



**WORLD
WATCH
LIST
2021**

**THE TOP 50
COUNTRIES
WHERE FOLLOWING
JESUS COSTS
THE MOST**



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THE TOP 50 COUNTRIES

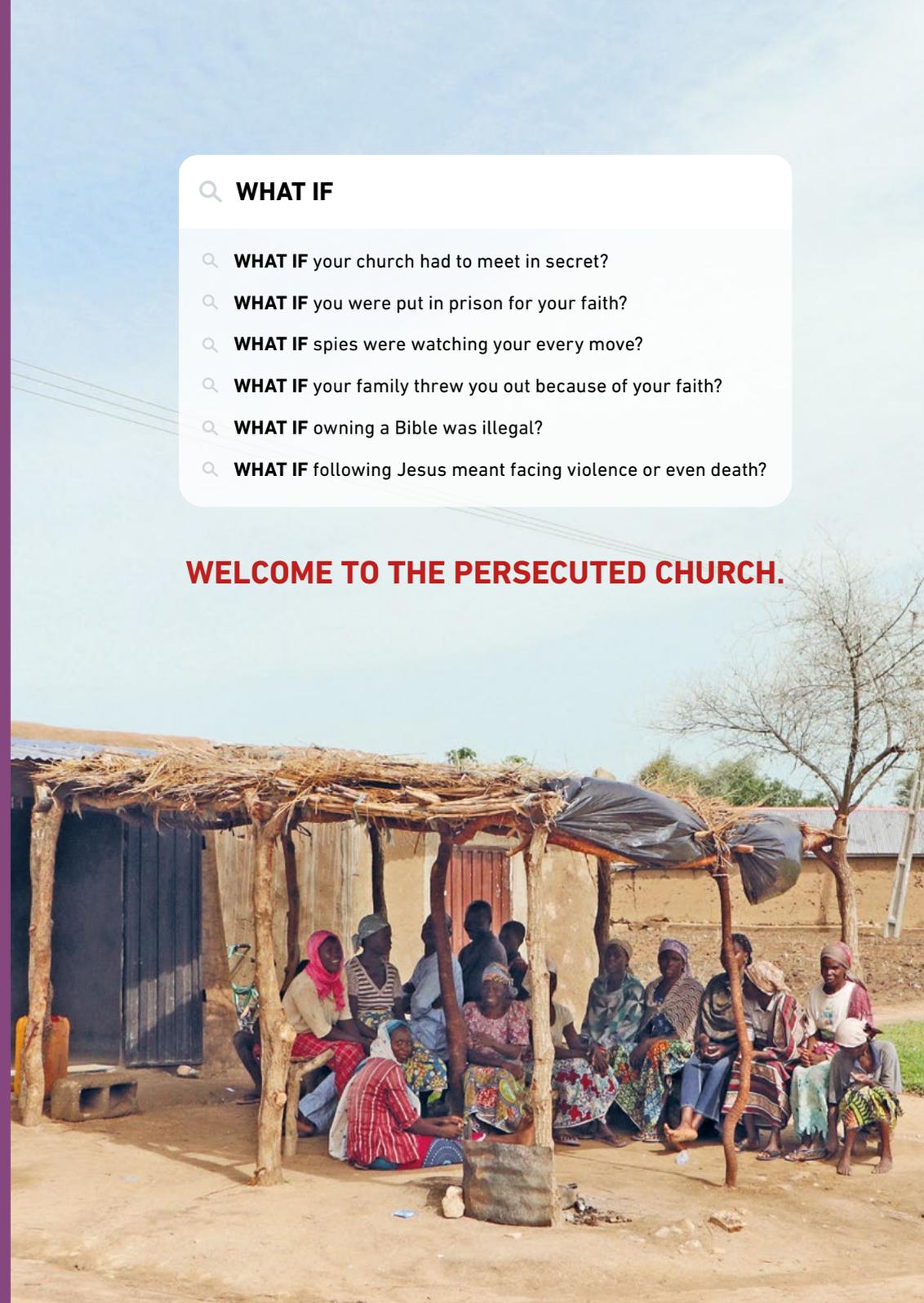
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Q WHAT IF

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- Q **WHAT IF** you were put in prison for your faith?
- Q **WHAT IF** spies were watching your every move?
- Q **WHAT IF** your family threw you out because of your faith?
- Q **WHAT IF** owning a Bible was illegal?
- Q **WHAT IF** following Jesus meant facing violence or even death?

WELCOME TO THE PERSECUTED CHURCH.



CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IS A GLOBAL REALITY.

At least 340 million Christians around the world experience systemic discrimination, unfair treatment and persecution. That means an astonishing **1 in 8 Christians**

1 IN 8 CHRISTIANS ARE AFFECTED BY EXTREME, VERY HIGH OR HIGH LEVELS OF PERSECUTION.

are affected by extreme, very high or high levels of persecution.

Think about that for a minute. Think of the

Christians you know. What if 1 in 8 of them were refused a job because of their faith? Or

placed under surveillance? Or arrested and put on trial? What would it do to your family, your friends, your home group, your church?

And of course, this *is* our family.

We are one body, one church. This book details the 50 countries in the world where Christians face the most extreme persecution.

But the courageous Christians whose lives you can read about here are not statistics. And they are not strangers.

They are our family. And they need our help.

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED?

We have all faced a global pandemic. But the plague of Christian persecution goes on year after year. So why is it happening?

One reason is **religious fanaticism**. Deluded followers believe that killing Christians is God's will, that suicide bombing a church is a passport to paradise, that trying to force Christians to give up their faith is a righteous act.

Often, **fanaticism presents itself as politics**. Ultra-nationalists preach hatred and Christians are an easy target. Bullies always need someone to blame. Sometimes it's **all about control**. Christians know that 'the truth shall set you free', but freedom is the last thing that paranoid dictators and authoritarian governments want.

It could be as basic as **simple greed**.

You want the land that Christians have, or their jobs, or even their women and children. Where Christians are poor and in the minority, how will they stop you? Ultimately, though, there is one reason why Christians are persecuted.

Because the church is alive.

It's active. And it's growing.

THE CHURCH IS ALIVE. IT'S ACTIVE. AND IT'S GROWING.

For over 25 years, Open Doors has tracked the scale of worldwide persecution. And the church has not been destroyed. Remember, then, that Christ has the victory.

Christians may be in hiding, but they are still shining a light. They may be in prison, but they are still free. They may be victimised, but they are still victors.



The headlines



PERSECUTION CONTINUES TO RISE



VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS RISES DRAMATICALLY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENTS INCREASE SURVEILLANCE AND RESTRICTIONS



NORTH KOREA TOPS THE LIST FOR THE 20TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR



MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS DELIBERATELY EXCLUDED FROM RECEIVING CORONAVIRUS AID



RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM CONTINUES TO FUEL PERSECUTION



SUDAN MAKES RADICAL IMPROVEMENTS IN RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



PERSECUTION CONTINUES TO RISE

For the first time since the list began, all top 50 countries score at least 'very high' levels of persecution. Twelve countries are categorised as having 'extreme' levels of persecution, up from 11 the year before. And there are another 24 countries scoring 'very high' or 'high' levels of persecution that don't even make it into the top 50. *See, 'Beyond the Top 50' p.6*



VIOLENCE RISES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Of the top six countries where Christians experience the most outright violence, five are in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria – which re-entered the top 10 for the first time since 2015 – saw the most violence against Christians in 2020, with armed Fulani herdsmen killing with impunity. Islamist violence is also why Cameroon rose to 42 from 48, and why Democratic Republic of Congo (40) and Mozambique (45) are new entries to the top 50. *See 'Alarming rise in violence in sub-Saharan Africa' p.50-51*



GOVERNMENTS INCREASE SURVEILLANCE AND RESTRICTIONS

Increasingly, countries are using modern surveillance methods to monitor citizens for their own 'protection' and 'security'. In China (up to 17 from 23) a mix of restrictive new laws and increased surveillance has propelled the country back into the top 20 for the first time in a decade. *See 'Surveillance, suffocation and sinicisation' p.33*



NORTH KOREA TOPS THE LIST

North Korea is the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian, as it has been every year since 2002. If you are discovered to be a Christian you will be sent to one of the country's notorious prison camps, which have been described by sources as 'a living mass grave'. *See 'The appalling inhumanity of North Korea's prison state' p.18-19*



CHRISTIANS DELIBERATELY DENIED CORONAVIRUS AID

Open Doors research reveals the extent to which Christians are being specifically excluded from receiving Covid-19 aid. Incidents have been recorded in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Yemen, Sudan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Nepal, Malaysia - not to mention Central Asia and North Africa. *See 'Covid-19: When Christians are the last in line' p.8-9*



RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM FUELS PERSECUTION

In Turkey, an overtly Islamist, nationalist agenda has led to increased violence and intolerance towards Christians. It rose 11 places to number 25. In India, rising Hindu nationalism continues to claim that 'to be Indian is to be Hindu'. *See 'Turkey flexes its muscles' p.44*



SUDAN'S IMPROVEMENTS IN RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Good news in a bad year. Sudan drops six places to 13 after abolishing the death penalty for apostasy (i.e. renouncing Islam) and introducing other liberalising measures. *See 'Good news from Sudan' p.30*

→ BEYOND THE TOP 50

Out of the 340 million Christians around the world who experience high levels of persecution and discrimination, some 309 million Christians live in the 50 countries in this book.

The Open Doors World Watch List monitors many countries where freedom of worship is threatened or curtailed. Overall, this year, 74 countries showed extreme, very high or high levels of persecution. Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Niger dropped out of the top 50, not because the situation improved, but because other countries have deteriorated.

In **Sri Lanka** (52), Christians are still treated as second-class citizens and Buddhist supremacy is still a driving factor. In **UAE** (53) the major factor is Islamic oppression – as it is for most of the countries just outside the top 50, such as **Kyrgyzstan** (55), **Palestinian Territories** (56), **Tanzania** (57) and areas of the **Russian Federation** (58). Meanwhile, **Niger** (54) saw increased violence from Islamist militants. The same is true for other sub-Saharan countries such as **Chad** (62), **Uganda** (65) and **Guinea** (66).

Long-time Open Doors supporters will remember the days when **Cuba** was

STILL STANDING STRONG

Persecution is at unprecedented levels. But as the need has grown, so has the response.

Open Doors is now at work in almost 70 countries around the globe. Your support keeps the church around the world standing strong.

And the church is not destroyed.

regularly in the top 50. Now it is just below – at number 51. The Communist government still rules and churches are experiencing more restrictions.

↑ OTHER RISERS

Colombia is up 11 places to 30.

Covid-19 has actually helped organised crime groups. With an overstretched government struggling to contain the pandemic, criminal gangs can exploit the quarantines and curfews for their own ends. The same is true in **Mexico**, which rose 15 places to 37. In both countries, Christians have been prevented from providing material or spiritual aid, and church leaders who challenge the gangs can be extorted, robbed, kidnapped and even killed.

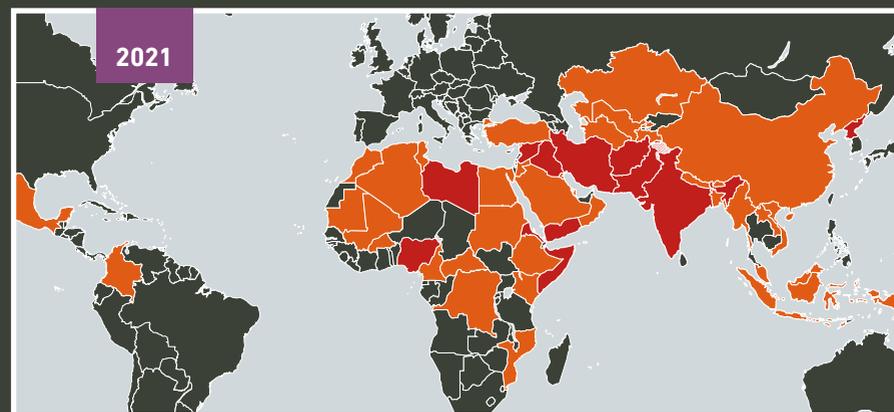
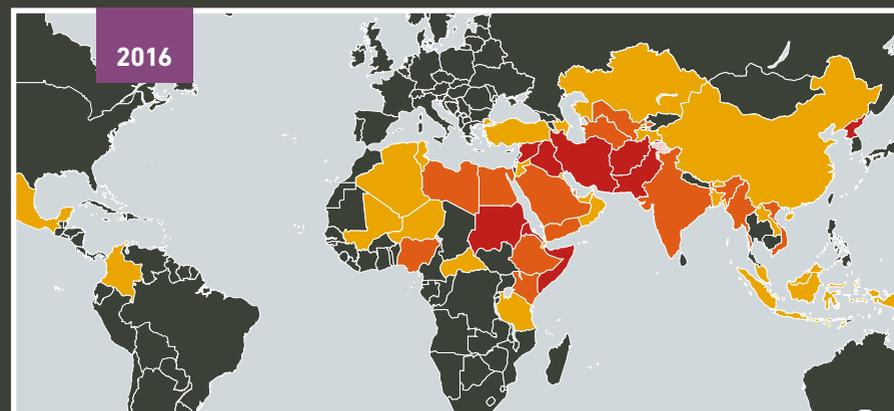
Iraq has risen from 15 to 11, due to ongoing insecurity and Turkish military attacks in northern Iraq in summer 2020. **Bangladesh** is up to 31 from 38. Among the Rohingya refugees who are oppressed are about 2,000 Muslim converts to Christianity, who have faced attacks and abduction.

After many years' absence, the **Comoros** Islands have re-entered the top 50. The government has openly denied freedom of religion for its citizens and any Christian seen preaching faces imprisonment.

“ I CAME TO FAITH IN A SAFE HOUSE IN CHINA AFTER I ESCAPED NORTH KOREA. YOU WOULD BE AMAZED TO SEE HOW THE SPIRIT IS AT WORK IN THESE SAFE HOUSES. SO MANY PEOPLE COME TO FAITH. THAT'S ONLY POSSIBLE THANKS TO YOU. WE WOULDN'T EVEN EXIST WITHOUT YOUR PRAYERS.”

Jae-Hwa*, North Korean believer

*name changed for security reasons



ABOUT THE WORLD WATCH LIST

The Open Doors World Watch List is compiled by Open Doors analysts using real-world data from experts on the ground in 150 countries.

Persecution in each country is recorded by Open Doors using a points system. This not only tracks violence, but also how much freedom Christians have to practise their faith in their private, family, community, national and church life.

EXTREME 81-100 POINTS
VERY HIGH 61-80 POINTS
HIGH 41-60 POINTS

A HEAT MAP OF PERSECUTION

The fires of persecution are burning faster and further than ever before.

In 2016 there were 25 countries where persecution was ranked as 'high', 16 as 'very high', and nine marked as 'extreme'. This year, there are just two colours: 12 countries are ranked as 'extreme'; all the rest are 'very high'.

To put it another way: on this year's list Comoros is number 50 with a score of 62 points. In 2016 that would have made it number 23.



COVID-19: When Christians are the last in line

It is, of course, *the* story of 2020. A global pandemic, hospitalising and killing millions. But there is another story to be told about the Covid crisis – and that is the way the virus is being used against the persecuted church.

In the World Watch List countries, Christians are often the poorest and most vulnerable. For them, lockdown is a disaster. If you are a day-labourer, what savings do you have? If you have been cast out of your family, village or community, who can you turn to? If you are a church leader reliant on the gifts of your congregation, what do you do when church services stop?

Psychologically, there is a huge effect as well. Some Christians have been locked down in homes where everyone is hostile to their faith. Among the Top 10 countries, the number of women reporting psychological violence has increased.

In Nigeria, Rose's husband Matthew, a church pastor, was killed by Fulani militants. She lost everything. And then Covid hit.

"We had no food," says Rose (PICTURED BELOW). "There was no money to buy any food. We couldn't trade anything for money, because the markets were closed."



THE LAST IN LINE

It's not just the economic impact. In many places Covid has been weaponised against Christians. Many have found themselves denied aid, even where it was available. Some were told that 'your church or your God should feed you'. In India, of more than 100,000 Christians receiving aid from Open Doors partners, 80 per cent reported to World Watch List researchers that they were dismissed from food distribution points. In southern Kaduna, Nigeria, families from several villages said they received one sixth of the rations allocated to Muslim families.

"We were happy when the government announced food aid for the poor," said Rose. "But we were left out. We received none of that food."

CARING FOR THE FAMILY

But there is yet another story of Covid and the persecuted church, and that is the way in which Christians across the world

have stepped up to support their family.

In India, Open Doors partners have so far provided aid for some 14,750 families who were struggling during lockdown. In Nepal, 1,300 families were supported; in Nigeria our work is supporting 9,000 families.

Thanks to your support, Open Doors partners were able to bring a relief package to Rose.

"I had never imagined that I would receive such gifts, but today, my faith in Christ has been strengthened. This support will enable me to care for my family," she said.

> See a video of Rose and find out more about how your support is helping persecuted Christians caught up in the pandemic. Go to opendoorsuk.org/rose

(PICTURED ABOVE) A Buddhist-background believer receives Covid aid through Open Doors partners

ABOUT OPEN DOORS

At least 340 million Christians around the world experience high levels of persecution and discrimination.

For over 65 years Open Doors has stood alongside the persecuted church, strengthening and supporting Christians who dare to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.

Our global, underground networks operate in almost 70 countries, always working in partnership with the local church – wherever it is found and whatever shape it takes.

Through the gifts and prayers of Open Doors supporters, millions of Christians around the world receive emergency food and aid, spiritual care, smuggled Bibles and books, and vital training and legal advice.

It's long-term work. But for 65 years that has been the calling: to stand with Christians who dare to follow Jesus no matter the cost. To pray with them, support them, speak up for them.

To let them know that they are not forgotten, and never alone.

> [Go to opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org) for more stories of courageous faith, detailed information about the Top 50 countries on the World Watch List, videos, the latest news stories, and a wide range of resources for churches, families and individuals.

Pastor Jeremiah* leads a church in northern Nigeria (PICTURED BELOW). One night, his village was attacked by militant Fulani herdsmen armed with automatic weapons. The villagers fled into the bush as the attackers rampaged through the village shooting and burning.

Fulani militants are trying to drive Christians from the communities where they have lived for generations. But, amazingly, Pastor Jeremiah is determined to remain, and to give hope to his flock.

"We should give glory to God. He is alive and will help us," Pastor Jeremiah adds. "Even if we die, we are in the hands of God," he says.

With your support, Open Doors partners helped the believers in the village to

buy food, medicine and materials to rebuild their homes. Our partners have also provided spiritual support and trauma care.

Without the help of Open Doors they would be completely abandoned.

"If you had not come, we would have suffered even more," Pastor Jeremiah says. "Open Doors, on behalf of my people, we are saying, Thank you."

*Name changed for security reasons

“ IF YOU HAD NOT COME, WE WOULD HAVE SUFFERED EVEN MORE. OPEN DOORS, ON BEHALF OF MY PEOPLE, WE ARE SAYING, 'THANK YOU.' ”



WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Your gifts, prayers and support make a huge difference to persecuted Christians around the world.

"There are times when I feel like it's me against the world and that the Lord has not provided me with people," says Sop*, a persecuted church leader in Laos. "But God sends people. He used your ministry."

GIVE

Give an isolated Christian a precious Bible, help rebuild shattered homes and churches, provide persecuted Christians

with vital food and medicine. Whatever you can give will make a difference.

PRAY

Sign up for weekly emails with stories of courageous faith to inspire your prayers. Our website has a wealth of prayer resources for individuals and churches.

SPEAK OUT

Tell others what is happening. Raise your voice to your MP. Tell your church about their persecuted brothers and sisters using Open Doors resources for churches.

TAKE THE WORLD WATCH LIST TO YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our website has World Watch List resources for all ages.

WHAT IF? WORLD WATCH LIST SMALL GROUP GUIDE

What if your church had to meet in secret? What if you were put in prison for your faith? What if owning a Bible was forbidden? Explore the world of the persecuted church and rethink how we worship, pray, read the Bible and witness where we are. Six downloadable interactive small group sessions.

WORLD WATCH LIST CHILDREN'S MAP AND PRAYER PASSPORT

Grab your Prayer Passport and set off on a journey of prayer! Each week, colour in the flag of the country you are praying for and put a sticker on that country on the map. Perfect for families or children's groups.

WORLD WATCH LIST: YOUTH LEADER GUIDE AND YOUTH MAP

Two resources for youth leaders and young people exploring what persecution is, why and where it is happening and how our prayers can cross borders to bring light and hope in the darkness.

These are just some of the ways to take the World Watch List to your church. Why not book an Open Doors speaker for your church – whether in person or online? Or share a video in your church service. You can even download graphics to help your church or home group pray for the top 50 countries.

> Find out more at opendoorsuk.org



(PICTURED) Open Doors has so far provided 151 families in Uganda with Covid food aid

WHAT IF YOUR PRAYERS COULD CHANGE THINGS?

In the summer of 2020, Bakhit was abducted at gunpoint from his shop in Egypt.

Weeks passed without any news, but Bakhit's daughter Miriam continued to pray.

"I was crying and praying at the same time," she says. "I hadn't lost the hope of his

return, I had a strong feeling that he would return one day."

She was not alone. Open Doors supporters around the world joined her in prayer. Then, a full four months after the kidnapping,

her father was released! A little underweight but otherwise in good health.

Miriam says: "His return to our home has returned the joy that was absent from my heart. Life has come back and laughs at me again. Hopelessness has become hope, and sadness has turned into joy."

"I would like to thank everyone who prayed for the return of my father. May God bless all of you."

Your prayers bring comfort and hope to Christians enduring the most desperate circumstances. But more than that, they bring *life*. To pray with our persecuted brothers and sisters, then, is to stand with them in the power of the resurrection and to courageously affirm that the darkness cannot win.

PRAY WITH THE WORLD WATCH LIST

We know that many supporters use this book to pray daily for the persecuted church.

Here are some other ways – using stories of Christians featured in this booklet – to build prayer for our persecuted brothers and sisters into the activities of everyday life.

WASH AND PRAY

Caleb* (PICTURED), a Chinese church leader, describes underground house churches as "...water in a river. Whenever an obstacle is encountered, they will not fight it. Instead, they stream past the obstacles and change course."

Whenever you run water during the day, think of Caleb's phrase and pray that the church will 'flow' around any obstacles.

Perhaps you could place a mug or glass in the base of a bowl or sink as you fill it. Watch how the water flows around the object, then eventually submerges it. The power of God does likewise: nothing can stand against it. Pray that church leaders like Caleb would be filled with this same power.

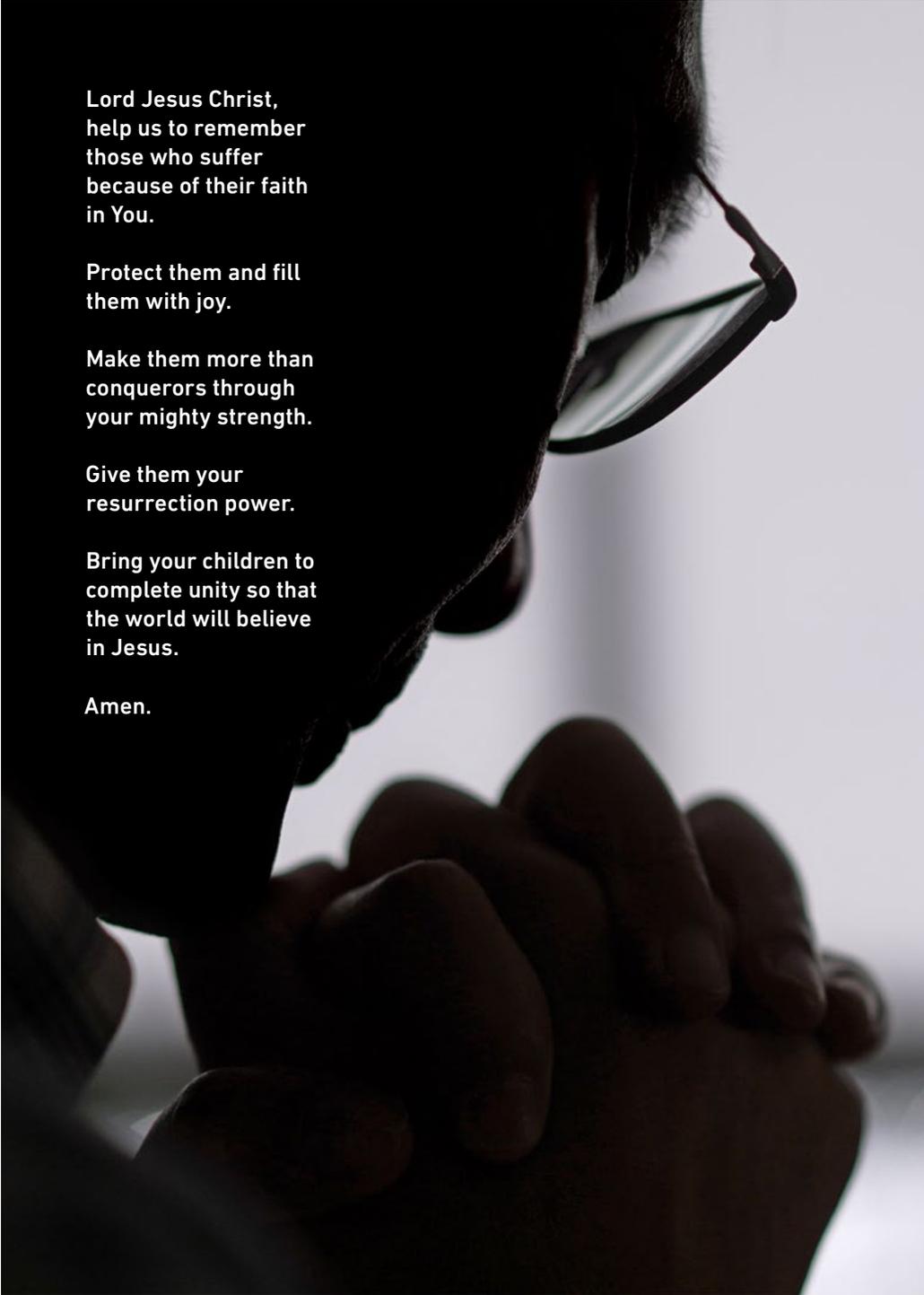
SIP AND PRAY

In Central Asia, secret Christians meet in coffee shops, and pray with their eyes open as if they were having a conversation.

Whenever you make yourself a drink during the day, remember Christians worshipping together in secret.

Make yourself a drink and quiet your heart before God. Say the following prayer out loud, pausing after each line to take a sip of your drink and think about persecuted Christians around the world.

*name changed for security reasons



Lord Jesus Christ,
help us to remember
those who suffer
because of their faith
in You.

Protect them and fill
them with joy.

Make them more than
conquerors through
your mighty strength.

Give them your
resurrection power.

Bring your children to
complete unity so that
the world will believe
in Jesus.

Amen.



BREATHE AND PRAY

In North Africa, Islèm* (PICTURED ABOVE), a believer from a Muslim background, says: "Jesus is like oxygen, because without oxygen you cannot breathe. If Jesus were not in my life, I wouldn't be here today, I would not be alive."

This simple breathing exercise will help you pray for believers like Islèm. (It's also good for reducing feelings of stress, anxiety and panic in your own body.)

1. Choose a country profile within this booklet and read the prayer points.
2. Note any key words or phrases from the prayer points that you are most drawn to. For example, from a prayer point that reads "Pray that Christians will find ways to share their faith despite the risks" you might pick out 'despite the risks'.
3. Close your eyes and welcome the presence of God.
4. As you breathe in, say to yourself, to the rhythm of your breath, "Lord Jesus, hear my prayer".
5. As you breathe out, say your key phrase.
6. Repeat for as long as you like.

OTHER RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PRAY

The prayer points for countries in this booklet are available on Power Point slides to help you pray in church services, and also on our larger Open Doors World Watch List maps – perfect for displaying on church noticeboards, in prayer rooms or at home.

Prayer News is a regularly refreshed collection of online videos which is great for prayer groups.

The Open Doors monthly **Prayer Diary** is packed with information and prayer points for every day of the year, while our **weekly email** features a different World Watch List country each week.

And don't forget – younger members of the church can use the **Children's Prayer Passport** or the **World Watch List Youth Leader Guide and Map**.

> You can find all these resources at opendoorsuk.org

*Name changed for security reasons



THE TOP 50 COUNTRIES

WHERE FOLLOWING JESUS COSTS THE MOST

**POPULATION**

25.8 million / 400,000 Christians

LEADER

Kim Jong-un

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)

Being discovered as a Christian is a death sentence in North Korea. You will be taken to a labour camp as a political criminal, if you aren't killed instantly. Few believers survive. And everyone in your family will share the same punishment.

Many Christians keep their faith entirely hidden, even from their families. Secret police carry out raids to identify Christians, and children are encouraged to tell their teachers about any sign of faith in their parents' home. A Christian is never safe.

Open Doors secret workers are keeping 90,000 North Korean believers alive with vital food and aid through networks in China, as well as providing shelter and training for North Korean refugees in China.

PRAY

- For strength and survival for North Korea's secret believers
- That God would sustain Christians in horrendous labour camps
- That God would tear down the strongholds of the ruling Kim dynasty and replace them with His kingdom.

The appalling inhumanity of North Korea's prison state



If you are discovered to be a Christian in North Korea, you will be arrested, interrogated and imprisoned. And you are unlikely to ever be released.

Open Doors estimates that tens of thousands of North Korean Christians are in prisons or labour camps for their faith.

RISING PRISONER NUMBERS

It emerged last year that since Kim Jong-un came to power in 2011, the number of prisoners in political prison camps run by the Ministry of State Security has increased substantially. In 2012, around 130,000 people were detained. As of March 2020, this is reported to have increased to around 160,000. The largest camp, Yodok – described by one Christian as 'a living mass grave' – holds around 55,000 detainees.

Prisoners include officials deemed to have performed poorly in

their jobs, people who've criticised the regime, and those suspected of engaging in anti-government activities.

Most Christians are sent to political prison camps. These camps tend to be Kwan-li-so – 'total control zones' – from which inmates will never be released. Prisoners are considered 'enemies of the state' and beyond the protection of the law. If not secretly executed, they endure lives of unending physical and psychological torture, hunger and labour. They may even be used for chemical tests.

These camps differ from other detention facilities in North Korea, such as the Kwo-hwa-so (or 'revolutionary zone') which are for 'less serious' crimes, where detainees receive an 'ideological education' while doing forced labour.

Wherever they are detained, Christian women are also at grave risk of sexual abuse. In a report released in 2019, the UN revealed that rape and other sexual

violence and torture against women in detention facilities is endemic. It added that guards are known to sexually abuse or exploit female prisoners.

'NOBODY SURVIVES THE KWAN-LI-SO'

"I saw moving, shapeless forms," recalls one Christian of her time in a Kwo-hwa-so. "It took me a moment to realise these were people. Some were bent over. Others missed an arm or a leg. I looked at my own arms and legs, thin like matches. In the camp, I worked 12 hours a day, sometimes more. Every day is just one long nightmare."

The believer, who was released after two years, discovered another Christian in the camp. "She was much braver than I was – she spoke to others about Christ." But it came at an awful cost. "One day a car came to pick her up. When I saw her leave, I knew they were taking her to a maximum-security prison, a Kwan-li-so. Nobody survives the Kwan-li-so."

02

AFGHANISTAN



POPULATION

38.1 million / A small number of Christians

LEADER

President Ashraf Ghani

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



It is impossible to live openly as a Christian in Afghanistan.

Leaving Islam is considered shameful, and Christian converts from a Muslim background face dire consequences if their new faith is discovered. Either they have to flee the country or they will be killed.

If a Christian's family discovers they have converted, their family, clan or tribe has to save its 'honour' by disowning the believer, or even killing them. Christians from a Muslim background can also be sectioned in a psychiatric hospital, because leaving Islam is considered a sign of insanity.

Open Doors raises prayer support for persecuted believers in Afghanistan.

PRAY

- That God would make 'seeing eyes blind' and that any persecutors looking for secret Afghan Christians would not discover them
- That despite their isolation, Afghan believers would be strengthened and encouraged in their faith
- That God would be at work, changing the hearts of Islamic extremists and turning them to Him.

03

SOMALIA



POPULATION

16.1 million / A few hundred Christians

LEADER

President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



It is impossible to publicly admit your Christian faith in Somalia.

Islam is considered a crucial part of Somali identity, and if any Somali is suspected of having converted to Christianity, they are in great danger. Members of their family, clan or community will harass, intimidate or even kill them.

Christians are also in danger from the Muslim extremists al-Shabaab, who consider Christians from a Muslim background a 'high-value target'. They often execute believers on the spot, when discovered.

Open Doors supports Somali believers across the Horn of Africa with discipleship support, literature distribution and community development, as well as broadcasting radio programmes into the country.

PRAY

- That the families of those murdered for their faith will receive the comfort of their Heavenly Father
- For a strong church to grow among Somali people, relying on Jesus
- For those who kill Christians to be convicted with the fear of the Lord.

04

LIBYA



POPULATION

6.7 million / 34,500 Christians

LEADER

Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj

PERSECUTION SCORE (+2)



There is no freedom of speech, no freedom of religion, and no possibility of public church life in Libya.

Though there are around 34,500 Christians in the country, only a tiny number (approximately 150) are Libyan – the majority are migrant workers.

Libyan Christians from a Muslim background face violent and intense pressure from their family and the wider community to renounce their faith. They are also vulnerable to abduction, murder or sexual assault by Islamic militant groups and organised crime groups.

In cooperation with local partners and churches, Open Doors supports the church in North Africa through training, literature distribution, socio-economic development and advocacy.

PRAY

- For Libyan Christians under immense pressure to know God's peace
- That new and isolated believers will find others to share with and learn from
- For those in power in Libya. Pray for peace and stability, and for an end to the proxy civil war.

05

PAKISTAN



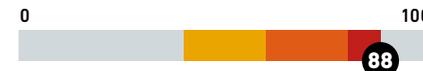
POPULATION

208.3 million / 4.1 million Christians

LEADER

Prime Minister Imran Khan

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



Christians in Pakistan face extreme persecution in every area of their lives.

Believers who have converted from Islam face the greatest persecution, but all Christians are considered second-class citizens in this strongly Islamic country. They are given jobs perceived as dishonourable, and can be victims of bonded labour.

Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws are used to target Christians, and Islamic extremist groups vehemently 'defend' these laws, including attacking or killing those believed to have contravened them. Christian girls are at risk of abduction and rape, and are often forced to marry their attackers and coerced into converting to Islam.

Open Doors raises prayer support for persecuted believers in Pakistan.

PRAY

- For Pakistani Christians to have courage to speak about their faith
- For protection over Pakistan's churches, especially around Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter
- For God's strength for Christian girls who have been abducted and forced to convert and marry.

What if your church had to meet in secret?

Illustrative image of a believer in the Horn of Africa

In many of the countries in the Open Doors World Watch List Top 50, Christians have to worship in secret.

They meet in houses or apartments. They gather on remote mountainsides, or deep in the jungle. They disguise their meetings, so that services look like simple meals or baptisms look like swimming parties.

Their courage and ingenuity are beyond question, but the pressure is intense. For secret Christians in Eritrea, for example, there is no let up. At school their children need to be careful what they say. And at home neighbours are always on the alert for any signs of secret gatherings.

“NO ONE, NOT EVEN THE GOVERNMENT, CAN BLOCK THE GOSPEL.”

“Christians continue to receive teaching and pray together,” says Eyal*, an

Eritrean underground church leader. “It is very difficult. We are watched all the time. Believers cannot move around freely and this makes outreach very difficult. But as hard as it is, we have to continue.”

In the background, behind every secret church meeting in Eritrea is the fear of a police raid. Musse* is a church leader who was sent to an Eritrean prison – yet even there he found a way to meet.

“In prison, one of my main purposes as a Christian was to evangelise,” he says. “You continue teaching. Of course, it is forbidden to do it openly, but we did it at night-time when everybody was asleep. We even had Bible portions we could study in secret.”

He found people desperate for hope. “Those people loved what we taught and shared. Some of them even tried to cover for us. We saw many conversions. The gospel can’t be chained.”



However, when pastors are arrested, secret churches are often left without leaders. That’s why Open Doors underground networks help train church leaders, as well as providing smuggled Bibles and Christian literature, and digital teaching and discipleship resources.

And, amazingly, the church is still alive, still witnessing, still growing. In countries like Libya, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea even, the church is standing strong.

“Thank you for your help to us, thank you for praying, thank you for being on our side,” says Eyal. “With the help of God and because of you, we are doing our Christian activities. We are coming together, meeting and helping people in different ways.

“No one, not even the government, can block the gospel.”

*Names changed for security reasons

WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can help secret believers throughout the world. Go to opendoorsuk.org/whatif to:

- > Watch videos featuring secret believers from around the world, including Bangladesh, North Africa and Colombia
- > Download the ‘What If?’ small group resource and share it with your church or small group. Available end of February 2021.

06

ERITREA



POPULATION

5.4 million / 2.6 million Christians

LEADER

President Isaias Afwerki

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Christians from non-traditional denominations face the harshest persecution in Eritrea, both from the government and from the Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC) - the only Christian denomination recognised by the government, controlled by those in power.

Government security forces monitor phone calls, scrutinise activity and conduct countless raids that target Christians, seize Christian materials and damage house churches. Christians can be arrested and imprisoned in appallingly inhumane conditions, without trial. Their loved ones often don't know if they are still alive.

Open Doors works through local church partners in Eritrea to provide practical assistance to persecuted Christians, support Bible and discipleship training, and raise awareness and prayer.

PRAY

- For believers in prison, and their families, to know God's provision
- That church leaders would have wisdom to engage their government on the issue of religious freedom
- That believers would remain steadfast in their faith.

07

YEMEN



POPULATION

30.2 million / A few thousand Christians

LEADER

President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi

PERSECUTION SCORE (+2)



Christians in Yemen usually keep their faith secret; if they are discovered they could face the death penalty.

Leaving Islam is forbidden, and all Yemenis are considered Muslims by the state. Islamic militant groups threaten Christians from a Muslim background with death, and tribes may kill or banish anybody converting to Christianity.

The civil war and pandemic are impacting all citizens, but Christians are particularly vulnerable as relief aid is mostly distributed through local Islamic leaders and mosques. They often discriminate against anyone not considered a devout Muslim.

Open Doors supports the body of Christ on the Arabian Peninsula through organising prayer, distributing Scripture resources and training believers and pastors.

PRAY

- That secret believers will have wisdom and discernment as they support one another
- For those taking great risks to provide seekers and new believers with discipleship support
- That peace will return to Yemen.

08

IRAN



POPULATION

83.5 million / 800,000 Christians

LEADER

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Secret churches are often raided, and their leaders and members arrested and given long prison sentences for 'crimes against national security'.

The Iranian government sees the conversion of Muslims to Christianity as an attempt by Western countries to undermine the Islamic rule of Iran. Christians from Muslim backgrounds are persecuted the most, primarily by the government, but also by their families and communities. Covid-19 has hit the country hard, and many believers are in desperate need of food and aid.

Open Doors supports the church in Iran through partners with online ministry, multimedia productions and advocacy. Special attention is given to Christian leaders, women, former prisoners, youth and children.

PRAY

- For Christians in isolation to have access to online resources and other believers
- That Christians imprisoned for their faith will know God's comfort
- That the Iranian government would listen to those who advocate for the rights of Christians.

09

NIGERIA



POPULATION

206.2 million / 95.4 million Christians

LEADER

President Muhammadu Buhari

PERSECUTION SCORE (+5)



More Christians are murdered for their faith in Nigeria than in any other country, and violence is increasing.

Attacks by Islamic extremist groups are common in the north and middle belt of the country, and are becoming more common further south.

In these attacks, Christians are often murdered or have their property and means of livelihood destroyed. Christian women are often abducted and raped by these militant groups, and sometimes forced to marry Muslims.

Open Doors partners with the local church to strengthen persecuted believers in Nigeria, through discipleship and persecution survival training, education and community development projects, emergency relief and trauma care.

PRAY

- For those who are mourning for loved ones, to know God's peace
- That God would lovingly heal women and girls suffering trauma after sexual attacks
- That Nigeria's government will take decisive action to protect all citizens in the country.



What if you were put in prison for your faith?

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have experienced a little of what it is like to be confined. But for some persecuted Christians, their 'lockdown' is much more severe and long-lasting. So how do you cope if you are labelled as an enemy of the government and thrown in jail? How do you live out your faith in solitary confinement, where it's just you and God?

Mojtaba from Iran (PICTURED) faced that challenge. Arrested for leading a secret house church, he was incarcerated in the notorious Evin Prison for over three years. In the darkness of his prison cell, God was present and at work, but Mojtaba didn't see it that way at first.



"I had this feeling that, if I am in prison now, it's about my sin, it's about my faults, it's about what I did bad and God is punishing me. One day, God spoke to me and I felt it strongly: 'Mojtaba, stop being selfish. If you are in prison now, it's not about you, it's about me. Look around yourself.'

"And I looked around myself. And I saw people, poor people. Many people that had bad crimes, many bad experiences in their lives. I saw the doors, the huge gates of the prison and the big locks on the doors and how secure it is. No one can enter the prison and start to evangelise.

"But it was an inner voice that said, 'Look, I took you through these doors and gates here to evangelise people, to talk to people about Jesus.'"

Mojtaba saw the incredible opportunity God had placed before him. He began talking about his faith with other prisoners. Some of them accepted Jesus.

The next difficulty was getting a Bible. How could anyone bring one into the prison? But God had the most unusual solution...

A kindly imam came to the prison every day, so Mojtaba asked him for a Bible. Bringing in a whole Bible was too dangerous, but he brought in portions of the Bible in English. With the help of a friend, Mojtaba translated them, and shared them with other prisoners. Through these smuggled snippets of Scripture, more and more prisoners gave their lives to Jesus.

"I never prayed for God to release me from prison," Mojtaba says. "It doesn't matter what situation I'm in, I can work in God's kingdom wherever God places me. It doesn't matter if it is in prison or out of prison. Because persecution will take the gospel to the places where nothing else can do it."

WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can help believers around the world who are imprisoned for their faith. Go to opendoorsuk.org/whatif to:

- > Watch an interview with Mojtaba and hear more of his remarkable story
- > Download the 'What If?' small group resource and share it with your church or small group. Available end of February 2021.

10 INDIA



POPULATION

1.4 billion / 67.4 million Christians

LEADER

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



Hindu extremists believe that all Indians should be Hindus, and that the country should be rid of Christians.

Extremists particularly target Christians from a Hindu background. These believers are often physically attacked and sometimes killed, as well as being under constant pressure from their family and community to return to Hinduism.

Anti-conversion laws (currently in nine states, with more considering adoption) are also abused to intimidate Christians.

Open Doors works through local church partners to strengthen the Indian church through providing emergency aid, persecution survival training, Bibles, livelihood and community development, advocacy support and legal training.

PRAY

- Praise God that many are coming to faith in India through miraculous healings and courageous witness
- For protection from attack for Indian believers, particularly new Christians
- For courage, wisdom and protection for Open Doors partners helping those most in need.

11 IRAQ



POPULATION

41.5 million / 175,000 Christians

LEADER

President Barham Salih

PERSECUTION SCORE (+6)



Iraq saw recurrent violent protests last year, and the instability is a catalyst for the increase in persecution of Christians.

Islamic extremists remain active, attacking and kidnapping Christians. While so-called Islamic State no longer has a stranglehold on the country, their notoriously cruel treatment of Christians, particularly women and girls, has left a legacy of trauma. Christians from a Muslim background often keep their faith secret, because of the pressure and threats they are likely to face from family and community.

Open Doors works through local partners to support Christians in Iraq through Bible distribution, discipleship training, emergency relief, microloans and livelihood projects to build self-reliance.

PRAY

- For an end to the violence, and for God's peace to fill the hearts of Christians - and those who persecute them
- For a holy thirst and hunger among the people of Iraq for God
- For courageous Open Doors partners serving the Iraqi church.

12 SYRIA



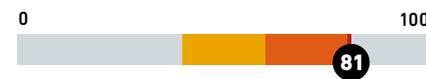
POPULATION

18.9 million / 677,000 Christians

LEADER

President Bashar al-Assad

PERSECUTION SCORE (-1)



A decade of civil war has made Syria a breeding ground for the persecution of Christians.

In areas controlled by Islamic extremist groups, public expressions of Christianity are banned and most churches have been seized or destroyed. Islamic dissidents are still active and violent attacks continue, while Covid-19 has exacerbated many vulnerabilities.

Christians from a Muslim background are vulnerable to pressure from their families and communities, who perceive conversion from Islam as dishonourable.

Open Doors works through partners in Syria to strengthen the church through Bible distribution, discipleship and leadership training, trauma counselling, relief aid and rehabilitation programmes for internally displaced Christians.

PRAY

- That Syrian Christians will be able to return to their homes, communities and livelihoods
- For Syrian believers to shine the light of hope in their communities
- For Open Doors partners reaching those in urgent need.



**Help and hope
for the Middle East**

Open Doors partners in Syria and Iraq had intended to start scaling back emergency food distribution in 2020. The focus was going to be on rebuilding and activities that promote self-sufficiency. Coronavirus changed all that.

But your gifts and prayers during Open Doors' seven-year *Hope for the Middle East* campaign, and God's faithfulness over many years, means that local partners have been able to escalate plans to meet the need caused by Covid-19.

Pastor George (PICTURED ABOVE) – in Qamishli, Syria – is one of many Open Doors partners helping their communities, distributing aid and offering fellowship: "When we saw the increased need, we restarted relief distribution," he says. "Our church saw that now was a time to stand by the people, support them and show Jesus' love in difficult times."

Please keep praying for your family in the Middle East – that they can be the light of hope to their friends, families and neighbours.

13

SUDAN



POPULATION

43.5 million / 1.97 million Christians

LEADER

Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan

PERSECUTION SCORE (-6)



Sudan has taken significant steps towards religious freedom – but the battle is not over.

Thirty years of Islamic law are coming to an end, and Christians from a Muslim background no longer face the death penalty for leaving Islam. But stigma doesn't end overnight, and these believers still face extreme persecution from their families and communities. They may be attacked, ostracised or discriminated against if their faith is discovered. Many still keep their faith secret, for the safety of them and their family.

Open Doors partners with the local church in Sudan to provide theological and discipleship training, persecution survival training, trauma care, and community development and income-generating projects.

PRAY

- Praise God for the steps towards religious freedom in Sudan!
- That Christians from a Muslim background would be able to withstand opposition
- That Christians would have opportunities to show the love of Jesus to their communities.



Sudan makes huge leap forward towards religious freedom

Praise God, 2020 was a year of great news for Christians in Sudan.

First, in July, the transitional government announced they would end the death penalty for people who leave Islam, as well as other reforms that repealed laws that violated human rights. Then, in September, the government agreed to remove Islam as its state religion – after 30 years of Islamic law. Most recently, Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Sudan have signed a declaration, joining forces to promote religious freedom.

This is an extraordinary and very welcome change for Sudan, which falls several places in the World Watch List (from seven to 13). Thank you so much for faithfully praying for your brothers and sisters in Sudan for so many years. There is still much to be done to tackle stigma and persecution from communities and families, but 2020 saw a huge leap forward for Sudan. Hallelujah!

14

SAUDI ARABIA



POPULATION

34.7 million / 1.2 million Christians

LEADER

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud

PERSECUTION SCORE (-1)



Christians living in Saudi Arabia – where the legal system is based on Islamic law – risk severe opposition, even death. Many hide their faith.

The few Saudi Christians from a Muslim background face enormous pressure, especially from their families. This is most keenly felt by women, reflecting their low status; consequences can include forced marriage, sexual abuse and house-arrest. The death penalty for leaving Islam remains in force. Expatriate Christians are wary of evangelising or gathering for fellowship as this could lead to detention and deportation.

Open Doors supports the body of Christ on the Arabian Peninsula through organising prayer, distributing Scripture resources and training believers and pastors.

PRAY

- Ask God to continue to use the internet to strengthen believers and grow the Saudi church
- That the Lord will reveal Himself to both Christians and non-Christians in dreams and visions
- For wisdom and protection for all Christians as they follow Jesus.

15

MALDIVES



POPULATION

459,000 / A small number of Christians

LEADER

President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih

PERSECUTION SCORE (-1)



The Maldives are viewed by many as a luxury holiday destination, but behind this lies an oppressive regime relentlessly determined to keep the islands 100 per cent Muslim.

Believers must follow Jesus in secret as conversion to Christianity can result in harassment, violence or imprisonment. Being a Christian is so dangerous that family members may not even know of each other's faith.

Expatriate Christians, the majority of whom work in tourism and come from India and Sri Lanka, are also closely watched, making Christian fellowship very difficult.

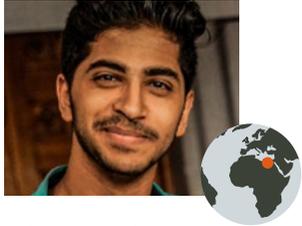
Open Doors raises prayer support for believers in the Maldives.

PRAY

- Ask the Lord to provide opportunities for believers to gather safely to worship
- That God will use the Bible to powerfully strengthen, encourage and nurture believers
- That attitudes among government officials, especially President Solih, will soften towards Christians and other religious minorities.

16

EGYPT



POPULATION

102.9 million / 16.3 million Christians

LEADER

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

PERSECUTION SCORE (-1)



Christian persecution happens mostly at the community level, especially in Upper Egypt where Islamist Salafist movements strongly influence rural communities.

Incidents include false accusations, abduction of women and mob violence. The lack of serious law enforcement and the unwillingness of local authorities to protect Christians adds to their vulnerability. Christians from a Muslim background face enormous pressure from their families to return to Islam. Churches also face state restrictions and communal hostility if they try to build new churches or run social services.

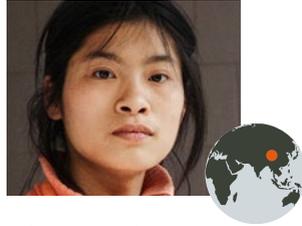
Open Doors works through partners in Egypt to support the church with literacy training, education, advocacy support, medical care and youth, family and women's ministry.

PRAY

- For the safety for all Christians and release for those held captive
- That local police forces will bring about justice for those wrongly accused or attacked
- That Christians will have courage to shine the light of Christ in their communities.

17

CHINA



POPULATION

1.4 billion / 96.7 million Christians

LEADER

President Xi Jinping

PERSECUTION SCORE (+4)



The church in China continues to enjoy extraordinary growth. However, recent years have seen an increase in persecution.

New restrictions on the internet, social media and non-governmental organisations – along with a revision of religious regulations in 2018 – seriously limit freedom. Churches are monitored and the online sale of Bibles is banned. Converts from Islam or Buddhism whose new faith is discovered are likely to face threats and attack to lure them back.

Open Doors supports believers in China with persecution survival training, and by providing contextualised Christian literature to believers from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds.

PRAY

- For wisdom for church leaders as they lead congregations in light of increased restrictions
- That those who have left their former religion to follow Jesus will be strengthened in their faith and empowered in their witness
- Ask the Lord to open the eyes of those in authority to the unequalled power and beauty of the gospel.



**Surveillance,
suffocation
and sinicisation**

This year, the Chinese Communist Party turns 100. But while the nation celebrates, Christians are being increasingly crushed under the weight of increased regulation and oppressive surveillance.

In Shandong province, a woman took her child to a state-affiliated church. This was captured on CCTV and the church was reprimanded because it's illegal for under-18s to attend a religious activity. Across China, this is quickly becoming the 'new normal': law and surveillance are combining to restrict Christian freedom.

The ban on children attending religious activities is linked to a revision of religious regulations introduced in February 2018, aimed at the 'sinicisation' of churches – making them more 'Chinese'. The laws, enhanced again last year, are being implemented with relentless determination. One church registered to avoid closure, only to find that a submitted list of names was used to threaten and insult older believers. The question now asked in churches is: to register or not?

Technology is adding to the suffocation. There are an estimated 570 million CCTV cameras in China. Many have facial recognition software. This is linked to a 'Social Credit System' which also monitors 'loyalty' and party dissension. Such cameras are in use in some religious-approved venues. Worryingly, social credit is already being linked to religion.

This year could see the state tighten its grip even further. Believers are being forced to retreat or react. While the older generation is better placed to adapt, because they've done so before, younger believers are struggling to get accustomed to the 'new normal'.

In its centenary year, the Chinese Communist Party wants to suck the life out of the country's Christian witness. Believers are feeling the squeeze and desperately need your prayers. But there is hope. Every time a wave of persecution has come against the Chinese church, God has breathed fresh life into it. He'll do so again.

What if

spies were watching your every move?



In China, they have a saying: “A crafty hare has three burrows.” In other words, if you are going to be hunted, you had better have several places to hide.

“The climate for Christians in China is like going through a bitter winter,” says Xiang*, who leads a house church in China. “The government wanted to install facial recognition cameras in our sanctuary,” he says. “Of course, we refused their unreasonable demand. Then they installed cameras in the lobby of our church building.”

Data from these cameras is used to target church members. “They will intimidate them with their jobs, their housing and their children’s education to prevent them from going to church.”

And so the church has been forced, like the hare, to find some new burrows.

Some churches have continued to meet – and are even using the opportunity to preach to those who are watching the surveillance footage! Others have split into smaller groups, meeting in believers’ homes. To avoid detection, they keep moving from venue to venue.

Aynur* is a Chinese believer from a Muslim background who leads a house church of five people in her apartment. They don’t know any other Christians in the city, but they meet faithfully every week, and they are growing. Recently they baptised a new believer in a tub of water in the apartment.

“I want us to grow in the faith and I want to share the gospel with others,” Aynur said. “It is very hard to stay positive, especially with all the surveillance, but today has given me hope.”

Around the world, Open Doors partners help many churches to dig new ‘burrows’ in order to escape the hunters. We

provide training to help them prepare for persecution, and online and digital resources so that they can worship anywhere.

Our persecuted family show us that, whatever shape our churches take, we can still witness to others. Many believers meet in remote places. Sometimes, though, they hide in plain sight: in Central Asia, church services are disguised as meals, or they meet in coffee shops and pray with eyes open, as if they were having a conversation.

“ IT IS VERY HARD TO STAY POSITIVE, ESPECIALLY WITH ALL THE SURVEILLANCE, BUT TODAY HAS GIVEN ME HOPE”

As Caleb*, another Chinese church leader, says: “Many house churches are like water in a river. Whenever an obstacle is encountered, they will not fight it. Instead, they stream past the obstacles and change course, but still continue to flow towards the big ocean, which is the Great Commission. The ultimate destination never changes. It is just the way we do church is adjusted or modified, to sustain the continuous growth of the kingdom against all odds.”
*names changed for security reasons

WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can help believers under surveillance throughout the world. Go to opendoorsuk.org/whatif to:

- > Watch an interview with Xiang and find out how you can support Christians in China
- > Download the ‘What If?’ small group resource and share it with your church or small group. Available end of February 2021.

18

MYANMAR



POPULATION

54.8 million / 4.4 million Christians

LEADER

President U Win Myint

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Buddhist nationalism is especially strong in Myanmar and drives much of the persecution of Christians.

Converts face persecution from their families and communities for 'betraying' the system of belief they grew up in. Non-traditional church groups experience opposition too, especially those known for evangelistic activity. Myanmar's long-running civil war affects, among others, the predominantly Christian states of Kachin, Karen and Shan. Believers are vulnerable to persecution by insurgent groups and the army.

Working with local partners, Open Doors strengthens persecuted believers in Myanmar through literature distribution, discipleship and leadership programmes, livelihood support, family and marriage enrichment, and children and youth training.

PRAY

- For those who have left Buddhism to follow Jesus
- That all believers in Myanmar will enjoy fellowship with other Christians
- That the Lord will bring a peaceful resolution to the ongoing civil war.

19

VIETNAM



POPULATION

98.4 million / 8.9 million Christians

LEADER

President Nguyen Phu Trong

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



In Buddhist-majority Vietnam, the most intense persecution is reserved for non-traditional Protestants and converts from indigenous religions.

Many belong to the country's ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, and face social exclusion, discrimination and attacks. Homes are sometimes destroyed, forcing Christians to leave their villages. However, there is pressure on all Christians, particularly in light of strong Communist rhetoric. New regulations on religion, implemented in 2018, and tighter regulations on online communication have limited Christian activity.

Open Doors partners support the Vietnamese church by providing Christian literature, discipleship training, socio-economic development projects, advocacy and relief aid.

PRAY

- That the suspicion aimed towards Christians will be replaced with an appreciation of their value to society
- That believers under pressure to deny their faith will have strength
- That young Christians will grow in their understanding of the Bible, giving them a foundation for life.

20

MAURITANIA



POPULATION

4.7 million / 11,000 Christians

LEADER

President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani

PERSECUTION SCORE (+3)



The restrictive environment in Mauritania makes it impossible for Christians to gather openly.

In Mauritania's tribal culture, leaving Islam is not only seen as a religious betrayal, but a betrayal of the tribe and family. Those who convert to Christianity could face prosecution since it is illegal to leave Islam. Men will lose their status in society and may be forced to leave home, while women could be forcibly married to a Muslim or subject to excruciating servitude. Foreign nationals can also face prosecution if they openly express their faith.

Open Doors supports the church in North Africa with Christian literature, training, socio-economic development projects and advocacy support.

PRAY

- That the law will change so it is no longer illegal to leave Islam
- For strength and protection for all converts, and that families will increasingly respect the decision of any member to follow Jesus
- For opportunities for believers to share the gospel safely, despite opposition.

21

UZBEKISTAN



POPULATION

33.2 million / 345,000 Christians

LEADER

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev

PERSECUTION SCORE (-2)



No religious activities beyond state-run and state-controlled institutions are allowed in this highly authoritarian state.

Church leaders are especially targeted for persecution; they can be fined, detained or put under house arrest for their involvement in Christian activities.

Christians from Muslim backgrounds bear the brunt of persecution. They face considerable pressure from family, friends and communities, who see them as traitors. The risk is heightened for women who, given societal expectations around submission, are effectively not allowed to choose their own religion.

Open Doors strengthens persecuted Christians in Central Asia by providing Bibles and Christian literature, training, socio-economic projects and practical aid.

PRAY

- That the new leadership of President Mirziyoyev will bring welcome changes
- Ask the Holy Spirit to encourage, equip and empower believers
- For ongoing protection and nourishment of church leaders, who can come under immense pressure.

What if

your family threw you out
because of your faith?

When Aziz* became a Christian in Uzbekistan, he knew that he could be arrested or fined for taking part in 'illegal' religious activities.

But the biggest threat came from his own family.

In Uzbekistan, converting to Christianity from Islam is seen as an act of betrayal. It can lead to expulsion from your family, and even violence.

"After my conversion to Christianity, my brother wanted to have nothing to do with me," says Aziz. "He came to my house one time, in the middle of the night, while my wife, children and I were sleeping. And he drove straight into our house with a small truck."

After that, they had no contact for 20 years. But his brother's rage didn't diminish.

"My nephew, the son of my oldest brother, became a believer. He was so afraid of how his father would respond that he came to my house with his wife and children.

"Not long after, I got a phone call: 'If my son is in your house, I will set your house on fire, with everything and everyone in it!'

"My nephew and his family fled to another place. But one day, his father caught him and wanted to kill his son. He didn't succeed, but he beat him up terribly."

For believers in Central Asia – as in so many places on the World Watch List – family means everything. Your family provides you with a job and looks after you when you are sick. So to lose your family is to lose a key part of your identity.

That's why new believers need the protection and help of a new family. Thanks to the support of their wider church family

around the world, Open Doors partners are strengthening persecuted Christians like Aziz with medical care and emergency relief aid and, crucially, by helping them to find new jobs and start new businesses.

Thanks to your support, the church in Central Asia is growing.

Aziz's faithful witness has brought reconciliation. About a year ago, his brother sent him some gifts, including four loaves of bread. It was a message: giving someone bread in Uzbekistan is a sign of being connected.

“AFTER MY CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY, MY BROTHER WANTED TO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH ME”

Aziz was able to re-connect with his brother, who was very unwell. "I visited him and asked if I could pray for him. And for the very first time I was able to tell him about the gospel.

"The heart of my oldest brother is becoming softer and softer. And he is in contact again both with his son and me."

*Name changed for security reasons

WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can help believers around the world who are exiled from their families. Go to opendoorsuk.org/whatif to:

- > Find out how you can support Christians in Central Asia
- > Download the 'What If?' small group resource, and share it with your church or small group. Available end of February 2021.

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-10 (ESV)



(PICTURED) Last year, Open Doors supporters were able to stand with their persecuted family across the world through prayers and gifts - including these believers in Bangladesh. As well as persecution from their community for their faith, they faced Covid-19 restrictions and the deadly Cyclone Amphan.

22

LAOS



POPULATION

7.1 million / 199,000 Christians

LEADER

President Bounnhang Vorachit

PERSECUTION SCORE (-1)



Christian activities are heavily monitored by the Communist authorities, including those of registered churches.

House churches meet underground as they are considered 'illegal gatherings'. Life is especially difficult for Christian converts, who face persecution from their families and local authorities; repercussions can include damage to property and confiscation of possessions, and women are vulnerable to rape and sexual harassment. Church leaders can face imprisonment and fines, putting financial pressure on families and churches.

Open Doors partners strengthen persecuted believers in Laos by providing Christian materials, leadership training, socio-economic development programmes, advocacy support and emergency relief.

PRAY

- Give thanks for the growth of the church in Laos
- That believers under pressure to recant their faith will have strength to stand firm
- Ask God to meet the needs of families and churches of pastors imprisoned for their faith.

23

TURKMENISTAN



POPULATION

6 million / 68,000 Christians

LEADER

President Kurbanguly Berdimukhamedov

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



Persecution of Christians in this repressive Islamic state comes largely from the government and society.

The government imposes many restrictions on church life. Unregistered churches are highly susceptible to police raids, threats, arrests and fines. Even registered churches such as Russian Orthodox churches may have their services monitored. The printing or importing of Christian materials is also restricted. Believers who come from Muslim backgrounds experience intense pressure from families, friends and neighbours to deny their faith.

Open Doors strengthens persecuted Christians in Central Asia by providing Bibles and Christian literature, training, socio-economic projects and practical aid.

PRAY

- For an easing of heavy restrictions on churches
- For the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of church leaders
- That believers from Muslim backgrounds will be protected, and that their communities will be powerfully impacted by their witness.

24

ALGERIA



POPULATION

43.3 million / 129,000 Christians

LEADER

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune

PERSECUTION SCORE (-3)



Most Christians in Algeria are converts from Islam. They are at risk of persecution not just from their extended family, but from the wider community.

This can involve harassment, beatings, threats and imprisonment. Those living in the rural and religiously more conservative areas are particularly exposed to danger. Laws regulating non-Muslim worship prohibit anything that would 'shake the faith of a Muslim'. In the past three years, 13 churches have been closed by the authorities.

In cooperation with local partners, Open Doors supports the church in North Africa through training, literature distribution and advocacy support.

PRAY

- That all recently closed churches will reopen, and the 2006 law regulating worship will be repealed
- That converts will be connected to a community of Christians to support and build them up
- For improved relationships between Christians and local leaders, which will inspire greater respect among communities towards Christianity.

Texting the good news

Christians in North Africa – apart from Egypt – are a tiny minority. “More than 99 per cent of the population is Muslim,” says Daniel* of his country.

There are only 20 Christians in his city. They meet secretly in homes, or in cafés as groups of two or three. Subjects for discussion are arranged by text message. Prayer looks like normal conversation. “We won’t show that we are Christians when we’re in a café.”

But because of Covid, even undercover meetings have become impossible. So during lockdown, Open Doors partners have increased the use of text messaging and social media.

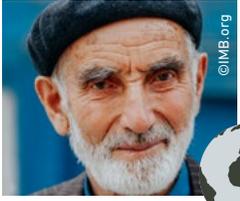
In another country, Mariam* and her team started providing daily devotionals. Subscribers receive an audio message with Bible verses, a reflection and a prayer.

“I saw a lot of people on social media with anxiety because of the virus,” says Mariam. “We try to help people discover that God loves them and that it is never too late to start having a relationship with God. Yes, it is a big crisis and it is normal to be afraid. But we want to give people hope.”

*Names changed for security reasons

25

TURKEY



POPULATION

83.8 million / 171,000 Christians

LEADER

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

PERSECUTION SCORE (+11)



Religious nationalism is growing in Turkey, creating an increasingly stifling atmosphere and putting Christians under enormous pressure.

2020 saw a clear increase in reported violence. Christians must take great care in sharing their faith and some believers hide their conversion. Converting to Christianity from Islam is not illegal but converts often face opposition from their family and community, which can lead to divorce or disinheritance. Christians have limited access to state employment and experience discrimination in the private sector. A number of foreign Christians have been told to leave Turkey or prevented from re-entering the country.

Open Doors raises prayer support for believers in Turkey.

PRAY

- That the prevailing attitude of suspicion towards Christianity will change
- That foreign Christians will be shown favour in their residency applications and appeals against residency bans
- That those under pressure for their faith in Jesus will stand firm and grow in their love for Him.



Turkey flexes its muscles

In the summer of 2020, two of Turkey's historic monuments with a rich, Christian history – the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, and the former Church of the Holy Saviour in Chora – were repurposed from museums to mosques. These events have only reinforced concerns among Christians over the Islamic and nationalistic direction in which the country is moving under the country's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Turkey is one of the high risers on this year's World Watch List, jumping 11 places to number 25. In its 2020 report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom stated that '...religious freedom conditions in Turkey remained worrisome, with the perpetuation of restrictive and intrusive governmental policies on religious practice and a marked increase in incidents of vandalism and societal violence against religious minorities'.

But Turkey is also flexing its muscles beyond its own borders. In October 2019 hundreds of Christians in Syria were forced to flee when the Turkish military attacked their homes. Recently Turkey has also backed Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia over the largely Christian region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

26

TUNISIA



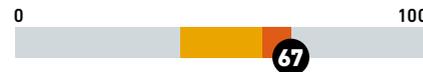
POPULATION

11.9 million / 23,100 Christians

LEADER

Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi

PERSECUTION SCORE (+3)



Christians who've converted from Islam are most vulnerable to persecution – often from their own family members and surrounding society.

The hostility and pressure they face make it dangerous to share their faith with others. Men can face intimidation, ostracism, beatings and even death threats, whilst women are at risk of sexual harassment, domestic violence, expulsion from family and forced marriage.

Violent Islamic extremists are active in the border areas to the south. They will target any Christian, whether foreign or national, if the opportunity arises.

Open Doors works with local partners to support the church in North Africa through training, literature distribution and advocacy support.

PRAY

- That God will bring isolated believers together for fellowship
- That believers across Tunisia will be filled with renewed boldness and faith as they follow Jesus
- For female believers in Tunisia struggling with trauma, that God will heal, restore and encourage them.

27

MOROCCO



POPULATION

37 million / 31,500 Christians

LEADER

King Mohammed VI

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Converts to Christianity face opposition from family members, who do not want them to practise their new faith publicly.

Often, this means new Christians are not allowed to be baptised, marry a Christian or be buried in a church or Christian ceremony. They can lose their inheritance rights or even custody of their children. It is illegal to 'shake the faith of a Muslim' – which, in practice, means it's very difficult for Christians to share their faith. Christian advocates have been targeted for violent attack by Islamic extremists.

Open Doors works with local partners to support the church in North Africa through training, literature distribution, socio-economic development and advocacy support.

PRAY

- For unity between Moroccan believers who are scattered across the country
- For courage and protection for believers facing opposition from their family
- That Christians involved in social work will be a powerful testimony to God's care for the vulnerable.



What if owning a Bible were forbidden?

How many Bibles do you have in your house? One? Two? Five? Ten? In our society Bibles are easy to buy and read. But in other parts of the world, a Bible is a dangerous object.

Islèm* [PICTURED] is a secret believer in North Africa. She has to hide her faith. "My family still think that I am a Muslim," she says. Even her own father doesn't know she is a Christian, or that she owns – and reads – the Bible.

Islèm started exploring Christianity online. "I thought there were no Christians in North Africa. I thought I was the first person who might become a Christian in North Africa."

“TO ME, READING THE BIBLE WAS SIMILAR TO EATING, IT WAS A NEED.”

Eventually she contacted a pastor, who sent her a gift. "One day a Tunisian girl came together

with her brother to give me a Bible. She was sent by the pastor.

"I went to the Bible study group with them and that was the first time I was reading the Bible. And the pastor, who was explaining the verses, even showed me how to touch and hold the Bible."

The pastor was teaching on John 14:6 – 'I am the way, the truth, the life.' "I felt as if he was answering the questions I had," says Islèm. "On that day I became a believer."

For Islèm the Bible is not just a book: it is a source of life.

"To me, reading the Bible was similar to eating, it was a need. I wanted to read more and more."

All around the world there are believers who know exactly what she means.

Persecuted Christians don't just want the Bible: they need it. That's why they run such risks to obtain it. In the prisons of Eritrea and Iran, small portions of scripture are hidden, handed round and memorised. In North Korea, where owning a Bible means instant arrest, Bibles are buried to keep them hidden.

Wherever possible, Open Doors partners risk their lives to distribute scripture. In regions like Central Asia, for example, where owning or distributing scripture is a criminal offence, our partners work tirelessly to distribute smuggled Bibles.

Even where the books are supposedly available, the supply is controlled. In China, Bibles are officially only available from State-sanctioned church bookshops: they want to know who is consuming this dangerous substance.

Why? Because the Bible changes people. It is a book of life.

As Islèm says, "Before I knew Jesus, I had two choices: either this life or die. It is as if I was taken from the waste bin and was cleaned. I have changed and, despite some difficulties in my current life, I cannot leave Jesus."

"No matter what happens in my life, I can't leave Jesus."
*Name changed for security purposes

WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can help secret believers access the Bible. Go to opendoorsuk.org/whatif to:

- > Watch a video featuring Islèm and learn all about her amazing story
- > Download the 'What If?' small group resource and share it with your church or small group. Available end of February 2021.

28 MALI



POPULATION
20.3 million / 467,000 Christians

LEADER
Interim President Bah Ndaw

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



The coup of summer 2020 has exacerbated Mali's political instability, opening the door for Islamic extremists.

Extremists have also used the uncertainty of the pandemic to assert more control in some areas. As these groups often target Christians, this is a worrying trend. It remains to be seen what a change in leadership will mean for religious freedom. Believers from Muslim backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to pressure from their families. Christian missionaries operating in Mali live under the constant threat of abduction; some have been kidnapped by jihadists.

Open Doors works through local partners to strengthen the church in Mali with persecution survival training, economic empowerment projects and discipleship support for new believers.

PRAY

- For a new government who will fight for religious freedom and stability
- That God would soften the hearts of Islamic extremists
- That Christians exhausted by constant threats will be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

29 QATAR



POPULATION
2.8 million / 367,000 Christians

LEADER
Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Qatari Christians from a Muslim background face significant persecution, particularly from their families.

Most Christians in Qatar are migrant workers and are generally much freer to worship, but they can be deported if they tell Qatari Muslims about Jesus. Churches are often monitored and restricted to specific areas. Both indigenous and migrant converts risk discrimination, harassment and police monitoring. Moreover, conversion from Islam to another faith is not officially recognised and is likely to lead to legal problems.

Open Doors supports the body of Christ on the Arabian Peninsula through organising prayer, distributing Scripture resources, and training believers and pastors.

PRAY

- That Christians will meet those willing to hear the gospel
- For protection for Christian migrant workers facing abuse and discrimination by their employers
- That secret believers will be allowed by their family and community to worship freely.

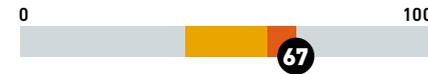
30 COLOMBIA



POPULATION
50.2 million / 47.7 million Christians

LEADER
President Ivan Duque

PERSECUTION SCORE (+5)



Colombia may be largely Christian, but persecution of believers is getting worse.

Church leaders are often targeted by guerrillas and drug cartels, and they face threats, kidnap or even murder. They are viewed as an obstacle by the guerrillas, because they speak out against crime and work to deter young people from joining gangs.

In indigenous communities, converts face persecution for leaving their traditional religion. They may be rejected, imprisoned, abused or have their property confiscated.

Open Doors strengthens the persecuted church in Colombia through Bible distribution, training, trauma care, relief aid, and education and safe houses for children.

PRAY

- For courage and protection for Christians living in areas controlled by guerrilla and criminal groups
- For grieving families of church leaders who have been killed, that they would be healed from trauma
- For Christians from indigenous backgrounds to be strong and bold in their faith.

31 BANGLADESH



POPULATION
169.8 million / 903,000 Christians

LEADER
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

PERSECUTION SCORE (+4)



Bangladeshi society is growing increasingly Islamic, with the government doing more to appease concerns from Muslim hardliners.

Islamic extremists pressure all groups of Christians and violence is increasing – a major reason that Bangladesh has risen eight places on the World Watch List. Converts from a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or ethnic/tribal background suffer the most severe restrictions, discrimination and abuse. They often gather in house churches or secret groups to avoid attack.

Open Doors works with local churches to strengthen persecuted believers in Bangladesh through training, Bible distribution, literacy and socio-economic development projects, and emergency aid.

PRAY

- That Christian converts will be protected from attacks
- For Rohingya Christians in Bangladesh's refugee camps, facing persecution for their ethnicity and faith
- For Open Doors partners supporting Christians who face discrimination in the distribution of Covid aid.

**POPULATION**

20.9 million / 5 million Christians

LEADER

President Roch Marc Kaboré

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)

Extremist attacks have driven followers of Jesus from their homes and villages, with many being forced into refugee camps.

This is particularly true in the north east of the country, where there are now no open churches. Violence has decreased slightly, but is far from over. Christians who have converted from Islam also face significant pressure and opposition from their families and communities. Families may reject Christian converts, many of whom choose to keep their new faith secret.

Open Doors works through local partners to strengthen Christians in Burkina Faso by providing trauma care, relief aid, persecution survival training and advocacy support.

PRAY

- Praise God that there have been fewer violent attacks and pray that this trend continues
- For Christians to receive grace so they can stand firm in their faith in the face of hostility
- That peace will return to the country so that believers can go back to their villages.



**Alarming rise
in violence in
sub-Saharan Africa**

It's a frightening statistic. Last year across sub-Saharan Africa, levels of violence against Christians were up to 30 per cent higher than in 2019. Unlike other parts of the world, which mostly saw a drop in violence against Christians during the pandemic, sub-Saharan Africa witnessed a spike in attacks – and there are no signs of it abating.

In a region characterised by poverty, corruption, fragile governments and weak security forces, Covid-19 only made things worse. Christians said that lockdown made them 'sitting targets'.

In Nigeria, hundreds of Christian-majority villages were attacked by militant Fulani herdsmen. Meanwhile, collaboration between Fulani militants, Boko Haram factions and criminal gangs continued in the north of the country, exploiting the government's diminishing control in the region.

In north Cameroon, Boko Haram and its splinter group, Islamic State of West Africa, reinforced their growing threat,

instigating some 400 violent attacks – a 90 per cent increase on the previous year.

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – part of the Sahel region, immediately south of the Sahara Desert – there were more than 85 attacks on places of education between January and July 2020.

In Burkina Faso – once a beacon of inter-religious harmony – Islamists also continued to target churches, including two separate attacks that killed 38 people. In neighbouring Mali, Western Christian hostages are still being held and killed.

Elsewhere, a group popularly called al Shabaab (different from the Somali group) wants to impose Sharia (Islamic law) across the poorly developed but mineral rich northern province of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. Since 2017, more than 1,150 people have been killed in 600 attacks. The group has also attacked Christian villages across the border in Tanzania.

Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a group called the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)

have burnt churches and attacked Christian-run schools and clinics. More than 1,000 civilians have been killed since the beginning of 2019.

It's a terrible catalogue of violence. But there is hope. Our brothers and sisters are determined to stay and witness to Christ. And thanks to your prayers and support, they have not been abandoned. In Nigeria alone 9,000 vulnerable Christians are being given food and supplies. While in Central African Republic, Open Doors partners delivered Covid relief aid to over 4,500 Christians including widows, orphans and other vulnerable believers.

So please remember our brothers and sisters in this region. Pray that governments will be able to exert control over militant groups. Pray for protection and strength for Christian communities. And give thanks that, despite their isolation and their vulnerability, they know that they are not alone.

(PICTURED ABOVE) Boko Haram burnt down the homes of Christians in this village in northern Cameroon

33

TAJIKISTAN



POPULATION

9.5 million / 66,300 Christians

LEADER

President Emomali Rahmon

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



It's common for churches to be raided by Tajik authorities, and for church members to be interrogated and even tortured.

Laws regulating religious activities are hard to adhere to, and police often use them to harass and pressure Christians – disrupting meetings and detaining believers. Church buildings are confiscated, pastors imprisoned and heavy fines imposed. Christians from a Muslim backgrounds bear the brunt of persecution from their families and communities, as well as the state.

Open Doors strengthens the persecuted church in Central Asia by providing Bibles and Christian literature, training, relief aid and socio-economic development projects.

PRAY

- For pastors and church leaders, especially those who are monitored and detained by the government
- For Christians from Muslim backgrounds facing severe pressure from their family and community – that they will know they are not alone
- For the government of Tajikistan - that God would soften their hearts towards Christians.

34

NEPAL



POPULATION

30.3 million / 1.3 million Christians

LEADER

Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli

PERSECUTION SCORE (+2)



Christians from Hindu backgrounds experience the most pressure in Nepal. They are viewed as deviating from the faith of their ancestors, and therefore breaking with their cultural identity.

Converts often experience pressure from family, friends, community and local authorities, and are viewed as second-class citizens. An anti-conversion law, used to target Christians, says that anyone who causes an individual to convert to a different religion can be imprisoned, fined or deported.

Open Doors works through local partners to strengthen Christians in Nepal by providing Bibles, training for Christians and church leaders, socio-economic aid and legal support.

PRAY

- That Christians will have wisdom to know how to share their faith safely
- For God's strength for Christian women facing persecution from family members, and that their families will come to know Jesus
- For protection and support for isolated and vulnerable believers in remote villages.

35

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC



POPULATION

4.9 million / 3.7 million Christians

LEADER

President Faustin-Archange Touadéra

PERSECUTION SCORE (-2)



The Central African Republic (CAR) has seen near-constant conflict and fighting since 2013.

Much of the country is occupied by armed militia groups, responsible for a range of human rights abuses. Many of these groups specifically target Christians. Christian leaders who have publicly denounced the violence have been threatened; church buildings have been burned and ransacked. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians who have lost their homes, now forced to live in displacement camps.

Open Doors works through local partners to support believers in CAR through persecution survival and discipleship training, economic empowerment projects and trauma care.

PRAY

- That stability and peace would return to the Central African Republic
- For protection for Christians targeted by militia groups and that God will change the hearts of the militants with His love
- That God would comfort and sustain believers in displacement camps.

36

ETHIOPIA



POPULATION

112.8 million / 67.5 million Christians

LEADER

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

PERSECUTION SCORE (+2)



In Ethiopia, the persecution you face as a Christian often depends on what 'sort' of Christian you are.

The Orthodox Church is approved of by the Ethiopian government, but other denominations are persecuted by the state – and even, sometimes, by the Orthodox Church. This includes harassment, mistreatment and being denied permission to hold services. Islamic extremists also persecute the church, and Christians from a Muslim background are particularly vulnerable to attacks, rejection by their community, and being denied access to community resources.

Open Doors works through local partners to strengthen Christians in Ethiopia with persecution survival training, economic empowerment, livelihood training and legal support.

PRAY

- That Christians of all denominations in Ethiopia would embrace Christ's command for unity
- For protection for Christians in areas where Islamic extremists are active
- For courage for believers from Muslim backgrounds.

37

MEXICO



POPULATION

133.9 million / 128.2 million Christians

LEADER

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador

PERSECUTION SCORE (+4)



Criminal networks have spread throughout Mexico, and Christians face the constant risk of being targeted for violence because they oppose corruption and drug use.

Young men are exposed to indoctrination and forced recruitment; those who refuse to join a gang or take part in criminal activities are threatened, abducted or even killed. Christian converts from indigenous communities in the south of the country are also likely to face persecution from their families and tribes for choosing to follow Jesus over any traditional faith.

Open Doors strengthens persecuted believers in Mexico with biblical training, legal support, trauma care and socio-economic aid.

PRAY

- That God would fill believers with boldness to keep proclaiming the hope of Jesus in the midst of dangerous circumstances
- For healing and comfort for those who have suffered from violence by the cartels
- For protection for Open Doors staff serving persecuted believers.

38

JORDAN



POPULATION

10.2 million / 180,000 Christians

LEADER

King Abdullah II

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



Although Jordan likes to present itself as a beacon of tolerance and interfaith dialogue, Islamic extremists continue to pose a threat to the Christian community.

Christians from Muslim backgrounds are most susceptible to persecution, particularly from family or community who oppose their conversion. Churches that are not legally recognised by the government can face harassment by public authorities, particularly those that actively evangelise. Believers who are active in evangelism or help converts from Islam can face threats and oppression in daily life.

Open Doors works with local partners in Jordan to support the church through training for Christians, relief and rehabilitation projects, and practical aid.

PRAY

- That God would give believers opportunities and boldness to share the gospel in their communities
- For God's protection and provision for believers from Muslim backgrounds
- For Jordan's leaders, that they would be increasingly open to religious freedom.

39

BRUNEI



POPULATION

445,000 / 52,000 Christians

LEADER

Sultan Sir Hassanal Bolkiah

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Leaving Islam for another religion is illegal in Brunei.

Converts can be disowned by their families and forced to divorce their spouse and leave the family home. Non-traditional Christian communities cannot be registered as churches and instead must be registered as companies, societies or family centres. Even though overt violence remains a remote risk for most followers of Jesus, many feel intense discrimination and abuse daily.

The full implementation of Sharia (Islamic law) in April 2019 has heightened believers' fears.

Open Doors raises prayer support for persecuted believers in Brunei.

PRAY

- For believers in Brunei to be strengthened and encouraged, and for opportunities to share the gospel with their communities
- That God would protect and provide for believers from Muslim backgrounds who face persecution from their families
- For the Sultan of Brunei, that God would transform his heart, and reveal His love and mercy to him.

40

CONGO DR (DRC)



POPULATION

89.5 million / 85.1 million Christians

LEADER

President Félix Tshisekedi

PERSECUTION SCORE (+8)



Christians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) face some of the most extreme violence in the world.

Islamic militants kidnap, torture and murder Christians, and believers also face forced recruitment into militia groups, forced labour and having their homes destroyed. Christian women are vulnerable to rape and sexual slavery. It's only the (relatively) low levels of persecution in other spheres of life that mean DRC isn't higher on the World Watch List. Last year, DRC was number 57 – persecution is getting significantly worse.

Open Doors works through local partners to support Christians in the DRC through persecution survival and discipleship training, economic empowerment projects and trauma care.

PRAY

- That God would thwart the plans of those who violently attack Christians
- For protection and provision for the 1.6 million people in the DRC living in camps for internally displaced people
- That God would comfort those who mourn and are afraid, and bring them hope.

41 KAZAKHSTAN



POPULATION

18.8 million/ 4.9 million Christians

LEADER

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev

PERSECUTION SCORE (NO CHANGE)



There is no freedom of religion in Kazakhstan. The government has steadily increased its control over religious expression in the country, which means increased surveillance, raids on church meetings and arrests.

Kazakh Christians from a Muslim background face the worst persecution, from the state and from family, friends and community. Some converts are locked up by their families, beaten and even expelled from their communities. Persecution is worse in rural areas.

Open Doors strengthens persecuted Christians in Central Asia by providing Bibles and Christian literature, training, socio-economic projects and practical aid.

PRAY

- That God would work in the hearts of the country's leaders and bring about more freedom to worship
- That believers from Muslim backgrounds would be strengthened and protected
- That the church in Kazakhstan will be a light in the darkness which draws more people to Jesus.

42 CAMEROON



POPULATION

26 million/ 15.9 million Christians

LEADER

President Paul Biya

PERSECUTION SCORE (+4)



Islamic extremist group Boko Haram is active in northern Cameroon and has kidnapped and killed Christians.

Churches in the north have been attacked, and in other areas church activities are disrupted by security restrictions. Female converts from Islam are often forced into marriage with non-Christians, and Christian women also face the danger of abduction by Boko Haram. Believers from Muslim backgrounds who express their Christian beliefs are at risk of violent opposition from their communities.

Open Doors works with local partners to strengthen persecuted Christians in Cameroon through persecution survival training, trauma care, discipleship training and economic empowerment projects.

PRAY

- For healing for Christians who have suffered violence
- That displaced believers would be able to return to their homes and rebuild their communities
- For peace across Cameroon - ask God to thwart the plans of those who stir up violence and hatred.

43 BHUTAN



POPULATION

835,000/ 30,000 Christians

LEADER

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

PERSECUTION SCORE (+2)



All Bhutanese citizens are expected to be Buddhists and anyone who leaves Buddhism to follow Jesus is watched with suspicion.

Conversion to Christianity is perceived as bringing shame on the family, so family members often put enormous pressure on converts to return to their original faith - including disowning them if all else fails. Particularly in rural areas, Buddhist monks oppose the presence of Christianity. No Christian church in Bhutan has official government recognition, so all Christian gatherings for worship are technically illegal.

Open Doors partners strengthen persecuted Christians in Bhutan through Christian literature distribution, discipleship and persecution survival training, literacy projects and advocacy support.

PRAY

- Ask God to bless leadership gatherings run by Open Doors to bring leaders together for fellowship
- That God would protect believers from Buddhist backgrounds
- For wisdom for those leading churches that are being monitored.

44 OMAN



POPULATION

5.2 million/ 185,000 Christians

LEADER

Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Islam is the state religion, and all Omani citizens are assumed to be Muslim.

Local converts from Islam are under the most pressure - their families, neighbours and wider society all press them to return to their national faith. They can be expelled from their families and lose their jobs. Although the government largely tolerates foreign Christian communities, it still greatly restricts their public gatherings. All religious organisations must be registered with the authorities, and all Christian meetings are monitored for political statements and to see if any Omani citizens attend.

Open Doors supports the body of Christ on the Arabian Peninsula by organising prayer, distributing Scripture resources and training believers and pastors.

PRAY

- That isolated believers would find fellowship with others
- For God to pour out a spirit of boldness on the church in Oman
- That God would open doors and provide opportunities for believers to tell others about Jesus.

45

MOZAMBIQUE



POPULATION

32.3 million / 17.4 million Christians

LEADER

President Filipe Nyusi

PERSECUTION SCORE (+20)



Mozambique has entered the World Watch List Top 50 for the first time.

Attacks from Islamic extremists and the presence of drug cartels in some areas have all contributed to increasing persecution. Christians face extreme violence in northern Mozambique, where Islamic extremists have looted and destroyed many Christian places of worship, schools and businesses owned by believers. In Muslim-majority areas, converts to Christianity face extreme pressure to renounce their faith.

Through local partners, Open Doors supports the persecuted church in Mozambique by providing emergency relief, persecution survival training and economic empowerment projects.

PRAY

- That Christians who have lost loved ones will know God's comfort and healing, and even His power to forgive their persecutors
- For protection from further attacks by Islamic extremists, and that God would thwart their plans
- Ask God to change the hearts of those who wish to harm Christians and show them His love.

46

MALAYSIA



POPULATION

32.9 million / 3 million Christians

LEADER

Sultan Abdullah of Pahang

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



In Malaysia, the government monitors churches and it's illegal to share the gospel with Malay Muslims.

Converts from Islam to Christianity experience the most persecution, as every ethnic Malay is expected to be Muslim. These believers are often forced to hide their faith and meet in secret. If discovered, they could face rejection from their spouse and family - and even being sent to a re-education camp.

Anyone who leaves Islam to become a Christian isn't just going against Malaysia's constitution, but against society at large - pitting believers against their own community.

Open Doors raises prayer for Christians in Malaysia.

PRAY

- For believers who meet in secret to find meaningful fellowship and worship
- For religious freedom across Malaysia, so believers can share the good news openly
- That Malaysian Christians from a Muslim background would know God's love deeply, despite opposition from their communities.

47

INDONESIA



POPULATION

272.2 million / 33.2 million Christians

LEADER

President Joko Widodo

PERSECUTION SCORE (+3)



Indonesian society has become steadily more Islamic in recent years.

Only a small number of Christians from a Muslim background face physical violence, but it is common for Muslim families to verbally abuse converted family members, and isolate them because of their faith. In certain 'hot spots', such as West Java or Aceh, Islamic extremist groups have a strong influence on society and politics. Christians found evangelising risk severe persecution.

Open Doors partners support persecuted believers in Indonesia by providing training, Bibles and Christian literature, socio-economic empowerment projects, relief aid and advocacy support.

PRAY

- Praise God that President Joko Widodo is beginning to speak about religious freedom for religious minorities - pray this continues
- For Christians who are rejected by their Muslim family
- That Indonesia will continue to be protected from attacks by militant groups, many of which have been foiled by Indonesian authorities.

48

KUWAIT



POPULATION

4.3 million / 513,000 Christians

LEADER

Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Conversion from Islam to another faith is not officially recognised in Kuwait.

Kuwaiti believers from Muslim backgrounds face the most persecution. As well as pressure from their families and community to recant their faith, they risk harassment, monitoring by the police, and even intimidation by vigilante groups. Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship informally, but places of worship must be registered with the government, and it's extremely difficult to obtain a property for gathering for worship. However, the number of Christians in Kuwait is rising fast.

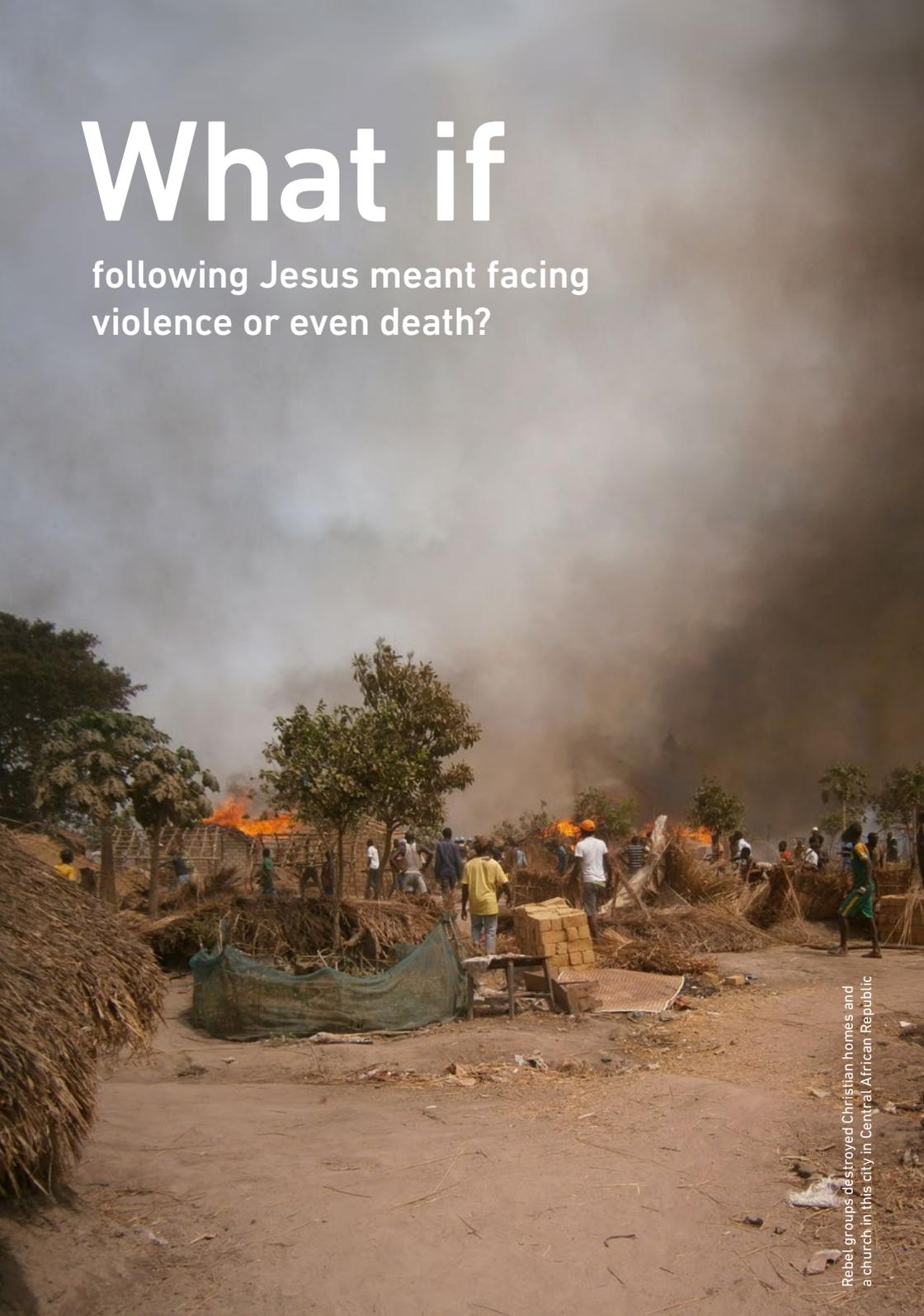
Open Doors supports the body of Christ on the Arabian Peninsula by organising prayer, distributing Scripture resources and training believers and pastors.

PRAY

- That believers would find fellowship with one another
- For God's protection for Christians who must keep their faith secret or risk being persecuted
- That the government will allow believers more freedom to worship and share their faith.

What if

following Jesus meant facing violence or even death?



Rebel groups destroyed Christian homes and a church in this city in Central African Republic

It was a day like any other for Peninah in Kenya. She went to the market, leaving her phone behind, not expecting any calls. But then she returned home.

And everything changed.

Peninah's phone was full of missed calls. Her husband, Paul, a lorry driver's assistant, was on his way home from the Somali border when the lorry was stopped by al-Shabaab militants. They lined up

“IF YOU WANT TO KILL ME, I’LL REMAIN IN JESUS... AND IF YOU LET ME GO, I’LL STILL REMAIN IN JESUS.”

everyone from the lorry and demanded that each person recite the Shahada, an Islamic creed. Paul didn't know it

and, as Peninah relates, he 'told them he could not deny Jesus'.

"If you want to kill me, I'll remain in Jesus," Paul told the attackers. "And if you let me go, I'll still remain in Jesus." He was shot dead.

Paul and Peninah are just one family. But throughout the world, there are many Christians whose faith leads to violence, brutality and even death. There are fathers, mothers, widows, children left to grieve. And to doubt.

"I lived a life full of questions," Peninah shares, now 26 and a single mother to four-year-old Steve. "I almost lost my faith." Instead of supporting the young widow as custom dictates, her in-laws abandoned her. Peninah and her son were alone. They struggled for food.

It's here that you came alongside Peninah, paying for courses in dressmaking, tailoring and computer studies, and enabling her to attend our Standing

Strong Through the Storm (SSTS) and trauma awareness seminars.

"The training helped heal my wounds," she says. "What's stayed with me is that the hardships we pass through don't happen because God has left us but because there's a reason. Talking to people and growing in my faith has restored my joy."

Now she wants to help others. "I want to call my shop Fadhili za Mungu (God's favour) or New Fashion Designers," she explains. "I'd like to make clothing more accessible to people in my village."

But sadly, just as Peninah was to sit her final exams, Kenya went into lockdown. It was a blow, halting her dreams of providing for her family. Thankfully, Open Doors partners provided her with emergency relief aid and a sewing machine so she can earn an income (PICTURED RIGHT).



"I'd like to say thank you," Peninah says. "You've played a great role in my life.

I cannot pay you with anything but I pray that the Lord, who has given you a heart to give, will be gracious to you."

WHAT IF YOU COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You can help the victims of violence, like Peninah. Go to opendoorsuk.org/whatif to:

- > Download the 'What If?' small group resource and share it with your church or small group. Available end of February 2021.
- > Look out for a video featuring Peninah and read more about her story – out in March!

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KENYA



POPULATION

53.5 million / 44 million Christians

LEADER

President Uhuru Kenyatta

PERSECUTION SCORE (+1)



Although Kenya is a majority Christian country, Christians living in the north-east and coastal areas live with the constant fear of being attacked.

Islamic extremist group al-Shabaab has infiltrated the local population to monitor the activities of Christians, and believers have been attacked and forced to flee their villages. Christians from a Muslim background in particular are under threat of violence - even from their closest relatives. Organised crime is also a serious problem. Corrupt officials often fail to take measures against persecutors, increasing the potential for further attacks on Christians.

Open Doors partners support persecuted Christians in Kenya through leadership and discipleship training, economic empowerment projects and trauma care.

PRAY

- That Christians in Kenya would know God's love, peace and joy
- For healing and protection from violence for believers
- That the plans of al-Shabaab would come to nothing, and God's peace and justice will reign.

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COMOROS



POPULATION

870,000 / 4,200 Christians

LEADER

President Azali Assoumani

PERSECUTION SCORE (+5)



Christians in Comoros are not able to share their faith freely in public. If they do, they face legal consequences.

In some parts of the country, extremist groups threaten Christians with violence. Evangelism by any religion except Islam is illegal, and converts to Christianity can be prosecuted. Converts from a Muslim background face the most severe difficulties. They are often pressured to keep their faith private - leaving them no option but to live out their faith in secret.

Open Doors partners support persecuted Christians in Comoros through leadership and discipleship training, trauma care and economic empowerment projects.

PRAY

- For Christians in Comoros to live joyful, godly lives so that others will ask them about their faith and open a door for the gospel
- That Christians from a Muslim background would know God's peace and protection
- That the Lord will work through Open Doors partners to strengthen persecuted believers in Comoros.

In 1955, a man called Andrew went into Communist Europe and discovered a small and struggling church behind the Iron Curtain. He became known as Brother Andrew and dedicated his life to supporting persecuted and oppressed Christians by smuggling Bibles, raising awareness and simply letting them know that they were not forgotten.

As the work grew, he was joined by many others, and today the movement he began has become Open Doors - an international ministry working in almost 70 nations.

Every day, thanks to the prayers and support of Christians around the world, courageous Open Doors partners bring hope to millions of persecuted Christians. It is dangerous work. There are many obstacles. But our God is great. And the door is always open.

opendoorsuk.org

“ OUR VERY MISSION IS CALLED ‘OPEN DOORS’ BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT ALL DOORS ARE OPEN, ANYTIME AND ANYWHERE. I LITERALLY BELIEVE THAT EVERY DOOR IS OPEN TO GO IN AND PROCLAIM CHRIST, AS LONG AS YOU ARE WILLING TO GO AND ARE NOT WORRIED ABOUT COMING BACK.”

Brother Andrew, Founder of Open Doors

(PICTURED) Brother Andrew's first trip to deliver Bible portions to persecuted believers in Yugoslavia





THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY

Thank you for supporting them through your prayers, your gifts, your actions.

You may never know the names of the people you are helping. You might never see their faces, or even know exactly their situation. But they know that you care.

“THE BODY OF CHRIST IS ONE: THIS HELP CAME FROM PEOPLE WE HAVE NEVER SEEN IN OUR LIVES!”

Church leader in Burkina Faso, whose congregation received food aid after fleeing militants

STAY CONNECTED WITH YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY

- > Online at opendoorsuk.org where you can find a wide range of resources to help you pray, give and tell others about the persecuted church.
- > Through social media where you can keep up to date with the latest developments and inspirational stories.
- > Subscribe to our regular emails for stories of courageous faith and information on how your prayers and support are changing the lives of persecuted Christians.

opendoorsuk.org

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The Open Doors World Watch List is a unique, comprehensive and reliable ranking of the countries where the persecution of Christians is most extreme.

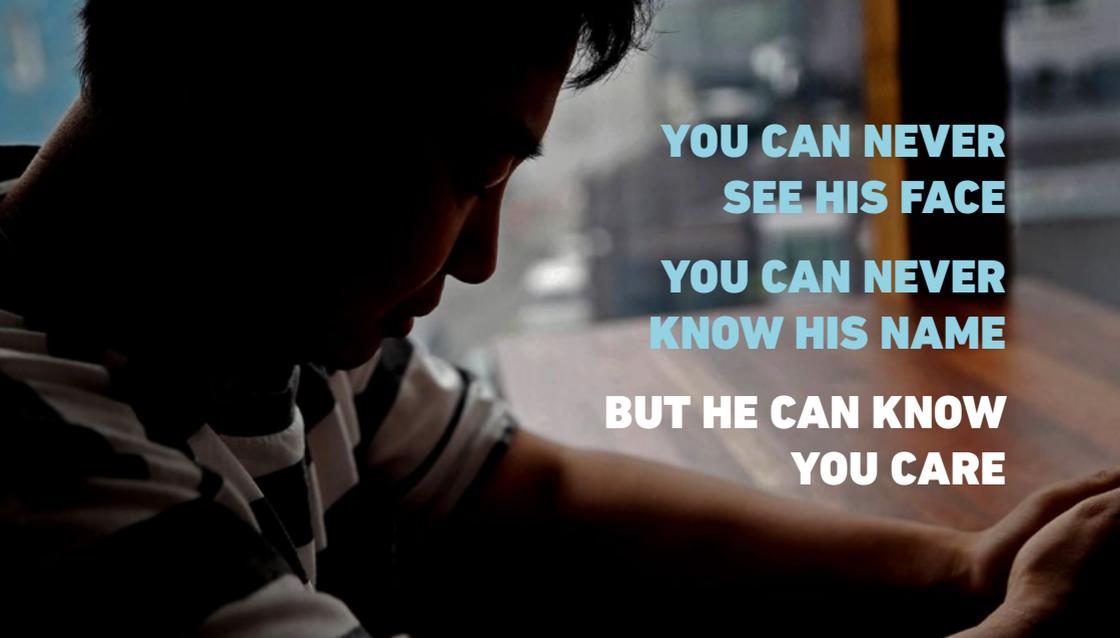
Unique. It's compiled by Open Doors analysts using real-world data from experts on the ground in 150 countries.

Comprehensive. Persecution in each country is recorded by Open Doors using a points system which not only tracks violence, but also how much freedom Christians have to practise their faith in their private, family, community, national and church life.

Reliable. Now in its 29th year, the list has a track record for credible, dependable information. Open Doors research methods and results are independently audited by the International Institute for Religious Freedom.

opendoorsuk.org

All data relates to the period 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020.



**YOU CAN NEVER
SEE HIS FACE**

**YOU CAN NEVER
KNOW HIS NAME**

**BUT HE CAN KNOW
YOU CARE**

**His face is hidden, but it's
no secret he needs your
support and prayers.**

Since 2002, North Korea has been top of the Open Doors World Watch List: the hardest place to follow Jesus. If anybody finds out you're a Christian, you will be killed or taken to a horrendous labour camp.

Persecuted Christians from countries like India, Nigeria and Eritrea rely on your ongoing gifts and prayers. It gives them hope and help when they face attacks, opposition or exile.

"We need to remember our brothers and sisters," says Peter (not his real name), an Open Doors fieldworker who supports North Korean believers in China. "I believe we can help them. That's what being the body of Christ is all about."

Will you show your love with a gift to a secret believer today?

EVERY £74 could provide food, medicine and shelter for a believer fleeing extreme persecution.

To make your gift, return the enclosed envelope, phone **01993 460015** or visit **opendoorsuk.org**. Thank you.



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