

News and Current Events :: Reports of Christian martyrdom nearly doubled in 2013

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Washington D.C., Jan 9, 2014 / 04:51 pm (CNA/EWTN News).- Nearly twice the number of Christians were reported as dying for their faith in 2013 than the previous year, according to a new study by an organization monitoring global religious persecution.

The World Watch List, issued by Open Doors USA each year, documents oppression of Christians throughout the world. Based on data from the past year, it ranks the 50 countries that are home to the worst treatment of Christians.

Along with the release of the 2014 report, Open Doors USA also offered information about global Christian persecution on its website, explaining that it had gathered evidence of 2,123 Christians who were killed for their faith in 2013, up from 1,201 such martyrdoms in 2012.

“This is a very minimal count based on what has been reported in the media and we can confirm,” said Frans Verman, head of research for the organization, according to Reuters. He explained that the actual numbers could be much higher.

The Open Doors USA report estimated that around 100 million Christians were persecuted for their faith in 2013.

North Korea, which ranked as the worst offender on the 2013 World Watch List, remains the most dangerous country for Christians in 2014 as well, solely because of the national government's targeting of religious believers.

“The God-like worship of the rulers leaves no room for any other religion,” the report said, explaining that any “reverence not concentrated on the Kim dynasty will be seen as dangerous and state-threatening.”

It is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 Christians in the country are imprisoned in forced labor camps. Immediate family members of Christians are also targeted, often being placed in “re-education camps,” Open Doors USA said.

Conditions have also deteriorated in Somalia, which moved from the fifth most dangerous to the second most dangerous country for Christians in the past year. The report explained that within public society, leaders “maintain that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches,” an attitude that is “upheld and reinforced on different levels” throughout society.

This problem is compounded by the tribal social structure, which creates a fracturing of society, allowing “Islamic extremism, via groups like al-Shabaab, to flourish in Somalia.”

To gain access to “basic necessities, such as basic social services, education or justice,” the report stated, “Somali Christians have to hide their belief,” with Church life and community existing in secret.

A spike in persecution also occurred in Syria, which accounted for more than half of the total Christian martyrdoms recorded by Open Doors USA in the past year.

Syria was ranked as 36th worst offender on the World Watch List in 2012. Two years later, in 2014, it has risen to become the world's third most dangerous country for Christians.

The report noted that while the government was totalitarian and persecuted some Christians before the country's civil war, the ongoing conflict has given rise to great social instability and militant Islamist groups with ties to al-Qaeda throughout the country.

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