

International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

“Do You Know Our Suffering?”

1 and 8 November 2026

Convened by the World Evangelical Alliance

30 YEARS · 1996–2026

“You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:10–12 · THEME: DO YOU KNOW OUR SUFFERING?

How to use this kit

Written for three audiences at once: national evangelical alliances adapting IDOP for their own country, church and ministry leaders promoting it to their congregations, and Christian media covering the observance.

Everything in this kit is designed to be taken apart. Lift the press release and localize it. Pull one statistic for a bulletin insert. Use the key messages to brief a spokesperson. Nothing here has to be used whole.

THE 2026 ANGLE

2026 marks 30 years since the global launch in 1996. The anniversary is the single strongest reason for an editor to run a story this year rather than treat IDOP as an annual fixture. Lead with it.

Contents

1. **Press release** Ready to localize — English master text
2. **Fact sheet** What IDOP is, and where it came from
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A NOTE ON THE DATA SOURCE

All figures in this kit come from a single source — the IIRF Violent Incidents Database, for the 2025 calendar year. Using one dataset consistently is a deliberate choice: it keeps the numbers internally coherent and makes them straightforward to defend. Two things follow from it. First, IIRF was formerly associated with WEA — it was founded by Thomas Schirrmacher, a former WEA Secretary General — but the two organizations are no longer connected. The link is historical, not current. If a journalist raises it, that is the accurate answer. Second, other organizations publish different totals on the same questions, and a reporter may put those to you; the answer is that methodologies differ, not that one is wrong.

Press release

Master English text. National alliances should localize the headline, add a domestic angle in paragraph five, and substitute a local spokesperson.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**EMBARGO: NONE**

Churches worldwide mark 30 years of praying together for the persecuted

The World Evangelical Alliance marks 30 years of the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church on 1 and 8 November, under the theme “Do You Know Our Suffering?”, as new data records 4,652 Christians killed in violent incidents in 2025.

[CITY], [DATE] — Congregations across the world will gather on Sunday 1 November and Sunday 8 November for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP), marking thirty years since the World Evangelical Alliance first called the global church to a single day of united prayer for believers under pressure for their faith.

The 2026 theme, “Do You Know Our Suffering?”, is drawn from 2 Timothy 3:10–12, where Paul commends Timothy for his faithful following of Paul’s teaching, his way of life, and the persecutions he endured. Put as a question rather than a statement, it asks the wider church what it actually knows about the believers it prays for and frames the anniversary as an examination rather than a celebration. It also conveys the Bible’s honesty about the reality of suffering.

The need has not receded. The International Institute for Religious Freedom’s Violent Incidents Database recorded 4,652 Christians killed across 36 countries during 2025, together with 2,832 abductions and 3,527 people forced from their homes inside their own countries. Nigeria alone accounted for 3,792 of the killings — more than four in five — and together with the Democratic Republic of the Congo makes up over ninety percent of the recorded total.

A second and quite different pattern runs alongside it. Where killings and abductions are overwhelmingly the work of non-state armed groups, arrests and prosecutions are almost entirely the work of governments: officials were recorded as the perpetrator in 812 of 843 arrests and in 198 of 199 custodial sentences. China led on arrests, followed by Iran, Tanzania, Russia and Thailand; Russia led on sentences. In India, 212 places of worship were affected, 200 of them through administrative closure rather than physical damage.

These devastating statistics represent individuals, families and communities following Jesus’ cruciform example in the midst of terrible circumstances.

[LOCAL ANGLE — national alliances may choose to insert one paragraph here: a country your churches are praying for, a partner congregation, a believer whose case is public and whose family has consented to be named. This is the paragraph local editors will use.]

QUOTE — YOUR ALLIANCE LEADER

Insert a quote from your alliance's leader or spokesperson, in their own words and approved before release. Suggested substance: why a 30-year-old prayer observance still matters; the Church as one body across borders; what churches in your country will do on the day.

Godfrey Yogarajah, Chair of the WEA International Council and former Executive Director of its Religious Liberty Commission, said:

For thirty years, the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church has reminded the global Church that persecution is never someone else's problem. Scripture tells us that when one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). IDOP is not simply a day of prayer, but a yearly act of solidarity with millions of Christians who face persecution and discrimination for their faith. Their courage calls the rest of us to pray more deeply, care more practically, and defend, everywhere, the God-given freedom to believe, worship, and live according to conscience.

IDOP began with an emergency call to prayer. In 1994, following the martyrdom of Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr in Iran and the imprisonment and death sentence of Mehdi Dibaj, the WEA's Religious Liberty Commission convened a "Day of Prayer for Iran." The response was large enough that the Commission formalized it, and in 1996 launched the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. More than 100 countries took part in the first year. It has since been taken up well beyond the evangelical constituency, by Catholic and mainline bodies and by ministries around the world.

Free resources for churches — a prayer guide, Bible studies, children's and Sunday school material, liturgy, sermon helps, posters and video — are available at idop.org in English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Arabic.

— ENDS —

MEDIA CONTACT

[Your alliance's media contact: name, role, phone and email.] International enquiries: Daoud Kuttub, Senior Communications Officer, World Evangelical Alliance
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SECTION TWO

Fact sheet

The essentials — what IDOP is, when it happens, who it is for, and a short account of where it came from.

What — The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP): a global call to united prayer for Christians facing discrimination, hostility and violence because of their faith.

When — The first two Sundays of November each year. Two Sundays are given so that churches can respect their own traditions. Many mark All Saints' Day on 1 November, and in the UK and Commonwealth the second Sunday of November is Remembrance Sunday.

Why November — The date sits within the Western Christian season of All Saints' and All Souls' — the church's traditional season for remembering the martyrs.

Who convenes it — The World Evangelical Alliance, through its Religious Liberty Commission.

Resources — idop.org, free, in English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Arabic.

Cost to participate — None.

Where IDOP came from, in the words of Godfrey Yogarajah

In January 1994, Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr was murdered in Iran for defending Mehdi Dibaj, a pastor sentenced to death for apostasy. Brian O'Connell, newly appointed director of the Religious Liberty Commission, led an emergency Day of Prayer for Iran. The response was so overwhelming that in 1996 the Religious Liberty Commission launched IDOP. More than 100 countries took part that first year; a US coalition working through WEA's North American office built much of its early US reach.

Thirty years on, the particulars have changed: the countries most in the headlines, the tools we use to communicate, and the sheer scale of what we now know about the persecuted Church. But the conviction behind it has not changed at all. No member of Christ's body suffers alone (1 Corinthians 12:26).

It has since been taken up well beyond the evangelical constituency, by Catholic and mainline bodies and by ministries around the world. Several now run their own IDOP campaigns, which is a good outcome. The originating act was from the World Evangelical Alliance.

“Only through mobilizing the church to pray for those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ will we see a significant shift in the involvement in their plight.”

BROTHER ANDREW, OPEN DOORS — ON RECEIVING THE FIRST WEA RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AWARD, 1997

The Research

All figures below are from the IIRF Violent Incidents Database and cover 1 January to 31 December 2025. Counts are restricted to incidents in which victims were recorded as Christian. Cite the source whenever you use them. ¹



Two patterns, not one

The 2025 data confirms a dual pattern, which is important to recognize as Christians all around the world experience persecution differently. In sub-Saharan Africa, and in Nigeria above all, Christians face lethal violence from non-state armed actors, which destroys homes and drives large-scale internal displacement. In China, Iran, Russia and parts of Latin America, the pressure is exercised by the state itself, through arrest, prosecution and the administrative closure of places of worship.

The categories are not sealed off from one another, but for advocacy purposes the first is a failure of protection and the second is a deliberate exercise of state power. They call for different responses, and blurring them weakens both arguments.

Killings and abductions

Of the 4,652 killings recorded across 36 countries, 3,792 — more than four in five — occurred in Nigeria, which also accounted for 2,486 of the 2,832 abductions. Together with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the two countries make up over ninety percent of all killings in the dataset. Within Nigeria, where a perpetrator was identified, revolutionary or paramilitary groups and ethnic group leaders accounted for the largest shares.

KILLINGS

COUNTRY	RECORDED
Nigeria	3,792
Democratic Republic of the Congo	445
Mozambique	72
Ethiopia	58
Haiti	42

¹ <https://iirf.global/publications/reports/top-five-countries-for-killings-abductions-arrests-and-sentences-of-christians/>

ABDUCTIONS

COUNTRY	RECORDED
Nigeria	2,486
Democratic Republic of the Congo	99
Ethiopia	77
Myanmar	32
Cameroon	30

Arrests and sentences

This category follows a different geography and a different logic. What distinguishes it is who acts: government officials were recorded as the perpetrator in 812 of the 843 arrests and in 198 of the 199 sentences. Where killings and abductions are largely the work of non-state armed actors, arrest and sentencing are almost entirely the work of states — the continuing pattern of legal harassment and criminalization of religious activity in authoritarian contexts.

ARRESTS

COUNTRY	RECORDED
China	228
Iran	115
Tanzania	89
Russia	61
Thailand	60

CUSTODIAL SENTENCES

COUNTRY	RECORDED
Russia	88
China	41
Iran	32
Cuba	14
Nicaragua	7

Attacks on buildings — homes and businesses

These track the areas of armed conflict, and are in effect the property dimension of the same violence that produces the killings and displacement figures. Nigeria and Mozambique were driven overwhelmingly by attacks on homes rather than businesses.

COUNTRY	RECORDED
Nigeria	556
Mozambique	381
Bosnia and Herzegovina	60
Iraq	48
Myanmar	40

Attacks on houses of worship

This distribution is markedly different, and the raw totals conceal two distinct phenomena. India heads the list, but 200 of its 212 affected places of worship were administrative closures rather than physical destruction. The other four countries recorded almost exclusively destruction, damage or vandalism, with no closures at all.

COUNTRY	AFFECTED	NATURE OF THE INCIDENTS
India	212	200 were administrative closures, not physical damage
Germany	69	Destruction, damage or vandalism
Mexico	48	Destruction, damage or vandalism
Ukraine	44	Destruction, damage or vandalism
United States	42	Destruction, damage or vandalism

WHY THIS TABLE IS THE MOST NEWSWORTHY ONE HERE

Bureaucratic restriction and physical attack produce similar-looking numbers but call for very different responses. And the presence of Germany and the United States near the top is a reminder that attacks on church buildings are not confined to states where Christians face broader legal restriction. For Christian media in the West, this is the figure most likely to be picked up.

Internal displacement

Some 3,527 Christians were recorded as forced from their homes within their own countries, of whom 2,117 — three in five — were in Nigeria.

COUNTRY	RECORDED
Nigeria	2,117
Mozambique	777
Democratic Republic of the Congo	346
Kenya	100
Nicaragua	62

Source and methodology

IIRF, 2026 Combined Thematic Report — Top Five Countries for Killings, Abductions, Arrests and Sentences of Christians, Attacks on Buildings and Houses of Worship, and Forced Displacement (January – December 2025), drawing on the IIRF Violent Incidents Database.

The VID is an events-based, open-source repository launched publicly in January 2024, compiling incidents from digital media reporting supplemented by field interviews, desk research, partner reporting and public submissions. It is supported by the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE) and the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA), the latter particularly for Nigeria. IIRF operates a quality-control and vetting process and corrects entries retroactively, while stating openly that it cannot independently verify every record.

IMPORTANT CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- Event-based counts from the Violent Incidents Database reflect what was reported and recorded, not everything that happened. They are a floor, not a total.
- Year-on-year changes can reflect improved data collection rather than changed conditions — which is explicitly the case for Nigeria in 2025 per the IIRF.
- IIRF was formerly associated with WEA — it was founded by Thomas Schirrmacher, a former WEA Secretary General — but the two organizations are no longer connected.

Key messages

Four messages, in priority order. If a spokesperson remembers only the first, the interview has still worked.

1. The persecuted church is not the object of our prayer. It is our example in it.

Paul commends Timothy for having followed his teaching, his way of life, and the persecutions he endured. This year's theme asks the wider church whether it knows the believers it prays for, and the honest answer places us as learners rather than benefactors. Those paying the highest cost for Christ are walking the path every Christian is called to walk.

2. Thirty years is the story this year

IDOP has been observed every November since 1996, through changes of government, war, and shifting attention. Persistence is the point — persecuted believers consistently say the thing they fear most is being forgotten.

3. Following an example means knowing what it actually costs.

You cannot imitate what you have not taken time to see. In sub-Saharan Africa the cost is lethal violence from armed non-state groups — a failure of protection. In China, Iran, Russia and parts of Latin America it is arrest, prosecution and church closure — a deliberate exercise of state power, with government officials carrying out ninety-six percent of recorded arrests. Naming them accurately, citing the source and refusing to inflate numbers is part of counting the cost.

4. Accurate, sourced, and not sensational

WEA cites published research, names its source, and states its limits. The record is grave enough without amplification, and credibility is the asset that supports advocacy work at the UN and with governments.

WHAT WE ARE CAREFUL ABOUT

- **Naming individuals.** Never name a believer, congregation or location without explicit, current consent from them or their family. Publicity can raise the risk. When in doubt, describe the situation without identifying detail.
- **Numbers.** Attribute every figure to the IIRF Violent Incidents Database and the 2025 calendar year. Do not round upward, do not merge it with other organizations' datasets, and do not present the killings figure as though it described all persecution.
- **Whose suffering.** IDOP prays for the persecuted church. It does so without claiming Christians are the only religious community under pressure. Acknowledging that strengthens the case rather than diluting it.
- **Politics.** Persecution is not a partisan issue and IDOP is not a political campaign. Avoid framing that maps persecution onto a domestic political argument in any country.
- **Tone.** Solidarity, not pity. Persecuted believers are the subjects of this story, not its objects.

Likely questions

“Where do these numbers come from, and can they be trusted?” — The IIRF Violent Incidents Database, calendar year 2025. It is events-based and built from reported incidents, so it is a floor rather than a total. Be candid that measuring persecution is difficult, that organizations differ, and note that IIRF was founded by a former WEA Secretary General but is no longer associated with WEA. IIRF has published its methodology in a peer-reviewed, open-access journal: Petri, Wisdom and Bainbridge, *International Journal for Religious Freedom* 18:2 (2025), ijrf.org/index.php/home/article/view/404.

“Why are Germany and the United States on your list?” — Because attacks on church buildings happen there too — vandalism, arson and damage. It is not equivalent to the situation in Nigeria or North Korea but still deserves inclusion.

“Doesn’t 2 Timothy say everyone will be persecuted? Doesn’t that flatten the differences?” — Verse 12 describes the cost of following Christ; it is not a claim that every context is equivalent. Vandalism in Germany and killings in Nigeria are both real and are not the same thing, which is why they are reported separately.

“Isn’t this just Western Christians talking about themselves?” — IDOP was shaped from the beginning by leaders from Sri Lanka, Romania and Egypt, and the churches most affected are in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

“Does prayer actually change anything?” — WEA regularly engages in advocacy at the UN, submissions to human rights mechanisms, and support to national alliances. Prayer and advocacy are complementary aspects of one movement, not alternatives.

SECTION FIVE

For national alliances

A short guide to adapting this kit for your own country and press.

The global release might not get picked up in your country. A localized one might. These are the five changes that make the difference.

1. Change the headline to your country

“Churches across [country] join 30 years of global prayer for the persecuted” is a domestic story. The global version is not.

2. Write paragraph five yourself

The local angle paragraph is the one your editors will actually use — a country your churches have a historic link to, a partner congregation, a diaspora community in your cities, a case your alliance has worked on. One paragraph, specific, verifiable.

3. Offer a local spokesperson

Someone available by phone, in your language, in your time zone, on the day. This matters more than the quality of the written release.

4. Give a date, a place and a time

“Prayer will be held” is not a story. A named church, an address and a time is one — and it gives broadcast media something to attend.

5. Send it eight to ten days out

For 1 November, that means the third week of October; for 8 November, the last days of October. Follow up once, by phone, three days later. Do not follow up twice.

TRANSLATION

The theme is a question, not a quotation — it turns Paul’s commendation of Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10 into something asked of the reader. Render it as a natural question in your language, anchored to how your standard Bible translation words that verse, rather than translating the English phrase word for word.

WHERE YOU SHOULD NOT LOCALIZE

- The statistics and their attribution to the IIRF Violent Incidents Database, 2025 — use them exactly, or leave them out.
- The founding account — the dates and names in the fact sheet are the record.
- Any identifying detail about believers at risk. Consent does not transfer between countries.