


# OpenDoors NEWSLETTER

Open Doors Southern Africa – celebrating 50 years of service to the persecuted Church

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2021 WWL  
prayer map  
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January / February 2021

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# LATEST TRENDS IN CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

## More than 340 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.

On Open Doors' 2021 World Watch List top 50, 309 million Christians face very high or extreme levels of persecution.

The pandemic has had a considerable influence on the persecution of Christians across the world in 2020. Here are some common trends facing Christians on this year's World Watch List.

## Covid-19 restrictions used to spread Islamic extremism in Sub-Saharan Africa

South of the Sahara Desert in the Sahel region, Islamic extremism is fuelled by injustice and poverty. Some groups pledged to wage jihad (holy war) against the "infidels" because, they say, it was because of them that "*Allah punishes us all*" with the pandemic. Human Rights Watch reports that, despite Covid-19 closures, there were more than 85 attacks on education outlets in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger between January and July 2020. Christians reported that lockdown made them "sitting targets", as security forces appeared to collude with the marauders.

Other countries notably affected are Nigeria (9), Democratic Republic of Congo (40) and Mozambique (45).

## Covid-19 legitimises increased surveillance and restrictions

China extended its regulation of all religions, using the need to contain the pandemic to increase restrictions and surveillance. As China's global influence spreads, Chinese companies, including Huawei, supply AI surveillance technology to 63 countries, some known for human rights violations and targeting ethnic and religious minorities.

Other countries notably affected are Iran (8), Saudi Arabia (14), Laos (22) and Myanmar (18).

## Covid-19 exacerbates Christians vulnerability

The pandemic has exacerbated existing social, economic and ethnic vulnerabilities of millions of Christians worldwide. Often-hidden attitudes of oppression and repression have surfaced in discriminatory acts or expression, such as online hate speech. In many countries, Christians were excluded from emergency aid and lockdowns meant that many were confined in spaces with those who are hostile to their faith.

Countries notably affected are Pakistan (5), Yemen (7), India (10), Sudan (13), Myanmar (18), Vietnam (19), Bangladesh (31), Nepal (34), and Malaysia (46).

# LIFE IN PRISON

## North Korea vs Eritrea

In the 90s Hee-Yol\* (a victim of human trafficking) fled North Korea (1) to China during the Great Famine where she became a Christian. Unfortunately, she was sent back to North Korea, where she was imprisoned for defecting. In Eritrea (6), which is called the “North Korea of Africa”, Shiden\* (in his 30s) was imprisoned in his twenties after being arrested at a secret worship service.

Both Hee-Yol and Shiden experienced horrific treatment in prison.

### Treated like animals

In prison, Hee-Yol and the other prisoners called their daily schedule the “crazy woman’s day”.

*“During the day, if we’re called to cut the trees, we had to cut the trees. If we had to bring vegetables, we had to dig for the food. And if they call us to deliver human excrement, we had to hold it with bare hands... and we would eat lunch with the same hands,”* recalls Hee-Yol.

Rotting food and rice with stones damaged their teeth. At night, they were tormented by lice, bed bugs, cockroaches and rats in their small cell of about 50-60 prisoners.

### Life after prison not easy

Shiden suffered indescribable torture that when he was released from prison, he fell into a deep depression.

In one prison, he shared a metal shipping



Prison is a constant threat for believers in North Korea.

container with 30-40 prisoners. They had one 10-minute toilet break a day, where they relieved themselves by a nearby shrub under the close watch of the guards. The lack of sanitation caused regular bouts of diarrhoea.

In another prison, for 10 years, he often endured solitary confinement for about six months at a time in a tiny cell where he couldn’t stretch out his arms or even stand up straight. Once a day he would receive a cup of tea and a slice of bread.

Through all the pain and suffering, Hee-Yol and Shiden remained faithful to God. Today Hee-Yol and Shiden are out of prison. Hee-Yol continues to serve the Lord in South Korea. Shiden still suffers emotionally but says: *“I will serve the Lord until I die.”*

Please pray for the many who are still imprisoned for their faith – for strength and endurance.



# FROM JAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Dear partner of the persecuted Church

Looking at the 2021 World Watch List, I see that once again the levels of persecution in many countries have worsened and that three more Sub-Saharan countries are on the list. Seeing all this, I want to cry out on behalf of our persecuted family: *"How long, Lord, must I call for help"* (Habakkuk 1:2).

Reading about the imprisonment conditions in North Korea and Eritrea (p. 3) shocked me, but it also showed me how much Christians in these countries and other countries, love our Lord Jesus Christ. They're willing to be His salt and light no matter the cost.

A few months ago, a brother in the Persian Gulf was recently sentenced to six years imprisonment for his involvement in spreading the Gospel. A co-worker of Open Doors assured him of our prayers by saying: *"We will pray for you that the Lord may be with you in this furnace and trial, like Daniel and his friends and deliver*

*you unharmed."* The brother replied with Daniel 3:18: *"But brother, even if he does not, I will still be faithful to Him"*.

Our persecuted brothers and sisters are willing to shine the light of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ even to the point of death. In this new year, they need our prayers and support more than ever before.

Thank you for standing with them in prayer and support. Your love ensures them that they are not alone, and it gives them hope!

As we join together in this new year to stand with our persecuted family in Christ, I pray that this year will be filled with the Lord's peace, provision and love.

Together in His service



Jan Gouws, Executive Director  
Open Doors Southern Africa



On 8 May 2021 Open Doors Southern Africa will be celebrating 50 years of love and service to the persecuted Church. All glory to God!

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**8 MAY 2021**



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