

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## How Religious Persecution Exacerbates the Vulnerabilities of Marginalized Groups

**DR. EWELINA U. OCHAB**

On January 16, 2019, Open Doors, an international NGO advocating on behalf of persecuted Christians, launches the [World Watch List 2019](#), at the UK Parliament. The World Watch List is an annual ranking of 50 countries where it is the most difficult (if not impossible) to live as a Christian. Open Doors indicates that, in 2018, over 4,305 Christians were killed — simply because they follow the Christian faith. The newly released data, used by Open Doors to compile the report, suggests that approximately 245 million Christians experience high levels of persecution in 73 countries. This is a sharp rise since 2018 when the estimates were at 215 million in 58 countries. The numbers may be higher but continue to be underreported due to fear of repercussions. The sharp rise is explained in part by a new hotbed of persecution against Christians in Asia.



Walls of a Baptist church in Kandhamal, India, still bare scars of destruction 10 years after it was destroyed by Hindu nationalists during the summer of 2008. Though the building is completely inoperable, members of the Church continue to hold their services under severe persecution, elsewhere. (Photo credit: John Fredricks/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

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One of the biggest offenders on the World Watch List 2019 is China. China jumped from 43rd place in 2018 to 27th place in 2019. If the trend continues, China may well continue to the top of the list of the worst offenders. What has led to China's rise in the rankings? In recent months, the persecution of Christians in China has been making more and more headlines. The news included information about churches closing and prohibitions on the selling of bibles online. Some other news includes concerns that there are plans to "contextualize" the Bible to make it more "culturally acceptable" and that China will require Christians to preach the core values of socialism. Furthermore, the State Administration of Religious Affairs has been disbanded, guidelines have been introduced with requirements as to how crosses are to be displayed on churches. In some cases, crosses have been removed and pastors and worshipers have been arrested. These examples raise serious concerns.

Furthermore, as Open Doors notes, China revised its Religious Affairs Regulations to the effect that the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief is significantly affected. For example, the regulations state that citizens can enjoy the right to freedom of religion or belief but that no organization or individual may compel other citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion. While the provisions appear not to have any practical implication upon the enjoyment of the right, the empirical reality suggests otherwise. The concept of "compelling" others may be abused to include scenarios where Christian organization provide humanitarians assistance, housing or other support and such support is considered to be as forcing others or compelling others to convert to Christianity. Indeed, such an [argument](#) has been used in several other countries. All religious groups must register with the relevant bodies. Similarly, building or using a place of worship must be registered as well. Without such registration, any meeting of an already registered religious organization would be illegal and would trigger legal consequences, including a fine or even arrest. Religious organizations or churches cannot be run by foreigners. This prohibition also applies to foreign funding.

In the World Watch List 2019, India has entered the top ten of the worst offenders for the first time. This is predominately because of the rise in violent Hindu extremism and ultra-nationalism that continues to flourish with impunity. However, there are several other [factors](#) that contribute to this result.

Burma rose to 18th place (from 24th in 2018). This is because of the newly reported (although ongoing for several years) persecution of Christians in Kachin, Chin and Karen states. In a recent [report](#), Alex Crawford from Sky News shed more light on the situation. However, the situation continues to be neglected and gets lost among the atrocities perpetrated against the Rohingya Muslims.

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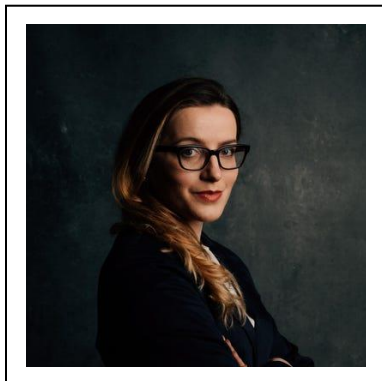
Open Doors raised the issue of escalating violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt where, because of the violence and the doubling of fatalities, villagers have started to abandon their homes and flee for safety. In the Plateau State, 1,885 Christians were killed by the Fulani herdsmen. The atrocities of the Fulani herdsmen were declared 'genocide' by the Nigerian House of Representatives in 2018. However, despite this designation, the Nigerian government has not taken any decisive steps to address the situation and the attacks continue to this day.

Nonetheless, the top of the ranking is reserved for North Korea and has been so for several years with the level of the persecution categorized as extreme. Other countries in the same category include Afghanistan (2), Somalia (3), Libya (4), Pakistan (5), Sudan (6), Eritrea (7), Yemen (8) and Iran (9).

In addition to raising the issue of religious persecution, the 2019 report highlights how religious persecution exacerbates existing vulnerabilities such as gender, class, ethnicity or age. For example, the female experience of religious persecution is characterized by rape and sexual violence but also forced marriage (and forced conversion). As Open Doors notes "Religious persecution remains the canary in the coal mine often pointing to wider human rights abuses."

The 2019 report of Open Doors is haunting and does not provide much hope for the coming years. Religious persecution against Christians continues to increase. The same is true for other religious groups, especially in countries where they exist as minorities. The numerical vulnerability of these groups is used to advance the agenda of states or non-state actors. Also, other characteristics, especially sex of the individuals, are used to brand the victims for years to come. If nothing changes urgently to address the issues, the future is grim. If there is a future.

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*UN Forum on Minority Issues, PACE and other international and regional fora. Ochab authored the initiative and proposal to establish the UN International Day Commemorating Victims and Survivors of Religious Persecution. The initiative has led to the establishment of the UN International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief on August 22.*

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2019/01/16/how-religious-persecution-exacerbates-the-vulnerabilities-of-marginalized-groups>