



Malaysia – #31

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 60 / Position: 31

WWL 2016: Points: 58 / Position: 30

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Malaysia are *Islamic Oppression* (main engine) and, to a lesser extent, *Dictatorial Paranoia* (blended with *Islamic Oppression*).

3. Context:

Malaysia is still known as the world's best role model for a liberal and tolerant Islamic country but this image is fading. Malaysian society is increasingly divided between an ethnic Malay majority (which continues to be clearly favoured by the government) and the Chinese and Indian minorities (as well as the indigenous tribal population living mainly in the eastern part of Malaysia) which are discriminated against. Indeed, racism is an everyday experience for ethnic minorities in Malaysia. Christians are particularly affected by this tension since most Christians either belong to indigenous tribal groups or are of Chinese or Indian origin.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

All four World Watch List (WWL) categories of Christianity exist in Malaysia and are experiencing persecution: Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians struggle with obtaining legal status at times. Historical Christian communities and Non-traditional Protestant Christian communities also suffer from certain forms of discrimination. It is the communities of converts to Christianity (mainly from a Muslim background – BMBs) who suffer the most at the hands of family, friends, neighbours and authorities.

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

- The overall pressure on Christians remains at a very high level but rose considerably in the WWL reporting period.
- Pressure is strongest in the *family*, *national* and *community* spheres of life. While pressure in the *national* sphere is typical for countries where *Dictatorial Paranoia* is active, the pressure in the *family*, *community* and *private* spheres points to problems faced by converts from Islam and other religions.
- Finally, the violence score remained unchanged at a low level. There were no killings but converts do get abducted and can be put under house arrest.
- The overall persecution situation in Malaysia is fuelled by the government increasingly relying on Islamic conservatism in order to stay in power.

6. Future outlook:

The youth wing of the ruling party (UMNO) seems to follow the concept of a "Peaceful Salafism", which is worrying for Christians and other minorities. The Islamic State (IS) continues making inroads into Malaysia and its first attack (in Selangor in June 2016) sent shockwaves through the



country. Although Malaysia agreed to take up joint sea-patrols with Indonesia and the Philippines to counter Islamic militant activity (and the police is also arresting IS supporters), the threat is growing. Consequently, the situation in Malaysia will remain volatile as its main persecution engine *Islamic Oppression* remains active, leading to ongoing challenges for and threats to the Christian minority.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray protection over secret gatherings of new believers. Pray these times of fellowship would be encouraging and unifying.
- Pray for new converts who are often kicked out of their homes, isolated from their families and communities, and at times sent to Islamic re-education camps. Pray for strength and courage.
- The constitution defines ethnic Malays as Muslims. For this reason, Malays do not have religious liberty to leave Islam and those who practice other religions are forbidden from sharing this among Malay Muslims. Pray for change in Malaysia.

8. Role of Open Doors

Given the increasing restrictions placed by the Malaysian government and society upon the local churches and new believers, Open Doors calls for prayers from Christians, worldwide. Prayers are especially needed for new believers who are thirsty for spiritual nourishment and fellowship.

Open Doors offers the following support to believers in Southeast Asia:

- Prayer support.
- Advocacy and awareness.