

Three Baptists in 10 are in highly vulnerable areas

July 3, 2023

STAVANGER, Norway—Globally, three Baptists in 10 face the highest levels of vulnerability to hunger, poverty, violent conflict and religious persecution, the 2023 edition of a vulnerability index produced by the Baptist World Alliance revealed.

In his report to the BWA annual gathering in Stavanger, Norway, General Secretary Elijah Brown reported 15.7 million Baptists—30.4 percent of all 51 million BWA Baptists in the world—are subject to the most significant levels of vulnerability.

That represents a significant increase over the previous year, when one in four Baptists worldwide—13.5 million—faced the highest levels of vulnerability to hunger, poverty, war and challenges to religious freedom.

Examining the same data through the congregational lens, 23 percent of churches affiliated with BWA member bodies—39,626 churches—are in places where they face the highest levels of vulnerability.

Forty-nine BWA member bodies in 10 of the 128 countries and territories represented in BWA are in areas where they are most vulnerable.

According to the Baptist Vulnerability Index, Syria—home to about 800 Baptists in 11 churches—faces the highest levels of vulnerability, ranking 9 on a scale of 0 to 10.

Top 10 Countries

However, looking at the Top 10 Countries on the BWA list, the greatest number of affected Baptists are in Nigeria, where more than 9 million people in close to 15,000 churches face the highest levels of vulnerability.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 3.4 million Baptists in about 7,000 churches are subject to the highest levels of vulnerability, as are 2.7 million Baptists in India, home to more than 14,000 churches.

The Top 10 Countries all scored 6 or higher on the scale of 0-10.

Ranked in order, the Top 10 Countries on the Baptist Vulnerability Index are: 1. Syria; 2. Central African Republic; 3. Democratic Republic of Congo; 4. South Sudan; 5. Sudan; 6. Chad; 7. Burkina Faso; 8. Burundi; 9. India; and 10. Nigeria.

Half-dozen countries on Watch List

The Baptist Vulnerability Index Watch List includes six other nations on its Watch List that scored between 4.5 and 5.5 on the same scale. Baptists in these countries number about 2.2 million, representing an additional 3.9 percent of all BWA Baptists globally.

Myanmar—which faces continuing challenges after a military coup in February 2021—accounts for more than 1.75 million Baptists in 5,574 churches.

Nations on the Watch List represent more than 11,000 churches—an additional 6.4 percent of all congregations related to 13 BWA member bodies.

Countries on the BWA Watch List for significant levels of vulnerability are:

1. Ethiopia; 2. Madagascar; 3. Myanmar; 4. Haiti; 5. Ukraine; and 6. Russian Federation.

The BWA develops its annual Baptist Vulnerability Index based on annually updated Baptist membership data and input from regional leaders, along with other global measures such as the United Nations Human Development Index, the Global Hunger Index, the Global Peace Index and Pew Forum research.