When two or three are gathered in North Korea...
...one could be a spy
What’s your legacy?

Give a lifetime of hope to your persecuted family by prayerfully including a gift to Open Doors in your Will.

Find out more and order a pack at www.opendoorsuk.org/legacy or phone 01993 460015.

“Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters... you did for me.” Matthew 25:40
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 image:
Young North Korean boy
© 2019 REUTERS/Damir Sagolj

Open Doors

Letter from Henrietta

Choices

“I have decided to follow Jesus... no turning back” ATTRIB. ADHU SUNDAR SINGH

I was at lunch with friends the other day, telling them some of the stories of people I have met this year, and one said, “But I don’t understand, if they are facing that sort of difficulty and opposition, why don’t they just give up being Christians?”

It really is the million-dollar question, isn’t it? Around the world, life is getting harder, not easier, for Christians.

In India, we see rising levels of violence against believers – especially pastors’ wives and daughters. The Chinese government has been clamping down hard, too. In North Korea, there is still a total lack of freedom for Christians, and yet the world and the church remain largely ignorant of the scale and severity of persecution.

Galatians 5:1 says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” The God we worship gives us the freedom to choose and we should defend this freedom vigorously, wherever and whenever we can. The Open Doors World Watch List is vital because it shows where those freedoms are being denied and the ferocity of the battle we’re in.

For millions of men and women, each year, the choice to follow Him is a matter of life and death. So why don’t they just give up? It’s because they know that Jesus is worth any amount of opposition. He, too, was unfairly tried, convicted of blasphemy, violently beaten, and sentenced to death. But, more than that, they have had an encounter with Him which has literally changed their lives – and they are not going to give Him up.

The faith of these brothers and sisters inspires me and grows my own faith. It is a privilege to bring Christians like North Korean Christian Kim Sang-Hwa* to Standing Strong and it was very humbling to receive thanks from a supporter who said, “Please keep going, this matters so much.” Kim Sang Hwa’s story (p8) convinces me that giving up is not an option. She hasn’t given up – and nor will we.

Last year saw the UK government calling for an independent review of UK support for persecuted Christians. This new year gives us a chance to increase that momentum further through the parliamentary launch of the Open Doors World Watch List on 15 January. Please use your freedom to invite your MP to attend. Your choice can make all the difference – and keep faith and hope alive for our persecuted family.

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK & I
BURKINA FASO

Christians ask for urgent prayer as Islamic militants continue to attack

Open Doors teams have been visiting Christians in the West African country of Burkina Faso, where violent attacks from Islamic militants have rocked the country.

In the latest attack, armed men stormed a church in the town of Hantoukoura, killing the pastor, Tchintchiéba Ouoba, and 13 other worshippers, including five teenagers.

Pastor Samuel Sawadogo, who cares for displaced Christians in the city of Kaya, told Open Doors, "We don't know who the attackers are, neither do we know who is sponsoring them. All we know is that they attack Christians."

Armed terrorist groups have spread into the country from neighbouring Mali, exploiting widespread disaffection with the government and a power vacuum which followed the end of former President Blaise Compaoré’s 27-year rule. Parts of Burkina Faso are now under the control of Islamic militant forces who are attempting to turn their territory into an Islamic state.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced, but Christians have been especially singled out.

At least 41 Christians have been killed in nine reported jihadist attacks since the beginning of 2019. An unknown number of pastors and their families have been abducted, and churches in the north have been closed to prevent further attacks.

Meanwhile, extremists have started expelling Christians from their villages, with villagers given an ultimatum: convert to Islam or leave your homes. Many thousands of Christians are now living in IDP camps or seeking refuge with family and friends.

Open Doors teams are on the ground to assess the needs, provide prayer and encouragement and deliver relief aid to the most vulnerable Christians.

Please pray for our teams, and for the suffering people in Burkina Faso. As one Christian leader warned, "If the world continues to do nothing, the result will be the elimination of the Christian presence."

In Oct 2019 Open Doors provided 560 families with maize, rice and beans to help them survive after an attack.

SYRIA

Shootings and bombings continue to spread uncertainty

Christians living in Qamishli in northeast Syria are facing more uncertainty following the murder of two priests and the detonation of three bombs.

Hovsep Petoyan and his father Abraham Petoyan were shot dead by terrorists on 11 November. The so-called Islamic State declared themselves responsible - an indication that their threat has not disappeared.

Hovsep leaves behind a widow and three children. Please pray for them as they grieve.

On the same day, three bombs were detonated in the city, in an obvious attempt to frighten the community into leaving.

"[Hovsep] was a peaceful man," said Open Doors partner Pastor George, who leads the Alliance Church in Qamishli.

"Men of God were killed. This made the people frightened... People started calling us and saying, ‘Why are you still there in that area?’"

Yet Pastor George and others are courageously continuing to serve. Thanks to your help, Open Doors partners like the Alliance Church are supporting hundreds of displaced Christian families with food, medicine and fuel for heating. Read more on p.18.

Please continue to pray for Christians caught up in the ongoing conflict.
Philip is the answer to his own prayer

Have you ever been the answer to your own prayer? When Philip, a 27-year-old pastor from a small village in the east of Bangladesh, saw members of his isolated tribal community dying because of a lack of access to medical care, he didn’t know what to do.

“I have seen people die without treatment even for simple diseases, like malaria, diarrhoea and women dying in childbirth,” he says. “I just used to pray to God for our community to open a door because I could do nothing. I never thought that God would open the door through me!”

“Through this medical service, I am telling them about Jesus Christ.”

With help from Open Doors, Philip trained as a rural doctor. The training meant that he could return to his village to serve as a pastor and a doctor. Not only would he be able to provide medical help for the community, he would also be able to support the 12 Christian families who were struggling in this traditionally Buddhist tribal community.

For a long time, the Buddhist villagers mocked and insulted the Christians. But that is beginning to change. “Now they have started to show respect towards us. They buy medicine from me and also say good things about my service,” Philip says.

“Through this medical service, I am building good relationships with them and telling them about Jesus Christ.”

Thank you for your support which makes this kind of training possible. Please pray for the effective witness of pastors like Philip.

Appeal hearing for five Iranian believers postponed

Christians in Iran continue to face increasing pressure, with mass arrests and increased state surveillance. In the latest injustice, a court hearing due to take place for five Iranian Christian believers was postponed – because the court was ‘too busy’.

The hearing was to review the sentences of five believers: Pastor Victor bet Tamraz, his wife Shamiram, Amin Nader Afshari, Kavian Fallah Mohammadi and Hadi Asgari. Kavian believes that the underlying reason for the postponement is Pastor Victor’s determination to remain in Iran.

Please pray that their appeals will be heard and that God’s will and justice would be enacted.

Meanwhile another brother, Ebrahim Firouzi, has been released from Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj – where he’d been imprisoned for five years. He now must endure two years’ internal exile in the remote city of Sarbaz on the border with Pakistan.

Widespread protests

The crackdown on Christians comes against a background of widespread protests by ordinary Iranians, angered by poverty and unemployment. Despite attempts to hide what is happening - including shutting down internet access in the country - it is clear that there is widespread dissent. Some suggest that thousands of people have been injured.

And it is not just Iran: there have also been protests in Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt. A recent BBC story even talked of the region slipping into ‘a new Arab spring’. Please pray for Christians in these countries.
Ask your MP to represent you at the Open Doors World Watch List launch

We can always rely on Open Doors supporters. When we asked you to contact your general election candidates for the third time in four years, you didn’t let your persecuted brothers and sisters down!

Over a thousand of you emailed your candidates, urging them to commit to three key actions:

1. BE EQUIPPED
   If elected, attend Open Doors’ World Watch List launch in Parliament on 15 January 2020

2. BACK THE ENVOY
   Reappoint and resource the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief

3. TAKE ACTION
   Implement the recommendations of the FCO’s report on religious persecution.

Candidates showed their support for Open Doors’ election pledges on behalf of their parties, and we’re slowly seeing a party-political consensus emerge around supporting the persecuted church:

• The Conservatives’ manifesto committed to implementing the recommendations of the Foreign Office’s review into the worldwide persecution of Christians.
• The Labour party’s faith and race manifesto committed to ensuring British embassies and high commissions around the world deliver tailored responses to any violations of freedom of religion or belief.
• The Liberal Democrat manifesto committed to appointing an ambassador-level Champion for Freedom of Belief.

PLEASE ACT NOW
But let’s not miss a moment. Now is the time to hold the parties to account. We need to make sure MPs old and new are equipped to support the persecuted church in Parliament throughout the year. Make sure your MP represents you at the Open Doors World Watch List launch in Parliament on 15 January 2020.

Please sign and post the tear off section at the bottom of the letter accompanying this magazine to ask your Member of Parliament to prioritise this year’s World Watch List launch.

If you have already done this, please consider asking them again. With so much political upheaval it’s important to remind your MP or tell your new MP about the World Watch List launch in Parliament. It’s worth the price of a stamp!

You can also email your MP an invite at www.opendoorsuk.org

The turbulence of the election means we need you to do everything you can to make sure your MP attends the launch. Contacting your MP today will make all the difference and will put the persecuted church squarely on Parliament’s agenda at the beginning of this new year. Thank you!
You’re invited to meet persecuted Christians who dare to follow Jesus no matter the cost.

Standing Strong 2020

Standing Strong is a celebration of all that God is doing in and through His church around the world, thanks to your prayers and support. This is your unique opportunity to meet persecuted Christians from Asia and the Middle East and hear them speak about how they and fellow believers are courageously following Jesus, despite the dark and dangerous reality of persecution they face.

Join with hundreds of others in worship and prayer and find out how you can support your persecuted family. Learn more about the dangers, risks and joys that being faithful to Jesus brings and the work Open Doors is doing to support those whose faith costs them the most.

Hearing from courageous Christians around the world had a real impact on those who attended Standing Strong in 2019. “Standing Strong is one of the high spots of the year,” said one supporter who attended the event in Birmingham. “It is always a tremendous privilege and challenge to hear first-hand from persecuted believers and how we can stand with them and pray for them.”

“Now I know what to pray for because I’ve heard it directly, and not just by reading it in the magazine or the prayer diary.”

“From the minute I walked in, there was a welcoming atmosphere,” added another. “I really felt like we were one family in Christ.”

That family includes children, of course. At Standing Strong Birmingham, children aged 5-11 years will have the opportunity to join an exciting all-day programme put together especially for them – and this year there are optional youth sessions (ages 12-15) to delve into the stories of courageous faith from the persecuted church. We know that God speaks to His people whatever age they are, and we’re excited to see how He uses these dedicated times with younger supporters. But spaces for children and youth are limited, so book now to avoid disappointment!

Book before 31 May 2020 and get 25% off your total order – go online to www.opendoorsuk.org or call our Inspire team: 01993 460015.

BOOK NOW!

Visit www.opendoorsuk.org for details of further Standing Strong 2020 evening events across the UK.

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

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

SCOTLAND 6-9 October 2020 | 7pm-9pm | Whitburn/Ayr/Aberdeen
£5 per person
Dangerous faith in North Korea

When two or three are gathered in my name...

...there I am with them ...one could be a spy
MATTHEW 18:20

Kim Sang-Hwa knows God is with her at all times, including when she met secretly with other Christians in North Korea. What she didn’t know was whether one of the other secret Christians was actually a spy and would tell the authorities.

READY TO DIE
When you became a Christian, perhaps it was after hearing about Jesus from a family member or friend. You might have asked questions of a minister or youth leader. You could explore the Bible and any number of books about the Bible. None of that is possible in North Korea.

Sang-Hwa doesn’t live in North Korea any more, and she is very conscious of the change this has made in her life and her freedom: “Where I live now, I can choose to go to church or not to go. In North Korea that’s very different. You give up your life if you follow Jesus. You have to be ready to die for your faith every day.”

You can’t go to church. You can’t talk about Jesus. You can’t risk anybody

LEFT Kim Sang-Hwa didn’t discover her parents were secret Christians until she was 12 years old
finding out that you’re a Christian.

“We have a saying in North Korea,” says Sang-Hwa. “When three of us are meeting, one of us is a spy and will report to the government.” If the government finds out that you’re a Christian, it’s likely that you’ll spend the rest of your life in a concentration camp, if you’re not killed. These camps are worse places than we can possibly imagine. And it’s also hard to imagine the sort of courage it takes to follow Christ in North Korea. It’s been number one on the World Watch List since 2002: it’s the most dangerous place in the world to follow Jesus.

CAN’T TELL FAMILY

Many North Korean Christians can’t even tell their families about their faith. Sang-Hwa didn’t realise that her mother and father were believers until she was nearly a teenager. “My parents couldn’t share any Christian stories with my siblings and me. It’s too dangerous. A child may accidentally betray his or her parents’ faith.” The consequences would be horrendous. In North Korea, teachers sometimes ask children to inform on their parents’ activities – even asking very young children if they’ve seen their parents reading from a black book, to discover underground Christians reading the Bible.

When she was 12, Sang-Hwa found her parents’ secret Bible. “When I opened the book, my parents weren’t there. I read that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. When I saw the words, I felt a chill.

“I threw the book across the room. I had shivers throughout my body. And I was so very afraid. I thought: ‘Wow, we’re all dead now.’ If someone found out about the Bible, it would 100 per cent mean that we would be sent to a political prison.” Terrified, she put the Bible back where she’d found it. Sang-Hwa was left with a tremendously difficult choice. Should she do her ‘patriotic duty’ and tell the police, or should she find out more about Christianity from her parents – and risk her own life?

THE DANGEROUS CHOICE

Praise God, after 15 very anxious days, she made the brave decision to ask her father about his faith. And he was equally brave, sharing the truth of God’s Word with his daughter.

“You give up your life if you follow Jesus.”

As her father talked about the Bible, Sang-Hwa felt the Holy Spirit come over her. “That’s when he explained the Bible and the gospel to me. First, he shared about Adam and Eve. Then he asked what the most dangerous animal was and I told him it was the snake. He agreed and then he shared how sin came into the world and how we are in need of redemption.”

As her father talked about the Bible, Sang-Hwa felt the Holy Spirit come over her. “It was the first of many conversations we had about the
Bible; about God, Jesus and the gospel. He explained many Bible stories to me. I was not a real believer yet, but they did make a lot of sense to me.”

Sang-Hwa’s father wasn’t the only member of her family who courageously told her about the Christian faith. “My mother taught me to memorise Bible verses and the Apostolic Creed and also explained the full gospel to me. My grandfather showed me how to pray. He told me, ‘It is just talking to God. Nothing more, nothing less.’”

Eventually Sang-Hwa became a Christian. She knew how dangerous it was, but she also knew it was the best choice to make, once she was convicted of the truth of the gospel.

Sang-Hwa’s family have been spied upon, and she tells of a spy who attended several meetings. Her father visited him on his deathbed, and he confessed: “I know everything about you, your family and your faith. I was a spy and ordered to watch you. But you are a good man. I never told anyone you were a Christian. Tell me how I can become a Christian too.’ Not only did God prevent Sang-Hwa’s family from being arrested, He brought this man to faith in the final moments of his life.

“Thanks to your support, the secret believers experience that God loves them”

THE GROWING CHURCH
More and more North Koreans are making the same courageous decision that Sang-Hwa made. Despite the suffocation of living in a police state and the enormous dangers of being a believer, there is a massive underground church and it is growing. Open Doors estimates that there are 200,000 to 400,000 secret Christians in the country. Tens of thousands of believers are in concentration camps.

Incredibly, and thanks to your ongoing support and prayers, Open Doors is able to keep more than 60,000 Christians in North Korea alive with food, urgent medical help and clothing. Open Doors gets this vital aid to them through secret networks that we can’t say anything about. Writing too much about them would compromise the safety of everyone involved.

Sang-Hwa is convinced that the impact of this work is felt by the average Christian family in North Korea. “It’s really significant. The love of God flows through believers to others. Thanks to your support, the secret believers experience that God loves them and provides in everything they need.”

As Sang-Hwa explains, the oppressive regime makes it difficult for North Koreans to know how to say thank...
you. "Even for a Christian. It’s because of the way they are raised. However, even if someone doesn’t express their gratitude, I know they are grateful deep down. What you do is so important for their survival," she says.

KEEPING HOPE ALIVE
Sang-Hwa isn’t exaggerating when she uses the word ‘survival’. While Kim Jong-un and his family live in luxury, millions of North Koreans are starving. Even those who aren’t in concentration camps are in desperate need of food. As well as vital spiritual support, North Korean families urgently need the winter relief packs they receive with your support. Each pack contains food, medicines, winter clothes and blankets, to keep a family alive for three months. These believers rely totally on their worldwide church family for this relief – and on God to sustain them.

Open Doors also supports Christians from North Korea who have managed to escape the country, though the deteriorating security situation makes this work increasingly dangerous. There is evidence that North Korean spies are sent into neighbouring countries to kidnap or kill anyone working with refugees, particularly Christians. Please pray for their safety as they make the courageous choice to serve God and their family of believers in this way.

Together with local Chinese Christians, Open Doors runs safe houses in China. Believers from North Korea will stay for between a couple of days and a few weeks, learning about the Bible and developing in Christian leadership. Many have never had access to the whole Bible before, and certainly wouldn’t have been able to read or listen to one openly in their own country.

“OUR VICTORIOUS MARCH!”
Your support enables Open Doors to secretly distribute Bibles and Christians materials through our networks within North Korea, but these have to be destroyed as soon as they are read, so that there is no incriminating evidence in believers’ homes. And these resources are making an enormous difference. As one underground church leader says, “Through your secure delivery, we received the Christian books and other materials. I cannot express our thankful hearts with any words in this world. With your loving support and care for our spiritual and physical lives, we can overcome any struggles and keep our faith until the end.”

Another leader speaks triumphantly about the power of Christ in the face of terrible persecution and opposition: “Through your support and wise guidance, our believers have been bearing good fruit in the spiritual warfare with powerful faith and love in Jesus Christ. Nothing and nobody in this world can stop our victorious march! Our faith will be strengthened a hundred times over, even in the suffering and difficult situations before us.”

Open Doors’ long-term presence is vital for the survival of the North Korean church. In all the countries on the World Watch List, and particularly those in the top ten, your ongoing gifts and prayers are a lifeline to many of the world’s most vulnerable believers.

That leaves us in the UK and Ireland with a choice. As we follow Jesus in safety, will we remember our brothers and sisters who don’t have the same freedom? Can you choose to grow the courage and faith of those facing extreme persecution today?

*Name changed for security reasons

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Open Doors World Watch List 2020

Which are the 50 hardest places in the world to follow Christ?

The persecution of Christians in North Korea is shocking, but it is far from the only place where Christians face terrible treatment, even death, for following Jesus. It is also shocking that the worldwide church often doesn’t know about the scale and severity of persecution.

Each year, Open Doors publishes the World Watch List. It ranks the 50 countries where it is most difficult and dangerous to be a Christian, using data about the freedom believers have to follow Christ in various spheres of life, and the levels of violence they face. As a unique and in-depth record of persecution, it will help you and your church pray for the most vulnerable believers – and inspire you in your own faith.

Sign up to have the 2020 World Watch List emailed directly to you as soon as it’s launched, on 15 January 2020 at www.opendoorsuk.org/subscribe. You can also order the top 50 guide and download resources for churches from our website from mid-January.
Please give

Every £22 could provide a North Korean believer with a Bible

Every £42 could provide a winter relief pack to help two North Korean families survive for three months. This could include food, medicines, winter clothes, boots and blankets.

Every £60 helps provide access to a safe house for a North Korean believer fleeing extreme persecution.

Gifts will go to support persecuted Christians in North Korea and the other nine countries in the 2020 World Watch List Top ten.

Please pray

Pray for faith, resilience and courage for Christians in North Korea facing unimaginably harsh conditions, and pray for the continuing growth of the secret church. Please pray for Christians in all the countries on the World Watch List, particularly those in the top ten, where following Christ comes with enormous cost.

Invite your MP to the World Watch List parliamentary launch on 15 January 2020

Please ask your MP to attend the parliamentary launch of the World Watch List, if you haven’t done so yet. It’s a great way to ensure that an awareness of faith-based persecution is on the agenda for new and returning MPs. Use the enclosed invitation or visit www.opendoorsuk.org

Please use the freedom you have as a Christian to raise awareness of those who have no freedoms – but who nevertheless courageously serve and worship the same powerful, loving God that you do.
Thank you so much to everyone who made handmade petition squares, visited the exhibition and prayed for the impact of the installation. The handmade petition is part of Open Doors’ ongoing See. Change. campaign in support of persecuted Christian women, and has already been a wonderful way to amplify their voices. It declares that Christians in the UK and Ireland won’t let the suffering of our sisters go unseen. You said “I see you” to those persecuted for both their gender and their faith – thank you.

“What happens to our sisters in many countries is hidden,” said Henrietta Blyth, CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland, at the reception for The Handmade Petition: I See You exhibition. “Sadly, even if they manage to escape from – for example – Boko Haram in Nigeria, when they get back to their communities and churches, the stigma and shame associated with what’s happened to them follows them. It sticks to them, and their communities brush the persecution under the carpet – it remains hidden. This petition is about saying to these women, we do see you, you are seen, we hear your story, we want justice for you, we are praying for you.”

In the November magazine, we wrote that over 12,500 supporters had painted, embroidered, drawn or otherwise added their name to this unique petition. By the time the petition closed, more than 16,000 names had been added! Thousands of these squares were sewn into banners that hung in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey for a week in November, acting as a tapestry of prayer that was visited by thousands of people – Open Doors supporters, worshippers and tourists. For many, it had a really significant impact.

“IT’S LIFTED MY EYES”
“The handmade petition has been a really powerful thing to experience,” said Tom, an Open Doors supporter. “It’s lifted my eyes and given me a real perspective on how comfortable we have it in our faith. It was really powerful to read the stories of women and children who’ve been abused – and it reminded me that we’re part of a global family. I pray for my sisters around the world who are suffering for their faith.”

The stories in the exhibition included that of Tara* in India. She is 15 and lives at home – but has been ostracised by her Hindu family since she converted to Christianity. In their eyes, this makes her unclean – they refuse even to share the same water source, and she had to go out alone to find daily labour jobs to get enough money to eat.

Thankfully, Open Doors partners have been able to get her access to a school with a hostel that caters for all her essential needs. “I am very thankful for all your help,” says Tara. “Now I can concentrate on my studies. Unlike before, I do not have to struggle to earn money for my survival.”

Stories like this bring the reality of persecution home, and have had a significant effect on those who saw the exhibition and read about the women’s and girls’ experiences.

“IT’S LIFTED MY EYES”
“IT’S LIFTED MY EYES”

YOUR HANDMADE PETITION GOES TO WESTMINSTER ABBEY

The invisible suffering and courage of women who are persecuted for their faith has been seen, heard and prayed over by thousands of people in the heart of the capital, at the public exhibition of the handmade petition in the Chapter House, Westminster Abbey.
inspired me to pray more for the persecuted church.”

“A CROWD OF WITNESSES”
At the reception for the petition, trauma counsellor Tirham* highlighted the positive impact the petition will also have on women who suffer for their faith. She works at an Open Doors trauma care centre in Nigeria and has seen the psychological damage that persecution does to the women who attend, many of whom have been the victims of sexual violence: “The first step in trauma healing is for them to open up. They come with bitterness and anger but leave in peace and joy.

“This handmade petition will allow every woman to see that everyone is seeing them. Every handmade petition, it’s like a crowd of witnesses. It is opening a forum for them to be able to speak out, so that their voice would be heard. We are pleading and soliciting that church leaders and politicians will take this petition seriously and stand seriously against segregation and marginalisation of religious minorities.”

POLICY CHANGE
It is really vital that we pray for our vulnerable sisters around the world. The petition is designed to have a lasting impact on UK government policy. Open Doors believes that faith should be recognised as a specific vulnerability in relation to persecution, in the same way
Theologian and philosopher Dr Elaine Storkey also attended the reception, and explained why it’s so crucial to raise the issue of religious identity when talking about the targeting of Christian women: “When you don’t include the whole issue of faith, then it just becomes hidden. We can’t deal with it properly if we aren’t looking at the real thing that’s the cause of the violence. Even in those countries where women are being violated sexually, [...] you’ll find that Christians are being violated even more, over and over again, in many different forms.”

The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) conference, at which the petition was originally going to be presented, has been postponed due to the general election. Open Doors still intends to present the petition to key decision-makers, and is exploring other ways in which the handmade petition can be used to ensure that women who are persecuted for their faith and gender are seen, valued and empowered to reach their God-given potential. Please keep praying that God will use it as He chooses – and look out for more on the See. Change. campaign in March’s magazine.

**PLEASE PRAY**

- That the petition will continue to have impact, moving those in power to act
- That our persecuted Christian sisters would know God’s presence and peace
- For strength and encouragement for Open Doors workers like Tirham as they continue in their difficult but vital work of bringing healing and hope to women persecuted for their faith.

*Names changed for security reasons*
Syria emergency update

HOW YOUR SUPPORT IS STRENGTHENING DISPLACED CHRISTIANS IN NORTHERN SYRIA

Thank you to everyone who responded so generously to our emergency appeal for Christians caught up in the recent conflict between Turkish troops and Kurdish-led forces in northeast Syria. Your prayers and gifts are helping the church in northern Syria to help hundreds of Christians displaced by the fighting with food, medical and hygiene kits, and heating fuel.

We spoke to Open Doors church partner, Pastor George, who shares how his church has been able to strengthen others, thanks to your support.

“PEOPLE LEFT WITHOUT ANYTHING”
Just before 3pm on 9 October, the heart of Qamishli, a vast Syrian city one kilometre from the Turkish border, was beating with life. Children were at school, men and women at work, shops were open and taxis driving around when, all of a sudden, the peace was shattered. The explosion of bombs signalled a massive attack by the Turkish Air Force, launched against Kurdish centres and neighbourhoods.

“It was terrifying,” says George, who has led his church in Qamishli for almost ten years. “Everyone felt threatened, especially when rumours spread that the Turkish militias might enter the city, or that groups linked to so-called Islamic State (IS) might attack. We are deep in the city, which wasn’t as affected, but we received several families who left their homes and came to the city. I bought lots of basic supplies like rice, sugar, canned food, bread, cheese, etc. I tried
On 18 October, a ceasefire was announced, to the relief of all in the region. “We thank God for the ceasefire,” says George. “People might think it’s a political decision, but we trust that the Lord is higher than human kingdoms. We know it was a response to prayer; He moved His hand in response to our prayers and our friends’ prayers in those tough times.

“Of course, Qamishli isn’t completely as it was. So, please keep praying for the peace to be completed. Life has returned, but still there is tension in the atmosphere and political moves are unclear and vague. We hope everything will be clear and peaceful and God will help us spread His kingdom.”

“A CHURCH, WE ARE SERVING IN SO MANY WAYS”

Although the attacks have stopped for now, many of those affected remain in dire need. “We will help renovate destroyed houses, and give immediate food aid to those who’ve been displaced,” says George. “This month, we distributed 250 coupons for food aid to people from all kinds of backgrounds. We’ve also given 200 litres of fuel to widows, which is particularly necessary in winter.

“As a church, we are serving in so many ways. Firstly, due to the expensive costs of living and the huge need, we had many refugees even before the Turkish attack. We offered food aid for people in need, especially for widows and orphans, and we still do that. We also give medical aid for medicine and surgeries and support some cancer patients with money. In several cases, we give financial support to people who can’t afford the rent or need electricity generators for when the power shuts down. We help people from all backgrounds, including Islamic. And while doing that, we try to spread the Word of God. But we help unconditionally.

“Keep praying for us. Our church is persecuted, we’ve been closed many times. We tried to open in a formal building but were stopped. We meet in a small apartment and it isn’t big enough for the people. Pray that we can open our church in a bigger building.”

“YOU HELPED US”

The recent instability in northern Syria is a reminder of how volatile the situation is in the region. Open Doors has been working through local church partners in Syria since before the war began, and these partners will continue to provide emergency relief, medical care and pastoral care, as well as longer-term support. It’s thanks to your long-term praying and giving that pastors like George can provide for the most vulnerable in their communities – and respond immediately when crises strike.

“We thank you for your support,” says George. “You helped us, and especially you made us feel that we have brothers and sisters outside Syria. May God bless you and protect you.”

**DISPLACED FAMILIES – THE STATS**

- 106 Christian families were displaced from Ras al-Ain and Derbassieh, and moved to Al Hasakeh
- The Alliance Church in Al Hasakeh is supporting 43 of these displaced families; the Syrian Orthodox Church there is supporting another 63 displaced families.
- All displaced people received food baskets, medical/hygiene kits, and heating fuel support.

**VULNERABLE FAMILIES – THE STATS**

- The Alliance Church has supported up to 550 vulnerable families, in Qamishli, Al Malikyah and Al Hasakeh, with food baskets, medical aid, educational support or winterisation support.
- The Armenian Orthodox Church has supported 500 vulnerable families with food baskets, medical aid and drinking water. They also set up an emergency shelter in case of future displacement.
HOW YOUR SUPPORT IS HELPING CHILDREN IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Jeovani, Steven and Dieu Fera from the Central African Republic (CAR) run around, play football and dream about their futures just like many other teenage boys. But, unlike many teenage boys, they have had to overcome life-changing injuries and completely readjust to how they live – which they are now able to do, thanks to your prayers and support.

On 13 April 2013, a rocket-propelled grenade was fired into the Evangelical Church of the Brethren in CAR by Seleka rebels. Amongst the 40 casualties were three boys: Steven, Jeovani and Dieu Fera (pictured left to right). All three of them lost limbs as a result of the attack; Dieu Fera and Steven each lost one of their legs, and Jeovani had to have both of his legs amputated.

Thanks to supporters who give and pray regularly for children, Open Doors local partners have been journeying with these three teens as they continue to recover and heal from the attack, including providing prostheses and paying for school fees. All three boys have been undergoing extensive surgery and physiotherapy to get them out and playing again.

Jeovani says, “At first, I had to walk with walking sticks, or crutches. But then the doctors in another, small hospital gave me artificial legs. Now, when I put on trousers, I almost look like other kids. But I cannot run. And I still need the walking sticks to walk well. But I can stand on my legs without using the sticks.”

As well as receiving physical therapy, Jeovani has also been able to forgive the people who attacked his church. “If I should one day meet the Muslim man who shot the grenades at my church, I will not be angry,” he says. “I will smile. I do not even have the heart to hurt him. I think that he doesn’t really know how terrible it is what he has done. I will greet him and say, ‘God forgives you, and He wants me to forgive you too. You do not know what you have done to me, but I forgive...”
you.’ And once I have told him that, I will never be angry with him.”

The three boys are looking forward to the future. “I do not have my two legs, but I like to play soccer with my friends,” says Dieu Fera. “I am very good at it, because I play every day. I am getting better and better.” Steven is also learning to live without his leg. “For now, I want to play ball every day. When I grow up, I want to be in the government. I want to read documents and make decisions,” he says.

Jeovani wants to enter the medical profession. “I am very happy that Open Doors pays the medical bills and the school fees, because I like very much to read books and study. When I grow up, I want to be a doctor so that I can help other people.

“I want to thank everybody who has written a card to me”

If God wants me to be a doctor, I will become a doctor. But if God has other plans for me, then that is okay, too.’

Thank you to everyone who wrote letters to Jeovani, Dieu Fera and Steven to encourage them in their journey of recovery. Jeovani says that the cards and letters he received were sent ‘by friends all over the world’. “They tell me that they love me and will pray for me and my family. That is why I often read the cards, again and again. I want to thank everybody who has written a card to me. You are all my friends.”

You can watch a film about the boys’ recovery at www.opendoorsuk.org

Your prayers and support are enabling Open Doors to support vulnerable children like Jeovani, Dieu Fera and Steven, and their families, with the care, protection and provision that they need, for as long as they need it. Please continue to pray for their recovery. You can also find prayer points for other children affected by persecution in the prayer diary included with this magazine.

> You can watch a film about the boys’ recovery at www.opendoorsuk.org

PLEASE PRAY:
- That God will continue to heal and bless Jeovani, Steven and Dieu Fera as they grow – pray that their faith would also continue to grow
- For the families and churches who were affected by the attack in 2013, that God would continue to comfort them in their grief
- That God would guide Open Doors partners working in CAR to know how best to provide ongoing support to our persecuted family.

POST IT!

As Jeovani’s story shows, your kind words can have an enduring, powerful impact in the lives of persecuted Christian children. As well as the current Letter-Writing Guide, there is also POST IT! which gives children a whole range of ways to send messages of encouragement to children whose Christian identity brings risk and danger. Order your copy today at www.opendoorsuk.org, or call our Inspire team: 01993 460015.
IS 2020 THE YEAR FOR YOUR FUNDRAISING CHALLENGE?

Is there something you’ve always dreamed of doing to raise money for your persecuted church family? This could be your year! Baking or biking, crafting or running – you can follow your passions and achieve personal goals. Whatever you choose, our team is here to support you every step of the way.

“Open Doors is all about family,” says Mike Walker, an Open Doors supporter. “It’s about standing together as one wildly diverse family beautifully knit together by Jesus. That’s what inspired me to do the Great North Run.

“The Bible tells us that when one part of the family hurts, we all hurt together (1 Corinthians 12:26). When we hear about the persecution of our brothers and sisters worldwide, it can sometimes feel a hopeless situation we can do nothing about. But all of us can do something – and for me, that ‘something’ was using my legs to run a half marathon!”

Mike raised £554 for our persecuted family last year. He was inspired to run to raise money, but you could do anything – and achieve many goals along the way. You could challenge your fitness, with the Great North Run, or Ride 100, or Vitality 10k. Or you could organise a community event to bring people together – like our new Bake With Them project.

BE GUIDED BY GOD
You could take inspiration from David McClarty, and create your own challenge unique to your circumstances. David, 71, used to run marathons and climb mountains, but now finds his mobility limited due to multiple conditions including Parkinson’s disease and a brain tumour. He walked 100km on his treadmill over 40 days, averaging around 3km a day.

“It was an awful lot more walking than usual!” he says. “But I didn’t want to do something ‘easy’. I wanted a challenge that would require some effort and discipline to make it worthwhile.”

David’s challenge inspired his friends, neighbours and church members to sponsor him, raising £250. He also had the chance to witness to a passerby while out walking.

“To anyone considering their own challenge, I’d say be guided
by God,” says David. “Listen closely to Him so that you are sensitive to His voice and His leading. If God speaks to you, go for it! Everything springs out of love for Jesus. It makes any sort of suffering fade into the background.”

**WARRIORS AND SAINTS**
If you feel called to an extreme challenge, you could follow Nick Gerrard’s lead, who was part of a team to travel to South Korea last year to complete an epic Muskathlon challenge. The Muskathlon allows you to run, walk or cycle an extreme distance in an extreme location – and to meet members of your persecuted family along the way.

The Muskathlon appealed to Nick when he first read about it, but it was when he heard former North Korean labour camp inmate Hea Woo speak at Spring Harvest that he felt determined to travel to Korea. Her faith in the face of extreme persecution left a deep impression on him.

“She was praying in Korean, which we couldn’t understand,” he says. “But you could sense the spirit of God talking through her.”

After months of training, praying and fundraising towards the £10,000 target, Nick found himself in South Korea, on a bike, ready to begin the challenge. He was surprised when Hea Woo herself came to pray for the team and support them on their mission.

“I told her, ‘You’re the reason I’m here!’” says Nick. “It felt a total privilege to meet her. The persecuted Christians we met are not the casualties of life they are warriors and saints.”

**REAL, NOT REMOTE**
During the cycle ride, Nick and the team had to ride through a river. “They put that in because most North Korean Christians escape that way,” says Nick. “It’s all become very real, rather than remote.”

Say ‘fundraiser’ and you might imagine a certain kind of person, maybe someone different to you. But really, anyone can try. You just have to find your own way. So, whether you’re running a marathon or running round the kitchen making cakes, there’s something everyone can do to raise money. The need to support our persecuted family is greater than ever. If not now, then when?

**DO WHAT YOU LOVE TO HELP YOUR PERSECUTED FAMILY IN 2020**
Turn a hobby, a passion or a dream into a blessing for your persecuted family in 2020. Open Doors has places for the Great North Run, Ride 100, Vitality London 10k and 2020 South Korea Muskathlon. You could order our Bake With Them pack or design your own challenge to raise money.

Chat your ideas through with Fiona or Sally by emailing challenge@opendoorsuk.org or calling 01993 460015. Visit www.opendoorsuk.org/fundraise to find out more.
You are North Korean.
You discover your parents’ secret Bible.
You have a choice.

Betray your parents to the authorities and see them sent to a labour camp.

Listen to their story and courageously decide to follow Jesus.

Kim Sang-Hwa* was faced with this terrifying choice. Thousands more North Koreans have made the same dangerous decision she ultimately made: to become a Christian and live for Jesus.

“You give up your life if you follow Jesus,” says Sang-Hwa. “You have to be ready to die for your faith every day.”

North Koreans who have made the courageous choice to follow Christ urgently need your help. Despite the dangers, they still desperately want Bibles. With your support and prayers, Open Doors is able to keep over 60,000 Christians in North Korea alive with food, medical help and clothing. Thousands more who have fled persecution find refuge in Open Doors’ safe houses in China.

This is dangerous work. These are dangerous choices. Please make the choice to give what you can today and help others like Sang-Hwa remain courageous in their faith.

Every £22 could provide a North Korean believer with a Bible.

Every £42 could provide a winter relief pack to help two North Korean families survive for three months. This could include food, medicines, winter clothes, boots and blankets.

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

*Name changed for security reasons

The 2020 World Watch List will be launched on 15 January 2020. Visit www.opendoorsuk.org to find out the full list of 50 countries, and which are the most dangerous places to be a Christian.