

THE OPEN DOORS WORLD WATCH LIST, 2008

Explanation of the World Watch List

The World Watch List is compiled from a specially-designed questionnaire of 50 questions covering various aspects of religious freedom. A point value is assigned depending on how each question is answered. The total number of points per country determines its position on the WWL.

The questions differentiate between the legal, official status of Christians (e.g. *Does the constitution and/or national laws provide for freedom of religion?; Are individuals allowed to convert to Christianity by law?*) and the actual situation of individual Christians (*Are Christians being killed because of their faith?; Are Christians being sentenced to jail, labour camp or sent to a psychiatric hospital because of their faith?*). Attention is paid to the role of the church in society (*Do Christians have the freedom to print and distribute Christian literature?; Are Christian publications censored/prohibited in this country?*) and to factors that may obstruct the freedom of religion in a country (*Are Christian meeting places and/or Christian homes attacked because of anti-Christian motives?*).

The “variation” column gives an indication of how certain we are about the information obtained. Sometimes information is unconfirmed or incomplete. In that case, the “variation” will rise. Thus some countries may be ranked lower on the list because complete information is not available.

The WWL Top Ten Ranking

This year's number one on the World Watch List is no stranger: **North Korea** has topped the list for six years in a row now. There is no other country in the world where Christians are being persecuted in such a horrible and relentless way. The Wahhabi kingdom of **Saudi Arabia** holds a solid second place, followed closely by a country that's also ruled by Sharia law: **Iran**. Islam is the official religion in these two countries, as it is in the **Maldives**, the country in the fourth position. New on position five is **Bhutan**, moving a few places up from seven last year, mainly due to the fact that Somalia and Yemen decreased in total points. On six we come across **Yemen**, whose position did not change in spite of a slight decrease in points. **Afghanistan** rose, from 10 to seven. Apart from the influence of other countries moving down, the country went up as a result of several incidents against Christians in 2007. There was no big change to the status of religious freedom in **Laos**. However, the country moves up one place, from nine to eight. Two new countries have entered the top 10: **Uzbekistan** and **China**. Their total number of points hardly changed compared to last year, but other countries dropping off the top 10 made them go up. Concerning the countries of Somalia and Vietnam, an explanation of their descent follows under “Changes for the Better.”

Islam is the majority religion in six of the top 10 countries: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen and Uzbekistan. Three countries have communist governments: North Korea, Laos and China. Bhutan is the only Buddhist country in the 10 highest countries on the list.

Changes for the Worse – Summary¹

The status of religious freedom for Christians deteriorated in 2007 in **North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Jordan, Belarus** and **the Palestinian Territories**. We received more information on the position of Christians in **Mauritania** which resulted in a higher score.

Compared to 2006, even more Christians were arrested in **North Korea** and their overall situation grew worse in 2007. Christians have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs in the hermit kingdom.

The situation in **Afghanistan** remained bad. The major incident of the 23 South Korean Christians who were abducted in July, two of whom were killed by the Taliban, gave the country a worse mark than last year, though other incidents also contributed to this.

¹ More information from page 5 onwards

In **Pakistan** the influence of fanatic Muslims increased in the state security forces and the police, which meant that Christians in general were more closely monitored than before. Also the number of attacks on churches, Christian homes and other meeting places increased.

Also this year we received more information on **Mauritania**, which indicated that the situation for Christians is even worse than earlier expected. This does not mean that the situation worsened during the past year. According to our regional co-workers, there was no change in the trend towards Christian persecution.

Libya rose from position 26 to 23. Contrary to the previous year, we received reports that several Christians were arrested for their (suspected) Christian activities. Apart from that, the increase in points was also caused by the fact that a number of Christians were physically harmed because of their faith.

We received more information on the situation of religious freedom for Christians in **Jordan**. This, and the increased pressure on foreign missionaries, resulted in the rise of points for this country.

In **Belarus** the number of persecution incidents increased, resulting in a slightly higher score for the country on the list. More Christians were arrested and interrogated, more were harassed, and more church meetings were disrupted.

New on the WWL are the **Palestinian Territories**. An increased number of incidents against Christians and more information on their situation in general led to the increase in points for this area. A Christian was murdered and several others were imprisoned, questioned and beaten because of their faith.

Changes for the Better – Summary²

The total number of points decreased for **Somalia, Vietnam, Burma, Ethiopia, Colombia** and **Nepal**, most of them considerably. In the case of Vietnam, Colombia and Nepal this was due to an improvement in the status of religious freedom for Christians in 2007. For Somalia, Burma, Colombia and Ethiopia it was merely the result of the absence of incidents or considerably fewer incidents against Christians during the past year.

Whereas during 2006 we received confirmed reports from **Somalia** that several Christians were killed, others physically harassed and some kidnapped for their faith, this was not the case in 2007. However, Islam is the national religion and social pressure is strong to respect Islamic tradition, especially in certain rural parts of the country.

Vietnam is in transition. Entire denominations and several house churches have received permission or registration. The Church is enjoying more freedom than in decades. Not all is well yet, however. There are still religious prisoners, at least one believer was killed, and tribal areas experience a greater degree of restriction compared with their urban counterparts. Overall though, the situation has improved markedly.

In **Burma** (Myanmar) the number of arrested Christians was less than in 2006. Christians for the most part stayed aloof from the pro-democracy demonstrations in September 2007, when the regime reacted harshly to quench the demonstrators.

In 2007, the number of Christians killed for their faith in **Ethiopia** was considerably lower than in 2006, just like the number of Christians forced to flee and number of attacked Christian meeting places or homes. Christians are still risking their lives in some regions of the country when they overtly share their faith. In other regions, the church has much more freedom.

We received fewer reports on arrests and harassment of Christians in **Colombia**, while the depiction of Protestant Christians in the media was not as negative as before.

Nepal dropped off the WWL. In January 2007, the country passed a new constitution in which only proselytism remained forbidden. The country is no longer a Hindu kingdom; it has become a secular state

² More information from page 7 onwards

which will soon abolish the monarchy. Christians have enjoyed many new freedoms, and the church in Nepal is growing rapidly.

Focus on the Top Ten

1. North Korea

North Korea is again on the top of the list for the sixth time in a row. The government deals harshly with all opponents, including those who engage in religious practices. A personality cult has been built around the country's leader, Kim Jong-Il, and his late father and founding president, Kim Il-sung. The North Korean population is cut off and isolated from the rest of the world and dependent on the regime for their needs. It is a widespread North Korean perception that Christianity is "a bad element" in the socialist country. The North Korean authorities have brutally persecuted and slaughtered God's people. Christians have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs. Our local source estimates the number of underground Christians to be at least 200,000, and it's likely that there are as many as 400,000 to half-a-million believers. At least a quarter of the Christians are imprisoned for their faith in political prison camps, from which people rarely get out of alive. Raids are made regularly, both in North Korea and China, to arrest refugees and those helping them. However, the Christians are brave and they dream of reopening the churches of their forefathers.

2. Saudi Arabia

In Sharia-ruled Saudi Arabia, the deplorable state of religious freedom remained generally unaltered in 2007. Under the kingdom's strict interpretation of Islamic law, apostasy (conversion to another religion) is punishable by death if the accused does not recant. There were no reports of executions for apostasy in 2007. Public non-Muslim worship is prohibited. Non-Muslim worshippers who engage in such activities risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture. Like the previous year, several Christians were arrested for their involvement in religious activities in 2007.

3. Iran

Islam is the official religion in Iran, and all laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of Sharia law. Although Christians are a recognised religious minority who are guaranteed religious freedom, they have reported imprisonment, harassment and discrimination because of their faith. Armenian and Assyrian churches are allowed to teach fellow countrymen in their own language, but it is forbidden to minister to people with a Muslim background (speaking Farsi). Under Iran's strict apostasy laws, any Muslim who leaves Islam to embrace another religion faces the death penalty. Many church services are being monitored by the secret police. Believers that are active in churches or the cell group movement are being pressured. They are questioned, arrested and sometimes put in jail and beaten. Individual believers are being oppressed by society, under pressure of the authorities. They have difficulty in finding and keeping a job and are easily fired when it becomes known they are Christian. Also in 2007, house church leaders and Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) were arrested and interrogated for religious activities in the privacy of their homes.

4. Maldives

In the archipelago of the Maldives, Islam is the official state religion and all citizens must be Muslims. Sharia law is observed, which prohibits the conversion from Islam to another religion. A convert could lose citizenship. It is prohibited to practice any other religion than Islam, which is considered to be an important tool in stimulating national unity and maintenance of the government's power. Thus it is impossible to open any churches, though foreigners are allowed to practice their religion in private if they don't encourage citizens to participate. The Bible and other Christian materials cannot be imported apart from a copy for personal use. In the country -- one of the least evangelised countries on earth -- there are only a handful of indigenous believers, and they live their faith in complete secrecy because of the omnipresent social control by other Maldivians. The lack of respect for religious freedom in the Maldives remained the same during 2007. After bomb attacks against Western embassies, the government took active steps to curb radical Islam. In December 2007 there was an attack on the life of President

Gayoom, which failed. Main suspects were again extremist Muslims. There were no reports this year about indigenous believers who were arrested, or of expatriate Christians deported from the country.

5. Bhutan

Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. A key leader says there are approximately 13,000 Bhutanese Christians in the country. Officially, the Christian faith does not exist and Christians are not allowed to pray or celebrate their faith in public. Christians can meet as a family but not collectively with other Christian families. Religious workers are denied visas to enter the country. Christian children are accepted in schools, but they face discrimination if known to be Christian and they face the constant pressure to attend Buddhist religious festivals. It is almost impossible for Christian students to get to university level. For Christians with government jobs, discrimination is also an issue, as there are cases of believers being deprived of government jobs simply because of their faith. The import of printed religious matter is banned, and only Buddhist religious texts are allowed in the country. Persecution mainly comes from the family, the community, and the monks who yield a strong influence in the society. There is discrimination for some Christian workers in the government, but this is not rampant. Cases of atrocities (i.e. beatings) are sporadic. The persecution mainly comes in the form of pressure to reconvert, and this comes mainly from the family and community.

6. 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 Yemeni government allows expatriates some freedom to live out their faith, but Yemeni citizens are not allowed to convert to Christianity (or other religions). Converts from Islamic background may face the death penalty if they are discovered. Proselytising of Muslims is prohibited. During the past year, several Christian converts were arrested and physically harmed for their faith. There was no major change in the lack of religious freedom for Christians in Yemen in 2007.

7. Afghanistan

Afghanistan is an Islamic republic with no churches and a Christian population of about 0.01 percent. After domination by Muslim fundamentalists, the country is now ruled by a coalition government. There is still much anarchy, and the central government does not control the entire country. Violence occurs frequently, and Muslim fundamentalist resistance seems to be gaining strength and confidence. Freedom of religion as stated in the nation's constitution remains a contradiction, as Islamic law is promoted as the law of the land. Although it guarantees freedom of religion to non-Muslims, laws that are "contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam" are prohibited by the same constitution. Christians need to be very careful. Foreigners caught in outreach are jailed and usually deported. Local Afghans who commit themselves to Christ are often pressured by family and society to follow the cultural norms of Islam. Converts to Christ suffer repeated verbal abuse and intimidation, beatings, loss of employment, imprisonment, and sometimes even death. Some had to flee the country for their lives. On July 19, 2007, rebel Taliban forces abducted a group of 23 Christian South Korean aid workers. Several were pressured to convert to Islam and beaten when they refused. Two of them were executed. The rest were later released and deported to South Korea.

8. Laos

Laos is a communist state with some 100,000-120,000 Protestants and about 45,000 Catholics. Though there has been some progress in southern areas (e.g. Attapeu province), the state's attitude towards Christians continues to decline in several northern areas of the country, especially regarding Hmong Christians. The year 2007 is unique, as the government has shown two faces. On the one hand, they have shown leniency towards Christianity in certain areas of the country. On the other hand, they have shown their dislike for the church and continue to consider Christians as enemies of the state, specifically by being passive towards the local authorities in the provincial and district levels that continue to restrict religious and ethnic minority rights. The Laotian authorities allow limited presence of Christianity and put leaders especially under strict surveillance. The regime limits the number of open churches, and it closes

churches, especially in the countryside. The church in Laos experiences societal pressure against converts who renounce evil spirit worship, surveillance at every level by the state, and social control. Still there are many unregistered activities, and the church seems to be growing despite persecution. In July 2007, a huge crackdown occurred against believers in the village of Ban Sai Jarern, Bokeo province. Thirteen believers were killed, houses were raided and dozens of believers were arrested. To our knowledge, 21 believers are currently still in jail in Laos, and most of them have never faced a trial.

9. Uzbekistan

Restrictions and persecution continued for Christians in Uzbekistan in the year 2007. The government passed legislation that prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytising, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction. The law prohibits having more than one copy of a Christian book, including the Bible. In order to operate, churches must obtain registration, which is very hard to get. As there are few registered churches, many Christians have to meet secretly in homes under constant threat of arrest for illegal religious activities. Police raids are common and often lead to Christians being arrested, beaten and even tortured, and their literature and other Christian material destroyed. Uzbek believers are especially put under pressure to reconvert to Islam. The media regularly agitate against Christians and this causes an increase of intolerance in society. A nationwide manhunt was organised to arrest a Christian leader from Karakalpakstan (northwest Uzbekistan). The pastor of a charismatic church in Andijon was sentenced to four years labour camp in March 2007. Another Protestant Christian was sentenced to two years probation with work for the state, that was later reduced to one year probation and work for the state – including 20 percent of his wages going to the state. He was amnestied in December 2007 on the occasion of the re-election of President Karimov.

10. China

China is a large country with many contradictions. There are Christians who are restricted in their freedom to worship, but there are also areas where the situation is not as tight. Sometimes the government crackdowns against Christians were motivated by preparations for the Beijing Olympic Games in August 2008 and not by anti-Christian grounds. The government wants to make sure that there is no risk for any instability during 2008. The way they wanted to achieve this differed per area and situation. Sometimes unprecedented politeness was used, but there were also reports of house church raids and arrests. An unprecedented number of foreign Christians, living in China as missionaries, have been expelled from China in 2007. Sources inside the Chinese government reported the launch of this massive expulsion campaign. This campaign, encoded Typhoon No. 5, is believed to be part of the "anti-infiltration" efforts to prevent foreign Christians from engaging in mission activities before the Beijing Olympics. A number of house churches were raided in 2007 and Christians were arrested; in some cases, the government used physical violence against Christians. Although the situation in China differs per region, it remains difficult for many Christians to practice their faith.

Countries Where the Situation Deteriorated

Apart from **North Korea** and **Afghanistan**, the situation for Christians deteriorated in **Pakistan**, **Mauritania**, **Libya**, **Jordan**, **Belarus** and **Palestinian Territories**.

15. Pakistan

For Christians in Pakistan, life in the "land of the pure" (this is what Pakistan means) is fraught with difficulties, limitations, discrimination, threats, pressure, harassment and occasionally murder. The government offers only very limited protection to Christians. As result, Muslim fanatics have almost free reign and they use their freedom to make life for Christians as difficult as possible. Add to this that corruption is rampant, and that the infamous Blasphemy Laws will not likely be repealed or adapted, and it is much easier to understand how difficult the situation of Pakistani Christians really is. They are second-class citizens at best. According to our information, the influence of fanatic Muslims increased in the state security forces and the police, which meant that Christians in general were more closely monitored than before. Also the number of attacks on churches, Christian homes and other meeting places increased.

23. Libya

Libya has no constitution and there is no law clearly providing for religious freedom. The country adheres to traditional Islamic law. It is prohibited to proselytise Muslims. The authorities restrict the importation and distribution of religious literature in the country. Converts from Islam are subject to social pressure and ostracism. Most persecution comes from family and society. The expatriate churches are generally free to conduct worship services on their compound as long as they do not engage in politics and they don't allow access to Libyans. In contrast to 2006, the total number of points for Libya increased because we received reports that several Christians were arrested for their (suspected) Christian activities and others were physically harmed because of their faith.

24. Mauritania

The Islamic republic of Mauritania recognises Islam as the official religion of its citizens. The government limits freedom of religion partly by restricting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the evangelisation of Muslims, though private ownership is not prohibited. There is no freedom for conversion to a religion other than Islam. The sentence for apostasy is death -- although this sentence has (formally) not been carried out in recent years. Like the previous year, the total points for Mauritania increased considerably in 2007. We received more information on this country in 2007 which indicated that the situation for Christians is even worse than previously expected. This does not mean that the situation worsened during the past year. According to our regional co-workers, there was no change in the trend toward Christian persecution. In 2007, a few Christians were arrested.

39. Jordan

The state religion of Jordan is Islam. Conversion from Islam and evangelisation of Muslims is prohibited. Converts from Islam face societal and sometimes governmental discrimination. Muslims who convert to another religion are still considered Muslims and fall under jurisdiction of Sharia courts. Jordan is known as one of the most Western-orientated and free countries in the Middle East. So the rise of points for Jordan will come as a surprise to many. This increase is explained by both more information that we received on the country and an increase in control of Christians in general, particularly the increased pressure on foreign missionaries. Many visas were not renewed, and three missionaries and their families were forced to leave the country, some after a few days of detainment. Church leaders reaching out to Muslims were harassed. Some ministry to Iraqi refugees was also hindered. Further, our staff in the region reported that it is now impossible for new denominations to register.

41. Belarus

Belarus has one of the most repressive regimes in Europe. Under the dictatorship of President Lukashenko, human rights are trampled and dissidents are jailed. The government continued to restrict religious freedom. Though the country officially has no state religion, the Belarusian Orthodox Church has a privileged position. Protestants (like Lutherans, Reformed, Evangelicals and Baptists) attracted negative attention, presumably for their perceived links with the United States. Numerous attacks on religious monuments, buildings, and cemeteries occurred with little discernable response from the government. Authorities kept many religious communities waiting as long as several years for decisions about property registration or restitution. Authorities also harassed and fined members of certain religious groups, especially those that the authorities appeared to regard as bearers of foreign cultural influence or as having a political agenda. Foreign missionaries, clergy, and humanitarian workers affiliated with churches faced many government-imposed obstacles, including deportation and visa refusal or cancellation. In 2007, the number of persecution incidents increased, resulting in a slightly higher score for the country on the list. More Christians were arrested and interrogated, more were harassed, and more church meetings were disrupted.

42. Palestinian Territories

The Palestinian Territories – West Bank and Gaza – are new on the World Watch List this year. During the past year, the trend towards persecution of Christians increased considerably. Apart from that, we also collected more information on this area than in previous years. The Palestinian Territories fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, which does not have a constitution. The Palestinian Basic Law provides for freedom of religion. However, it also states that Islam is the official religion and that the principles of Sharia shall be the main source of legislation. In June 2007, the unity government of Hamas and Fatah came to an end when Hamas militants launched a military coup against Fatah. A few days later, they took over the Gaza strip. In the same period, unidentified militants attacked the Rosary Sisters School. The victory of Hamas also resulted in more violence against Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). Given these circumstances, extremist Muslims seem to feel increasingly encouraged to persecute MBBs. Also, a growing number of incidents against MBBs were reported: e.g. two believers had to flee to Jordan; one of them was detained by his family because he converted to Christianity. The manager of the Bible Society Bookshop in Gaza was killed last October after he had received threats from extremist Muslims. Nobody has been charged with the murder. The bookshop was bombed in April 2007 after previous threats. Several other Christians were imprisoned, questioned and beaten because of their faith.

The scores of the Gulf States of **Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, UAE** and **Bahrain** seem to suggest that the situation of religious freedom for Christians worsened. However, this is not necessarily the case. First, we received more information indicating that the situation of Christians in these countries is worse than we thought previously. Second, there is a special situation in the Gulf States, where expatriates make up a disproportionately large part of the population. Many of them come from predominantly Christian countries, and they are often treated differently. For instance, in many cases they enjoy more freedom than the citizen population who are often considered to be Muslims. Among the latter there are Christians as well, either from ancient Christian or Islamic background. They seldom if ever enjoy any religious freedom. Since their situation would be “thrown into the shade” by the favorable situation of the expatriates, we chose to put the focus on this Christian citizen population when completing the questionnaires for the Gulf countries. We did not exclude the expatriate population but counted them less heavily than their figure may suggest. This is another reason, apart from the increased amount of information, why the scores for the Gulf countries increased. As this does not entail a change in the situation of religious freedom for Christians, we did not change the zero under “trend.”

Countries Where the Situation Improved

The situation improved considerably for **Somalia, Vietnam, Burma, Ethiopia, Colombia** and **Nepal**. Concerning Vietnam, Colombia and Nepal, this was due to an improvement in the status of religious freedom for Christians in 2007. For Somalia, Burma, Colombia and Ethiopia, it was merely the result of fewer incidents against Christians during the past year.

12. Somalia

Somalia has left the top 10 on the WWL due to a decline in their total number of points. However, this does not mean the situation for Christians in Somalia is favorable. The absence of reported incidents against Christians in 2007 explains the difference in total points compared to 2006. Whereas during 2006, we received confirmed information about several Christians being killed, others being physically harassed and some kidnapped for their faith, this was not the case for 2007. Yet Somalia still has no constitution or any legal provision explicitly protecting religious freedom. Islam is the national religion and social pressure is strong to respect Islamic tradition, especially in certain rural parts of the country. In the absence of a national judicial system operated by a central government, local Sharia courts continued to operate throughout the country. Evangelising for any religion other than Islam is prohibited in the local administrations of Puntland and Somaliland and socially undesired in the rest of the country. Religious activities are very closely watched in Puntland. Less than one percent of ethnic Somalis are Christian, practicing their faith in secret.

17. Vietnam

Vietnam is in transition. Entire denominations have been registered, and several house churches have received permission or registration. The new ordinance on religion has been better implemented, and as

a result the church is enjoying more freedom than in decades. The church's role in society has become more visible, and the state encourages social activities. These improvements have especially been felt in the cities. Not all is well yet, however. There are still religious prisoners, at least one believer was killed, and tribal areas experience a greater degree of restriction compared with their urban counterparts. Overall though, the situation has improved markedly.

25. Burma (Myanmar)

Burma is a police state. The army has ruled the country for many decades. There is limited freedom of religion. Most of the country's Christians belong to ethnic minorities. Army campaigns against these minorities often have a side-effect of persecuting Christians. The situation for Christians in Rangoon seems to be okay, but it is difficult to assess the situation in the countryside. The regime restricts travel of foreigners. At the end of September 2007, the regime reacted with its usual iron-fist approach to quench the pro-democracy demonstrations in Burma. Dozens were killed, and hundreds if not thousands were arrested. What was most remarkable in this event was the prominent role Buddhist clergy played in defying the regime and the incredible hardness of the regime against the monks. It seems that the "automatic" link between the regime and the state-controlled form of Buddhism has now disappeared. Christians mostly stayed aloof of the demonstrations, because they usually don't have the same kind of protection Buddhist monks have. Now even that protection seems to have gone, so Christians were wise to not participate too obviously. The number of arrested Christians was less than a year ago, hence the "improvement."

43. Ethiopia

The total points for Ethiopia decreased over 2007. Unfortunately this decline in points is not due to a clear improvement in the situation of religious freedom for local Christians. The decrease in total points resulted from fewer reported incidents against Ethiopian Christians in 2007. In 2006, the number of Christians killed for their faith was considerably higher than in 2007, just like the number of Christians forced to flee and number of attacked Christian meeting places or homes.

Christians are still risking their lives in some regions of the country when they overtly share their faith. In a rural part of Ethiopia, a Christian died after he was severely beaten by Muslims while he was witnessing for Christ last year. Occasionally church leaders and believers have been jailed for allegedly insulting Islam and for distributing Christian leaflets. About 50 believers were physically harmed for their faith in 2007. A church was bombed during service in the Somali region of eastern Ethiopia last August. Responsibility for these attacks has not been claimed, but many guess that this has been the work of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Although the constitution of Ethiopia provides for freedom of religion, local Christians feel the government controls this freedom. Evangelical believers are not recognised, and they report that their churches are monitored. In majority Islamic regions, Christians experience most of the opposition from local authorities and radical Muslims. Christians from an Islamic background are often fiercely persecuted by family members. Not only are they ostracised from the community, but they also face threats and attacks. In other regions, the church has considerable freedom.

50. Colombia

Colombia is one of the major producers of cocaine in the world, along with Afghanistan. A 40-year conflict between government forces and anti-government insurgent groups (most important of these are the FARC and the ELN) and illegal paramilitary groups -- both heavily funded by the drug trade -- escalated during the 1990s. The insurgents lack the military or popular support necessary to overthrow the government, and violence has been decreasing since about 2002, but insurgents continue attacks against civilians and large swaths of the countryside are under guerrilla influence. Colombia has the highest occurrence of kidnappings and murders per capita in the world. Christians are often caught in the crossfire of the rivalling groups. They have nothing to fear from the government, but they may be targeted by the rebel groups or the paramilitaries for extortion. Some of the leftist rebel groups have Marxist credos and are therefore hostile to Christians. In 2007 we received fewer reports of arrests and harassment of Christians, while the depiction of Protestant Christians in the media was not as negative as before.

Nepal

Nepal dropped off the WWL. In January 2007, the country passed a new constitution in which only proselytism remained forbidden. The country is no longer a Hindu kingdom; it has become a secular state which will soon abolish the monarchy. Christians have enjoyed many new freedoms, and the church in Nepal is growing rapidly.

Additional information:

20. Zanzibar Islands

The Zanzibar archipelago is new on the list. It is the first time that we received a questionnaire on this country and the contents indicate that the situation for local Christians is quite serious. The Zanzibar Islands are part of Tanzania. Whereas mainland Tanzania is predominantly Christian and its constitution provides for freedom of religion, 97 percent of the population of the Zanzibar islands is Muslim, with a very active extremist element. Zanzibar Islands are made up of three islands: Unguja (the main island), Tumbatu and Pemba Islands. The church in general on Zanzibar Islands faces struggles in areas like registration of churches, purchase of property, education, and employment. In 2007, four churches were burned, several pastors were arrested falsely and a number of MBBs were kidnapped by Muslims. Many MBBs and some pastors have been physically harmed because of their faith during 2007. Our co-worker in the region states that the Muslim extremist element on the islands continues to grow and cause problems for the Christians.

Because overall persecution increased and long-time WWL country **Mexico** remained at the same level as last year, it dropped off the list.

World Watch List January 2008

Country Name	January 2008	January 2007	Trend	Variation
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1.	Korea, North	90,5	85,0	-	0,0
2.	Saudi Arabia	64,5	66,5	0	6,0
3.	Iran	64,0	65,5	0	0,0
4.	Maldives	61,0	62,0	0	0,0
5.	Bhutan	58,0	57,5	0	0,0
6.	Yemen	57,5	59,5	0	0,0
7.	Afghanistan	57,5	55,0	-	2,0
8.	Laos	56,5	55,0	0	0,0
9.	Uzbekistan	55,0	55,0	0	0,0
10.	China	55,0	54,0	0	0,0
11.	Eritrea	55,0	53,0	0	9,5
12.	Somalia ³	54,5	63,0	+	7,0
13.	Turkmenistan	54,0	52,5	0	0,0
14.	Comoros	50,0	52,0	0	5,0
15.	Pakistan	48,0	45,5	-	0,0
16.	Qatar ³	47,5	40,0	0	0,0
17.	Vietnam	46,0	57,0	+	0,0
18.	Chechnya	46,0	47,0	0	1,5
19.	Egypt	46,0	45,0	0	0,0
20.	Zanzibar Islands ⁴	43,0	-	0	10,0
21.	Iraq	42,5	43,0	0	1,5
22.	Azerbaijan	42,5	42,5	0	0,0
23.	Libya	42,5	39,0	-	1,5
24.	Mauritania ³	42,5	35,5	-	0,0
25.	Burma (Myanmar) ³	42,0	44,5	+	0,0
26.	Sudan (North)	41,5	43,5	0	0,0
27.	Oman ³	41,0	33,5	0	6,0
28.	Cuba	40,0	41,0	0	0,0
29.	Brunei	39,0	41,0	0	1,5
30.	India	37,5	36,5	0	0,0
31.	Algeria	37,5	35,5	0	3,0
32.	Nigeria (North)	37,0	38,0	0	0,0
33.	Djibouti	36,0	37,0	0	0,0
34.	Turkey	36,0	34,0	0	0,0
35.	Kuwait ³	36,0	29,0	0	0,0
36.	Sri Lanka	35,5	35,5	0	0,0
37.	Tajikistan	34,5	34,0	0	0,0
38.	United Arab Emirates ³	34,0	30,5	0	8,0
39.	Jordan	34,0	27,5	-	0,0
40.	Morocco	33,0	34,5	0	1,5
41.	Belarus	30,0	27,0	-	5,0
42.	Palestinian Territories ⁵	29,5	20,0	-	0,0
43.	Ethiopia ³	28,0	32,0	+	0,0
44.	Syria	27,5	26,5	0	0,0
45.	Bahrain ³	27,5	22,5	0	1,5
46.	Tunisia	26,5	26,0	0	0,0
47.	Indonesia	26,0	27,0	0	0,0
48.	Bangladesh	26,0	26,5	0	0,0
49.	Kenya (North East)	26,0	24,5	0	0,0
50.	Colombia ³ (Conflict Areas)	23,5	27,0	+	0,0

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³ More information was received on this country causing the difference in points see explanation per country

⁴ Zanzibar Islands are new on the list, see explanation under "additional information" on page 14

⁵ Palestinian Areas are new on the list, see explanation from page 10 onwards