

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | January/February 2023

Risking everything for North Korean refugees

Read Rebecca's
secret diary





WORLD WATCH LIST 2023 LAUNCH

PRAYER EVENING

WESTMINSTER CHAPEL | 18 JANUARY | 8PM

You are invited! For the first time, the World Watch List launch prayer evening will be in-person, at Westminster Chapel. Come and pray for our global church family, as well as hearing first-hand from Timothy Cho (LEFT), a North Korean persecuted Christian.

If you can't come to London, the prayer evening will also be livestreamed. Register today at opendoorsuk.org.

WORLD WATCH LIST 2023 TOP 50

THE COUNTRIES WHERE CHRISTIANS RISK EVERYTHING FOR CHRIST

Meet the risk-takers of the persecuted church. In your free *World Watch List Top 50*, you'll find detailed information and specific prayer points for the 50 countries where Christians risk the most to follow Christ. You'll also find a map, inspirational testimonies and ways you can stand with your persecuted church family.

Pre-order today at opendoorsuk.org/www



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.

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COVER Rebecca serves North Korean refugees through secret networks in China (image from a reconstruction of Rebecca's story)

Letter from Henrietta

God's risk-takers

"I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." EZEKIEL 11:19

When I read the stories of North Korean Christians, and the Open Doors fieldworkers who support them, I am bowled over by their courage. I always have to stop and think – what compels them to take such extraordinary risks?

As you read about Rebecca* and other secret Open Doors fieldworkers in China (p8), and about their ministry to North Korean women refugees, you might ask the same question. You can find the answer in something Sister J*, one of the fieldworkers, says: "We have to take risks. But even though we know it is not safe, we still have to do it. God loves each of the women so much. We really want to share God's love to them."

It's love that drives them – love for God and for His children. Their long-term hope is like the promise in Ezekiel 11 – they long for Christians in North Korea to be free, that 'they will be my people, and I will be their God'. I am challenged and inspired by the depth of their love and the limitlessness of their obedience. And we see this not just in China and North Korea, but in so many countries where our global family face persecution and discrimination.

At the World Watch List parliamentary launch, there's a vital opportunity to bring these brothers and sisters to the attention of people in power. I've found that even MPs with no personal faith are increasingly recognising how important freedom of religion or belief is – because if this freedom doesn't exist, so many other human rights will also have been compromised.

Please do pray for the parliamentary launch on 18 January and, if you haven't yet, invite your MP. And please keep praying for, and standing with, Open Doors courageous secret fieldworkers. These are things we can do that don't really require any risk at all – but can make such a difference. It's a small step of obedience which demonstrates our love for Jesus and our persecuted church family. Thank you – and a very happy new year to you and your loved ones.



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

*Name changed for security reasons

Leave a legacy of hope

You can give your persecuted family hope of a brighter future by including a gift to Open Doors in your Will. Your gift will mean a lifetime of support for those who suffer for following Jesus.

If you have not yet made a Will, you can make a Will for FREE using our partner *Farewill*.

To find out more, go to opendoorsuk.org/legacy or phone 01993 460015.



World Watch News

YEMEN Christians shaken by arrest and torture

Christians in Yemen are experiencing a sharp rise in arrests and torture, resulting in a traumatising impact on affected believers and their families.

The spike has come in recent months. These are not linked to one specific church network, but several different ones.

"We are specifically concerned because torture is used to force the Christians to give information about the activities of believers or names of other believers," says an Open Doors spokesperson.

Some of the arrested Christians have been released, but they are struggling with the aftermath of the torture they suffered.

"We see that their arrest and the torture had, and still has, a deep impact on their families, too," the spokesperson adds. "They are shocked and are struggling with their faith, as they were counting that God would spare them, that God would intervene. Their faith is shaken."

The persecution of Christians in Yemen has been extreme for many years. Believers are

mostly converts from Islam, but because conversion from Islam to Christianity is forbidden in Yemen, they must keep their faith hidden, with pressure coming from both the government and local communities.

"Pray that they will see God as a loving and caring God," continues the spokesperson. "Pray for the Christian community in Yemen, that the Christians won't be paralysed by fear and stop visiting and encouraging each other out of fear that, for example, their mobile phones would be traced."

NIGERIA "My heart is full of joy"

Your support has helped provide life-saving practical and spiritual support for some 13,000 Christians affected by escalating persecution in Nigeria.

"I am really grateful to God, today my heart is full of joy," says Christiana*, whose family was among the beneficiaries of aid that included food and

other essential aid. They're also receiving trauma care and other medical support.

Attacks on Christians in Nigeria by Islamic militants and armed bandits, particularly in the north, have devastated lives and driven many from their homes. Without your support, thousands of believers would be left helpless.

"This is even too much, I lack words to use," Christiana continues. "God is Lord, and He uses His children to help widows, orphans and others less privileged."

God, we thank You for Your servants who have come to our aid. We say thank You, our gratitude is not enough."

BELOW Christiana sings thanks to God following your timely provision



LAOS Church leader found dead

A 42-year-old church leader and father of eight from Laos has been killed in what is believed to be a faith-related attack.



Atsawin* (LEFT) was found dead two days after being reported missing following a visit to a neighbouring town. He had previously been imprisoned and threatened by

local authorities for refusing to deny his faith in Jesus and turn back to animism.

"Our sources say that it is indeed faith-related. Investigations are ongoing," said Kale, an Open Doors local expert, who added that the incident is highly unusual in Laos.

"The last time someone was killed because of his faith took place decades ago," Kale

continues. "I understand if this raises significant concerns among the church, most especially in the province where it happened."

He adds, "Let's pray that justice will be given towards the family of the bereaved and that the church will remain firm in their faith. Whenever I encounter the persecuted church in Laos, I always witness their resolve to follow Christ whatever the cost."

IRAN

Christian prisoner released

Iranian Christians are celebrating some good news – Naser Navard Goltapeh was released from Evin Prison in October, after being pardoned by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamanei.

In June 2017, the Iranian pastor was sentenced to ten years in prison for 'acting against national security through forming and establishing illegal house churches'. The conviction and sentence were upheld by the appeal court, and Naser started his sentence in January 2018.

Naser's release comes alongside the pardon of several other prisoners, and is a surprise – and an answer to the prayers of his loved ones.

Please continue to lift in prayer Christians who remain imprisoned for their faith in Iran.

INDIA

Imprisoned pastor leads cellmates to Jesus

Across the world, Christians are imprisoned for their faith, but God often uses this experience to do amazing things – and that's certainly the case for Pastor Kumar* (RIGHT) from India.

Pastor Kumar and his wife spent a spell in prison after the police sided with Hindu extremists who invaded a church meeting and accused them of forced conversions. This sort of false accusation is a common tactic used to target believers.

"When my condition was tough, it was at this moment that you held my hand and lifted me"

Whilst imprisoned, God used Pastor Kumar to lead two cellmates to Jesus, including someone convicted of murder.

"I knew that we would face difficulties and struggles in jail, but God was with me," Pastor Kumar shares. "At first, I wasn't sure about what the purpose for



my being in jail was, but I did not fear. God was with me, and the Spirit of God kept reminding me not to be afraid."

Pastor Kumar and his wife have since been released and are being supported by Open Doors local partners. This includes the provision of tailoring machines for them to earn a living after Pastor Kumar lost his job.

*Names changed for security reasons

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



How to make sure your MP hears from the persecuted church

This year's Open Doors World Watch List parliamentary launch is an opportunity to share with MPs stories of unimaginable violence and courageous faith that so often go unnoticed.

In March 2022, several dozen members of an underground church in North Korea were captured and executed. It was a targeted and shocking act of violence that reinforced the dangers facing our North Korean family.

Elsewhere in Asia, violent attacks against believers in India by Hindu extremists were commonplace. In one incident, a pastor in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh State, was found dead beside his home, two months after being

threatened by name in letters circulated locally.

In Nigeria – where more Christians are killed for their faith than the rest of the world put together – Christians and churches remain subject to horrific attacks. In one incident, last Pentecost, at least 50 believers were killed, including children.

Other countries in the region are also seeing a rise in Islamic militant violence. Last summer,

at least 17 Christians were killed in multiple suspected attacks by Islamic extremists in the Democratic Republic of Congo. "We are overwhelmed," says Reverend Besisa Birahure. "What can we do, even where to start during this difficult time we are going through?"

"The pressures and threats emboldened our church, and we continued our ministry to bring many lives to Christ."

There are hundreds of stories like this from the last 12 months, each one leaving a trail of pain and devastation. Often they go unnoticed by the international media. That's why the World Watch List parliamentary launch is such a critical event for raising awareness of our persecuted family.

This is the 30th year that the World Watch List has been published and at the parliamentary launch your MP can hear first-hand accounts

from both North Korea and India. Two of the speakers are Timothy Cho, a North Korean escapee who has been imprisoned four times, and Shruti Hembrom*, an Open Doors local partner in India who herself is exposed to persecution for her faith.

EMBOLDENED CHURCH

Going into a new year, the outlook can look bleak, but your prayers, support and speaking out do make a monumental difference. It's remarkable that many Christians have been able to stand strong amid such atrocities, but this is the reality across the word – helped by you.

Fikiru* from East Africa, an Open Doors expert on the region who will also speak at the parliamentary launch, has experience of this. After becoming Christians, he and his wife received death threats from villagers, who destroyed their church building and bribed the local authorities to restrict their ministry activities. This led to his first meeting Open Doors, with local partners providing physical, emotional and spiritual support.

"The pressures and threats emboldened our church, and we continued our ministry to bring many lives to Christ," he says. It's the same for other Christians he has encountered. "I have met

countless men and women of God who have passed through difficulties as a result of their faith in Christ, and still remain strong enough to share their love for God with others," he says. "Words fail to describe how that makes me feel!"

STORIES THAT PROVOKE ACTION

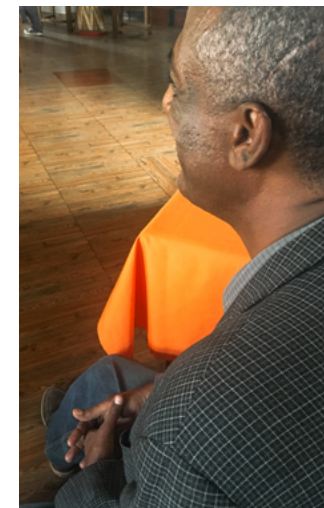
Fikiru will share some of these stories with MPs. Last year, 93 MPs attended the digital launch and they were really impacted by what they learned. "Hearing the stories and stark statistics really brings it home," said Kirsten Oswald MP.

"Hearing the stories and stark statistics really brings it home."

KIRSTEN OSWALD MP

This year's event will be held in-person. It'd be amazing to have a high turnout of MPs to hear such impactful stories and to find out what they can do to help.

If you haven't already, could you invite your MP to the launch? It will only take two minutes to do and makes such a difference for our risk-taking persecuted family. And please join us in praying that those in attendance



ABOVE Fikiru from East Africa will speak at the parliamentary launch

will be moved by what they hear, so that they are provoked to decisive action on behalf of our persecuted family. Thank you!

PLEASE PRAY

- That the parliamentary launch will be well attended by MPs
- That MPs will be inspired by the speakers' words to take action to make a difference for our persecuted family
- For God to surround our persecuted family with His peace and protection.

**Names changed for security reasons*

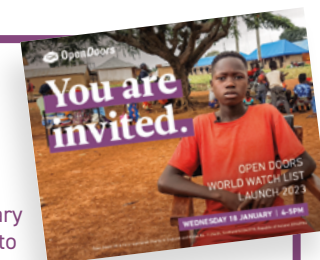
BELOW Pastor Andrew's village is among the many Christian communities in Nigeria devastated by violence at the hands of Islamic extremists



Invite your MP to the World Watch List 2023 launch

For the first time in three years, the World Watch List parliamentary launch will be held in-person. It's taking place on Wednesday 18 January 2023, from 4-5pm, and will be hosted by Sir Stephen Timms MP. Head to opendoorsuk.org/advocacy to send your invitation today. Thank you!

Please note that this event is for MPs only and it will not be streamed online. You can join us for a prayer evening at Westminster Chapel at 8pm. Please visit opendoorsuk.org to book your place. If you can't come to London, the prayer evening will also be livestreamed.



A woman with dark hair is shown in profile, looking out of a window. She is holding a small white cup with both hands. The background is dark with some green plants visible. The lighting is soft, coming from the window.

Risking everything for North Korean refugees

THE DIARY OF A SECRET FIELDWORKER

Rebecca* has one of the riskiest jobs imaginable. Through Open Doors' secret networks in China, she meets with North Korean refugee women. They've escaped North Korea in search of a better life – but have ended up being trafficked. Often they are neglected or abused by the families they end

up in. Rebecca is able to bring them pastoral care, a little money and, most importantly, the good news of the gospel. As the weeks go by, she sees God working amazing change in these vulnerable women. Her work comes with incredible risks – but it brings incredible joy. This is her story.

*Name changed for security reasons

첫째 날

DAY 1

I met some new North Korean sisters today. These women endure such poor lives. Their lives are truly difficult and harsh. Many were trafficked into Chinese families. They should be welcomed as a new family member but many of them are not. Instead, they are just treated as a means to deliver babies. Without legal identification, they cannot travel freely within China. They cannot do what they want. They are confined in the situation.

God allows me to find the sisters. When they first hear about the Word of God, they laugh at it, and they respond as if it were nonsense. I know they're only coming for funds, for the small amount of money I can give. But I've seen God do many transformations in the past, and I have faith He will do it again.

It's very difficult to teach them the message of the Word because, in their minds, there are a mixture of ideas that they learned from North Korea which are against the teachings of Jesus. They really want to believe it, but the messages from the Bible are so different from what they had learned so far, so it takes time for them to actually accept the Truth. In North Korea, being found with a Bible would mean a death sentence. I know how dangerous it is – both for them and for me – to share the gospel. Oh, but it's worth it.

한달 후

AFTER A MONTH

I need to go to faraway places to meet these sisters. They live far away from where I live, and in a new place that I didn't know. The journey is difficult and dangerous.

I know God protects me. There have been a lot of times when I needed to travel alone. Those were such insecure moments but, all the time, God prepared the way for me.

Every time I've travelled for this work, there was not one accident or incident – this is God's amazing grace! Even though the journeys from village to village aren't safe, I am able to continue visiting the sisters for the Bible study meetings. This proves that God protects the ministry.

"I need to go to faraway places to meet these sisters. The journey is difficult and dangerous."

두달 후

AFTER TWO MONTHS

I'm getting to know the sisters more. Surely, I feel pity for them, but they are so lovely. They are God's children, that's their identity, and just feeling pity for them is not enough. God looks for them, and wants to build them. As they get to listen more and more to the Bible and to explanations about it, they become serious about the message.

At first, the women only talked to me about their own problems. They didn't listen to others. They were jealous of what the other person had and hated one another. They had a lot of conflicts and fights among them. But as time goes by, the sisters are changing, and they now know how to listen to others, how to comfort others and how to encourage others. I'm seeing that Jesus is really touching their hearts and teaching them how to love.

세달 후

AFTER THREE MONTHS

Today, I was thinking about the sisters I miss the most. The sister I really miss is, ironically, the sister that I was the most suspicious about. My guess is that she was actually a spy.

This is just my speculation, but she acted suspiciously and she sometimes lied about her faith. But a moment came and, after that, she wasn't that distant anymore. She engaged with us in the meetings and helped us with things. And slowly, she began to show who she really was.

But she seemed to have cycles. Sometimes she was distant, sometimes she was close. At times she sounded like she truly believed in Jesus, but at other times she didn't.

I wonder how she encounters God these days. I miss her a lot.

"I'm amazed when I think about how the sisters have changed in the time I've known them."


여섯달 후

AFTER SIX MONTHS

I'm seeing amazing transformation in the North Korean sisters. During the worship services within the Bible study group, the sisters begin to sincerely pray for their husbands and in-laws and their redemption. They've started to ask for God's heart when praying for their families. Even the Chinese families notice. Often they say, "You have changed since you've been to the church."

When I see these transformations, I feel so happy and proud of them. As they get to know more about Jesus, the Word of God surely changes the women in His good ways.

Also, they've started to really pray for their own country. They prayed that churches will be built in the land and that North Korea will accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some sisters have contact with underground believers in North Korea, and we've been able to help them through secret networks in China. We received their letters and news that they received the funds safely and that they're worshipping God. It made me feel so happy to hear this news.



아홉달 후

AFTER NINE MONTHS

I'm amazed when I think about how the sisters have changed in the time I've known them. At first, all they wanted was to receive. They came to the Bible study meetings to get the funds. They wanted to be supported. But then when they kept listening to the Word of God and learned about God's love, they started to help other sisters, comforting and encouraging them, loving them. That's the moment I thought, "Wow, they really have changed." I thank God for such transformation.

"Surely, God has His own plans for your life," I say to them. "Please remember this. Please remember this wherever you go, whatever you do. Even when it's pitch dark and you feel like you are all by yourself, Jesus Christ is holding your hand. Please don't forget this Truth."

I pray that the fruits of the Holy Spirit will be abundant among the sisters, so that they will first see God's glory and shine His glory right where they are – whether they stay in China or go back to North Korea. I pray that they will be able to shine God's glory to their families, to their neighbours and the people around them. I pray that the sisters will be able to show God's beautiful character and love right where they are. I pray that the sisters will serve as powerful disciples of God.



Rebecca takes extraordinary risks to meet with North Korean women refugees, showing them the love of Christ. She can only do it if Open Doors supporters like you keep supporting and praying for her. Together, the body of Christ is transforming the lives of courageous North Koreans.

PLEASE PRAY

- That God will protect the ministry of secret fieldworkers, so they will not be detected by the authorities
- For many more North Korean refugees to encounter Jesus and choose to follow Him
- For God to show His love, strength and comfort to all who take risks to obey Him.

PLEASE GIVE

You can give to support believers from North Korea and other countries where Christians face extreme persecution. Gifts can be made at opendoorsuk.org.

- **Every £20** could help provide spiritual and financial support for a believer fleeing extreme persecution
- **Every £35** could provide a refugee fleeing extreme persecution with a food package and essential medicine to help them survive
- **Every £48** could provide a refugee with clothing, blankets, fuel and heaters to keep them warm this winter

PLEASE INVITE

Your MP can hear first-hand from a North Korean believer, who is one of the persecuted Christians speaking at the World Watch List 2023 parliamentary launch on 18 January. You can invite your MP at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy.



Interview: Sister R and Sister J secretly support North Korean refugees in China

WHO ARE THE REFUGEE WOMEN?

SISTER R: Many times the women are sold into marriage. Some of them are trafficked into the countryside where they are sold to Han Chinese families to have a baby or to be a wife. Any ladies who are captured by the officials or police have to be deported to North Korea because they are illegal escapers. Those ladies are hiding around the remote areas, and our lady fieldworkers go to visit their villages to have a Bible study group.

SISTER J: They are all brainwashed by the North Korean regime. The first time they come, they are really afraid to hear about the gospel. We have to pray a lot. God will be the one who opens her heart.

Each time they bring one new lady, we need more and more prayer, because they are really against Christ and against Christianity. Every new lady is really precious for us. When we hear that one visitor or one new person has come to our ministry, that is really precious.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

SISTER R: If the women are caught with any evidence of contact with any Christian people, they will be deported to North Korea and sent to a political prison camp - or even executed. If someone is caught with Christian materials, the government will look for their family and the

whole family will be sent to the political prison camp.

SISTER J: We have to take risks. But even though we know it is not safe, we still have to do it. God loves each of the women so much. We really want to share God's love to them.

"The women are really ready for any risk. They are still coming because they really want to learn more about the Bible and know Christ more. They are really full of joy in Christ."

We cannot prevent all the risks, but we do everything we can to protect ourselves and the people who come to our meetings. Everything is really hidden and the meetings are secret so they cannot be tracked down or followed by anyone.

But the women are really ready for any risk. They are still coming because they really want to learn more about the Bible and know Christ more. They are really full of joy in Christ. They give thanks for everything, even the small things they have. They also give thanks to all the supporters, though they have never met you.

HOW CAN WE PRAY?

SISTER J: We need a lot of prayer from supporters. That's why we can do this work, because of your prayers and your support. We are just going out to share the gospel, but you are the ones who send us there. We are like a team. God gives you a heart to support us and pray for us.

Pray for safety first. Safety for our fieldworkers as they minister and also for the ladies who are coming to our ministry. They are in danger, so they need God's protection.

Pray for more fieldworkers to work together for our ministry, for their physical and spiritual support. And for our fieldworkers' families.

SISTER R: Pray for the ladies – that they will choose to come despite opposition. And many of the sisters also have to travel far. So please pray they will not be open to any threat when they travel.

Pray for the health of the ladies. Sometimes they have to work to support the families they have left in North Korea, so when they come to the meetings they are sacrificing their time instead of choosing to work. But that's a blessing because they come to listen to the truth and then their spirit lives.

> You can read the full interview at opendoorsuk.org.

AFGHANISTAN'S CHRISTIANS:

"I still haven't lost my hope"

How your prayers and support are sustaining Afghan believers

In February, it will be 18 months since Taliban fighters swept into Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and took control of the country. So much has changed for Afghan Christians in that time – but they have not lost their hope, thanks to your continued prayers. Hana*, an Open Doors partner in the Gulf region, and other Afghan believers share what life is like under the Taliban regime, and how the church continues to stand strong.

"The Taliban have lost the trust of all people, and many live a life of uncertainty," Hana says. "In fact, things are getting worse; on days when policies become moderate, they are changed to even more harsh policies in hours. The banking system has collapsed, and inflation is at an all-time high."

Abdulla* (LEFT) is an Afghan refugee now living in Central Asia. He says, "Ordinary people in Afghanistan live in great danger. When they get up in the morning, they can't be sure if they'll live to see the night. A lot of terrible things are happening there, which we learn about from our friends and relatives. They say that the Taliban often go out in the evenings; they break into houses and can just kill for any reason."

Christians who have not been able to flee must keep changing their location to avoid detection. "There is a great deal of fear among the followers of Jesus; many have had to migrate to other parts of the country," Hana shares.

AFGHANISTAN IS A 'PRISON' FOR WOMEN

Education for women and girls has come to a complete halt. One Christian refugee shared that her parents – who still live in the country – describe Afghanistan as a 'prison' for women. "This is the return to the ways of an

extremist branch of Islam that sees women as the 'property' of men who have one purpose: to produce more soldiers," explains Hana. "Therefore, for some it is a prison; others have been forced into marriage with Taliban fighters who abuse them for the purpose of raising a family. The numbers of female activists killed in Afghanistan continues – now as state-sanctioned and approved actions."



"GOD IS CONTINUALLY AT WORK"

But – praise God! – the church continues to shine a light amid all this darkness and fear. "Christians stay because they are called to Afghanistan by Jesus, and they are obedient to His call," Hana says. "They are a part of the land – it is their home. They're not visitors or tourists: they are there for the purpose of being Christ to their neighbour, even if the neighbour seeks to kill them."

With your continued prayer support, our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan are being anchored in God's hope. "God is continually at work in Afghanistan – because He has always worked in Afghanistan," says Hana. "Even though there are only a handful of believers,

He has been faithful to them. He continues to answer their prayers, give them the strength to endure suffering and call them to Him at the time of His choosing. God continues to lead the visible and freer church like yours in the West to pray for them, so you can recognise yourself as being of one body."

"I feel like Jesus is always here," says Nargis* (LEFT), an Afghan refugee living in a neighbouring country. "When I pray, I feel that He is sitting next to me and listening to me. Even though I have so many problems, I see His grace and His mercy in my life. And I still haven't lost my hope."

KEEP PRAYING FOR THE CHURCH IN AFGHANISTAN

Your prayers are sustaining our Afghan sisters and brothers – here are a few ways Hana asks you to keep praying for them:

- For people to meet with Christ in dreams and visions, and that Christ may direct them to a place of nurture and discipleship
- For access to education and medical aid, particularly in rural areas
- For Open Doors fieldworkers who continue to risk their lives to strengthen Afghan Christians in neighbouring countries.

Abdulla also asks that you pray for the Taliban: "Of course, the Taliban are our enemies, but I ask you to pray for their salvation."

Get the latest stories – and pray your way through the World Watch List 2023 – by signing up for regular emails at [opendoorsuk.org](https://www.opendoorsuk.org).

*Names changed for security reasons



How you're helping lonely children find friendship and faith

Layla from Egypt is no longer alone, thanks to you

For many children, Christmas is a time of joy and excitement. But for Layla* (14) from Egypt, Christmas meant rejection and loneliness – until you stepped in.

When Layla was nine, her parents became Christians. "My parents gradually told me about Christianity," she says. "Our family are strict Muslims; it was dangerous for them to tell me all at once." Despite her parents' caution, Layla's extended family soon found out about their conversion when they noticed that Layla's father had stopped attending the mosque. Her parents were forced to flee with

her in the middle of the night and settled in a new town far away. Layla didn't really understand what was going on. Jesus was still a mystery to her, but she knew that she belonged to a family that was 'different'.

INTIMIDATED BY TEACHERS AT SCHOOL

It was Ramadan when Layla started at her new school, but her parents' faith made her an outsider. "My peers gathered to celebrate breaking their fast and watch TV together, enjoying each other's company," she remembers. "However, they excluded me from their

gatherings because they knew my family didn't participate in Ramadan. Instead, we celebrated Christmas at home, but I could not share this with my peers."

"After the camp I just wanted to share about God's love with other people."

Even though Layla didn't fully understand what being a Christian meant, she was no longer allowed to follow the rules and habits of strict Muslims. This led to further struggles at school,

including bullying. "My friends at school ridiculed me when they saw me once drinking a cup of water during the break in the Ramadan period. I was hurt by their harsh looks and verbal harassment," she says. "One of the teachers once insulted me in front of my classmates and intimidated me to get veiled. Teachers said that if I didn't wear it, I would go to hell."

Layla's parents tried to explain their faith to her, but they couldn't find the right words to help her understand. Layla started wrestling with lots of questions, but there was no one her age to share her struggles with: "Is the Christian faith the truth? Or should I go back to Islam so that I may not end up in hell? I didn't know who I was. What was my identity? What beliefs should I accept and live for? I felt left out and rejected." She became severely depressed, and even attempted suicide.



"JESUS STEPPED INTO MY HOPELESSNESS"

But thanks to you, Layla was not alone for long. When Open Doors local partners heard about her desperate situation, they immediately stepped in to help. Sally*, an Open Doors fieldworker, came alongside her to listen to her worries and encourage her. "She became the Christian friend I had been looking for," Layla says. "She gave me new hope."

"My eyes were opened to the truth."

Sally also invited her to a secret children's camp, and a discipleship group, where she could connect with other Christian children her age. "My eyes were opened to the truth," Layla says. "I believed in Jesus' words when He said the truth sets us free. After the camp I just wanted to share about God's love with other people and to help them to change by God's power."

Meanwhile, Layla's parents were invited to join discipleship training which, among other things, helped them to explain their faith in a way that Layla could understand.

She has also learned to play the piano and accompanies the worship in the small house church that she attends with her parents. Although Layla still cannot share much about Jesus at her school, she remains in touch with Sally and others who continue to encourage her in her faith.

Thanks to you, Layla has a new Christian community to grow in her faith with – not just for Christmas, but the whole year round. She says, "Jesus stepped into my life in my hopelessness and made all the difference."

PLEASE PRAY

- That Layla will continue to grow in her faith and make new, steadfast friends
- That Layla's witness will draw other children and teachers at her school to Jesus
- For God's continued blessing and provision for children's programmes run by Open Doors partners in Egypt

*Names changed for security reasons and images used for illustrative purposes



PRAY YOUR WAY AROUND THE WORLD WITH A PRAYER PASSPORT

Grab your *Prayer Passport* and set off on a journey of prayer with the secret church! Find out about each country on the World Watch List, write a prayer for Christians there and check off your virtual travels using your handy, interactive map. With lots of children to do and colour in, this is a great resource for families and churches to pray for the persecuted church together. Order your free copies at opendoorsuk.org/children

Order your free World Watch List resources to help you, your family and your church stand with the persecuted church

Where do Christians risk the most for following Christ? Why are Christians persecuted? How do I pray for my persecuted brothers and sisters? What are the latest trends in persecution around the world?

The answers to these questions – and many more – are found every year in the annual Open Doors World Watch List.

Released every January, the Open Doors World Watch List ranks the countries where Christians risk the most to follow Christ. Now in its 30th year, the list uses extensive, on-the-ground research to ensure you are equipped with reliable and accurate information to pray and speak out for our persecuted family.

Because the World Watch List is more than a set of data or a collection of statistics – important though that information is. It's about real people. It's about our brothers and sisters.



The World Watch List offers a unique window into the world of the persecuted church, a world where violence against Christians is growing, where digital surveillance is holding an ever-more suffocating grip on freedom of belief and worship, and where following Jesus and sharing the gospel is increasingly dangerous.

STANDING ALONGSIDE THE RISK-TAKERS

The World Watch List also offers you an opportunity to stand alongside Christians who risk everything to follow Christ.

"I found it so helpful to learn a lot about the persecuted church worldwide. I prayed one day at a time for each of the countries."

- OPEN DOORS SUPPORTER

This year, your free resources focus particularly on the theme of risk. Here in the UK and Ireland most of us don't risk much by being a Christian – and, perhaps, we don't often take big risks in sharing our faith. But from North Korea to Nigeria, from India to Indonesia, from Syria to Sudan, Christians risk losing their freedom, their homes and possessions, even their lives, for following Jesus.

What gives them the courage to carry on? One of the most important factors is knowing that they are not alone. They know that they are part of the worldwide family of believers.

So please use the World Watch List and your World Watch List resources as a way to bless and support our persecuted church family, and to raise awareness of what they experience. It's a great way to learn from the courageous faith of the persecuted church. But more than that, it's an opportunity to stand alongside those who risk everything for Jesus.

WORLD WATCH LIST 2023 RESOURCES

AVAILABLE FROM THE END OF JANUARY

We are so thankful for those of you who use these tools to pray regularly for the persecuted church, and this year you can order a range of resources to help the whole church family stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters.

THE WORLD WATCH LIST TOP 50

The comprehensive handbook to the top 50 countries where Christians risk everything for following Christ. It includes:

- detailed information and specific prayer points for each of the 50 countries
- World Watch List map
- inspirational stories and testimonies from persecuted Christians
- written prayers for persecuted Christians
- headline news and global trends in the persecution of Christians.



CHILDREN'S MAP AND PRAYER PASSPORT

Grab your *Prayer Passport* and head off on a journey of prayer around the World Watch List.

- 48-page *Prayer Passport* with prayers for each country
- stories, activities and ideas for prayer
- wall map to help children discover more about the world of the persecuted church.

"These resources are not only educating my son but are helping develop his spiritual growth."

- OPEN DOORS SUPPORTER

YOUTH MAP AND SESSION OUTLINE

Interactive and innovative ideas to help young people engage with the persecuted church:

- a world map with the 50 riskiest places to follow Jesus
- interactive prayer points to help you pray brave prayers
- a downloadable youth session outline introducing themes of persecution and brave faith.

Along with these core resources, there are many other ways in which you and your church can engage with the World Watch List in 2023:

- book an Open Doors speaker for your church – in-person or online.
- order a poster-sized World Watch List map to put up in your church
- watch and share inspirational and informative videos.

You'll find all the information and resources you need to explore the World Watch List and engage with your persecuted family at opendoorsuk.org/wwl. Thank you!



Extreme persecution calls for extraordinary risk

Representative image

Christians across the world face extreme violence, abuse and discrimination every day. And it is only getting worse. But these persecuted believers take extraordinary risks in response. Open Doors fieldworker Rebecca* risks everything to secretly help North Korean refugees receive help and hear about Jesus. But for her work to continue, she needs you to stand with her.

Your gift today of £20 could help provide spiritual and financial support for a believer fleeing extreme persecution.

Visit opendoorsuk.org, return the enclosed envelope or phone **01993 460015** to make a gift today. Thank you.

*Name changed for security reasons

The Open Doors World Watch List 2023 launches on 18 January 2023.

You can explore the top 50 countries where Christians risk everything to follow Christ at opendoorsuk.org.

