

YAHOO!

North Korean Leader Wants Christians To Celebrate Grandmother's Birthday, Not Jesus Holiday

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has reportedly replaced Christmas with celebrations honoring his deceased grandmother. While Christians remain a minority in North Korea, Kim has declared Dec. 25 a holiday to pay tribute to Kim Jong Suk, who died in 1949, according to media reports Sunday.

Kim's grandmother was born on Christmas Eve in 1919. Known as the "Sacred Mother of the Revolution," she was the wife of former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung and a Communist activist. To honor her birthday, many North Koreans visit her tomb on Dec. 25 each year.

North Korea has previously banned Christmas trees and Kim has upheld his family's anti-Christmas beliefs. In 2014, he threatened war against South Korea after it announced it would erect a **Christmas tree along the border.**

"The DPRK ostentatiously treats anyone of faith, but especially Christians, as hostile," wrote Doug Bandow, a Senior Fellow at the **Cato Institute**, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C. "Believers place loyalty to God before that of the North Korean state. Churches allow people to act and organize outside of state entities. Christianity also has ties to a world seen as almost uniformly threatening by Pyongyang."

Christian celebrations, including decorating Christmas trees, were banned in 1950s, but some of the nation's estimated 70,000 Christians continue to put up holiday decorations each December, especially in upscale shops and restaurants. In recent decades, however, North Korea has sent some Christians to prisons because of their religion.

"Under the rule of Kim Jong-Un, North Korea remains among the world's most repressive countries. All basic freedoms have been severely restricted under the Kim family's political dynasty. A 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry found that abuses in North Korea were without parallel in the contemporary world. They include extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions, and other sexual violence," **Human Rights Watch** wrote in its most recent report on North Korea.