



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on January 28, 2016

Report Says 2015 Was the Worst Year Yet for Persecution of Christians

The recently released 2016 World Watch list compiled by Open Doors — a nondenominational Christian mission organization dedicated to supporting persecuted Christians around the world — found that 2015 was the worst year for persecuted Christians than any other time in modern history.

This year's report compiled statistics for the one-year period between November 1, 2014, and October 31, 2015 and noted that more than 7,100 Christians worldwide died for their faith during that time.



Open Doors' CEO, David Curry, spoke about the report during a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on January 13, during which he stated: "This research has concluded that after the brutal persecution of Christians in 2014, 2015 proved to be even worse with the persecution continuing to increase, intensify and spread across the globe."

Although the very violent attacks against Christians in Syria and Iraq by ISIS and in Nigeria by Boko Haram have received more attention, the World Watch list noted that North Korea was listed at No. 1 for the 14th consecutive year. The communist dictatorship of Kim Jong-un rated 92 out of a possible 100 points for the worst possible persecution, and interns 50,000 to 70,000 Christians in harsh regime labor camps.

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Though not mentioned in the report, a key distinction between Christian persecution in North Korea and in the Middle East is that in the communist state it is inflicted by the authoritarian government. In contrast, in places such as Syria and Iraq, the removal or attempted removal of secular authoritarian rulers resulted in a power vacuum that was filled by Islamic terrorists from ISIS and similar groups, who then became powerful enough to persecute Christians.

The report did capture the essence of atheistic communism, however, which has always persecuted practitioners of religions, most notably Christianity.

"Christianity [in the eyes of North Korea's regime] is not only seen as 'opium for the people' as is normal for all communist states," the report noted, "It is also seen as deeply Western and despicable."

After North Korea, the report listed the following countries in order of how bad persecution of Christians is in each: Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Iran, and Libya. All of these are Muslim majority countries and Islamic extremism is listed as the principle source of Christian persecution in each one.

"Islamic extremist caliphates are solidified and expanding," Curry said during his press conference. "The data shows that the Islamic State [ISIS] caliphate has effectively carried out genocide against



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Yazidis and Christians in Syria and Iraq, pushing hundreds of thousands of Christians into refugee camps in North Iraq and other countries.”

Curry also noted the expansion of Islamic terrorism in Africa, saying: “Boko Haram in Nigeria threatened to control large parts of Nigeria, it does control large parts of Nigeria and its extending its territory into Niger and looking into Chad, as well.”

As we noted in [an article posted December 14](#):

The Nigerian Boko Haram terrorist group was responsible for 6,644 deaths in 2014, compared to 6,073 attributed to ISIS, making it the deadliest terrorist group in the world last year. And, in what has become a disturbingly familiar pattern in the rise of terrorist organizations, Boko Haram’s growing strength is a direct consequence of NATO’s war on Libya.

The basis for the above claim that Boko Haram benefited from NATO’s war on Libya was a 2014 article by Peter Weber in *The Week* that traced the improvement in Boko Haram’s weaponry, which had “shifted from relatively cheap AK-47s in the early days of its post-2009 embrace of violence to desert-ready combat vehicles and anti-aircraft/ anti-tank guns.”

Freelance writer Dan Glazebrook, in a November 2015 article, expanded on Weber’s findings to explain how Boko Haram’s weapons cache had increased so dramatically:

A UN report published in early 2012 warned that “large quantities of weapons and ammunition from Libyan stockpiles were smuggled into the Sahel region,” including “rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns with anti-aircraft visors, automatic rifles, ammunition, grenades, explosives (Semtex), and light anti-aircraft artillery (light caliber bi-tubes) mounted on vehicles,” and probably also more advanced weapons such as surface-to-air missiles and MANPADS (man-portable air-defense systems).

NATO had effectively turned over the entire armory of an advanced industrial state to the region’s most sectarian militias: groups such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Boko Haram.

Of course, the most widely reported cases of Islamic terrorist persecution of Christians have focused on the deadly attacks by ISIS on Christians in Iraq and Syria. Among the most heinous acts committed by ISIS have been the beheading of its captives, including many Christians. ISIS has posted videos of these beheadings to bolster its standing among other terrorist groups and to instill fear among the population of areas under its control. In July 2014, ISIS posted photos of 75 Syrian soldiers from the army of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad it had captured and beheaded.

In December 2014, ISIS reportedly beheaded about 100 foreign fighters who tried to leave the Syrian city of Raqqa.

In addition to its grisly actions against those it considers enemies wherever it has gained control, ISIS has attempted to wipe out any vestiges of Christian culture (and even Muslim culture from branches of Islam not its own) such as ancient church buildings. [We recently reported](#) on the destruction by ISIS terrorists of St. Elijah’s Monastery in Mosul — the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq, which had stood for 1,400 years.

Some may wonder how this Christian monastery came to exist in the predominately Muslim country. They may also wonder why the monastery managed to survive for 1,400 years and only now has been destroyed.



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Before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, there were an estimated 1.5 million Christians throughout the country.

Under the secular regime of Saddam Hussein, who was undeniably a tyrant and no champion of human rights, Christians were nevertheless tolerated and even protected from occasional anti-Christian violence. Hussein even appointed Tariq Aziz, a Chaldean Catholic, as his deputy prime minister and foreign minister.

Once U.S. armed forces removed Hussein, however, chaos and turmoil began to overrun Iraq. As *The New American* noted in an April 23, 2012 article entitled "[Christian Massacres: A Result of U.S. Foreign Policy.](#)"

Unfortunately, as [political-science expert Glen Chancy, a member of the Orthodox Church] and countless other analysts warned, Christians did not fare well. With the fall of Hussein's regime, Islamist militias vented their fury not just on the "infidel" invaders, but on local Christians, too.

Businesses were seized, churches were bombed, women were raped, Sharia law was brutally enforced, and Christians, including women and children, were viciously slaughtered.

The power vacuum left after the removal of Hussein allowed Islamic militants to take control much of Iraq and persecute Christians and others.

ISIS started to become a major force in Eastern Syria and Iraq in 2013 when two al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist groups, known as the "Islamic State in Iraq" and "Jabhat al-Nusra," merged to form the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant," often referred to as ISIS or ISIL. By 2014, the al-Qaeda offshoot had begun its brutal campaign to build an Islamic "Caliphate," exterminate "apostates," and overthrow the "apostate" regime of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.

When ISIS joined the battle to unseat Assad, it benefited from the support that the U.S. government supplied to the "moderate" coalition of rebel forces attempting to remove the Syrian strongman from power. As we saw, when ISIS captured and beheaded 75 Syrian soldiers from Assad's army it revealed just how "moderate" it was. Yet, ISIS terrorists blended in with other groups attempting to overthrow Assad and used them as cover to secure some of the support that the United States was providing to the rebels.

It was noted in our January 2, 2015 article, "[ISIS: The Best Terror Threat U.S. Tax Money Can Buy](#)":

Indeed, without the U.S. government and Obama's "coalition" of Sunni Islamist strongmen, the "Islamic State" would probably not exist — much less have the resources, weapons, manpower, and training needed to seize enough territory to create a "Caliphate" (Islamic Empire) of barbarism across large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

The World Watch list ranked Syria as number five on its list where Christians suffer the most persecution. However, it is important to make a distinction between those areas of Syria controlled by ISIS and those areas still under the control of the central government in Damascus. The commentary in the Open Doors Report notes:

The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) attacked 35 Christian villages in February 2015 alone, abducting over 250 people and driving 3,000 others from their homes; the militants later executed three Christian hostages. It is impossible to be a Christian in IS-controlled areas, and even in areas still controlled by the government, evangelism and conversion from Islam are illegal.

While Christian evangelism may be illegal in government-controlled areas, no one has suggested that



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Assad's troops have abducted or executed any Christians or driven them from their homes.

Likewise, in the description of Christian persecution in Iraq we read:

Thousands of Christians were forced from their homes in 2014 to escape the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) — remaining in IS-controlled territory as a Christian is effectively a death warrant.

That is also a far cry from the life Christians in Iraq had under Saddam, who had a Christian as his deputy prime minister, and where Christians could build churches and practice their faith openly.

If we can name the largest contributing factor to the current persecution of Christians in the Middle East (and even Libya, about which similar examples could be provided) it is U.S. interventionism, which has destabilized Christian-tolerant regimes and allowed Islamic terrorists to run rampant.

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