

THE MOST PERSECUTING NATIONS

According to the *World Watch List* the leading ten persecuting nations are:

1. North Korea

Christianity is observed as a dangerous foreign influence which stimulated the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and therefore poses one of the greatest threats to the regime's power. As a result, the North Korean authorities are making harsh efforts to root out Christianity. It is believed that tens of thousands of Christians are currently suffering in North Korean prison camps, where they face cruel abuses..

2. Saudi Arabia

Religious freedom does not exist in the Saudi kingdom where citizens are only allowed to adhere to one religion: Islam. Conversion to another religion -- is punishable by death.

3. Iran

The deterioration of religious freedom for Christians started with the victory of conservative parties at the beginning of 2004, but a new wave of persecution of Christians followed the election of a hard-line conservative president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in June 2005.

Many Christians have not only been harassed, arrested and beaten. Ethnic Christians are still allowed to express their faith within their own church walls, but those who come from a Muslim background face tremendous risk because the government wants them to return to Islam.

4. Somalia

There is no constitution or any legal provision for the protection of

religious freedom. Less than 1% of ethnic Somalis are Christian, practicing their faith in secret. In 2005 believers were killed by fundamentalist Muslims, and as a result, many others fled to Kenya and other parts of the world.

5. Maldives

In the Maldives, Islam is one of the least evangelized countries on earth. The official state religion and all citizens must be Muslims. Sharia law is observed, which prohibits the conversion from Islam to another religion. There are only a handful indigenous believers, and they live their faith in complete secrecy.

Churches are not allowed although foreigners are allowed to practice their religion in private if they don't encourage citizens to participate.

6. Bhutan

Buddhism is the state religion in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. Officially, the Christian faith does not exist and Christians are not allowed to pray or celebrate in public. Christian house gatherings that involve several families are forbidden. Christians are being deprived of their rights, such as children's education, government jobs and setting up private businesses. Some are arrested as the local police often use arrests as a pressure tactic to make believers refrain from witnessing.

The new constitution of Bhutan promises religious freedom, but believers are not convinced that it will become an established fact.

7. Vietnam

The constitution Vietnam provides for religious freedom but the atheist regime tries to keep religion under strict control with a system of obligatory registrations. The government often closes churches, especially in the highlands. In November 2004, a new ordinance was implemented in Vietnam to regulate religion. Though many feared this would lead to increasing oppression, it seems that the new ordinance has in fact resulted in slight improvements.

8. Yemen

The Yemeni constitution guarantees freedom of religion but it also declares that Islam is the state religion and that sharia is the source of all legislation. The government allows expatriates some freedom to live out their faith, but Yemeni citizens are not allowed to convert. There are a handful of converts from Islamic background who face the death penalty

if they are discovered.

9. Laos

Laos is one of the four remaining communist countries in the world. Its constitution provides for religious freedom. However, the absence of rule of law and specific regulation on religious matters allows local officials to interpret and implement the constitutional provisions as they choose. The Laotian authorities put believers under strict surveillance.

The regime limits the number of open churches and regularly closes churches. The situation for Christians has improved over 2005 in the southern part of the country, but in the north believers continue to face difficulties and persecution.

10. China

In China, the constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the government is using new regulations to pressure unregistered house churches to register and extend control over them. Authorities still crack down on house churches throughout China and leaders imprisoned.

Pray on these nations. Maybe you would like to focus on one or two of these nations, or all of them. As the Master leads you.