



magazine

# Open Doors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

March 2017

**INSIDE:**

- **NIGERIA**  
Bringing hope back to life
- **EAST AFRICA**  
Planting the seeds of faith
- **PILGRIMAGE**  
Be a pilgrim for the persecuted



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# Letter from Lisa: Watch



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.

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## Religion and refugees have been hot topics following the launch of the Open Doors World Watch List 2017, with reaction to the recent US travel ban dominating the news.

The trends evident from the list, and the research behind it, go a long way to explain the forced migration we are seeing around the globe. It's no coincidence that as – for the fourth year in a row – the level of overall persecution globally has risen, so has the number of people who've been displaced. The UNHCR states that 34,000 people are displaced each week due to conflict or persecution.

And it's not just in Syria and Iraq that this is happening. Eight out of the 10 countries from which most people are fleeing are on the Open Doors World Watch List. In northern Nigeria, the violence of Boko Haram and other groups has displaced millions – rivalling the numbers in the Middle East – and 8 million people across Africa are starving as a result.

From my visits to Sudan and Kenya, I know that everyday life can be uphill work. Just to put one step in front of the other each day – to find water, food, shelter – is a challenge. But for Christians it brings an extra level of challenge – and, in many cases, danger. For millions of believers in sub-Saharan Africa, their daily walk of faith mirrors Jesus' walk to the cross – very deliberate, and very costly.

Nevertheless, I've met so many brothers and sisters who demonstrate great courage and hope: the quiet dignity that comes from believing that God

*"Watch and pray."*

Mark 26:41

is with them. And that belief is strengthened by the tangible love and encouragement of their global family. "I know God is with me because you are with me," a brother in Sudan told me when I visited last year. "Only God could put it in your heart to leave your place of safety and come to be with us in a war zone."

"Stay here and keep watch with me," Jesus said to his disciples on the night before his death. At that point, He could have walked away from the Garden of Gethsemane and the pursuit of His enemies. But He didn't. Many of our brothers and sisters have opted to stay in their communities, too, so they can 'finish the race and complete the task' (Acts 20:24). You can meet some of these courageous believers at *Standing Strong* in October this year (p.16).

The World Watch List doesn't give us a litany of doom, it gives us a real indicator of where to invest our energies. Even though the scale of persecution is growing, the opportunities are growing, too. By looking out for our brothers and sisters – praying for them, writing to them, providing for their needs and visiting them – we can encourage those for whom it's still Easter Saturday – and give them hope that Sunday is on its way.

Lisa Pearce  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

# WORLD WATCH NEWS

## **SUDAN:** Court finds men guilty in shock decision

**In a shock decision, a judge in Khartoum has found Czech aid worker Petr Jasek, Darfuri graduate Abdulmonem Abdulmawla and church leader Hassan Kodi guilty in their long-running trial.**

Petr (52) was sentenced to 23-and-a-half years for various charges, including spying. He was also fined 100,000 Sudanese pounds (around £12,300) for undertaking NGO work without a permit. Abdulmonem and Hassan were each sentenced to 12 years – their major ‘crime’ was to ‘aid and abet’ Petr in his spying.

Lawyers for the three men plan to lodge appeals against the sentences.

This is a heavy blow to all those involved. Sources told Open Doors the verdict was pronounced in the presence of a great number of Christians attending the proceedings who received the verdict with great shock and sadness. Hassan’s mother was so shocked, she fainted and needed to be ‘escorted from the room’.



FROM LEFT Hassan, Abdulmonem and Petr  
Source: World Watch Monitor, Middle East Concern, Voice of the Martyrs

The men were first arrested in December 2015 alongside another church pastor, Kuwa Shamal, who was thankfully released in January 2017. Throughout their trial, many Open Doors supporters have been praying for them. Thank you!

We know that your prayers and support make a difference. In the cases of Christian mother Meriam Ibrahim (who was sentenced to death in Sudan for apostasy) and Sudanese pastors Yat Michael and Peter Yen, who were found guilty of various charges, all of their sentences were reversed after prayer and pressure was raised for them worldwide.

**You can take action on behalf of these men. Email [advocacy@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:advocacy@opendoorsuk.org) for more information.**

### • PRAY

- Ask God to comfort and sustain Petr, Abdulmonem, Hassan and their families
- For the men and their lawyers as they lodge appeals against the verdict
- That God will bring about justice for His people.

## **ETHIOPIA:** Detained Christians finally acquitted after years of prayer

**Praise God that three evangelical Christians have been acquitted and freed after being falsely accused of burning down an Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) building in the rural community of Gulema Iyesus.**

Tibebu Mekuria, Dawit Jemberu and Belete Tilahun, who were imprisoned in June 2014, were arrested one month after the EOC building burned down, even though witnesses testified that

the men were nowhere near the church at the time of the incident.

The men then endured over two years of flawed court proceedings and delays, during which time they faced hardship in prison. They have now been joyfully reunited with their families.

Thank you to everyone who has supported these Christian brothers – whether by carrying them in your prayers, or by writing

to them through Open Doors’ letter-writing campaign.

### • PRAY

- Praise God that the men have been released!
- Ask God to restore them as they adjust to life outside of prison
- For justice as they appeal against another court ruling that ordered them to pay compensation.

## "No attack can stop us. We shall continue to meet and pray under a tree."

- Kamal Wasantha, leader of the Kithu Sevana prayer centre, Sri Lanka

### **SRI LANKA:** Church vows to continue despite attack by mob

**The leader of a Sri Lankan church destroyed by a 200-strong Buddhist mob has vowed that the church will continue to meet.**

"No attack can stop us," said Kamal Wasantha, leader of the Kithu Sevana prayer centre in Paharaiya. "We shall continue to meet and pray under a tree.

"First they threatened us verbally," Wasantha explained. "Then they came with wooden sticks, iron bars and knives and destroyed everything." People 'begged the attackers not to damage the place of worship', he said.

The church was destroyed in the attack, leaving the Christian community of 15 families and 20 other worshippers with nowhere to meet. But they have no desire for revenge. "[We] shall not attack them in retaliation. Judgment belongs to God," Wasantha said.

Ranjan Palitha, a pastor who

comes every week from Chilaw (more than 55 miles away) to help Wasantha, said that the centre, built more than 15 years ago, 'was never attacked before, only verbal threats. This is the first incident that has the proportions of a real disaster'.

#### **GROWING CHURCH**

One of the factors which led to the attack is the fact that the church is growing rapidly. Also, all its members are converts from other faiths. Wasantha, himself a Buddhist convert, said he cannot abandon his mission just because of the attacks. He added that there are people in the village who do not tolerate Buddhists changing their religion to Christianity.

Sri Lanka is number 45 on the Open Doors 2017 World Watch List. Although it is a secular state, belief in the concept of Buddhist supremacy remains widespread.



#### **PRAY**

- For protection for the church in Paharaiya
- That the perpetrators will be brought to justice
- For Open Doors workers assisting Christian communities who have faced violent attacks with medical assistance, livelihood support and help to rebuild homes and churches.

### **PAKISTAN:** Christian accused of blasphemy out on bail

**After spending more than three years in jail, a Christian accused of blasphemy and facing the death penalty has been granted bail by the Supreme Court in Lahore.**

Adnan Prince has been imprisoned in Lahore's district jail since November 2013 after he was accused by a work colleague of insulting Islam, the Qur'an and Islam's prophet.

On 1 February, the three-man bench, headed by Justice Dost Muhammad Khan, ordered the release of Adnan, a resident of Lahore, against a bail bond worth Rs300,000 (around £2,300).

According to Asma Jahangir, Adnan's lead counsel, the case against her client should have

been decided within two years. This did not take place due to lawyers' strikes and delaying tactics by the prosecution, she said. She added that there were no direct eyewitnesses and that all forensic evidence failed to link the accused. She also said there was a strong possibility of his release and little chance of a decision in the case in the near future.

Similar cases have been known to take as long as seven years to reach trial. Perhaps the most famous on-going 'blasphemy' case is that of Asia Bibi, who was sentenced to death for insulting Islam in 2009 and still remains in jail, awaiting a delayed final appeal hearing by the Supreme Court.

#### **PRAY**

- For God's strength and healing for Adnan, and that the case against him will be dropped
- For justice for Christians imprisoned under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.



Image Source: The Voice Society

Source: World Watch Monitor

# CAMPAIGN UPDATE

## HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST CAMPAIGN BUILDS MOMENTUM

**Hundreds of thousands of believers around the world are uniting to petition, pray for and support persecuted Christians in the Middle East.**

Over 122,000 people have now signed Open Doors' global petition, calling on the United Nations and world leaders to ensure equality, dignity and responsibility for Christians in the Middle East. And the number is increasing! Since recent petition launches in the Middle East, France, Poland and Hong Kong, thousands more have added their voices. Here's just some of the action:

- **Switzerland:** International Human Rights Day saw Swiss Open Doors supporters (pictured above) take part in marches across the country to show solidarity with believers in the Middle East. In Geneva, the petition was read out in English, French and Arabic in front of the UN.
- **Syria:** The Syria Joint Day of Prayer on 18 December brought people together around the world, including multiple denominations in Syria. "This day is beyond all geographical, cultural and civilisational barriers... It will unite hearts and minds with Christ in order to... seek the Lord for peace in our land," said Deacon Bassam Sawan from Homs.
- **Brazil:** Youth activists have taken the petition out onto the streets, asking passers-by to add their voice!

## HELP RAISE ONE MILLION VOICES

We are committed to taking a million signatures to the UN in support of Christians and minorities in Syria and Iraq. But we cannot do it without you! If you haven't already, please **sign the One Million Voices petition** at [www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME) And if you have, please ask others to sign it too – we won't reach a million without your help!

## Your voice rings loud in Parliament

Wonder if any of this makes a difference? Please be assured that it does!

Many Christians face escalating persecution. What's more, persecution is fuelling the global displacement crisis. This was the message heard by over 90 Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum at Open Doors' 2017 World Watch List launch on 11 January. Thank you to the thousands of people who invited their MPs!

Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP hosted the launch and was joined by Pastor Aminu Sule\* from Nigeria, Fr. Daniel from Iraq and Lisa Pearce.

Aminu shared about devastating Boko Haram attacks on his church: "I can't count the number of people I have buried"; while Daniel made a personal plea to the audience: "I ask you, your people, and your governments, on behalf of the Christians of Iraq, please do not forget us!"

Lisa issued a clear call to action and Theresa commented that MPs "believe it's vital that... we do all we can to ensure that Christians around the world are able to practise their faith without persecution."

Thank you to everyone who invited their MPs and prayed for this launch. Your actions have brought the stories of persecuted Christians to the corridors of power. Please continue to build on this by signing the One Million Voices petition and spreading the word!

\*Name changed for security reasons



TOP Aminu at the parliament launch

ABOVE Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP and Lisa Pearce, Open Doors UK & I CEO



## Nigeria: Bringing hope back to life

It can be easy to look at the situation in Nigeria and the wider region and think that it's hopeless. Boko Haram, the militant Islamist group that has terrorised northern Nigeria for years, has forced an estimated 2.1 million people to flee their homes, leading to a humanitarian crisis.

Displaced Christians often face discrimination from their local governments or other organisations when it comes to aid distribution, meaning that they are not only far from home, but refused access to the basic resources they need to survive.

And yet, even in the midst of the most dire of circumstances, our brothers and sisters in Nigeria are seeing God at work. With the help of our supporters, Open Doors partners are stepping up their response to the growing crisis, and God is answering the prayers of thousands of families.

### 'GOD IS HEARING'

"I awoke one night and saw that the streets were brightly lit by the many churches that had been set ablaze. In the weeks that followed, we heard gun shots

every night. It felt like war. The following morning I saw corpses on the streets."

This was Rebecca's terrifying experience in 2009, as Boko Haram attacks began on Maiduguri, the city where she lived in Borno State in the north east corner of Nigeria.

Eight years on, while Boko Haram have been pushed back by the Nigerian army in some areas, their attacks on Christians and all who refuse to conform to their radical brand of Islam continue. In August 2016, Boko Haram's new leader Abu Musab al-Barnawi vowed to eradicate Christianity in Nigeria. He said that militants will blow up 'every church that we are able to reach... killing all of those who we find from the citizens of the cross'. The group have killed thousands of people, leaving many desperate widows and orphans behind, and forcing an estimated 2 million people to flee their homes.

Rebecca and her family fled Maiduguri and went to their home village of Gavva, but later returned to Maiduguri in 2011. At a time when many international organisations were evacuating the area, and Maiduguri was effectively cut off from the outside world, Rebecca decided she needed to help those who were in even greater need than her. "We were all refugees at that time and we all needed help, but I saw that many widows needed more help than I did," Rebecca says.

With financial support from a friend who lived abroad, Rebecca began distributing food and paying for medical care for some of the widows she knew. Her work soon grew, and when Open Doors workers heard about what she was doing, they began to provide her with financial support too. Today she has a team of volunteers who care for 2,000 widows, build simple housing and provide school fees for orphans. "Now with the aid of Open Doors I can give more help to the widows and orphans," she says.

"Many women ended up in IDP



"With the aid of Open Doors I can give more help to the widows and orphans."

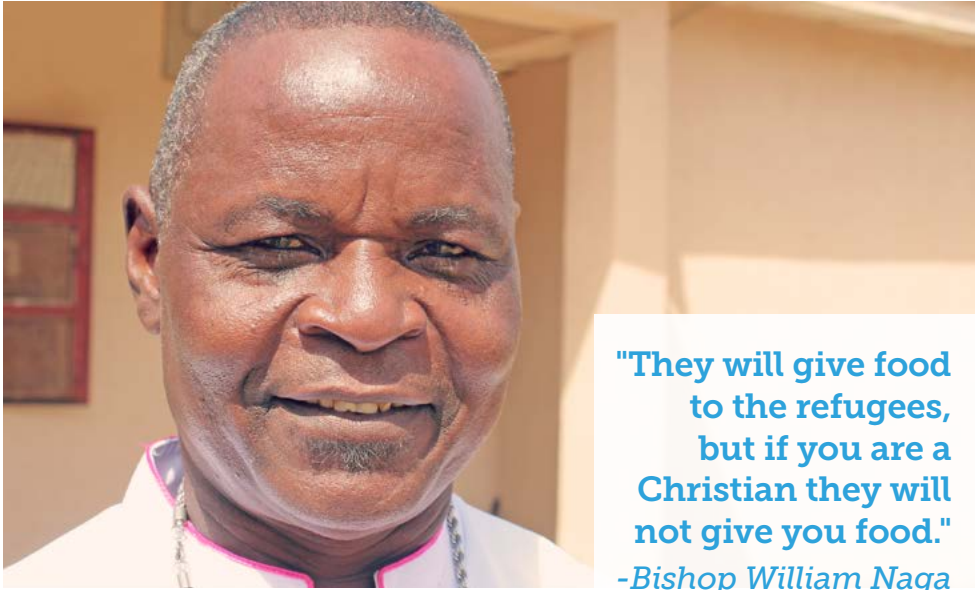
- Rebecca

(internally displaced people) camps, alone with their children. They own nothing and do not have any kind of job. Most of them do not have any form of education. That's why I wanted to help. I felt the need to stand with these women who sometimes fought bitterly to survive."

One of the widows that Rebecca supports is Miriam, a mother of four whose husband was murdered by Boko Haram. "It is only thanks to the support Rebecca gives that we are still surviving," Miriam says. "I pray with my children every morning to ask God to help us. So far we have had something to eat most days. I can feed my children thanks to this help I receive."

Rebecca says, "God is hearing. Sometimes when a widow comes to me with a specific need, I can help because of the support I get from others. This is God who is hearing. Also with school fees for some of our orphans: we prayed about it





**"They will give food to the refugees, but if you are a Christian they will not give you food."**  
*-Bishop William Naga*

and money came, and now the orphans go to school. All this is God answering prayers."

#### **FAITH THAT CAN'T BE TAKEN AWAY**

Thanks to Rebecca's excellent network of contacts and local knowledge, she was able to help Open Doors workers provide food for thousands of displaced Christians in her region who are facing discrimination when it comes to aid distribution.

Bishop William Naga was forced to flee his home in Gwoza, the city Boko Haram declared the capital of their 'caliphate' (Islamic State) in 2014. He explains, "The governor did his best when the Christians had to flee in 2014 and 2015. But when the care of the camps was handed over to other organisations, the discrimination started. They will give food to the refugees, but if you are a Christian they will not give you food. They will openly tell you that the relief is not for Christians."

Displaced Christians started to form their own, informal camps, when they no longer felt welcome in the main camps. However, without essential supplies, many were left in dire circumstances – some were forced to eat leaves to survive.

But thanks to the prayers and generosity of our supporters, Open Doors was able to provide vital aid to 3,000 families – around 15,000 people. Each family was given enough food to last several months, as well as blankets and cash to buy oil or soap.

Mary Charles, one believer who received this support, says, "We had to flee Boko Haram because they didn't allow us to go to our farm. We had no drinking water and we didn't have anything to eat. But I take courage from the Bible. It is written that there is a time when we will suffer, but that

the suffering will end by the grace of God. We have to endure. I thank God for this food aid and I thank the people who brought it. We now have food that we can give to our children."

Bishop Naga says, "Churches have been burned down. Our livelihood has been taken away from us. But there is one thing that has not been taken away: our faith in Christ Jesus."

#### **'MAKE SURE THAT THE EXTREMISTS FAIL'**

In Adamawa state, just below Borno state, some displaced families have begun to return to their homes as the Nigerian army have pushed back Boko Haram.

Returning is difficult. It's not always safe, as Boko Haram still carry out sporadic attacks, even if they can no longer take and hold ground in the same way. The militants destroyed not only homes, but entire communities – they burned churches, schools, libraries and health centres, and polluted wells by dumping corpses in them. Farms have been deserted, meaning it will take time before people will be able

## Sub-Saharan displacement crisis



Source: UNHCR, Open Doors

- There are 18.4 million displaced people in sub-Saharan Africa – that’s almost 30 per cent of the global total
- Sub-Saharan Africa hosts 26% of the world’s refugees – more than any other region in the world
- Christians have been displaced by violent persecution in Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Kenya, Central African Republic and Cameroon
- Over 2 million people in Nigeria have been displaced by Boko Haram attacks – including around 1.3 million Christians
- In November 2016, the UN accused Boko Haram of causing Africa’s most urgent emergency, with 14 million people needing humanitarian aid and hundreds of thousands in danger from starvation.

to produce their own food again.

However, Isaac\*, an Open Doors worker who is providing support to the returning Christians, writes, “The desperation seems to be matched by determination. These Christians refuse to let the challenges stop them from taking back their homes.

“They are rebuilding houses with materials like corn stalks, wood and grasses or mud. It is a far cry from the more permanent structures Boko Haram destroyed, but it is a roof over their heads that offers protection against the elements.

“Church activities have resumed despite the fact that there is very little left of their buildings. It was a privilege to spend time in prayer with men in a small church recently rebuilt. But there are many congregations that don’t have the resources and have to make other plans. They gather under trees, or use whatever’s left of their buildings. In one place I walked around a church that was little more than a skeleton, with no roof and no walls. But believers placed anything remotely resembling seating on the ground so that they could continue services without having to sit in the dirt.

“As far as I went, I witnessed Christians working hard to reclaim their homes. They expressed a desire to respond in faith and trust God for His timely provision in their daily needs, in comfort and in grace to face this new phase of their lives. They need our prayer and support as they make sure that the extremists fail in their effort to remove them permanently from this area.”

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### **“The desperation seems to be matched by determination”**

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The support and prayers of people like you have enabled Open Doors workers to provide vital relief aid to 2,000 people in communities like these in Adamawa state, as well as looking at how to best support these returning families long term. The leader of our Nigeria team says, “The next few months of mapping the circumstances of returnees and determining the most pressing needs for the short and long term are very important for us. We are careful to avoid duplicating the work done by others, including the government, but rather seek to compliment those efforts.

“The situation of returnees is very fluid, so we need a lot of prayer for wisdom. We really appreciate your prayer for our team on the ground.”

# Be an answer to prayer for our church family in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa

Open Doors workers recently met Mamadou, a believer who was displaced by Boko Haram, to provide him with food aid. He told us, "There are 12 in our house. We went to bed last night not knowing what we'll eat today. I got down on my knees and prayed to God and asked Him to help me out. In the morning there was a knock on my door. It was the pastor who told me you had come here with some food and that I had to come to church to receive it.

"I thought it would be something I could easily carry. But look here, it is a bag of rice, a bag of millet, sugar, oil, and soap... Look at me! All this food! I am a king! I tell you, it feels as if God loves me and me alone!"

It's only thanks to the prayers and generosity of Open Doors supporters that we had anything to give Mamadou. Your support is truly an answer to prayer for believers like him.

But the needs in the region are increasing – and not just in Nigeria. Mamadou lives on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, where thousands of believers have also been displaced by Boko Haram. In Kenya and Somalia, the militant Islamist group al-Shabaab are forcing Christians to flee. In Sudan



*Mamadou receiving food aid from Open Doors*

and Eritrea, the government targets Christians. The 2017 World Watch List shows that violent persecution is rising across sub-Saharan Africa, with Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Nigeria and Kenya all in the top 20.

Open Doors workers and partners are stepping up their response to the crisis in the region, working to provide immediate relief and long-term support to the many believers who have been displaced. But this is only possible with your help.

## Give to bring hope back to life in sub-Saharan Africa

- **Every £30** can provide two days of trauma care training for a church leader or lay leader in sub-Saharan Africa, so they can help others begin to recover from their experiences of persecution.
- **Every £60** can provide food aid to a family in the region for six weeks, to help them simply survive.

## Pray for forgiveness and strength

Bishop Naga says, "Christians all over the world, we yearn for their prayers. Pray for God to give us hearts to forgive and to love our Muslim brothers. Pray for us Christians to seek the face of God to ask for strength to start our lives afresh. Pray that we will not give up our faith, but that we will continue in our faith dynamically, strongly, vibrant and bold."

Please also pray for provision for our church family in the region, and for protection and wisdom for our workers and local partners.

## Wake up your church

Here in the UK and Ireland, many people simply don't know about the extreme persecution being faced by our church family in Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa and around the world. But you can change that by sharing the World Watch List with your church or small group, and help those you know to wake up to extreme persecution. Order our free World Watch List church pack to help you get started – call **01993 460015** or visit **[www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)**.





## Planting the seeds of faith in East Africa

**It is hard to be a farmer in the Muslim-majority regions of East Africa. It is hard to be a Christian as well. But thanks to the gifts and prayers of longterm Open Doors supporters in the UK and Ireland, including thousands of Secret Child sponsors, many Christians are learning how to support their families, increase their independence and maintain their dignity.**

In these predominantly rural, subsistence farming communities, Christians struggle with poverty and exclusion. Violence and persecution have left many widows and orphans, and followers of Jesus have to stay under the radar. But despite the danger and the hardship, beneath the surface, change is growing. With God's help and your support, these believers are planting the seeds of faith, and beginning to see a harvest.

### **'MANY ARE SECRETLY COMING TO FAITH'**

In a small border town, surrounded by beautiful mountains, Ruth\* and Fabian\* have opened a school. This was once a predominantly Christian area, but today the town is dominated by mosques and minarets. Indeed, to tell you the name of this place would put the Christians there in peril.

Ruth and Fabian came to this town from the nation's capital, in response to a call from God to bring the gospel to rural communities.

"We learned that many children were not in school because their parents couldn't afford it," says Fabian. "We desperately wanted to help but had

no resources." The couple attended an Open Doors training course, and Open Doors gave them some money so they could buy land and build a school.

Today they have 32 pupils, eight of whom are orphans. One of them – a six-year-old boy with learning difficulties – was previously forced to work on a farm. They also run a growing church. "Many are secretly coming to faith," Fabian explains.

"We have gone through a lot of challenges," says Ruth, "but we have learned that the Lord is faithful to His promise to never leave or forsake us. He is faithful to bring it to accomplishment."

### **'WE SEE GOD'S HAND'**

In many areas of persecution, Christians without skills or an education are vulnerable to exploitation and pressure to deny their faith. Open Doors' Social and Economic Development (SED) programme not only provides persecuted believers with crucial literacy, numeracy and work skills, it also gives them self-sufficiency, dignity and hope.

Wilson\* was a struggling alcoholic, with a string of failed relationships, scraping a living as a casual labourer. Then he became a Christian and met Doreen\* at a small church for believers from Muslim backgrounds. Doreen had been ostracised by her community for converting to Christianity. She and Wilson fell in love and, helped by an Open Doors SED course, they started to save a little.

Open Doors helped Wilson to start farming tomatoes and eggplant. In 2015 he expanded into planting ginger and garlic. Soon Doreen and



LEFT With Open Doors' support, Ruth and Fabian started a school where 32 pupils receive quality education  
 ABOVE 1. Wilson showing produce from his farm 2. The group Matthew started is bringing hope to the wider community  
 3. Matthew's wife at work on the farm 4. Matthew has started keeping bees.

Wilson were able to afford to get married.

"We eat from the land and see God's hand. The community that knew me as a drunk now sees the changes and understands that they came because of Christ and Him alone," Wilson says.

### FARMING GOD'S WAY

Growing up as a Muslim, Matthew\* made the radical decision to follow Christ. But he had some misguided ideas. "I thought being a Christian meant only praying and worshipping God in church," he says. He gave up his business. "My family suffered. We hardly ever ate more than one meal a day."

Then Matthew attended an Open Doors course. "I understood that worshipping God also means working and helping the poor and the weak... I stopped dividing life into sacred and secular."

He returned home, rolled up his sleeves and started working. "We started developing a culture of saving. I also went to the local church and started sharing what I learned."

Matthew started an Open Doors Self Help Group – small groups of people who decide to save together and pool their savings. After six months, they choose how to use the money they have saved to benefit each other. Often these groups become village saving and loans associations that allow members to borrow money to help them start or grow a business.

"Today we have eleven members in three

groups," says Matthew, "and as a result of the income generated and the tithes and offerings coming in, we have been able to appoint a full-time pastor and two evangelists."

Matthew was also helped by an Open Doors seminar called 'Farming God's Way', which brings together biblical principles, management skills and modern farming practices to help subsistence farmers escape poverty.

"With the methods we learned, we produced three times more maize than usual," says Matthew. "Now my food stores are full, and my family eats nutritious meals."

He has bought some bee hives, which produce 68 kilos of honey a year, and intends to start cattle breeding and milk production. Matthew's farm has become a model for others to follow and has even appeared on TV!

"On that day we were able to tell everyone that we gained our understanding from the Bible.

"We are very thankful for your support. Thanks to you, my family benefitted, my church benefitted and my larger community benefitted," Matthew concluded.

### ▶ See for yourself

On our website, you can see a video featuring Matthew, Wilson, Doreen and others from this region. Go to [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)

\* Name changed for security reasons

# PILGRIMAGE



*Be a pilgrim for the persecuted*

**A personal challenge. An opportunity to spend more time with God. An adventure that will deepen your understanding of the persecuted church – what could a pilgrimage mean for you?**

This year, we're inviting you to follow in the footsteps of many thousands of Christians over the centuries on a prayerful journey from Winchester to Canterbury. The Open Doors pilgrimage 2017 is an opportunity to raise support for our persecuted brothers and sisters, as well as open our hearts to the possibility of transformation along the way.

Curious? We spoke to Kathy Havell, Challenge Events Coordinator – and our first Pilgrim – to find out what a pilgrimage for the persecuted church is all about.

**So Kathy, what's the purpose of a pilgrimage?**

Traditionally, a pilgrimage is a meaningful journey to a sacred place. A pilgrimage enables us to step out of our usual routines, and to seek a time of quiet and reflection. It gives us the chance to 'be' in the present and both pray and listen to God as we journey. We can reconnect with our cultural heritage and the beauty of God's creation.

**Is there a particular story you will be reflecting on?**

I have been hearing stories of people forced out of their homes because of their faith, such as those fleeing extremism in northern Nigeria and

believers driven out of their villages in India and Sri Lanka. One of the things that struck me was that those who are persecuted are often forced to leave with few possessions and walk many miles to a place of safety. I think this Pilgrimage will help me to reflect on their turmoil, but also their steadfast determination, courage and hope. A verse that sprang to mind was Jeremiah 6:16:



*This is what the LORD says:*

*"Stand at the crossroads and look;  
ask for the ancient paths,  
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,  
and you will find rest for your souls."*

**Why go on a pilgrimage for Open Doors?**

- To set aside time for God, and 'walk with' your persecuted family
- To pray for the persecuted church and its needs
- To raise money which will practically support your persecuted brothers and sisters
- To be strengthened in your faith and understanding
- For the joy and challenge of pilgrimage

**Where does the pilgrimage take place?**

The Pilgrim's Way is an ancient journey from Winchester Cathedral to Canterbury Cathedral,

passing through beautiful countryside, towns and villages along the North Downs. Many of the churches on the route welcome pilgrims, providing opportunities for rest, prayer and conversation. It's a journey of approximately 133 miles.

### How long does it take?

Many people can cover the distance comfortably in 12 or 13 days. So you could take a two-week holiday and complete the challenge in one go. We know that's not possible for everyone, so other options include walking the distance at weekends over a longer period, or completing the journey as a relay with other members of your church. It's about finding a way that works for your circumstances.

### Is this a challenge that anyone can take on?

Well, I would say that if I can do it, anyone can! I'll be walking the Pilgrim's Way with a team from Open Doors in March. We'll post on our Facebook page so you can keep up with our journey and see how we get on, what we learn etc. I am looking forward to the physical challenge, but also spending an extended time with God in prayer. The needs of our persecuted brothers and sisters are great – we need to pray for them.

### Do I need to raise a certain amount of money to take part?

The aim of this challenge is to raise both prayer and practical support for our persecuted family. There is no minimum amount you need to raise, but setting a target really helps. We've produced a *Pilgrimage* pack containing lots of fundraising ideas, and we are here to help if you want to discuss any of these ideas or have further questions.

### How can I get involved?

First, pray! Talk to others about it. You can contact Challenge Events at Open Doors on **01993 460015** for a chat about your Pilgrimage. If you'd like to know more, we can send you our *Pilgrimage* pack.

### What's in the *Pilgrimage* pack and how can I get hold of one?

Your pack includes: useful information that you'll need to plan your journey, fundraising ideas to help you raise support and a series of daily reflections to help you pray and deepen your understanding of the persecuted church and to encourage you on your journey.

Packs will be available in April and you can call **01993 460015** to order yours.



## GOING THE EXTRA-ORDINARY MILE

Walking, running, cycling... there are no limits to the ways you can raise funds for the persecuted church. Here are a few examples to inspire you.

### Northern Ireland to Turkey cycle

Stephen Kyle is a passionate supporter of the persecuted church – so much so, that on 19 April he'll begin an epic 3,000-mile bike ride from Northern Ireland to Turkey. Please support Stephen by donating £5 to get him a mile further on his journey – go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/challenge](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/challenge). You can also follow Stephen's progress on our Facebook page.



### Marathon Des Sables

Six marathons in six days. Sound tough? Try running all of them in the Moroccan Sahara! Jonathan Bryson will be doing just that in the world's toughest footrace starting on 7 April. Jonathan wants to do something extreme to raise support for those Christians living under extreme persecution. You can support him by going to [www.opendoorsuk.org/challenge](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/challenge).

### READY FOR YOUR OWN EXTREME ADVENTURE?

Set yourself the challenge of a lifetime! Join the Open Doors Muskathlon 2017. Run, walk or cycle across extreme terrain – raising money and meeting your persecuted family on the way. This year we have a few spaces left for the Muskathlon in Lebanon (13-20 May) or Sri Lanka (7-14 October.) Your faith will never be the same again. Find out more and read last year's Muskathlon blog at [www.opendoorsuk.org/muskathlon](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/muskathlon).

YOU ARE INVITED TO  
**STANDING  
STRONG**  
OPEN DOORS CELEBRATION 2017  
BIRMINGHAM : 14 OCTOBER | BELFAST : 21 OCTOBER

**Want to be part of something amazing this year? Join us for *Standing Strong*, a unique event that's jam-packed with worship, prayer, inspiration and challenge. This one-day celebration will bring you hot news direct from the persecuted church in the Middle East, Nigeria and India, as well as a global perspective on the work of Open Doors.**

The increase in violent persecution has caused India to rise to number 15 on the Open Doors World Watch List which is why Open Doors is prioritising support for believers in India this year and is thrilled to welcome Pastor Sandeep Kumar as one of our speakers at *Standing Strong*.

Pastor Sandeep has an in-depth understanding of the issues for Christian communities in India, having been a partner of Open Doors for many years. He is in demand far and wide as a preacher, and has a wealth of experience in serving the needs of the persecuted church.

Sandeep is ideally placed to help supporters at *Standing Strong* grasp the joys and sorrows of those who are struggling with persecution, to give

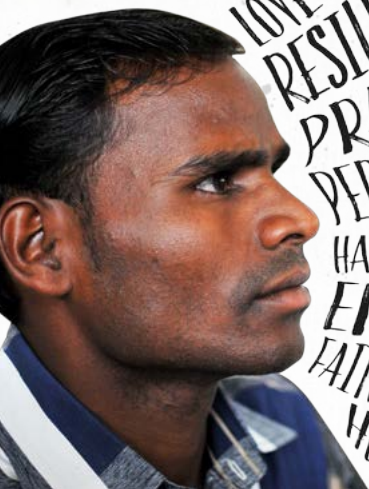
an authoritative voice on what our partners are doing to support them, and to share how we can help our persecuted family in India to stand strong.

"I got three messages today," he says, "Three believers were beaten up severely in one village; two believers were severely beaten up by a mob and now they are in hospital; one disabled pastor was severely beaten up by a mob of 250 people and they dragged him to the police station. And

**Stop press!  
We've just had confirmation that our international speaker from Africa will be a Nigerian pastor with first-hand experience of persecution. More details to come, so watch this space!**







LOVE  
RESILIENCE  
PRAYER  
PERSISTENCE  
HARD-PRESSED  
ENDURING  
FAITHFULNESS  
HOPE

**“We felt so humbled as we listened to the different speakers, but so encouraged to feel that we were part of their story through our prayers and support.”**

– attendee at  
*The Greatest Adventure,*  
Open Doors’ 2015  
Celebration

right now they are launching a file against him to say that he is forcibly converting the people. So this is how they are treating pastors in India.”

**So what does ‘standing strong’ mean for persecuted Christians in India?**

“The more I meet people who are going through suffering and pain, the more I see their faith. It is simple faith in Jesus Christ, not because they’ve got material blessings, but because they have received him as their personal saviour. They are not there because the pastor or someone has bribed them or given them anything, but because of the love of Christ. And that faith in Christ has held them and sustained them through their pain and suffering.

“Looking at the current scenario, the way Hindu extremism is growing in India, it has not

come to its peak yet. Maybe in five or ten years it will come to its peak. And we don’t know, but its powers may grow, and persecution will grow as a result of it. But whatever persecution may come, the church is growing very fast and needs to be strengthened from within. And that is something that as members of the body of Christ we need to do: strengthen the church from within. We need to come together to strengthen the church so that the love of Christ can flow from it, whatever persecution might come, because we also need to respond with the love of Christ to our Hindu brothers and sisters.”

**Please pray** for wisdom for Sandeep in the challenges and responsibilities of his work. “In these dark situations,” he says, “believers need to find the sunshine of Jesus.”

**BOOK TODAY FOR *STANDING STRONG!***

**BIRMINGHAM**

International Convention Centre  
9am–5pm

Adult £18  
(after 30 June £24)

**BELFAST**

Assembly Buildings Conference Centre  
9.30am–4pm

Adult £15  
(after 30 June £20)

**Spaces are limited, so book now to ensure your place for this very special event.**

Earlybird tickets for all prices apply before 30 June – go to [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org) for details.

Other discounts apply for youth, groups and partner churches.

All tickets include lunch and refreshments.

# 10 ERITREA



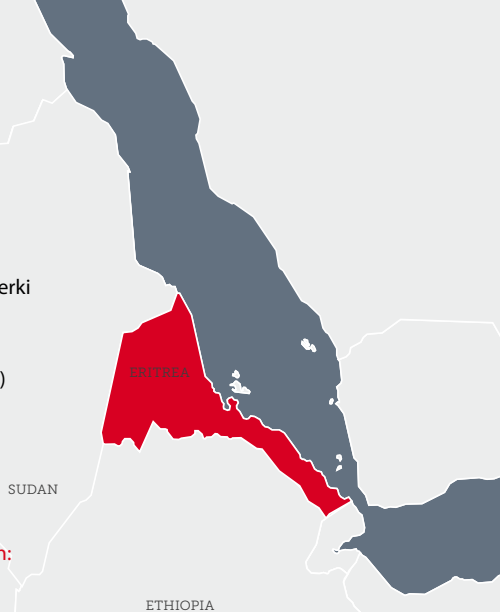
**Leader:**  
President Isaias Afewerki

**Population:**  
5.5 million  
(2.7 million Christians)

**Main religion:**  
Islam/Christianity

**Government:**  
One-party state

**Source of persecution:**  
Dictatorial paranoia/  
Islamic extremism



## NO FREEDOM. NO SAFETY.

There is no safe place in Eritrea. Under President Afewerki's authoritarian regime, Christians are severely persecuted. Huge numbers of refugees – as many as 47,025 in 2015 alone\* – have been risking their lives to flee to Europe.

Referred to as the 'North Korea' of Africa, for the last decade Eritrea has consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous African countries for Christians to live in.

Although reports of violence decreased during 2016 (causing Eritrea to fall seven places on the Open Doors World Watch List to number

ten), at least three believers died in the country's harsh prisons.

Viewed as 'agents of the West', Christians not belonging to state-authorised churches face imprisonment, arrest, abduction, even torture.

The government has been accused of supporting the rise and spread of regional Islamist extremist groups – like neighbouring Somalia's al-Shabaab – who are known to target and kill Christians.

Muslims, who make up around 50 per cent of Eritreans, are showing increasing tendencies towards radicalism and often pressurise Christian converts in family and community life.

## ABERASH'S STORY: HOW PRISON TURNED INTO A BLESSING

Aberash looked into the eyes of a nearby prisoner. In that moment they spoke – not through words, but through their expressions.

This silent, 30-minute walk in the sunshine was the highlight of the week for inmates of the crowded prison in Eritrea. For Aberash, this was a chance to meet new people, to 'converse' and share their suffering. It was a source of relief in an otherwise hostile environment.

### ABERASH ARRESTED

Two years earlier, heavily armed guards stormed Aberash's home. A neighbour had informed the authorities that the young Christian was holding illegal gatherings, and, indeed, one such gathering – a prayer meeting – was taking place

at the time of the raid. They were all arrested. For eight months, the believers languished in cramped, unhygienic cells with drunkards, hardcore criminals and the insane.

Then the questioning began.

"As the group leader, they isolated me and accused me of being a dangerous anti-government agent," Aberash recalls. One day, when he refused to reveal information about other Christian leaders, the guards chained Aberash's legs together for days. He was beaten many times. Under intense pressure, Aberash suffered a mild stroke that left him partially paralysed.

"After two years I had fallen into deep depression," he says. "I was very angry with God and questioned Him. I asked, 'Why am I in here? I was doing good things for you. Why did you let this happen to me?'"



That was very encouraging and I was surprised that outsiders cared about us."

### TRANSFORMATION... AND FREEDOM

Over time, the prison officials noticed a change in Aberash. "We (believers) shared the food our families brought with the guards," he explains. "This opened opportunities for conversation and I found myself counselling many, praying with them and even sharing the gospel. We became like brothers and they started seeing Christians differently."

Aberash even lost the desire to leave prison. But then, after three years, the unexpected news came that he would be released. With shouts of joy, Aberash celebrated with his fellow inmates.

Outside of prison, it took him time to adjust to life. Now, though, Aberash has begun to recover – both emotionally and financially.

"I feel very lucky to have been arrested because it transformed me," says Aberash. "I saw it as a big blessing to show Christ's love and to share the gospel with people I would never have met otherwise: thugs, murderers, poor people, rich people, politicians, all kinds of people, because there is equality in prison!"

**Open Doors has been strengthening believers in Eritrea through the local church by raising awareness and prayer, encouraging positive engagement on behalf of the church, and offering discipleship support and practical assistance to persecuted Christians.**

### ENCOURAGEMENT

But soon Aberash began to hear from God. He learned that God wanted him to stop fighting against his imprisonment. "I needed patience because He has His own ways and His own timing," says Aberash. "This is when He taught me to be quiet, to be patient and to have hope in Christ."

And hope came. One day, pages from the Bible were smuggled into the prison. "Those Bible pages were better than gold!" he says. "It became food

**"Those Bible pages were better than gold!"**

that kept our souls alive and our minds steady."

Aberash and other believers secretly listened to a Christian radio station which was 'like manna from Heaven.' "I also received support in the form of money and clothes from Christians abroad.

### • PRAY

- Thank God for the witness of Aberash: his strength, faith and transformation
- Ask God to encourage and sustain imprisoned Eritrean believers
- That the Good News would spread throughout Eritrea.

### NEW 2017 WORLD WATCH CHURCH PACK OUT NOW!

For 25 years, Open Doors has been producing the World Watch List, which ranks the countries where Christians face the severest persecution.

You can help your church explore the 50 countries where faith costs the most by ordering your free copy of the *Open Doors 2017 World Watch Church Pack* today! The pack includes a copy of the *World Watch Guide*, a poster-sized *World Watch Map*, and Youth resources.

Fill in the Magazine response form or visit [www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution) where you can also download inspiring films.



\* Figure recorded by the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea

# How the gift of a yellow dress helped to bring hope back to life for Miriam



**This is Miriam, a widow from Nigeria, in a new yellow dress. New clothes are a luxury she hasn't enjoyed for years.**

When Miriam's husband was killed by Boko Haram militants, she was left to care for her children alone, and forced to flee her home. She is just one of many Christians across sub-Saharan Africa who have been targeted by extremists - thousands of believers have been displaced and traumatised. They also face discrimination from local governments and those distributing aid.

But Miriam says, "I pray with my children every morning to ask God to help us."

Rebecca, an Open Doors partner, is part of the answer to those prayers. Her team of volunteers support 2,000 widows, including Miriam, with vital aid such as food, medical care – and new clothes.

"It is only thanks to the support Rebecca gives me that we are surviving," Miriam says. And it is only thanks to your prayers and support that our partners like Rebecca can help.

Be an answer to prayer for a believer in sub-Saharan Africa with a gift to provide immediate relief and new life.

**Every £30 can provide two days of trauma care training for a church leader or lay leader to help them bring healing to others.**

**Every £60 can provide food aid to a family in the region for six weeks, to help them simply survive.**

Give and pray today. Use the enclosed response form, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org) or call our Inspire team on **01993 460015** to give a gift or to order resources to share with your church.



**OpenDoors**

60 years of serving persecuted Christians