

In 25 years of chronicling and ranking the political and societal restrictions on religious freedom experienced by Christians worldwide, Open Doors researchers [identified](#) 2016 as the “worst year yet.”

The report corroborated an earlier [study](#) from the Turin-based Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), which found that during the year 2016, **some 90,000 Christians were killed for their faith around the world.**

The director of CESNUR and leader of the study, Dr. Massimo Introvigne, told Breitbart News that Christians are “the most persecuted religious group in the world,” and the numbers of those affected are staggering.

Islamic extremism remains the dominant [driver](#) of Christian persecution in the world, responsible for initiating oppression and conflict in 35 out of the 50 countries on the 2017 list. Moreover, nine out of the top ten countries where Christians suffer “extreme persecution” have populations that are at least 50% Muslim.

“Islamic oppression remains the most common cause of pressure against Christians,” the report states, “and it is rising most sharply in Africa, where more people are killed for their Christian faith than anywhere else in the world.”

For the 14th straight year, North Korea tops the list as the most dangerous place to be a Christian, followed by Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Eritrea and Yemen.

While killings of Christians in Nigeria saw a dramatic increase of more than 62 percent in 2016, the most violent nation is now Pakistan, which climbed to No. 4 on the list for a level of anti-Christian violence “exceeding even northern Nigeria.”

Last Easter Sunday, an [Islamist](#) terror group affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban carried out a suicide bombing in Lahore, Pakistan, killing more than 70 children and adults. “The target was Christians,” said a spokesman for the group, adding that the jihadists wanted to send a message to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif “that we have entered Lahore.”

The Watch List [examines](#) the pressures faced by Christians in five spheres of life (private, family, community, national, and church), plus levels of religiously motivated violence, in order to rank the top 50 countries where “Christians face the most persecution.”

By the specific criteria used, approximately 215 million Christians experience high, very high, or extreme persecution, the study found.