

# Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | Jan/Feb 2022

## Isolated but not alone

Life in exile in  
North Korea





## WORLD WATCH LIST 2022 TOP 50

Your comprehensive guide to the countries where following Jesus costs the most, this booklet, with removable map, is packed with information and inspiration to help guide your prayers and support for your persecuted church family.

Available to order from 19 January



## WORLD WATCH LIST 2022 LAUNCH prayer webinar

YOU'RE INVITED TO THE LIVE WEBINAR

WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY, 8.15PM

Join our prayer webinar on the evening of the World Watch List launch, to pray for Christians living in the Top 10 countries where following Jesus costs the most.

Hear the latest updates from this year's parliamentary launch and pray with us for God's Spirit to move in the corridors of power.

Find out more and register today at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org)



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To find out more go to [opendoorsuk.org/legacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/legacy) or phone 01993 777338.

**"It gives me wonderful peace of mind to know that Open Doors will use the money wisely and prayerfully"**

- VALERIE, OPEN DOORS SUPPORTER (PICTURED)



Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide.

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services. We also mobilise the church in the UK and Ireland to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you have any questions about the work of Open Doors, or would like to reprint any of the articles in this magazine, please do get in touch.

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### Open Doors UK & I

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### Cover image:

North Korean believers who aren't imprisoned or killed are often exiled to labour in remote villages. (Illustrative image from North Korea.)

## Letter from Henrietta

# Love always perseveres

**"Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."** 1 CORINTHIANS 13:7

When I speak to Christians who've faced extreme persecution for their faith, or I read their stories, I'm so often amazed by their perseverance. Courageous believers in countries like North Korea and Afghanistan know that they are likely to face injustice for a long time – but still say "I know my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25).

Bae (name changed) in North Korea has an extraordinary testimony of perseverance (see p8). She made the amazing decision to return to forced labour and hunger in a desolate North Korean village, from an Open Doors safehouse in China. Because she knows that perseverance is key.

Persevering is something the persecuted church understand much better than most of us. We often think that suffering means something's gone wrong – but Bae writes in a letter (p11) that 'suffering is a blessing [...] because it is a shortcut to the Father'.

You and I may not be called to persevere in the same way as our brothers and sisters in North Korea, Afghanistan and other countries – but we are called to persevering prayer. It makes such a difference for our persecuted family to know we are faithfully standing alongside them, for the long-term.

And it's important that we know what our family are facing, to help us pray, give and speak out for them. That's one reason that Open Doors' World Watch List is so vital – using detailed research to share the countries where following Jesus costs the most. Please do invite your MP to attend the parliamentary launch of the World Watch List 2022 on 19 January, using the tear-off invite enclosed. Your MP has a huge amount of influence – which means you do too, because our MPs are really keen to hear what their constituents are passionate about.

Thank you so much for standing with your persecuted church family. It makes a real and lasting difference.

May God bless you and yours in the year ahead,



Henrietta Blyth  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

# World Watch News

## **SUDAN** Prime Minister reinstated following coup but uncertainty remains

Protests have continued in Sudan despite Abdalla Hamdok being reinstated as Prime Minister after October's military coup.

The seizure of power – which included putting Abdalla Hamdok on house arrest

– occurred following an escalation in hostilities between conservative Islamists who want a military government and those who toppled Omar al Bashir in April 2019.

The overthrow of al Bashir resulted in a transitional

government, with power shared between the military and civilian leaders. During this time, significant steps were made towards religious freedom, including abolishing the death penalty for leaving Islam. However, these are now under threat following the coup.

The reinstatement of Abdalla Hamdok is encouraging news, but at the time of writing protests continue. The situation remains changeable and it's unclear to what extent he and the interim cabinet he leads will have power, as they remain subject to the military.

The coup has brought renewed fear and uncertainty to the country's Christian minority, and affected livelihoods and church activities. Please keep our Sudanese family in your prayers.

BELOW The coup is disturbing news for Sudan's Christians after a hopeful couple of years



## **CUBA** Pressure intensifying on Christians

The nationwide protests that took place against the government last year in Cuba have highlighted the increasing pressures facing the country's Christians.

Several church leaders were arrested for involvement in the protests that erupted last July. This included Pastor Lorenzo Fajardo, who remains detained in awful conditions and could face up to 20 years in prison under charges including 'disrespect' and 'public

disorder'. Other leaders were warned against participating in further protests that were held in November.

The arrests coincide with churches facing increasing surveillance from the authorities. "Government officials have joined some *WhatsApp* groups the churches have set up, and they do so to monitor our activities," says one pastor. The pandemic has increased pressure, giving the authorities an excuse to tighten their grip.

Pray for Pastor Fajardo's swift release, and ask the Lord to give wisdom to church leaders facing increasing monitoring.

BELOW Several church leaders were detained following last year's protests



## **NIGERIA**

### One Christian killed and at least 60 kidnapped in church attack

Your prayers are needed for the family of a Christian who was killed, and for at least 60 believers who were kidnapped, after a group of bandits stormed a church in Kaduna state, Nigeria.

It's the latest in a string of kidnappings in Nigeria, with Islamic militants and armed bandits targeting people with increasing impunity. This has been aggravated by the government's failure to decisively address the country's rapidly growing security problem.

It's not clear if this recent attack was religiously motivated, though observers report that armed bandit groups are at least partly influenced by the Islamic extremists Boko Haram.

"This kidnapping is a shocking example of the audacity of the so-called bandits and the impunity that is escalating, seemingly without bounds in Nigeria," says Jo Newhouse, spokesperson for Open Doors work in sub-Saharan Africa.

Please pray for the swift and safe release of those held, and that Christians in Nigeria – where more believers are killed than anywhere else in the world – will be protected from further attacks.

## **MYANMAR**

### Over 500 people become Christians

Thank you for your prayers for Myanmar following the military coup last February. Despite ongoing challenges, the church is seeing God move in mighty ways.

**"God is working mightily!"**

Open Doors local partners are aware of 544 people becoming Christians in the last year, including 50 children who gave their lives to Jesus during an event conducted by local partners.

"By partnering with local churches, we are reaching out to the unreached children, assuring salvation in their young age, strengthening



ABOVE Children worshipping Jesus

their faith, building good character, and helping develop a Christlike attitude in their lives," says Brother Lwin\*, one of the partners.

"Amidst the backdrop of intense strife and violence, God is working mightily!"

Brother Lwin requests prayer for the children, many of whom are feeling the effects of the war. "Pray for the safety of our children. Pray for a bright and hopeful future for the children of Myanmar."

## **CHINA** Bible app removed from Apple Store

A Bible app has been removed from China's Apple Store after its creators were unable to provide a permit for its distribution in the country.

In China, the sale of online Bibles was banned in 2018, meaning many Christians rely on the Bible apps on their phones to access Scripture. Sadly, this development is a



continuation of a trend that is seeing the Chinese government assert their control over religious groups in the country.

"This sets a dangerous precedent for religious freedom," says Dr David Landrum, Director of Advocacy for Open Doors UK and Ireland.

"Historically, more than any other influence, it is access to the Bible that has enabled religious freedom, which in turn is the foundation for so many other human rights. This is precisely why the Chinese Communist Party is so implacably opposed to Chinese people having access to it."

Please pray that our persecuted church family in China will still find ways to access the Bible and share it with each other. \*Names changed for security reasons

## Cow Bank project udder-ly transforming lives

**Pounds. Dollars. Euros. Cows. What do these things have in common? They are all found in banks!**

Cow Banks are run by Open Doors local partners in Vietnam: a family receives a pregnant cow, and the loan is repaid with the first offspring the cow produces. After that, the family keep any other calves and can trade and sell any dairy produce. This aid allows persecuted Christians to live independent lives and continue to witness.

**“It was a miracle and a blessing from God!”**

This includes Vang’s\* family. In 2018, they received a cow through his local church. Vang’s herd has since grown from one cow to seven!

“One cow was given back to the Cow Bank, four were sold to buy the materials for our new house, and we’re still raising the other two,” Vang shares. “It was a miracle and a blessing from God. My family’s economic situation has improved a lot. Now, my dream of serving my people has been fulfilled. I can now serve God through this project.”

To date, almost 700 Christians in north Vietnam have already benefited from the project. It’s a long-term solution, helping families to build their own houses, invest in a farm, send their children to school, put food on their tables and give tithes in their church. And none of it would be

possible without your ongoing prayers and support. Thank you!

\*Names changed for security reasons



ABOVE Almost 700 Christians have so far been blessed through the Cow Bank

## Jewel connection

**To most of us, sea glass has little to do with the persecuted church. But one Open Doors supporter in Ireland has spotted a connection – and it’s led to an exciting new venture.**

Christine is from Ballycastle and has a small silversmith business. Compelled to do more for our persecuted family, she set up Sea Secrets, a new jewellery line crafted from local sea glass and sterling silver wire. All profits go to the work of Open Doors, and so far Christine has raised £135!

The shape and shine of the perfect piece of sea glass are created from the buffeting and scouring of sand and waves – and it’s here Christine sees the persecuted church. “The horrors they’ve endured may have been designed to grind them into nothingness,” she explains. “But instead the beauty of Christ is perfected in their faithful witness, and like the glass, no two of them have the same story or experience.”

This year, how could you use your gifts, hobbies and



resources to fundraise for our persecuted family? Find out more or tell us what you’re doing at [opendoorsuk.org/fundraise](https://opendoorsuk.org/fundraise)

You can find out more about *Sea Secrets* at [newcreationsni.com](https://newcreationsni.com)

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

## You’ve spoken out in all seasons. Can you speak out again?

The seasons change but your incredible support for our persecuted family remains constant. Throughout last year, we asked you to speak up for our persecuted family – and you responded to huge effect. Thank you! As a new year begins, will you help us go again, starting with inviting your MP to the World Watch List parliamentary launch?



### WINTER LAUNCH GOES DIGITAL

Last winter, for the first time ever, the World Watch List parliamentary launch took place online, enabling over 13,500 people to tune in to watch the key findings relayed to more than 100 MPs. This encouraging MP turnout was because thousands of you invited your local representative to the event. More than 2,000 of you also sent the report to your MP.



### SPRING SEEING CHANGE

The spring brought the return of our *See. Change.* campaign, which focuses on the double vulnerability of Christian women because of their faith and gender.

This issue was starkly highlighted in *Hidden, Violent, Complex: The Double Vulnerability of Christian Women*, a report which 3,360 of you sent to your MP. This contributed towards 48 MPs signing a letter to Liz Truss MP, Minister for Women and Equalities, and Dominic Raab MP, the then Foreign Secretary, urging them to do more to protect Christian women.



### SUMMER AND AUTUMN

**#STANDFORTRUTHINDIA**  
During the summer, your invitations led to 38 MPs attending a presentation of



*Destructive Lies*, a report outlining the extreme persecution facing Christians and other religious minorities in India. Thousands of you also shared the issue via email and on social media.

All of this provided a foundation for our Advocacy team to present vital research to the government before trade talks with India commenced in the autumn, and initiate discussion with figures at the UN.

### PRAY

- Give thanks for the impact your voices have made in power
- That the stories and statistics shared last year will continue to drive change
- That God will prepare the hearts of MPs who will attend the World Watch List 2022 parliamentary launch.

### ▶ WATCH

Hear the latest stories and key findings from the World Watch List during a special webinar on 19 January 2022. Book your place at [opendoorsuk.org](https://opendoorsuk.org).

## Will you invite your MP to the WWL launch?

The last year has shown what a powerful difference your voice can make – and it remains as vital as ever.

The parliamentary launch of the new World Watch List will take place on **19 January 2022**, when MPs will have the opportunity to hear first-hand accounts from China, India and West Africa. This is a critical opportunity for the stories of our persecuted family to be heard in the corridors of power so they can use their voice to call for significant change. Amazingly, at the time of writing, 91 MPs have committed to attend. We’d love for as many MPs as possible to hear this vital information.

Will you help us by inviting your MP? It’ll take just two minutes. Simply scan the QR code or head to [opendoorsuk.org/advocacy](https://opendoorsuk.org/advocacy). Thank you!



You can watch a reconstruction of Bae's brave story at [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org)

# LIFE IN EXILE IN NORTH KOREA

## Will you show Bae she isn't alone?

**If you were to see Bae\* during the day, you'd assume that her work was picking crops.**

Every morning in the village she's forced to live in, Bae spends the day working in the fields. She has to meet her work quota of crops. If she has any time for a short break, she heads for the woods. The mushrooms and plants she forages help stem the gaping hunger in her belly – otherwise she only gets to eat meagre rations. Like everyone else in her village, Bae is close to starving. The authorities give them just enough to stay alive. It's partly a punishment, and partly a reflection of the terrible food shortage in North Korea.

If you saw all this, you'd be appalled. But you'd have no idea this isn't Bae's real work.

That starts at night. When she and her housemates cover the windows with blankets, light a small candle and sit in a tight circle. Bae gets out a book.

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God," she reads.

This is Bae's real work. This is the North Korean secret underground church.

### EXILED FOR OWNING A BIBLE

Bae hasn't always lived in this village. She and her husband were sent there when the authorities discovered that they owned a Bible. Simply for that, they were sentenced to a lifetime of hardship and back-breaking labour in this remote village, always on the brink of starvation.

**"MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD"**  
Bae's favourite Bible verse

It's almost unimaginably hard but, believe it or not, Bae is one of the 'lucky' ones – because she wasn't killed. That's what happens to most North Korean believers if their Christian faith is discovered. Open Doors estimates there are around 400,000 Christians in North Korea, but they all have to completely hide their faith.

There is absolutely no freedom of religion or belief for any

faith. The authorities decide everything about the lives of North Koreans. Where they live, what they do, and even what they think.

### THE MOST EXTREME PERSECUTION

North Korea certainly isn't the only country where following Jesus exposes Christians to terrible opposition and violence. For example, it has a lot in common with Afghanistan – where Christians also face some of the most extreme persecution in the world, and which has been in the news so much in the past six months. Despotism. Human rights abuses. Persecution of minorities. Humanitarian crisis. From Iran to Nigeria, Somalia to Saudi Arabia, many Christians around the world know they could be imprisoned, tortured or even killed if their faith is discovered.

In comparison, it might seem like Bae received a light sentence. She is grateful to be alive, but her punishment is much harsher than it sounds. The region she's been sent to is more like a prison than a farm. She doesn't have any freedom to make decisions about her



Bae is exiled to do back-breaking labour in remote North Korea – because she owned a Bible (reconstruction image)

life. The roads out are closely monitored and guarded.

Unbelievably, Bae did once manage to escape.

### SHELTER AT A SAFE HOUSE

When North Koreans flee the country, they often go across the Yalu River into China. This is far from a simple journey, and it has become much harder during the pandemic – with security intensifying even further at the country’s borders.

Once in China, North Koreans risk being found by security forces and sent back to North Korea to face interrogation and imprisonment. But it’s a risk that many North Koreans take – including Christians. When Bae arrived in China, she was able to find shelter at a safe house. It’s run by Open Doors secret fieldworkers, thanks to your gifts and prayers.

Brother John\* is an Open Doors fieldworker whose ministry at a safe house involves supporting North Koreans like Bae with

food, medicine and fellowship. Food aid is particularly vital, as even North Koreans who aren’t exiled like Bae face extreme shortages – and North Korea is on the precipice of another famine like the one that gripped the country in the 1990s.

**“WE WILL BREAK THROUGH ALL DIFFICULTIES WITH UNITED SUPPORT, AND YOUR LOVING SUPPORT AND PRAYERS”**  
North Korean believer

“We were overwhelmed when we received this food,” one

message from the North Korean believers says. “No matter what circumstances we encounter, we will break through all difficulties with united hearts, and your loving support and prayers. It is God’s grace and blessing.”

### INCREDIBLE PROVISION

As Brother John explains, many have travelled to China to get food from relatives – but sometimes they’ve gone, or can’t help.

“When we give them something, they just start to well up,” he says. “They weep, and they try to say thank you, but we know that some things are not possible to



To get enough food to survive, Bae has to forage in the nearby woodland for mushrooms and plants to supplement meagre rations (reconstruction images)

**Bae was able to get a letter to an Open Doors worker, thanking Open Doors and supporters like you for their prayers and gifts. We can’t tell you how she got it to us – doing so would put Bae in incredible danger. Please pray for Bae as you read her extraordinary message.**

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주 안에서 사랑을 담아,  
내 올림

Dear friends,

We are well and peaceful with Father’s grace and your concern.

We give thanks to the Father who is doing almighty works. I am so overwhelmed to write you this letter; we received the greatest love and concern which cannot be returned back. We live firmly in the suffering march, as always.

Whenever I open my eyes in the morning, I feel the presence of our Father. Right now, we only receive materials from you—but we expect the day to come when we can return those back in God.

From the perspective of other people, our life of suffering must seem like a cursed life; however, this suffering is a blessing from our Father who allowed it in our life because it is a shortcut to the Father. He knows our suffering and listens to our prayers. We thank our Father who has done such great things to prepare life for us.

We, who receive His amazing grace, keenly realise and understand His words: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the Father.” That means any life that follows His words is blessed.

The thing I give thanks for the most is that Father God uses me to work as His servant. I desire to dedicate my life, until death, to glorify Him.

Brother, I have one request. Please send our gratitude and appreciation to those who sent these support materials to us. I bow to them with a thankful heart.

Let’s stay healthy and fight strongly for a gospelised North Korea.

Take care,

Bae, your sister in Christ

say through words, and we see that on their faces.”

He often invites people who aren't yet believers to the safe house, who might be scared of him: North Koreans are taught from a young age that Christians are bad people. Others, like Bae, are already Christians. They are delighted to meet with other believers – and some secret Christians travel to these safe houses specifically to receive biblical training.

“The most important thing for them is to have the opportunity to learn and hear about the Bible as much as possible,” Brother John says. “If they can't take a Bible back home, I strongly recommend that they recite my favourite verse, Romans 5:8: ‘But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”’

#### IMPOSSIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Can you imagine what a joyful experience it was for Bae to find fellowship at the safe house?

Bae is so used to leading her underground church in whispers, aware that being caught could mean death. In the safe house, that all changed. She sang worship songs and

**“IF YOU DON'T SUPPORT US, WE CANNOT GO AND MINISTER – THANK YOU”**  
Brother John

prayed loud prayers. She read the Bible openly with fellow believers, experiencing fellowship in a way that is impossible in North Korea. There are still many risks, but they don't compare to the ones Bae faces back at home.



North Korean believers find vital aid and teaching at a safe house in China, run by Open Doors workers

You wouldn't blame Bae if she praised God for her lucky escape and never looked back. But amazingly, when offered the chance to stay in the safe house, she refused.

Instead, Bae returned home with the food and medicine she'd been given, and a precious Bible. She shared all these with her underground group of believers. These gifts will sustain the faith of these North Korean Christians for years.

And when believers like Bae know you're praying for them, it makes an enormous difference. It gives North Korean believers the resources, faith and courage to continue.

#### VITAL VISION

The vision of the church in North Korea isn't just to survive – it's to survive, strengthen, equip and go. Open Doors stands alongside our courageous brothers and

sisters – through safe houses in China and through prayer.

**“EVEN DURING SUCH DIFFICULT TIMES, GOD CONTINUES TO SHOW US HIS FAITHFULNESS”**  
Brother Simon\*

Your prayers and gifts are sustaining 60,000 North Korean believers with food and medical help, through Open Doors' secret networks in China. Without your help, many thousands of Christians wouldn't be able to survive.

“Our distribution projects, providing food and medicines for North Korean Christians, have been very significant in supporting their survival during this desperate situation in North Korea, and we have increased the amount we are providing,” says Brother Simon. “Even during such difficult

times, God continues to show us His faithfulness.”

Your ongoing praying and giving provides vital, long-term support for believers from countries where faith costs the most – not just North Korea, but all the places where Christians face extreme persecution.

“If you don't support us, we cannot go and minister – thank you,” says Brother John. “You make a team with us when you obey Him. God does not neglect your heart and calling. Thanks to all the supporters who pray and support us from all around the world.”

Courageous Christians like Bae truly know what it means to follow Jesus no matter the cost – and the cost has been enormous to her, yet she considers her suffering ‘a blessing’ (see letter on p11).

But your gifts and prayers are vital for showing believers like Bae that they aren't forgotten – and ensuring the survival and flourishing of the persecuted church. Today, you can show Bae that she isn't alone.

#### PLEASE PRAY

Brother John shared this prayer – please join with him:

“Thank you to the God who loves North Korea. You are always with the North Korean believers when they suffer. You feel their pain. You comfort them and give them wisdom to survive. You provide their daily bread.

“God, the North Korean churches have been surviving for a long time. They are relying only on You in their difficulties. Use them to transform North Korea. Let them be a voice to the world and share the gospel to the world.

“Let us be obedient to God's calling. As supporters and missionaries, let us be part of God's ministry.

“We praise and worship the God who never gives up on North Koreans. Amen.”

#### PLEASE GIVE

- **Every £21** could give a Bible to three believers from a country where Christians face extreme persecution
- **Every £37** could provide emergency food, medicine

and shelter for a month to a family of Christian refugees fleeing extreme persecution.

- **Every £56** could give discipleship training to 14 believers from a country where Christians face extreme persecution.

You can make a gift at [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org)

\*Name changed for security reasons



Bae courageously chose to return to North Korea - bringing a Bible, to help disciple others (reconstruction image)

# AFGHANISTAN IN CRISIS

You will doubtless have watched the tragic news from Afghanistan in recent months. It's so painful to watch the speed with which the Taliban have retaken power in this country – and to see desperate Afghans fleeing the country. Your prayers and support are deeply needed.

For Christians in Afghanistan, the crisis is devastating – but it isn't a sudden removal of their religious freedom. Even before the Taliban took power, Afghanistan was number two on the Open Doors World Watch List. It was already impossible to live openly as a Christian.

It didn't seem like life could get harder for Christians in Afghanistan. And then it did.

What hasn't changed, though, is the love and sovereignty of God.

## SHARIFULLAH'S STORY

"Everything beautiful is considered 'infidel,'" says Sharifullah\*. He is a traditional

craftsman in Afghanistan whose business came to a standstill when the Taliban returned to power. "The Taliban want their ideology reflected everywhere, and so all signs of colour, life and hope have been removed. They've been replaced with Taliban slogans, which are a far cry from hope."

Sharifullah has a reason to be particularly worried about the Taliban. He is a secret Christian, devoting his life to shepherding the people God has entrusted to his care, and reaching out to their community with the gospel and their craft intertwined. If the Taliban knew Sharifullah and his wife were Christians, they'd be killed.

## “JESUS CAME TO US IN A DREAM

### “KILLING OUR SOULS”

Living out their faith behind a veil of secrecy, Sharifullah and his fellow believers knew that the Taliban could return. Despite the dangers, they continued their secret ministry, training women and men in how to make beautiful and colourful crafts in a bid to share the gospel.

"The Taliban are killing our souls and spirits," says Sharifullah. "They are killing the souls of our children by taking all that is beautiful away from them."

### SECRET SYMBOLS

Sharifullah is particularly worried about his brother-in-law. He doesn't know that Sharifullah and his wife are Christians, but has asked threatening questions about the symbols in their art.

"He used to come and destroy all my wife's paintings to hurt her,"

shares Sharifullah. "He used to tell us, 'You are too free with your lives. One day the Taliban will come back and it will be better for you that you destroy all this.' Now, that day has come. Pray that God will keep him away from us and our work."

### PERSEVERING FAITH

Amazingly, Sharifullah and his Christian family are committed to persevering. "Jesus came to us in a dream and opened up our imagination. It is a door that has been opened that can never be shut.

"We will never let that hope be silenced," he adds. "We will make sure the world hears the gospel through every breath we take. And we know you will help us by living the gospel, using your freedom and sharing Jesus. Please continue to stand with us."

### SUPPORTING REFUGEES

Sharifullah and his family have courageously stayed in Afghanistan. Others have had to leave behind everything they know, finding refuge in nearby countries. This new influx has made Open Doors partners' work supporting refugees more important than ever.

"We have been able to meet Afghan people and hear their stories," shares Nazim\*, an Open Doors contact in a neighbouring country. One of them is Samad\*, whose wife and children are still in Afghanistan. Samad longs to go back and rescue them, but the border is tightly controlled.

"Samad couldn't hold back tears when he told us about his family and how hard the situation was in Afghanistan. We supported him as we could, most of all with prayers, and really trust God can save him and his family. Please,

Thousands of refugees are fleeing Afghanistan - including Christians who fear violence from the Taliban SOURCE: ALAMY

join us in prayers for Samad, his wife and his children."

As well as prayers, local Open Doors partners are offering practical help: "We also support other families in this area – Christian and non-Christian – with some food packs and clean water."

## “WE WILL MAKE SURE THE WORLD HEARS THE GOSPEL

### JOIN A MONTH OF PRAYER FOR AFGHANISTAN

Your prayers make an enormous difference to those both inside and outside Afghanistan. It means so much to vulnerable believers like Sharifullah to know that they aren't forgotten. Thank you!

Afghan Christians have asked us to continue to stand with them

in prayer. So your Prayer Diary includes a month of prayer for Afghanistan – part of a prayer run throughout 2022. Please join with believers around the world in lifting up our Afghan brothers and sisters to our sovereign God at this critical time.

*Father God, we pray for Afghan believers, both those who've stayed and those who are refugees. Please give them resilience, strength and hope. May they know Your joy even in the darkness. We ask Your provision and healing for the hungry, the sick and the traumatised. We believe that You are sovereign in Afghanistan, and we ask You to move in power. Amen.*

You can also give to help provide fleeing Christian refugees like Samad with emergency food and shelter by going to [opendoorsuk.org](https://www.opendoorsuk.org) or using the response form enclosed with your magazine.

\*Names changed for security reasons

Women are particularly vulnerable to attack from the Taliban. This shop has hidden pictures of women, to prevent attack. SOURCE: REUTERS/ALAMY

# PERSECUTED CHILDREN RECEIVE GIFTS AND THE GOSPEL

THANK YOU FOR BRINGING THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS TO CHRISTIAN CHILDREN IN CENTRAL ASIA



It's amazing how a single gift can impact someone's life. For persecuted children across Central Asia – especially those from Muslim backgrounds – celebrating Christmas is often not possible. But thanks to your prayers and support, Open Doors partners were able to bring the hope and joy of Christmas to many of them, distributing over 4,000 Christmas gifts!

In one Central Asian country (which we can't name, for security reasons) the team visited schools, maternity hospitals, orphanages and state colleges to share the Nativity story and the message of Jesus. They also distributed 8,000 calendars containing Bible verses, organised street performances depicting the gospel and provided Christian literature written in the local language.

One six-year-old girl said: "I was waiting the whole year for somebody to give me a gift. I am not going to school as it become expensive. My mum is not working; my dad is working but earning very little. I am happy that Jesus remembers me and loves me."

Another believer shared, "We are so grateful for your visits to our hospital. Nobody else comes to see us and nobody makes such joyful events with songs, performances and Christmas presents! Thank you for your visit and the news about Isa Masih [Jesus Messiah in Arabic] which gives hope to our children. Children here are

very sick, but your words about Isa and His love help them to have hope for a better future!"

## MIRACULOUS MEETINGS MAKE A WAY FOR THE MINISTRY

But it wasn't without risk – the faith of the team was stretched through several challenges as they continued their Christmas ministry. Murat\* shares about one of their most difficult experiences at a local high school: "A mother of one of the students complained to the head teacher about the school hosting Christmas events. She then contacted the State Department of Education, who questioned us intensely about the materials we were distributing."

The State Department of Education recommended the materials be sent to the nation's head Muslim clergy for review. Upon hearing this, the team met together for a time of prayer to seek God's wisdom. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, they decided to continue with the programme.

"While awaiting a response, we visited another community where 50-100 people gathered for our Christmas programme," Murat continued. "There we met people who had connections to the Department of Education, and they promised to assist in the resolution of the conflict. As a result, our materials were not

sent to the Muslim clergy and were cleared for use!"

Part of the ministry is about reaching people who've never encountered the gospel before. Evgeny\*, another member of the team, describes the time they were arrested – again, in a school: "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 celebration programmes in schools with songs, performances and games. In one of the schools, officers from local security

"I AM HAPPY THAT JESUS REMEMBERS ME AND LOVES ME."

services came and arrested our team. We were detained in a 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."

## AID DISTRIBUTED TO CHRISTIANS IN POVERTY

Some of the most impactful gifts given weren't just toys. Many Christians in Central Asia, especially converts from Islam



or Buddhism, struggle with poverty and unemployment as well as persecution for their faith – and children often suffer the most hardship as a result. But even here, Evgeny and the team were able to meet their needs: "We also reached poor families with humanitarian help – grocery packages with flour, oil, pasta and other necessary products."

God saw them through each of these challenges, which meant that the team was able to continue with their ministry. Zuchra\*, a mother of six, expresses her thanks to you: "I am so grateful to God for the opportunity to know you. You came to our house and brought with you this amazing holiday. My daughter will celebrate Christmas for the first time in her life. It is amazing! Thank God for this wonderful gift in our lives!"

## PRAY

- That the seeds sown through this ministry will grow
- For Open Doors partners as they continue to minister to children and families
- That all persecuted children will know that they are loved and treasured by their heavenly Father.

\*Names changed for security reasons

Thanks to you, many children in Central Asia heard the gospel for the first time!



# THE WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

## THE SACRIFICE AND SECRECY OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH



Each year, Open Doors produces the World Watch List – ranking the countries where following Jesus costs the most.

The World Watch List 2022 will be published on 19 January on [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org). It is more than a set of data or a collection of statistics – vital though that information is. It's a window into the world of the persecuted church, a world where surveillance is growing every day, where dictators and extremists hold a suffocating grip on society, where following Jesus means sacrificing so much.

Some sacrifice their safety, risking violence or attack to read the Bible or worship with their fellow believers.

For others, identifying as a Christian means giving up the chance of a decent education or a job. Or abandoning homes, or

businesses, being driven out of the places where they live.

Many – far too many – must sacrifice their voice, their visibility. They must stay silent and secret, hide what they believe, what they think, who they really are.

Some sacrifice their freedom – choosing to go to prison or a labour camp rather than deny their faith. Some even pay with their lives.

Christians in these countries know the reality of taking up their cross and following Jesus.

But what gives them the strength to walk this path?

First, they see the bigger

picture. They have learned to look over the horizon of this world, and into the eternal story beyond. Their country might turn against them, but they know they are part of the strong, secret and victorious kingdom of God.

Second, they know that they are not alone. They know that God is with them. And many know that others are with them as well: praying for them, speaking up for them, supporting them. Their family might abandon them, but they are part of the worldwide family of Christ.

And that's what this list is really all about. It's about our family. It's a call to stand with our persecuted brothers and

sisters and let them know that they are not alone.

As usual, Open Doors will be producing a wide range of

World Watch List resources to help you do this. We are so thankful for those of you who use these tools to pray regularly for the persecuted

church, and this year we hope to be able to give you even more ways to stand with those who sacrifice so much to be part of our family of believers.

## WORLD WATCH LIST RESOURCES –

AVAILABLE TO ORDER FROM 19 JANUARY

NEW!

### CHILDREN'S MAP AND PRAYER PASSPORT

This year's edition is bigger than ever! Grab your Prayer Passport and set off on a year-long journey of prayer with the secret church.

- Full-colour wall map with prayers for the Top 50 countries
- 24-page Prayer Passport with information, Bible verses and secret codes to crack
- Weekly activities and flags to colour in
- Sticker sheet with stamps to add to your passport week by week.



### THE WORLD WATCH LIST TOP 50

The comprehensive handbook to the top 50 countries where following Jesus costs the most. Information and inspiration to help you pray, support and speak up for the persecuted church.

- Detailed information and specific prayer points for each of the 50 countries
- Inspirational stories and testimonies from persecuted Christians
- Written prayers, Bible quotes and prayers from persecuted Christians
- A removable World Watch List map
- Information on global trends in the persecution of Christians.



### YOUTH GLOW IN THE DARK MAP AND TATTOO, PLUS YOUTH SESSION OUTLINE

Even in the darkness, God's light is still shining. Reveal stories of brave faith from Christians that have to keep their love of Jesus secret.

- A world map with the 50 places where following Jesus costs the most



- Simple prayer points for the top ten countries (with corresponding countries on the map glowing in the dark too)
- Interactive prayer ideas and ways to further connect young people and youth groups with Open Doors
- Downloadable youth session outline.

Along with these core resources, there are many other ways in which you and your church can engage with the World Watch List in 2022.

- Book an Open Doors speaker for your church – whether in person or online.
- Order larger World Watch List maps to put up in your church
- Download digital resources for use in church services, including prayer slides for each of the top 50 countries
- Watch and download inspirational and informative videos.

You'll find all the information and resources you need to explore the World Watch List and engage with your persecuted family at [opendoorsuk.org/persecution](http://opendoorsuk.org/persecution)



You can show Bae she isn't

# ALONE

Bae (name changed) has been exiled to a remote village in North Korea. She faces a lifetime of back-breaking labour and near-starvation. All because the authorities found a Bible in her home.

Bae managed to escape once – to a safe house in China, run by Open Doors partners. There, she found vital shelter, aid and community. Amazingly, she chose to return home – to continue serving her underground church.

Your gift and prayers today will mean courageous Christians like Bae can know they are not alone.

**Every £21** could give a Bible to three believers from a country where Christians face extreme persecution

**Every £37** could provide food, medicine and shelter for a family of Christian refugees fleeing extreme persecution

Stand with them with your gift by returning the enclosed envelope, phoning **01993 460015** or visiting **opendoorsuk.org**. Thank you.



The Open Doors World Watch List 2022, listing the countries

where Christians face the most extreme persecution, will be launched on 19 January 2022. Head to **opendoorsuk.org** to discover where following Jesus costs the most.

Illustrative image