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NEW DATA: Global Persecution of Christians Surges in 2024

SANTA ANA, Calif. — In the West, it's common to think of world history in terms of a narrative of progress, but instead, troubling new data indicates the global community is regressing, as violent religious persecution continues to increase around the world, with North Korea topping the list.

The annual World Watch List, releasing January 15, ranks the top 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. This year's report reveals an alarming trend: the intensity of persecution has increased significantly, with approximately 380 million Christians (one in seven) worldwide now experiencing high levels of persecution for their faith (an increase of 15 million in just one year).

Amid tightening restrictions and brutal crackdowns, North Korea continues to top Open Doors' World Watch List as the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian, where an estimated 400,000 believers practice their faith in complete secrecy or face imprisonment, torture, or death.

"When discovered, North Korean Christians face severe punishment – including death – yet remarkably, we continue to see extraordinary courage from believers who risk everything to share their faith," said Ryan Brown, CEO at Open Doors US.

After escaping North Korea during the devastating famine of the 1990s, Joo Min found refuge in a safe house operated by Open Doors. There, she encountered Christianity for the first time – a faith she had been taught was evil. After accepting Christ, Joo Min made an astonishing decision: she chose to return to North Korea to share her faith with others.

"I know the risks," says Joo Min.* "If I am caught, I could end up in a labor camp. But I felt called to share everything I've learned with other secret believers in my homeland."

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings from the 2025 World Watch List include:

- Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan round out the top five countries where Christians face extreme persecution
- Digital Technology has led to increased restrictions and surveillance of religious activities worldwide
- A rise in violent attacks against Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa, and civil wars in places like Yemen and Myanmar have created lawlessness that has given rise to anti-Christian violence
- There is growing pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity across the Middle East and North Africa

The complete 2025 World Watch List will be released on January 15 at <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/persecution/countries/>. Media resources, including detailed country reports, expert analysis, photos, and videos are available upon request prior to that date.

ABOUT OPEN DOORS

Open Doors works in the world's most oppressive regions, strengthening Christians to stand strong in the face of persecution and equipping them to share the gospel in their communities. Since Brother Andrew started the work of Open Doors in 1955, the ministry has mobilized prayer, support and advocacy for Christians living in places where faith in Jesus can be costly. Now working in more than 70 countries around the world, Open Doors is committed to standing with persecuted Christians through Bible distribution, training and socio-economic aid. Learn more at <https://opendoorsus.org/>.

**Because of the extreme risk to North Korean believers, we've disguised 'Joo Min'. Her story is taken from accounts of two believers and details have been changed.*