

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | May/June 2023



## Escalating violence in sub-Saharan Africa

Ayuba's story of  
grief and forgiveness

**ARISE AFRICA**  
CAMPAIGN SPECIAL





# MEET THE RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



## STANDING STRONG

is coming to a region near you in 2023!

To find your nearest event and to book tickets, go to [opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong](https://opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong)



## 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](https://opendoorsuk.org/legacy) or phone 01993 460015.



## COULD YOU SERVE THE PERSECUTED CHURCH AT A FESTIVAL IN 2023?

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We are looking for volunteers to help our events team raise awareness and support for our persecuted family at Christian festivals across the UK and Ireland. Come and experience some of the UK and Ireland's top Christian events, while also sharing the courage and faith of those who risk everything for Christ.

Find out how you can get involved at [opendoorsuk.org/volunteer](https://opendoorsuk.org/volunteer)



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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**Open Doors UK & I**

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COVER Ayuba\* in Nigeria, pictured with his sisters, was only 20 when his father was killed by Islamic militants. Image is from a reconstruction.

Letter from Henrietta

## A scandalous secret

**“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” JOHN 10:10**

The level of violence in sub-Saharan Africa is truly scandalous. Every year, thousands of Christians are killed for their faith by Islamic militants. Every year, thousands more lose their homes, their land and their livelihoods. I can't think of any better description than Jesus's words in John 10:10 – these militants come 'to steal and kill and destroy'. Their aim is to destabilise families, extinguish faith and crush the life of the church. Nigeria is the epicentre of this escalating violence, but it's spreading across the surrounding countries too.

And it's just as scandalous that the world isn't aware of these atrocities. Open Doors supporters have faithfully prayed for the African church for many years – but the media seldom reports these attacks, and the suffering of our brothers and sisters seems to be largely ignored. Even within Nigeria and other countries in the region, persecutors aren't being prosecuted. Forgiveness is powerful and important – it's something I find so inspiring in Ayuba's story of healing and restoration (p8) – but, without justice, perpetrators will continue to attack with impunity.

Ayuba\* was only 20 when his father was murdered by Islamic militants. So many young people like him have their lives derailed by extreme violence. As Pastor Sola Irukwu from Jesus House said at a recent prayer event for Nigeria, which Open Doors co-hosted, “Young people are disillusioned [...] and they are our nation-builders, they are our future.” We have to listen to their testimonies, share their stories with others and help ensure the future of a strong and resilient church in Nigeria and the wider region.

Our brothers and sisters in sub-Saharan Africa are calling for the global church to join them in standing up to extreme violence. It's a vital opportunity to help the world wake up to what our courageous church family are experiencing. Today, will you answer their call?

Every blessing,



*Henrietta*

**Henrietta Blyth**  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

\*Name changed for security reasons

# World Watch News

## TURKEY

### Sahar safe following earthquake

We are pleased to report that Sahar (RIGHT) and her family – who featured in our March/April magazine – are safe from the recent earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

"I'm saddened to hear about the people of the affected areas who have lost their loved ones, their homes, and everything they had," shares Sahar, who was forced to flee to Turkey from Iran because of persecution. "The situation is horrible. I'm also worried about my family – what would happen to us if we experienced the same disaster in our city?

"We already face so many problems as refugees, we barely

receive our basic human rights, and now with this crisis, the discrimination is worse than before," she continues.

"Seeing my people in pain, with no solution at hand, breaks my heart.

"Please pray that God would help all the refugees in this country who cannot go back to Iran or their homelands, nor can they go to another country. Please also pray for the current situation of Iran, where people are fighting for their freedom and justice."



ABOVE February's earthquake has devastated parts of Turkey

## DRC

### Presence and provision of God comforts widow

"I have hope that God is present," says Gertrude, a widow from the Democratic Republic of Congo who, helped by supporters like you, is rebuilding her family's livelihood following an unspeakable tragedy at the hands of Islamic extremists.

In 2021, members of the Allied Democratic Forces

(ADF) attacked her family's farmland and killed her husband, kidnapped her son (who remains missing) and left her unable to walk.

"Since my husband died, I no longer go to the farm," says Gertrude, who cares for six of her sister's children (she was killed by the ADF in 2017) as

well as her own four children.

"My foot hurts if I walk too much. The children's schooling has stopped because I can no longer pay school fees."

Open Doors local partners have provided Gertrude the finance to start a small shop. "I thank God for how He has provided through brothers and sisters," she says. "Please pray that this will glorify Him."

"I had many questions, but as God is good, I just consoled myself," she adds. "I told myself we all are sojourners on this earth. It is God alone who gives me the strength to be able to bear this pain."



RIGHT Gertrude (identity protected)



## VIETNAM

# Newlyweds forced from village

Newlyweds from Vietnam have been forced from their village after refusing to include ancestral worship in their wedding.



Nhia\* and Hang\* (ABOVE) had only recent become Christians when they married earlier this year. After bravely resisting their family's demands, Nhia was badly beaten on his back, before both were kicked out from their village.

"Even if they kicked us out or beat us, I will not give up on our faith," said Nhia. "We will not return to our old beliefs."

"Nhia and his wife are now staying in a local church, which is also providing their spiritual and daily needs," says Isaac\*, an Open Doors local partner. "The church plans to build the couple a small house where they can stay comfortably as they start their family."

Please pray that the couple will be able to build a home and family in their new location, and that they will remain encouraged in their faith.



## IRAN

# Pastor Nadarkhani released after five years in prison

Many of you have been praying for Pastor Nadarkhani (ABOVE), who has been in prison since 2017 for involvement in a house church. Praise God, he has been released!

The pastor was the last to be released of four Christian converts sentenced to ten years in prison in 2017. He told Article18 that he was 'happy to be released and at home after nearly five years in prison' and 'very grateful for all those who prayed for me and remembered me while I was in prison'. He added, "All I endured was small in comparison with what Christ has done for us."

However, your prayers continue to be needed because Pastor Nadarkhani still faces flogging and two years' exile on the other side of Iran.

\*Names changed for security reasons

## INDIA

# 15,000 Christians protest against persecution

More than 15,000 Christians from different denominations in India came together in the capital New Delhi to protest against ongoing persecution.

The demonstrations on 19 February called on the government, courts and civil society to intervene on behalf of persecuted Christians, particularly in states that have passed so-called 'anti-conversion laws'. In theory, these laws prohibit forced conversion from Hinduism to another religion, but in practice

they are often used as an excuse to target Christians.

According to research by the United Christian Forum, a New Delhi-based human rights group, there were 598 reported cases of violence against Christians in 2022. The actual number of attacks is likely to be significantly higher, as people are often too scared to report incidents.

Last year, the Supreme Court began an investigation into the issue, whilst a Commission has been asked to investigate whether a government benefit for society's poorest people can be extended to include minority religions, including Christianity.

Please pray that these developments will lead to greater freedom and protection for our Indian family.



> For the latest news and stories of courageous faith, visit [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)



# Life after the earthquakes in Aleppo, Syria

INTERVIEW WITH AN OPEN DOORS PARTNER

**Thank you so much to all of you who have prayed and given so generously to Open Doors' earthquake appeal.**

You're standing with our global family as they face this crisis, and it means so much to them. Leyla\* is an Open Doors partner who has worked for many years with the persecuted church in Syria. Because Leyla and other Open Doors partners were already in the region, they were able to provide support immediately in the aftermath of the earthquakes – and Centres of Hope will continue their work of providing aid and discipleship for many years to come. In this interview, Leyla shares what she is seeing in Aleppo – the difficulties, but also the grace and strength of God.

## **CAN YOU PAINT A PICTURE OF WHAT LIFE LOOKS LIKE NOW?**

**Leyla:** In some ways, it looks like life is gradually returning to normal, at least from the

outside. But really people are returning to their homes, knowing that it is not safe for them to return. Until a few days ago, people were still sleeping in their cars. Some people's homes are being demolished before their eyes because the houses are not safe – they are too damaged to be habitable.

## **“We need to keep walking alongside the church here.”**

The people I have talked to are really trying to put on a smile – a fake smile or a real smile, you wouldn't know really. Most of them are grateful they're still alive. And everyone here, when they meet each other for the first time since the earthquake, they greet each other by saying, “Thank God you're safe.”

Some people are angry – they're still not accepting what happened. Some are in kind of

an opposite mode: they're just giving in. They don't care. One thing is for sure, however: life for Syrians after the earthquake is not the same as before the earthquake. I've heard that sentiment many times now.

## **HOW ARE CHURCHES AND CENTRES OF HOPE SHOWING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST?**

**Leyla:** The church and Centres of Hope have been there since the very first hours of the earthquake. Now we are moving from immediate basic relief assistance – things like food and providing temporary shelter – into rehabilitation and restoration of houses. We work with all Christian denominations and together we are helping around 2,600 households – but this is not enough if it is not coupled with trauma healing activities. We need to keep walking alongside the church here.

Yesterday, I talked to a local Christian called Julie and asked her if she could see any meaning





Thanks to you, the local church is supporting communities affected by the earthquakes with vital aid. ABOVE Local Open Doors partners visit earthquake victims in hospital

in all that has happened to her. Her answer was simply: "God wanted me to go out of the safe walls of my home and the walls of the church. God wanted me to reach out to other people." And she told me that she went from the first 48 hours of total fear, to calmness, and to a huge fire ignited in her to help others, especially the families of the 155 children she's in charge of in a Sunday school. In her own words, she said: "I was given five loaves of bread and two fish, and I put them in the hands of God for Him to bless." She's such an inspiration in what she's doing.

### WHEN OPEN DOORS SUPPORTERS GIVE TO CENTRES OF HOPE, HOW WILL THEIR GIFTS BE USED?

**Leyla:** What makes Open Doors unique is that it has been present since the beginning, not just before the earthquake, but also during the war. And being present here means that we are already aware of how to help people.

So when Open Doors supporters give, they can rest assured that this money is going straight to the people who are affected – we already have projects in place that are feeding people, projects that will guarantee that they will have restored homes to go back to. This is not a parachuted-in project. Open Doors partners

already live here. They know the needs of the people. They go to the same churches as the rest of the Christians – they are part of this community.

### HOW CAN YOUR GLOBAL CHURCH FAMILY BE PRAYING?

**Leyla:** We really need to pray for Open Doors partners in Syria. They are emotionally stressed and physically tired. This is not a sprint; it's a marathon. This is a long-term thing.

So, we need to pray for strength, for peace, for rest, for their emotional healing. And for the leaders, whether in our organisation or in the church, to have the wisdom to know how to deal with this.

### PLEASE PRAY

- That all affected by the earthquake would encounter Jesus and know His healing peace
- For Open Doors partners to receive God's sustaining love, strength and rest as they serve the community
- For local Christian communities to be equipped to show Christ's love to those around them.

*\*Names changed for security reasons*

Open Doors local partners are working to serve at least 50,000 Christians in Aleppo and Latakia, Syria (and another team of local partners is supporting Christian refugees in Turkey). They can do this work thanks to your gifts and support – and because they have been serving in the region for many years. As well as building on existing programmes at Centres of Hope, this will include:



**Six months of emergency financial support for the most vulnerable**



**Trauma care so people can heal**



**Rent support for those left homeless**



**Rebuilding of homes, schools and hospitals**



**Income-generation projects for those who've lost businesses**

A close-up portrait of a young Black man with short, dark hair and a light beard. He is looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. He is wearing a blue and white striped shirt with a traditional African collar. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and yellow flowers.

**AYUBA'S NAME  
WAS ON BOKO  
HARAM'S HIT LIST.**

**HE'S FORGIVEN  
THE MAN WHO  
PUT IT THERE.**





\*To protect Ayuba, his name has been changed and images used are from a reconstruction of his story

Ayuba\* vividly remembers the day that Boko Haram came to his village. Where he lives in the north east of Nigeria, this is a danger that everyone knows could happen: violent attacks by Islamic militant groups are increasing and there is the constant threat of attack. But nothing could truly prepare him for the day it became a reality. He was only 20 years old.

"Around 6pm, word spread that Boko Haram were approaching our village," he remembers. "My dad told me to remain at home." It wasn't long before the situation escalated. "By 10pm, people had started running for their lives, because Boko Haram had arrived in our community."

## **"EVERY DAY, 14 CHRISTIANS ARE KILLED FOR THEIR FAITH IN NIGERIA"**

### **ARISE AFRICA: A WAKE UP CALL TO THE CHURCH**

Thousands of communities in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa are experiencing violent crises like this. Last year, more than 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith in Nigeria – that's 14 people a day, and about 90% of all the Christians murdered for their faith across the world. And yet much of the world doesn't seem to notice.

That's why the church in sub-Saharan Africa is calling for support – and the *Arise Africa* campaign aims to wake up the global church to the persecution and suffering taking place on

such an extraordinary scale, and to unite with them in standing up to violent persecution. That means raising prayer, awareness and vital support for Christians, like Ayuba, directly affected by the violence.



### **FLEEING THE VILLAGE**

With Boko Haram torching buildings nearby, Ayuba knew he couldn't wait anymore. He and his younger brothers and sisters fled the village, hiding some distance away overnight. "I started crying, but someone with us cheered me up and asked me to pray rather than cry. I did, and I told others to stop crying – and to pray, instead. When we finished praying, we slept there by the riverbank until morning."

Ayuba's father had initially been hiding at his sister-in-law's house, where he was the only Christian. When Boko Haram burst into the house, they singled him out. It's not only Christians who are affected by attacks in the region – but, in this attack, they were targeted. Ayuba tells the story based on what he heard later from his relatives.

"They grabbed our father and took him with them. He kept asking what his offence was, but they did not reply. They brought him outside and put him on his knees."

The militants demanded that Ayuba's father read a passage from the Qu'ran, as a test to see if he was a Muslim. But he didn't try to hide his faith in Jesus. When they asked him if he was a Muslim or a Christian, he replied 'Christian'. That reply was all the militants needed to hear to kill him. They beheaded Ayuba's father on the spot.

### **"YOU HAVE GIVEN AND YOU HAVE TAKEN"**

In the morning, not yet knowing what had happened, Ayuba and the others made their way back to the village. "Everywhere was silent," remembers Ayuba. "When we approached our house, I could see three bodies on the ground. I recognised my father by his clothing. I dropped to my knees by his side and prayed."

Even in that moment of grief, Ayuba was able to give thanks to God. He said, "God, I am grateful – You have given and You have taken. May my father

rest together with You." His words echo Job's in Job 1:21: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Nine Christians were killed in the attack.

## **"BOKO HARAM SENT A LIST OF PEOPLE THEY ARE COMING TO KILL. MY NAME WAS ON IT."**

### **AYUBA'S NAME ON A HITLIST**

Ayuba vowed to take revenge. He even started carrying a knife. A man in the village had helped Boko Haram identify their targets, and Ayuba was determined to kill him. "It was all I could think about," he says.

**ABOVE** After hiding outside the village overnight, Ayuba returned to find his father had been killed; **BELOW** Ayuba chose to forgive, after spending time at an Open Doors trauma care centre





But then he heard that the Islamic militants were planning to return. He says: "A few weeks after the attack, Boko Haram sent a list to our village – a list of people they are coming to kill. And my name was on it."

Ayuba was reluctant to leave, but was eventually persuaded to move his siblings to another village. From there, a local pastor was able to arrange for them to move further south, about eight hours' drive away.

### TRAUMA CARE

It was here that Ayuba was able to get trauma care at a centre run by Open Doors partners. Our partners have been supporting persecuted believers in sub-Saharan Africa for many years, and so their networks are expertly equipped and experienced to support people like Ayuba. When his father was murdered, Ayuba was at an age when persecution can have a particularly damaging impact on a young believer's faith. Being a young Christian in his community, he took on a lot of responsibility – his life looks radically different from that of other people his age. And now, he is the breadwinner for his family.

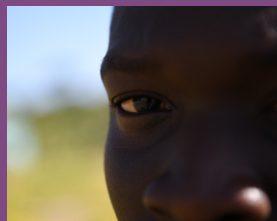
## "I HAVE LEARNED TO LEAVE EVERYTHING AT THE FEET OF JESUS."

This sort of persecution can determine the path a young Christian chooses to follow. As well as making it much harder to pay fees for schooling, the young person might decide that following Jesus is too hard where they live, and opt for an



### WHAT HAPPENS AT A TRAUMA CARE CENTRE?

Trauma care programmes, like the one for Ayuba, are run by Open Doors partners at trauma care centres to help survivors of persecution persevere and heal emotionally from their experiences.



The trauma counselling training sessions are multi-layered. Sessions focus on what trauma is, and how to respond in a resilient and biblical way. This includes workshops that help trauma survivors, especially church leaders, women and young people, to process and work through their trauma and start to heal.

Survivors of persecution like Ayuba are coached to pass on their learning to others – as well as given training manuals to take home. This means trauma care can go much further in impacting communities of Christians.

As well as emotional and spiritual support, it's important for resilience that survivors of persecution are supported physically, with crucial aid. Three months' worth of food and medical aid are provided to persecuted Christians – and longer-term funding for education, where relevant.

#### SEND A LETTER

You can send messages of encouragement to trauma survivors and Open Doors partners at the trauma care centre to let them know you are standing with them. Find out how at [opendoorsuk.org/write](https://opendoorsuk.org/write)

ABOVE Most images in this article are from a reconstruction - but the images above show the real Ayuba receiving care at the trauma care centre

'easier' path. Trauma care is a powerful way to ensure this doesn't happen – instead, it can help a young person to heal and to understand the love and sovereignty of God, even in the face of persecution.

### LEARNING TO FORGIVE

Ayuba found the trauma care transformative. When asked about the biggest lesson he learned at the trauma care centre, he says, "Forgiveness." Before the counselling, he was determined to murder the man who'd betrayed his father – but, at the trauma centre, he handed over the knife he'd been carrying. "Before coming here, I had decided never to forgive, and to avenge my father's death," Ayuba says, "I have no problem with this man now. If we meet, we would greet each other.

"I thought to myself, what would I gain going around with a knife seeking for revenge, and my mind is never at peace? So I decided to let go of my anger and have peace. God brought me here to heal me. Honestly, if I had not come, I don't know how I would have ended up."

Boko Haram wanted to destroy Ayuba's faith – but, as Joseph says in Genesis 50:20, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good." The opposite of Boko Haram's plans happened: Ayuba's faith was strengthened by the trauma care.

### THANK YOU FROM AYUBA

Ayuba has a message for Open Doors supporters: "I thank you so much; it is because of you that I have peace in my mind now. I said I would never forgive, and I wanted to take my revenge, but now I have forgiven totally. I have learned to leave everything at the feet of Jesus."



ABOVE Thanks to Open Doors supporters, Ayuba now has hope for the future

Without this trauma care, he would be another young person lost to their traumatic

**"I SAID I WOULD  
NEVER FORGIVE,  
BUT NOW  
I HAVE FORGIVEN  
TOTALLY."**

circumstances. Instead, he is also able to help others facing similar trauma to him. "Firstly, I would tell them to pray, because without prayer

nothing will work. I wouldn't be here if not for prayers," he says. "Other people going through the same things – I would like them to come to this programme. Because whatever has happened to you, you will find others who have the same issues, and more."

God has used a particular psalm to encourage Ayuba too. "In Psalm 91, there is a portion which talks about how a thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. Honestly, this verse has encouraged me a lot because it helps me pray more often," he says.



# STAND UP TO VIOLENT PERSECUTION

As the breadwinner for his family at such a young age, Ayuba needs ongoing practical support and prayers from his global church family. With your help, he can receive ongoing financial help from Open Doors partners, so he can continue his education and support his siblings.

Ayuba's story is just one of thousands of stories in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa. Today, you can join the courageous African church in standing against escalating violence. You can help ensure that other believers experience the same extraordinary transformation that Ayuba was able to receive – from revenge and despair to forgiveness and hope.

## ESCALATING VIOLENCE

Nigeria is the epicentre for extreme violence against Christians in sub-Saharan Africa.

In the past year, Nigerian Christians faced this persecution for their faith:

- **5,014 Christians killed**
- **4,726 Christians abducted**
- **At least 10,000 Christians forced to leave their homes**

You can read more about how persecution affects Christians in Nigeria at [opendoorsuk.org/nigeria](https://opendoorsuk.org/nigeria)

Today, you can answer the call of the courageous local church and join with them in standing up to violent persecution. The future of the church in sub-Saharan Africa is at risk. But, together, we can help ensure they are able to persevere, grow and share the gospel – now and for years to come. Thank you.

## PLEASE GIVE

**Every £16** could give a month's education to four young people from persecuted families to give them hope for the future.

**Every £28** could mean a believer displaced by persecution receives food, medicine and other emergency relief to help them survive.

**Every £42** could give hope and healing at a trauma centre to three Christians who have experienced extreme violence.

## PLEASE PRAY

- "I want you to pray for us here in Nigeria experiencing terrorism," says Ayuba. "Pray with us that God will bring an end to it."
- That the global church will wake up to, and stand up to, the violent persecution affecting Christians in sub-Saharan Africa
- For Open Doors trauma care partners to be equipped with God's love and grace as they bring His healing to young people like Ayuba.

You can join the African church in a week of prayer for Nigeria and the wider region – you'll find details in your Prayer Diary.



## PLEASE SPEAK OUT

The UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is currently reviewing Nigeria's human rights record with a view to improving the human rights situation on the ground. This is a key moment for us to stand up to the violent persecution affecting Christians in the country.

**Write to your MP**, to raise awareness of the human rights violations being experienced by Nigerian Christians.

Go to [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica) to take action today.

# MPs hear Dabrina's story of persecution in Iran

To mark International Women's Day, Dabrina shared with politicians her story of persecution to highlight the brutality of the Iranian regime. Thank you to all of you who invited your MP and raised awareness of this issue.



After being involved in two car accidents in Iran, Dabrina received a phone call. It was the authorities telling her that the next accident wouldn't be as harmless.

It wasn't an isolated incident. "Growing up as a Christian, I got used to persecution," she told a parliamentary panel discussion titled 'Iran: Oppressing religious freedom and human rights' on 7 March.

"I've experienced pastors and church leaders being murdered," said Dabrina, who has since fled the country with her family after being sentenced to imprisonment for their Christian activities.

## STOPPED ON THE STREET

Last year, protests broke out in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini whilst in custody for 'improper' wearing of the hijab. The incident, and the crackdown on protestors, has further exposed the intolerance and brutality of the country's regime.

Dabrina first encountered the morality police aged seven. "Walking down the street with my mum, I was told that I needed

to be wearing a scarf," she recalled. "He insisted that I was tall and looked older and would lead men to temptation.

## "Their fear has been broken"

"This was an assault to my freedom as a woman, but also it made me behave in accordance with a religious perspective that was not mine," explained Dabrina. It was just the beginning of the unremitting intrusion and surveillance by the state that Dabrina experienced.

## BREAKING FEAR

"This government has done so many brutal things for so long, and they have gotten away with it," Dabrina told the panel. "Now they have made it their signature to attack, rape and kill their people."

She highlighted that Iran are signatories of Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Political and Civil Rights. "Both compel Iran to provide full religious freedom for all its

citizens, including changing and sharing your faith."

Dabrina has seen a shift emerge from the protests, with Iranian people – especially women – no longer afraid. "Their fear has been broken."

She urged the UK Government to use their influence to bring the Iranian regime to account for their human rights and religious freedom violations. You can echo Dabrina's call by heading to [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy) and inviting your MP to sign a petition to put the issue on the political agenda. Thank you!

## PLEASE PRAY

- That swift and decisive action will emerge from this discussion
- That the recent protests will bring change in Iran
- For the strength, encouragement and protection of Christian women facing persecution in Iran.

ABOVE The panel (L-R): Henrietta Blyth, Taiwo Owatemi MP, Dabrina and Fleur Anderson MP



# MEET THE RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



What is it like to follow Jesus in some of the most dangerous places in the world? Come and meet the risk-takers of the persecuted church and find out at Standing Strong!

Join together to worship and pray with our brothers and sisters who are risking everything for Christ and hear first-hand from them how your prayers and gifts are making a difference. There will be seminars where

you will have the opportunity to interact with our speakers and hear their stories, ask them questions and pray with them.

We have a variety of guest speakers from around the world who will be at different events. Abraham\* and his wife Eti\* will be speaking at events in June. Abraham grew up in a Muslim family and became a Christian when he was a college student. Despite being disowned by his

family and experiencing torture, he has not stopped following Jesus. Together, they serve persecuted believers in South East Asia – particularly converts from Islam – and help them to stand strong in their faith.

Our September and October events will be another chance to meet your persecuted church family. Find a Standing Strong gathering coming to a region near you below.

## **STANDING STRONG** COMING TO A REGION NEAR YOU!

10AM - 2.30PM

**BOOK  
NOW!**

### HEA WOO\* FROM NORTH KOREA

**13 MAY** - Ps & Gs Church, Edinburgh

**20 MAY** - Lee Abbey, Devon

### ABRAHAM\* & ETI\* FROM SOUTH EAST ASIA

**10 JUNE** - Westminster Chapel, London

**17 JUNE** - Vine Christian Centre, Bridgend

### SPEAKER TBC

**30 SEPTEMBER** - East Midlands

**7 OCTOBER** - Northern Ireland

**4 NOVEMBER** - Northern England

**11 NOVEMBER** - West Midlands

\*Names changed for security reasons

Please go to [opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong](https://opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong) for venues, speakers and more details of future Standing Strong gatherings later in the year!



To book your free place, go to [opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong](https://opendoorsuk.org/standingstrong)



# GO DEEPER BY VOLUNTEERING

A wonderful way to deepen your connection with your persecuted family is by volunteering your gifts, influence and time. We caught up with three people who are doing just that...



## **ROSE,** **VOLUNTEER** **SPEAKER**

### **What inspired you to serve as a volunteer speaker?**

I had been a prayer group leader previously, and felt God tap me on the shoulder at a Standing Strong event about doing a bit more.

I speak several times a year and preparation takes a few hours per talk. I like to pray, then sit in front of my laptop sifting through earlier talks, plus information from Open Doors' website, including finding a couple of stories. I then try to relate it back to us, using Scripture.

### **How do you establish and build relationships with churches you speak at?**

I usually contact churches by email, and explain about Open Doors and offer to meet online or in person. For example, the launch of the World Watch List

in parliament was a good thing to email over to all my contacts and I asked if the church would like me to come and speak, giving updated information on what is happening with our brothers and sisters.

### **Could you share a stand-out moment?**

One that comes to mind is when a woman who has family in Pakistan thanked me for the talk and the video, saying it was so true about life in Pakistan, and how her family and their friends have to keep their faith a secret. I think she was grateful that it was acknowledged publicly.

### **What advice would you give to anyone starting out as a speaker?**

Ask for help from Open Doors or other speakers! Depend on God, ask friends to pray for you as you speak. God is so faithful, He will help you!

### **How do you feel this role has deepened your connection with the persecuted church and grown your faith?**

It has 100% deepened my connection with the persecuted church. I find it such a blessing to share their stories and needs, and to encourage others to pray and support. It builds your faith because it's easy to be lukewarm as a Christian in the UK, but engaging with our persecuted family deepens your faith because you see what they are walking through on a daily basis and it's challenging.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

In 2022, almost 13,000 people were reached by our 67 volunteer speakers. These were at places like churches, schools, youth groups and women's/ men's events.





## SARAH AND TOM, PRAYER GROUP LEADERS

### What inspired you to serve as a prayer group leader?

I (Sarah) joined an Open Doors prayer group at my church in 2018. It was led by two wonderful women with a real heart for the persecuted church which greatly inspired me. When they moved to a different church, I knew that I needed to continue praying, so I offered to lead the group. Tom joined after we married.

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are currently 263 prayer groups in the UK and Ireland – and we'd love to add to this!

### How do you prepare?

We meet once a month before the evening service. Each time, we focus on one or two countries on the World Watch List, often based on current world events.

We prepare a presentation that provides some background to the country, what it's like to be a Christian there, and specific prayer points. The Open Doors website is a brilliant resource for this.

### How do you establish and build relationships with people who join your prayer group?

We seek to make our group as welcoming as possible for people and invite them to join the WhatsApp group, which helps us keep in touch.

### Could you share a stand-out moment?

The recent World Cup in Qatar. We prayed that it would be an opportunity for the gospel to come to Qatar, and for Qatari people to see people worshipping Jesus. When we got home, we saw that Ecuador had celebrated their goal, all kneeling and pointing to heaven. It was wonderful to see.

### What advice would you give to anyone starting out as a leader?

God will 'take the little in your hands and use it for His glory',

even if only a few people turn up to your group.

### How do you feel this role has deepened your connection with the persecuted church?

Before, I (Sarah) would've said that I cared for the persecuted church, but didn't have much understanding of their unique situations and struggles. Now, when I hear their stories, I feel connected with them.

Through attending events like Standing Strong, my (Tom) connection to God has grown immensely. At one event, the challenge from one persecuted church member was: "We are prepared to die for our faith. Are you prepared to live for yours?" This has deeply impacted me.

### DID YOU KNOW?

This year, Open Doors will be sharing about the persecuted church at some 13 festivals across the UK and Ireland. We still need event volunteers. Can you help?

BELOW, L-R ANTI-CLOCKWISE Leanna volunteering at a festival, Advocacy Rep John Williams with Dean Russell MP, and delegates at Wildfires festival take the World Watch List quiz

## HOW CAN I VOLUNTEER?

Depending on your interests, skills and availability, we have several roles for you to choose from...

- Prayer Group Leader
- Volunteer Speaker
- Events Volunteer
- Advocacy Rep
- Church Rep

Head to [opendoorsuk.org/volunteer](https://opendoorsuk.org/volunteer) for more information on the different roles and to apply. We'd love to hear from you!



# RISK-TAKERS OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



## Pastor Jean from Democratic Republic of Congo

**When Pastor Jean\* was transferred to his new church, he was full of hope. He arrived at Beni – a city in the north east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – to lead a church of almost 280 people.**

There were challenges, of course. For five years, the area had suffered from attacks by an Islamic extremist rebel group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), but he believed God would protect him. “We told ourselves that God will help us.” It was an exciting time and he had big plans.

Then the ADF arrived.

### **‘GOD HELP US’**

“At around 11p.m. we heard the first gunshot,” Pastor Jean recalls. “It was right behind us, and I told my wife that we were being attacked.”

It was a terrifying ordeal. From their house in the church compound, they could hear screams and incessant gunfire as the attackers made their way through the village.

### **“Even if we are persecuted, our tears will be wiped”**

Then Pastor Jean heard the militants right outside his door. It was clear that they intended to kidnap him. “They started arguing amongst themselves to know whether I was inside or not,” he recalls. “We prayed... ‘God help us’”.

The attackers tried the door but failed to break in. On the other side, Pastor Jean heard them discuss their plans. Then he heard them step back. There was the sound of a rocket grenade being launched, an explosion and then everything went black.

“We lost consciousness for about 45 minutes,” he remembers. “Lying there like we were already dead.”

When dawn came, Pastor Jean went outside to find that fifteen people had been killed, six from his church. Houses and shops had been destroyed and at least 20 people – mainly young girls – were missing.

### **‘I NEEDED HELP’**

Mercifully, Pastor Jean and his family had no wounds. But the emotional and psychological pain ran deep. “We were traumatised,” he says. “Our health was destroyed.” He tried to be strong: “If I showed my congregants that I was traumatised it would be difficult to help them because they would be disappointed,” he said. But it was too hard. He could no longer preach.

“Even at the funerals, I could not participate because I myself



needed help. I had to call on another helper because I had no strength.”

Healing from trauma takes a long time. But, with the right help and support, restoration is possible. Pastor Jean and his family have been helped to relocate to a safer area, where, little by little, God is restoring them. Open Doors partners have provided money to help them start a small business, and he draws strength from knowing that others are praying for him and has been able to start leading a congregation again.

And, crucially, he has found some of that hope which he thought he'd lost.

“The Bible tells us not to be afraid because God is with us,” he says. “That is my consolation, and I often say it in church: even if we are persecuted, our tears will be wiped.

“That is why I have hope. One day everything will be finished, and we will see Christ.”

\*Name changed for security reasons



### READ MORE STORIES OF RISK-TAKERS

There are more 'risk-taker' stories in the Open Doors *World Watch List Top 50* booklet, along with country profiles, trends from the latest report and prayer requests. Order your free copy today at [opendoorsuk.org/persecution](https://opendoorsuk.org/persecution)

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH?

### READ

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

– Revelation 21:3-4

### REFLECT

Pastor Jean talks of the difficulty of showing vulnerability, doubt and fear in front of his congregation. Perhaps you, too, feel that you must 'put on a brave face' to the world. Or perhaps you know of others who are in this situation. What can we learn from Pastor Jean's experience? What difference does it make to 'fix our eyes on Him' and ask God for help?

### RESPOND

Pastor Jean says that he takes strength from the prayers of others. Please pray for him and for other persecuted Christians in DRC. But perhaps you can think of others who need the comfort and strength of God. You could write their names down on a tissue and pray that God's presence will wipe away their tears.

## HOW YOU CAN PRAY FOR DEMOCRATIC CONGO WORLD WATCH LIST #37

### 1 PRAY FOR CHURCH LEADERS

Some 95% of the population of the DRC are Christian. But in the eastern areas, Islamic extremist groups like the ADF openly target Christian homes and churches. Pastor Jean asks us to pray for church leaders – that God will keep them safe and protect their ministry of teaching.

### 2 PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE REGION

The ADF kidnaps women for forced marriage and inflicts terrible violence on communities. Many Christians have been forced to flee. Open Doors partners are providing emergency aid for displaced people through local churches. Pray that God will protect His church.

### 3 PRAY FOR PASTOR JEAN AND HIS FAMILY

Pastor Jean says: "Our help comes from the Lord and nowhere else, for He says let us fix our eyes on Him, towards the mountain because that is where we find our help." Pray that the family will fix their eyes on God.

➤ Watch a video of Pastor Jean at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)





# STAND UP AS ONE TO VIOLENT PERSECUTION IN AFRICA

Ayuba\* in Nigeria was only 20 when Islamic militants murdered his father. He was next on their list.

Ayuba's father was one of more than 5,300 Christians in sub-Saharan Africa murdered for their faith last year. Violent persecution is increasing, and will only get worse if we don't take action.

The African church is asking the global church to stand with them against this shocking violence.

Trauma care and aid from Open Doors local partners are giving Ayuba hope for the future. Your gift today can help others like him.

**Every £42 could give hope and healing at a trauma centre to three Christians who have experienced extreme violence.**

You can visit [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org) to make a gift today, return the enclosed envelope or phone **01993 460015**. Thank you.

**STAND UP TO VIOLENT PERSECUTION.**

\*Name changed for security reasons