



Palestinian Territories – #23

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 64 / Position: 23

WWL 2016: Points: 62 / Position: 24

Please note: 1) The increase in the World Watch List (WWL) score is mainly due to adjustments based on the availability of more information. 2) Believers from a Muslim Background (BMBs) face much persecution pressure. However, in conversations with Open Doors field researchers, Christians from both Historical Church and Evangelical Church backgrounds on the West Bank have emphasised that Israel's (military) control of the West Bank is the main restricting factor for their freedom of movement, including the visiting of holy places in Israel. These restrictions are not specifically focused on Christians but affect all Palestinians and are therefore not included in WWL analysis.

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in the Palestinian Territories are *Islamic Oppression* (main engine) and to a lesser extent *Ethnic Antagonism* (blended with *Islamic Oppression*).

3. Context:

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict causes many challenges for indigenous Christians – their ethnicity results in many restrictions from the Israeli side, and their religion puts them in a minority position within the Muslim-majority Palestinian community. The territories are ruled or impacted by three different governments: The West Bank's ruling Fatah party is formally based on secular principles – meaning non-Islamist – and Christians enjoy several rights, even being active in the highest levels of government. In Gaza, although Christians are largely tolerated by Islamist Hamas, the rights of Christians are neither upheld nor protected. In past years Christians in the Gaza strip have faced threats from radical Islamic vigilante groups; in 2016 there were no incidents reported. Israeli military law is valid in parts of the West Bank, leading to great restrictions of movement of all Palestinians, including Christians. The total number of Christians has been decreasing in both areas over time due to emigration and lower birth rates. A ray of hope is the small but growing number of converts from Islam to Christianity.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Three of the four WWL categories of Christianity exist and face varying forms of pressure: Historical Christian communities, communities of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (BMBs) and non-traditional Protestant Christian communities.

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

- Overall, the pressure on Christians (from a Muslim background) remains at a very high level.
- Pressure is at a very high level in all *spheres of life* and strongest in the *church, family* and *private* spheres of life. This is typical for a situation in which *Islamic Oppression* is the main persecution engine and affects BMBs mainly.



- The score for violence increased compared to WWL 2016 but remains at a low level.
- The overall persecution situation in the Palestinian Territories is characterised by high levels of persecution of BMBs, especially in Gaza, but also in the West Bank. In Gaza, all other types of Christianity face restrictions, mostly in the *national* and *church* spheres of life. In the West Bank they merely face subtle forms of discrimination, which are characteristic for the situation of religious minorities in a majority Islamic society in the Middle East.

6. Future outlook:

The Economist Intelligence Unit expects outbreaks of Israeli-Palestinian unrest to continue to occur in Gaza and West Bank for the next few years.^[1] Nation-building and reform are hindered by – among other factors – divisions between Hamas and Fatah. The peace process is expected to continue to stagnate and the chance of new outbursts of violence is high. This will further affect the quality of life of all Palestinians negatively, including Christians, leading to a continuing emigration of the latter.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray for the Christians in the West Bank and Gaza that God will grant them the ability to be peacemakers, able to share the love of Christ in every circumstance.
- Praise God for the good work He does in the hearts of people, despite the challenges in daily life. God's Spirit works in the hearts of children and adults alike, from whatever background they come.
- Pray that the unity of the Body of Christ will be celebrated and become visible to be a witness for all.

8. Role of Open Doors

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors is supporting the Church in Israel and Palestine through the following activities:

- Training.
- Bible and Christian literature distribution.
- Socioeconomic development (relief work).
- Advocacy and presence ministry.
- Research.
- Prayer and presence ministry.

[1] See: <http://country.eiu.com/Palestine>.