



Syria – #6

WWL 2017 / Summary

Reporting period: 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016

1. Ranking: WWL 2017: Points: 86 / Position: 6

WWL 2016: Points: 87 / Position: 5

2. Main persecution engines:

The persecution engines affecting Christians in Syria are *Islamic Oppression* and *Tribal Antagonism* (blended with *Islamic oppression*).

3. Context:

The roots of the Syrian civil war are complicated, but the religious component is primarily Sunni versus Shia (including Alawite). The Syrian opposition becoming increasingly “Islamised” and the civil war is becoming a form of *jihad* against the Syrian government. The geographical concentration of Christians in strategic areas is an important factor in their vulnerability, as is their alleged support to the government.

4. Types of Christianity affected:

Of the four World Watch List (WWL) categories of Christianity, three are present in Syria and experiencing varying degrees of persecution: Historical Christian communities, communities of converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (BMBs), non-traditional Protestant Christian communities (such as Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations).

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

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Syria is at an extreme level and even rose slightly compared to WWL 2016. But this increase is due to adjustments based on the availability of more information. In reality pressure on Christians did not change compared to the WWL 2016.
- Pressure in all spheres of life reached extreme levels and was strongest in the *church*, *community*, and *national* spheres of life. This is typical for a situation in which *Islamic Oppression* is the main persecution engine, combined with *Dictatorial Paranoia*.
- Though lower than in WWL 2016, the level of violence is still extreme. Most Christians have fled areas held by Islamic militants (including Islamic State (IS)), leading to a lower number of violent incidents. Also, many churches were already destroyed in the previous reporting period. Another factor is the difficulty to receive confirmed information from a country in the chaos of civil war.
- The overall situation in Syria is characterised by heavy persecution of all types of Christians in areas held by IS and Islamic militants and by considerable pressure being put on BMBs in the entire country.

6. Future outlook:

With the continued support of Russia and Iran, the Syrian regime is expected to maintain its power mostly in the western part of the country. Islamic militants are likely to control much of eastern



Syria. Instability is likely to stay for the next few years and this is affecting local Christians, causing them to flee. However, some Christians make a deliberate choice to stay and reach out to their fellow countrymen.

7. Prayer Points:

- Pray for peace in Syria. The daily news coming from parts of Aleppo is heartbreaking. Every day people die from bombings by the Syrian and Russian air force, including many women and children. Eastern Aleppo is a place of complete destruction. Please pray for an end to the fighting and bombing.
- Pray for the more than 4.8 million Syrian refugees in the countries surrounding Syria and the refugees who fled even further (some 1.1 million Syrians asked asylum in Europe). Pray they will be received well by their hosting countries. Pray that churches in these countries will show them the love of Christ.
- Pray for the Syrian government, that they will make the right decisions that are good for the Syrian people and for the future of the country.
- Pray for the Christians still living in places dominated by Islamic State or other extremist groups. Pray they will hold on to Jesus, and pray that they will find opportunities to encourage and strengthen each other.

8. Role of Open Doors

Open Doors is encouraging the local church through strengthening its leadership and helping them take advantage of the many opportunities for ministry, even in the ongoing crisis situation in the country. It does so in cooperation with local church partnerships. Opportunities include the following:

- Literature distribution: Bibles, Study Bibles, Children's Bibles, New Testaments, and Christian books.
- Discipleship training for leaders so they might teach others.
- Leadership training in general and specific for youth leaders.
- Various types of training on request of the various local churches in Syria.
- Trauma counselling and debriefing for people who have gone through very stressful situations.
- Partnering with the local Church to care for and provide relief aid to the many Syrian Christian IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) and start all kind of rehab programmes for them.
- Supporting the remaining Iraqi Christians (who fled to Syria years before the war in Syria started because of the conflict in their own country) through Syrian churches, and providing an outreach to minorities in the country.
- Building bridges between the various Christian denominations by sponsoring conferences to which all denominations are invited.
- Open Doors is also raising prayer support for believers in difficult situations and prayer for the situation in general.