



North Korea functions as a totalitarian regime, heavily influenced by a personality cult centered on the Kim dynasty, which has ruled for three generations since the end of World War II. The sole accepted 'religion' is Juche, an ideology of Marxist 'self-reliance' created by the country's founder, Kim Il-Sung.¹⁷⁹

Currently, Christianity is regarded as a significant threat to the state's supremacy and the Kim family's dominance, forcing it to operate covertly. Gauging the true number of Christians or the extent of their faith in North Korea is exceedingly difficult, however they are estimated to comprise around 0.38 percent of the population, which equates to just over 98,000 people.¹⁸⁰

Christians in North Korea face extreme persecution. Anyone identified as a Christian or showing interest in Christianity or the Bible will almost certainly be considered an enemy of the state.¹⁸¹

Those discovered practising Christianity can be sent to labour camps, where they endure starvation and torture. The government enforces strict loyalty, requiring citizens to act as informants, and indoctrinates children to report on their parents. Thus, Christians in North Korea must be exceedingly discreet in their expressions and actions. If a Christian is apprehended, their entire family is subjected to punishment.¹⁸²

SELECTED INCIDENTS

APRIL 2023 Authorities in Tongam village, South Pyongan Province, arrested a group of five Christians for their religious activities and confiscated dozens of Bibles. The Christians reportedly refused to renounce their faith and disclose the Bibles' origin.¹⁸³

MAY 2023 An entire family, including a two-year-old child, was condemned to life imprisonment for possessing a Bible.¹⁸⁴

MAY 2023 A Christian man held in a detention centre was almost beaten to death by prison guards after he was discovered to be secretly praying. Despite the assault leaving him with near-fatal injuries, the man continued to pray daily, even though his dedication

to his faith resulted in guards regularly beating him with a club and kicking him.¹⁸⁵

APRIL 2024 Among the more than 200 North Korean defectors repatriated from China in 2023, those found to have interacted with Christians while in China were sent to prison camps. Without exception, any defectors found to have read the Bible or to have been exposed to Christian doctrine were sentenced to hard labour.¹⁸⁶

MAY 2024 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Report 2024 recommended that the US State Department redesignates North Korea a Country of Particular Concern, based on the conditions of religious freedom within the country throughout 2023.¹⁸⁷