

North Korea has the deadliest level of Christian persecution in the world

Due to serious security concerns, the identities and voices of those interviewed in this video have been disguised.

In North Korea the regime of Kim Jong -Il requires god-like-loyalty from all citizens. Worshipping in public or in private brings systematic torture and imprisonment. Carrying a Bible or speaking to others about Jesus Christ can bring a cruel death. And it can mean torture for three generations of one's family members.

Hiding behind a self-enforced curtain of exile, the socialist country of North Korea is getting away with grave human rights violations. North Korea, officially a socialist republic, is considered by many to be a totalitarian Stalinist dictatorship. After decades of inefficient resource management, in 1991, the country began relying heavily on international aid to feed its population that has grown to 25 million people. Government-sponsored religious groups exist to provide the illusion of religious freedom. But in reality, North Korea is the most difficult place in the world for Christians to live. Despite this fact, there are an estimated 400,000 Christians who are in constant danger because they choose to follow Jesus Christ.

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?

North Korea is #1 on the OpenDoor's WorldWatch List of most difficult countries for Christians to live. It has held this shameful position since the year 2002.

Today, an estimated 40,000 Christians are being held in North Korean prison camps. One out of every 10 Christians in this country is suffering cruel imprisonment. The stories of their torment are being told as some escape.

Mi Ja Choi: There were two of us who escaped. We were looking for a way to provide food for our family. The vast majority of people are extremely hungry. But Christians are the last to receive any allowance for foods. Everyone uses the black market to survive. My younger brother was taken by immigration authorities. Since then, no one has heard about where they took him or even if he is still alive.

North Koreans who leave the country without state permission are considered guilty of an act of treason. This is punishable by lengthy prison terms, working in labour camps or the death penalty. Sometimes Christians are executed immediately with no trial.

Miyoung Lee: Many times the authorities come to our house without warning. They always do this to people. It's not because we're Christian, it's because they want to scare people and make sure they can't cause trouble. This is their way of making sure everybody worships the North Korean leader. One time, I copied Bible verses by hand. I always prayed these would not be found because it would put my family's lives in danger.

Chulho Kim: In North Korea, Christians constantly fear being discovered. There is severe punishment if they are found guilty. That's huge because it means death! The North Korean government can't stand Christians worshipping God since they force people to worship Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il as their gods.

Miyoung Lee: One day the police came to my house and searched it. They found pieces of the Bible verses I copied by hand. They shouted many times to me, and took away my husband and kids. We were all taken to a prison camp where they worked us to death. Now, I'm not sure whether my parents and kids are still enduring hard labour or are even alive in prison. Or if they're still in North Korea. I'm always praying for Christians left behind in North Korean prison camps because I know that living there is like being in hell.

Chulho Kim: The people are well-trained to worship Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il. But those parents who believe in God cannot worship Kim Jong-Il. This makes their children get punished, and even other family members as well. These kids suffer so much because they are stripped of any opportunities for higher education or a good job. They lose everything.

Mi Ja Choi: I want the world to know about the cruelty we faced in the North Korean prison camps. I was forced to go to Yodok prison camp. I spent nine long years there. They treated us like animals. But even animals lived better than we did there. The thing that made me feel so sad, yet furious, was the fact they also put my parents and children in Yodok prison camp. Because only I was Christian, my father, mother and whole family were imprisoned. It hurt me so much that they treated my kids like animals. It made me so angry, what they did. It was only me, but I want the whole world to know what they did.

Presenter: Ja said that she and her family members were forced to engage in heavy labour both day and night. For her father, it was more than he could physically endure.

Mi Ja Choi: First, I lost my father in Yodok prison. I had to wrap his body in a straw mat, since there was no coffin. Not long after, my mother also died of severe hunger. When I also lost my children, my heart was so broken and I felt very sad and miserable. It hurt me so much. I'll never forget seeing so many dead bodies from famine stacked all around the fields and mountains of Yodok. I want to tell the whole world...

Presenter: God has called OpenDoors to minister to those who are suffering because of their faith. This has been a core value since the founding of the organisation by Brother Andrew.

Brother Andrew: Strengthen what remains. What is ready to die – ready to die – there's nothing I can do about that. Strengthening them, I can do everything. Now I must go, find out, provide the things they need which will always be, first of all, the word of God, the fellowship, the assurance that people pray for them.

Chulho Kim: Many in the West are not aware of the suffering endured by North Korean brothers and sisters. In North Korea, if people believe in God and are caught by the Kim Jong-Il government, they are killed along with three generations of their family. Believers do not care if they die by themselves. However, because entire families could get killed, many believers secretly follow Jesus, but do not know who else is a believer.

Daeho Park: Someone told me about a man who was at home reading the Bible by himself. He was so into reading the Bible at night that he did not hear a knocking sound at his door. As the knocking sound grew into loud banging, he realized someone was at the door and quickly hid his Bible. The local village director and two neighbors rushed in asking questions and searched his small house. One of them found the Bible. After that, he was really afraid and thought he was going to die. He knew what would happen if they found a Bible. He was afraid. But the neighbour hid the Bible in his own clothes and told the others there was nothing in the house. The next day, the man who took the Bible returned alone. He gave the Bible back and asked, “Do you also believe in Jesus Christ? I am also a believer. Because of the current situation in our country, I cannot fellowship with other believers, so I am keeping my faith to myself. I am so thankful to God that there are other believers besides me. Please be more careful with reading the Bible and please pray for me. Even though I work for the government, I secretly help out other believers. We should pray for other believers and that someday North Korea will freely allow people to receive God’s Word.”

Chulho Kim: Christians in North Korea endure the most suffering in the world. Even in the face of such hardship, God provides them with the faith, strength and courage to persevere. God is with them and gives them the hope of heaven. That’s why whenever there is contact with North Korean Christians, they ask for prayer and understand the value of standing together before God in prayer. People ask me, “How are Christians surviving in North Korea?” They have a secret – it is through God’s intervention, protection and miracles. They are starving so much physically, but they cannot live without reading God’s Word, praying and praising God. That’s the secret to their survival!

Presenter: In the face of considerable pressure and threats, OpenDoors workers near the border are helping North Korean defectors and believers. This year, hundreds of North Korean defectors were given food and medical supplies. The organisation is providing for the needs of defectors’ families while they study theology in South Korea. OpenDoors has trained thousands of believers in the past 10 years. They have safely made their way back to North Korea to help their brothers and sisters grow in faith.

Chulho Kim: Although the circumstances are very tough, North Korean Christians are not discouraged but instead, are united in one heart and they say it is a good opportunity to spread the Gospel throughout their country. After I heard that, I was so excited and encouraged. Your prayers and aid are very valuable to us.

Presenter: Earlier this year, OpenDoors was able to successfully provide many goods for Christians in North Korea. The large scale of this project cannot publicly disclosed. There were some difficulties transporting the goods due to strict surveillance, but by God’s grace

OpenDoors was able to deliver the goods to Christians believers. Thank-you letters and testimonies from all over North Korea are being received by OpenDoors.

Chulho Kim: We are not looking for a political solution in North Korea, but applying pressure through the international community is good. There is only one answer: the love and grace of Jesus Christ. North Korean Christians pray that their family, friends and neighbors would discover Jesus. They even pray for those who persecute them. They pray not that bad things would happen to Kim Jong-Il but that he would also discover Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul was once a man who persecuted Christians too. We truly believe in a God of miracles. Amen!

(singing Amazing Grace in Korean)

Presenter: North Korea, the hardest country on earth to be a Christian. Under the rule of a heartless dictator, Christians continue to pray and worship. They continue to receive spiritual nourishment from the Word of God and yes, they suffer terribly in their bodies, their hearts ache for the pain that their loved ones are enduring.

When one part of the body of Christ suffers, all the parts suffer. This is what God's Word tells us. Surely today the entire Christian community must be feeling the pain of brothers and sisters in North Korea. Christians around the world who have freedom must exercise that freedom to pray and to financially aid Christians in this place where food is hard to find. Those who can speak freely must become the voice of these believers who are silenced in their own country. Pray, pray with passion and with faith. In North Korea, there is no easy answer but together, Christians from around the world can become a part of God's plan for this country.