



Eritrea – #10

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 82 / Position: 10

WWL 2016: Points: 89 / Position: 3

2. Persecution engines:

Three persecution engines operate in Eritrea: *Dictatorial Paranoia* (main), *Islamic Oppression* and *Denominational Protectionism*.

3. Context:

Although Eritrea dropped in score and rank (due mainly to a reduction in violence), there has been an upward jump in score over the past decade and this is due to the nature of the Eritrean regime, which is authoritarian and intolerant towards any form of association, dissent, and free expression. The government's attempt to control all religious institutions was particularly evident in the deposing and replacing of the Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC) in 2007 who has now been under house arrest ever since. High pressure is also being exerted by the EOC on those leaving the EOC to join Evangelical or Pentecostal groups. The situation in Eritrea is also contributing to the global refugee crisis: Thousands have been fleeing the country. In October 2016, a UN Human Rights Commission of Inquiry investigated the human rights crisis in Eritrea and recommended that the Eritrean government be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

All World Watch List (WWL) categories of Christianity exist in Eritrea and face severe persecution: Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians, Historical Christian communities, communities of converts to Christianity (from a Muslim background – BMBs – but here also including “church-changers” from an Orthodox background) and non-traditional Protestant Christian communities.

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

- Overall, the pressure on Christians went down considerably in the WWL 2017 reporting period but remains at an extreme level.
- Pressure is at an extreme level in all *spheres of life*, with highest scores being recorded in the *national* and *community* spheres of life. This is typical for a situation in which *Dictatorial Paranoia* is the main persecution engine.
- In Muslim dominated areas, persecution is strong in the *private* and *family* spheres of life, especially affecting BMBs. This is the result of the persecution engine *Islamic Oppression*.
- The score for violence is over 50% lower than in WWL 2016 but is still at a high level. Over the last years, thousands of Christians have been arrested and imprisoned and many died as prisoners. There are still many Christians languishing in prisons just because of their faith.

6. Future outlook:



Despite reports from human rights groups, Eritrea has not yet faced serious consequences for its appalling human rights record. Considering past trends, the following seem likely:

- The Eritrean government will continue its authoritarian course, oppressed Eritreans will continue to flee the country and non-traditional Protestant Christian communities will continue to be regarded as agents of the West.
- The Eritrean government will continue forcing Christians to join the army without upholding the rights of conscientious objectors.
- The Eritrean Orthodox Church and radical Muslims will continue persecuting converts.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray that the Holy Spirit would comfort Eritrean refugees, many of whom have fled because of economic reasons and the extended mandatory military service.
- A great deal of pressure comes from President Isaias Afewerki and his ruling government. Pray that the president would find true life and fulfilment in Christ. Pray for God's intervention in Eritrea. The local Church does not pray evil upon their rulers but rather that their rulers would have a change of heart.
- Thousands of Christians have been arrested and imprisoned over the years, some of whom still remain in prison after 10 or 11 years. Pray for brother and sisters imprisoned under horrific conditions, that they might be a light to their captors.

8. Role of Open Doors

Since the late 1990s, Open Doors has strengthened believers in Eritrea through strategic partnerships with the local church. Open Doors encourages Christians in the region through the following activities:

- Raising awareness and prayer.
- Encouraging positive engagement on behalf of the Church.
- Offering discipleship support and practical assistance to persecuted Christians.