

# OpenDoors

magazine

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

January 2017



## INSIDE:

### • NORTH KOREA

Risking it all

### • IRAQ

Out of the ashes

### • FAST FOOD

Get fed by the faith of the persecuted church



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## Letter from Lisa: Stand

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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**At the end of a busy year, I love those few days after Christmas when everything goes quiet and time seems to stand still. It gives a welcome chance to stop and reflect with thankfulness on what the Lord has enabled in the year just passed, and to seek Him for the year ahead.**

The world has changed in many ways in 2016, with political and social upheaval in our own nation, as well as in the rest of the world. It has certainly changed for many of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have faced fresh losses as well as joys this year. There's no doubt that the work is getting harder, with Open Doors staff and partners taking ever greater risks.

In this context the continued faithfulness of Open Doors supporters makes me so thankful and, more importantly, gives our brothers and sisters courage to face the future. From the visits I make, the reports I read, I can see that everything done on their behalf is making a difference. It's an amazing thought, but as you sit in your home praying, sending an email, or writing a cheque, a believer in another part of the world can be strengthened to survive and stand strong!

More amazing still is the knowledge that in North Korea, for many of the churches that we are helping, Open Doors is their sole connection to the outside world. As the most hostile place on earth for a Christian to live – it's been at number 1 on the Open Doors World Watch List for the last 14 years – that is a huge privilege and responsibility. Please be encouraged and

*"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."*

1 Corinthians 15:58

continue to plant seeds of hope and courage for our persecuted family in 2017.

Open Doors' advocacy work is bearing fruit year on year. If you haven't already, please invite your MP to the launch of the 2017 Open Doors World Watch List on 11 January and sign the campaign petition, encouraging church and friends to do the same!

You do so much to support your family who are suffering so we want to encourage you and celebrate with you along the way. We'd really love to see you and your church at Standing Strong, our 2017 Open Doors celebration, on 14 October. To that end, my prayer is that as God's people we will be refreshed and renewed with vision and strength for the days ahead: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6: 9).

*Lisa*

Lisa Pearce  
CEO, Open Doors UK&I



# WORLD WATCH NEWS

## INDIA: Christian woman stripped and murdered

**In a climate of growing violence against Christians in India, a Christian woman has been stripped naked, beaten to death, and had her body set on fire by people from her village.**

Samari Kasabi (55) was from the village of Dokaway, District Sukma, Chhattisgarh. Her son Sukura (35) and his family were at church about 8 miles from their village when the attack took place on 16 October. The villagers had initially been looking for Sukura, and attacked Samari when they discovered he was not there.

Sukura's family are the only Christians in their village. Earlier in 2016, Sukura's family were abducted by Naxalites, a Communist guerrilla group, after the villagers told the militants that Sukura's family were causing trouble. The Naxalites

released them after three days when they realised that they were only praying for the sick and needy.

Three Open Doors volunteers visited Sukura after the incident. Sukura's village is very remote and there is no network coverage, so mobile phones do not work in the area. When they spoke to Sukura he was very distressed. He said, "Since the day I came to faith no Christian leader from any place has visited us. This is the first time someone has come and prayed for us. Thank you so much."



*Sukura, with his wife and two children*

### • PRAY

- For God's comfort for Sukura and his family
- For protection for Christians in central India, where violent persecution is on the rise.

## CUBA: Castro's death not likely to change much for Christians

**For decades, the church in Cuba has experienced persecution and oppression. Now the architect of much of that oppression, Fidel Castro, has died aged 90. Ever since Castro took power, political rights and civil liberties have to a large extent been restricted. So what does his death mean for the church in Cuba?**

"In the short run not much is expected to change," says an Open Doors analyst. "Cuba has been led by Raúl Castro, Fidel's brother, since 2008, who essentially continued his policies, and this is not likely to change in the foreseeable future."

However, a lot depends on the foreign policy priorities of the new US President. There are also the 2018 presidential elections in Cuba, which are not expected to be free,

but which could nevertheless lead to change.

"The improved relations between the USA and Cuba raised hopes that Cuban churches would be granted more freedom," says the Open Doors analyst. "However, after one year, the situation for Cuban churches remains unchanged. Outspoken Christian leaders continue to face intimidation, while the Cuban regime is still firmly in place, benefitting from increased legitimacy due to its release from international isolation and the economic benefits of increased tourism."

The authorities remain suspicious of the church. For example, in the aftermath of hurricane Matthew, Open Doors partners have been providing

humanitarian aid through local churches. Recently, we received reports that the Cuban authorities have ordered some churches to hand over all donated goods to the government, as they consider the state to be responsible for the material needs of the people. Pastors engaging in relief work are under constant monitoring by the police.

### • PRAY

- For change in Cuba and a relaxing of restrictions on freedom to worship
- For pastors in Cuba who are often intimidated and monitored
- That Christians in Cuba will still be able to spread the good news.

**"This is the first time someone has come and prayed for us. Thank you so much."**

- Sukura, Indian Christian whose mother was beaten to death

## PAKISTAN: Five sentenced to death for burning couple alive

**An Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore has sentenced five men to death for the murder of a Christian couple who were burned alive in the kiln where they worked.**

A mob of about 600 people beat to near-death Shahzad Masih (26) and his five-months-pregnant wife Shama Bibi (24) for 'blasphemy' in November 2014. The couple were then thrown into a large kiln where they worked as bonded labourers.

Shama had burnt an amulet containing paper with passages from the Quran written on it – she was illiterate and didn't know what the papers said. When the remains were found, a call went out from the loudspeaker of a mosque saying

that she had desecrated the Quran.

National outrage over their deaths saw the case moved to the Anti-Terrorism Court and the State become the prosecution claimant.

More than 50 people were originally charged under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act. "Although several of the suspects were acquitted after statements by Shahzad's brothers, still five have received the punishment of death, which is an extraordinary step by the court," said Riaz Anjum from the Voice Society, which represented the murdered woman's father, Mukhtar Masih, in court.

Mehdi Khan, Riaz Kambo, Irfan Shakoor, Muhammad Hanif and Hafiz

Ishtiaq were convicted of inciting violence and of throwing the couple into the kiln, and sentenced to death on 23 November. They also received a fine of Rs 200,000 (approx. £1,500) each. Another eight men were jailed for two years and fined.

Christians experience more violence in Pakistan than almost anywhere else, a trend which looks set to continue.

### • PRAY

- For comfort and healing for Shahzad and Shama's family, especially their five children
- That the men who killed Shahzad and Shama would come to know Jesus.

## INDONESIA: 100,000 hardliners protest against Christian governor in blasphemy case

**Indonesia's only Christian Governor is to be tried for blasphemy after around 100,000 Muslim radicals took to the streets and demanded he be prosecuted.**

Basuki Cahaya Purnama, also known as Ahok, has been accused of 'desecrating' the Quran after he said in a speech that Islamic groups who were using a verse from the Quran to discourage support for him were deceiving voters. The verse is interpreted by some as prohibiting Muslims from living under the leadership of a non-Muslim. Islamic groups then accused him of criticising the Quran.

Despite a public apology, Ahok will now stand trial.

Initially, the rally of around 100,000 Muslim radicals from across Indonesia was peaceful, even though they were calling for Ahok

to be prosecuted for blasphemy. Later, though, it turned violent and one protestor died.

President Joko Widodo, who inaugurated Ahok as governor, said: "I deeply regret the [protest's] chaos later in the evening. Political actors are taking advantage of the situation."

Political opponents of Ahok have been stirring religious unrest against Ahok to damage his rising popularity and deter his candidacies for Jakarta's 2017 governorship elections, which take place this February.

"While persecution of Christians in Indonesia is nothing new, it's perhaps the first time that it's blatantly being used against a high-ranking

public official at a national level," explains an Open Doors expert. "This will not happen without repercussions in the grassroots."

### • PRAY

- Ask the Lord to protect Ahok during this unstable time
- That churches would remain strong under increased pressure from extremists.



*The protests in Jakarta*



# DON'T SETTLE FOR LESS



'Plans to give you hope and a future' – Jeremiah 29:11. A displaced girl and her family in Aleppo receive food from the local church.



**In 2016 church and state in the UK and Ireland showed an increasing response to the needs of persecuted Christians. So what is God calling us to in 2017? Open Doors CEO Lisa Pearce shares her vision for the year ahead.**

"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die." Jesus' words from Revelation 3:2 resonated for us ever more clearly in 2016 as Open Doors embarked on a seven-year campaign, *Hope for the Middle East*. At the launch of the report in Westminster in October, I gave evidence of Christians willing to risk their lives to get food, medicines, trauma care and other support to people in Syria and Iraq. I reinforced the message of the report: that for the future of the region, it is vital that the Christian community not only survives, but is given the necessary support and opportunity to play its part in building peace and stability.

The launch at Stormont was equally encouraging, with a significant attendance by senior church leaders.

Over the year, we've seen a great outpouring of compassion from Christians in response to the arrival of refugees, including those fleeing Islamic extremism in the Middle East. And it's exciting to see how many churches have put on *Pray for ME* events in recent weeks. Thank you so much.

"To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world," said theologian Karl Barth and his words have never been more prescient. Over half the Christians in Syria have left the country since the war began in 2011. In Iraq, five out of six Christians have left since 2003. And yet Christianity was born in that region.

Christians don't see themselves as a minority. They want the right to live in their homelands as equal citizens and contributors, in peace and safety.

So let's not settle for less.

Every act of prayer, petition and provision is bringing hope to Christians in Syria and Iraq: to those preparing to return to the Nineveh Plain (read more on p12) as well as to those who wait. And not just to our family in the Middle East but to those in Africa, Asia – wherever extremism and violence is flourishing.

The situation can look hopeless, but as Brother Andrew says, "The church is larger than any one nation or any one political scene." And our God is greater still. He loves His church, and together we can be a practical demonstration of that to thousands of our brothers and sisters. If you are a citizen of the UK and Ireland, you undoubtedly have far more power than your persecuted family around the world. At the beginning of a new year, I urge you to use it well.

## Start the year well - bring hope to the Middle East

We all have demands on our time – but this is worth finding time for:

**Find 3 minutes** - sign the global *Hope for the Middle East* petition - and share!

**Find 5 minutes** - invite your MP to the launch of the 2017 *Open Doors World Watch List*

**Find 30 minutes** - have a coffee with your church leader - become a Partner Church.

**Look out for more news of how you can support Iraqi families to return home once it is safe for them to do so.**

**#SAVE ME**  
BRING HOPE TO THE MIDDLE EAST



# North Korea

RISKING IT ALL

Pyongyang, North Korea's capital city, was known as 'the Jerusalem of the East' in 1907. There was a great revival, and hundreds of churches were started.

Over a century later, that's hard to believe. North Korea is now the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian. Anyone who is even suspected of following Jesus faces imprisonment, torture – even death.

And yet, despite these terrible risks, the church in North Korea is enduring – and growing. Hundreds of thousands of North Koreans follow Jesus in secret. Open Doors workers provide these believers with vital aid, and often their only contact with the outside world. The risks our workers are taking are greater than ever. But your prayers and support make their work possible, and show our North Korean brothers and sisters that they aren't forgotten.

LEFT Trafficked North Korean women worshipping at a Bible study in China.





Man collecting plants for food along railway tracks

## HOLY RICE AND MIRACULOUS ESCAPES

Life in North Korea is incredibly hard, even for those who aren't Christians. Every year there are natural disasters, with droughts in the dry seasons and flooding and mud slides in the rainy seasons. Harvests are poor. North Korea operates a 'military first' policy for distributing food and resources, meaning that ordinary people are often left to go hungry. But sometimes there isn't even enough for the soldiers. It's estimated that famine has killed between two and three million people in North Korea since the early 1990s.

*"We are astonished that God loved us so much that He uses brothers and sisters we don't know to support us."*

Despite their often meagre resources, Christians in North Korea perform a practice they call 'holy rice'. This means they take a little of their food, even if they don't have much themselves, and share it with others who are in even greater need. Your support and prayers enable our local workers to smuggle food into North Korea to help them survive.

Trying to find enough food for their families is just one of many challenges faced by Christians in North Korea. Their lives are constantly scrutinised by the Inminban, a neighbourhood watch system in which the leader writes reports on

their neighbours, trying to work out if anyone is disloyal to the ruling regime. Daring to believe that there is a higher authority than the nation's leader, Kim Jong-un, is completely unacceptable; Christians often don't even tell their children about their faith in Jesus until they are older for fear that they might let something slip.

And when you know what kind of fate awaits those who are discovered, you can understand why. If someone is even suspected of being a Christian, their entire family will disappear, sometimes up to three generations. They may be executed. Often they are sent to horrific labour camps where torture and rape are common practices. We estimate that between 50,000 and 70,000 Christians are imprisoned in these camps.

An Open Doors worker spoke to a family who were forced to work as slaves when their faith was discovered. They told him, "We thought God had forgotten us. How else could he allow us to suffer so much? Every day we worked and at night we needed to find our own food to survive. We wanted to give up on God and deny our faith."

But for this family, a miracle happened. They were released, and local Christians, supported by Open Doors, were able to help them resettle. The family said, "We just found out that God has mobilised Christians outside this country to pray for us and help us financially. We are astonished that God loves us so much that He uses brothers and sisters we don't know to support us. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

## WORTH THE RISK

The Open Doors North Korea coordinator, a man we'll call Simon, recently spoke to us about the work we do supporting North Korean Christians. "Their understanding of the Bible may be limited, but their faith runs deep," he tells us. "There are so many unknown heroes in North Korea and they are able to withstand torture."

When asked how we can know this, he explains, "We hear it from people inside the country. When a Chinese mission worker is captured in China and brought to North Korea, it usually doesn't take long before there's a wave of arrests in North Korea. The North Korean people this person was connected to are then taken to prison and tortured as well. But usually they don't arrest new people [when a North Korean Christian is captured]. That means the North Korean Christians didn't talk despite the torture."

Many North Koreans risk their lives to make the dangerous and illegal journey over the border into China in search of work or food to take back to their families. Others, mainly women and girls, are lured into travelling to China by human traffickers who then sell them into marriage or prostitution.

But it's in China that many North Koreans hear the gospel for the first time. Simon says, "We still operate safe houses in China where we disciple North Korean Christians. I can't share with you how many exactly. Those disciples, when they are arrested, don't collapse but remain faithful."

Kim Jong-Un's government has dispatched hundreds of security officials along the border between North Korea and China. They are tasked with kidnapping these 'defectors' from North Korea and taking them back to be punished.

And it's not only the North Korean people themselves who are in danger – these security officials also kidnap and kill those who are supporting North Koreans. An example of this was the murder of Pastor Han Choong Yeol, a Korean-Chinese pastor who lived in Chiangbai, a town on the Chinese side of the border with North Korea. Han was active in helping North Korean refugees by giving them food, medicines, clothes and other goods they needed for survival back in North Korea. He was murdered on 30 April 2016 by North Korean assassins.

*"We will never abandon the church in North Korea"*  
*'Simon', Open Doors North Korea coordinator*

Pastor Han's murder wasn't just getting rid of an opponent. It was a warning to everyone attempting to help North Korean refugees, including Open Doors workers. Our work with North Korean believers, smuggling in vital aid and Bibles, and supporting those who escape to China, has become increasingly dangerous. But when we asked Simon if he thought it was time for us to stop this work, his answer was 'no'. "We will never abandon the North Korean church," he said. "God has called us to do this work."



Open Doors organises small Bible study groups for North Korean women who have been trafficked into China.



# How to pray for the church in North Korea

Brother Andrew, the founder of Open Doors, says, "Our prayers can go where we cannot. There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray." North Korea may be the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian, but not even Kim Jong-un and his most deadly secret agents can hold back the hand of God. Our prayers make a real difference for our brothers and sisters in North Korea.

Here are some ideas to prompt you to pray for North Korea in the coming days and weeks.

## Pray when you eat

As you begin a meal or tuck into a snack, pray that God will bless North Korean Christians as they share the little food they have with others. Ask God to protect Open Doors workers as they smuggle in food and other vital supplies to our brothers and sisters.

## Pray when you open your Bible

The Bible is a forbidden book in North Korea – but there is probably no country in the world with so many hidden Bibles. Some are literally buried in the ground – North Korean Christians have to dig them up to read them. Pray that North Korean Christians will be brave enough to own a Bible, and for their protection as they read it in secret. Pray also that God will enable Open Doors workers to smuggle more Bibles to North Korean believers.

## Pray as you walk around your neighbourhood

North Korean Christians know that they are always being watched by their neighbours. Pray that God will make seeing eyes blind and that North Korean Christians will not be discovered.

## Pray when you hear a siren

Tens of thousands of North Korean Christians are imprisoned in prison camps or sentenced to forced labour. Pray for strength and comfort for them, and that they will soon be free. Pray especially for those who have started to lose hope, or have even given up on their faith, that they will know God's love and presence with them.

## Pray as you pass a church building

It's hard to go far in the UK or Ireland without passing a church building. In North Korea, although there are four church buildings in Pyongyang which hold services, defectors testify that these churches serve as showpieces – they hold fake services in an attempt to convince visitors to the country that there is religious freedom in North Korea. The greatest desire of Christians in North Korea is to be able to meet together and worship in freedom. Pray that that day will come soon.

"Our prayers can go where we cannot. There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray."

Brother Andrew,  
founder of Open Doors



## How to help the church in North Korea survive

When we hear about North Korea, it almost doesn't seem real; the secret agents, megalomaniac dictators and prison camps sound like something from a film, or a terrible nightmare. And yet, this is the horrific reality for the millions of people who live there – a nightmare they can't wake up from.

But you really can make a tangible difference to the lives of North Korean Christians. By giving a gift, you can enable courageous Open Doors workers to bring vital aid to help North Korean believers survive – your support could literally mean the difference between life and death for a believer facing starvation. Your gift could put a Bible in the hands of a believer who desperately wants to read the Word of God, even in a place where it should be completely impossible to access. And your prayers and gifts show our brothers and sisters in North Korea that they are loved by God and by us.

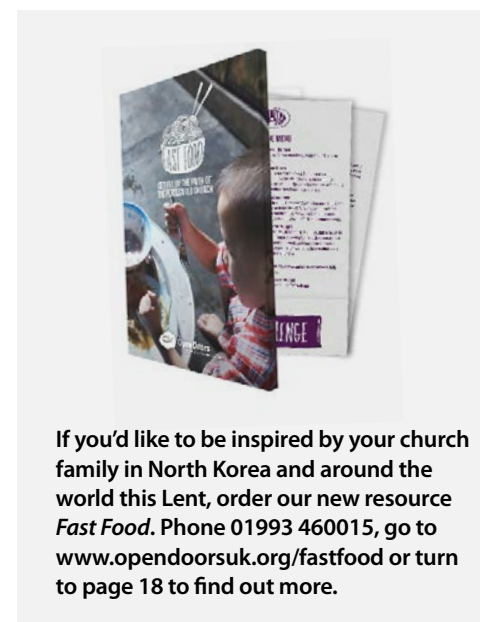
**Every £24** can provide three Bibles to help North Korean believers keep their faith alive.

**Every £41** can help provide emergency food, medicines and clothes for a North Korean family.

One North Korean believer told us: "When we received your materials and support, we were filled with Jesus' love and grace. We are passionate to do our utmost to help the

underground church in North Korea and feel so thankful for what you have done. We – underground believers – are weak and powerless. However, through your support and prayers, we become stronger."

Thank you for helping us strengthen our church family in North Korea. None of our work would be possible without your support and prayers.



If you'd like to be inspired by your church family in North Korea and around the world this Lent, order our new resource **Fast Food**. Phone 01993 460015, go to [www.opendoorsuk.org/fastfood](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/fastfood) or turn to page 18 to find out more.

# "THE LORD WILL TURN THIS ASH INTO BEAUTY"

It's a long journey home for Iraqi Christians who fled the Islamic State. But with your prayers and support, Open Doors will be with them all the way.



LEFT Walking back into Bartella

ABOVE 1. Putting a cross back on the roof of Tahira church in Qaraqosh.

2. Church leader Ammar inside Tahira church

3. Devastation and damage to the streets of Qaraqosh.

It is the moment hundreds of displaced Christian families had been longing for. Two church leaders and two soldiers climb to the roof of the church they had been forced to abandon some two years before. Together, they lift a makeshift cross and secure it in place. There are tears in their eyes. There is joy in their hearts. The church in Qaraqosh has a cross on its roof again.

## Thanks be to God

"Thanks be to God," says Ammar, the church leader who returned to Qaraqosh that day. "It was a wonderful day to see Qaraqosh. Yes, they destroyed and burned houses and churches, but of course we will fix it again."

Qaraqosh was home to the largest concentration of Christians in the region. But when Islamic State (IS) militants overran the town in 2014, thousands were forced to flee, often taking little more with them than the clothes they stood in.

The damage to the town has been severe. "The area we visited appeared totally destroyed," said an Open Doors partner. "Many houses and buildings were burned, and in some streets the houses were totally collapsed. Rubbish and damaged goods were everywhere... We constantly heard shooting. Sometimes it appeared nearby, other times a few blocks away, and all the time there were explosions. Fortunately, they sounded a bit further away."

**"We will support families to make their houses liveable again"**

At the time of writing it is clearly unsafe for displaced people to return to these liberated areas. But one day, they hope there will come a time when the rebuilding can start.

"We will support families to make their houses liveable again," our partner told us. "We will help them with funds to repaint their house, to replace doors and windows and to repair cabling and water pipes. It is important that we help them rebuild their churches. We will also help to repair schools and infrastructure."

## 'My dream is to bring back all the Christians'

As the forces moved forward in the Battle for Mosul, Qaraqosh was not the only Christian town to be liberated. Back in the refugee camps people gathered excitedly to hear the news: Karamles has



been freed! And the church bells are ringing again in Bartella.

In Bartella, despite the damage, the church leaders took time to ring the church bell. In the village of Karamles, local church leader Thabet planted a cross on the hill overlooking the town, a cross covered in blossoming flowers.

"I am so happy I can do this," he says. "I'm smiling from cheek-to-cheek and I weep tears of joy at the same time. This is the trip I have been praying for for two years now."

"My dream is to bring back all the Christians to this village," says Thabet. "Then we will worship outside on this hill; we will take communion in the open air. Everybody will see that this is the church; this is the body of Christ; this is Christian land. That is my dream – to give a testimony to the world."

It's a good dream. But there is a long way to go.

### Supported every step of the way

Like many other church leaders in Iraq, Thabet could have left his congregation and sought asylum in Europe or America. But instead he chose to stay and serve his displaced community in the 'Karamles camp' – a temporary housing project in Erbil.

Thanks to your generosity, Open Doors has been supporting some 15,000 displaced families from Mosul and the Nineveh plain – not only with practical aid like food and medicine, but also with pastoral training and trauma care. Some of them

have also been given micro-loans so that, even in exile, they can start their own businesses.

And, with your help, we will go on supporting them. Because it will be a long and difficult road before Christians can return home and rebuild their lives and communities.

*"We will continue to support them every step of the way"*

"It is expected that most Christians will wait for the entire Nineveh Plain to be completely safe and 'ISIS-free', before thinking about going back," said an Open Doors co-ordinator. "Christians are still displaced and are still uncertain about their future."

Some will feel that it is impossible to return. They have made new lives in the Kurdish controlled areas. Those Christians, too, have a vital role to play in preserving a life-giving Christian presence in the region.

A local project worker said: "We will continue to support them every step of the way."

### Out of the ashes

The situation in Iraq remains volatile and it is still unclear when it will be safe enough for communities to begin returning to their villages. Many areas are badly damaged; some places have been deliberately made unsafe to prevent Christians from returning home.

So it will not be easy or quick. But many Iraqi Christians have hope that, once again, there will be a live Christian presence in this ancient region.

In a damaged, charred church building in Qaraqosh one church leader stood with tears in his

eyes, remembering how the church had looked like before he'd left it two years ago.

Through all the ashes, through all the dirt and destruction, he still had faith.

"The Lord" he said, "will turn this ash into beauty."

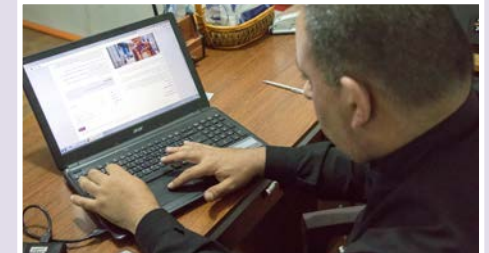
## HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Back in the Karamles camp, Thabet remains committed to his 'parishioners'.

"Many of them are willing to stay in Iraq," he says, "they just need enough hope."

Thabet believes that Christians only have a future in Iraq if the international community will also take its responsibility for them.

"We will need international support and protection. That is the only way our future as Christians in this country can be guaranteed." That is why Thabet is supporting Open Doors' *Hope for the Middle East* campaign. Thabet has even joined with tens of thousands of others around the world and signed the global petition, which calls on governments and the UN to ensure equal citizenship and dignified living conditions for Christians in the Middle



*Thabet signing the petition*

East and support the role of Christians in reconciliation and rebuilding society.

"I just signed this petition myself," he says. "Please join me."

If you haven't signed the petition already, please do so. And please encourage others to sign it as well. You can sign today by going to [www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME](http://www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME)

## Building a better future

Open Doors partners are working closely with displaced believers like Thabet and Amman to help them to plan towards building a better future for their communities. For the last two years, our focus has been on creating stability in the lives of displaced families by providing food, water, long-term shelter, sanitation, healthcare, and helping them return to school and work. Now we are planning how we can support those who wish to move back to their villages and towns once it is safe to do so. We will look at repairing infrastructures, churches and schools, as well as helping people to repair their houses. We will also continue to provide long-term support through trauma care, livelihood projects and biblical training.

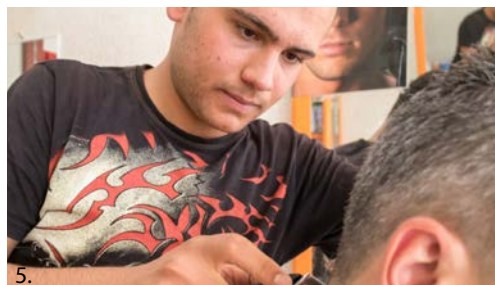
It's a huge task – our partners estimate it could take anywhere from five to 15 years. But Open Doors is committed to standing alongside

our persecuted family in Iraq for as long as it takes them to re-build their lives.

It's thanks to the prayerful generosity of so many Open Doors supporters that Open Doors has been able to keep hope alive for the church in Iraq – but there is much more still to do. Please continue to pray, give and speak out for your persecuted family in Iraq. Every signature, every prayer, every gift is a pledge of faith in the future of this region.

### Please pray:

- For patience and trust among for displaced Christians who are desperate to return home
- For areas still occupied by IS to be liberated with the minimum loss of life
- For wisdom for Open Doors partners, local churches and other aid agencies as they plan how to support believers and other displaced people who choose to return to their villages when it is safe to do so.



FROM TOP LEFT 4. Ringing the bells in Bartella for the first time in two years 5. Artin has set up a barber shop with a start-up grant through local partners of Open Doors. 6. Church leader Thabet planted this flower cross on the hill of St Barbara overlooking the town of Karamles.

#SAVE ME  
BRINGING HOPE TO THE MIDDLE EAST



# DOZENS OF CHIBOK GIRLS ARE FINALLY FREE

## "Our prayers are not in vain"



Tears, heartache, sorrow. And prayers. For well over two years, that has been the seemingly endless and painful cycle for the grieving parents of the over 200 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram militants in April 2014. Many had begun to lose hope that they would ever see their daughters again. Around the world, prayers were said for their safe return.

And in 2016, prayers were answered – hope is being kindled in the heartache.

• • • • •

Twenty-one of the abducted schoolgirls were finally freed in October, and reunited with their parents after two-and-a-half years in captivity. Your prayers and support have been making a difference. But despite immeasurable joy, there is still a long road of recovery ahead for these girls – and nearly 200 young women are still being held by the militants.

### FINDING FREEDOM: "WE DIDN'T KNOW WE WOULD COME BACK"

On the day Rebecca Mallum was finally reunited with her parents, she praised God, saying: "Let us thank God for His love. We are happy to see this wonderful day because we didn't know we would come back to be members of Nigeria."<sup>1</sup>

The first of the girls to be freed from Boko Haram was Amina Ali Nkeki. In May 2016, she was looking for wood in the forest with her baby and militant husband when she was found and rescued by the Civilian Joint Task Force. In November, Maryam Ali Maiyanga was found – she had escaped a militant compound and was carrying her ten-month-old baby. And in October, successful negotiations between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram led to the release of 21 schoolgirls, including Rebecca.

Shortly afterwards, there were joyful scenes and tears of relief as the 21 'Chibok girls', who are now young women, were finally reunited with their parents in Abuja.

One of the girls, Gloria Dame, told how they

had survived for 40 days without food and narrowly escaped death at least once: "I was... (in) the woods when the plane dropped a bomb near me but I wasn't hurt. We had no food for one month and 10 days but we did not die. We thank God!"<sup>2</sup>

"Let us pray for the rest in the Sambisa



The released Chibok girls changed into bright coloured clothing and sang praises to God for their release

[Forest] now," said Rebecca. "Let God help us to be together."

### CHIBOK PARENTS EXPRESS THEIR GRATITUDE

Since the girls' abduction, your support has been enabling Open Doors to stand alongside the Chibok parents to provide essential relief, such as medicines, emergency aid and trauma counselling, as well as raising prayer and delivering messages of hope.

One lady from the UK sent this message during Open Doors' writing campaign in 2016:

*Although only you know exactly how painful it has been, I can only imagine your pains; and I find it very painful. Yet the Bible says, "When you have done all you can do, to keep standing." I stand with you in my prayers.*

And your prayers are making a difference.

"It is by your prayer that we are surviving."

Those were the words of Pastor Ayuba last March whose daughter, Amina, still remains in militant captivity – sadly, at the time of writing, all of the parents whom Open Doors has been supporting are still missing their daughters.

But as well as praying for the safe release of the remaining Chibok captives, we must also pray for those who have been freed, for whom there is a long road to recovery ahead.

Esther was amongst 47 Chibok schoolgirls who escaped Boko Haram on the night of their capture, but life for her has continued to be a struggle. Incessant Boko Haram attacks separated

Esther from her parents and forced her to seek refuge in an internally displaced people's camp.

An elderly lady who heard about Esther's plight has taken her in, but though Esther is thankful for the roof over her head, tears flow freely down her cheeks as she speaks about the



Esther escaped from Boko Haram in 2014 but has since been forced to seek refuge away from her parents

longing for her parents and the hardship she is facing. She feels totally abandoned. Thankfully, Open Doors has been able to come alongside Esther to support her with education, upkeep and medicine.

"Our prayers are not in vain," says Open Doors worker, Isaac\*, who has been working with victims of violence in northern Nigeria, including the families of the abducted schoolgirls. "We thank all our supporters for the continued prayers for this situation over the past two and a half years. Our eyes are still on God for the release of the rest of them."

### • PRAY

- Thank God for the release and freedom of these kidnapped young women
- That they and their families would receive the support they need to heal fully
- For the swift release of the scores of Chibok girls and other women who remain in captivity
- For Open Doors workers continuing to provide much-needed support to the Chibok families.

\*name changed for security purposes

<sup>1</sup>CNN, (19 October, 2016) 'Chibok girls: Freed from terrorists, they smile through pain to give thanks'

<sup>2</sup>Today, (16 October, 2016) 'We stay without food for one month, 10 days – Chibok girls'



This Lent...  
Share a meal with others  
Serve up stories of the persecuted church  
Take away a weekly fasting challenge

# FAST FOOD 2017

Get fed by the faith of the persecuted church



**Fast Food** is a new Lent resource from Open Doors. The idea is simple: you gather together with others to share a meal, you discover more about the persecuted church, and you take on a mystery challenge to 'fast' from something during the following week. Who you share with is up to you – family, friends, church, small group, youth group – but whoever takes part, **Fast Food** is a great way for people to interact with the persecuted church. Here's a taster of what it involves...

## SHARE A MEAL WITH OTHERS

You meet up for a meal. It's a different meal each time – but each menu links to a country where Christians are persecuted: you might be in India with a curry, or in Syria with pitta bread and humus, or in North Korea with nothing more than a tiny, plain bowl of rice.

## SERVE UP STORIES OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

During the meal, you explore some of the challenges facing Christians in that country. You watch a short video. There are special, downloadable **Fast Food** placemats which include stories, discussion questions, quizzes and even colouring-in pictures for children.

## TAKE AWAY A 'FASTING' CHALLENGE

Finally, at the end of the meal you are presented with a challenge to 'fast' from something or give something up during the following week. Each challenge gives you a taste of what life is like for persecuted Christians. But here's the twist: you and your guests don't know in advance what the challenge is going to be! It's hidden behind a sealed section.

Our free **Fast Food** resource pack includes eight ready-made session plans for each week. Each of these 'Menu' cards suggests what food to serve, provides an outline plan for the evening, and contains information and prayer points about the country. And at the bottom of each card is the sealed challenge!

For each meal there are special, downloadable **Fast Food** placemats which include stories from that week's country, colouring-in pictures for children, and even a weekly 'Know Your Place(Mat) Quiz'. Also, the Open Doors website will be piled high with videos, recipes, downloadable place-mats and other **Fast Food** resources, plus news, information and loads more!

## AFTER THE MEAL

As you take on the challenge, you share what you are doing with your church and friends, and on social media. (You'll also see what other supporters around the country are doing for **Fast Food**.) Then, it's time to gather for the next meal. What country's food will be waiting for you this time? What lessons from the persecuted church will you be learning? And what will this week's mystery challenge be?

## FAST FOOD 2017: QUICK QUESTIONS

### When does it take place?

Lent 2017 is from 1 March to 13 April. **Fast Food** starts with a great big Pancake Party on Shrove Tuesday, and ends with a sunrise breakfast on Easter Sunday. There are eight meals, but you can do as many or as few as you like.

### What kind of challenges are there?

That would be telling! What we can say is that they are all 'do-able', and they come in different portions – the 'regular' challenge, or the 'go large' version which might be a longer, or more challenging version. (And you can adapt the challenge to suit you. It's up to you.)

### How many packs do I need?


Depends on how many **Fast Food** groups you have! You only need one pack per family or small group.

## ORDER YOUR FREE PACK TODAY!

To order a copy phone 01993 460015,  
email [inspire@opendoorsuk.org](mailto:inspire@opendoorsuk.org) or  
use the enclosed response form





A photograph of an elderly woman with dark hair, looking out from behind a strand of barbed wire. She is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus landscape.

# North Korea: is it worth the risk?

Prison camps, torture, death. This is what Christians in North Korea are risking every day because of their faith in Jesus.

They have decided that knowing Jesus is worth the risk – but many will not survive without outside help. Your prayers and gifts enable Open Doors' secret workers to smuggle in physical and spiritual support. The food they bring is the difference between life and death for some. And our workers are the only contact many North Korean Christians have with the outside world.

One North Korean believer told us, "We just found out that God has mobilised Christians outside this country to pray for us and help us financially. We are astonished that God loves us so much that He uses brothers and sisters we don't know to support us. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Will you pray and give today to support Christians who are risking it all?

Every **£24** can provide three Bibles to help North Korean believers keep their faith alive.

Every **£41** can help provide emergency food, medicines and clothes for a North Korean family.

To give a gift, please use the enclosed response form, visit [www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org) or call our Inspire Team on 01993 460015.

## TIME TO WAKE UP THE WORLD

The 25th edition of the Open Doors 2017 World Watch List is launched on 11 January. Visit our website then to discover where Christians are facing the most extreme persecution.



**OpenDoors**

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

[www.opendoorsuk.org](http://www.opendoorsuk.org)