The World Watch List (WWL) is a ranking of 50 countries where persecution of Christians for religious reasons is most severe.

Open Doors works in the world’s most oppressive countries, strengthening Christians to stand strong in the face of persecution and equipping them to shine Christ’s light in these places.
In 2015, persecution increased around the world, even in places where it has not been reported in the past, such as parts of Asia, Latin America, and especially sub-Saharan Africa. There have been some significant trends documenting this persecution.

Here are some significant trends to note while reading the 2015 World Watch List and this report:

+ The most rapidly growing area of persecution in the WWL is in the countries of Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

+ Worldwide levels of persecution have risen, but this has not been primarily due to increased violence, but increased cultural marginalization.

+ Asia is facing more persecution again- several Asian countries have seen rising levels of persecution.

+ Latin America is back on the radar- Mexico is on the World Watch List this year, along with Colombia.

+ Islamic extremism is by far the most significant persecution engine- 40 of the 50 countries on the World Watch List are affected by this kind of persecution.

+ Under the influence of ISIS, radical sentiments have increased in the Middle East. Many historically Christian communities have been forced to flee.
North Korea ranks first on the 2015 World Watch List for the 13th consecutive year. Yet again, nothing has improved for Christians since Kim Jong Un took over power. Pressure remains extremely high, and there is virtually no way to escape for those who don’t live near the Chinese border.

In most countries, there is a mixture of different persecution engines, though regularly one can be identified as the main reason. In North Korea, there is one all-encompassing persecution engine, excluding all other possible engines: Communist oppression. The God-like worship of the rulers leaves no room for any other religion. Any reverence not concentrated on the Kim dynasty will be seen as dangerous and state-threatening.

Not only will the believers themselves be punished if they are discovered, but likely also their families. Immediate family members, even if they aren’t Christians themselves, will serve a sentence in a re-education camp. Christians are sent to political labor camps, from which there is no release possible.

According to recent reports about the labor camp systems, it is estimated that political prison camps house approximately 150,000 to 200,000 inmates, not including all those in the other types of prisons in the country. One report suggests the number of political prisoners dropped to between 80,000 and 120,000 people, due to the high death rate.
Somalia ranks as the second most difficult place to be a Christian in the world. The main types of Christians in Somalia are Christian converts from a Muslim Background, also known as Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), and there is a tiny population of expatriate aid workers.

The majority of people within Somalia are Muslim, and no one is expected to be a Christian. Moreover, Islamic religious leaders publicly maintain that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches in Somalia. This view is upheld and reinforced on different levels by government officials of the various administrations (including the Somalia Federal Government, located in Mogadishu), political parties and ordinary people.

Additionally, the violent, militant Islamist terrorist group, al-Shabaab, subscribes to the Wahhabist doctrine and advocates for Sharia law as a basis to regulate all aspects of life in Somalia (i.e. legal, political, social and economic).

Al-Shabaab's implementation of its Wahhabist worldview is so extreme that, according to an Open Doors field researcher, even Sufi-Muslims move underground to avoid persecution by al-Shabaab. The social structure underpinning the way in which Somalia is governed is tribal. Clans within this tribal system maintain their own militias. This tribal system allows Islamic extremism, via groups like al-Shabaab, to flourish in Somalia.

In the country's very recent history, MBBs, or those accused of being MBBs, have often been killed on the spot when discovered. An Open Doors field researcher indicated that ordinary citizens, in collaboration with al-Shabaab, have been involved in the killing of Christians. The researcher stated that, "Believers have been betrayed into the hands of al-Shabaab by their neighbors…"

Open Doors field reports indicate that Somali Christians have to hide their faith to get access to basic necessities, such as basic social services, education or justice. Church life is constrained and has to remain underground. Believers are organized in small community groups, and they meet in secret across the country.

**PRAY**

+ Praise God that, despite the pressures, He has preserved a Christian witness in Somalia.
+ For the very few isolated believers, ask God to provide ways for them to mature in Christ.
+ That Christians would have more freedom to worship Jesus.
Iraq has a long church history. Related to today’s borders, the Christian biblical patriarch Abraham was an Iraqi. Mosul, Iraq’s second biggest city now captured by ISIS militants, is the current name of the former city Nineveh, from the biblical book of Jonah. There has been a long tradition of Christians living in Iraqi cities, such as Baghdad and Mosul. Before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq was home to one of the largest Christian communities of the Middle East. Christians have lived here for nearly two millennia, but are currently on the verge of extinction.

In June 2014, ISIS took hold of large parts of north and west Iraq, including the second largest city of the country, Mosul. It proclaimed a caliphate (which includes the region they control in Syria) and implemented specific rules. The punishments for breaking these rules are cruel, varying from cutting off hands to execution. Christians were forced to pay a tax for being a part of a religious minority, allegedly varying from $250 to $450. When an Assyrian family was not able to pay this amount, the mother and daughter were raped in front of the father. He was so traumatized by this event that he committed suicide later.

After July 17th, ISIS began marking houses owned by Christians with the Arabic ‘N’, which stands for ‘Nazarene’—Arab for ‘Christian’. These houses were taken over by ISIS militants. The militants gave Christians in Mosul an ultimatum to convert to Islam by July 19th, pay a tax or be executed.

On July 25th, 2014, ISIS declared Mosul to be free of Christians, and this event was celebrated on the streets of Mosul. Since then, several churches and monasteries have been raised to the ground, burned, or have been changed into ISIS offices, animal breeding houses or storages. Christian and Shiite gravesites have been blown up and destroyed. On July 27th, a Christian man was allegedly beheaded after he asked why he was being stopped in the street.

More than 140,000 Christians have been forced to flee from their homes since ISIS infiltrated Iraq last year.