



N. Korea Top Persecutor of Christians for Eighth Straight Time

Iran Jumps to Second Spot on Open Doors World Watch List

For Immediate Release

Sydney NSW (March 1, 2010) – Two of the most notorious and restrictive regimes in the world top the Open Doors 2010 World Watch List (WWL) of 50 countries which are the worst persecutors of Christians.

In the No. 1 spot for the eighth straight time is North Korea, the country where every religious activity is recognized as an insurrection to the North Korean socialist principles. In 2009, the North Korean regime of Kim Jong-Il targeted Christians all over the country. That resulted in arrests, torture and killings. North Korean leaders are desperately trying to control society in order to eradicate all Christian activities. There are an estimated 200,000 North Koreans in political prisons, including 40,000 to 60,000 Christians.

A veteran North Korean watcher, who can't be identified due to security reasons, states: "Christians are the target of fierce government action, and once caught, are not regarded as human. Last year we had evidence that some were used as guinea pigs to test chemical and biological weapons."

Iran is now No. 2 on the list. Iran was previously No. 3 on the WWL for many years, behind Saudi Arabia. The wave of arrests of Christians which started in 2008 continued even stronger during 2009, resulting in the arrest of at least 85 Christians. It is suspected that the arrests are a way for the Iranian government to distract attention from internal problems, including the domestic turmoil after the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Most of those arrested were mistreated in prison. The turmoil and rioting continued at the end of 2009.

Of the countries on the top 10 list, eight have Islam as their dominant religion – Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania and Uzbekistan. North Korea and Laos are communist countries. Also, 35 of the 50 countries on the list have Islamic governments.

"It was expected that North Korea would be No. 1 again on the list of countries where Christians face the worst persecution," says Nigel Rooke, CEO of Open Doors Australia. "There is no other country in the world where Christians are persecuted in such a horrible and systematic manner. Three generations of a family are often thrown into prison when one member is incarcerated.

“Iran jumping to No. 2 is noteworthy. Iranian Muslim Background Believers Maryam Rustampoor and Marzieh Amirzadeh were arrested simply for being Christians and refusing to recant their faith in Jesus Christ. They were released almost two months ago, helped by an advocacy campaign by Open Doors and other Christian organizations. But these two brave women along with hundreds of other believers still remain at risk inside Iran.”

Rooke adds “that despite the growth of persecution in many regions of the world, Christianity continues to flourish. There is a strong group of Christians in North Korea and actually the number of Christians in North Korea has grown in the last 10 years. Many are coming to Christ in the Muslim World. But we need to continue to remember them in prayer.”

Saudi Arabia at No. 3 remains unchanged in the situation of religious freedom for Christians. However, no reports of Christians killed or physically harmed for their faith were received, and only one report of a Christian arrested was noted.

Somalia moved up one spot to the No. 4 position as religious freedom for Christians became worse. In April the Parliament voted unanimously to institute Islamic law.

Rounding out the top 10 are Maldives No. 5, followed by Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos and Uzbekistan.

The World Watch List, started by the Open Doors Research Department in 1991, seeks to understand the unique persecution fingerprint of each country. This is to ensure effective intervention since Open Doors ministers to the persecuted church in more than 50 countries worldwide. The data is derived from a questionnaire containing 53 questions sent to Open Doors co-workers, key church leaders and recognized experts in 70 countries. The questionnaire examines every aspect of persecution, including the degree of legal restriction, state attitudes, how free the church is to organize itself, as well as noting incidents of persecution, such as church burnings, anti-Christian riots and even martyrdom. Open Doors is uniquely positioned to provide this research as it is the world’s largest mission agency working on behalf of the persecuted. For more information, including a list of all 50 countries, go to www.worldwatchlist.com.au

An estimated 100 million Christians worldwide suffer interrogation, arrest and even death for their faith in Christ, with millions more facing discrimination and alienation. Open Doors supports and strengthens believers in the world's most difficult areas through Bible and Christian literature distribution, leadership training and assistance, Christian community development, prayer and presence ministry and advocacy on behalf of suffering believers. To partner with Open Doors Australia, call (02) 9451 2999 or go to our website at www.opendoors.org.au

**For more information or to set up an interview, contact
Roz Trestrail, Communications and Marketing Manager
Phone: (02) 9451 2999
Email: rozt@od.org
Website: www.opendoors.org.au**