

Persecution of Christians in North Korea likely to worsen in 2010

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ORPINGTON, England (ABP) — Persecution of Christians is set to worsen in North Korea, the world's worst trouble spot for Christians, in 2010, according to a group that tracks the status of Christians globally.

[Release International](#), an England-based charity that supports the persecuted church around the world, made the prediction in an [end-of-the-year assessment](#).

North Korea regularly tops the [Open Doors World Watch list](#), a chart of the world's worst places for Christians maintained by another group that supports the persecuted church. It uses a range of indicators to rank countries according to the intensity of persecution Christians face for actively pursuing their faith.

Christians in the oppressive, isolated communist nation are subject to imprisonment if they are found to have Christian literature or are caught holding Bible studies and prayer meetings in their homes. Their families are subject to punishment as well.

Many North Korean Christians have been sent to death camps as political prisoners, where they are frequently subjected to brutal treatment in appalling conditions.

But with a poor harvest and worsening economy, things are getting worse, said Release International partner Tim Peters.

“North Korean Christians are arguably subject to the worst persecution in the world,” he said. “As the North Korean economy continues its slow-motion collapse, reports of worsening persecution of Christians are coming out of North Korea.

“2010 is forecast to be a year of tremendous hardship and food shortages since the country's harvest in 2009 was a poor one.”

“The situation in the North is getting worse,” said former prisoner Kang Cheol Hwan, according to Release International. “It is like a giant prison camp has crossed the land. Starvation spreads out over the entire nation; it has become the norm.

“I lived in Yoduk prison camp for 10 years; I was treated like an animal there. I had watched many people die from starvation and beatings. I witnessed open executions and watched helplessly as people died miserably. These fearful scenes have not left my mind.”

Nobody knows how many Christians there are today inside North Korea. Before the communists came to power, the nation was estimated to be home to about 300,000 Christians. However, during the Korean War (1950-53) many fled to South Korea or were killed. The BBC has estimated that up to 30,000 North Koreans may continue to practice Christianity secretly in their homes.

As of press time for this story, North Korean officials were believed to still be detaining Robert Park, a Korean-American Christian activist who crossed a frozen river into the nation on Christmas Day to highlight Pyongyang's human-rights abuses.

-Paul Hobson is a news reporter for [The Baptist Times](#), the newspaper of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. A version of this story [originally](#)

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