

OpenDoors

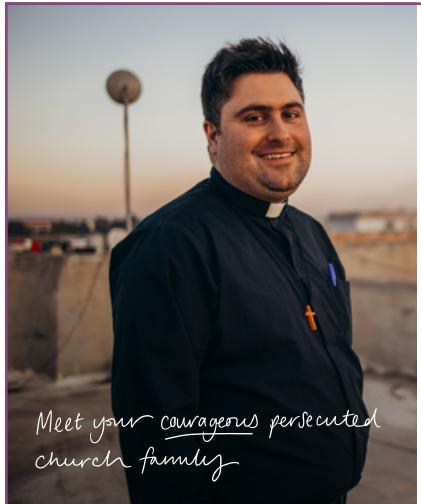
MAGAZINE | September/October 2022

A close-up portrait of Pastor Edward, a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a clerical collar and a light-colored shirt. He is smiling warmly at the camera.

Make hope
last in the
Middle East

Pastor Edward is
standing strong in Syria

HOPE FOR THE
MIDDLE EAST
CAMPAIGN SPECIAL



Meet your courageous persecuted church family

OpenDoors

STANDING STRONG

ANNUAL GATHERING 2022

Saturday 24 September, 7.30pm

Trent Vineyard, Nottingham, NG7 2PX

You're invited to meet your persecuted church family! Hear first-hand from believers including Father Daniel from Iraq, and join other Christians from the UK and Ireland in prayer and worship.

Book now: opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong

In-person
and online
event

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

E inspire@opendoorsuk.org

Find us on:

opendoorsuk.org

OpenDoors

Open Doors UK & I
Registered as a Charity in England and Wales No.1125684, Scotland No. SC043710, Republic of Ireland 20140984 ©Open Doors 2022



Cover: Open Doors partner Pastor Edward runs a Centre of Hope in Syria, where he brings hope to the Middle East through emergency relief, long-term support and Christian fellowship

Letter from Henrietta

Overflowing with hope

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope."

ROMANS 15:13

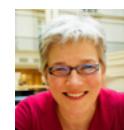
You might not know that it was through the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign that I first got involved with Open Doors. I remember sitting with my husband at our kitchen table, saying that we wanted to do something to support Syrians. And we discovered that Open Doors partners were working in the Middle East, strengthening the church through short-term relief and long-term support.

A lot has changed over those years, but those partners – people like Pastor Edward (p8) – remain with the persecuted church in Syria and Iraq. I'm so inspired and encouraged when I hear about their dedication for years. They chose to stay when more than half the church left, so they could be Jesus's hands and feet, and salt and light to those around them. It's thanks to your gifts and prayers that the church has remained to be a beacon of hope in Syria. As Pastor Edward says, "Your support makes it possible to bring the light of Christ further."

People need hope. That is the main thing we've seen in the seven years of *Hope for the Middle East* and the establishment of hundreds of Centres of Hope, which the local church uses to provide practical and spiritual support. Hope is what is restoring these communities. Hope is what is strengthening the church, and will do for years to come. I know many people are struggling in the UK and Ireland at the moment too – perhaps we, and our churches, can be inspired to show that same godly hope here.

Thank you so, so much for praying, giving and speaking out during *Hope for the Middle East* so far. As the seven-year campaign draws to a close, and we look to the future of Open Doors partners' work in the region, I'm reminded of the seventh day that Joshua led the march around the walls of Jericho. I believe breakthrough is around the corner! You have helped keep hope alive – but our church family continues to need our help to hold on to that hope. Let's pray as never before.

Every blessing,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I



Join us for
IDOP
ONLINE
2022

UNITING IN PRAYER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Sunday 6 November, 7.30-8.30pm

We'd love you to join us as we unite with our friends at the Evangelical Alliance, Release International and CSW to mark the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church! You'll get updates and stories from Iraq, China and Cuba, and have opportunity to join with others in praying for our persecuted family and making a difference to their lives.

To register, go to opendoorsuk.org/idop

World Watch News

EGYPT

Christian killed in front of son and two nephews



A 58-year-old Christian man from Egypt was brutally murdered in front of his son and two nephews, with the attacker heard saying he did it 'to get to paradise'.

Abdel-Masih Sadeq Khalil and the three children (aged between four and eight) were approaching the family's farm in Ezbat Al Thawabit, Minya Governorate, on 5 July when a villager stabbed him to death.

One eyewitness heard the attacker say, "I killed this Christian kaffir to get to paradise." ('Kaffir' is an insult used by Muslims to refer to people who are not Muslims.) He was arrested, but his family say that he is mentally ill. This is often falsely cited in attacks against Christians to avoid punishment, making believers more vulnerable to attack.

Please pray that justice will be served against the attacker, and that the three children will heal from the traumatic experience.

MYANMAR

Christians continue to suffer under military rule

Your prayers remain urgently needed for Christians in Myanmar, as the military's grip on power continues to bring devastation and disruption.

Three Christians were recently killed in an attack on four homes in the village of Janglenphai in Sagaing Division. Meanwhile, in Thatlang in neighbouring Chin State, two churches were burnt down. This brings the total number of destroyed churches in the locality to 12 since February 2021, when the military seized power. The ongoing attacks are leading to the displacement of more Christians.

"When will this war end?" asks Tun Tun*, an Open Doors local partner. "We live as refugees in a foreign land, resources are

scarce and we never wanted to move, but for our safety and for our family, we must run."

Despite the challenges, Christians are continuing to find ways to gather for worship and fellowship. Please pray that God will continue to strengthen the faith and witness of our brothers and sisters and pray for peace and stability in the country.

BELOW Believers gather to pray amid the ongoing crisis



UK

High-wire act for retired vicar

An 81-year-old retired vicar has raised over £850 for the persecuted church by going on a zip wire.



Brian Ardill (LEFT) from Cullompton in Devon was at a prayer meeting for the persecuted church when he was particularly impacted

by a video on Nigeria, where a relative had served as a

missionary. "That drew me in to think about these people and their plight, and Open Doors were going in and bringing food, support and money," he shares. "That really got me."

The challenge was especially hard for Brian as his legs remain weak after getting Covid-19. "It was quite an adventure but I did the job," he says.

Find out how you can take on a fundraising challenge of your own at opendoorsuk.org/fundraise



SRI LANKA

Local partners face obstacles amid crisis

The political and economic crisis engulfing Sri Lanka is posing enormous challenges to many Christians, including local Open Doors partners seeking to reach people with practical and spiritual support.

Recent months have seen mass protests because of soaring prices and shortages of food and fuel. This came to a head in July, when peaceful protests in the capital Colombo drew huge crowds who wanted to oust

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who has since resigned.

Many believers and pastors in rural areas are struggling to provide for their families. While Open Doors local partners have been able to provide emergency relief to many in need, issues such as fuel shortages, road closures and transport strikes are posing severe challenges.

Furthermore, although local partners are still leading

discipleship programmes amid the crisis, some have had to be cancelled for safety reasons.

Please pray that local partners will be equipped and able to reach all those in need, and that believers will find safe ways to attend discipleship programmes.

ABOVE (L-R) Christians hand out drinks in their local community during the crisis; believers receive aid from local partners

EAST AFRICA

Sarah finds courage to share the gospel

Your prayers and support are helping Sarah* (RIGHT) from East Africa to stand strong in her faith despite persecution and courageously share it with others – and it's led to a flourishing house church.

Despite growing up in a staunchly Muslim household, Sarah's faith was only ever nominal. This was further entrenched when various rituals failed to heal her chronic headaches.

Her life changed after attending a church to childmind for a family. "I went home and continued using the medicines," she recalls. "But they were harming me, so I thought, maybe it would be better to

receive Christ." She became a Christian and soon her headaches stopped.

But her choice caused uproar among her family. They rejected her and withdrew financial support, meaning Sarah had to drop out of school. Thankfully, Open Doors local partners enrolled her in a Bible study group as well as trauma healing and persecution survival seminars.

The support is giving her the courage to share the gospel with others. Family members who once persecuted her are now Christians and she began a house church. So many people joined that they had to move to a bigger location! Some

Muslims who oppose it have even asked for prayer for their sick children.

"You gave us counsel, you prayed for us, you were close to us, you gave us advice, you gave us everything," Sarah says of the help provided by Open Doors supporters.



*Names changed for security reasons



ABOVE The 2022 FoRB Ministerial is a significant step forward for urging freedom of religion or belief for all

Open Doors' Advocacy team were at the Ministerial, raising awareness of alarming trends of the persecution facing our brothers and sisters. Thanks to you, many MPs heard what more can be done to promote and protect the right to religious freedom. They're now better equipped to act on behalf of our church family.

Even better, 25 Open Doors supporters (BELOW), with a passion for speaking out on behalf of our persecuted family, were able to meet their MPs during the conference. They shared more about the importance of FoRB, and how their MP can use their influence.



TIRHAM FROM NIGERIA SHARED HER STORY

Tirham (name changed) is an Open Doors partner bringing trauma care to Nigeria, particularly to Christian women and girls who've faced violence because of their faith. Her

MPs hear why freedom of religion or belief is crucial

Thank you to all of you who invited your MP to attend the 2022 FoRB Ministerial in London on 5-6 July. This international human rights conference was a unique opportunity for governments, parliamentarians and faith and belief representatives to gather to urge increased global action on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all.

testimony brought alive the persecution that our church family is facing. "One family I met at the trauma centre had been abducted by Islamic militants Boko Haram," she shared. "They wanted to show the families that they were serious, so they shot the two eldest sons. Then a soldier told one of the women he would kill her second child if she didn't let him rape her." The trauma centre enabled this family to begin healing from this ordeal.

Tirham spoke at two Open Doors events in Parliament. Firstly, an event co-hosted with Aid to the Church in Need on gender-specific religious persecution, and secondly alongside Open Doors regional expert Illia Djadi and Dr Richard Ikiele at an event in conjunction with PSJ UK, highlighting how life for Christians in Nigeria was deteriorating sharply, and how urgent action was needed.

NEW DIGITAL PERSECUTION REPORT

On 6 July, Open Doors launched a new report at the Ministerial: 'Digital Persecution: the new frontier for FoRB'. The report focuses on this alarming trend

of religious persecution, and the related panel chaired by Rehman Chishti MP (PICTURED ABOVE) saw speakers including Open Doors' Director of Advocacy Dr David Landrum, Rahima Mahmut of the World Uyghur Conference on Chinese surveillance technology and Fareed Ahmad of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK on the censorship faced by their community in Pakistan. You can read the digital persecution report online at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy.

PLEASE PRAY

Following the Ministerial, can you continue to pray for ongoing impact?

- For all delegates and UK Parliamentarians who attended the Ministerial to use their influence to further global religious freedom
- That new ministers build on the UK's existing commitments to religious liberty
- For real and lasting change for the persecuted church – particularly those who suffer from digital persecution.



OpenDoors

STANDING STRONG

ANNUAL GATHERING 2022

Saturday 24 September, 7.30pm

Trent Vineyard, Nottingham, NG7 2PX
In-person and online event



Are you looking to be inspired and challenged in your faith? Do you want to broaden your vision of God's kingdom? Have you ever wondered how God is at work in some of the most dangerous places to be a Christian?

If you answered yes to any of the above, then join Open Doors at Standing Strong in September! It's an amazing evening celebrating all that God is doing in some of the darkest places in the world. Hear first-hand how the church is alive and active in Asia and the Middle East from Hannah* and Father Daniel, find out how your prayers and gifts are reviving hope for persecuted Christians around the world, and worship and pray with your church family in the UK and Ireland.

"Thank you. I was challenged, blessed and encouraged to keep praying"

STANDING STRONG 2021 ATTENDEE

If you attend in-person, you'll be able to come to exclusive afternoon seminars, where you can meet with Hannah, an Open Doors partner working with Asian refugees, and Father

Daniel (PICTURED ABOVE), a church leader in Iraq, to hear how they are seeing God's power and presence at work in the face of extreme persecution.

FATHER DANIEL, IRAQ

Father Daniel has known persecution all his life, which came to a head when so-called Islamic State (IS) invaded in 2014. Despite many opportunities to flee, he chose to stay and support his church and those in his community who could not leave the country. You helped his church to become a Centre of Hope, providing practical and spiritual support to all who need it. "[Open Doors supporters] helped us through the relief process in the beginning, and then they helped us to start rebuilding our community," he says. "They continue helping us through so many projects like the trauma healing project and the leadership trainings and also the discipleship project and Bible studies."

Standing Strong is a fantastic opportunity for you to meet and worship with other Christians from around the UK and Ireland. It's also a great way to introduce and connect your church, small group, friends and family to persecuted believers around the world! See for yourself how your prayers, gifts and actions are making a difference for the persecuted church and spurring them on in their faith.

REGISTER TODAY

Join us in September – book your tickets today!



Scan the QR code or go to opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong

*Name changed for security reasons



"WE ARE AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST"

Making hope last in Syria

"It's a prolonged crisis, without seeing an end," says Pastor Edward, an Open Doors partner in Syria. "On the other hand, we experience divine light amid darkness."

That's his answer when asked about the situation – for Syria, but also for the whole persecuted church in the Middle East. You might remember meeting Pastor Edward (**OPPOSITE, WITH HIS WIFE RANA**) at the beginning of Open Doors' seven-year *Hope for the Middle East* campaign, in 2016. The initial vision for the campaign was to keep hope alive for the church through emergency relief for survival, and long-term help to rebuild shattered lives, through income-generation, leadership training and trauma counselling. That vision remains strong today.

Six years on, it's clear from speaking to Pastor Edward again that your gifts and prayers are making a huge difference in the lives of many men,



PICTURED Everyone pictured is finding support at a Centre of Hope in Iraq or Syria

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

women and children who faithfully follow Jesus no matter the cost. It's also clear that the crisis is far from over, and we need to keep going in bringing hope to the Middle East.

"THE CHURCH WAS BLEEDING"

"The church was bleeding," says Pastor Edward, looking back at the decade of persecution, war and pandemic that continues to have a severe impact. "We lost over 60 per cent of our members; they left Syria. It was so hard. Many of them had positions of leadership in the church."

All Syrians and Iraqis have experienced hardship in the past decade, but Christians have faced more than most. In many regions, they were targeted by Islamic militants – losing their jobs, their homes and even their lives. Many had to flee, displaced either within Syria or abroad. Those who stayed either had no choice, or decided – like Pastor Edward – to courageously remain with the church.

BELOW Pastor Edward and his wife Rana run a Centre of Hope in Syria



GOD OPENED DOORS

The church hasn't fully recovered its numbers, and Covid-19 derailed many attempts to rebuild lives and communities – but Pastor Edward has seen, and is seeing, God at work. "When we look back, we will see how the hand of the Lord was

moving," he says. "Some places were hit very hard, but the result was a great expansion of the Kingdom. God opened doors for the gospel."

The establishment of Centres of Hope in Syria and Iraq, thanks to the persistent prayers and support of Open Doors supporters, is a key way those doors have opened. During *Hope for the Middle East*, 160 Centres of Hope have been established in Syria, and 126

in Iraq – and there are plans for more. These Centres of Hope are places (often church buildings) where the local church can support their community practically and spiritually. The activities and provision differ depending on the context, but often include vital food and medical aid, Bible study and discipleship,

"IT'S VERY IMPORTANT AND MEANINGFUL FOR US, AS MIDDLE EASTERN PEOPLE, TO SEE THE CHURCH STAY – TO DO THE WORK OF CHRIST HERE, LIKE A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS."



training, income-generating projects and trauma care. It's hard to overstate the impact they're having.

"WE BROUGHT LOVE AND CARE"

At the beginning of the campaign, Pastor Edward said: "It's very important and meaningful for us, as Middle Eastern people, to see the church stay – to do the work of Christ here, like a light in the darkness." That's exactly what he has done ever since. At Pastor Edward's Centre of Hope in Damascus, a lot of community connection was fostered by distributing emergency food and medicine. "The church has distributed relief items to the neediest. There were months where we gave over a thousand packages. We brought love and care to the people in need, in the name of Christ.

"We are the ambassadors of Christ in the country," Pastor Edward says, of his church and the whole, growing network of Centres of Hope in Syria and Iraq. "We stayed with the message of light, when the embassies of the nations closed their doors. We gained a lot of respect from the whole community. People were touched by what we did as a church.

"Yes, it is tough, the experiences are painful but, at the same time, the Lord has His divine project. We are somehow instruments in His hand to complete this project."

IKTIMAL'S STORY

One of the people benefitting from a Centre of Hope in Syria – and giving back to it – is Iktimal. She and her family were well-off, living a very comfortable middle-class life in a village near Idlib, Syria. That all changed overnight.

"WHERE EXTREMISTS THERE WANTED TO KILL US, THE CHURCH HERE HAS LOVED US. IT FEELS LIKE BEING RAISED FROM DEATH."

"We had a big house and many olive fields," she remembers. "One year, the harvest gave us enough to buy two houses. We also had a driving school with about 50 cars. We had a very good life. We had no idea that our stable life would end."

Armed militia started bombing the area and threatening the people living there, particularly targeting her village because of the Christian population.

"They wanted money; they said my husband and son would be taken away and that we would never see them again," says Iktimal.

"One day they killed a cousin of ours, and we got so scared that they would kill my husband too. We fled the village. We escaped in the early morning, about 3am. I remember looking back at our house, thinking we would never see it again."

FINDING HOPE AT THE CENTRE

About 20 Christians in Iktimal's village were killed. Her family stayed with relatives for a few months but couldn't afford to find their own place. When



ABOVE Iktimal got support from a Centre of Hope after Islamic militants invaded her village

people at one of the Centres of Hope in Latakia saw the situation, they rushed to support Iktimal's family with a home and much more.

"They helped us with everything, with mattresses, blankets, gas," says Iktimal. "They also gave us a monthly food package, clothes, stationery for the children. When they saw our need, they helped. I never expected that. I experience the love of God as the church stands with us."

Through the Centre of Hope, the church gave emotional, psychological and spiritual support. "They prayed with us,

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

they listened to our story, they stood with us," says Iktimal. "God was with us. He sent those people to stand by us, they were like angels. Their love brought us closer to Jesus."

"EXTREMISTS ARE LIVING IN OUR HOUSE"

Of course, Iktimal misses her village. "We miss everything there – our house, the house of my parents, the church they destroyed." Now, the village is still in the hands of extremist groups. "There is no safety there. If we would return now, they would kill us. The extremists are living in our house. Where extremists there wanted to kill us, the church here has loved us. It feels like being raised from death."

As Iktimal says, "For God, nothing is impossible." She still hopes that she and her family will one day be able to return home. But, in the meantime, she is getting much-needed practical and spiritual support from the Centre of Hope – and contributing in return. Iktimal has a job at the Centre of Hope, helping in the children's ministry: "I am working on the bus that picks children up at their homes, and gets the children safely back after they've attended the activities. Education at the schools in Syria is very bad – the Centre of Hope offers extra tutoring for free. That is very important."

"THE CURE OF CHRIST"

Centres of Hope support their local communities in many areas – one of which is a medical clinic that Pastor Edward and his wife, Rana, started in 2006. Called 'Jesus, Light of the World', the clinic serves 1,500 people a month – both Christian and Muslim.



"I EXPERIENCE THE LOVE OF GOD AS THE CHURCH STANDS WITH US"

ABOVE Iktimal now works at the Centre of Hope, helping transport children to activities

It really is shining Christ's light to the community, most of whom couldn't otherwise afford healthcare.

"Most of the patients are non-Christians," says Pastor Edward. "They can tell that there is something different in this clinic. Most of our doctors and staff are committed Christians who really try to serve medically and, at the same time, bring the cure of Christ."

It's clear that the clinic is having a significant impact – thanks to people like Pastor Edward, and to your prayers and gifts. "People feel the respect and love of our staff," says Pastor Edward. "Many of them ask questions about Christ and about the Word of God. Patients

in the clinic come from all backgrounds, and especially people from non-Christian backgrounds love the clinic."

WORST ECONOMIC SITUATION

The need for the services of the clinic, and for the other provisions of Syria and Iraq's many Centres of Hope, is greater than ever.

"The economic situation now is the lowest ever in the country," says Pastor Edward. Though the conflict has died down from its peak, everyday

life is extremely difficult for most people. "For the first time in our country, the middle class is now close to starvation."

Iktimal knows how crucial Centres of Hope remain, for offering life-sustaining support. "The Centre gives joy and peace," she says. "When all doors were closed for us, we found this place and started to love life again."

With your ongoing support and prayers, many more doors can be opened. More vulnerable believers can be equipped to ensure the church survives in the Middle East, and more non-Christians can see the light of Christ. With your help, Open Doors partners will continue bringing practical support and spiritual encouragement to the region for as long as it is needed.

YOUR SUPPORT CAN MAKE HOPE LAST

When the campaign started, Pastor Edward said: "I feel that I am privileged to bring the only message of hope to people who are in desperation." Six years on, it's a message that is as vital

BELOW (L-R) A medical clinic run by Pastor Edward's Centre of Hope serves 1,500 people a month – both Christians and Muslims; Pastor Edward's ministry is possible thanks to Open Doors supporters like you



as ever. And Pastor Edward knows that he still needs you. "The support of the church globally is very vital – we know that we are not left alone," he says. "We belong to the larger body of Christ. Your support makes it possible to bring the light of Christ further."

Thank you for all you've done. There's so much more to do. Keep bringing hope to the Middle East.

> **Watch Pastor Edward's story at opendoorsuk.org**

PLEASE PRAY

- For God to equip and strengthen Pastor Edward and all other Open Doors partners in the region
- That persecuted Christians in Syria and Iraq would know God's sustaining love and protection
- For Centres of Hope to flourish, helping the church in the Middle East to survive, thrive and share the love of Christ.

Go to opendoorsuk.org/makehopelast to join in raising one million prayers of hope for Christians in Syria and Iraq. Add your light to the interactive map so that Christians all over the world can see we are uniting in prayer.

PLEASE GIVE

Every £20 could help a believer get trauma support and counselling to heal from their persecution.

Every £36 could provide a vital parcel of food, clothing and blankets for a persecuted Christian struggling to survive the harsh winter.

Every £50 could enable two vulnerable believers to access essential health services.

You can make a gift online at opendoorsuk.org. Thank you.



160 Centres of
Hope in Syria,
serving their
communities



126 Centres of
Hope in Iraq,
providing holistic
support



1,000,000+
food packages
distributed
in Syria



808,172
people from 143
countries signed a
petition on behalf
of Christians in
Syria and Iraq



2,000 homes
rebuilt in Iraq

INTERVIEW:

Reflecting on seven years of *Hope for the Middle East*

Thomas* oversees the work of Open Doors in the Middle East. In this interview, he reflects on the seven-year *Hope for the Middle East* campaign – and the future of Open Doors' work in the region.

How did *Hope for the Middle East* begin?

Thomas: As the crisis in Syria escalated, and during the rise of so-called Islamic State in Iraq, there was a clear plea from church leaders to come alongside them. We brought a team together, including external experts. I asked them what the biggest issue was, and the answer was "Hope. The church and society need hope."

The church, for centuries, has been the hope bringer. We are convinced that the only hope is through the church, because Jesus is the Hope. We looked at the very dramatic situation in Syria and Iraq, and we felt that we needed to strengthen the church.

We listened to the church and the answer was a multi-layered campaign that had an advocacy part – and emergency relief.

How did Centres of Hope develop?

Thomas: We came across leaders with vision amid horror. They created conditions for families to return and to rebuild. This is where the idea was born: churches as a place where people receive hope again. That was through prayer, pastoral counselling, biblical teaching on suffering, giving food packages. We have already distributed one million food packages in Syria.

We started with a goal of 60 Centres of Hope in Syria, and

we now have 160. In Iraq, we have 126 churches designated as Centres of Hope. We don't come and do relief and then leave. We build relationships with the churches, and we stay. A bishop said to me, "You are the oxygen in our lungs."

What is the future of the church in the Middle East?

Thomas: I know for sure that our work has contributed to people staying. The church has become smaller, but it is still vibrant. We strongly believe that the role of the church will remain. God will keep his remnant.

The church was born in the Middle East, and the church will be there to convey the love of God to the Muslims. I was speechless when I walked into a church service with only believers from a Muslim background from Syria. They all went through war, killings, being expelled from their families. They were sitting there with a serenity and a calmness, worshipping the Lord and hearing from the Bible, and I knew this place was a Centre of Hope for them.

As we remain faithful to the Christians in Iraq and Syria, we will grow the number of Centres of Hope and deepen the work with the existing Centres of Hope in the middle of hopelessness. We cannot let them down. Don't give up. Let hope last.

*Name changed for security reasons

THIS CHRISTMAS, SEND SOME

words of peace

NEW RESOURCE!



many of you regularly encourage our persecuted church family by sending messages of encouragement via Open Doors' letter-writing campaigns.

But this year we are inviting you to go bigger. Literally.

SEND A GIANT MESSAGE OF PEACE

This Christmas, we'd like your church to send words of peace on one huge, fold-out Christmas card.

The idea is simple:

- ◆ Share the story of Mimi and Valentina with your church
- ◆ Invite everyone to write a message on the card
- ◆ Return it to us, and we will forward your messages of peace to persecuted Christians around the world.

Along with the card, you'll also be able to get *Words of Peace* carol sheets to use in your Christmas services, and giveaway cards for people to take home to remind them of the peace of God.

So, this Christmas, will your church send words of peace to our persecuted brothers and sisters? True peace is more than just the absence of conflict and pain: it's the presence of Jesus. And that, of course, is what Christmas is all about.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- ◆ Videos to use in your Christmas services
- ◆ Free youth group session outline, with games, Bible discussion, video, prayer activities and the chance to write a festive message of peace to young Christians facing pressure for their faith
- ◆ Downloadable children and families activity – make your own *Words of Peace* Christmas cards to share with others.

WORDS OF PEACE The Open Doors Christmas resource 2022

- ◆ Carol sheet with well-known carols, prayers and inspirational stories
- ◆ Giveaway card for congregation and visitors
- ◆ Giant *Words of Peace* Christmas card for your whole church to sign and return
- ◆ Online downloadable resources for youth and children and families.

Find more information and order today at opendoorsuk.org/christmas



A VOICE OUT OF DARKNESS: SPEAKING HOPE IN IRAQ

How you're helping Iraqi Christians find their voice through advocacy training and radio



ABOVE Saeb's radio ministry, 'Voice of Peace', is changing attitudes towards Christians and Christianity across Iraq

"Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent." Acts 18:9

In 2016, Open Doors launched the *One Million Voices of Hope* petition as part of the seven-year *Hope for the Middle East* campaign. Through this campaign, thousands of you have brought hope to the church in Syria and Iraq, after Islamic extremists did their best to wipe it out. Praise God, they did not

succeed – and six years later, Iraqi believers are continuing to see the fruit of your faithful prayers and support as they settle again in their homes and rebuild their lives.

“MY DREAM WAS TO RAISE MY VOICE AGAINST INJUSTICE”

In a matter of a few decades, the Christian population in Iraq has dropped significantly, from around 1.5 million believers in the early '90s to just 150,000

today – and Christians continue to leave. This is partly because the rights of Iraqi believers are not upheld by the government or local authorities. “Many young people who belong to minorities just leave the country when they see their rights being violated,” says Yacoub, a local TV presenter and journalist. “My dream was to raise my voice against the injustice that afflicted my



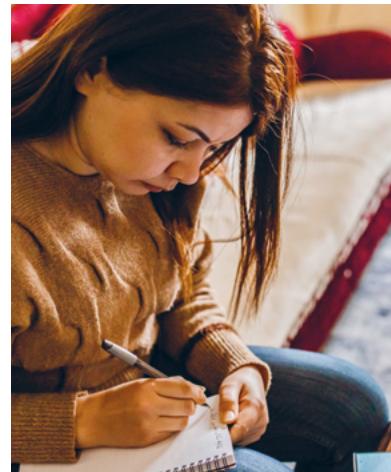
Christian community, but I didn't have enough knowledge of legal frameworks and other knowledge I needed to advocate in the right way.”

One of the priorities of the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign is a call to ‘promote and protect the equal and inalienable rights of all their citizens, irrespective of race, religion or other status’. Thanks to your prayers and support, Open Doors local partners in Iraq have established a training programme called ‘Know Your Rights and Speak Up’ to help Iraqi Christians understand their rights and use their voices to stand up for themselves and their churches.

Raeda, another activist who took part in the training, went back to her hometown after the first year and held some seminars about human rights. “In our communities, people didn't know a lot about their rights or how to ask for their rights,” she says. “We had a lot of interaction and debate in those sessions; the people were really interested.”

RADIO SHOW CHANGES HOW CHRISTIANS ARE SEEN

In another part of Iraq, other Christians are speaking out – not through seminars, but over the airwaves. Saut al Salam (*Voice of Peace*) radio station broadcasts from Qaraqosh and reaches up to 150,000 people all over Iraq and the Middle East. The programmes are about the church, Christianity and Christian life. “The programmes provide a type



ABOVE The messages Silva broadcasts through ‘Voice of Peace’ radio are encouraging Christians to stand strong in their faith

around the world, thanks to the signatures of Open Doors supporters like you. Churches across the UK and Ireland joined together in prayer for their persecuted church family in the Middle East. You are helping them to stay in their villages, towns and cities and make hope last – thank you. There is still a long way to go for the church in Iraq but, in the same way that God encouraged the apostle Paul in Acts 18:9 to ‘keep on speaking’, we can continue to strengthen our Iraqi sisters and brothers through prayer.



ABOVE Raeda is now teaching other Christians about their human rights

PRAY

- For God's continued blessing on the advocacy training and radio ministry in Iraq
- That God will continue to strengthen the church in Iraq to be a voice of hope for the nation
- That the aims of the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign will be fully realised.

“We get a lot of calls from listeners. Many of them tell us that their view on Christians changed.”

THANK YOU FOR SPEAKING OUT

By raising your voice – in prayer, in advocacy – you are helping Iraqi Christians find and use their own voice. The *One Million Voices of Hope* petition was seen in the corridors of power – not just in the UK, but

VOICES OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Daniel from Ethiopia



ABOVE Daniel RIGHT Daniel's diploma in theology

It was the middle of the night and Daniel* had a phone call warning him that his father and brothers had sent people to burn down his house while he was sleeping. Daniel slipped out of the house and escaped what was the third attempt on his life – simply because he loves Jesus.

Daniel's journey of faith began when a young Muslim brought a New Testament to the mosque. Islamic leaders were about to burn it when Daniel stepped in. He wanted to study it – but only to prove the truth of the Quran. But, instead, Daniel had questions.

HEALED AT CHURCH

He gathered Islamic teachers to discuss the biblical claim that Jesus is the Son of God, but they accused Daniel of having a bad spirit. "You destroy our religion," they told him. "Don't come to our mosque ever again."

Daniel visited the nearest church to get a copy of the full Bible, studying it and asking God to reveal the truth. At the same time, Daniel developed hypertension. Having read that Jesus healed people, he visited a church. "The moment they prayed for me, I felt healing," he says. "Then I became 100% sure of everything I had read in the Bible."

Having become a Christian, Daniel regularly attended



church – much to the disdain of family, friends and locals. At first, he was rejected, but then it grew more sinister. "Kill him, wherever you find him," his father said. In his eyes, Daniel had dishonoured the family.

Daniel fled to the forest. "It was a very scary place," he recalls. After a week living among hyenas and other dangerous animals, he returned home. "I told myself, 'If they kill me, let them kill me.'"

OUTSMARTING THE MOB
For a second time, they nearly did. Daniel was walking along a street when a mob surrounded him. "This person has insulted our prophet Muhammad," said one of them. "Kill him!" But Daniel outsmarted them, drawing the group into a theological debate that led to them turning on each other.

And then came the third attempt on his life, after which he fled the area. He connected with a local church and, with support from Open Doors, was given money for rent, necessities and nursing training. Four years later, Daniel graduated and now has a job!

"It is not only my success, but also your success," Daniel says. "I would like to thank you."

*Names changed for security reasons

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?



READ

"The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists... Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me'" Acts 12:6-7, 11



REFLECT

Like Daniel in Ethiopia, Peter experienced remarkable deliverance – but often God's protection is less noticeable. Ask God to open your eyes to the unseen ways He's kept you from harm.

While many of our prayers for protection are answered, there are times when Christians face attack, even death. How can we reconcile this tension?



RESPOND

After his escape, Peter visited the home where people were praying for his release – and they didn't believe it was him! (Acts 12:15) It's a lovely reminder of the difference your prayers for protection make – perhaps even in Daniel's deliverance from harm.

Like Peter, who can you visit, message or call to let them know that their prayers for you have been answered?



HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR ETHIOPIA WORLD WATCH LIST #38

1 PRAY FOR UNITY

Believers who leave the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to join a Protestant group can face persecution from local communities and family members.

Lord Jesus, soften the hearts of Orthodox believers who are hostile to those who've changed denomination. Raise up leaders in the Orthodox Church who will use their influence to promote church unity in Ethiopia. Amen.

2 PRAY FOR BELIEVERS

Converts from Islam can also face persecution, while pressure can come from local authorities who oppose the growth of Protestant groups.

Heavenly Father, strengthen our Ethiopian family in the face of opposition and protect them from harm. Give them a fresh vision of Jesus that will help them to stand strong. Use their witness to draw others to You. Amen.

3 PRAY FOR PEACE

Political violence – especially in Tigray – together with drought and plagues is creating instability and uncertainty that make Christians a soft target.

Dear God, impress upon influential figures a greater determination to work towards peace in Ethiopia. Pour rain on thirsty ground and keep the land from plagues. Surround Christians with Your peace and protection. Amen.



"I would implore you to pray for those facing suffering and persecution, because the Lord of resurrection will help them and because we have faith in your prayers."

– PASTOR SAMUEL* FROM ETHIOPIA WHO SERVES BELIEVERS FROM MUSLIM BACKGROUNDS

Hear more stories and updates from the persecuted church by signing up for weekly emails at opendoorsuk.org/subscribe

MAKE HOPE LAST

So-called Islamic State set out to destroy the church in Syria and Iraq.

Together, we helped keep hope alive.
Thank you.

But persecution, conflict, poverty and hunger are still major threats.

"The support of the church globally is very vital," says Open Doors local partner Pastor Edward. "Your support makes it possible to bring the light of Christ further."

Without our ongoing support and prayer, Christians may lose hope and leave.

EVERY £36 could provide a vital parcel of food, clothing and blankets for a persecuted Christian struggling to survive the harsh winter.

Make hope last by returning the enclosed envelope, phoning 01993 460015 or visiting opendoorsuk.org.
Thank you.

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST



OpenDoors