



Saudi Arabia – #14

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 76 / Position: 14

WWL 2016: Points: 76 / Position: 14

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Saudi Arabia are *Islamic Oppression* (main) and to a lesser extent *Ethnic Antagonism* (blended with *Islamic Oppression*).

3. Context:

There is a growing gap between Saudi's large youth population and the ageing monarchs. Youth culture is changing under the influence of satellite TV, the Internet and social media. There is also a considerable degree of youth unemployment. The Internet revolution has also reached Islamic leaders and several imams have Twitter accounts with a large following. The number of Christian converts from Islam and other religions is increasing, along with their boldness in sharing their new faith. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world without any church buildings.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Only two WWL categories of Christians exist in Saudi Arabia: 1) Communities of expatriate or migrant Christians: Of the foreign Christians, it is especially the migrant Christians from low income countries who are affected and treated badly because of their ethnicity and low status. 2) Communities of converts to Christianity, here from a Muslim background (BMBs). Saudi and other nationalities of BMB risk fierce persecution from family, society and government. They have to live out their new faith in deepest secrecy.

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

- Overall, the pressure on Christians remains at an extreme level, with a very slight increase from the level recorded in the World Watch List (WWL) 2016.^[1]
- The scores for pressure in all spheres of life are at extreme levels, except for the score in the *family* sphere which is at a very high level. Pressure is most extreme in the *church* and *national* spheres of life, which is typical for a situation in which *Islamic Oppression* is the main persecution engine.
- Pressure resulting from the persecution engine *Islamic Oppression* blended with *Ethnic Antagonism* is present mostly in the *private*, *family* and *community* spheres and is exerted by the social environment.
- Fewer reports of violence were registered compared to WWL 2016, with less confirmed reports of Christians being arrested and Christian gatherings raided. The score remains at a low level.
- The overall persecution situation in Saudi Arabia is characterised by strong societal and governmental pressure on BMBs in a country whose citizens are expected to be Muslims.

6. Future outlook:



In the short run, no major changes are expected. In its annual forecast, the Economist Intelligence Unit, observes the rise of the young deputy crown prince Mohammed bin Salman who has loosened social restrictions that affect the youth. The struggle with Iran for power in the region is expected to dominate Saudi foreign agenda. The severe religious restrictions that are typical for the persecution engine *Islamic Oppression* in its fully developed form will continue to lead to severe pressure for religious minorities, including Christians.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray that Saudis who recently embraced the truth of the Gospel of Christ would become strong and mature in Christ. Pray also that they would disciple others until the whole country knows the name of Jesus Christ.
- Pray that Christian Saudis will find ways to share the truth with their own family members, and pray for the family members, that they will search for the truth and not respond in anger.
- The desert kingdom is defined by Wahhabism, a purist and strict interpretation of Islam. It is forbidden to openly practice other religions. Conversion is punishable by death. Please pray that Muslim Saudis will come to know Jesus.

8. Role of Open Doors

[1] This increase is mainly due to adjustments based on the availability of more information. In reality, pressure on Christians did not change that much compared to the WWL 2016.