

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | March 2020

Seed. Change.

Planting seeds of hope for
Nigerian Christian widows

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Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services. We also mobilise the church in the UK and Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

Contact us:

England and Wales
PO Box 6, Witney
Oxon OX29 6WG
T 01993 460015

Ireland
PO Box 873
Belfast BT15 1WZ
T 02890 751080

Scotland
T 01292 800006

Email inspire@opendoorsuk.org

Find us on:

www.opendoorsuk.org



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Cover image:

Jennifer, northern Nigeria. Her mother, Rikiya, was widowed and then their village was attacked by Boko Haram. Open Doors partners have supported their family with trauma care and a microloan. Read more on p8.

Letter from Henrietta

Persist

“And there was a widow in that town...” LUKE 18:3

Jesus' story of the feisty widow pleading for justice against her enemy has lost none of its power in 2,000 years. It was very difficult then to be without a husband and continues to be so today. Many women in countries on the Open Doors World Watch List live in societies where they are seen as second-class citizens. Those who are persecuted may also lose fathers, husbands, income, children and homes because they've chosen to follow Jesus. The rise of Islamic militancy in Nigeria, where 1,350 Christians were killed last year, and across West Africa, is causing suffering to thousands of women and children, as you can read on p8. They become outcasts.

In the last 12 months, I've heard three stories that remind me of the tenacious faith of this widow: Janey, whose husband threw her out (with five children) having forced her to choose between him and Jesus; Gaus, whose family tied her by her hair to the verandah and beat her for marrying a Christian in church; and Christy, targeted and raped by Fulani herdsmen because she was a pastor's wife. All three experienced horrific persecution. But all three chose Jesus.

I am shocked. Inspired. Astounded. Their example challenges me. These women deserve our very best support and the fact that last year we received over 16,000 handmade petitions for our persecuted sisters, saying 'I see you', indicates that you agree. Thank you so much.

Jesus made a point of singling out and supporting women. He called both men and women to account and clearly expects each of us to play our part in building His kingdom on earth. That's why Open Doors provides vital support to sisters like these, through economic empowerment projects, assistance with school fees, and training. Through your gifts and prayers, we are restoring dignity and hope – the resurrection hope that we celebrate at Easter.

One year on from the launch of the *See. Change.* campaign, our sisters still need us to stand with them – and so we continue to challenge church and state to make the world safer for women. I am encouraged that the government has accepted all the recommendations of the Bishop of Truro's report and we need to continue to hold them to account on this matter. Read more on p12.

In a season when we particularly remember and celebrate women, let's persist in prayer and seeking justice on their behalf. And let's put our faith in the Son of Man who daily proves to millions that He is worth choosing above all else.



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

NIGERIA

Martyred pastor trusted 'God's will to be done'



"Don't cry, don't worry, but thank God for everything." Revd Lawan Andimi was executed by Boko Haram in January

Christians in Nigeria are calling on the worldwide church to join them in prayer for their country after a prominent Nigerian pastor was kidnapped and executed by Boko Haram.

Revd Lawan Andimi was kidnapped during an attack on Michika, a village near the Cameroon border, on 3 January. As well as being a local church

pastor, he was also Chair of the Adamawa State region of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

Shortly after his kidnapping, in a video released by his captors, the pastor said that he trusted God's will to be done. "Don't cry, don't worry, but thank God for everything," he said.

Some two weeks later – on 20 January – he was martyred. He leaves behind a wife and nine children.

This is the latest in a series of brutal attacks on Christians in Nigeria over Christmas and New Year. In response, CAN called for three days of fasting and praying for Nigeria.

"We are mourning the calamity that has befallen us," said Revd Joseph Hayab, from CAN. "We are mourning the

lack of progress that we are experiencing in our country. We are mourning the bad things that are going on around us. We are asking God to hear our cries."

PRAY FOR LEAH

A special focus of their prayer was the situation surrounding schoolgirl Leah Sharibu, who was kidnapped by Boko Haram two years ago. While most of the other students were released, Leah was kept because she refused to renounce her Christian faith. An aid worker who had been held hostage by Boko Haram, but was freed on 16 January, said that Leah is 'alive and well'.

Please pray for Revd Lawan's wife and children at this very difficult time. Pray also for renewed urgency for the Nigerian government in the negotiations to release Leah, the Chibok girls still in captivity, and many thousands more women whose names we don't know.

Kay shaves her head to share about persecution

Seventeen-year-old Kay Baxter from Malvern wanted to do something to support the persecuted church.

After praying about it, she felt God prompt her to get sponsored to shave her head – a significant act of witness when you are at school and about to attend interviews for university! And because she wanted to share the reasons for her action, she decided to have her head shaved in front of the entire school.

"I'm hoping that they will know a bit about Christian persecution now," she said. "I hope it will help people to think about why people would be willing to die for their faith."

Kay's brave act of faith has raised over £2,000 to support persecuted Christians – well done Kay! If you would like to do something in your school or youth group to raise support for our persecuted family, go to www.opendoorsyouth.org



CHINA

How a church gets creative in the face of persecution

What would you do if the government closed the doors of your church, and banned you from meeting? For one Chinese pastor the answer is to take a new, creative approach to what it means to worship.

Pressure on churches in China is building: in a number of localities, authorities have ordered some churches to close, and placed others under intense surveillance. Pastor Xiang's* church was closed down after he refused a government order to put facial recognition cameras in the building.

But closing the building is not the same as killing off the church. Instead of gathering together, the church's multimedia team now distributes recordings of church services within the Christian community for 'walking worship'. Christians can listen to the audio file when they go out for a walk or on their way to work.

"We just listen, we cannot speak out loud, we cannot sing out loud, and we cannot gather in outdoor spaces to worship," said Pastor Xiang. "But we are praying internally. We are singing, not so loudly. That's kind of a unique experience and encourages a lot of brothers and sisters."

The use of biometric technology and digital surveillance to control Christians is one of the latest trends in persecution. Find out more in our new World Watch List Top 50, which includes a mix of features, in-depth information and prayer.

Order your free copy today at www.opendoorsuk.org/wwl

CENTRAL ASIA

"We know there are people who care for us"



(TOP) Ilmur visits Gulnara and her children; (BOTTOM) Ilmur providing bags of clothes, food and basic supplies

Your prayers and support have helped needy Christians in remote areas of Central Asia to survive the winter.

Ilmur* was disowned by his family and community when he became a Christian, but now he and his wife Gulya* lead a small house church and – supported by Open Doors partners – travel to remote villages, helping those in need and sharing the gospel.

"It's a huge blessing for those families that we visit with your help, who receive food, clothes and coal to keep their houses warm during the winter," says Ilmur. "We start with friendship and only after a while we start to share the gospel. We must be very

careful. It's dangerous not only for us, but also for them."

One of those he has helped is Gulnara, a mother of three children who has no income, and is struggling to take care of her three sons. Ilmur took her clothes, food and coal for the winter season.

"Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your help," says Gulnara. "We wouldn't live through the winter without coal."

"If your help wasn't there, we wouldn't be able to do as much as we do now," says Ilmur. "We know that there are people around the world who care for us. We are very grateful for that."

*Name changed for security purposes

For the latest news and stories of courageous faith visit www.opendoorsuk.org

Rikiya was left vulnerable when her husband died. Then Boko Haram attacked her village.



Seed. Change.

PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE FOR
NIGERIAN CHRISTIAN WIDOWS

No matter where you live in the world, being widowed is very, very hard.

Most of us have experienced grief at some point, and know the pain and disorientation that it can cause. In the UK or Ireland, if you lose your husband then you would hopefully get compassion and help from your family, friends and community. It doesn't lessen the grief, but it makes it a bit easier to bear.

Things are different in northern Nigeria. Being widowed can lead to social and economic exclusion and poverty. That's what Rikiya found after her husband died - and that's why your support can make an enormous difference in the life of a vulnerable Christian widow.

RUNNING FROM ATTACK

Rikiya was married for nine years, during which she and her husband had three children: Jennifer, Peace and Joshua. In the ninth year, her husband became ill. Tragically, only two days after his symptoms appeared, he died. Rikiya was still in mourning when Islamic extremists Boko Haram came to attack her village.

A neighbour was the first to tell her. He burst into her home and shouted that houses were being set alight in a nearby village. Rikiya knew she didn't have much time: she and her children ran.

They managed to escape Boko Haram, and stayed in a local town for two months. Eventually Rikiya decided it would be safe to return. When she got there, she found that her home and all her possessions

had been destroyed.

"I was so traumatised," says Rikiya. "My husband was gone, and Boko Haram had captured our village. We had nothing except the clothes on our backs."

THE SPREAD OF ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

The research behind the 2020 Open Doors World Watch List shows that this isn't an isolated incident. Islamic extremism is spreading across West Africa.

"I used to do this work with my husband, but now nobody helps me."

KWATE

While Nigeria has remained at number 12 on the World Watch List, Burkina Faso has seen a shocking rise (from 61 to 28) and Cameroon is on the list for the first time, at 48. The numbers of violent attacks are increasing in these countries, and various Islamic militant groups are taking advantage of instability in several nations.

This broad trend has a very local impact. Nobody knows that better than the women of Dzangola, a remote village in Adamawa State, northern Nigeria - the same region as Rikiya's village. In the past five years, Boko Haram has attacked Dzangola three times. Each time, they have killed and abducted people, burned down houses and left many lives and livelihoods destroyed.

"I COULDN'T HEAR HIS VOICE ANYMORE"

"My husband was killed in the first attack," remembers Kwate (MIDDLE RIGHT). Kwate is an elderly woman and walks with a pronounced stoop. She's lived in Dzangola through all the attacks.

"When they pushed him into one of the huts, I ran away. I didn't see how they set fire to the hut, because I was hiding. He kept shouting and screaming. And then I couldn't hear his voice anymore." Her husband was burned to death, and she only managed to escape because the militants couldn't find her.

Mariayamu (BOTTOM RIGHT) has similar painful memories. Her husband was killed in the second Boko Haram attack on the village. The attackers initially told her that they meant no harm, and there was no need to run. She and her children had been fleeing, but returned to her father-in-law's house.

"Around 11 o'clock, while my children were asleep and I was awake, they came back," remembers Mariayamu. "We ran, but my husband stayed behind." Due to a physical condition, he couldn't run with them. Mariayamu and her children spent the night hiding in the bush - when they returned, she found out that the militants had killed her husband. She buried him, and hid again in the bush for another week.

Kwate wasn't even able to bury her husband: "What pains me is that they burned him. They could have simply killed him, and then I would still have his



Thanks to your support, Rikiya (TOP, WITH HER CHILDREN) Kwate (MIDDLE) and Mariayamu (BOTTOM) have all received microloans



body to bury."

This is the human cost of rising Islamic extremism, targeting Christian villages in Nigeria and across West Africa. These senseless killings leave behind vulnerable widows - and their lives don't get easier once the militants have gone.

DOUBLE VULNERABILITY

Across the world, grief doesn't change - but the circumstances in which someone grieves do. In the UK and Ireland, a widow is usually treated with compassion and dignity. In northern Nigeria, being widowed puts you at the bottom of the social hierarchy. A woman who has lost her husband hasn't just lost the person she loves; she's lost a breadwinner, a vital contributor to her livelihood and a support for her children.

"I have been here sometime now, cultivating the land and getting good harvests," says Mariayamu. "But with these attacks, I have lost everything - including my husband who has been my helper."

You might expect a widow to get compassion and help, but their social status is very low. And a Christian widow is vulnerable on two further counts - her gender and her faith. This is the double vulnerability faced by Christian women in northern Nigeria and in many countries on the World Watch List. They are persecuted for their faith, and their gender means that they face social and economic exclusion when they are widowed. Their isolation





Rikiya: "You are the ones who brought hope and healing back to me"

leads to poverty, and it's almost impossible to get out of that spiral without help.

Women like Rikiya need the support of their global church family – but they need more than just practical support to survive. The vision of the *See Change* campaign is that every Christian woman who is doubly vulnerable for her faith and her gender is seen, heard, valued and empowered to reach her God-given potential. As well as economic empowerment and trauma care, Open Doors partners in West Africa are working with church leaders to make sure that women are treated with dignity, seen when isolated, and confident in the knowledge that God sees and loves them.

MICROLOANS CHANGE LIVES

It's hard to hear or read the stories that Rikiya and the

widows of Dzangola have to tell. Whether their husbands were murdered by militant attacks, or they were vulnerable because they had already lost their husbands, widowhood has made life very hard for these women.

"I still go to farm and, with the little I get, I can feed myself," says Kwate. "I used to do this work with my husband, but now nobody helps me."

But with your help, that is changing. Open Doors partners in Nigeria offer microloans and trauma counselling. The trauma care addresses the immediate psychological needs of women and men who have suffered at the hands of Islamic militants – and the microloans offer a long-term future.

Rikiya, Kwate and Mariayamu all continue to receive loans, thanks to the ongoing prayers and gifts of Open Doors supporters.

HOW DO MICROLOANS WORK?

Open Doors partners provide microloans to 'voluntary saving and loan associations' – groups of 10-15 people who have a common goal, such as saving for school fees, or a shared characteristic such as gender, age or type of job.

These groups tend to work independently, saving together without paying outside interest. But if they need extra funds to start or expand income-generating projects, then Open Doors partners will invest with a loan.

The money is paid back with interest, and repayments are then reinvested – in the same groups and in new ones. (The interest ensures that the inflation-adjusted loans are available to new groups.)

The Nigerian widows featured in this article received loans in 2018 and 2019, and paid them back both years. They will receive further loans in 2020, as well as being given grants for their children's school fees, which don't need to be paid back. With your support, Open Doors partners can expand the scheme to more of the many vulnerable women in Nigeria and elsewhere.

See. Change. by seeding change



"If not for the loan I received to rear these goats, I don't know what I would have done," says Rikiya

With her loan, Rikiya has been able to buy two goats. Each goat produces two kids every season, which Rikiya can sell to pay for food, crops or clothing.

"You are the ones who brought hope and healing back to me," says Rikiya. "When these things happened – my husband's death, the Boko Haram attack – I drew closer to God. I totally depended on God. I held onto God strongly. He became a father, mother and husband to me."

"If not for the loan I received to rear these goats, I don't know what I would have done."

Despite all they have been through, the women in Dzangola also continue to praise God for His goodness and mercy. He has shown that He is truly 'a defender of widows' (Psalm 68:5), and that He 'sustains the fatherless and the widow' (Psalm 146:9). "He spared me and helps me in my small farm," says Kwate. "I will continue to praise Him."

Mariayamu puts it simply: "Jesus is my Saviour. He can save me from any calamity."

He is using Open Doors supporters' gifts and prayers

to answer the prayers of these women. In Dzangola, they use the microloans to buy and sell grains, and some of the women use them for farming crops or animals. It means, at the moment, they have food to feed themselves and money to develop their farming further.

But although they are receiving help, their story isn't over. They need continued support to keep them from being desperate and excluded again – to have hope for their future and their children's futures. Together, we can continue to give that hope to many more women and the next generation.

You can seed hope for women like Rikiya, Mariayamu and Kwate – not just in Nigeria, but in many countries where vulnerable women are socially and economically excluded and praying for God's intervention. See change by seeding change.

PLEASE GIVE

Every £20 could provide a widow with a loan to buy seeds for crops and other farming equipment so that she can become self-sufficient.

Every £47 could provide six months' food and housing for a widow and child, and education for her child.

Every £60* could help provide immediate trauma care for a woman in Nigeria who has been the victim of persecution.

PLEASE PRAY

Dear Father, the defender and sustainer of widows, we pray that You would draw close to Rikiya, Kwate, Mariayamu and all other excluded and isolated Christian women. Please give them comfort and encouragement, and restore their hope, their dignity and their livelihoods. Thank You that You see them and that You love them.

PLEASE SPEAK OUT

Open Doors is asking supporters to contact their MPs with three pledges to help persecuted women from religious minorities be seen. Find out more on p.15

*It costs £346 to provide trauma and spiritual healing in all areas of her life.



“Do not forget the Christian community in Syria”: Open Doors partner Pastor Abdalla speaks to a packed room in Parliament

World Watch List launches in Parliament: You can help keep the momentum going

Your invitations worked! The highest ever number of MPs attended the Parliamentary launch of the World Watch List 2020 on 15 January: 123 Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum heard about the urgent issue of the rising persecution of Christians.

“It is disheartening to learn from Open Doors’ report that the number of Christians living in countries where they are at risk of high to extreme levels of persecution has increased to 260 million people,” said Rehman Chishti, the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, speaking at the event. “This is an alarming trend. We must not sit idly by. The United Kingdom will not sit idly by.”

These words are welcomed by Open Doors, and should encourage every one of you who sent invitations and prayed for your MPs. Over 4,000 email invitations and tens of thousands of postal invitations were sent – thank you so much.

HEARING FROM SYRIA AND SRI LANKA

At the event, hosted by Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP, Pastor Abdalla from Syria and Sunil*

from Sri Lanka spoke about their first-hand experiences of persecution.

“What we long for is this: freedom to exercise our own faith. We are hoping to see a day when believers in every village can worship together without resistance and violence,” said Sunil, an Open Doors partner supporting families in mourning after the Easter Sunday church attacks in Sri Lanka.

Pastor Abdalla runs an Open

Doors-supported Centre of Hope in Aleppo, and spoke about the dangers of Islamic extremists in Syria and the high percentage of Christians who have left the country. “But we are determined to stay,” he said. “Please do not forget the Christian community in Syria. We are a minority, and yet we are determined to do all we can to rebuild and strengthen our country.”

AN INCREDIBLE RESPONSE FROM MPs

Highlighting the courageous faith of believers in the World Watch List countries and elsewhere is a vital part of ensuring that communities like Abdalla’s aren’t forgotten. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said on social media that Open Doors’ report will ‘inspire the UK to do more to use our global network and UNSC seat to champion freedom of religion and belief’, and there has been an incredible response to the launch from many MPs.

“Thank you to Open Doors for the launch of the World Watch List report re: persecution of Christians globally,” wrote Preet Gill, Labour MP for Birmingham Edgbaston and Department for International Development (DFID) Shadow Cabinet Team Member. “I support the call for DfID to recognise local faith actors as a resource and do more for women from minority religious communities vulnerable to sexual violence.” Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative MP for Chingford and Woodford Green, commented: “Inspiring talk from Pastor Abdalla, who has bravely chosen to stay in Syria to support his congregation.”

Many MPs told us that the main reason they came to the launch was because their constituents had made clear how important the issue of Christian persecution was to them.

“The persecution of



123 Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum attended the World Watch List 2020 launch event in Parliament



Henrietta Blyth, Open Doors UK & Ireland CEO, speaking at the launch event



(LEFT) Pastor Abdalla with Iain Duncan Smith MP; (RIGHT) Kate Green MP
*Name changed for security reasons

Dominic Raab @DominicRaab · Jan 15
 Research from @OpenDoorsUK shows an increasing number of Christians are at risk of persecution. That will only inspire the UK to do more to use our global network and UNSC seat to champion freedom of religion and belief. @Rehman_Chishty #WorldWatchList

Preet Kaur Gill MP @PreetKGillMP · Jan 15
 Thank you to @OpenDoorsUK for the launch of world watch list report re: persecution of Christians globally. I support the call for @DFID_UK to recognise local faith actors as a resource and do more for women from minority religious communities vulnerable to sexual violence #PSVI

Jamie Stone MP @Jamie4North · Jan 15
 Glad to support @OpenDoorsUK today in Parliament as they raise awareness of persecution towards Christians around the world.
 @LibDems support freedom of religion or belief for those of all faiths and none

Christians is an issue close to the heart of many of my constituents who have written and sent emails urging me to act on this issue," said Kate Green, Labour MP for Stretford and Urmston. "I attend Open Doors' World Watch List not only to represent their strength of feeling on this issue but also because I believe it's vital that Parliamentarians such as myself take action on behalf of Christians around the world who are persecuted on the basis of their faith."

David Linden, SNP MP for Glasgow East said; "It was an insightful and significant event, and I left feeling armed to take strategic action on the important issue of Christian persecution across the world."

Thank you for amplifying the voices of our vulnerable church family.

YOUR VOICE BRINGS CHANGE

In his speech at the World Watch List launch, Rehman Chishty spoke about the government's progress on implementing the recommendations from the Bishop of Truro's 2019 review on persecuted Christians. Ten of the recommendations have been implemented already, including some that Open Doors supporters have been

specifically advocating for – which shows what an impact you have when you speak out. Thank you for contacting your MPs!

- **You asked for the role of Special Envoy to be reappointed and resourced**
 Rehman Chishty's role as PM's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) was renewed and he and his team have an extended and important role in ensuring that the human right of FoRB is recognised around the world.
- **You asked for Nigeria to be recognised as a priority country for pursuing FoRB**
 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) organised a special conference in February on what the UK government could do to solve the crisis in northern Nigeria, and invited Open Doors to contribute.
- **You asked for the double vulnerability of Christian women to be recognised**
 An FCO project is training 2,000 women in Dalit Christian colonies in Andhra Pradesh, India, to identify victims of persecution and

help them understand their legal rights, with the goal of combating violence against women. Additionally, a Dalit Women Human Rights Defenders network was established in four Indian states. Other projects in Kolkata and Telangana aim to promote interfaith tolerance to the next generation of Indians.

- **You asked for DfID to recognise religion as a factor of vulnerability**
 In February debates were held in the House of Commons and the House of Lords on FoRB. The World Watch List report was used by both MPs and Lords to challenge the UK Government to ensure faith is recognised by DfID in their aid efforts and development programming.

THE HANDMADE PETITION

Many of you signed the handmade petition, saying 'I see you' to women doubly vulnerable for their faith and their gender, and prayed that our sisters would be seen by the UK government. Key MPs responded, including Rehman Chishty who asked to be given a square of the petition, to hang in his office. It's wonderful that this vivid call for vulnerable women from religious minorities to be recognised is hanging where FoRB decision makers will see it.

The petition continues to be used to urge the UK government to take action on behalf of our sisters. In February, we exhibited the handmade petition at The Justice Conference. In March, a portion of the handmade petition will be exhibited in The Morlan Centre in Aberystwyth from 2-28 April, and further opportunities are on the horizon.



Matthew Rees, Head of Advocacy for Open Doors UK & I (LEFT) presenting Rehman Chishty, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, with a section of the handmade petition.

Contact your MP: pledges for 2020

In 2020, Open Doors is continuing to advocate for persecuted Christian women across the world. We believe that the UK government can play an important role in addressing the persecution faced by women from religious minorities, and this is true across the policy cycle – from recognising the current issue, to projects offering immediate support and longer-term influence on cultural climates that foster discrimination and fear. Will you contact your MP to ask them to commit to the following three pledges?

Women from religious minorities are doubly vulnerable. We urge the UK government to:

- **Recognise their hidden vulnerabilities in policy**
- **Support short-term projects that empower and meet their specific needs**
- **Influence long-term change to cultures of discrimination and fear**

Please contact your MP to ask them to support these pledges, and help persecuted Christian women. Find out more at: www.opendoorsuk.org/advocacy



“I want to testify about what happened to us and to testify of who Jesus is”



(TOP) Rebekah (LEFT) and Debbie (SECOND FROM RIGHT) laughing with their family. They were both injured in the Sri Lanka Easter Sunday bombings. (BOTTOM) Sunday school at Zion Church on the morning of 21 April, shortly before the bombing took place.

Standing with the church in Sri Lanka

A year after the devastating Easter Sunday bomb attacks in Sri Lanka, your overwhelming response to this tragedy means that Open Doors local partners like Sunil* are able to continue to stand with our brothers and sisters as they pick up the pieces.

Thanks to you, Sunil and his team have been able to help practically by covering the cost of medical fees, as well as providing livelihood support for families who have lost their breadwinner. They are also offering trauma counselling to those affected by the bombings.

Sunil intends to stand with the church for as long as they need. “From previous crises, we know that victims get all the attention and support they need in the first days and weeks,” he says, “but after a month, the visits grow less and less, until they are left by themselves. But our message is: we are here and we are here to stay.”

“ALL I REMEMBER IS FIRE”

On 21 April 2019, three bombs exploded in three churches in three different parts of Sri Lanka, including Rebekah and her sister Verlini’s church – Zion Church in Batticaloa.

Verlini led the Sunday school that day, during which six children gave their lives to Jesus. She was killed as she led the children across the courtyard to the church. “I

“Jesus will open my eyes and I will see my family again.”

was in the bookshop,” Rebekah recalls, “and the suicide bomber stood right outside when he detonated the bomb in his backpack. All I remember is fire. Fire everywhere.”

Rebekah sustained third-degree burns down the left side

of her body – but your prayers and gifts mean that Sunil and other Open Doors local partners have been able to strengthen and support her and her family – including her six-year-old niece, Debbie.

“I AM EXCITED FOR WHEN JESUS WILL COME!”

Debbie – Verlini’s daughter – lost both her parents and her eyesight that day. She spent over a month in intensive care, but she is now at home where she has not only relearned how to walk, but she is dancing! She also loves to sing. One of her favourite songs goes like this:

*Little, little children, look around and see
Jesus gave us this world
Listen to the birds, tweet, tweet, tweet
Listen to the waterfalls,
whoosh, whoosh, whoosh
The Garden of Eden is very beautiful!*

Despite the hardships Debbie has endured, her faith is amazingly strong. She says, “My favourite Bible story is that though Adam and Eve sinned, Jesus still came to save everyone. Jesus came to save us! And when Jesus came, He had victory over Satan, and Satan was defeated.”

Debbie’s hope for the future is strong and vivid. “I believe that one day, Jesus will come again. And oh, I am excited for when Jesus will come! He will open my eyes and I will see my family again.”

When asked about her hope

for the future, Rebekah says, “I want to testify about what happened to us and to testify of who Jesus is.”

“NO PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN SHOULD FEEL ALONE”

As the first anniversary of the Easter attack approaches, Sunil and other Open Doors partners will continue to walk with the church in Sri Lanka as they grieve and recover. Sunil says, “On behalf of Open Doors and its supporters, I’ve visited Batticaloa several times to stand with our Christian brothers and sisters who were struck by this tragedy... We have seen the family of Christ unite together, to grieve, to comfort and to support. No persecuted Christian should feel alone. We will continue to stand by them, for as long as it’s needed.”

PRAY

- For the church in Sri Lanka – especially as persecution intensifies there. Ask for God’s continued provision and comfort for Rebekah, Debbie and the families affected by the 2019 Easter attack
- For Sunil and his team as they continue to strengthen our brothers and sisters there
- For Christians celebrating Easter in places where going to church makes you a target, that God would protect them as they celebrate Jesus’ triumph over death.

*Name changed for security reasons

STANDING STRONG 2020

You're invited to meet persecuted Christians who dare to follow Jesus no matter the cost.



Image used for illustrative purposes

Meet Hannah* from South West Asia. As a partner of Open Doors, she and her husband have a deep commitment to walking alongside those who struggle with the isolation and trauma that persecution brings. By working with pastors and Christian workers, they help to equip and connect believers through leadership training, theatre and the arts. Hannah spoke powerfully at last year's summer festivals and at the Parliamentary launch of the 2018 World Watch List, and we're thrilled to be welcoming her to this year's Standing Strong.

Hannah, what's it like for you as a Christian in South West Asia?

I'm a fourth generation Christian with some family members in that part of the world who have, over the generations, really seen it become more difficult for Christians to practise their faith and also to live as Christians in the public sphere.

How is it getting worse?

There has been an escalation in attacks against believers who go to places of worship: attacks aimed to silence, intimidate, and say with a very strong message, "You are not welcome." And then, on a lesser scale in terms of impact or violence, are 'squeeze events' that affect Christians on a day-to-day basis, making it harder to find

employment and receive professional education. A lot of the attacks are taken very seriously, but it is the smaller everyday events that are more difficult to get anyone to listen to us about.

And is it harder for women?

It is much harder. South West Asian women are ambitious, and there's a fire to see tomorrow happen. However, it's much harder for a South West Asian woman who is a minority. If she does not conform to the demands of the community, she will be accused of blasphemy, but she can't go to the police and complain as it will expose her to that accusation. It's the silencing of the Christian. It's not just freedom of speech, it's also freedom of thought that's very much at risk. When you're so fearful that you cannot tell your children the fullness of what you believe, an entire community is debilitated. Just to be able to breathe, dream, think of a future, these are things that are being taken away from you as a Christian in this region. That's why it's so important to pray and strengthen a church that is at the point of death and needs restoring to the abundant life of Christ.

Thank you so much, Hannah – we look forward to hearing more at Standing Strong.

*Name changed for security reasons

BOOK NOW!

Book before 31 May 2020 to get 25 per cent off your total order. Call our Inspire team on 01993 460015 or go online to www.opendoorsuk.org

BIRMINGHAM

Saturday 3 October 2020
10:30am – 4:30pm
Arena Birmingham
Early-bird £12

SCOTLAND

6-9 October 2020 | 7pm-9pm
Whitburn/Ayr/Aberdeen
£5 per person

NORTHERN IRELAND

Saturday 10 October 2020
10:30am – 4:30pm
Bloomfield Presbyterian Church, Belfast
Early-bird £12

WALES

Wednesday 7 October 2020 | 7pm-9pm
Waterfront Community Church, Swansea
£5 per person



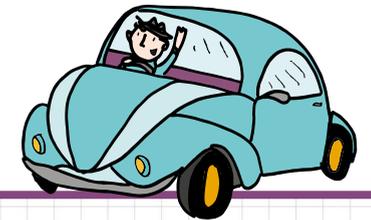
It's important that the church in the UK and Ireland hears our brothers and sisters' voices. Why not invite your church now and book while places last?

"It was my first time at an Open Doors conference. I was really blessed by being there and spurred on greatly by the stories shared by our brothers and sisters."

STANDING STRONG 2019 DELEGATE

Bring your children, too!

In response to the success of last year's children's programme for 5-11-year-olds, we are offering more places, more great activities and the chance to meet a guest speaker. To find out more, read this wonderful letter from 8-year-old Elena:



Dear Open Doors,

I am writing to thank you for your hard work at the 2019 Standing Strong conference and especially the children's programme there. I participated in the children's programme. I am 8 years old. I particularly enjoyed the second half (after lunch), when John came in and made us all laugh. It was fun learning all of the songs with John and getting sprayed with water. The lady from Nigeria also made us learn a lot. My favourite bit was sending cards to Colombia in Spanish. Also, making the gingerbread men was very fun.

To introduce the message to other people, I spoke to my class about Open Doors and persecuted Christians. I explained life in the Top 10 countries and how dangerous it is for Christians. Also, I explained how many people were killed in 2018 because of their faith and belief in Jesus. As a result of my speech, I had a relentless shower of questions pouring down on me. To help, some children in my class decided to go on the Open Doors website and send cards (reading the instructions carefully) to endangered countries.

I believe I should thank you for giving me ideas and materials to work on. The children's team, theatre workers, and John, all were fantastic!!

I am very happy we don't get persecuted in Great Britain. Thank you!!!! God bless,

ELENA



“Today our prayers have been answered”

Open Doors strengthens Christians in Burkina Faso as extremism spreads across West Africa



Naomi: “Honestly, I lack words to say. God will richly bless all those who gave”

“Naomi, take heart. Your husband is dead.”

These words brought Naomi’s world to a standstill. A mother of nine from Arbinda, a quiet, friendly community in northern Burkina Faso, she never imagined she would be without her husband, Eli. But all of that changed when terrorists began attacking her village.

The day she lost Eli was mostly peaceful and ordinary. It was a Saturday evening, and Eli had gone to visit a friend as Naomi was preparing dinner.

“Some hours later, we began to hear gunshots everywhere,” Naomi says. “My children all came to my room and asked what was going on. My eldest son peeked outside and saw people running and shouted, ‘Mama, where will we run to?’

“Let’s be calm and start praying,” I told him, but my heart was already in my mouth. My husband wasn’t far from there, but I sensed that he was in trouble. I couldn’t pray. I just kept murmuring words and crying.”

After about two hours, the

shooting stopped. Naomi went and stood outside her house, watching and waiting for Eli to return. Instead, the pastor and friend Eli had gone to visit approached her, alone. That’s when she received the news.

“[The pastor] told me my husband insisted that he wanted to come home to be with his family when the shooting started,” recalls Naomi. “He tried to stop him from exiting the house, but Eli refused. A few metres from his house, Eli was shot and died.”

“Thank you to all the believers who prayed, gave and came to support us”

THE GREATEST ESCALATION OF PERSECUTION IN THE WORLD

Naomi’s story is one of many now coming out of Burkina Faso in West Africa, which, in its first ever appearance in the top 50

of the Open Doors World Watch List, has overtaken 30 countries and is now at number 28 - the greatest escalation in Christian persecution in the world. The primary change has been in the level of violence, which is now considered extreme, and is mostly due to the rapid spread of Islamic extremist ideology. Tragically, more than 50 Christians were murdered in 2019.

Thousands of Christians in Burkina Faso have been displaced by violence, with many seeking shelter and safety in the northern city of Kaya.

Naomi and her family are among those thousands seeking help from the church there, which is doing its best to serve the refugees, but is struggling with the sheer volume of support that is needed.

“Life became so tough and unbearable,” Naomi says. “In Kaya, the church was gracious enough to provide accommodation for us but feeding us became a big challenge. We were too many



Open Doors local partners were able to distribute food aid to over 500 families

and the church ran out of resources.”

“THIS SUPPORT HAS A GREAT IMPACT IN OUR LIVES”

But there is hope for Naomi, and thousands of displaced Christians like her. Thanks to our supporters who give and pray regularly for persecuted believers, Open Doors partners were able to respond immediately to the crisis by delivering food aid to over 500 vulnerable families taking refuge at the church in Kaya.

When Naomi received the food she needed for her family, she said, “Day and night, we kept meeting in the church to cry out to God to remember us and send us help.

“Today, God’s promises have been fulfilled. He promised to never leave us or forsake us.

God is a miracle-working God... Honestly, I lack words to say. God will richly bless all those who gave to support us, and He will provide all your needs as He has done to us today.”

Pastor Samuel Sawadogo, who is in charge of caring for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the city, says, “We as church leaders in Kaya have been praying and encouraging the IDPs never to lose hope but to trust that one day God will come through for them. And today our prayers have been answered.

“This support has a great impact in the lives of the IDPs and in our lives, because they have now realised that in their suffering they are not alone. Believers all over are standing together and supporting them. We want to say a very big

thank you to all the believers who prayed, gave and came to support us.

“Please continue to pray for Burkina Faso so that the peace of God will reign in the country, and our people will be able to go back to their villages.”

> You can watch a film of Naomi and other believers receiving support at www.opendoorsuk.org/burkinafaso

PRAY

- For God’s comfort and provision for all who have been bereaved or displaced
- That peace and stability will be restored
- For Open Doors partners strengthening believers with relief aid, trauma care and persecution survival training.



SHARE THEIR COURAGE AND GROW YOUR FAITH

You can find out more about the countries where following Jesus costs the most using our range of World Watch List resources, including the Top 10 and Top 50 guides, maps, top 5 video, youth and children’s resources. You can also read stories of courageous faith and pray for a different country on the World Watch List each week by signing up for our weekly email. Go to www.opendoorsuk.org, or call our Inspire team on 01993 460015.

ALL-SINGING, ALL-DANCING

Fundraising fun as 'Africa meets Cosham'

Ever read a story in a magazine and felt so moved you had to do something? When Sue Jones from Cosham, Portsmouth, read the story of Esther in the Open Doors magazine, she knew she had to respond – and she decided to get her church involved too.

Esther's story, told as part of the *See. Change.* for persecuted women campaign last year, was both heart-breaking and hopeful. Abducted by Boko Haram extremists because she was a Christian, Esther gave birth to a daughter in captivity. But when she was released, her ordeal was not over. Her community refused to accept baby Rebecca because she'd been born of rape.

Hope changed Esther's life when she experienced trauma counselling made possible through support for Open Doors. Inspired, Sue decided to raise money so that another woman like Esther could experience trauma counselling. She could share the 'hope' of the story and pass it on.

SISTERS HELPING SISTERS

"We normally hold a brunch or tea meeting, with speakers, each quarter," says Sue. "But

after reading the stories of Esther and Rebecca in the Open Doors magazine, we decided we would do something to help our sisters in Africa for our Summer meeting instead."

Over the past decade or so, Cosham Baptist Church has welcomed several families from Nigeria and Ghana to their fellowship. Members of these families became central to the day as the Women's Ministry Team planned a fabulous programme of 'Africa meets Cosham'. It was a celebration of African art, music, food and culture, as well as a chance to raise money and awareness for Christians who face persecution for their faith.

DANCE MASTERCLASS

Young and old learnt new moves in a Nigerian dance masterclass, while the audience learnt to sing songs in various African dialects. A panel of church members born in Africa were interviewed, so others could learn more about their lives and experiences.

"All this was topped off by authentic African food for visitors to sample – our African friends cooked up a storm – and a display of African art. Undoubtedly, a

highlight of the event was the moving acapella rendition of a psalm in Igbo sung by Josephine Ezeigbo," says Sue.

Among the singing, dancing and feasting, there was an opportunity to learn more about the challenges facing Christian women in Nigeria, and the work of Open Doors to support them. The event was covered by the local press, giving Sue an opportunity to share the message to a wider audience.

FRESH UNDERSTANDING

She says, "The Africa event worked on a number of levels. Not just fundraising and raising awareness of our suffering brethren – but also bringing together different cultures within the church and introducing a fresh understanding between us."

After the last bunting had been taken down and the final bin bags emptied, it was time for Sue and her team to count the takings. They were in for an exciting surprise.

"We had hoped our event would raise enough to pay for a lady to have trauma counselling at the new Nigerian centre," says Sue. "So, we were pleased to raise £1,000 – enough to sponsor three women!"



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Two of the organising team, Lizzie Okani and Sue Jones; Playing the bongo drum; Esther with baby Rebecca; An authentic taste of Nigeria and Ghana.

Over to you!

Inspired? If you fancy fundraising like Sue to bless your persecuted brothers and sisters, you can pick up all sorts of tips and inspiration for your event – not to mention delicious recipes from your persecuted family – in your free *Bake with Them* pack. You could run an event like 'Africa meets Cosham', or do something much simpler, like a collection during coffee and cake after church. It really is up to you! **Order your pack today by calling 01993 460015 or by visiting www.opendoorsuk.org/bakewiththem. Share your photos using #bakewiththem #opendoorsuk and #opendoorsbake**





Sow seeds of hope for persecuted Christian women like Rikiya, targeted for their faith and gender.



When Rikiya's husband died, her problems were only beginning. Boko Haram destroyed her village in Nigeria. She and her three children had to flee for their lives. When they returned, they'd lost everything.

With your support and prayers, Open Doors partners have been able to give her a microloan. She has bought two goats, and each year can sell young goats to provide for herself and her children.

"Honestly, if not for the loan I received, I don't know what I would have done," says Rikiya.

Rikiya is still receiving an annual loan and is on the path to self-sufficiency, but millions of women around the world are still socially and economically excluded both because they are Christians and because they are women. With a loan, they can buy seeds for crops and other farming materials, and build a long-term livelihood. Without one, they will remain vulnerable and excluded.

Your Easter gift and prayers can seed hope for women, like Rikiya, who are persecuted for their faith and gender.

EVERY £20 could provide a widow with a loan to buy seeds for crops and other farming equipment so that she can become self-sufficient.

EVERY £47 could give six months' food and housing for a widow and child, and education for her child.

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

Thank you.