

Persecution Watch Countries

The *Persecution Watch Countries* are part of a group of countries below the WWL Top 50, in which serious degrees of hostility against Christians and churches are prevalent. World Watch Research is paying extra attention to these countries. There could be different reasons for doing so but they are always related to a suspicion of serious hostilities against Christians and their communities. The *Persecution Watch Countries* will be indicated in grey on the world map to show something serious is going on but not yet to the degree of entering the WWL Top 50.

The *Persecution Watch Countries* are listed below with a short explanation. WWR has scored some of them; others not. The list is not also exhaustive. There can be countries we missed but that would take place in this list if we had investigated them more.

Morocco (47 points)

Morocco gets 47 points for the World Watch List 2015 exercise, the same score as on the World Watch List 2014. 'Islamic extremism' is the main persecution dynamic in Morocco, emphasized by the fact that the nation is led by an Islamic party. The revolutionary wave that went through North Africa and the Middle East known as the Arab Spring also reached Morocco. In the case of Morocco, the protests did not bring the monarchy to an end, but King Mohammed VI adopted a number of reforms in order to restore social peace and satisfy the demands of the Islamists.

Victims of persecution are mainly Christian converts from a Muslim background, though restrictions also apply to the small historical Catholic and expat communities in the country. Foreign workers still must seek legitimate grounds for living in the country. In this reporting period, few violent incidents against Christians were recorded. Compared to previous years, the situation of Christians in Morocco has not changed much apart from one important change: the arrival of the Islamist party in government. This has had a negative effect on the position of the Church. Islamist forces are becoming more visible in the country causing many Christians to be pessimistic about the future.

Niger (46 points)

Niger scores 46 points for the World Watch List 2015 exercise (45 points on the World Watch List 2014). The increase in one point is mainly explained by the growing influence of Islamism in the country. The main persecution dynamic in Niger is 'Islamic extremism'. In recent years the country has been gradually shaking off the characteristics of the typical West-African state with a (mostly) moderate Islam, constitutionally secular state. Now, there are indications that the government functioning in a secular state does not keep enough distance from Islamic religious leaders. Since 1991, dozens of Islamic associations emerged, including Wahhabi groups. These organizations have been mostly concerned with the perceived erosion of Niger's religious identity by the secular democratic state.

The country has three types of Christianity (Catholics; Muslim Background Believers (MBBs); Evangelicals and others). Sometimes the pressure on Christians only affects MBBs, sometimes all three types of Christianity are affected. The pressure on the spheres of private and church life is lower than on the spheres of family and community life. In many ways, Christians are being obstructed in the community sphere.

Violent incidents continued during this reporting period. At least seven churches were attacked in Zinder (2), Niamey (2) and Maradi (3). Christians also face death threats and threats of abduction. The future for the Church in Niger seems worrying. The dynamic described in this persecution profile seems to point to a potential increase of pressure (squeeze) and plain violence (smash). A considerable part of the Southern third of the country seems prone to persistent Islamic hostilities.

Bahrain (46 points)

The position of Christians in Bahrain has not evolved, even though the score of the country is two points less than that of the World Watch List 2014. The country dropped from the World Watch List 2015. This can be explained mainly by the fact that the entry score for this year has increased to 49 points. It is not because persecution is significantly decreasing in the country. Had it been last year, a country with a score of 46 points would have made it to the list.

The main persecution engine in Bahrain is 'Islamic extremism'. 'Dictatorial paranoia' is a relevant persecution engine. Persecution dynamics is best explained by 'Islamic extremism' as the society is becoming more radical and hence wants to eliminate Christianity from the country. The Bahraini constitution declares that the religion of the State is Islam. At the same time the constitution also states "the State guarantees the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country." It is also provided that Sharia (Islamic law) is the principal source for legislation. With Bahrain being a tribal society, 'Tribal antagonism' can in some cases also play a role in restricting the freedoms of Christians.

Bahrain is a Sunni minority and Shia majority country (i.e. in terms of numbers). It is a country which is the scene of a hegemony competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran playing out in the affairs of the country. This was especially very visible during the Arab Spring where Saudi sent its troops in support of the Bahraini government in order to extinguish the spark of revolution and Iran only limited itself to threatening rhetoric.

This mainly Shia-Islamic country is relatively tolerant in general because of its international position in banking and trade. There are several Christian bookshops and Christian hospitals. A considerable number of expatriate Christians (mainly from South Asia and Africa) work and live in Bahrain and are relatively free to practice their faith in private places of worship, but proselytizing Muslims is illegal. Since the number of compounds is limited, dozens of congregations must use the same building. They are not allowed to advertise their services in Arabic but they can in English.

In Bahrain, there are two types of Christianity: Expatriate Christian communities and communities of converts. Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) are considerably under more pressure than expatriate Christians. Pressure is systemic for MBBs. Expatriate Christians are often denied additional legally recognized facilities.

Traditionally, society is not tolerant towards MBBs. Families and communities have often shunned them. MBBs generally do not dare to talk about their conversion and some of them believed it necessary to leave the country permanently. Pressure comes mostly from family and community, to a lesser extent from the state. There is a lot of fear that explains the pressure in all spheres of life. Pressure is particularly intense in the private sphere of life, especially for MBBs. The government imposes tough

restrictions on the national and church spheres of life. No violence was recorded in this reporting period.

Since the constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and Islamic law as an important source of legislation, it implies that Muslims are forbidden to change faith. MBBs are still considered Muslims by the state, and a legal challenge to this was not permitted, which has strong implications for family law for example. However, in terms of religious freedom for foreign Christians, Bahrain remains one of the most liberal countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Following the unsuccessful Arab Spring of 2011, rather than addressing the social issues that triggered the revolution, the government decided to strengthen its machineries so that the power of the Dynasty is safe. As such, in the near future, the government might be more restrictive which would have a chilling effect on Christians to maintain the slightest freedom they are enjoying.

Russian Federation (45 points)

Russia is currently not on the World Watch List. This is due to the fact that the total score for the country as a whole (an average between very difficult areas like Chechnya or Dagestan and areas where almost no problems exist like Siberia and European Russia) is too low. For the World Watch List 2015 exercise the Russian Federation still scored 45 points, however.

The main persecution engines in the Russian Federation are 'Dictatorial paranoia' and 'Islamic extremism', while 'Ecclesiastical arrogance' is a secondary engine.

- Dictatorial paranoia: Under President Putin, a former KGB officer, more and more restrictions are introduced in legislation. The authoritarian government continues to restrict freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and other human rights.
- Islamic extremism is the most important persecution dynamic in the Caucasus region. In the various republics on the northern slopes of the Caucasus range (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia), Muslim extremists are fighting the Russian army to establish a Muslim emirate. Many ethnic Russians have left the area due to the violence. Churches have seen the number of their members drop. Christian converts from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) have to keep their faith secret for fear of being executed.
- Ecclesiastical arrogance: this is another dynamic that plays a role in persecution of Christians. The regime is seeking close ties with the traditional denomination – the Russian Orthodox Church. Traditional moderate Islam – present in Russia longer than Christianity – is also tolerated. Neo-Protestants are regarded as foreign (western). From time to time they experience problems with church registrations and building permits.

Nepal (45 points)

The times that Nepal made it prominent to the World Watch List date back more than ten years now, what is not to say that Christians do not suffer for their faith in that Himalayan country. The main persecution engine for Christians is 'Religious nationalism' in the form of radical Hinduism. Especially

Christians from a Hindu background face restrictions by their family and the community they are living in and will be pressured to recant their faith. The same can be said for the small group of believers coming from a Buddhist background. In December 2013, in the reporting period for the World Watch List 2015, a Protestant church and four homes of Christian converts have been set on fire. In June 2014, more than 40 Christians were detained and accused of forcibly converting Hindus. This came after a high-ranking member of the BJP, ruling party in neighboring India, visited the country and publically called for introducing a law to ban conversions.

Nepal struggled with elections for a new parliament and government and the country still is in a stalemate. In discussions on a new constitution restriction of religious beliefs played a prominent role, the interim constitution bans all proselytism. Though the government cannot be seen as the main persecutor, its role towards Christians remains unclear: there are reports indicating that its treatment of Christians doesn't seem to be improving, rather it seems exploiting and manipulative. It is heard that the higher officials from the Government have ordered the inferior ones to speak well with Christians but delay their work in terms of cases of Christians. Other reports indicated an improvement.

One case in point may be the national census of 2011: Church leaders alleged that the number of Christians in the country was vastly underestimated. The Federation of National Christians of Nepal said that it could prove from church records that there were more than 2.5 million Christians in the country, but the final report of the 2011 census, which was published towards the end of last year, recorded just 375,699.

Cameroon (44 points)

Cameroon increased from 38 points for the World Watch List 2014 (WWL) exercise to 44 points for WWL 2015. 'Islamic extremism' is the main persecution engine in the country. Despite the fact that the country is roughly 70% Christian and the government should be seen as pro-Christian, Cameroon's historically moderate form of Islam, which is the religion of about only 20% (or 5 million people) of the country, has eroded with the development of jihadist groups across the Sahel and the Sahara, and in particular the activity of Boko Haram within its borders. Boko Haram over the past several years has used the country as a base of operations and refuge in order regroup, while also conducting several kidnapping operations and terrorist attacks in Cameroon's north.

Most notably, the more than 200 girls kidnapped from Chibok, Nigeria were believed to have been taken to the border area of Cameroon and Nigeria. Several other prominent raids have left dozens of Christians dead during the reporting period. In addition, a growth in Salafism has been observed in the north (and to a lesser extent in the southern cities of Yaounde and Douala). This has occurred as a result of the expansion of the ideology from Boko Haram, primarily facilitated by the ethnic linkages between the populations of northern Nigeria and Cameroon. Also, many Cameroonian Christians live in the north and are directly threatened by this, as evidenced by the numerous Christians that have been the victims of terror incidents over the past several years in both northern Cameroon and northern Nigeria.

Boko Haram has staged innumerable attacks during the reporting period along the border region and in Cameroon as well. One issue in estimating this is that a large amount of Boko Haram's atrocities go unreported, and even in the reported incidents, details are often obscure. Secondly, it is difficult to establish the specific religious background of the victims even in verified, reported incidents. There were no reports of government-sanctioned church closures, unlike the mass closures seen in the previous

reporting period. It appears that at the minimum, ten churches have been attacked during the reporting period by Boko Haram. Due to underreporting, there could be many more churches that were attacked by Boko Haram.

Kyrgyzstan (44 points)

Kyrgyzstan didn't make it to the World Watch List 2015 (WWL), just like it didn't make it to WWL 2014. In 2014 the country only scored 42 points, and this year saw a slight increase to 44 points. In general, the position of Christians in the country remains as difficult as before, but this year we could make use of more and better information.

Kyrgyzstan is the only country in Central Asia where 'Dictatorial paranoia' is absent as dominating Persecution Engine. The dominating persecution engine affecting Christians in Kyrgyzstan is 'Islamic extremism,' while 'Organized corruption' puts pressure on Christians to a lesser extent.

- Islamic extremism: Islam plays an important role in every day's life, especially in rural areas. Communities and families will react strongly if someone decides to change his or her faith and no deviation would be accepted. This means that the Christian minority, especially converts experiences strong pressure from this side. Especially in rural areas, Christian converts from a Muslim background face an enormous pressure to recant their new-won faith. Sometimes they are physically harmed or their possessions destroyed. In one case, Christian believers were not allowed to bury a deceased person at the local cemetery and had to evade to a larger city.
- Organized corruption: organized corruption is well-known, even if it is to a smaller extent than in its neighbouring countries. If the Christian minority is perceived as being in the way of the actors, they will run into trouble. Reportedly, gangs attacked churches "being in the way" in one respect or another in the past.

Chad (41 points)

Chad scores 41 points for the World Watch List 2015 (WWL) exercise (44 points for WWL 2014). The score of the country for WWL 2014 is an expression of the rising religious tensions that up until recently have been latent. Also, research on this country has improved in recent years.

The main persecution engine in Chad is 'Islamic extremism'. Though the country has a large Christian population (around 40 per cent of the total population), the default in society is towards Islam. Islamic extremism also expresses itself furthermore through pressures in the family and community spheres, basically making life difficult for Muslim Background Believers. Islamist movements are also present in Chadian society. They want to see all citizens under the banner of Islam and to make the country an Islamic republic. All other religions especially the Christian faith are seen by them as an obstacle to be removed with all possible means. Islamic teaching is ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Muslim population as to severely punish those who renounce their faith to embrace the Christian faith. Moreover, the radical religious group Boko Haram is known to have infiltrated Chad recently.

A moderate but homogeneous level of pressure on Christians is present throughout all spheres of life. Particularly in the national and church sphere, all types of Christianity face discrimination. In Muslim

areas, all Christians face discrimination, social exclusion and harassment in the community sphere. Specifically for Muslim Background Believers, pressure is high in the private, family and community spheres. Last year, one convert from Islam has been poisoned and killed by his uncle. One church was attacked in Bolong by a violent mob in the Guera region in the center of the country. A number of converts to Christianity have been forced to flee their homes because of the threat of violence they faced. One Christian even had to leave the country. It is further noteworthy that anecdotal evidence suggests that the abducted girls seized in April 2014 from Chibok Nigeria by Boko Haram were believed to have been brought across the border into Cameroon and perhaps Chad. Many of the kidnapped girls were Christians, forced to convert to Islam.

Venezuela (41 points)

In Venezuela, persecution of Christians is subtle and hard to discern. The main persecution engine is 'Communist oppression'. There is a political trend towards a socialist society, with the president crushing opposition. The church has been affected by the complex political situation. Tensions between President Chavez, and his successor Nicolás Maduro, and the leadership of the Catholic Church have been growing. For years, the Chavez administration has attempted to shut down private education of all kinds in favor of public schools. His goal, observers say, is to use the public school system for political indoctrination of the youth. The government gives economic incentives to students who attend state schools while denying equal recognition to students of private schools. Hence, parochial schools, Catholic as well as evangelical, find themselves working against policies and programs designed to eventually drive them out of business.

The general security situation is rapidly deteriorating due an alarming increase in violent crime, which puts Christians at greater risk of violent death. In some cases, Christians with political views critical of the Chavez administration have been threatened with physical harm. Some say they know of friends or neighbors arrested or 'disappeared' (sometimes kidnapped by Colombian guerrilla groups operating within Venezuelan territory with the tacit approval of the Chavez regime) because they have opposed policies of Hugo Chavez. Political ideology often produces persecution of Christians, even though the persecution is not purely religious. States that do not protect the human rights of its citizens have the highest index of Christian persecution. It is only a matter of time until these two factors combine to put the Christian community in Venezuela at risk of real persecution for practicing its faith.

Uganda (41 points)

With a score of 41 points Uganda did not make it to the World Watch List 2015 (WWL). Similarly, the country did not make it to WWL 2014 with a score of 37 points. Yet persecution of Christians increased in the country (with 4 points).

'Islamic extremism' is the main persecution engine in the country and remains a concern. 'Dictatorial paranoia' is also present. The "tabliqs" (a Muslim sect that contains a sect of puritanical Muslims whose members portray themselves as 'Muslim evangelists'), according to an Open Doors researcher, "have continued to advance the cause of Islam in areas like Mbale, Kasese, Arua/Yumbe. The Muslims have also positioned themselves strategically in all levels of politics and governance. In addition, they have invested heavily, and the Bureaus for Foreign Exchange are operated by Muslims. Furthermore, Sharia

compliant banking favors Muslims at the expense of Christians, because Christians cannot access the same services like their Muslim counterparts.”

Islamic extremism in the country is explained by pressure put especially on converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (Muslim Background Believers, MBBs) by family, extended family and community, especially in Muslim dominated areas. Violence has also become visible. From its base in East Democratic Republic of Congo, Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed force established by tabliqs, has orchestrated a number of deadly attacks on civilians, the majority of whom were Christians.

Dictatorial paranoia is explained by the restrictive legislations and implementations by the government of Yoweri Museveni. This denies citizens the freedom of expression and association - intrinsic elements of the freedom of religion.

Compared to last year, the overall score indicates an increase in persecution. This is in part caused by – according to an Open Doors field researcher - spontaneous attacks as well as attacks orchestrated by ADF on churches, Christians and Christian interests. In addition - according to the same field researcher - it seems that the Islamic agenda is very much on course politically and economically. Christians in Uganda face an overall increase of pressure in their different spheres of life. It is very important to underline that the increase of pressure in the private, family and community spheres is primarily driven by ‘extended family’ and Islamic religious leaders and does mainly affect the precarious position of MBBs.

Despite the fact that Uganda dropped from the WWL for the past two consecutive years, an Open Doors field report suggests that the situation in Uganda remains a challenge for the Church. On the one hand the Church sees a growth in numbers (especially the churches in the rural areas of Uganda). On the other hand, it is suggested that Muslim communities have entrenched themselves, feel themselves emboldened by the impunity they enjoy, and radical Islamic expressions are advancing. Within this context it is understandable that Christians feel concerned about the future. Moreover, Muslim groupings have pushed successfully for the implementation of “Kadhis courts” (Sharia family courts) and Islamic law to operate them. The attacks by ADF forces have also become more visible recently. Considering these developments, it is very well possible that Uganda might return on the WWL 2016.

Cuba (40 points)

Cuba is one of the few remaining communist regimes in the world. Some years ago, the country’s aging leader, Fidel Castro, made a place was replaced by his brother Raúl in the government, but the regime stayed essentially the same and desired changes did not take place. Cuba continues to isolate itself from the rest of the world and function under totalitarian control. The persecution engine is ‘Communist oppression’.

In recent years, a set of internal and external factors – whose scope and impact are not yet visible – bear the potential of bringing about a certain degree of political change. Persecution of Christians, more severe in the past, is slowly changing. While Christian persecution in the past included beatings, imprisonment and sometimes murder, now it is generally more subtle. It continues in the form of harassment, strict surveillance and discrimination, including occasional imprisonment of leaders. All believers are monitored and all church services are infiltrated by spies; Christians are threatened and suffer discrimination in at school and at work.

Yet, the totalitarian regime allows no competitors of any kind. Religious groups complain about widespread surveillance and infiltration by state security agents. Pastors and Christians are sometimes pressured to stop evangelizing and to limit their activities to their own church premises. Permission to print Christian literature locally is hard to obtain. Bibles, Bible study materials and Sunday school materials are in extremely short supply. Everything is restricted. Existing seminaries and church buildings may be used, but new churches and seminaries cannot be built. Legal procedures are possible, but are excessively slow. Foreigners who enter the country can bring Bibles with them, but only a maximum of three Bibles. Mail can be sent but there is a maximum of two kilograms that can be sent, and all mail is checked and censored. The Gospel may be preached, and even foreigners may request a 'religious visa', but it is not possible to mention the human rights situation and politics. It is possible to leave the country, but administrative processes are intentionally slow.

Guinea (Conakry) (40 points)

After a long period of dictatorial governments, Guinée succeeded in electing its presidents since 1993 in a democratic way. The constitution, which allows freedom of religion, is generally respected. There is no evidence of systematic persecution coming from the government in Guinea. However, some incidents at the individual and family level indicate that the level of pressure on Christians is on the increase. The persecution engine in the country is 'Islamic extremism'.

David Foromo Guilavogui Secretary General of the Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Guinea declared to World Watch Monitor; "The violence has a strong religious dimension, Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise in southeastern Guinea". One woman reportedly was seized by the Muslim attackers, who tortured her and covered her in petrol before setting her alight. They left her screaming in agony, saying, "She is dead, let us not waste our time here." Miraculously, she survived, after hiding in an abandoned building for three days with severe burns to her head, back, shoulders and arms before being taken to hospital.

In some regions, Muslim Background Believers are not free to live their faith. They must remain anonymous most of the time. In such a context, it is not possible for a Christian convert to publicly display a Bible or anything that is likely to demonstrate his Christian faith. Taking part in Christian activities publicly exposes the life of the person, obliging converts to live their faith in silence and isolation at the risk of being thrown out of the community or even put to death in some places. In large cities, the problem lays in the housing and the pressure of the community. Christians are refused to rent houses if there are not Muslim.

There are no restrictions imposed upon churches, but problems may arise in traditional settings between church leaders and traditional authorities in rural areas. Often traditional authorities motivate young people to demolish churches or to confiscate building materials from Christians. In July 2013, in the area of N'zérékore, at least 95 Christian were killed and 130 wounded. This communal incident quickly became religious, in which Muslims have targeted Christians. Muslim Background Believers have been physically abused and houses of Christians were destroyed.

Senegal (37 points)

Although Senegal is known for its culture of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence amongst various religions, 'Islamic extremism' as a persecution engine is present in the country. There are reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Many of these abuses target evangelical churches, which are rapidly increasing in membership, mostly due to evangelicals in churches originally transplanted from other African countries.

For the most part, persecution occurs in the form of mobs targeting evangelicals who are seen as encroaching on the identity of this almost entirely Islamic nation. A small number of violent incidents has been recorded during this reporting period, but it has happened in the past. For example in June 26, 2011, rioting youth attacked a Dakar evangelical church, while this church was holding worship service and injured 40 people. On the following day, violent Muslim youth attacked six other evangelical churches and completely burned down one of them.

Moreover, according to an ECOWAS PEACE AND SECURITY SURVEY conducted from February to March 2013, "most of the Senegalese people opposed to the French intervention in Mali also blame their country for taking part in it". This is the case with 35 to 40 percent of interviewees in Thiès and the environs of Dakar. One even felt that the Islamists are waging a jihad in northern Mali should spread that across the country to the rest of West Africa ... because "our states are dirty and are led by infidels", he argued. Among the survey participants in the region of Saint-Louis, some consider Ansar al-Dine and MUJAO – international jihadist groups - as 'simply applying Islamic law, the Sharia'.

Philippines (32 points)

The times that the Philippines made it to the list are laying back 15 years now and its mentioning here seems surprising as the country is well-known as the only Catholic majority country in Asia (except East Timor). Lesser known is the fact that the Southern part of the Philippines holds a strong minority of Muslim citizens and has a difficult history of violent movements. Its main island Mindanao together with a group of other islands like Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi form the southwestern part of the Philippines. It contains about one third of the territory of this island nation and is home to 22 million people (around 25 percent of the whole population). Around 63 percent of the population is Christian, one third is Muslim. The islands of Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi have a majority population of Muslims, Christians are mostly converts and are strongly affected by persecution.

The main persecution engine in Mindanao is 'Islamic extremism', which especially targets Christians with a Muslim background, belonging to the Islamic people of the Sama and Tausug. Those people are famous as "Sea Gypsies" and they live on the before mentioned islands, but many live on Mindanao for economic reasons. Christians also live on those islands and Mindanao. As Mindanao is the region with the largest Muslim population in a predominantly Catholic state, there are several independence movements active on the islands, some even crossing the border to Malaysia. Everyone leaving the Islamic faith is not just seen as apostate, but also as acting against the struggle for independence or at least autonomy. The main drivers of persecution are leaders of ethnic groups, fanatical movements, local leaders and especially the (extended) families of converts.

After many – violent – years in Mindanao, parts of the rebel movement and the central government agreed on creating an 'Autonomous Region Muslim Mindanao' (ARMM). Despite all promises that basic civil rights as freedom of religion remain guaranteed, there are fears that Sharia will extend to non-Muslims as well and that the ARMM is used as a first step for further expansion. Therefore more

Christians, even in majority Christian regions, could be affected. Moreover, Islamic radicals are using the remoteness of Mindanao as a basis for criminal activities such as abductions across the border, including Malaysia and Indonesia. This could end up in creating a safe haven in Mindanao for Islamic radicals from all over the region, crossing borders and spilling over into other regions.

Usually persecution is not very violent and converts face constant pressure (squeeze) rather than violence (smash). But if Islamic radicals want to put pressure on the government to negotiate, they can be very violent. On 8 October, a grenade was shot at the building of a Protestant church in Pikit Town, Province North Cotabato, attacking an evening service, killing two believers and wounding three others. The attack is assumed to be related to a radical Islamic splinter-group not accepting autonomy. Apart from that, violence is directly targeted against converts and can end up in burning the house of a convert, effectively also closing down the house church that met in that house. Neighbors and the family are closely monitoring converts and pressure them to return to Islam. Some converts were threatened with death and had to leave their place of living.

The future outlook depends on how the ARMM will develop. Will autonomy mean unchecked government and will Sharia be applied to non-Muslims as is observed in many other countries? Another question is how strong the Islamic radical groups are which were not included in negotiations and what they will do. And how will the situation develop on the neighboring islands that do not belong to the Philippines? All these are open questions. One thing is sure: the region will remain instable. Also, it will remain particularly dangerous to live as a convert to Christianity as this will be seen as treason not only to the own family and people, but also to the autonomy of the region.

Belarus (no questionnaire)

Belarus is often considered the last surviving dictatorship in Europe. The main persecution engine is 'Dictatorial paranoia'. The country is ruled by Alexander Lukashenko, an authoritarian who has been in power since 1994. His government allows almost no room for any opposing group, especially political opposition. After the 2010 presidential election, human rights, including freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, have repeatedly been violated. Although the constitution provides for the equality of religions and denominations, the Orthodox Church is the only officially recognized denomination (80-85% of all Christians in Belarus), while the Catholic and Lutheran churches are merely tolerated. Church registration in Belarus is difficult, if not impossible.

In practice, it is forbidden to carry out any religious activity without prior government recognition of the religious organization as a legal entity. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (2002) makes unregistered religious activity a criminal offense and may result in a two-year term of imprisonment or heavy court-imposed fines. The very restrictive religious laws will continue to be used as an instrument of the government to oppress religious minorities in the country. A change still is not in sight.

Religious communities do not have the right to develop their own media, to establish religious educational institutions, to train religious personnel, nor to invite foreign priests to satisfy religious needs of believers. Members of religious organizations do not have the right to share their religious convictions or to carry out any religious activity (to preach, to distribute literature, to hold public

worship services, etc.), beyond the borders of the location where the community is registered. Protestant and Catholic denominations are restricted in their activity and monitored by the secret police. Because the numbers of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians are growing, persecution is getting more intense for them.

Bolivia (no questionnaire)

President Evo Morales assumed office in 2006 with promises of greater religious freedom. The first indigenous Andean to be democratically elected president of Bolivia, he abolished the historic religious domination of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, the constitution of 2008 established a “secular state” designed to be neutral in matters of faith and conscience. The country’s Protestant Christian population, which had long sought church and state separation, initially welcomed the new political order. They assumed a secular state meant the end of religious discrimination.

However, a controversial “Law 351 for Granting of Juridical Personality to Churches and Religious Groups” was passed in March 2013 in Bolivia, causing the country’s Evangelical community to worry. It seems ‘Dictatorial paranoia’ as a persecution engine is slowly unveiling itself in the country. The law requires all churches and not-for-profit organizations to re-register their legal charters with the government. This involves supplying detailed data on membership, financial activity and organizational leadership. The law also stipulates a standardized administrative structure for all “religious organizations” which church groups must adopt. Churches failing to complete the registration within a stipulated two-year period would lose their legal right to exist.

According to David Miller, a reporter based in Bolivia, “Protestant church leaders assert that, taken together, the new measures grant the government regulatory power over the internal affairs of churches to the point of defining what is, and is not, a church”, thus restricting religious freedom.

Democratic Republic of Congo (no questionnaire)

Persecution engine ‘Islamic extremism’. Islamist militants massacred more than 20 people in Eastern Congo on 16 October, a local Pastor told the BBC. A Mayor of a town of Beni in Eastern Congo claimed that the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) were behind the attack. A persecution analyst for World Watch Research: “The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) are not from Congo itself; it is a Ugandan rebel group but based along the Rwenzori Mountains of eastern DR Congo. Most of its members are Islamists who want to establish Shari'a law in Uganda. The government of Uganda claims that the ADF has created an alliance with Al-Shabaab of Somalia.’

“For the Christians and other groups in the region, this is a worrying development. After years of war and chaos, the overall situation in DR Congo has stabilized. However, from the borders of Uganda in the North there is an increasing push by violent Islamic radicalism to spread Islam. Even though it is not entirely sure that Christians have been specifically targeted, the fact that a pastor reported the incident makes it highly likely. Even though DR Congo is not in the World Watch List Top 50, this incident should be taken as a warning that more faith-related violence and pressure could come to DR Congo. Up until now, the attacks seem to happen on with impunity, which will make it easier for the ADF to attack again. This will also increase the risk of persecution. This makes DR Congo a country we need to closely monitor.”

According to the Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin, the ADF receives support from the Islamic regime in Khartoum which sponsors proxies to destabilize the predominantly Christian states neighboring and allied to South Sudan, i.e. Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, DRC and Central African Republic. Since 2002, the ADF is said to have killed around 3000 Congolese and kidnapped over 900, including some 600 Congolese women and girls. Women who have escaped report being kept in a hole in the ground and only taken out to be used for sex.

Gambia (no questionnaire)

Gambia, a Muslim majority country, is popularly known as a religiously tolerant country. Not only is the Constitution secular, the present government has so far defended its position on religious tolerance with unwavering commitment. Yet, 'Islamic extremism' as a persecution engine is present in the country. Non-violent measures are taken to Islamize the country, particularly the educational system/institutions, public institutions, media and marriage/family.

Muslims who convert to Christianity face important problems in the communities. Every citizen is considered a member of the 'umma' from birth and thus expected to practice the religion of his people. Christian families are rarely free to conduct their family life in a Christian way. The implications of the communal lifestyle for majority background believers, particularly those in remote areas, is such that their freedom of interaction with expressions of their Christian convictions is often over-shadowed by the fear of persecution from various quarters within their local communities.

Islamist-inspired mobs are also present in the country. Recently, there was a group which tried to recruit girls and get them to wear the veil in addition to the prescribed uniform to a Roman Catholic School. Another group once went on a rampage in Brikama, beating up girls/women who were 'not properly dressed' according to Islamic requirements. They also vandalized restaurants which prepared food 'not in accordance with Islamic requirements'. The government came down hard on those involved in both cases.