecution advocacy and awareness.