

OpenDoors

magazine

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

May 2017



INSIDE:

- **REBUILDING HOPE**
for Christians in
Iraq and Syria

- **WALK, BAKE, RIDE,
RUN...WITH THEM**
Support persecuted Christians
in the Middle East

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST
CAMPAIGN
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30 DAYS OF PRAYER FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD

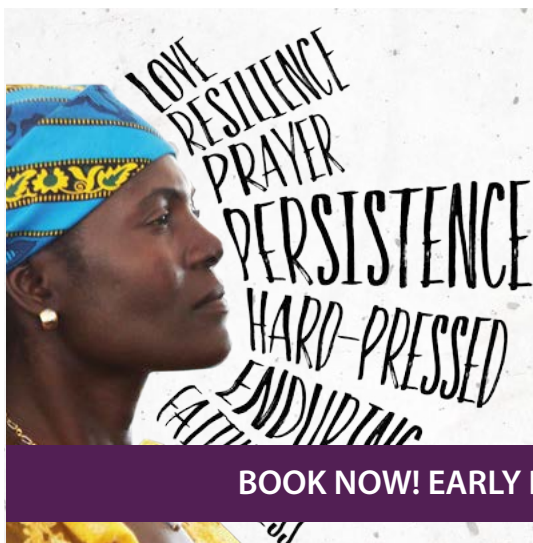
27 MAY – 25 JUNE 2017

Join with Christians around the world to pray for the Muslim world during Ramadan. Includes:

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- Stories of how God is at work in the lives of Muslims today
- Daily focus on different countries and people groups across the Muslim world



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Letter from Lisa: 'Hearting'

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

Open Doors supplies Bibles, leadership training, literacy programmes, livelihood support and advocacy services.

We also mobilise the church in the UK & 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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OpenDoors
60 years of serving persecuted Christians



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Last month I was in Lebanon, meeting Christian leaders from Syria and our partners serving refugees. They are so grateful to be able to demonstrate God's love practically with visits, food and medicines, because of your provision through Open Doors. When we were praying at the end of our time together, one courageous sister who has endured kidnap but continues working in Aleppo said quietly, "I have the impression that, just as when Jesus was carrying His cross and it became too heavy for Him, Simon stepped in to share the load – that is what you are doing for us." In the face of insurmountable need, they are full of stories of how God is at work.

In Iraq, too, though the problem is complex and vast, progress in driving out so-called Islamic State (IS) is providing a glimmer of hope. Each country is different – and the needs of the people are changing rapidly – but the longing to return home unites both. And in both there's clearly a huge need to rebuild, though the obstacles seem insuperable. No electricity. No water. That's why the return of families to their homes in Iraq (see p8) seems like a prophetic act.

Of course, it's not just homes that need rebuilding – it's the trust between people, the reconciliation. That's where Christians can truly play their part. Pastor Edward says: "We strongly believe that we are ambassadors of heaven. That means that we are a kind of outpost for the kingdom of Christ and the values of Christ. So instead of revenge: forgiveness. Instead of hatred: love. Instead of killing: giving life."

Speaking up for our brothers

"We are living stones being built into a spiritual house"

1 Peter 2:5

and sisters now is critical in giving encouragement to all who want to return and rebuild, as well as providing the right political climate for them to do so. That's why the global petition is so important. Iraqi church leader Thabet says, "We will need international support and protection. That is the only way our future as Christians in this country can be guaranteed. I just signed this petition myself. Please join me."

If you haven't already, please sign the petition now – at www.opendoorsuk.org – because the more of us who act together, the stronger the 'spiritual house' will be.

There's a wonderful word that stonemasons and dry-stone wallers use for the stones that fill the gaps in a wall: it's called 'hearting'. The tighter the hearting, the stronger the wall. You and I are the hearting for Christians in Syria and Iraq, living stones that make them strong – and it's exciting to be used in this way because, however small the offering, God can multiply it. Every signature, prayer and gift enables His people to face the future, making the possibility of returning and rebuilding more bearable, more achievable.

So, thank you for continuing to believe in a future for your brothers and sisters.

Lisa Pearce
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

WORLD WATCH NEWS

INDIA: 'Firebrand' appointed chief minister in Uttar Pradesh

Hindu fundamentalism is still rising in India, causing alarm to Christians and other religious minorities.

In recent state elections the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made major gains, most notably taking control of Uttar Pradesh. With a population of more than 222 million people, if Uttar Pradesh were a separate country, it would be the fifth-largest by population in the world.

Following this victory, Prime Minister Modi installed Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu monk as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Adityanath has been accused of stirring up hatred towards religious minorities and is even now facing a list of criminal charges. He is also a prominent figure in the so-called 'homecoming' movement, which seeks to reconvert Christians from a Hindu background.

An Open Doors expert commented: "With the appointment of Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister, BJP has given a clear message to the nation that they are going to push forward the agenda of transforming India into a Hindu nation."

Already five Indian states have anti-conversion laws to prevent people leaving Hinduism. Now there are fears that such legislation will be imposed at a national level. "This would have disastrous consequences for the mission efforts and the church growth in the country," said our source.

One obvious indicator of the rise of aggressive fundamentalism is the increase in violent attacks on Christians. India has risen to 15 on the 2017 World Watch List, with Open Doors experts already reporting 163 violent incidents in January and February 2017.

Yet amidst all this, individual



Christians are still standing strong. Sohan Singh (pictured), was beaten brutally and imprisoned because he refused to renounce Christ. He said he was happy to go to prison, because he had never shared his faith with others before. In prison he shared the gospel with six of his inmates and saw miracles and healings.

• PRAY

- That the Indian government will uphold freedom of belief and not bring in anti-conversion laws
- For Open Doors partners supporting Christians like Sohan with advocacy and legal support.

EGYPT: 44 killed in Palm Sunday bombing

At least 44 people were killed in blasts on two churches on Palm Sunday, in northern Egypt.

The first blast exploded inside St George's Coptic Orthodox church in Tanta, in Gharbiya governorate in the Nile Delta region. At least 27 people were killed and, according to the Ministry of Health, 71 people were injured.

Later in the morning, a suicide bomber was intercepted by police and detonated his device outside St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Alexandria. Included amongst the 17 killed were several police officers. Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadrous II was presiding over the Palm Sunday celebrations

in the cathedral, but was reported to be unharmed.

The militant Islamist group Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement quoted by Reuters, IS declared: "Crusaders and their apostate allies should know the bill between us and them is very big and they will pay it with rivers of blood from their children, god willing. Wait for us, for we will wait for you."

In February 2017, dozens of Christian families fled the Sinai after a series of killings and kidnappings by IS-linked groups. That month, IS also released a propaganda video, vowing to wipe out Egypt's Coptic Christians and

'liberate Cairo'.

Egypt's Christian minority has often been targeted by Islamist militants. In 2013 the Egyptian military removed President Mohammed Morsi, the elected leader who hailed from the Muslim Brotherhood. Some of Mr Morsi's supporters blame Christians for supporting his removal.

Source: MEC

• PRAY

- For healing for the injured and comfort for the bereaved
- That the Egyptian authorities will do more to protect the rights of Christians and other minorities.

"It is my dream that... Christians in Yemen can worship God freely. I know that people are willing to give their lives to get there"

Jamil*, Yemeni believer from a Muslim background

YEMEN: Church finds hope despite war

Two terrible years of civil war have left Yemen devastated and created one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes in the world.

Yet the small, struggling Christian community is still finding reasons for hope. In a society dominated by strict Islamic rule, many Muslims are turning to Christ.

"Before the war most house churches were dependent on foreign Christians," says Jamil*, a former Yemeni Muslim who now follows Christ. "Now the foreigners are mostly gone, we had to take the lead ourselves. At first it seemed the house church movement would fall apart, but gradually, local Christians took up leadership positions. They may not have been highly trained, but they share the

knowledge they have and support each other."

Despite this good news, being a follower of Jesus in Yemen remains highly dangerous. Although government control has diminished, Islamic extremist groups like Al Qaeda have filled the vacuum, posing a grave threat to Christians.

"One of these groups posted the names and addresses of a group of known Christians online, endangering their lives and forcing many of them to go into hiding," says Jamil.

Nevertheless, he is hopeful for the future: "The church in Yemen is still young. The first generation who converted from Islam were used to fighting for their position. We are now seeing

a second generation of Christians growing up – children born in Christian families. They will be the generation that helps the church to grow. My hope and prayer is that the third generation – their children – will keep the faith and will be accepted into society.

"Yes, that is my dream – that in the next decades Christians in Yemen can worship God freely. I know that people are willing to give their lives to get there."

• PRAY

- That God will protect Christians from attack
- That Yemenis who have turned to Christ will grow in faith.

**Name changed for security purposes*

TURKEY: "Don't leave me here in prison"

The new US Secretary of State has met with the wife of an imprisoned pastor in Turkey.

Rex Tillerson met the wife of US pastor Andrew Brunson, jailed for nearly six months on undisclosed charges of involvement in a terrorist organisation. Tillerson was in Ankara to visit Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"I do not know what will come of it, considering the sensitive period Turkey is in, but I was grateful for the opportunity," Norine Brunson said.

Brunson and his wife have been involved in church work in Turkey for 23 years. They were detained without warning in October 2016, over an application to renew their residence visas. Neither Brunson nor his Turkish lawyer have been allowed to see any details or evidence of the

alleged criminal charges filed against him.

The Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim has indicated that Brunson's case could be 'accelerated', but has denied recent speculation that the pastor was being held as a political bargaining chip, to force Washington to extradite Fethullah Gulen, the Islamic cleric accused of orchestrating a failed coup against the Turkish government from his home in the US.

Rev Brunson currently shares a small cell with 17 Turkish prisoners, reportedly all accused of criminal links with Gulen. Tens of thousands of judges, journalists, military personnel, academics and civil servants have been jailed since last July on similar charges.

Two days before Tillerson's visit, US Embassy officials visited Rev



Norine Brunson looks towards the prison Source: World Watch Monitor

Brunson. Stressing that the Turkish government had produced no proof against him, Brunson wrote: "I plead with my government – with the Trump administration – to fight for me. Please do not leave me here in prison."

• PRAY

- For Pastor Brunson's release
- That God would be with Christians throughout Turkey during this time of unrest.



"WE ARE SO HAPPY IN OUR HEARTS"

YOUR LETTERS BRING JOY TO PASTOR BEHNAME

After six years in prison, Iranian church leader Pastor Behnam Irani was finally released in October 2016. Open Doors staff recently visited him and his family to encourage them and bring them your letters.

"This is a great present for us," Pastor Behnam said, after being presented with letters and cards from 11 different countries for him and his family. Over 3,000 Open Doors supporters wrote to Pastor Behnam when he was in prison; most of these letters were sent to the prison, but they were not given to Pastor Behnam by the prison guards. The letters that weren't sent to the prison were kept by Open Doors staff to give to Pastor Behnam once he was released, to ensure that some of your messages would get through.

A huge smile spread over Pastor Behnam's face as he read letters for his children and messages of love from all over the world. "This evening we will take time to look at all of these cards together," Pastor Behnam said. "We are so happy in our hearts."

Pastor Behnam, his wife Kristina, and their children Rebecca (14) and Adriel (9) are now living as refugees in Turkey. Pastor Behnam explained that he would like to have stayed in Iran, but he felt that God was telling him that, just as Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt for safety, that he should also take his family to a safe place. "We believe that one day we will return to Iran," Pastor Behnam said. "Please pray for Iran. God has big plans for Iran. There are many people there who love Jesus Christ, but they are afraid."

Iran is number 8 on the 2017 World Watch List, and those from the Persian ethnic group are considered Muslims – it is illegal to leave Islam, and can even be punished with the death penalty, although this punishment hasn't been carried out for decades. Despite this, Christians from a Muslim background, like Pastor Behnam, make up the

largest group of Christians in Iran.

It's obvious that Pastor Behnam and his family are happy to be together again – it seems as if Adriel is coming over to hug his father every ten minutes. "It's like he saved up his missed hugs and he's giving them all now," Kristina says. Adriel was just two when his father was imprisoned.

But the family continues to need our prayers. Pastor Behnam and Adriel are both suffering from acute health problems, and Rebecca is still traumatised from her father's imprisonment – every time the doorbell rings, she trembles with fear, worried that someone has come to take her father away again.

Despite all that they've been through, their faith in Jesus has not been shaken. "The Lord has always been leading us," Pastor Behnam says. "We just have to follow Him."

• PRAY

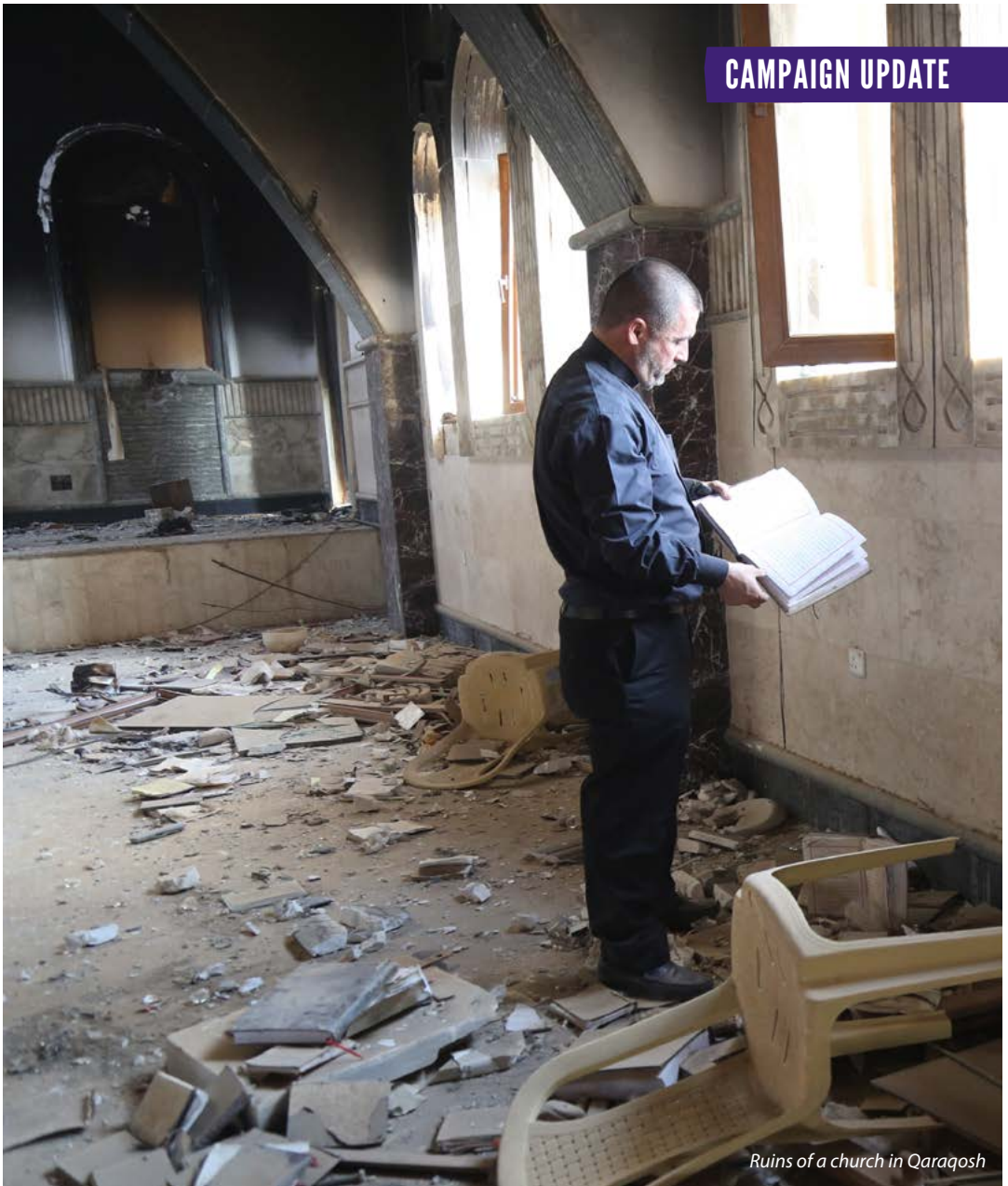
- For protection, provision and healing for Pastor Behnam and his family
- For a swift asylum process for the family – this can take up to two years
- For Christians in Iran, for protection, courage and strength.

▶ See for yourself

Visit the Iran country profile on the Open Doors website to see a short film of Pastor Behnam receiving cards and to hear a song written and sung by Kristina: www.opendoorsuk.org/iran



Write to other believers who need encouragement. Visit www.opendoorsuk.org/write to find out how.



Ruins of a church in Qaraqosh

REBUILDING HOPE

Your support is keeping hope alive for our church family in Syria and Iraq in the darkest of days. By praying, giving and speaking out as part of the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign, you are enabling Open Doors local partners to provide vital aid for tens of thousands of families. And it's not just the church here in the UK and Ireland – people from over 90 countries have added their

voices to those of Christians in the Middle East by signing the One Million Voices petition.

But we can't stop now. Our church family in Iraq and Syria want to rebuild their homes, their lives, and their hope for the future of their nations – and your support can help them to do it. We're just getting started.



Thanks to your support, Nashwan is able to work and support his family again

Looking for hope

Nashwan isn't the kind of man you might imagine when you think of the crisis facing Christians in the Middle East. Burley and bearded, seeing him doesn't inspire feelings of pity – his serious face commands respect. In many ways, he exemplifies the church in the Middle East today. Quietly dignified, he doesn't want to rely on handouts from others, and he doesn't want to leave his country – he wants to care for his family in Iraq, and quite literally help to rebuild the nation.

Nashwan is a highly skilled stone-cutter who lives in a village about 25 miles from Mosul, Iraq. He used to work in Mosul itself – but when the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) invaded the city in 2014, he and many others from his village lost their jobs. "I had worked for 20 years in stone-cutting, and suddenly I was unemployed. I had no means of caring for my wife and three children; they are depending on my income. We worried about our future in this country, especially as we saw so many other families migrate," he says.

"We thank your organisation and the church for supporting us"

– Nashwan, Iraq

Seeing local people like Nashwan struggling to survive without a source of income, the Mar Matti monastery decided to open a new stone factory. Open Doors supported the project with a grant to purchase the equipment needed to get the factory up and running. The factory

employs 50 full-time staff, including Nashwan; he is cutting the stones that are being used to build the cities of Iraq.

"Without this project I would still be unemployed at home. But now it is better. I can take care of my family again. We hope for better times," Nashwan says. "We thank your organisation and the church for supporting us."

Yosef, who oversees the factory on behalf of the monastery, says, "Most organisations just distribute food and give people some money. They eat it, they spend it and it's gone. This project offers long-term hope since it guarantees people's salary for the future.

"All these workers are now able to support their families. We hope this will give them a reason to stay in this country."

Giving families a reason to stay

The prayers and generous giving of Open Doors supporters in the UK and Ireland, and around the world, have helped our local partners in Iraq to keep tens of thousands of families alive with vital aid since they were forced to flee their homes to escape IS in 2014.

Our local partners in Iraq will continue to provide food aid to the most needy families, and they are now beginning to focus on projects to restore livelihoods like the stone factory. These projects help to give our brothers and sisters the dignity of supporting themselves, and the hope that a long-term future in Iraq is possible for them and their families.

And it is vitally important that this hope is kept alive if the church in Iraq is to survive. It is estimated that just 230,000 Christians remain

in Iraq; there were an estimated 1.5 million Christians in Iraq in 2003. Some Iraqi church leaders have suggested that the church in Iraq could be completely wiped out within five years.

As parts of the Nineveh Plain have been liberated from IS over the past year, this has given many displaced families hope that they will be able to return home. However, this is not as straight forward as it might seem; security is still a problem as the fighting continues, many villages have been left without basic infrastructure such as water and electricity, and many houses will need to be completely rebuilt.

As Father Gabriel, a church leader from Al Qosh, walks around the liberated village of Batanya, he says, "There were 750 Christian families living here when IS came. Four hundred of them already left the country. The rest will have huge problems returning here. Look around you, everything is destroyed." Batanya was shelled and bombed for days as the allied forces attempted to drive IS from the village – local Christians claim it is the most destroyed village in the Nineveh Plain.

It will take a long time and a huge amount of work to help families return to villages like this, but some are determined to stay in Iraq and rebuild –

and a few have even been able to return already.

Not far from Batanya is another village called Telskuf, where the fighting was much less intense. Nidal and Janan, sisters with six children, left Telskuf with their families to escape IS in 2014, and have been living in the Kurdish town of Dahuk. While they were there, they received food packages and emergency relief from Open Doors local partners. "That kept us alive and hopeful and helped us hope for better times," Nidal says. "And better times have come! Today I'm happier than ever. I'm home."

"We belong here. No way am I leaving this country"

– Nidal, Iraq

They returned to their home in Telskuf earlier this year; their home was ransacked by IS, but the damage to the building was fairly limited. The infrastructure of the village still needs to be restored, but Nidal is still glad to be back. "We had water and electricity there [in Dahuk], but it was not home. This place doesn't have all that, but it's home," she says.

When asked if they thought of leaving Iraq, Nidal says, "We belong here. No way am I leaving this country. That is why we chose to return here as soon as we could—to show others it is possible. By returning here we also give hope to our children, we show the new generation that they have a future in Iraq."

"Life is not easy here, there is no school for the children. My brother-in-law has to drive them to a village 15 minutes away from here every day. But the good news is that life goes on. Every day is new; we believe in Christ. He will help us through this period, He keeps us strong."

Open Doors local partners will be supporting families to repair their damaged homes and return to the villages in the Nineveh Plain when it is safe for them to do so.



Nidal (in pink) and Janan (in grey) received food aid thanks to your support

PRAY FOR ME

Thank you for praying for the Middle East – whether you’ve organised a prayer vigil with your church or small group, use the prayer diary, or wear a campaign wristband to remind you to pray, every prayer is truly precious to our church family.

Jacoub, a church leader from Bartella, one of the Iraqi villages that was recently liberated, says, “Thank God that the ‘dark cloud’ covering the Christian villages in the Nineveh plains has been taken away since the Iraqi government was able to retake control there. We believe that through prayers this has happened. This makes me believe that God will hear our other prayers too. So please continue to pray for the restoration of the Christian villages. Pray that people might start returning to their houses and land. Pray they might live there with dignity, in freedom and peace.”

You can find updates on how to pray for the Middle East every month in the Prayer Diary. There will also be a new resource to help you pray and take action for the Middle East with your church or small group, available in July.



Jacoub, visiting Bartella



‘I have big hopes for tomorrow’

It is now over six years since the war in Syria began. In those six years, five million people have fled the country, including over a million Christians; seven million people have been displaced within the country itself. Open Doors is continuing to support 12,000 families every month with vital aid through local churches and partners, thanks to the prayers and generosity of Open Doors supporters.

But in some parts of Syria, the fighting has come to an end, and incredibly, some families have been able to begin rebuilding their homes and their lives, with support from local churches and partners of Open Doors.

Maaloula is a small town on a mountainside, 30 miles from Damascus, where almost 3,000 people lived before the war in Syria began, most of them Christians. The town was occupied by fundamentalist Muslim group al-Nusra in 2014, forcing almost all of the inhabitants to flee their homes. The militants no longer occupy the town, but many homes were damaged in the fighting, and every church has been burned or vandalised.

Open Doors is supporting some families to repair their homes and return to Maaloula. Peter*, who is coordinating this project, says, “During my last visit in the beginning of 2017 I was very happy to see the first families who returned to Maaloula. We have invested in restoring houses; now the first four of these houses are inhabited again. In the coming weeks I expect the other houses to be finished too.”

Gradually, the infrastructure in Maaloula is also being restored. “A bakery opened its doors again, also the pharmacy and even a bookshop.



A Christian man in his damaged home in Maaloula. His house will be repaired with help from Open Doors partners

The government has invested in repairing the streets; this also was an encouragement for the displaced to return. Everywhere you go, you see villagers cleaning in and around their houses, clear signs of more people returning to their homes.

"I visited the house of a widow whom we supported in the restoration of her home. While I was talking with her, I discovered that her Bible had been burned during the occupation of Maaloula. I was so happy that I had Bibles with me, I could give her a new one. She was really thankful. At the end of the visit I was able to pray for her."

"Despite all that happened to us, my hope in God remained big"

– Milad, Syria

In the city of Homs, Open Doors was able to provide financial support to open a furniture factory. "It is a hope-giving project," says Roger*, who oversees the work of Open Doors local partners in Syria. "Over 30 people, men and women, are now able to have a paid job in the factory, providing an income for a similar number of families. As people have a job and an income, this will motivate them to stay in the city."

Milad is one of those who has found work in the factory. He was studying the hotel business and working in this sector when the war broke out, but lost his job due to the fighting. He found

another job, but was then injured in a car bomb. He says, "The doctors had to amputate my left leg; my brother lost a leg too. We were severely burned and had to stay in hospital for three months."

He was unemployed for 18 months before the furniture factory opened. "I am working as an accountant in that factory; my brother found work there too. We are currently manufacturing beds and clothes. I thank Open Doors for giving me the chance to work again in this project of the church, because I can't work in any other place because of my health situation.

"Despite all that happened to us, my hope in God remained big. God won't give up on us. I learned this from the incident that happened to us. Jesus said: 'Don't be afraid, I am with you till the end of the world.' I kept on going to the church and now pray more than before.

"I would love to stay in my country and I have big hopes for tomorrow that our country will be better than before."

Milad asks for our continuing prayers. "I ask people to pray for me and for my family, for an end to this hard phase. Please pray for my missing brother (one of his brothers has been missing since 2012) and for all the missing people and kidnapped persons to get back to their families. Pray that God will heal the wounded."

▶ See for yourself

Look out for a video of Milad coming soon to the Open Doors website on the Syria country profile page: www.opendoorsuk.org/syria

**Name changed for security reasons*

ONE MILLION VOICES OF HOPE – COUNT ME IN!

The *Hope for the Middle East* campaign is truly a global campaign. At the time of writing, people from over 90 different countries (shown on the map below) had signed the One Million Voices of Hope petition, speaking out with their church family in Syria and Iraq to ask for equality, dignity and responsibility for Christians and other minorities in the Middle East.

**Number of people
who have signed the
petition globally:**

200,030*

**Number of signatures
from the UK & Ireland:**

64,174*

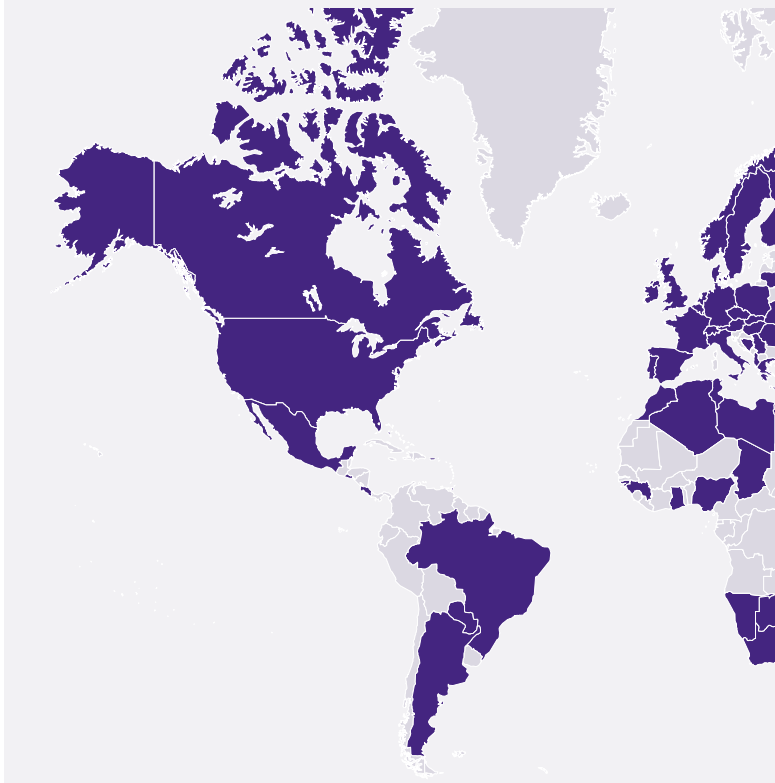
This is an incredible response! Thank you so much to everyone who has signed the petition, taken it to a church meeting or small group, or asked friends to sign. Every voice counts as we try to gather a million worldwide!

Your support enables Open Doors to engage in key advocacy work with the UK government, ensuring that the voices of persecuted Christians are heard by those in positions of influence. Tobias Ellwood, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, says, "Open Doors makes a major contribution to the government's thinking to try to support Christians and other religious communities in the Middle East and North Africa."

The Open Doors advocacy team has recently met with the Iraq, Syria and Middle East-North Africa teams in the Foreign Office, and Lisa Pearce, CEO of Open Doors UK & Ireland, met with the Prime Minister's faith advisor to brief him on the *Hope for the Middle East* campaign (pictured).

If you haven't signed the petition yet, please sign it – and if you have, please ask others to sign it too. You can sign the petition or find a printable petition sheet on our website at www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME

People from these 94 countries have signed the ONE



**Number of signatures
from the Middle East:**

27,739*

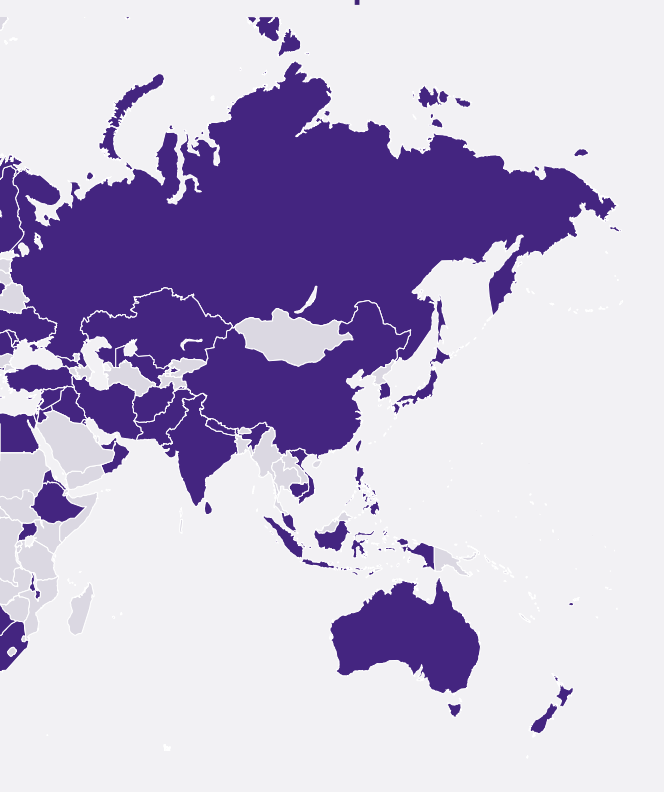
"This is very unique. It is the first time Christians in the Middle East have signed this type of Open Doors petition as well. We're part of something global – one family."

– Guillaume, Open Doors France

"We're excited to join with Open Doors offices around the world in this campaign."

– Kristin, Open Doors USA

MILLION VOICES OF HOPE petition



Open Doors researchers spent eight months consulting with church leaders and Christians in Syria and Iraq to form the petition, ensuring that we are not just speaking out *for* our church family in the Middle East, but *with* them. Father Thabet from Iraq (pictured signing the petition online) says, "We will need international support and protection. That is the only way our future as Christians in this country can be guaranteed. I just signed this petition myself. Please join me."

'Rami' from the Open Doors Middle East team says, "I would like to thank all the supporters who have come alongside and supported this campaign so far. I encourage you to pray that God can use what we do, recognising that our influences and resources and connections are always limited to our human abilities, but God can multiply our contribution for greater impact."

SAVE ME

Your continuing support for our church family in the Middle East is keeping hope alive. Last year supporters in the UK and Ireland raised an incredible £2.95 million to support our brothers and sisters in Syria and Iraq, helping us provide vital aid for tens of thousands of families every month, alongside long-term projects such as trauma care, training, job creation and distributing Bibles – thank you so much!

You can give our brothers and sisters hope for the future and help our local partners provide ongoing relief, rebuild homes and restore livelihoods.

It costs between £1,000 and £4,000 to set up a family in sustainable employment or to repair their home. For example £60 could pay for a water tank on a bomb-damaged roof.

Every £25 could go towards rebuilding homes or restoring livelihoods homes in Iraq and Syria.

Every £45 provides training to a church leader in the Middle East – living stones, building the church of Christ.

To give a gift, call our Inspire team on **01993 460015**, use the form enclosed with this magazine, or visit **www.opendoorsuk.org**



SEND A MESSAGE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Open Doors partners have launched an app to provide messages of encouragement from believers all over the world to our church family in the Middle East. If you would like to create a message of encouragement to be used in the app, visit **www.opendoorsuk.org/write** to find out how.

**Figures correct at time of writing*



GOD WORKS MIRACLES THROUGH CLINICS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

After years of discrimination and neglect, impoverished Christians in the Sharia-governed states of northern Nigeria are finally getting the health care and medical attention they need, thanks to the generosity of Open Doors supporters.

"This clinic has had a big impact in our community," says Manasseh, a pastor from a remote community in Bauchi state. "We are grateful to Open Doors for wiping our tears away. We were abandoned by the government, but you found us and came to our rescue."

"You found us and came to our rescue"

Four years ago, Christians in this area had little or no access to social amenities like health clinics. The nearest clinic for Christians, in the neighbouring town of Tafawa Balewa, was very run-down, with no plans from the government to upgrade it. Believers had to travel great distances in search of medical help at clinics in Muslim-majority areas. Sometimes they would be denied help if they were not willing to convert to Islam.

But in partnership with the local church, Open Doors has set up a new clinic in Boi, a Christian community in Tafawa Balewa. Now, thousands of believers in the area have access to a good clinic. They can stay overnight if needed, lie on clean sheets in a proper hospital bed, undergo blood tests and even receive medicine to take home if required.

ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS

Although all this might seem very basic compared to our expectations of hospitals in the UK, these clinics are a lifeline to many. Emmanuel Tumi, a Christian from Boi, explains: "The government is trying by all means to frustrate Christianity in the north by denying Christians basic social amenities in order to lure them to Islam.

"The reason this clinic was put up here is because there have been a series of attacks in Tafawa Balewa town. Attacks on farms, attacks on roads, attacks by Fulani Muslims, attacks by Boko Haram... all just because we are Christians. And every time there was an attack, it was very difficult to get treatment because some were injured, and carrying them to the hospital was very, very difficult. When Open Doors saw our suffering, they decided to put up a clinic in this area.

"This clinic is not only helping the people who were attacked, but it is helping the people of more than 20 communities," he adds. "We are very, very thankful to Open Doors and pray that God will prosper the donors so they might continue to support Christian communities like this."

The new clinic has also been a lifesaver for Manasseh's family. "Last year three of my children were down (sick) and I brought them to this clinic. They admitted us here and we received very good help. Without this clinic I think we would have suffered a lot because we would have to travel to a very far place.



LEFT Boi clinic staff TOP Yantama clinic BELOW Inside an Open Doors clinic

towards me and my family when we come here. Through this clinic, I am also reminded that God makes a way where there seems to be no way."

"A WONDERFUL GIFT TO THE COMMUNITY"

In the past few years, Open Doors has set up ten clinics like this in northern Nigeria. The work takes place over two years: first the construction, then the furnishing with beds, laboratory equipment and a grant towards medicine stock. Throughout the process, Open Doors works with the local church to closely monitor the clinics to make sure they function well.

In Yantama, a remote village that is often cut off during the rainy season, the new clinic has made a huge difference. "God must be praised for this wonderful gift to the community," says a local believer. "A clinic in this community is a great blessing to all, both Christians and Muslims. We have all suffered so much in this area with our health. That's why we can't

"The news of the good service rendered here has gone very far, and that is why people from very far places travel here. The love of Christ is shown

describe in words the importance of what you have done for us. We only pray that God will reward you for this great work. Thank you so much."

STANDING STRONG 2017

You can hear more inspiring news of how your support is making a difference to persecuted Christians in Nigeria at Open Doors' celebration in October: Standing Strong.

Pastor Abraham James* is one of our international guest speakers. As Chairman for the Christian Association of Nigeria in a northern state in Nigeria, he has personally experienced much persecution. "My position has exposed me to a lot of dangers and persecution," he says. "My life and that of my family were threatened. Three years ago my house was attacked and burned down completely. All our belongings were either looted or destroyed. Though we lost everything, our lives were preserved and that for us was a great act of deliverance from God."

To book your place at Standing Strong go to www.opendoorsuk.org or phone the Inspire team on 01992 460015.

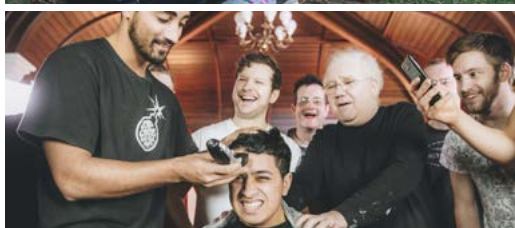


*Name changed for security reasons

WALK, BAKE,
RIDE, RUN...
...With
them

DO SOMETHING YOU LOVE
AND HELP RAISE MONEY FOR
PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS IN
IRAQ AND SYRIA





War, terror, destruction. Across Syria and Iraq Christians have been targeted, and the future of the church is looking bleak. But you don't need to feel helpless. You can support them, standing with them by doing the things you love. Running, walking, baking, swimming, cycling... you can do just about anything to raise money for your persecuted family in Iraq and Syria.

Often it is hard to understand or connect with those who share our faith in other countries, but get hold of our With Them fundraising pack and you'll see even the simplest things can connect us to the stories, hopes and dreams of our persecuted family.

TAKE RUNNING AS AN ENERGETIC EXAMPLE

"We left the food and ran... We didn't even stop for our shoes, we fled in our sandals! The children were very scared... it was crowded in the streets in the middle of the night... We learned that just a half-hour after we left home, Islamic State came to our area."

Back in the summer of 2014, the extremist group, so-called Islamic State, swept across Iraq and Syria, emptying towns and villages of all who didn't follow their strict view of Islam. Christians and other minorities were targeted. Homes were marked, people were beaten and ultimatums were given. Fearing the worst, most Christians fled

their homes. They left quickly, some even literally running for it in the middle of the night.

RUN WITH THEM!

Lace up your trainers, pull on your shorts and run. Get sponsored to run a 10K, half marathon or even full marathon and raise money for Christians who had to flee for their lives running from Islamic State. As you train, and as you compete, pray. Pray for people who lost everything in one night. Pray for faith, strength and endurance. Tell people why you're running and spread the word. Simple really.

NOT A RUNNER?

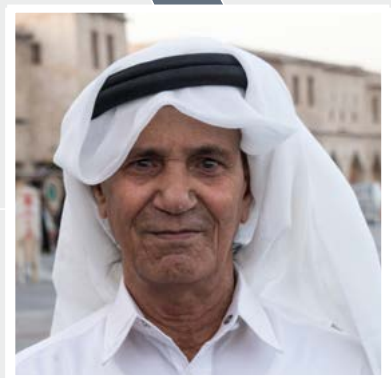
Don't worry, we've created an all-age fundraising guide packed full of ideas (like the one you've just read) to help you raise money. From baking to walking, sewing to cutting off your hair, there are loads of activities you can do that will also connect you to your persecuted family in Iraq and Syria.



GET THE PACK!

Visit www.opendoorsuk.org/withthem or call our friendly Inspire Team on **01993 460015** to order your free With Them fundraising pack. The pack includes a simple guide, posters, sponsor forms and more!

20 QATAR



Leader:
Emir Sheikh Tamim

Population:
2.3 million
(210,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism



OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARING THE GOSPEL

As the world eagerly awaits the 2022 Football World Cup in Qatar, the poor treatment of the vast migrant workforce has cast a dark shadow over the event. But there is some good news: as vast as the workforce is, so are the opportunities for sharing the gospel.

Around 80 per cent of Qatar's population are migrant workers. Yet it is here, under Qatar's strict state religion of Wahabi Islam, that many come into contact with Christianity for the first time.

But sharing the gospel comes with many challenges.

All non-Muslims in Qatar are banned from evangelising, worshipping openly and displaying Christian symbols. Publishing, importing and distributing religious materials is heavily regulated, and migrant Christians may only worship privately or in one of the six registered churches. For those migrant believers from a Muslim background (BMBs), worshipping in the churches is illegal.

Despite this, Christianity is spreading amongst migrant workers.

For Qatari citizens, the challenges are arguably much greater. Nearly all Qataris are Sunni or Shia Muslims by definition, and converting from Islam to Christianity is seen as 'apostasy' – a crime which carries the death penalty.

Qatari believers from Muslim backgrounds also risk being ostracised, attacked or even killed in 'honour killings' by their families and communities for openly practising their new faith.

But with the eyes of the world on Qatar for the 2022 World Cup, will any of this change?

Qatar's government is suspected of exporting fundamentalist Islam by financing Islamic militant groups, reportedly in Iraq, Syria and Mali – many of whom are responsible for persecuting Christians. Yet with the World Cup on the horizon, the vast influx of people from different backgrounds, ideologies and religions, and increasing international scrutiny of its handling of human rights may open up opportunities for the Word of God to spread, even in the most unexpected ways.

SIMON'S STORY: THE UNEXPECTED GOSPEL

When he arrived in Qatar, Simon* had not heard of Jesus. Raised as a Buddhist in Sri Lanka, he came to Qatar simply to find work – which he did in a restaurant. But after a young woman with whom he worked began praying for him and invited him to a church fellowship, Simon's life took an unexpected turn.

"I felt deeply in my heart that this is where I belonged"

"When you worship in the temple, you just follow the rituals and go home. Nothing has changed," shares Simon. "But when I started worshipping with the Christians, I saw that they really are a community, they deal with relationships, and they pray for each other, they care for the people around them. I felt deeply in my heart that this is where I belonged."



House church meeting in labourers' dormitory

Like many unofficial Christian meetings in Qatar, this gathering took place in someone's house. For a year, people in the fellowship prayed that Simon would become a follower of Christ.

"I was postponing the moment of committing myself," he admits. "Then one time, during worship, I really felt God speak to me: 'It's now time to accept Jesus.' Since then I have only been blessed."

Simon is now married – to the young woman who first prayed for him! But that is not the only way he has been blessed. "Gradually, I found better jobs, enabling me to give more tithes to the church. And the biggest miracle is the wonderful son and daughter God has given us."

SIMON'S STADIUM FOR EVANGELISM

Simon now works as a maintenance supervisor in stadium construction projects for the Fifa World Cup. Like many migrant workers, he is witnessing the remarkable spread of the gospel in this restrictive country.

"We can't go to people with the gospel in hand. But there is no need for that. People are coming to us. I have many conversations with colleagues about the faith, and they just keep asking questions. The only thing we have to do is answer them. There is no law against that."

"Even when we don't get a chance to preach, people notice that we are different; they sense that we care deeply about them. That's a witness in itself."

RAMADAN IN QATAR

From 27 May to 25 June, hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide will be observing Ramadan, the annual period of fasting and prayer. Between dawn and sunset, it is forbidden for Muslims to eat, drink, smoke or have sexual relations. For many Christians in Muslim-majority countries, not adhering to these rules can lead to arrest and even beatings. But what affect does this have on Christians living in Qatar?

Christians have to be careful to respect the Muslim fasting rules. Eating or drinking in public, or even in a private car, can result in their arrest, three days in jail and a fine. "But it must be said, they give very clear warnings in advance about this," says one migrant Christian.

So does the time of intensified Muslim prayer aggravate the religious pressure in these countries? "No, on the contrary. Ramadan is a special time of blessing for us Christians."

For many foreign labourers, working through the summer months can be seriously challenging, as temperatures easily reach over 50 degrees Celsius, and they still have to work 11-hour shifts. But during Ramadan, Qatari law states that workers must work reduced hours, with most only having to work from 8am to 2pm.

"For us the law is a blessing since it gives us time to organise extra church services and worship meetings," says the migrant Christian. "We have more time to pray and seek God's presence than during normal working days."

• PRAY

- Thank God that the migrant church is growing in Qatar
- That Simon and his wife would continue to know God's blessing and share the gospel
- For Christians in Muslim-majority countries this Ramadan, that they would be fruitful despite the challenges.

PRAY FOR THE MUSLIM WORLD: ORDER 30 DAYS OF PRAYER NOW!



To help you pray for the Muslim world this Ramadan, order your free copy of *30 Days of Prayer* – a resource full of inspirational stories, country information and prayer points. Call Inspire on **01993 460015** or fill in and return the Magazine response form.

You can also order Open Doors' 2017 World Watch Church Pack to help you and your church explore the 50 countries where faith costs the most.

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**

**Name changed for security reasons*

HELP REBUILD HOPE, STONE BY STONE, FAMILY BY FAMILY

"I had no means of caring for my wife and three children. We worried about our future in this country."

Nashwan, a highly skilled stone-cutter, lost his job when the self-proclaimed Islamic State invaded Iraq. Your support enabled Open Doors partners to open a new stone factory, providing Nashwan and others, including the man in this photo, with work. Nashwan says, "I can take care of my family again. We hope for better times."

Your support keeps hope alive. Help rebuild homes, livelihoods and hope.

It costs between £1,000 and £4,000 to set up a family in sustainable employment or to repair their home. For example, £60 could pay for a water tank on a bomb-damaged roof.

Every £25 could go towards rebuilding homes or restoring livelihoods in Iraq and Syria.

Every £45 provides training to a church leader in the Middle East – living stones, building the church of Christ.

Pray, give and share the One Million Voices of Hope petition with others – visit www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME or call our Inspire Team on 01993 460015.



Open Doors

60 years of serving persecuted Christians

#SAVE ME

BRING HOPE TO THE MIDDLE EAST