

Iran – #8

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 85 / Position: 8

WWL 2016: Points: 83 / Position: 9

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Iran are *Islamic Oppression* (main), and *Dictatorial Paranoia* and *Organised Corruption and Crime* (both secondary). *Dictatorial Paranoia* is blended with *Islamic Oppression*.

3. Context:

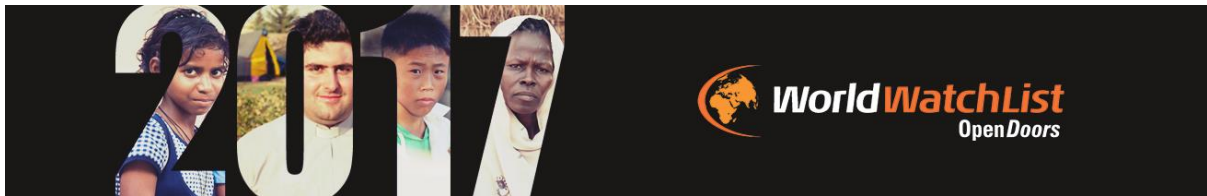
In the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the Shah was removed and Iran was changed into an Islamic Republic. Shia Islamic clerics took political control, today headed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran's current leaders see the expansion of the influence of Shia Islam in the Middle East as a means of continuing the revolution. Christianity is considered a Western influence and threat to the Islamic identity of the Republic. Apart from Christians, the rights of other religious minorities like Jews, Baha'is and Zoroastrians, as well as Dervish and Sunni Muslims are violated as well.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Communities of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (BMBs) are the largest group and experience the most persecution. Non-traditional Protestant Christian communities who evangelise Muslims are the second most persecuted group. Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians from Asia and the West suffered from some forced church closures. Historical Christian communities made up of Armenian and Assyrian Christians are protected by law but are treated as second-class citizens.

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

- Overall, the pressure on Christians is at an extreme level and rose slightly in the World Watch List (WWL) 2017 reporting period.
- The pressure is at an extreme level in all *spheres of life* and highest in the *church* and *national* spheres. Combined with a very high score for violence, this is typical for a situation in which government officials are the main drivers of the persecution engine *Dictatorial Paranoia*, which in the case of Iran is blended with *Islamic Oppression*.
- Pressure resulting from *Islamic Oppression* is present mostly in the *private* and *family* spheres and is exerted particularly on BMBs and Christians who minister to them, which are often from non-traditional Protestant Christian communities.
- Pressure in the community sphere is exerted on all types of Christianity, including Christians from Historical Christian communities.
- The level of violence is very high and increased in comparison to the WWL 2016 reporting period and included the arrest of approximately 193 Christians.



- The overall persecution situation in Iran is caused by a strict Islamic government which aims to eradicate or restrict any influence, including Christianity, which could endanger its position of power.

6. Future outlook:

The nuclear deal of mid-2015 has led to a further escalation of the power struggle between the reformist and conservative elements of the Iranian political spectrum. The latter are suppressing all elements considered a threat to the Islamic character of the regime: i.e. Iranians with ties to the West and religious minorities, including Christians and Baha'is. This situation is not expected to change in the short run.

7. Prayer Points:

- Due to government pressure, nearly all churches that held services in Farsi have been closed in the past five years and their leaders were arrested. Pray for Christians in Iran's prisons to have genuine love for their guards and fellow inmates.
- Shia Islam is the official religion in Iran. All laws must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law. Any Muslim who leaves Islam faces the death penalty. Pray that the laws will change, allowing for freedom of religion.
- For many Muslim families, it is a great disgrace when one of its members leaves Islam. Pray for Christians who have been cursed and disowned by their families for their faith.

8. Role of Open Doors