

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | January/February 2025



## Smuggle light

Why did Joo Min  
return to North Korea?





WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY | 7.30PM

You can now sign up for a special online event for World Watch List 2025. You'll join other Open Doors supporters to hear experts discuss the latest global persecution trends, get an update on the World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch, and pray together for our persecuted church family and the impact of the World Watch List.

Register today for you and your small group at [opendoorsuk.org/webinars](https://opendoorsuk.org/webinars)

## Will you share your views on our magazine?

As an Open Doors supporter, your opinion is important to us. We would love you to take part in our magazine survey.

We will use your responses to help us better shape the content of the magazine. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes and you can complete it any time before **31 January**.

You can take the survey at [opendoorsuk.org/surveys](https://opendoorsuk.org/surveys) or scan the QR code.

Thank you for your faithful support for our persecuted family.



## This Easter, help children to think about what it means to follow Jesus.

When Mrs Pilate's serving girl accompanies her mistress to Jerusalem, things don't turn out quite as she expects.

*Mrs Pilate's Serving Girl* is a fresh, funny, thought-provoking children's book set against the background of the Easter story.

Order your FREE copy today!

[opendoorsuk.org/mrspilate](https://opendoorsuk.org/mrspilate)

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:** Joo Min takes enormous risks as an underground church leader in North Korea (image from a re-enactment of her story)

## LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

# Smuggling light

**"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."** MATTHEW 5:16

**How do you pray for the persecuted church? It feels most natural to pray for persecution to end. But, time and again, our brothers and sisters in the persecuted church don't prioritise that prayer.**

They already know that every wicked regime will end – so they pray, instead, to remain resilient in the face of extreme persecution. They pray to be salt and light in the darkest places on earth to follow Jesus. Some, like Joo Min\*, even choose to return and smuggle light back into those dark places. I find it incredible that, after escaping North Korea, Joo Min went back to share the gospel. You can find her story on p6.

You may well be familiar with Jesus's instruction in Matthew 5: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." What strikes me is that He's speaking in the context of persecution. A few verses earlier, He says, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." He's speaking to followers who could – and did – face terrible persecution for following Him. Centuries later, persecuted believers are still determined to shine their light.

You can help them do exactly that. Your prayers and gifts can uphold our church family who are risking everything to share the good news of Jesus. They need your support now more than ever.

And you can help ensure your MP knows about Christian persecution and the importance of religious freedom. More than half of MPs are new to parliament in 2024, so it's a particularly crucial year. If you haven't yet, please do invite your MP to the World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch with the enclosed tear-off slip.

A blessed new year to you and your loved ones,



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

\*Name changed for security reasons



# WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

## INDIA

### “The Lord sent you to encourage us”

Thank you to all of you who wrote to Narendran\* and Kavita\*, a couple from India who were beaten severely when extremists attacked a prayer meeting. They’ve received your messages – and they couldn’t have arrived at more timely moment.

“Last night, we as a family were very discouraged,” shares the couple. “Though we have a strong desire to do many things for the Lord, we’re often unable to do them because of pressure from extremists. Just yesterday, we considered quitting the ministry, but the Lord sent you to encourage us today.



ABOVE Narendran and Kavita reading your timely messages

“After reading these letters, our hearts are filled with joy and gratitude that hundreds of brothers and sisters are praying for us. It’s given us the strength to move forward and continue the race that the Lord has set before us. Words cannot express our thanks.”

**PRAY** For resilience, protection and encouragement for Narendran and Kavita.

## CENTRAL ASIA

### Open Doors video leads to baptism

God often reaches out to people in the unlikeliest of ways – and that certainly applies to Samila\* from Central Asia.

Samila has a skin condition that makes her a social outcast. Her husband left her, relatives abandoned her and people avoid her on the street – all because she’s deemed ‘unclean’ and cursed. In search of healing, Samila explored several avenues, including saying



ABOVE Narendran and Kavita

Islamic prayers, touching the graves of sheikhs and travelling to holy places to fast. Nothing worked.

As she began exploring Christianity, she saw a video posted on YouTube by Open Doors. After leaving a comment asking for help, a local partner met with her, listened to her story and hugged her. Samila cried – it was the first time in years anyone but her daughter had embraced her.

After six months’ reading the Bible daily, asking questions and attending a house church, Samila gave her life to Jesus and got baptised!

Whilst Samila hasn’t yet been healed of her illness, she knows with deep assurance that she’s a beloved child of God and part of a worldwide church family. After years of hurt, her heart is beginning to heal – and she’s overjoyed!

**PRAY** Thank God for Samila and how God revealed His love for her, and pray that she’ll grow in her faith.



ABOVE Samila (right) no longer feels isolated after becoming a Christian

## PAKISTAN

### Christian mother sentenced to death

A Christian mother in Pakistan has been sentenced to death for allegedly sharing blasphemous content on a WhatsApp group.

Shagufta Kiran was fined under the country’s notorious blasphemy law and handed the death sentence. She was also found guilty under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which carries a seven-year prison sentence and an additional fine. The family plans to appeal the verdict.

Shagufta is currently in solitary confinement, and there is fear that she could face serious threats to her life. Death sentences are seldom carried out, but people charged under the blasphemy law have been killed by mobs or vigilantes. Shagufta’s family are also at risk and are currently in hiding.

**PRAY** For Shagufta and her family’s protection, comfort and peace, and that lawyers will secure her release.



ABOVE Shagufta and her family need your prayers

## MALI

### Crippling tax imposed on Christians

Christians in a Mali village have been threatened with church closure if they don’t pay crippling tax to Islamic extremists.

Believers aged 18 and over living in Douna-Pen village, in Mopti region, must pay a tax of 25,000 CFA francs each month – that’s £32, more than half the monthly income of many families. “We’re supposed to be living in a secular state, where such practices should not take place, but unfortunately this is becoming our new reality,” says a Christian worker.

It follows reports of the tax being imposed last summer in Dougouténé, another village in Mopti, and there are



ABOVE Mopti, Mali ©Unsplash

fears that other villages will follow. It’s been applied elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, and Open Doors analysts believe the cases are part of a wider systemic plan by extremists.

“Families who refuse, or cannot afford to pay, are driven from their lands – places where they have lived all their lives,” says Jo Newhouse\*, an Open Doors spokesperson on the region. “The long-term physical and emotional impact is devastating.”

**PRAY** For an end to this tax, and ask God to help believers navigate its imposition.

## MORE STORIES

- 200+ killed in Burkina Faso attacks
- Read messages from secret believers in Afghanistan
- 26 mostly Christian men released in Sudan

Head to [opendoorsuk.org/news](https://opendoorsuk.org/news) or follow us @opendoorsuk for more news and updates.



\*Names changed for security reasons



**If you escaped the  
darkest place on  
earth...**

**...what would make  
you go back?**

It wasn't the first time that Joo Min\* had crossed the border between North Korea and the neighbouring country. She knew that the river was deep and treacherous. Guards patrolled the riverbank, holding machine guns. If anybody discovered her, she'd be arrested and hauled

to a North Korean labour camp, where conditions are unimaginably bad.

Last time Joo Min made this dangerous journey, she was escaping starvation and an oppressive regime in North Korea.

This time, she was choosing to go back.

Re-enactment image of Joo Min

**A NORTH KOREAN CHILDHOOD**

Joo Min was born and raised in North Korea. In school, Joo Min was taught that North Korea was the greatest country in the world, and that the ruling Kim family were to be gratefully obeyed and even worshipped.

**“Driven by the need to provide, I crossed the border in search of work.”**

She did hear about Christians – and how they were to be feared. “I was told to stay away from missionaries,” she remembers. “They said missionaries were like wolves pretending to be sheep.” Her school textbook said the

same thing, telling stories of American spies pretending to be missionaries. These spies – so the textbook claimed – were sent to North Korea to kidnap children and sell them into slavery.

**SEVERE FOOD SHORTAGES**

Despite what she was taught about life being wonderful in North Korea, Joo Min’s actual experience didn’t match up. Her family was desperately short of food. Her father started abusing alcohol, meaning he couldn’t afford even the meagre amount of food available on the black market.

“My father told me I had to provide for our family,” says Joo Min. “Driven by the need to provide, I crossed the border in search of work.”

Joo Min was one of tens of thousands of North Koreans

who crossed the border looking for sources of food and income. While it’s illegal for North Koreans to leave the country, the authorities are less vigilant in stopping them during periods of severe food insecurity. If Joo Min had been caught, the punishment would have been dire – but the border crossing wasn’t as heavily guarded as it is at other times.

Joo Min hoped to find a way to survive when she reached the other side of the border. She found so much more than that.

**HEARING THE GOSPEL**

At first, after reaching the other side of the river, Joo Min wasn’t sure what to do. Soon, she met someone who said they could help her, and take her to a safe place. Unknowingly, she had met the first Christian she’d ever

known. She’d met a secret Open Doors fieldworker.

The fieldworker took Joo Min to one of the safe houses for North Korean refugees run by Open Doors underground networks, where she found herself part of a community of people who’d made the same difficult journey as her. At the safe houses, these local fieldworkers provide food and help people find jobs. More than that – they tell people about Jesus.

“In the safe house, I heard the gospel for the first time,” says Joo Min. At first, she was very resistant. Not only had her schooling taught her that Christians were evil – she knew what she’d

**“Despite what I was told as a child, I accepted Jesus as my Saviour.”**

face if she were discovered and deported back to North Korea. If you’re found even to have met a Christian while outside the country, you are targeted for particularly harsh punishments.

**“GO BACK TO NORTH KOREA”**

Even with the extreme risks, Joo Min couldn’t help wanting to know more about Jesus. The Christians she met weren’t like the sadistic missionaries in her North Korean textbook: they were kind, loving and offered



The border of North Korea is heavily guarded and leaving the country is illegal

her help without asking anything in return. “Despite what I was told as a child, I accepted Jesus as my Saviour,” she says. “I started attending Bible studies and training every week.”

Eventually, Joo Min chose to be baptised.

After a long period of biblical teaching and persecution survival training from Open Doors fieldworkers, Joo Min felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit. She knew God had a plan for her – and it would require extraordinary courage.

“I felt like God was telling me: ‘Go back to North Korea,’” she says. “I felt a calling to share everything I’ve learned in my homeland.”

And that’s what brought Joo Min back to the border, and to the dangerous crossing into North Korea. As she walked into the water and made her way across, this time it wasn’t because of

financial necessity or hunger – it was because her life had been turned upside down by the hope and love of Jesus.

**SMUGGLING LIGHT**

Today, Joo Min is still serving as a leader in the underground church. “I know the risks involved,” she says. “If I am caught, I could end up in a labour camp, paying a heavy price for being a Christian now.” Yet, by the power of the Holy Spirit and with the help of the training she received from Open Doors fieldworkers, she continues her ministry.

The light she found in the safe house is what she now smuggles into North Korea and nothing – not food shortages, the danger of imprisonment, or even the seemingly all-powerful Kim dynasty – can stop the light from shining brightly in the darkness. “Please pray for me,” she asks. “Pray for protection and courage, so that I can be like salt and light in a land overshadowed by darkness.”

Every year, many people risk their lives to cross the North Korean border (pictured below)



**YOU CAN HELP  
NORTH KOREAN  
CHRISTIANS**

Joo Min’s story is a little different from many stories you’ll read from countries on the Open Doors World Watch List. She hasn’t been attacked or imprisoned – but she risks extreme persecution every day. At any moment, she could be seized by the authorities. But she is determined to continue her ministry.

With your help, other North Korean refugees can encounter the gospel at Open Doors safe houses outside the country – and receive the vital training that enables them to return home and share the gospel in the darkest place on earth.

You almost certainly won’t ever be called on to cross the border into North Korea. But, with your support and prayers, you can stand shoulder to shoulder with believers like Joo Min as they courageously smuggle light into darkness.

**PLEASE GIVE**

Your gift will go to believers from North Korea and other countries in the World Watch List top 10. You can give at [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org)

- **Every £20** could give Bibles to two adults in a country where God’s Word is not easy to access.
- **Every £38** could help provide six months of safe housing and relief aid to



Open Doors secret fieldworkers run safe houses for North Korean refugees, where many hear about Jesus for the first time (re-enactment image of Joo Min)

- a family of North Korean refugees fleeing extreme persecution.
- **Every £45** could help give persecution survival and evangelism training to a Christian who has fled extreme persecution.

**PLEASE PRAY**

You can find prayer points for North Korea in your Prayer Diary.

- For God’s strength and inspiration for believers from North Korea and other countries where Christians face extreme persecution
- For Open Doors fieldworkers at safe houses to receive God’s wisdom and protection as they carry out His work
- That the darkest places on earth in which to follow Jesus would be filled with His light.

**“Pray that I can be like salt and light in a land overshadowed by darkness.”**

**INVITE YOUR MP**

Your MP can hear first-hand testimonies of persecution, and what they can do in response, at the Open Doors World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch on 15 January. It’s not too late to invite your MP to attend – go to [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](http://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy) or use the invitation on your magazine letter.

\*Joo Min’s story is taken from accounts of two North Korean believers. As the real people are currently living and ministering in North Korea, some details have been combined or omitted to protect their identities.

**Interview: Open Doors secret fieldworker**

Lydia Lee\* supports North Korean refugees in a neighbouring country, and shares what she is seeing of the North Korean church’s resilient faith, and how Open Doors fieldworkers help.

**HOW DO PEOPLE FIND JESUS IN NORTH KOREA?**

It is a sad reality that it is not possible for most North Korean citizens to hear about Jesus. Usually, even Christian parents wait until their children are old enough to keep their faith secretly. Christian parents often try to teach the gospel to their children in wise ways, like telling them Bible stories or singing hymns in disguised tones.

In some cases, like Joo Min’s, those who spend time outside North Korea – as foreign workers, students, or illegal refugees – may have chances to hear and accept the gospel in other countries.

**HOW DO OPEN DOORS FIELDWORKERS HELP?**

Open Doors distributes Bibles and Christian materials for the spiritual growth of the church and also provides food supplies, medicines and living essentials for their physical survival. There are Open Doors safe houses

outside of North Korea dedicated to providing Bible training and support.

It is very significant to train those Christians who may return to North Korea. They can share the gospel with their families and close friends, potentially forming Christian small groups and churches within the country. Ultimately, it is God who makes this possible.

**“Nothing and no one can stop the church from growing.”**

**WHAT IS THE CHURCH LIKE IN NORTH KOREA?**

Despite persecution, nothing and no one can stop the church from growing. There are dedicated believers who came out like pure gold even in the midst of difficulties. We estimate there are between 300,000-500,000 believers in the country – many in prison.

“We are steadfastly following the pilgrimage, unwavering in our commitment,” one church leader told me. “This is made possible by embracing Esther’s confession, ‘If I perish, I perish,’ which has

become deeply rooted in our secret church.”

Despite the struggles to survive, secret believers and church leaders in North Korea are encouraged and strengthened by the prayers and support of all the fellow workers and supporters around the world.

**HOW CAN OPEN DOORS SUPPORTERS PRAY FOR NORTH KOREAN CHRISTIANS?**

We ask the Lord to provide North Korean believers both spiritual and physical strength to endure and maintain their faith firmly and strongly through all challenges. Pray that God will inspire North Korean believers in spreading His Word throughout the nation, so that people in North Korea may witness His amazing love and almighty power.

Please also pray for our Open Doors fieldworkers who help North Korean believers and refugees. Pray that God will provide them with comfort, strength, wisdom and His presence as they carry out their work for His Kingdom. North Korean believers are deeply thankful for your support and prayers.

\*Name changed for security reasons



# TAKE ACTION: WORLD WATCH LIST LAUNCH 2025

Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK & Ireland, speaking to MPs at last year's World Watch List parliamentary launch

As we approach the final weeks in the lead up to the World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch, there are two ways you can take action to ensure the voices of the persecuted church are heard directly by MPs.

## INVITE YOUR MP... THERE'S STILL TIME!

Inviting your MP to the World Watch List launch is a vital step in making sure the voices of the persecuted church are heard. The Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP, co-host this year, says: "What always strikes me about the launch is that lots and lots of MPs get contacted by their constituents who say, 'We really, really want you to come up to the launch of the annual World Watch List,' and, of course, having got that instruction,

we all come! And it does reflect the very, very strong support that Open Doors has around the country."

Every year, MPs attend because of you! Your personal invitations make all the difference. So, thank you for using your voice.

Here are five reasons why inviting your MP is important:

### 1. MORE THAN 50% OF MPS HAVE BEEN NEWLY APPOINTED

There are 335 new MPs in the UK. Most current MPs have never had the opportunity to attend a World Watch List launch. That is a staggering number of new MPs to witness to. We can let them know that, globally, one in seven Christians risk high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. Make them aware

that the right of Christians to practise their faith freely is often violated. And even help them understand the reality that Christians can be uprooted from their land, unrecognised by law and left unaided in crisis because of their faith. Make sure your MP doesn't miss out in 2025!

### 2. THE ANNUAL LAUNCH IS HIGHLY REGARDED AND VALUED BY MPS

The World Watch List launch has been described by MPs as profound, powerful and unforgettable. It is a prominent annual event in Parliament drawing MPs across many parties. Your MP will hear the gravity of persecution and discrimination against Christians and consider what actions can be taken to support global religious freedom.

### 3. OPPORTUNITY FOR MPS TO HEAR DIRECTLY FROM PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

The launch is a unique platform for our persecuted family to directly address the UK government. In the past, MPs have been blessed to hear first-hand stories from North Korea, Iran, India, Nigeria and East Africa. Meeting the people behind the statistics may inspire your MP to advocate more passionately for change.

### 4. MPS FIND OUT HOW TO RESPOND

Your MP will be given Open Doors recommendations to actively make a difference for our persecuted church family around the world. Over the years, we have seen real progress in the fight for freedom of religion or belief, with the UK government acting on recommendations at national and international

levels ensuring that religious freedom remains a priority.

### 5. IT IS OUR CALLING!

We are called to speak up for the rights of all who are destitute (Proverbs 31:8). Inviting your MP to the launch is a powerful way to answer God's call and advocate on behalf of the persecuted church.

**"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute."**

Proverbs 31:8



You can invite your MP using the invitation attached to your magazine letter or at [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy)

## PLEASE PRAY!

Prayer is powerful and God is faithful. Please join us to pray:

### FOR MPS:

- For many MPs to attend and truly understand the importance of global religious freedom
- That MPs' hearts will be receptive to the stories of persecution and resilient faith
- Ask God to grant MPs wisdom and compassion as they consider policy recommendations.

### FOR THE LAUNCH:

- That God's presence would be felt powerfully throughout the event and advance His Kingdom purposes.
- For all speakers to communicate clearly about the reality of the persecution of Christians, and that the truth will convict the hearts of attendees
- That the event would have a lasting impact on all who attend, so they act in response and work together to stand up for the right of religious freedom.

**ARISE AFRICA CAMPAIGN UPDATE**

# You're helping start the healing in sub-Saharan Africa



In September last year, you were introduced to Pastor Barnabas from Nigeria – one of over 16.2 million Christians displaced across sub-Saharan Africa due to conflict and violence. Thanks to your prayers, gifts and actions through the ongoing *Arise Africa* campaign, thousands of displaced believers are already seeing a huge difference. “On behalf of the IDP camps and especially in my ministry, in this way, we are grateful,” says Pastor Barnabas. “We are saying thank you, thank you, thank you, God bless you.”

**FEDALIA'S STORY: "THESE THINGS HAVE MADE US SO HAPPY"**

Fedalia's life completely changed the day Fulani militants invaded her village and forced her to flee. “We heard gunshots all round,” she says. “Houses were being burned and seized. The churches in Kantoma were burned down.”

**“You treated us well.”**

Mercifully, she and her family made it to a displacement

camp and safety, but these camps are ill-equipped to deal with the number of refugees they receive. Thanks to your prayers and support, local Open Doors partners are providing Fedalia, her family and many other believers with their daily needs.

“You took us as your children and worked together with us peacefully,” Fedalia says.



Fedalia shares her thanks for life-changing support

“A lot of people, more than 2,000 of us, you treated us well and didn't want anything bad to happen to us. We are really happy, and our mind is now at rest.”

Open Doors partners are able to provide lots of different food and practical supplies to make life easier. “Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we are grateful for what you have done for us,” says Fedalia. “We are happy for the rice, beans, maize, palm oil, salt, blanket, mosquito net, Bible, bathing bucket, soap, pots, bath to wash my children's clothes and even pads for women. All these things have made us so happy.”

“Our prayer is that God will continue to open doors for you where there seems to be no way. We weren't the only ones who were helped, but others too, so our prayer is that may God open more doors, so you can help those in need.”



Pastor Barnabas is already seeing the impact of your prayers and gifts

**MERCY'S STORY: "YOU HAVE BROUGHT US THIS GREAT HELP"**

Mercy lives in the same displacement camp as Pastor Barnabas. “Before the unrest, we didn't think the attacks would reach us,” she explains. “We went to sleep but woke up due to a gunshot sound. It sounded very close to us.” Fulani militants were attacking her village in Mbagwen district.



“You people came and gave us food and I am very happy,” says Mercy, one of many persecuted Christians receiving vital aid

Tragically, in that attack and the ones that ensued, Mercy's mother and sister were killed – her sister was nine months pregnant at the time. Mercy's father was also abducted by

the militants, who have taken over and occupied their village.

Mercy's been in this camp for four years, but she is incredibly grateful for all the ways you are supporting her. “We, the occupants of this camp, are really suffering – you people came and gave us food and I am very happy,” she says. “We didn't used to have anything to eat, but since you gave us food, we've been eating. Before, we would wake up and ask ourselves, ‘What do we eat?’ but today it was different. I thank God.”

**“I can't even thank you enough.”**

She adds, “I can't even thank you enough – may God keep you all and may your days be long. I thank my brothers and sisters that have brought us this great help. I thank you all. And God should bless whatever your hands do; let it be good.”



## Arise Africa: the response so far

As well as ongoing prayers and financial help, the *Arise Africa* petition has been gaining traction globally – at the time of writing, over 80,000 people around the world have signed it! With the highest number of signatories so far, our church family in the Netherlands have gained over 36,000 petition signatures. The petition’s aim is to help provide our brothers and sisters in sub-Saharan Africa with protection, justice and restoration, and it is intended to be presented to the African Union, the United Nations, other international bodies and national governments around the world, including the UK government.

**“Over 80,000 people around the world have signed the petition.”**

As a global campaign, we’ve loved hearing how other Open Doors bases in Europe are seeing supporters get involved.

At an Open Doors event in Sweden, Afordia – a widow from north east Nigeria – shared her story with over 3,000 people, and gave interviews for two Christian newspapers. After her husband was killed by the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram, Afordia and her five children received help from the Open Doors trauma centre, where she now works.

Many church leaders were touched by Afordia’s story and the plight of the persecuted church, and plan to become more engaged in the work of Open Doors.

Open Doors France (*Portes Ouvertes*) had a stall at a conference and shared Pastor Barnabas’s story. They gained about 500 signatures on paper, and lots of young people engaged with the youth space where they could send messages of encouragement to believers. Over the course of two days, the team met with over 1,400 people who engaged with the stall in some way.

And across the UK and Ireland, over 11,500 of you have already signed the petition – thank you! Many of you have also sent in prayers and encouragement for Pastor Barnabas and his church in Nigeria. “Pastor, you are not forgotten,” says one. Someone else prays, “Father, stop the violence and protect our African brothers and sisters. Bring healing there, in Jesus’s name.”



ABOVE, TOP RIGHT Open Doors supporters around the world are praying and speaking out in the *Arise Africa* campaign



### YOUR NAME CAN HELP STOP THE VIOLENCE

Through your prayers, gifts and by signing the petition, we want to support the church across sub-Saharan Africa to persevere and to be resilient, resourceful and influential in the face of extreme persecution.

You can add your voice to the *Arise Africa* petition today and stand with the displaced and persecuted church across sub-Saharan Africa. If you’ve already added your signature, thank you – please share it with your friends, family and church to sign too. The petition will be presented to the UN, African Union, EU, UK Government and other decision makers in 2026, so keep sharing!

You can order a print form or sign online via [opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica](https://opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica)

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2025 RESOURCES

Your eyewitness guide to the world of the persecuted church

Every year, Open Doors publishes the World Watch List: an extensive, authoritative guide to the countries where Christians face the greatest persecution. What makes the list special is that it draws directly from the on-the-ground experience of persecuted Christians. This is first-hand information. Eyewitness testimony.

In the World Watch List resources, you can find out where Christians today face secret police, brutal authorities, communities who reject them or even families who try to kill them – yet still these believers keep witnessing to the good news of Jesus.

We hope that this year you will choose to stand

alongside them – through prayer, through giving and through testifying on their behalf. The World Watch List is an opportunity to see things through the eyes of our persecuted church family and to inform our prayers and our support through their words.

## Coming soon – free resources:

### WORLD WATCH LIST: THE TOP 50

Power up your prayer with this in-depth guide. Features key information on the top 50 countries, inspirational stories and a World Watch List prayer map.

### CHILDREN’S PRAYER PASSPORT AND MAP

Crammed with information and activities, this family-friendly resource is a great way to help children pray for the persecuted church.

### WORLD WATCH LIST YOUTH RESOURCE

What is persecution? Where is it happening? An interactive session outline for youth leaders, with games, videos, stories and Bible content.

### WORLD WATCH LIST CHURCHES MAP

A large display map to put up in your church. Let the world know that you are watching out for the persecuted church.

Resources will be available to order (for delivery in February) from World Watch List launch day on 15 January 2025.

Find out more at [opendoorsuk.org/wwl](https://opendoorsuk.org/wwl)





# Zahra

## FROM YEMEN

The text messages will be forever etched into Zahra's\* mind. They were sent to her friend, Anis\*, after she walked down a street with him and his son. "We wanted to kill you today, but we saw you walking with others," they said. "We don't want to harm them, but we're coming for you." A week later, Anis was killed in front of his children.

For Zahra, threats were nothing new, and that's why she brushed off the messages. Yemen is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a Christian. Despite this, Zahra and Anis bravely disciplined other believers, even when

extremists took over their town and the threats began.

**"I'm determined to stay, despite the risks to my comfort and safety, because I believe everyone deserves to hear about God's love."**

"I was shocked," says Zahra, recalling the moment she learned of Anis' tragic death. "I was haunted by the messages he had shown me a week earlier. I was terrified. What if I was next?"

### A BOLD WITNESS

Growing up, Zahra navigated a complex journey between two worlds: her personal faith in Jesus, which she learnt from her father, and external conformity to Yemen's deeply

## EYEWITNESS

Islamic culture. As her faith emerged in school, she was called *kafira*, meaning 'infidel', and after an Imam made the family's faith public, her father often had to stay away from home for the family's safety.

Throughout these challenges, Zahra's faith grew stronger – and so did her witness. Today, she's one of a handful of Christians reaching out to women in Yemen, using her experiences to connect with them whilst understanding the grave risks they may encounter by following Jesus, including house arrest as families seek to preserve their 'honour'.

And of course, Zahra faces her own dangers. "We're afraid of the extremists and the government as, at this point, they all work together against Christians," she says. Spies are a constant threat. "I know that, when I enter a house, I might not come back out. We live among wolves.

"I visit women in their homes, help them with housework, cook with them and spend time with them," she explains. "Through these visits, I can build relationships to be able to lead them to Christ. I need to hear God's voice in my daily decisions. *Shall I go to this meeting today? Or shall we postpone? Maybe*

## Yemen

**Number of Christians:**  
A few thousand

**Did you know?**  
Conversion from Islam is forbidden by Islamic and state law, meaning Christians must keep their faith secret.



*we should move our meeting to Zoom this week.* These are questions I ask God. We need constant sensitivity to hear His words."

### GALVANISED BY GROWTH

Zahra can feel fearful, but she is undeterred – because she is witnessing the Holy Spirit move. "I'm comforted and encouraged when I see how the church in Yemen, though in secret, is growing!" she says.

You're playing a crucial role in this, through support for initiatives run by Open Doors local partners. Zahra is enrolled in one of these: a two-year leadership programme. "The skill set I'm building will help me serve the Yemeni women better," she explains. "I'm determined to stay, despite the risks to my comfort and safety, because I believe everyone deserves to hear about God's love."

\*Names changed for security reasons

## Word

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." (Acts 4:29)

## Wait

Spend a few minutes reflecting on Zahra's and the early disciples' boldness, and wait for the Holy Spirit as you invite Him to give you greater boldness in your faith, using Acts 4:29 as a prayer.

## Witness

Identify the places where you can be a witness and ask God to provide opportunities to 'speak your word with great boldness'.

## Pray

**"Pray for me, that God will give me the strength and guide me to hear His voice, so I can serve Him." – ZAHRA**

Your prayer diary features a week of prayer for Yemen and an insight into how your prayers for the country are being answered.

Watch Zahra's story at [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org)



### GET REGULAR UPDATES

Would you like to receive regular updates, news and stories from the persecuted church in your inbox? Sign up for weekly and/or monthly emails at [opendoorsuk.org/subscribe](http://opendoorsuk.org/subscribe)

# Smuggle light into darkness

Joo Min\* escaped North Korea – one of the darkest places on earth to be a Christian. After meeting Jesus in an Open Doors safe house, she chose to risk everything by returning with the gospel.

Your support can help believers like Joo Min smuggle more light into darkness.

**Every £38** could help provide six months of safe housing and relief aid to a family of North Korean refugees fleeing extreme persecution.

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\*Name changed and re-enactment image used for security reasons

**The World Watch  
List 2025 launches  
on 15 January.**




Visit [opendoorsuk.org/wwl](https://opendoorsuk.org/wwl)  
on 15 January to find out



where Christians  
are facing the  
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**WORLD WATCH LIST 2025**

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