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Audit Statement on the outcomes of the Open Doors World Watch List 2026

Wednesday 14 January 2026

The audit of the 2026 World Watch List (WWL), conducted by the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) for the 12th consecutive year, confirms that the World Watch Research team of Open Doors International has broadly maintained its adherence to quality standards in the execution of the 2026 WWL exercise.

The audit, conducted in two parts, first examined the correct application of the WWL methodology. The findings show that, across the audited countries, the WWL 2026 largely complies with the methodological requirements of the exercise, drawing on diverse sources and, in many cases, adequately substantiating its conclusions. At the same time, in some large and complex contexts, the auditors noted areas where transparency and consistency in the application of the methodology could be further strengthened.

The second part of the audit evaluated whether the scores and write-ups accurately reflected the country situations based on the auditors' knowledge and expertise. The overall conclusion is that WWL 2026 generally provides a credible and realistic account of the discrimination and persecution faced by Christians, while also revealing specific areas where greater clarity on regional differences and on the distinction between social and structural factors in score justifications would be beneficial. The areas for improvement identified in this audit do not fundamentally undermine the integrity of the 2026 WWL exercise, but point to opportunities for refinement in future cycles.



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A team of five scholars with active expertise in religious freedom across the audited regions and countries carried out the audit. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, a selection of large countries from the WWL Top 50 was chosen, some of which had been audited in earlier years but not recently. The audit encompassed the work of both junior and senior World Watch Research persecution analysts.

The audit focused on how the existing WWL methodology was applied during the 2026 reporting cycle and did not evaluate or revise the methodology itself. Audit materials included final questionnaires (along with underlying questionnaires completed by external experts, field researchers and field contributors) and accompanying country dossiers. Any other statements, documents or interpretations from Open Doors International or its affiliates related to the WWL 2026 publication were outside the audit's scope.

A detailed audit report, including recommendations for potential improvements, has been submitted to World Watch Research and will be reviewed with the persecution analysts.

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Dr Dennis P. Petri
International Director, IIRF

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Dr Kyle Wisdom
Co-Director, IIRF