

# OpenDoors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

magazine

July 2016



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# Letter from Lisa: Choice



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 seek to mobilise the  
church in the UK & 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.

**Open Doors UK**  
PO Box 6, Witney  
Oxon OX29 6WG  
T 01993 460015  
E [inspire@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:inspire@opendoorsuk.org)

**Open Doors Ireland**  
PO Box 873  
Belfast BT15 1WZ  
T 02890 751080  
E [odireland@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:odireland@opendoorsuk.org)

**Open Doors Scotland**  
PO Box 8515  
Prestwick KA9 9AN  
T 01292 800006  
E [odscotland@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:odscotland@opendoorsuk.org)

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As you open this magazine, the  
referendum on Britain's place in  
the EU will be over and the choice  
will have been made. Whether  
you voted to stay or leave, or chose  
not to vote at all, my guess is that  
none of us would have wanted  
to be denied the opportunity to  
express our preference. Choice  
on economic issues is one thing.  
Choices about if and whom we  
marry, where we live, how we raise  
our children – they affect us more  
deeply. And the choice of what we  
believe – that's fundamental to  
what it means to be human. And  
it is this last choice that people all  
over the world are being robbed of.

Because of the phenomenal  
rise in religious extremism, and  
particularly the atrocities of so-  
called Islamic State, the Open Doors  
World Watch List is frequently now  
being referenced in the press.  
But violent religious extremism is  
not just a phenomenon of Islam.  
Although you're far less likely to  
read it in the papers our research  
shows that believers from a  
Buddhist or Hindu background  
are just as likely to experience  
such opposition. The recent rise  
of Hindu fundamentalism in India  
has resulted in an increase in  
violent persecution. And that's why  
supporting Hindu-background  
believers is one of our top priorities  
for the coming year.

Open Doors has supported  
Christians in India for many years,  
preparing them for persecution and  
supporting those who suffer the  
effects of violence and exclusion.  
You may remember the brutal  
attacks on Christians in Orissa (now  
known as Odisha) in 2008 – indeed  
you may have taken part in our  
advocacy campaign at the time.

*"We do not wage war as  
the world does."*

2 Corinthians 10:4

It's thanks to the outpouring of  
generosity towards our persecuted  
family that we have been able  
to support Christians in the  
Kandhamal community over many  
years as they rebuild their lives  
but sadly, Christians in this area,  
and across India, continue to be  
attacked, as you can read on p8.

Nevertheless, even in the midst  
of oppression, there are still some  
choices they can make. I was struck  
by the prayer of Indian Christian,  
Sunita, who, after being attacked  
with sharp weapons made from  
bamboo, saw she had a choice and  
prayed: "I can die or be a witness.  
Make me a weapon, Lord. Make me  
a witness for you."

It made me think of the apostle  
Paul's words, "The weapons we  
fight with are not the weapons  
of this world." These words sum  
up the courage of Christians  
who choose to remain faithful in  
the face of incredible pressure,  
whose witness of love and grace  
shines brightly in the darkness  
of extremism and hatred. By  
supporting Christians like Sunita,  
who choose to be faithful to Christ,  
we help our brothers and sisters  
to stay – and to stay strong – as  
witnesses to their communities.  
And as we express that choice, we  
too become witnesses to a God of  
justice and love.

*Lisa*

Lisa Pearce  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I



# WORLD WATCH NEWS



"They hurt me much, but I love them much. I want them to know that Christianity is life."

- Yakuba, victim of Boko Haram attack

## MEXICO: Christian ordered to leave home village

A Protestant Christian has been ordered to leave his community in Mexico.

Lauro Pérez Núñez (36) was ordered to leave his village in Santiago Camotlán, Oaxaca, because local authorities claimed he was violating their custom of belonging to the 'traditionalist' church – a blend of indigenous paganism and popular Catholicism.

Núñez has been imprisoned at least five times and his children refused schooling by their local school. Recently, a mob surrounded his mother's house, where he was staying. They cut the electricity and started banging on the walls.

Núñez even has a court order allowing him to live in the village. "I showed them the judge's decision," he said, "but that made things worse. I started to receive death threats and was told I only had 15 minutes to leave. I was told that if I did not drop the appeal, they

would take my mother's house away.

"This situation has been really hard, but especially hard for my children," Núñez said. "Today they are going to school in another community located miles away from my community."

Mexico is number 40 on the Open Doors 2016 World Watch List. Religious intolerance – mostly against the Protestant minority – is increasing. Many Christians experience harassment, arrest and imprisonment from their indigenous communities and local authorities.

Open Doors is raising awareness of persecution, sponsoring a widely-reported conference on the issue and helping to launch the National Council for Religious Tolerance which aims to promote religious freedom for all faiths in Mexico. As a result of the intense advocacy work

of Open Doors and its partners, the issue was also raised in the Mexican Congress.

### → PRAY

- That Lauro Pérez Núñez and his family will receive justice.
- That the National Council for Religious Tolerance will be an effective voice and that Mexico's Congress will protect religious minorities.



Lauro Pérez Núñez arrested and detained  
Photo: *Coordinación de Organizaciones Cristianas.*

## NORTH KOREA: Authorities deny murdering pastor

North Korean authorities have denied involvement in the murder of a Korean-Chinese pastor who was active in helping North Korean refugees.

Han Choong Yeol lived in Chiangbai, a town on the Chinese side of the border with North Korea. He supported North Korean refugees by giving them food, medicines, clothes and other goods they needed for survival back in North Korea. On 30 April, Pastor Han's body was found, visibly maimed by stab and axe wounds.

Han's mobile phone also went missing, which may place North Korean refugees and those involved

in helping them in danger. Those who flee North Korea, even on a temporary basis in search of basic supplies, are considered 'defectors' by the North Korean government.

Pyongyang's propaganda outlet has denied the involvement of the North Korean government, claiming, "The South Korean authorities are addicted to dirty slander." However, local sources believe that all the evidence points to a well-planned attack by North Korean agents.

Following North Korea's 7th Party Conference which took place in May, the first since 1980, it seems unlikely that the situation for Christians in North Korea and

those who help them will improve soon. Thomas Muller, an Open Doors persecution analyst, says: "As Christians continue to be seen as enemies of the state – and ideology seems to be of increasing importance once more – Christians in the country will try to remain as invisible as possible."

### → PRAY

- For comfort for Pastor Han's family and church.
- For protection for those working to support North Korean refugees and those who have fled North Korea, particularly those whose details may have been on Pastor Han's phone.

## PAKISTAN: Christians in fear after blasphemy allegations

Christians in Pakistan are living in fear after 'multiple incidents' of blasphemy accusations. According to Open Doors sources, Christians in Sheikhpura, a small settlement next to Lahore, are 'too afraid to speak'. Several Christian families fled the area after one of their relatives was accused of sending a blasphemous message on Facebook. The accused man – Usman Masih (30) – actually abandoned Christianity some years ago, but his Christian relatives were deemed 'guilty by association'.

"Their landlords told them to leave the village, or they would face dire consequences," explained Masih's cousin, Waris. "At least ten Christian families have locked their houses and gone to their relatives for an unspecified time."

"There are communal fights all the time here in our town," said a contact. "We are constantly threatened with the blasphemy law."

### FAITH AND COURAGE

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are routinely used as a means of settling old scores. Dozens of Pakistanis have been murdered and many Christian settlements attacked. The most notorious case remains that of Asia Bibi, who was arrested in 2009 and still remains in jail.

In the face of these attacks Christians are showing courage and faith. Sonia Gill (23) was accused by a neighbour of blasphemy after using an advertising banner bearing the name of the prophet Muhammad as a floor covering. An angry mob of

about 70 people gathered outside her house but, bravely, Sonia refused to leave her home.

"If I flee, what would happen to my Christian neighbours and their houses?" she said. "Whatever they want to do, they should do it to me and not to others."

Thankfully, the case was dropped. But the situation remains tense, so please continue to bear up Christians like Sonia in your prayers.

### → PRAY

- For safety and protection for Pakistan's Christians.
- For protection for Open Doors partners who run literacy projects in the area.

## NIGERIA: Boko Haram victim forgives attackers

Thank you for your support and prayers for Christians in Nigeria. We continue to hear many stories of God's amazing power at work, despite the violence and suffering.

Recently, in northern Nigeria, Open Doors staff met Yakubu, a Christian from Yobe State. Three years ago, he was asleep in bed when 20 armed Boko Haram soldiers burst into his house. The attackers looted everything they could find, then announced, "We are going to slaughter you." They held Yakubu down and tried to decapitate him.

"A man holding a knife came and stood beside me. He said an Arabic prayer, then cut the back of my neck," recalled Yakubu. "They turned my head the other way and then cut twice more."

They left Yakubu for dead, but amazingly, God gave him strength to get up. He made it to hospital, but

hours had passed since the attack. He had lost so much blood that he had lost his eyesight. Miraculously, he survived. And today he harbours no hatred towards the people who caused him so much suffering.

"They hurt me much, but I love them much. I want them to know that Christianity is life."

He still lives among Muslims and uses his story to witness to them. "I love to tell this to Muslims so they know that Christianity is life. Now, when I am walking in town, people know that I am a Christian. They point at me and say, 'This guy... God is in him!'"

### → PRAY

- Give thanks for Yakubu's faith. Ask God to use his witness.
- For Christians facing violence in Nigeria – for strength and courage.



Yakubu's scars from the attack



## NIGERIA: Governments wake up to crisis

Pressure is mounting on Western governments to respond to the crisis in Nigeria, thanks to the worldwide launch of a key Open Doors report into the incredible violence faced by Christians. More than 50 parliamentarians attended the UK launch of the report in April, a sign of increasing willingness by all parties to engage with the issue of persecution.

Among those who came were Hilary Benn MP, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Desmond Swayne MP, Minister of State for International Development, Chuka Umunna MP, Baroness Berridge and the Bishop of Coventry.

If you invited your MP to this event, thank you very much – over 3,030 of you did, and it made such a difference!

### WE DON'T HAVE LIBERTY

Our host, Fiona Bruce MP, opened the meeting by speaking about her own experiences last February, when she visited Nigeria in her role on the Select Committee for International Development. Among those she had met were contacts from Open Doors.

Those present heard moving testimonies from northern Nigerian pastors, Rev. Musa Bala\* and Rev. Joseph John\*. "Our constitution guarantees liberty, but we don't have liberty," said Rev. Bala – a pastor

**"Our constitution guarantees liberty, but we don't have liberty"**

from Nasarawa state whose hometown was attacked by Fulani herdsmen. Similarly,

Joseph John has experienced loss after members of his congregation were killed in an attack in 2011.

"Segregation is growing day by day," explained Arne Mulders\*, the Open Doors Research Manager for West and Central Africa, the report's author. He outlined the key findings regarding targeted violence against Christians.

Finally, Open Doors UK and Ireland's very own Head of Advocacy, Zoe Smith, called on parliamentarians to act on behalf of persecuted believers in Nigeria; to urge the Nigerian government and the local authorities to defend religious freedom, and to ensure that vital aid is reaching displaced Christians.

Around Europe, a sister tour was also conducted, with report launches in Norway, Sweden, France, the Netherlands and at the EU.

The Executive Summary of the report, entitled *Crushed but not Defeated: The Impact of Persistent Violence on the Church*



in Northern Nigeria, is now available to download at [www.opendoorsuk.org/nigeria](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/nigeria)

### WHAT NEXT?

MPs and Peers are continuing to put pressure on the UK government by asking regular parliamentary questions on the status of Nigerian Christians. We will also continue to raise these issues with parliamentarians, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Nigeria team and the Nigerian High Commission in the UK. You can get involved by continuing to pray, and by directly contacting the Nigerian High Commission. Visit [www.opendoorsuk.org/nigeria](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/nigeria) to find out how.



Zoe Smith, Head of Advocacy for Open Doors UK & Ireland, Fiona Bruce MP and David Otto, an expert on counter-terrorism in Nigeria.

\*Name changed for security reasons

## INDIA: THE RISE OF HINDU EXTREMISM

**"We know everything about Jesus, Jesus was crucified... we want to give the same punishment to you."**

This terrifying threat was given to two Indian believers who had decided to leave Hinduism and follow Jesus. Thankfully, these believers escaped with their lives, but the persecution of Christians in India is becoming increasingly violent, frequent and widespread. As Hindu extremism in India escalates, your prayers and support are enabling us to help our Indian brothers and sisters stand strong, and show them that they are not alone.





Meena\* (32)

**"I** can die or I can witness. Make me a witness for you."

This was the courageous prayer of Sunita\* as she hid in a goat shed from her attackers. She had been beaten with bamboo rods by a group of men until she was unconscious, then dragged to the edge of her town. When she awoke, her wrist was broken; a bone was sticking out of it. She had no idea if her sister, Meena\*, who was also beaten, was alive or dead.

Sunita and Meena's only crime was to decide to leave Hinduism and follow Jesus. Theirs is just one



Sunita\* (25)

**"I can die or I can witness. Make me a witness for you."**

example of the discrimination and violence that is becoming increasingly common for Christians in India. India was number 28 in the Open Doors 2014 World Watch List; last year, it rose to 21; this year, it's number 17. In 2015 Open Doors recorded 179 incidents of men, women and children being beaten by Hindu extremists. For the first quarter of 2016 alone, we have recorded 132 such incidents.

Sunita is only 25, but has already experienced more persecution than most will face in a lifetime. And yet, she has refused to give up her faith in Christ. As she hid in that goat shed, she says: "I prayed that God's will be done."

She was reunited with Meena shortly afterwards. Open Doors partners have been able to provide them with food and pay for their medical expenses; they now live in hiding. Meena says: "Thank you for praying and helping us. You help us stand strong."



Neeraj\* (23) & Ritu\* (21)

**Neeraj\*** faced such pressure to return to Hinduism that last year, on Christmas Eve, he found himself recanting his faith in Jesus in front of hundreds of people.

He had endured months of persecution from his community and family after deciding to follow Jesus; he was beaten by the religious leaders of his village, and his own father hit him with a brick. "They put me under pressure to renounce my faith in Christ, but I refused," Neeraj says.

Then, in December 2015, just after Neeraj and two Christian friends had been making plans for their Christmas celebrations, they were ambushed by radical Hindus. Their attackers beat Neeraj and his friends for four hours before taking them to a local community hall and locking them up.

Some of the attackers guarded them. They showed the Christians their knives and told them, "If you deny your faith in Jesus, you can go home." Neeraj refused, saying, "No, He is my Lord. I will never leave Him."

The next morning, the radical Hindus took the Christians to the police station, accusing them of forcing Hindus to become Christians. Outside, a mob of 200 villagers gathered, shouting for the deaths of the three young men. The police officers began to threaten them: "We will strip you naked and treat you with electroshocks."

After an entire night of beatings and threats, the believers agreed to give up their faith in Christ; first one of Neeraj's friends, then the

other, and finally, Neeraj. "I was so afraid that I decided to obey them," Neeraj says, trembling at the memory.

Neeraj found himself back in the local community hall in front of the Hindu idols. His attackers forced him to recite Hindu scriptures, and smeared him with water mixed with cow dung and urine. The extremists took photographs of the men as proof of their re-conversion. Then Neeraj was allowed to go home to his wife, Ritu\*.

That night, Neeraj's heart was broken, and he wept bitterly. But he remembered the words of Proverbs 24:16 that say, 'A righteous man falls seven times, and rises again.' Neeraj repented, recommitted his life to Christ, and promised the Lord he would never betray Him again.

Then he remembered another verse, Matthew 10:23 – 'When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.' He took Ritu and left the village that same evening.

When the Hindu extremists heard that Neeraj had returned to his Christian faith, they threatened to kill him. Neeraj and Ritu now live with Neeraj's Christian uncle in another town. "I asked him if we could stay because I did not want to betray Jesus again and I cannot go back to my village," Neeraj says.

Open Doors partners have been supporting Neeraj and Ritu with vital supplies – they fled with nothing but the clothes they stood in. Neeraj says, "You told us you will stand by us whenever we are in need. Your support has really encouraged us. Thanks to Open Doors and its supporters we even received legal assistance."

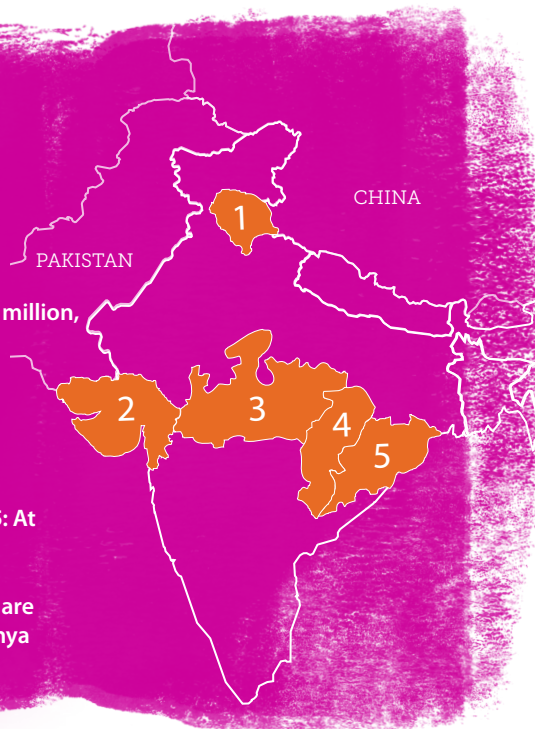
\*Name changed for security reasons



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INDIA FACTFILE

- World Watch List position:
  - > 2014: 28
  - > 2015: 21
  - > 2016: 17
- Population: 1.3 billion. Number of Christians: 63 million, less than 5% of the population.
- Leader: Prime Minister Narendra Modi
- Number of Christians attacked in 2015: Over 350
- Number of Christians killed for their faith in 2015: At least 9
- There are five states where anti-conversion laws are in place: 1. Himachal Pradesh, 2. Gujarat, 3. Madhya Pradesh, 4. Chhattisgarh and 5. Orissa.



**Rajeshwar** Singh, one of the leaders of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a militant Hindu nationalist group, has stated on national media that the RSS will make India free of Christians and Muslims by 31 December 2021. One of the ways they intend to do this is through forced conversions. Hundreds of Christians like Neeraj were forced to reconvert to Hinduism last year through intimidation and pressure.

Despite being the world's largest democracy, with a constitution that guarantees

**"Now that you've found us, please don't leave us"**

freedom of religion and belief, such extremism is thriving in India. The Indian government is now led by the Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political wing of RSS, and turns a blind eye to attacks on minorities.

The Indian government is even proposing

a national anti-conversion law. Such laws are already in force in five of India's states, and are used disproportionately against minorities. Christians can be falsely accused of forcing Hindus to become Christians as an excuse to harass and arrest them, as Neeraj experienced. Hindu nationalists see Hinduism as the true religion of India, so when an Indian person converts or returns to Hinduism, it is not seen as a conversion but a 'ghar wapsi' or 'homecoming': they are exempt from the anti-conversion laws.

Combined with the pressure from every side – from family, neighbours, the police and the government – is the sense of isolation believers often feel. India is an enormous country – you could fit the British Isles inside India ten times with room to spare. Many Christians live in isolated, rural communities, far from the support and encouragement of other believers.

One of Open Doors' partners in India recently visited a hospital to meet with a father and son who had been beaten for their faith, just the latest in a series of brutal attacks they had received from their Hindu neighbours. The two men were the only Christians in their village. The father said, "For five years we thought we were on our own and that no one knew about our situation. We were tempted to give up. Now that you've found us, please don't leave us."

## Stand with your brothers and sisters in India

As the discrimination and violence faced by Christians in India becomes more severe and more frequent, it is vital that we stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters in prayer and action, assuring them that they are not alone and that we will continue to support them for as long as they need us.

One of the ways that our partners do this is through Rapid Response teams. These are teams of local volunteers who can help to provide urgent aid such as food and medicines, as well as facilitating legal support, immediately after an attack. Open Doors partners have been working with local churches in India since 2000, and our network of contacts and years of experience enable our partners to respond quickly when incidents of violent persecution occur.

But our partners are also providing long-term support, such as vocational training to help believers to support themselves, sponsoring children's education, and building houses when believer's homes have been destroyed. They also run a training programme called 'Standing Strong Through the Storm', which helps to prepare the church for the persecution that may come and gives believers the strength to endure when it does. This training is for pastors, but also for ordinary church members, including specific training for families, women and youth.

One believer in India who received training said: "After accepting Christ in my life I faced numerous hardships but I continued praying and walking with the Lord. I came to this seminar and was revived spiritually. I learnt about how to overcome the obstacles that come in our spiritual life and also about how to stand firm and grow while working in the mission despite the hardships."



Standing Strong Through the Storm seminar

None of this work in India would be possible without the prayers and support of people like you. Will you pray, give and speak out today to give our brothers and sisters in India the support they need, not only to survive, but to stand firm in their faith?

### PRAY

- Meena and Sunita have asked us to pray that their village will come to faith in Christ. They would like to go back there one day. Please also pray for healing and provision.
- Neeraj has asked us to pray for those who have rejected Christ in forceful reconversions back to Hinduism. Join him in praying that they will know the love and forgiveness of Jesus.
- For energy and wisdom for Open Doors partners and volunteers in India as they support persecuted believers.

### GIVE

- Every £36 (€49) could equip a Rapid Response team of volunteers for 3 weeks.
- Every £42 (€56) could fund training for a pastor on a Standing Strong Through the Storm course, to equip them to face persecution and provide effective leadership.

### SPEAK OUT

The Indian constitution assures all citizens of the right 'to profess, practise and propagate any religion', yet Christians in India are frequently denied this right. Write to the Indian High Commission and urge them to raise these concerns with the Indian government.

Go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/act-india](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/act-india) to find out how.



# IS THERE HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST?

The church in Syria and Iraq has played a vital role in society for almost 2,000 years – but with the situation deteriorating fast, and the flight of Christians increasing rapidly, that could all change. That's why, in September, Open Doors is launching a new seven-year campaign asking you to pray, support and speak out for Christians in the Middle East. In the next few pages, we give you a sneak preview of a new report we will be launching as part of the campaign, with suggestions on how we can work together as one family to give hope to the Middle East.

Due to Syria's civil war unleashing a tidal wave of violent persecution against Christians, it is now estimated that between 50-80 per cent of the Christian population have fled Iraq and Syria, crossing the borders to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and beyond. Their homes, properties and businesses have been confiscated or destroyed. Many of them have no expectation that they will return.

But the situation is not without hope. There is still a strong core of Christians who have chosen to stay in their homeland because they have a vision for the future. They want to play their part in rebuilding their shattered societies. They want the church to be there to offer hope and compassion as a visible sign of God's love.

But before they can do that they need their voice to be heard.

After extensive research and consultation with a broad cross-section of Christian leaders and church members in Syria and Iraq, Open Doors has been asked to speak up on their behalf.

In September we are launching a new report, *Hope for the Middle East*, written in collaboration with Middle East Concern, Served and the University of East London. It will form the basis for our new campaign in response to our brothers and sisters' requests for advocacy, support and prayer.

**"What Christians need most is certainty about the future: they need hope."**

*Hope for the Middle East* report

## Christians in the Middle East: past, present and future

The *Hope for the Middle East* report details the extensive contribution of Christians past and present, and culminates in their requests for the future.

### Past

The Christian communities of Syria and Iraq have a tradition that goes back 2,000 years – living proof that Christianity in the Middle East is not a Western import or a foreign religion. Throughout the centuries, they have made a significant contribution to the whole of society in education, healthcare, business, culture and welfare, from translating Greek philosophy to sending missions across the world.

### Present

Christians in Syria and Iraq do not view themselves primarily as a religious minority clinging on for survival in a hostile environment. They are determined, if at all possible, to play their part in building peace, stability and harmony in place of violence and sectarianism. While Christians belong to different historic ethnicities, such as Assyrian, Syriac and Armenian, they also identify themselves with their national identity and are a vital and vibrant part of the life and culture of the Middle East. In the current crisis, churches have made a positive contribution by providing shelter for refugees and humanitarian relief programmes.

Through partners and churches in Syria and Iraq, Open Doors is bringing humanitarian aid and relief to 25,000 displaced families every month. Through local partners, we are also supporting trauma training for local Christian and Yazidi volunteers – equipping them to provide trauma care to the thousands of displaced families around them.

### Future

Open Doors and Middle East Concern consulted with a broad cross-section of church leaders and members in Syria and Iraq, asking what they want to see happen. Their responses fell broadly into three categories:

**Equality:** Christians are not calling for special privileges as a religious minority but want to be seen as fellow citizens, enjoying the full rights of citizenship and equality before the law. They want full protection of their right to freedom of religion or belief, including the ability for everyone to freely worship, practise, teach, choose and change their religion.

**Security:** Christians want their governments to ensure the dignified and continued improvement of living conditions for all citizens, but especially for returning refugees and the internally displaced. This would include the provision of adequate housing, education and jobs.

**Responsibility:** Christians want religious leaders and faith-based organisations to be identified and equipped to play a constructive and central role in reconciling and rebuilding Syrian and Iraqi societies.

### 'A new beginning'

In Iraq, displaced Christian leader Thabet from Karamles has faith that God can bring new life to his region. That's why he is committed to staying to serve his displaced community in Erbil. He says:

*"A crisis doesn't mean the end of the church. I lost my village, my church, and now I am losing many church members who are emigrating abroad. But I see things with the light of God. When Jesus died, everyone thought it was the end of the church. But three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and now we know that his death was just the beginning of the church. When Stephanus was stoned, it seemed to be the end of the church, but instead it spread Christianity. I believe this crisis might mark a new beginning for the church of Iraq as well."*



Christian leader Thabet



# ONE FAMILY WORKING TOGETHER to bring hope to the Middle East

## Our hope is that our new campaign will unite Christians around the world in prayer, support and advocacy for the church in the Middle East.

It builds on the incredible work that God did through the 2013 *Save Syria* campaign and we trust that, with Him, together we can bring about real change for our brothers and sisters in the region.

And that is their hope, too. A dear friend of Open Doors, Pastor Edward, who has chosen to stay in Damascus, recently shared with us:

*"We are very thankful that Open Doors... combines not just relief and humanitarian work but also spiritual impact in the country and in the lives of many people.*

*"And also they actually follow up with prayer: encouraging other churches to pray for us. This is amazingly important for us.*

*"Praying for the church in the Middle East is very important at this time. It breaks my heart to think that the Middle East will be evacuated of Christians. It's very important and meaningful for us to see the church stay and do the work of Christ, making a difference in the lives of people, like a light in the darkness. We really appreciate prayers for the country and the church because (it means) Christians will be able to revive and expand in an atmosphere of peace and freedom.*

*"One more thing: Open Doors gives voice to Christians in the area, which is really so helpful. I express my deep appreciation for what they do and I feel all their efforts and their work as if they are representing the church in my country and working on our behalf... Open Doors is really bringing our cause as loud as possible to everywhere in the West and in Europe and on every level, and for that we really thank God and appreciate what they do."*

*The church team in Damascus praying before the distribution of relief packages*

## "The more Christians stand together, the stronger we are"

Here in the UK, Rev. Denise Hayes understands the need for hope as she leads the newly-combined church of St Francis and St Barnabas in Wigan. It's an area battling considerable deprivation, with attacks, stabbings and suicides. Denise is keen for the church to look outward so they run a food bank, support those with alcohol addiction, and organise trips for young and old. "The church can't just be there to bury people," she says. "It needs to bring hope and light in the darkness." They've become an Open Doors Partner Church. "People are facing lots of change in Wigan," she says. "The persecuted church inspires and helps them to face change and grow."

It's not just the church in Wigan that's choosing to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their persecuted family. Here, three new Partner Churches explain why they are doing the same:

### 'They're members of our family'

"Unity is one of the biggest calls in the New Testament," says Ben Hodgetts, Partner Church contact for Skye Bible Church, "and it has to start where we are. I was very encouraged by our International Day of Prayer gathering on Skye last October, with six or seven denominations represented. We're starting to feel a oneness with the persecuted church through prayer. It's important to try and see the faces rather than just the numbers. They're members of our family."

### 'There is a hunger for God'

When Pastor John-William Noble of the Chinese Evangelical Church in Edinburgh met persecuted Christians in Orissa, India, he was humbled to discover how much our prayers mean to them. But he says we have much to learn from them, too. "The church in the West is too blended with modern society: it needs to stand out. And we have become detached from the church in places like India and China. Yet the churches there are more like the church of the New Testament. There is a hunger for God."

### 'We need to show a commitment and prioritise'

Although, St Brendan's, East Belfast, has supported persecuted Christians for many years, none of them had travelled with Open Doors so, hot on the heels of becoming a Partner Church, Rev. Ian Cruickshank went to meet believers in South Sudan. The connection, he says, has made things 'more personal, more tangible' for the church, which partners with three Christian organisations, including Open Doors. "There are so many needs," he says, "but there is also a need to show a commitment and prioritise."

## Three ways you can give hope to the Middle East

### 1. Invite your MP to the report launch

We want our government to speak up on behalf of Christians in Iraq and Syria. To do this it's vital that they hear what Christians need to survive, stay and shine in the Middle East. That's why we're launching our *Hope for the Middle East* campaign and report in Parliament on 12 October, at a meeting hosted by Kate Green MP, Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities.

Please invite your MP now and urge them to put the date in their diary before the summer recess starts on 21 July. Go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/MidEastMP](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/MidEastMP)

### 2. Put on a prayer vigil

The International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church (IDOP) takes place on Sunday 20 November this year. It provides a special opportunity for us all to pray together for our persecuted family in Syria and Iraq. If you can't make this date, pick another! Our prayer vigil pack will be available in September, giving you all you need to plan your event.



### 3. Become a Partner Church

If you would like your church to take the next step in connecting more closely with our persecuted family, just order a Partner Church booklet using the enclosed response form, by going to [www.opendoorsuk.org/churches](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/churches) or by phoning our Inspire team on 01993 460015. Alternatively, you can sign up online straight away!



# SUDAN: HOPE UNDER FIRE

Open Doors CEO, Lisa Pearce, recently travelled to visit Christians in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. There she discovered a church under incredible pressure, but standing firm thanks to your support.



Lisa, with some of the women from the Nuba community

**In March this year I had the privilege of taking the dangerous journey into the Nuba Mountains region of Sudan, and it has left me changed.**

The Nuba people are under attack from their own government because they don't want to live under the strict Islamic law that is in place across the rest of the country. They endure daily bombings, with planes seeking out and systematically destroying any signs of life – the clusters of huts that make up a village, the occasional brick buildings housing schools or churches, the land that villagers have planted to grow food – anything that makes life more sustainable, more bearable, is a target. Danger

doesn't only come from the air: ground-pushes where government troops 'reclaim' villages (laying waste to anyone and anything that doesn't flee quickly enough) and surface-to-surface missiles are all part of life for the Nuba community. And yet it remains one of the most under-reported tragedies of our day.

## HUNGRY FOR GOD

The Christians in the Nuba Mountains are beleaguered; the need for hope, encouragement, assurance that they're not forgotten by God or the outside world is huge. Some incredible male Open Doors co-workers have travelled consistently to meet with and

encourage the church leaders in particular – even with the bombs raining down. This year for the first time I and another lady were able to join them – to come alongside our precious, weary Nuban sisters.

We were expecting 20 women to gather together – and 175 women came! Some of them walked for two full days through the brutal 50 degree heat, carrying their children and sleeping mats, just to be with us.

We met under a large tree for four days, sleeping outside. We looked together at what it means to be unconditionally loved by God, and that we can come to him as we are and not as we think we should be. The women shared their questions and their burdens – including the unique challenges of raising children to respond with forgiveness, not hate, when violence and destruction are all around them – and also how they had seen the goodness of God in their situations. They taught me what it really means to be hungry for God, what a privilege it is to have fellowship with others, what it looks like to forgive when it really hurts. We prayed, laughed, wept and worshipped together. So many of those women's faces and stories are with me as I write, and even now their courage and resilience flows me.

One young woman, Susan, interpreted for us. She hasn't even had the chance to finish secondary school but through sheer determination has become almost fluent in English and is now one of the best teachers at the local school. Education is desperately important, giving children and young people structure to their day and helping them work towards a time when what they learn can be useful in a job. It's an active statement that things won't always be as they are today, giving hope to both the children and their parents.

## "GOD IS STILL HERE"

Education, trauma counselling, training courses, conferences to gather church leaders together for teaching and encouragement so that they can lead their congregations faithfully through these times of trial – with your help Open Doors is supporting the church to provide all of these. And in all of it, through our presence, reminding our family that God, too, is present.

As one pastor who lives in a particularly perilous area said to me:

*"I know God is still here because you've come. The fact that you would leave your family and safety and come to be with us in our difficulty can*

*only be the Lord. So the fact that you're here tells me that God is here."*

As is so often the case, Christians of the Nuba Mountains are working in an extraordinary way to bring hope to those around them. Open Doors has been involved in Sudan for 20 years and is one of the few organisations that didn't abandon the people of Nuba when things turned particularly violent in 2011.



Meeting under the tree



Susan (right)

The co-worker who asked me to visit the area lived years ago with his young family in what is now South Sudan – they led a team building a Bible school to train and equip pastors. All these years later I met pastors under terrible fire in the mountains of Sudan who are teaching their congregations to respond with love, not hate, and to hold on to the goodness of the Lord. It was incredible to discover that most of these pastors were trained at the Bible school that Open Doors partners were so intimately involved in establishing years ago, way before we could know what would happen to the Nuba people, or the depth of spiritual assurance and maturity that would be called on in the lives of the Nuba pastors. I love it that God sees the whole picture when we just catch glimpses of his good plans.

Thank you so much for your ongoing, vital support which enables us to resource the church in Sudan. Please do pray for the Nuba people – for protection, for children to grow up loving the Lord, for strong family relationships despite the pressures, for hope and, ultimately, for peace.

They send you their love.





**6 PAKISTAN**

**Leader:**  
Prime Minister  
Nawaz Sharif

**Population:**  
192.8 million  
(3.9 million Christians)

**Main religion:**  
Islam

**Government:**  
Republic

**Source of persecution:**  
Islamic extremism



## PAKISTAN: VIOLENCE AND HEALING

On a day-to-day basis, Christians in Pakistan suffer more violence for their faith than almost anywhere else in the world.

As Pakistani society becomes more Islamic, believers are not only facing persecution from a growing number of extremist groups, but also from their communities, the authorities, and the law – particularly the infamous ‘blasphemy laws’, for which Christian mother-of-five, Asia Bibi, has been on death row since 2010.

### TERRORISM

Multiple attacks on Christians by Islamist terrorists – some with links to the Taliban and the so-called Islamic State – have left hundreds dead and many more injured, particularly over the last three years. On Easter Sunday, more than 70 were killed when suicide bombers attacked a park in Lahore, targeting Christians.

In response, the government recently arrested tens of thousands of people with supposed links to terrorism, but local papers report that this has resulted in minimal leads. And new anti-terrorist regulations are actually preventing Christians from gathering outside of Sunday church services – making churches an obvious target for attackers.

But under the threat of further violence,

believers have mobilised to protect themselves. Many churches have been modified, with high walls and narrow gates. Security guards, often made up of volunteers, also stand guard to protect worshippers.

### BLASPHEMY LAWS

“Pakistan’s law is known not to be sympathetic to Christians,” said an Open Doors partner recently.

The infamous blasphemy laws are a sensitive issue in Pakistan. Believers are at risk of being falsely accused of blasphemy to settle personal scores, which can lead to imprisonment and even the death sentence – as in Asia Bibi’s case. Attempts to repeal the laws, or to defend people accused of blasphemy, have been met with violence, assassinations and riots.

With little legal support, and with reports of believers being beaten and even killed in police custody, many Pakistani Christians do not feel able to rely on the authorities.

### SOCIETY

Pakistan suffers from severe fractionalisation, and corruption is rampant across the country. In some rural areas, landowners have their own militias, courts and prisons, which can lead to serious injustices against the generally unprotected

### WORLD WATCH LIST FACTS:

- Only around 2 per cent of Pakistan’s population are Christians.
- Pakistan is ranked as one of the most violent countries in the 2016 World Watch List.
- Believers from a Muslim background are particularly at risk of violent persecution.
- Registering conversion to Christianity is not possible.
- Last year, at least 17 attacks took place on churches and Christian schools, and there were three major attacks on Christian neighbourhoods.
- An estimated 700 Christian girls and women are abducted and forced to convert to Islam each year.

Christian minority – particularly for Christian women, who may be taken from their families, forced to marry and then convert to Islam. Almost 200 Christian families fled their homes in 2015 when a 200-strong mob attacked a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore.

### HOPE

But despite this increasing Islamisation in society, the Christian minority is still a large size. And these numbers have not reduced much in the last year. There are also signs that, under international pressure, Pakistan’s Supreme Court is moving to amend the blasphemy law.

And through prayer, counselling, literacy programmes and vocational training, many Pakistani Christians are receiving life-changing support. Open Doors’ partners have been working with church leaders, women and families, breadwinners and other vulnerable Christians to help them provide for themselves, build themselves up, and find restoration. Healing is taking place.

### PRAY

- That vulnerable women, like Myra, would receive God’s protection and comfort.
- For Asia Bibi and others imprisoned under the blasphemy laws.
- For Open Doors’ partners who support the church with vocational projects, literacy training, trauma counselling, emergency aid and leadership training.
- That the Pakistani people would know the love and peace of Christ.

### WOMEN RECEIVE PRAYER AND TRAINING

“To be a woman in Pakistan is to be the most vulnerable. And to be a Christian woman, even more so,” said a contact from ALIVE, one of Open Doors’ partner organisations. Many Pakistani women cannot trust the men in their workplaces, communities, or even their families.

Myra\* is just one of many Christian women and girls who suffered sexual exploitation at work. She chose to run away. “I am praying God gives me a job in a safe place,” she told us. “I have three daughters, I cannot put myself or them at risk.” Through ALIVE, women like Myra are given discipleship teaching, training in new sewing techniques and lessons on hygiene, which they can take back to their communities.



They also spend time with trained counsellors and prayer ministers who listen to their stories, and help them on their road to recovery.

“I ran away but the memory does not leave me,” Myra explained. “Coming to prayer meetings and Bible studies gives me the opportunity to sit somewhere safe and heal from the shock and trauma.”

\*Name changed for security reasons



To find out more about Pakistan and other countries where it is hardest to be a Christian, order our free 2016 World Watch resources:

- 2016 World Watch Guide
- World Watch Church Pack, including DVD, Map, Kidzone and Youth resources
- Open Doors 2016 World Watch Advocacy Report

To order these resources go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution)



# INDIA: A COUNTRY WHERE YOU MIGHT NOT EXPECT EXTREME PERSECUTION



When Meena\* and Sunita\* (pictured) decided to leave the Hindu faith and follow Jesus, Hindu extremists brutally beat them with bamboo rods; Sunita was beaten until she was unconscious.

Attacks like this are becoming more frequent as Hindu extremism grows. Hundreds of our brothers and sisters in India have been violently attacked this year alone.

But many of these believers show incredible courage. When Sunita awoke after her horrific beating, she prayed: *"I can die or I can witness. Make me a witness for you."*

Open Doors partners were able to provide Meena and Sunita with

medical care and food. But there are hundreds of others who need emergency aid and long-term support.

Meena says, *"You help us stand strong."* Will you give and pray today to help our brothers and sisters in India not only survive, but stand strong?

**Every £36 could equip a Rapid Response team of volunteers for three weeks to provide victims of violent persecution with food, medical care and legal aid.**

Give today. Please use the enclosed response form, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org) or call our Inspire Team on **01993 460015**.

Thank you.