

## Christian Persecution in Iran

Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is home to 75 million people, with 98% of the population adhering to Islam. At least 450,000 followers of Christ live in Iran, and while Christianity is an officially recognised religion in Iran, in practice many Christians face oppression from their neighbours. Converting from Islam to Christianity is an offence which can be punishable by death.

To focus the world's attention on the plight of Christians where persecution occurs and where religious freedoms are limited, Open Doors instituted the WorldWatch List. Every country in the world is evaluated based on questions that go to the very heart of the issue:

1. Does the country have laws that provide for religious freedoms?
2. Is it legal to become a Christian?
3. Are Christians killed, imprisoned or institutionalised because of their faith?
4. Is the printing or distribution of Christian materials prohibited?
5. Are the meeting places or homes of Christians being attacked for religious reasons?

In Iran, many would say there is no religious freedom and that's despite the fact that Iran has, within its own constitution, a commitment to respect religious freedom. Many people in the West are surprised to hear that in much of the Middle East, the majority of pressure against Christians comes from members of their own families.

“The night that our family discovered that I'm a Christian and my wife is a Christian, they kicked us out of their house. For some time, we didn't have any place and we were sleeping on the streets.”

Even though the Iranian government does guarantee some rights for minority religions, in practice conversion to Christianity is considered to be a political insult.

“Government and religion are the same in Iran so when you change religion, in one way you're saying, 'I'm rejecting your leadership in my life.'”

“The Iranian government won't tolerate any form of opposition, or any form of grouping which is considered a threat to the Islamic Republic.”

Christian house churches must stay undercover. The government sends infiltrators to join and befriend Christians in order to gather information. House church leaders must be extremely careful to keep their members' identities secret because anyone might be a spy.

“The girl who was a member of our Church was engaged to a person who was a secret police agent. And through her, he got my phone number and my address. That guy threatened me, to kill me by knife. He told me, 'I will put your body in the streets.'”

The Iranian government imposes harsh punishments for anyone discovered to be a Christian, using violent tactics to pressure them to convert to Islam.

“They handcuffed me and after that, asked me about other believers. I told him, “I’m not going to tell you anything about anyone else” and they said, “Ah. You want to become a hero?” and they started beating me.”

“They bound my hands and hung me from the ceiling. Then they took a cable and started to beat me with that cable. I never imagined that I could scream like that. I have lots of pain in my body. After some time, a person came with a paper in his hand. He gave me a pen and he asked me to write on the paper that I’m Muslim. I didn’t do it. I didn’t sign the paper that I’m a Muslim. He told me, “You’re going to return back to the same place you were and I’m not sure if, this time, if you can come back alive.”

Thankfully, Ali was finally released when his father went to the Iranian government with the help of a lawyer.

“Today I’m happy because I believe that God chose me to be beaten for him. God permitted that situation to happen to me so I emerged victorious.”

“It’s my pleasure to be persecuted for my Lord. I really want the Western people to know that God is working here. They really need to know about Jesus, they really need to know that God exists and loves them.”

“My prayer is that, in His wisdom, to give the people of Iran what they need. Not just for Salvation, but to build his Church.”

Christian believers in Iran continue to place their hope and trust in God. They ask for our prayers as they bravely share Christ with their families and neighbours. God is moving and the Church is growing. Please, continue to pray for God’s grace and endurance for the followers of Jesus in Iran. May their faithfulness reveal the love and truth of Jesus to everyone they come in contact with, and bring hope to Iranians and to their land.