



**OpenDoors®**  
Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

8 – 19 Brownridge Road  
Halton Hills, ON L7G 0C6  
Canada  
T 905.636.0944  
F 905.636.0946

## NEWS RELEASE

### For Immediate Release:

Contact Monica Ratra at 905-636-0944

[opendoorsca@odcan.org](mailto:opendoorsca@odcan.org)

**TORONTO, CANADA, 11 JANUARY 2017** – Anti-Christian pressure is rising most rapidly in South and Southeast Asia, according to the annual Open Doors World Watch List, released today.

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party to power in India has unleashed a religiously motivated nationalist fervor, according to Open Doors researchers responsible for compiling the World Watch List. This index ranks the 50 countries where approximately 215 million Christians experience high levels of persecution due to their identification with Christ.

Five of the six countries whose underlying scores rose most sharply during the past year are in South and Southeast Asia: India, Bangladesh, Laos, Bhutan and Vietnam.

“A stand-out trend is that religious nationalism is driving the Asian countries up the list,” said Dr. Ron Boyd-MacMillan, Director for Strategic Research at Open Doors International.

Since the Hindu nationalist BJP won national elections in India in 2014, the pace of anti-Christian violence has accelerated in the country’s north, where as many as 40 million Christians live.

“Insecure governments of neighboring Hindu- and Buddhist-majority countries have found appeals to national religious identity to provide a boost to their own position of power”, Boyd-MacMillan said.

### THE TOP 10

North Korea again ranks No. 1 on the 2017 World Watch List, for the 16<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Open Doors rates Pyongyang’s dictatorial regime as unmatched in its hostility to religion.

Within the top 10 of the 2017 WWL, Somalia moved up 4 places to No. 2. The intensely tribal character of Somali society means any Muslim who converts to Christianity is immediately detected and that is enough to get you killed.

Overall, the top 10 on the WWL 2017 have been constant. Nine of the top 10 on the 2017 list also were among the top 10 on the previous year’s list: North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Eritrea.

In Iraq and Syria there were fewer reported incidents as most Christians have fled from IS held areas but the pressure on Christians is still very high.

At No. 9 on the 2017 WWL, Yemen is the only newcomer to the top 10, displacing Libya. Yemeni Christians are caught in the middle of a civil war between the Saudi Arabia-backed loyalists and Iran-backed Houthi rebels. “The Christians in this country are getting it from different ends including Islamic militants such as IS and al-Qaeda; it doesn’t matter who’s in charge,” Boyd-MacMillan said.



## OTHER TRENDS AMONG THE TOP 50

The average score for all 50 countries on the 2017 World Watch List increased slightly compared to 2016. Nearly a quarter of that increase is attributable to increasingly authoritarian regimes in eight countries in the Middle-East and Northern Africa. Countries like Egypt, Jordan and Algeria -- these are countries that are really cracking down on extremists.

Extremism has a freer hand in sub-Saharan Africa, where Islamic militancy is going main stream. Money is flowing to Islamic politicians and schools, among other elements of society.

2017 WORLD WATCH LIST – TOP 50 NATIONS WHERE CHRISTIANS ARE PERSECUTED									
1	North Korea	11	Libya	21	Egypt	31	Malaysia	41	Mexico
2	Somalia	12	Nigeria	22	Ethiopia	32	Mali	42	Comoros
3	Afghanistan	13	Maldives	23	Palestinian Territories	33	Tanzania	43	Kazakhstan
4	Pakistan	14	Saudi Arabia	24	Laos	34	CAR	44	UAE
5	Sudan	15	India	25	Brunei	35	Tajikistan	45	Sri Lanka
6	Syria	16	Uzbekistan	26	Bangladesh	36	Algeria	46	Indonesia
7	Iraq	17	Vietnam	27	Jordan	37	Turkey	47	Mauritania
8	Iran	18	Kenya	28	Myanmar	38	Kuwait	48	Bahrain
9	Yemen	19	Turkmenistan	29	Tunisia	39	China	49	Oman
10	Eritrea	20	Qatar	30	Bhutan	40	Djibouti	50	Colombia

Colour Key:

Extreme Persecution	Very High Persecution	High Persecution
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## ABOUT OPEN DOORS AND THE WORLD WATCH LIST

For over 60 years, Open Doors has worked in the world's most oppressive countries, empowering Christians who are persecuted for their beliefs. Open Doors equips persecuted Christians in more than 60 countries through programs like Bible & Gospel Development, Women & Children Advancement, Advocacy, and Christian Community Restoration.

The Open Doors World Watch Research unit surveys five areas of Christian life: private; family, community, national, and within the church. Separately, it measures violence against Christians. Scores for each of the six categories are combined to create a total score, which determines each country's ranking on the World Watch List.

The 2017 World Watch List accounts for the 12 months ending 31 October 2016.

Open Doors' research methods and results have been independently audited by the [International Institute for Religious Freedom](http://www.internationalreligiousfreedom.org/).

**For media interviews or further information on World Watch List 2017 research, trends, methodology and infographics, please contact Monica Ratra at 905-636-0944 or email [opendoorsca@odcan.org](mailto:opendoorsca@odcan.org).**