

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | March/April 2021



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to empower**

**See. Change. for
persecuted women**

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“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, 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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 **Open Doors**

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Cover image:

With the help of Open Doors partners, Sozan is overcoming persecution in Qamishli, Syria

Letter from Henrietta

In His image

“So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” GENESIS 1:27

It's now been almost a year since we first went into lockdown in the UK and Ireland. It's hard to believe that Covid-19 is still in all the headlines, and still affecting all of our lives so severely. For our persecuted church family, the pandemic has made a very hard situation even worse – that's particularly true for persecuted Christian women.

Tragically, across the globe, there has been a surge in domestic violence, sex trafficking and forced marriage. Christian girls and women are often targeted. Lockdowns have meant that vulnerable women and girls have no escape from abusive family members, including women and girls who are rejected and attacked for converting to Christianity from a different faith background.

Outside the home, in societies where a woman's sexual purity is linked to her family's honour, sexual violence and rape are very effective ways of destroying women and their families. Persecutors know this. Sadly, the local church has often adopted society's norms, and rather than being a place of healing it stigmatises these women and girls. It's truly heartbreaking. Women and men are equally valuable to God, regardless of what we have done or has been done to us.

But I am encouraged when I remember that women in these terrible situations aren't simply victims. I know, and they know, that it's not enough just to end violence – whether sexual, physical, coercive or economic. God's desire is for our sisters to 'have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10), and that's what Open Doors' *See. Change.* campaign aims to achieve.

That's why stories like Sozan's and Peninah's (p9-15) are so powerful. Your gifts, advocacy and prayers are empowering them to contribute fully to the life of the church, and to realise their God-given potential. Together, we can help empower many more of our persecuted sisters and show them that they are seen – by God, and also by their worldwide family.



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

World Watch News

MYANMAR

Military coup ‘may have serious implications for the church’

There are grave concerns over what the military coup in Myanmar could mean for the country's minority Christian population. On 1 February, the military took control of the country, detaining numerous government officials, including civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Between 1962 and 2011, Myanmar was under the rule of the staunchly-Buddhist military, leading to systemic persecution of Christians, especially in the Christian-majority states of Chin and Kachin. Churches have been closed and believers beaten. The military relinquished control in

2011, but Christian persecution by the army has persisted.

“Military rule could mean reinforced power for the dominant religion,” shares Brother Lwin*, an Open Doors partner. “This may have serious implications for the church.”

Meanwhile, the political upheaval has further alienated the more than 100,000 Christians in the north living in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, where they are already deprived of access to food and health care.



Church leaders gather to pray into the crisis

Amongst Christians there is sadness and fear, but also prayer. “Pastors are challenging their members to pray and intercede for the country,” shares Daisy*, another partner. Please join them in this.



MOZAMBIQUE

You're standing with widow caring for 14 children

It was her darkest day. Furaia* from Mozambique (PICTURED ABOVE) witnessed the brutal murders of her husband and brother, leaving her grief-stricken and solely responsible for 14 children. Without your timely help, the family faced starvation.

“The attackers rounded us up and forced us to get together in some open space using a path through grass and bush,” Furaia told visiting Open Doors partners of the attack in Cabo Delgado Province. “I managed to hide in some of the tall grass.”

She watched as her husband,

brother and other men were killed. The attackers fled with her sisters and other women. “I have not heard from any of them since.”

Furaia is now responsible not only for her children but her nephews and nieces – 14 in total. Having found a new place to stay in a neighbouring province, the family were left with little food, kitchen utensils and bedding - until you stepped in.

“My children and I now have something to eat,” Furaia shares. “Without this help we would have starved. I am very,

very thankful for all the things I received.” They are one of 328 mostly Christian families you're standing with who've been displaced by jihadist violence in Cabo Delgado.

Please continue to pray for Furaia. “Things are hard,” she adds. “I was used to having my husband to share life and hardships with. I had a family and relatives. Now I am alone with the children, wondering what to tell them, how to bring them up, and how to give them adequate protection. I can only pray for peace and that we will not be abandoned.”

IRAQ

Encouraging steps towards religious freedom

Praise God for not one but two encouraging developments in Iraq. Christmas Day has been made a national holiday and a committee has been established to return stolen properties to their rightful Christian owners.

In 2018, the government established a national holiday for Christmas in the Muslim-majority country on a year-to-year basis. On 16 December 2020, this was made permanent.

“Their [Christians'] religious and

cultural rights must be protected. As the country's history shows, they [Christians] are a major and important part of Iraq's people,” said Iraq's president, Barham Salih, a Sunni Muslim.

Meanwhile, influential Shia cleric and politician, Muqtada al-Sadr, has created a committee to enable Iraqi believers to return to their homes.

Since 2003, conflict has forced more than 80 per cent of Iraqi Christians to flee their

homeland. They've begun returning, only to be greeted by challenges including lack of basic services and security. Some homes have even been found occupied by strangers.

“We are hopeful that the new committee will meet regularly and work efficiently to investigate expropriated properties and restore them to their rightful owners,” said a member of the Open Doors Middle East team. Please pray that this will happen.

SYRIA

A decade of conflict but hope is spreading

Michel, who turns 10 in March, has grown up listening to stories of a Syria he has never known. He was born on 8 March 2011, two days after the start of the civil war that has wreaked havoc across the nation for a decade.

In 2014, Michel, parents Rasha and Elias, and sister Jessica, were forced from their village when Islamic troops announced over loudspeakers that all Christians should leave their hometown. They ended up in Latakia, where your support enabled Elias to set up a grocery shop to support his family.

“Thank God for the church and the way they stood by us”

“Thank God for the church and the way they stood by us,” Rasha says. Meanwhile, Michel enjoys attending Sunday school, where he loves hanging out with

his new friends. They memorise Bible verses. “One of my favourite verses is ‘He heals the broken-hearted’ (Psalm 147:3),” he shares.

In the 10 years since war broke out, your support for the Syrian church has been monumental. In the last seven years alone, more than 1 million food parcels have been delivered to needy families. Since 2015, 518 houses have been fixed – that's a home for 2,608 people. In the last two years, 1,734 income-generating projects have enabled people to set up their own business. And that's only some of the figures.

The conflict isn't over, and your help – through the ongoing *Hope for the Middle East* campaign, now in its fifth year – is still making an enormous difference.



Smiles and supplies - Michel (ABOVE) and Elias in his shop (LEFT)



“With all we do we give hope,” says Mourad*, a local partner. “And giving hope is contagious.”

*names changed for security reasons

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

You ensured at least 98 MPs heard from the persecuted church



Thank you so much for praying for the parliamentary launch of the Open Doors World Watch List on 13 January and for inviting your MP. Thanks to you, the voices of our persecuted family have been clearly heard by those in power, across the political spectrum.



That included Fiona Bruce MP (PICTURED), making her first speech in

her new role as Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. She commended Open Doors supporters on your continued advocacy: "You have helped ensure that increased awareness on the part of so many MPs of freedom of religion or belief is a concern."

This year, for the first time, the launch happened digitally – meaning that thousands of Open Doors supporters could watch the event live. At least 98 MPs attended, and others committed to watching the recorded

event later. "For all MPs, it really makes a big impact if constituents take the trouble to ask them to attend the event," says Stephen Timms MP.

MPs and parliamentarians heard first-hand from Father Daniel (an Open Doors partner in Iraq) and Amina (a Nigerian widow whose name we've changed), sharing their experiences of religious persecution. The event was co-hosted by Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP and Henrietta Blyth (CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland).

COVID-19 AS A WEAPON OF PERSECUTION

"Covid-19 has given new weapons to people who want

to suppress and eradicate Christianity," Henrietta Blyth said. "In Africa and Asia, Christians are being denied food aid. In Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic militants are exploiting Covid-19 restrictions to intensify their attacks.



"For all MPs, it really makes a big impact if constituents take the trouble to ask them to attend the event"

STEPHEN TIMMS MP

"In China and North Korea, increased surveillance and control have been legitimised by lockdowns. And thousands of vulnerable Christian women are being locked down with the very people who abuse them for both their faith and their gender."

"One of the most devastating findings is that the number of Christians killed for their faith is up 60 per cent compared to last year's reporting period," commented Theresa Villiers. "It is especially worrying that reports of forcible conversion and forced marriage have increased, highlighting the gendered nature of many of the attacks reported."

MPs HEAR DIRECTLY FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

In a video, Amina shared her shocking experiences of being attacked by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. "They entered my house. They tied my husband and three of my children," she remembers. "They asked them to denounce Christ – and they refused. My husband died and two of my kids were taken to the hospital."

A few years later, Amina

and ten other women were kidnapped by Boko Haram and held for eight months. "Having trauma, hunger, fear [...] This happened because we were all Christians." But they stayed firm in their faith: "We said, to die is gain for us. We cannot denounce Christ." As Amina added, violence is getting worse and worse.



"If we don't speak out for our Christian family, who will?"

TIM FARRON MP

Amina gave a vivid example of Christian persecution – highlighting the real lives behind the statistic that 340 million Christians are persecuted for their faith. "Amina's story really hit you between the eyes," said Andrew Selous MP, and recently appointed Second Church

Estates Commissioner. "What an incredible woman. It's unbelievably awful to hear that ten Christians in Nigeria are murdered each day for their faith, or forced to see their husband killed for his faith, or their children attacked, or taken hostage. Those of us who do enjoy freedoms and have a unique platform to speak out."

GROWING OPPRESSION IN CHINA

Several MPs were particularly impacted by hearing about growing persecution in China – which is now at number 17 on the list, up from 43 in 2018. This is largely because of the Chinese authorities' determination to monitor every aspect of life, and stamp out anything believed to threaten Chinese nationalism.

"The growing concern about China really struck me," said Tim Farron MP. "It's a lesson to us, with the freedom that we have in the UK, that the Chinese church has such vibrancy and growth despite the appalling persecution and oppression of the Chinese authorities. We

OPPOSITE, MIDDLE (L-R) Rt Hon. Theresa Villiers MP, Henrietta Blyth (CEO of Open Doors UK and Ireland), Fiona Bruce MP (PM's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief)

BELOW L-R Amina, from northern Nigeria, was widowed by Boko Haram; in China, surveillance and oppression continue to increase



should be concerned by any religious persecution – but if we don't speak out for our Christian family, who will?"



“Maybe we will forget about the people who persecuted us, but we will not forget about the people who stood with us”

FATHER DANIEL, IRAQ

LOCAL FAITH LEADERS ARE PART OF THE SOLUTION

One key recommendation from the event was the important role that local faith leaders can play in combatting persecution. Father Daniel shared his experiences in Iraq, when so-

called Islamic State (IS) invaded his Nineveh Plain community:

“More than 120,000 people were forcibly displaced by IS. My church became a shelter for more than 1,600 people, including 365 children. That's why we decided to open the Centres of Hope in Erbil, and in all the cities where Christians were displaced. These centres played a very big role in restoring their faith, and restoring their hope that they can still play their role as children of God in this country.”

Local faith leaders are best placed to act within the context of their communities' needs and histories. It was really encouraging to hear Fiona Bruce's commitment to feeding back this and the other recommendations from the World Watch List 2021 report: “I'll feed back, too, the fact that in aid distribution the additional vulnerabilities of people, particularly during the

pandemic, need to be taken into account. And that human rights are considered in trade negotiations.”

THANK YOU

Let's give the final word to Father Daniel, who made clear how important Open Doors supporters are to him and his community: “Maybe we will forget about the people who persecuted us, but we will not forget about the people who stood with us.”

Thank you for standing with Father Daniel and your persecuted church family. And please keep praying, giving and speaking out.

Dear Lord, thank You for the opportunity to amplify the voices of Your persecuted sons and daughters. Please use the report and launch to galvanise the UK Government into action – and ensure that their decisions will make a real and lasting difference in the lives of those who suffer because they follow You. Amen.

OPEN DOORS WELCOMES NEW DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

David Landrum has recently joined Open Doors UK & Ireland as Director of Advocacy and Public Affairs.

“The church is experiencing unprecedented levels of persecution across the world because of the name of Jesus, and it's a privilege to be able to speak out and to represent them to those in power. It's about amplifying the voices of those who

are suffering for following Jesus – in a way that brings influence and makes a tangible, practical change.

“I'm so thankful to God for enabling the World Watch List launch in January to reach so many MPs and also for the reach in the media. The extraordinary appeal of the World Watch List report reflects God's heart to give voice to all those who are

suffering because of the name of Jesus. Let's pray that it makes an impact that brings relief and increases freedom for God's people.”

Find out how to share the World Watch List report, and ask your MP to take action, at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy



Empowered to empower

SEE. CHANGE. FOR PERSECUTED WOMEN

Sozan's community thought it would be more 'honourable' to kill her than to let her live.

In her Muslim neighbourhood in Qamishli, northern Syria, the fact that she had become a Christian was considered deeply shameful – not



PERSECUTED WOMEN SEE CHANGE.

just for her but for her family. Locals told Sozan's father that she had disgraced him.

"I saw that there was no other solution for me than Jesus"

"Some Muslim men came to our father, saying that we, as his daughters, were bad," remembers 22-year-old Sozan. "They said we had a bad reputation and that we should be killed. Our father should take care that this shame would be washed away." Thankfully, he refused to do this so-called 'honour' killing.

Similar stories happen all around the world. Christian women are persecuted for their gender and for their faith, as Open Doors' *See. Change.* campaign has highlighted for the past two years. The vision

of the campaign is that every woman who is persecuted for both her faith and gender is seen, heard and empowered to reach her God-given potential. Thanks to your prayers, gifts and speaking out, your sisters are starting to see change – but it is slow and much more needs to be done.

In communities where converting to Christianity is shocking or even illegal, women who choose to follow Jesus are particularly vulnerable. Often, they have less financial and social stability, and are thus less equipped to withstand this persecution. It's become even worse during the pandemic (see p14). And sometimes that even ends in 'honour' killings – though there is, of course, nothing honourable about them.

SOZAN'S JOURNEY TO CHOOSING JESUS

In Sozan's family, it was actually her brother, Hussam, who became a Christian first. He

shared the good news of Jesus with Sozan and their sisters, Maria and Doaa.

"He told how Jesus was the only Saviour," says Sozan – though, at first, she was reluctant to hear about Jesus. "I refused to listen to him. 'What are you talking about?' I asked him."

But those conversations were enough to plant a seed of interest in Sozan. She couldn't stop thinking about what Hussam had told her – and so, when he asked her to read the Bible with him, Sozan agreed. One verse particularly stood out.

"I read this verse in Matthew 11:28: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' Jesus touched my heart with that verse," says Sozan. Shortly after that, she decided to go to church for the first time in her life. "There I saw that there was no other solution for me than Jesus. The Holy Spirit started



LEFT Sozan started reading the Bible after her brother became a Christian
RIGHT Sozan and her sister Doaa both faced persecution from their community when they became Christians





to work in me." Sozan decided to follow Christ, and so did her sisters.

AN EXTRAORDINARY VISION OF JESUS

For many of us, the decision to follow Jesus is followed by an exciting period of learning more about Him and about the Bible, and discovering fellowship and an active church. Sozan certainly found joy in her new relationship with God – but, almost immediately, she and her sisters also faced persecution from their community.

"People in the neighbourhood started talking negatively about us, as we were open about our conversion," she says. Only six weeks after Sozan became a Christian, that talk became something worse. "I was out with my sister Maria. A group of men came to hurt us, to persecute us. We were afraid, both of us were crying. We were so afraid to be killed."

But Jesus didn't leave them unprotected. She saw the words of Matthew 11:28 in action. Sozan remembers: "But then Jesus appeared to me. He said to me: 'Don't be afraid.' Then the people all suddenly disappeared – they even apologised! That can only be God's work."

FINDING A NEW ROLE IN THE CHURCH

Sozan was protected from that attack, but the neighbourhood still rejected her. Another time, two of their cousins tried to kill her sister Doaa when she was hospitalised: "They paid and put pressure on one of the doctors there to poison her. The doctor

LEFT Through your support, Sozan now works with children at an Open Doors Centre of Hope in Qamishli, Syria

agreed with the cousins, but in the end he didn't do it. Jesus didn't allow that to happen."

The church in Qamishli has been able to provide practical and spiritual support, thanks to

"God told His children to help others like us. Through that, we feel that God is with us"

you and Open Doors supporters like you. Sozan's father is still a Muslim, but he doesn't object to his wife and children going to church, and he is grateful when they pray for him.

"We really were in a poor situation; we are so thankful for the help we got – and also, in persecution, the church stood with us. We received relief items, we got shelter when we faced persecution. God told His children to help others like us. Through that, we feel that God is with us, that He is not leaving us at all."

And more than that, Sozan has been empowered to see the role she can play in the church. She dedicates a lot of time to serving, particularly with young children: "I love to teach the children. I do that work together with the wife of the pastor. Working with children is so beautiful."

Being able to take an active part in the life of the church has brought restoration to Sozan – going from being rejected and attacked by her old community to being loved, supported and valued by her new one. Empowering Sozan has helped

See. Change: the story so far

MARCH 2019

See. Change. campaign launched to ensure that persecuted women are seen, valued and empowered to reach their God-given potential.

NOVEMBER 2019

The handmade petition, a tapestry of over 16,000 embroidered, painted or hand-drawn signatures, is exhibited at Westminster Abbey. It calls for government policy to recognise the link between religious persecution and sexual violence.

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2020

Handmade petition exhibited at other venues in Wembley and Birmingham.

MARCH 2020

Tears of Gold portraits of persecuted women in Nigeria are exhibited at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and seen by the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

NOVEMBER 2020

The UK government launches the Declaration of Humanity, acknowledging the role that religious persecution plays in sexual violence and how religious leaders can help tackle the issue – one of the key policy asks of *See. Change.*

2020

Over 33,000 women receive livelihood support, persecution survival training and trauma care, thanks to donations from Open Doors supporters.

MARCH 2021

You can ask your MP to sign a parliamentary letter, which asks the government to recognise faith as a vulnerability in gender-based violence (see p15).

PERSECUTED WOMEN SEE CHANGE.

her to empower the church – and beyond.

PENINAH: WIDOWED BY AL-SHABAAB

As Christian women from a Muslim background, Sozan and her sisters are not only vulnerable to attacks from Islamic militants – but also from their own families, vulnerable for both their faith and gender. Their courageous faith is extraordinary – and is mirrored by Christian women in other countries and continents.

In many places, even if women aren't the ones being attacked or killed, they still suffer terrible consequences. Often, extremist militants target men because they know it will destabilise families and communities – removing the breadwinner leaves the remaining family members desperate for income and food, and stigmatised by their communities and sometimes even their in-laws. That's what Peninah in Kenya experienced.

Peninah was only 24 when her husband, Paul, was murdered



Thanks to you, Peninah received a sewing machine, training and trauma care

Persecution of women is exacerbated during Covid lockdown

During the pandemic and with fewer avenues for escape, there is a surge in domestic violence in the UK, mostly affecting women. The same is true in communities across the world. There have been sharp rises in both domestic violence and 'honour' killings, exacerbated by lockdowns and economic instability. Job losses, lack of food and medicine, and prolonged time confined to the home have been a perfect storm for this sort of appalling persecution.

Covid-19 has also seen a rise in forced conversion, forced marriage and human trafficking of women in many countries,

possibly because of the economic effects of the pandemic, with Christian women and girls often being particularly targeted. You might think that the pandemic would see a decrease in militant attacks, but these have increased in West Africa, particularly in northern Nigeria. During these attacks, women and girls are often abducted and enslaved.

Please keep praying for vulnerable Christian women and girls, for whom Covid-19 has made persecution even worse. And please ask the UK government to recognise faith as a specific vulnerability in gender-based violence (see p15).

by al-Shabaab, a jihadist group based in East Africa. Paul was on a work trip when his truck was ambushed near the border with Somalia. The men were lined up, and the attackers demanded they recite the Islamic creed. As a Christian, Paul didn't know it. He told them, "If you want to kill me, I will remain in Jesus – and if you let me go, I would still remain in Jesus." They shot him.

Peninah's in-laws refused to support her, and she was left to care for two-year-old Steve alone, with no means of earning an income: "Life became hard. I struggled because I was alone. Even food was a challenge to get." In Kenya, as with much of sub-Saharan Africa, widows are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

You can empower women to See. Change.

Thank you so much for standing with women like Sozan and Peninah through the first two years of Open Doors' *See. Change.* campaign. Through your support and prayers, thousands of Christian women can be empowered to overcome persecution and be voices of hope within their communities. Transforming their lives equips these women to transform the world around them.

"I went through a lot of difficulties, but I am in God's hands," says Sozan. "He helped me to pass through the problems. 'I will be with you; don't be afraid,' Jesus promises."

God sees women like Sozan and Peninah, and does not forget them. And you can show that you see them too.

PLEASE PRAY

- For every Christian woman to be seen, valued and empowered to reach her God-given potential

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AN OPEN DOORS COURSE

But, again, your gifts and prayers empowered Peninah and transformed her life. Thanks to Open Doors supporters, she was able to enrol in an Open Doors course in dressmaking – as well as attend a trauma workshop.

"The training helped me to heal my wounds"

"The training helped me to heal my wounds, to share my suffering and accept the Lord's leading in my life," says Peninah. "Talking to people restored my joy and helped my faith grow.

- That God will enable women like Sozan and Peninah to be the light of hope in their families and communities.

PLEASE GIVE

Every £18 could provide a Christian woman with persecution survival training.

Every £47 could give emergency relief and shelter to a persecuted Christian widow for six months.

Every £60 could help a persecuted woman attend workshops to empower her to make an impact in her church and community.

PLEASE SPEAK OUT

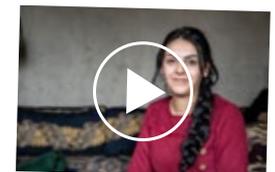
You have a great opportunity to speak out on behalf of women like Sozan, Peninah and millions of others around the world by **asking your MP to sign a letter to Liz Truss, Minister for Women and Equalities, and Dominic Raab, Foreign Secretary.**

My faith would have collapsed because not everyone gave me hope, but the seminars and Open Doors partners encouraged me a lot."

Open Doors partners were even able to give Peninah a sewing machine, so she could embark on a career in dressmaking. Lockdowns have temporarily halted her work, so Peninah and Steve are among the 1,200 families in Kenya receiving vital Covid-19 food and relief aid from Open Doors partners.

"I would like to say thank you wherever you are," says Peninah, to Open Doors supporters. "You have played a great role in my life."

Open Doors is asking the UK government to recognise faith as a specific vulnerability in gender-based violence, and to respond with effective policy. It's a vital part of empowering Christian women to realise their God-given potential – and you can be part of that today.



Go to opendoorsuk.org/advocacy or scan the QR code to **send a video to your MP** with specific policy recommendations, asking them to sign the parliamentary letter to support our persecuted sisters.



CHILDREN WITH A HOPE AND A FUTURE



HOW YOUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORT HAVE BROUGHT COMFORT AND JOY TO PERSECUTED CHILDREN

Thank you so much for all of your prayers and gifts for persecuted Christian children during our Christmas appeal last year. You have brought comfort and joy to thousands of children around the world! Here are just a few ways...



BRIDGE TO A BETTER FUTURE

In India, Open Doors partners run 'bridge schools' for children who struggle with studies at school. One local partner, David*, shares, "Most of the children who attend these tuition classes are from persecuted families. These children often have to help their family with chores in the household; in some cases, they also work part of the day to help their family earn a little extra money."

"All this makes it difficult for them to cope with studies at school. Their family members are also mostly uneducated and so are not able to support them." In many instances, these difficulties lead to children dropping out of school as their families can't afford it. This impacts the future earning and livelihoods of vulnerable Christians, many of whom are in India's lowest social castes. "These free tuition centres have helped several Christian children to do better at school and understand the value of education," adds David.

"The entire family got down on their knees and thanked the Lord for the provision"

"In the bridge schools, we not only provide help with their school studies, but we also

provide them with biblical moral guidance and supply them with necessary stationery material, sports equipment, and other school items."

When visiting schools, Open Doors partners also discovered some families in desperate need of food, because of Covid-19, and were able to provide this. David says, "We found out that they didn't have sufficient food because they had no work, as most of the families were daily wage workers. So, we arranged for a trip to these tuition centres where we spent time with them, praying and doing some fun activities. We met in very small groups [due to Covid restrictions]. We also visited the houses of these children, where we also provided grocery packets to their families."

"In one family there were four children, and when we

gave them the groceries, the entire family got down on their knees and thanked the Lord for the provision," says David. "The youngest girl led everyone in prayer, saying: 'Thank you Lord; You provided us this food in time of need. We are so

happy now as there will be no more scarcity of food in our house."



BIBLES AND BLESSINGS

Your prayers and gifts also meant that 26,000 children's Bibles were distributed to thousands of children in Syria over the Christmas season! Thank you.

And in Nigeria, Open Doors partners were able to visit and catch up with the four Christian boys who were among the students kidnapped from their school and subsequently released in December 2020. Hanna*, one of Open Doors'

local partners, shares, "The parents were very thankful for our visit, the money we gave them to help them with supplies, and the children's Bibles we gave the boys."



CHILDREN IN CENTRAL ASIA RECEIVE PRESENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME

In December, Open Doors partners in Central Asia travelled to remote mountainous areas to distribute Christmas presents to children. They shared that the trip was hard, because of the weather conditions and local features, but really blessed.

One of the team says, "We distributed 500 Christmas gifts in the area where people never heard about Jesus and the children never got presents for Christmas and New Year. We organised celebrations in schools – songs, performances and games."

However, difficulties soon arose. The partner explains, "In one of the schools, officers from local security services came and arrested our team. We were detained in the prison cell for several hours and threatened with imprisonment for 'illegal religious activity with children'."

But thank God, after several hours we were released; we just paid a fine and left that place."

Praise God that He was able to work that situation for good!

Thank you so much for your support – these children and so many more are growing stronger physically and spiritually because of you. Please keep praying for them, their families and the Open Doors partners supporting them.

PRAY

- Praise God for the amazing faith of these children! Pray that they will continue to grow 'in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God' like Jesus (Luke 2:52)
- For God's continued provision and protection for these children and their families as they continue to face challenges over the coming year
- That God would continue to make a way for Open Doors partners to serve and bless persecuted Christian children.

*Names changed for security reasons

OPPOSITE PAGE Thanks to you, these children from Nigeria and Syria can experience God's story for themselves BELOW L-R: You have brought Christmas joy to persecuted children in India, Syria and Central Asia!



LOAVES RAISED FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

What's been the biggest lesson you've learnt during lockdown? As well as finding out how to bake sourdough, navigate Zoom and cut your own hair, you may also be one of the many people who've realised just how much God has made us for connection with each other.

This was the revelation that made a fundraising activity by two Open Doors supporters especially exciting. Dietmar and Jutta from Nailsea, North Somerset, broke the monotony of lockdown by making artisan sourdough bread to raise funds for persecuted Christians.

"We are humbled by the bravery of Christians around the world"

"We enjoy baking, and for some years we and a group of friends baked pizzas for charity, featuring at local events," they explained. "This was not possible last year and so we were looking for other opportunities."

It's here that the persecuted church came to mind. "We are humbled by the bravery of Christians around the world in the face of imprisonment,



torture and even death," they said. "And during the pandemic, we've heard that Christians are often the last to be given aid, sometimes none at all."

Once the initiative began, friends jumped on board to help with the bread delivery – much to the personal blessing of Dietmar and Jutta. "The most exciting aspect was being able to connect with our friends and church family (Holy Trinity Nailsea), who helped in practical ways and gave encouragement. We united for a good cause."

It's therefore fitting that at the heart of the idea was bread, which features prominently in the Gospels and often in community. With hungry

crowds and little food to go around, bread was broken and miraculously multiplied (Mark 6:30-44). And when the last supper took place, Jesus – amongst friends – broke bread, a symbol of His broken body (Luke 22:7-38).

"Bread is about sharing, about blessing and about being blessed," the couple added. "We wanted to make a small contribution to bless our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith."

Over two weekends, 120 loaves were baked, raising £2,445!

COUPLE CLOCK UP NEARLY 70 MILES

Although the pandemic has

restricted outside activities, many people have still been able to go out and exercise. One couple, John and Dawn from Ipswich, have certainly been busy on this front, running a combined total of nearly 70 miles for the persecuted church.

John – who's travelled with Open Doors and is a volunteer speaker – ran half a marathon, whilst Dawn ran a whole marathon plus a further 30 miles. All were done last year in conjunction with local events.

John's visits to persecuted Christians not only motivated him to sign up for the run but, once started, to finish it. "When I felt tempted to give up, I thought of the people I met – for

instance, Christians in Egypt." As for Dawn, she added, "I want to use my running not only for personal benefit but to help others."

Together they raised £385! It's not the only money they've raised during the pandemic – Dawn put together a cookbook of people's different recipes and sold copies, raising a further £197.

LOCKDOWN OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the restrictions, lockdown can still present opportunities for fundraising – often of the novel variety!

Take the Walker family from Shropshire. "We placed a jar in the living room and encouraged



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Dietmar and Jutta, the Walker family and John and Dawn have found ways to raise vital funds for the persecuted church during the pandemic



RUN FOR THEIR LIVES

Do you want a chance to run the Virgin Money London Marathon on 3 October, and raise money for the persecuted church? If you don't get a spot in the London race, don't worry – there's also the opportunity to represent Open Doors in the virtual marathon. Find all the details, and how to apply, at opendoorsuk.org/run

each other to put money in if we mentioned the coronavirus," said daughter Ellie. "It was a way to keep our spirits up and try to turn the anxiety that surrounds the virus into something that blesses others." So far, they've raised £30!

FEELING INSPIRED?

Head to opendoorsuk.org/fundraise to find more fundraising ideas, how to get started and a form to tell us your plans. Thank you so much for all you do for your persecuted church family.



When Sozan became a Christian, her life changed dramatically.

So did her community's attitude towards her.

Your gift will help empower Sozan and other persecuted women to see change.

Sozan's decision to follow Jesus was considered particularly shameful for her Muslim family in Syria because she's a woman. She is vulnerable for both her faith and her gender.

"Some Muslim men came to our father, saying that we, as his daughters, were bad," says Sozan. "They said we had a bad reputation and that we should be killed." Thankfully, Sozan is finding practical and spiritual support from a local Open Doors partner.

With your help today, women around the world like Sozan can see change and be supported and empowered to fulfil their God-given potential. In turn, they will empower the church and share the love of Jesus.

EVERY £47 could give emergency relief and shelter to a persecuted Christian widow for six months.

EVERY £60* could help a persecuted woman attend workshops to empower her to make an impact in her church and community.

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

*The total cost for workshops is £89 per woman.