



Open *Doors* magazine

60 years of serving persecuted **Christians**

November 2016

INSIDE:

- **THANK YOU FOR BRINGING HOPE**

A Christmas letter from
your Open Doors family

- **SYRIA: HOPE THAT ENDURES**
Christmas in Tartus

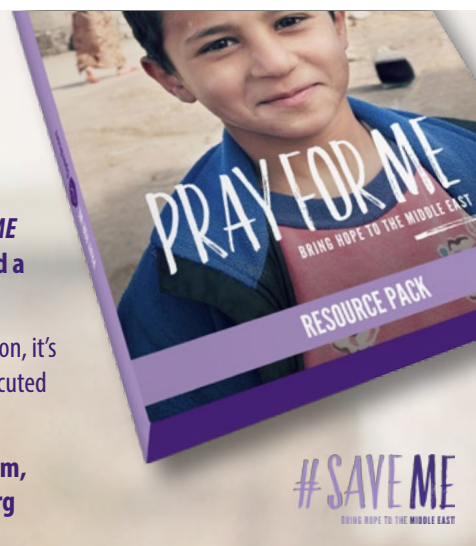
PRAY FOR ME

BRING HOPE TO THE MIDDLE EAST

It's not too late to order your free copy of the *Pray for ME* pack, and encourage your church or small group to hold a prayer event for Syria and Iraq this autumn.

Complete with Event Guide, DVD, posters and campaign petition, it's perfect for this year's International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church on 20 November – or whatever date best suits you.

Order your copy today! Fill in the enclosed response form, phone 01993 460015 or email inspire@opendoorsuk.org



8 SIMPLE MEALS
7 LIFE-CHANGING LENT CHALLENGES
6 AMAZING WEEKS

This Lent...

Share a meal with others

Serve up stories of the persecuted church.

Take away a weekly fasting challenge.

Get involved at: www.opendoorsuk.org/fastfood



Think you can't?
THINK AGAIN

MUSKATHLON 2017

Run walk or cycle to raise funds for persecuted Christians

SRI LANKA

7-14 OCTOBER

LEBANON

15-20 MAY

www.opendoorsuk.org/muskathlon



Letter from Lisa: Rise



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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In these dark days for Syria, the image of a baby being pulled from the wreckage in Aleppo has been a powerful sign of hope. Given the usual scenes of displacement, destruction and death, it would be easy to feel overwhelmed and to give in to despair. But every life saved is a reason for celebration, and I'm glad to be able to tell you that there are many more signs of hope in Syria.

Through our relationships with local partners and churches in Syria, Open Doors still has routes into cities all over the country, including Aleppo, allowing relief aid, Bibles and training to bring our persecuted family fresh energy and hope. And it's all down to God's grace, working through the courage of believers who've stayed to serve and minister to their neighbours.

But it's thanks, too, to the love and generosity of people like you. I once asked a lady on the Lebanon/Syria border what it meant to her to receive food and provisions funded by Christians in other countries, and to know that she was being prayed for. She thought for a moment and replied very quietly, "It means that God has not forgotten me. That He sees me in my predicament." What you or I may see as simply providing supplies is something much more to those who receive them: a message from God to His sons and daughters that He sees them in their predicament and is intervening with loving care to save them. That's a message of hope, and, at Christmas, that's a message for all of us – that the God of heaven saw us in our

"Our God is merciful and tender. He will cause the bright dawn of salvation to rise on us and to shine from heaven on all those who live in the dark shadow of death."

Luke 1:78-79

predicament and intervened with loving care to save us.

Knowing that your family are praying for you is a great encouragement, when your only hope is God. Hearing that your family are speaking up to ensure a better future when you have been robbed of a home, let alone a voice, is a powerful incentive to rise up and carry on. It's like a baby being pulled from the wreckage. A sign of hope.

The global *Hope for the Middle East* campaign is gathering momentum, with Christians all around the world signing the One Million Voices of Hope petition of advocacy, prayer and solidarity – you can read more about this on p. 12-13. But there's still much more to do. By bringing people together to pray on 20 November, the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church, and encouraging others to sign the global petition and to provide for their needs, you can bring hope to your persecuted family this Christmas. And that's the greatest gift you can give them. Thank you for being part of it.

Lisa

Lisa Pearce
CEO, Open Doors UK&I

WORLD WATCH NEWS

KENYA: Al-Shabaab claims "We have killed six Christians"

Al-Shabaab militants claimed responsibility for a terror attack on a residential compound in Mandera, northeastern Kenya, on 6 October that left six dead and about 27 injured.

"We are behind the Mandera attack in which we killed six Christians," local and international media reported the group's military spokesman, Sheikh Abdiasis Musab, as saying.

"THEY SPECIFICALLY TARGETED NON-LOCALS"

In a telephone interview, an Open Doors contact explained: "The al-Shabaab Militants, wearing Kenyan army uniforms, entered the compound on the pretext of being Kenyan security officers on patrol. They first hit a mobile money transfer shop with an explosive

device before throwing more explosives into the compound. People were caught unawares and were shot as they tried to flee.

"They specifically targeted non-locals (all assumed to be 'Christians'). Among the six dead is a local barber called Cege. Among the injured is one person who hid in the ceiling but the explosion from the grenades shook him and he fell through the roof and was injured. He is currently in hospital."

"We are greatly saddened by this attack on people perceived by militants to be Christians," said a member of Open Doors' East Africa team. "We ask that supporters pray for the people of Mandera at this time. There is a high level of fear among locals and we pray that the Lord will strengthen His children as they once more bear the brunt of militant anger."



In December 2014, al-Shabaab militants killed 36 quarry workers in a town close to Mandera. During the attack, gunmen separated the Muslims from among the workers and then shot dead the Christians.

• PRAY

- For comfort for the bereaved and healing for the injured
- For wisdom for Kenya's government and security forces tackling the Al-Shabaab insurgency.

SYRIA: "What has happened to our city?"

"A ceasefire is a lie unfortunately. Always know that, even if there is a ceasefire, the rockets and mortars are there. And when there is no ceasefire, the rockets and mortars are there. And life is going on in Aleppo."

The recent words of one of our Syrian contacts coincided with the collapse of the week-long ceasefire in Aleppo at the end of September.

"What has happened to our city?" lamented another Open Doors contact. She shared how the fall of missiles has become so common that 'nobody even turned to look where it had fallen'.

"I don't know what's happening to us. I just know that God is good and He loves us!"

As we go to print, the Syrian government is intensifying its military campaign in Aleppo. But whatever the future holds, our local partners are committed to continue working in Aleppo and other Syrian cities, providing vital aid and long-term support to fleeing families. And God is still at work in people's lives.



"In my church, now only ten per cent of the regular church-goers are left," Kristina explains, talking about her church in Aleppo. "But you know what's surprising? The church is still filled with people: refugees take their place. Muslims are coming to the church now."

• PRAY

- For the witness of Christians in Syria despite unimaginable hardship
- For all those coming to Christ in the midst of conflict
- For Open Doors partners providing emergency relief to families across Syria – even in Aleppo.

"Thanks to your prayers, we have been able to get out of Kaga Bandoro with our lives"

Open Doors partner caught up in violence in Central African Republic

CAR: Pastor among scores killed by rebels

A renewed outbreak of violence in the Central African Republic has left 26 people dead – including a pastor. Churches were looted and dozens of people were forced to flee when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels attacked Muslim communities around the town of Kaga Bandoro, 200 miles north of the capital, Bangui.

Although Christians were not specifically targeted in this incident, many Christians are among the victims. Among those threatened during the attack were an Open Doors partner and 15

pastors who were attending an Open Doors sponsored seminar.

"Thanks to your prayers, we have been able to get out of Kaga Bandoro with our lives safe," he told us. "Some Seleka fighters even came into the church where our seminar was taking place and hurt people lodging there."

Witnesses say the Seleka held them at gunpoint and beat them with their fists and machetes, before taking money and other valuables. At one point they ordered the pastors to lie face down and threatened to kill them. Mercifully, when one of their

members protested, the group left.

Elsewhere, others were not so fortunate and were killed by Seleka. "Those killed included servants of God and other believers," said our partner. "We came back to Bangui under the escort of the Lord Jesus, but our brothers in Kaga Bandoro, Ndele and Kouango are suffering."

• PRAY

- For comfort for the families of those who died
- Ask the Lord to strengthen and protect Christians in this volatile region.

TURKEY: Life sentences for Malatya Murders

For nearly a decade, Open Doors supporters have been praying for justice for the victims of a brutal murder in Turkey. On 18 April 2007 three Christian men, Ugur Yuksel, Necati Aydin and Tilman Geske, were tortured and killed at the Zirve publishing house in Malatya. Yet, although the five perpetrators were caught red-handed at the crime scene, the case has dragged on and on.

On 28 September the First Criminal Court of Malatya finally issued a verdict: the five murderers

were given three consecutive life sentences, while two military personnel were given sentences of some 13 years and 14 years. Sixteen other defendants were acquitted.

Initially, despite being handed life sentences, the perpetrators were not arrested and detained, to the consternation of the families and friends of the victims. The legal limit for detention pending the trial is five years and, since the perpetrators had already served this time, and with the case now

moving to the Court of Appeals, they could not be detained.

However, after the prosecutor expressed fears that they might flee the country, the men were re-arrested on 29 September.

The families and friends of the victims are desperate for justice. Pastor Ihsan Ozbek, chairman of the Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey issued a statement: "We as the Protestant community living in Turkey struggled hard to get the killers punished and to uncover the motivation behind the perpetrators... The repeated postponement of the punishment they deserve severely wounds confidence in justice."

• PRAY

- For justice to finally be done
- For safety and protection for the church in Turkey.



FROM LEFT: Necati Aydin, Ugur Yuksel and Tilman Geske

A Christmas letter from your Open Doors family

As the festive season approaches, perhaps you are expecting to receive letters from friends and family, telling you their news from the year just

gone and plans for the year ahead. This is our Christmas letter to you – but you are very much a part of it. As we look back at 2016, we can see the incredible difference that your prayers and support have made to our persecuted brothers and sisters. You are assuring them that they are not alone or forgotten, and enabling Open Doors to be there for as long as they need us – not just for this year, but for the months and years to come.



A message from North Korea

It can seem like little is changing in North Korea – it has been number one on the Open Doors World Watch List for the past 14 years. And yet, we know that God is at work and, incredibly, your prayers and support are enabling Open Doors to provide North Korean believers with food, medicines, Bibles and training.



"Every small or big thing you do for us is like a beautiful song in the ear of our Heavenly God"

- North Korean believer

One North Korean believer sent us this message: "We praise and worship our God who protects our believers. We truly are the apples of His eyes and receive abundant Heavenly blessings. We thank God who pours out His love in order that our believers may run the holy race towards the kingdom of the Heavenly God. I also give thanks to anyone who cares about us with the love of Christ.

"We realise that you pour out physical and spiritual blessings on us. Please know that every small or big thing you do for us is like a beautiful song in the ear of our Heavenly God. We want our next generation in Christ to spread what you have started for us."

✧ Thank you for your support for believers in North Korea. Every £21 you gave provided three believers in North Korea with a Bible. In total Open Doors was able to provide 15,000 Bibles, as well as emergency relief for 59,000 believers!

Books of love for the Chibok families



On 14 April it was two years since the Chibok girls were abducted from their school by the militant Islamist group Boko Haram – two years too long. But there were some glimmers of hope this year; one of the Chibok girls, 19-year-old Amina Ali Nkeki, was able to escape in May, and

two 'proof of life' videos gave other parents hope that their daughters may at least still be alive.

At the end of the summer, an Open Doors worker delivered thousands of messages of encouragement from supporters around the world to the families of the missing Chibok girls, bound into books for them to keep. "Knowing that people are praying for us is a great blessing," one parent said.

"We are alive because your ministry cares"
- Chibok parent

"We are alive because your ministry cares," said another. "Your prayers are keeping us. We cannot thank God enough for using Open Doors to intercede for us."

Open Doors workers have been making regular visits to the Chibok parents to encourage them and provide them with food, medicines and trauma care, thanks to your prayers and support.

✧ Every £46 you gave provided a trauma awareness training session for a church leader in sub-Saharan Africa. In total Open Doors was able to train 1,800 leaders, so they can better support people like the Chibok families.

A letter from Iran

In Iran, where believers from Muslim backgrounds must keep their faith completely secret, Christmas is a time of joy, but also a time of fear. Each year Christmas celebrations are raided. This is a letter from a secret believer from Iran, who reflects on her experiences of Christmas:

Hello fellow believers,

I'm Maryam. About ten years ago my family and I started to believe in Jesus. Now we are members of a house church. Every year on Christmas day we gather at the home of one of the believers and celebrate this great day and pray and sing songs and worship God.

"Although we were with few, the presence of God was tangible among us"
- Maryam, Iranian believer

Last year we could not celebrate this day with the whole church because the security situation wouldn't allow it. The only thing we did was invite two of our friends to pray together. We sang with a soft voice, and although we were with few, the presence of the Holy Spirit was tangible among us.

But I found out that not all Christians had a peaceful Christmas time. I read that a house church had been attacked and that the Christians participating in the Christmas service had been arrested. I'm still shocked. Now I know I can't stop praying for them.

Maryam

✧ Thank you for supporting secret believers like Maryam. Every gift of £35 helped us to provide a secret believer in the Middle East with discipleship training, enabling them to keep following Jesus, despite the incredible challenges they face. In total Open Doors was able to train 600 people as well as providing 6,850 Bibles!

Answers to prayer in India



Do you remember Meena* and Sunita*? They are sisters from a Hindu background who have endured horrific beatings for their faith in Jesus, but have found the strength to keep going and even ask God to forgive their persecutors.

"Thank you for praying for us and helping us"
- Meena, India

Open Doors partners have told us that Meena and Sunita are now staying in a Christian leader's home. When the sisters filed a police report about the abuse they have faced at the hands of their old neighbours, their abusers retaliated by falsely accusing Meena and Sunita of beating a girl from their village; our partners have arranged a lawyer to help them with this.

Your support and prayers have also enabled our partners to provide the sisters with medical support, and assist them in opening a small stationery shop to help them support themselves. "Thank you for praying for us and helping us," Meena says.

You can write to Meena and Sunita to encourage them - turn to page 14 to find out how.

✧ Thank you for supporting our church family in India. Every gift of £36 provided three weeks' funding for a Rapid Response team of volunteers who provide persecuted believers with vital relief aid and legal support. In total Open Doors provided a year's funding for 44 Rapid Response teams as well as extensive training for the church.

*names changed for security reasons

Thank You!

Whatever you've done this year, whether you've prayed with the prayer diary, lived like a refugee, written to your MP, volunteered at a festival, raised funds, or something else – we want to say a big thank you! None of our work would be possible without people like you, and every prayer, gift and voice raised really does make a difference. Here's a snapshot of what happened:



Theresa Villiers MP with Open Doors CEO Lisa Pearce

The 2016 World Watch List was launched in parliament in January, and 5,500 supporters invited their MPs! Over 100 parliamentarians were there, including at least 108 MPs – more than have ever been to the launch before. That's thanks to people like you: Theresa Villiers MP, who hosted the event, opened by describing how she had become involved in the issue of the persecution of Christians 'because my constituents asked me to be', a sentiment echoed by many of those attending. Your voice really does count!

We have been so encouraged over the years to see increasing understanding in parliament about the issues facing the persecuted church. One MP we have met along the way is Steve Brine. He recently wrote: "I may have been a Christian before entering Parliament but I had no real idea of the extent to which some parts of our world are dangerous places to just be. I am hugely grateful to Open Doors for the work they do in educating those of us in Westminster and to the many constituents who, judging by my postbag, know of their work and understand these issues as much as they are troubled by them." Thank you to everyone who has played a part in telling their MPs, like Steve, about persecuted Christians.

If you haven't already, invite your MP to the launch of the 2017 World Watch List using the postcard we've sent with this magazine.



Maayan sells cakes for Syria

In June, Maayan sold cupcakes at Ipswich Hope Church to support the persecuted church. Her Mum, Rozelet, says, "She was moved by the plight of our Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted. Being a feisty seven-year-old who loves Jesus very much, she really wanted to do something." Her amazing baking skills helped her to raise £60.55, enough to provide a family of five in Syria with food for six weeks! Well done Maayan!



Lindsay abseiled in support of persecuted believers

In September, our brave friend Lindsay Turner from Stockton-on-Tees did a bridge abseil – it's a bit hard to see her in this photo because she's so high up! Her daring feat helped her to raise £255 – that's enough to buy 46 Bibles for persecuted believers in South East Asia! Thank you Lindsay.



Littleham Sunday Club raised £700 by living like refugees

Littleham Sunday Club decided to 'live like refugees' for 24 hours, eating rations of tinned meat and bread with no electronic devices and no change of clothes. They raised over £700 – enough to support 16 refugee families for a month! Thank you so much to everyone who took part and gave so generously.

Anna Roberts' small group spent a night 'living like refugees' in the Peak District, to help them identify with real refugees who are forced to flee their homes because of their faith in Jesus.

She says, "We were only allowed to take 15 items with us. At first I thought that 15 items was plenty, but they quickly were eaten up by essentials like sleeping bags and tents and food and water.

One person spoke of deciding to bring a book with them as one of their 15 items, to help them remember who they were before they had to leave – an academic. It stunned us into silence as we considered how our Christian family have said goodbye, not only to their homes, but to who they are.

"One night in the woods, with friends, is by no means comparable to what our Christian family goes through every day, but it was an opportunity to connect with them in a new way. It gave us an opportunity to join together and really pray for them, knowing God's love for them and deepening our own love for them as our family."

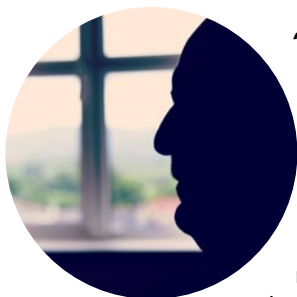


This prayer map is from our time at New Wine Ireland. It's a picture of just a few of the prayers that have been raised up for our persecuted church family this year.

We hope you will continue to walk with your persecuted church family in 2017, knowing that your prayers and gifts are incredibly precious to your brothers and sisters, and make a real difference. If you haven't already, perhaps you would like to make 2017 the year when you commit to pray and give to support your persecuted church family on a regular basis, enabling our workers and partners to be there for the long term – call our friendly Inspire team on 01993 460015 to find out how.

Your persecuted church family are praying for you. The North Korean believer who began this letter says: "I pray for you and your supporters. I pray they will receive more blessings from our Father in Heaven." That's our prayer for you too, wishing you every blessing for the rest of 2016 and the New Year.

SYRIA: HOPE THAT ENDURES



"There is a danger when travelling from one area to another because of kidnapping – they might ask for a ransom."

This is one of the risks Pastor B is taking by choosing to stay in Syria to serve his community.

His faith in Christ makes him a target for Islamic extremists, who would use his ransom to fund their acts of terror. Tartus, his home city on Syria's coast, has been relatively safe during the civil war, but is not immune to violence; in September this year, two bomb attacks carried out by the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) in Tartus killed 35 people and wounded 43 others, according to state media.

"We were receiving almost 100 families every day"

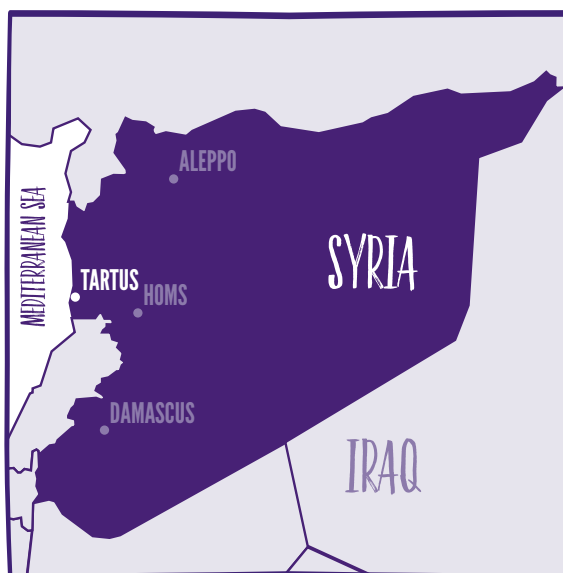
And yet, Pastor B has decided to stay and serve the thousands of displaced people who are looking to his church for help. You may remember Pastor B's story from the *Save Syria* campaign in 2013; in 2012, his church in Tartus was supporting just 16 families. "It started like the first church," he says. "We began visiting families in their homes. We formed a team, including a doctor, a Sunday school teacher, and women. The sisters were able to take care of the women and the Sunday school teacher could care for the children while we visited the families." Now, thanks to the prayers and gifts of people like you, his church is supporting thousands of displaced families.

The number of people in need of help from

Pastor B's church increased hugely with the rise of IS in 2014. "There were lots of displaced people who were on the borders with Iraq, and hundreds of these families arrived in Tartus and its suburbs. We were receiving almost 100 families every day," says Pastor B. The number of families his church was supporting increased from 2,000 to 3,500 that year.

Pastor B says, "The biggest need is to pay for the rent, and also the need for food supplies and clothes. These families lost their jobs, all their belongings and their homes. And because of them being displaced to these safe areas, the cost of goods in Tartus has risen up ten times, including rent. And now we don't have any houses for rent, and that has caused lots of problems."

"We have a big problem because we don't have work opportunities for all these people coming. Even the cost of fuel has gone up and the cost of mobile calls. In some villages it is very cold and there is a great need for fuel."



These problems show why your prayers and support are so vital. Pastor B and other Open Doors partners are supporting 12,000 families every month with vital aid such as food, clothes, rent payments and fuel subsidies.

Looking for hope

Despite the challenges they face, Pastor B believes that the crisis in Syria has helped to make the church more open and more united.

He says, "The doors of the church are wide open. It has never been closed in the face of anybody, and it does not differentiate between people whatever their background is [Christian or Muslim]."

"Every member in the church or whoever is left in the church is now committed to serve. Almost everyone inside the church is asking, 'What can we do?' Our message is that we love everybody and we would like to help because you are in need."

"We are cooperating with other churches as well. Before there was a kind of fear of each other from one church to the other church, but today, when

there is a food distribution and people come to the church to receive their package, if you look around you see people from every background, every denomination."

Pastor B is also seeing many come to faith. He says, "People are thirsty to know more about God, and they are looking for help and for support and for hope."

This includes some from Muslim backgrounds. "Recently there was a baptism for a Muslim family, the entire family they got baptised together. And the change that we can see in this family that got baptised is now they are helping us in distributing and helping others."

"People are thirsty to know more about God"

"My prayer for the Middle East is to see the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Muslim people. Some people think that salvation is to cast away Muslims. We believe and we pray for a special word from God in the hearts of these Muslims."

Christmas in Tartus

The church in Tartus has stopped celebrating Christmas in what we might consider 'the traditional way'. "Because of the war there is no



Displaced Syrian Muslim family who receive food packages from an Open Doors partner

Christmas tree. There is pain in every mouth, even among our neighbours, there is pain and a lot of grieving. So we as a church, because we respect their feelings, stop these celebrations."

But they do still celebrate – by serving others. "During Christmas time we go to the camps and we do a play for children. We talk to these children about how Jesus was born in a cave and how Jesus fled from one area to the other, like them, and how God protected Jesus the same way he is protecting them now. And this did not stop Jesus from loving God and obeying his commands. This is how we should remain also, loving God and obeying his commands.

"The true meaning of Christmas is to go and help those who are in need"

"When we present the gifts to them, the gifts are brought from the children in the church, and this brings also joy to the families in the church – they learn that the true meaning of Christmas is to go and help those who are in need. Our children they have clothes, but there are children who don't have any clothes; our children have food and they have shoes, but there are children who have neither food nor shoes.

"We celebrate Christmas now by bringing our church members together and bringing things to give to the children who don't have anything. This is one beautiful thing at Christmas."

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

ONE MILLION VOICES OF HOPE PETITION

Our church family in the Middle East are asking us to speak out for them. The One Million Voices petition is enabling Christians around the world to stand with their brothers and sisters in Syria and Iraq, who are asking for equality, dignity and responsibility for Christians and other minorities in the Middle East.

At the time of writing, 23,737 people from 54 countries had signed the One Million Voices petition – including 13,420 people from the UK! We have a little way to go to reach a million – but that's where you come in. We've enclosed a petition sheet with this magazine, which you can photocopy if you want to. Please sign it, and then take it to your church or small group and ask others to sign it too. Every signature will make a real difference, showing our church family in the Middle East that they are not alone, and helping to make sure their voices are heard by our leaders.



Six of our fantastic youth advocates were at Powerpoint in Edinburgh on behalf of Open Doors in September – they managed to gather over 170 signatures in less than 30 minutes!

The Open Doors advocacy team were at the Labour Party conference in September and the Conservative party conference in October, where they were able to speak to dozens of MPs and parliamentarians about the Hope for the Middle East campaign. Over 25 MPs signed our One Million Voices petition, including Andy Burnham MP and Eric Pickles MP, as well as Channel 4's Jon Snow!

Christians who have faced persecution are speaking out too. A field worker in Latin America told us, "Christians in Mexico and Cuba are increasingly committed to connecting with persecuted Christians worldwide. The Hope for the Middle East campaign is a powerful tool to engage these church leaders with the wider body of Christ, including with the church in the Middle East."



Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP



Rt Hon Sir Eric Pickles MP



Rt Hon Kate Green MP, who hosted the launch of the Hope for the Middle East campaign in parliament



TV presenter Jon Snow

HOPE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST REPORT LAUNCH

Our Hope for the Middle East report was launched in parliament on 12 October. If you invited your MP – thank you! Over 80 MPs let us know they were planning to attend. This magazine went to print before the launch took place, but head to our website to find out how it went. We'll also be reporting back in our January magazine.

PRAY FOR ME

At the time of writing 2,577 people had ordered our Pray for ME resource pack, to help them to hold a prayer event for Syria and Iraq. That's a lot of prayers! There's still time to order yours in time for the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church on 20 November – call our Inspire team on 01993 460015 or go to www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME.

If you're holding a prayer event, we'd love to hear how it goes – email us your stories and photos at inspire@opendoorsuk.org.



KEEP GIVING HOPE

Pastor B and other Open Doors partners are supporting 27,000 families in Syria and Iraq every month with vital aid such as food, clothes, rent payments and fuel subsidies, as well as providing long-term support such as trauma care and loans for small businesses. But it's only thanks to the prayers and generous giving of people like you that any of our work is possible.

Every £42 provides a food pack for a family of five for a month

Every £55 enables a displaced family of five in Iraq to attend a special Christmas party, with songs, cake and gifts – helping them to forget their difficult situation for a time, and focus on their faith and community.

SPEAK OUT

If you haven't already done so, please sign the One Million Voices petition and ask others in your church or small group to sign it too. You can order more petition sheets by phoning 01993 460015 or go to www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME

#SAVE ME
BRING HOPE TO THE MIDDLE EAST



THEIR STORIES CONTINUE... ... AND YOU CAN WRITE SOME OF THE PAGES

In July's magazine we told you the story of Indian sisters, Meena* and Sunita* – two believers from a Hindu background who were beaten severely with bamboo sticks and left to die because of their faith. Open Doors partners recently went back to visit the sisters. This is how their story continues...

After being beaten so severely, Meena and Sunita had to flee to a nearby village. Open Doors partners were able to provide them with food, basic necessities and covered the costs of their medical expenses. After some months, the sisters returned home and filed a report to the police, seeking help and protection. As is the custom in India, police officers attempted to set up 'a mutual understanding' between them and the village: the attackers receive strict warnings of punishments

if they continue to persecute Christians, in return the sisters would withdraw their complaint.

Despite the attempts by police to negotiate a truce, and the willingness of the sisters to compromise, the villagers responded unkindly. A village girl was told to file a complaint against Meena, Sunita and another Christian called Mamta*. By bribing police officers, she registered a false accusation against the women, accusing them of beating her as she drew water from a well.

Once again, Meena and Sunita have had to leave their village – Mamta, too. They now live with a Christian leader where they are receiving legal, medical and economic support through the help of Open Doors partners. The women are also opening a stationery shop, with the help of Open Doors, to generate income.

WRITE TO MEENA AND SUNITA

For believers who have been ostracised and rejected, like Meena and Sunita, knowing that their worldwide family is standing alongside them is incredibly valuable. "We thank all who pray for us. We thank God for them," Meena had told Open Doors when we visited the sisters earlier this year.

Writing a letter or card is a personal way of encouraging our brothers and sisters to stand strong through persecution.

Meena and Sunita still need your prayers and support – could you write to them to let them know that you are praying for them and to encourage them to continue standing strong?

AUTUMN 2016 LETTER- WRITING GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE!

For stories of persecuted Christians like Meena and Sunita who need your support, order our free Autumn 2016 Letter-writing Guide! This booklet contains ideas on how to be creative, guidelines to help you as you write, and the latest updates on how your letters are bringing hope to those who need it. To order your copy, fill in the response form or visit us online at www.opendoorsuk.org/write for the latest letter-writing campaigns.



YOUR LETTERS SHOW MERCY SHE'S 'NOT ALONE'

**"I am so happy because I know that I am not alone and that other believers out there are praying for me."
- Mercy James, Nigeria**



Mercy joyfully begins looking over 25kg of letters written by Open Doors supporters. After being separated from her father – her only family – when she was abducted by Boko Haram militants in Nigeria, these letters and cards represent something truly special: they are a way of connecting Mercy to her global family in Christ.

At just 22 years old, Mercy had experienced more horrors than many of us experience in a lifetime. Captured in a raid on her hometown, forcibly married and made to attend Islamic rituals, Mercy clung onto God even when things were at their darkest. Miraculously, she was rescued after surviving a bombardment on the militants' camp. "I thank God for rescuing me," Mercy shared. "God spared my life for a purpose."

FROM HARDSHIP TO HOPE

Mercy was destitute, injured and deeply traumatised when Open Doors workers met her in a displaced people's camp. But today, she makes a much more positive picture: her injuries have now healed, she has been receiving counselling and has even been taken in by a foster family. With the help of Open Doors, her medical and counselling costs have been covered and she is receiving financial support to start a new business.

"The sewing machine and monetary support I received helped me a lot," Mercy shares. "I now have a shop. A lot of people bring their clothes for me to sew; I can now cover my needs and those of my family."

But one other major source of support for Mercy has been your letters. One item that immediately caught her eye was a bracelet someone had included. "I was deeply touched by the bracelet I received," she explains. "Though it's just a bracelet, it has a deeper meaning. All the colours on it speak about Psalm 23.

"Words cannot express the joy and peace I have," says Mercy. "All I can say is, may God continue to bless your charity and all those who are out there praying for us in northern Nigeria."

Thank you to everyone who has been writing to Mercy. You still have time to write to her, until 30 November 2016.

For the latest letter-writing campaigns and updates on letter recipients, visit www.opendoorsuk.org/write

SUPPORTING SECRET CHILDREN

Thanks to the support of Secret Child Sponsors and the committed giving of Open Doors supporters, persecuted children around the world are receiving **protection, provision and education**. In most cases, we cannot share their names or what we're doing, but their lives are being transformed. Here are some stories from Colombia that we can share.

REJECTED

Children from indigenous communities in the north of Colombia experience persecution, along with their families, but now, thanks to the committed giving of Secret Child sponsors and the generosity of many other supporters, Open Doors is providing a place of safety and hope for a growing number of them.

'La Casita' is a new home for Christian boys that provides shelter, food, education and vocational guidance so that they can express their faith in freedom without fear. Families in these communities stay faithful to Jesus despite violence from guerrillas and extreme discrimination at the hands of their traditional leaders whose ancestral laws forbid the families from expressing their faith. Imprisonment, torture and exile are some of the punishments imposed on Christians here and many of their children have had experience of this, too – so parents are glad to have a safe place for their children to stay.

Open Doors pays for the house and food, with a stipend for the tutors, while parents are asked to periodically provide produce grown on their land as a way of payment.

The children living at 'La Casita' study at public school in the morning and receive Christian and vocational education in the evenings. Every weekend they are visited by their families. "It's a project that, in addition to protecting children from persecution, gives them the opportunity to have continuous contact with their parents," says Liz, the Director of Open Doors Colombia. "Adults spend 5-9 hours a week visiting their children and they do so with joy."

SEPARATED

Open Doors Children's Centre, opened 16 years ago, has been the model for 'La Casita'. Based in a different part of the country, it provides a home and education for over 50 children.

Change is so slow to come in Colombia, as the people's recent rejection of the proposed peace deal demonstrates, and pastors are still vulnerable to threats and violence. It was this that persuaded Pastor Pablo to send his son David* and daughter Lina* to the Centre – a 20-hour journey away from their home in the south.

"When we are at home," Pablo says, "my wife and I see the empty chairs and we feel their

absence. But we also know that having them at home would be dangerous. Many times, there are fights between the guerrillas and the army and we are caught in the crossfire. And there is always the danger of forced recruitment.

"For me and my wife, the staff of the Children's Centre is also family to us," he comments during one of his visits. "The children are doing well here. We can see the change in their lives. David was very shy and he has since overcome his fear of other people. Back home we are still going through many difficulties, but we feel less worried because we know that our children are in a safe and good place with people who love them."

ORPHANED

Sofia, whom you may remember from the *Secret Children* film in 2011, was orphaned at eight years old when her preacher parents were murdered by guerrillas. She has now graduated from the Children's Centre and continues to be grateful for the education she received, being full of praise for the staff. "They were real role models. Our teachers were the parents I never had." A course called 'My Life Project' was especially beneficial to her and other students, challenging them to grapple with their abilities and talents to find out what their long-term goals should be. It was through this that despite knowing the potential cost, she has identified God's call to be a missionary. Ferney, son of Jaime and Marleny Tenorio, whom many supporters wrote to in 2012, also discovered his love of information technology whilst at the Centre and now studies the subject at Bogota University, as well as working part-time for Open Doors.

TRANSFORMED

THANK YOU

The work of these two centres is playing a strategic role in strengthening the church in Colombia. Jaime (15), who is now living at 'La Casita' has a sister, Diana, who has lived at the Children's Centre for nearly four years. The two children have grown up in the context of deep persecution but, thanks to the committed giving of our supporters, have had the chance to spend their formative years in a place of safety and love. There they can express their faith and aspire to

a better future. Jaime appreciates the peace and stability of 'La Casita'. "I wish more parents could send their children," he says.

Open Doors' intention is to make that possible by increasing the number of available places next year: there are plans to open a 'La Casita' for indigenous girls at risk of violence, abuse and abduction from local guerrilla groups.



Graduation ceremony at the Children's Centre

CONTINUE TO PRAY

Thanks to your generosity and your prayers, there will be generations of Christians ready to continue God's work in Colombia. Please continue to pray for the children in these homes and for other secret children around the world: the Open Doors Prayer Diary regularly features prayer points for them.



WRITE TO PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN CHILDREN

Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to write to children in the Open Doors Children's Centre. However, there are many more Christian children whose families have experienced persecution and need encouragement. To write to displaced children from the Nasa tribe in Colombia, whose families have been forced from their homes and lands because of their faith, go to: www.opendoorsuk.org/write



Image used for illustrative purposes only

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: CASTING A LIGHT

The number of Christians in the Palestinian Territories has been decreasing for decades. A minority group targeted on two fronts, they experience restrictions from the Israeli side because of their Arab ethnicity, as well as religiously-motivated persecution from the Muslim-majority Palestinian community amongst whom they live. But a major trigger for the migration of believers from Christianity's homeland has been the growing threat of militant Islam in Gaza and the West Bank.

Yet there is a ray of hope. Despite the dangers, a small but growing number of people are converting to Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY, CONQUEST AND PERSECUTION

You might think that believers in the Palestinian Territories have access to Bibles and are allowed to attend churches – this is where Christianity originated from after all. But for many believers, this isn't so.

After the conquest of Islam in the seventh century, Palestinian Christians could only practise their religion in peace if they paid the subjugation 'jizya' tax and did not evangelise. But over time, a surge of missionaries and the

growth of evangelistic churches in the region led to more Muslims coming to Christ. As a result, Christians have been pressured to leave or to reconvert, and they and their properties have been attacked.

GAZA

West of Israel, Christians in Gaza face restricted laws under the leadership of the Islamist militant party, Hamas. For Gazan believers, who make up only approximately five per cent of the Palestinian Territory's Christians, it is practically impossible for Protestant churches to be built and registered.

Christians also face persecution from their communities and families. Believers from a Muslim background (BMBs) are likely to be harassed, discriminated against and pressured to reconvert.

THE WEST BANK

In the West Bank, religious freedom is generally protected – although it is very difficult for Protestant churches to be registered. In June, President Mahmoud Abbas even announced that he wants to increase the quota of Christians allowed on local governing councils.

WORLD WATCH LIST FACTS:

- Believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs) face the severest persecution
- Violent incidents against Christians increased last year
- BMBs are banned from gathering in churches
- The West Bank's ruling Fatah party is based on secularism and Christians enjoy several rights, including religious protection by law and seats in parliament
- In Gaza, rights of Christians are neither upheld nor protected.

Despite this, fear is growing amongst the Christian minority – particularly amongst BMBs, who face similar social and family pressures as Gazan believers. Political unrest over the legitimacy and direction of President Abbas' leadership, as well as increasing Islamic radicalisation in society, means that many BMBs have to hide their new faith.

BIBLES AND RECONCILIATION

Because of links forged by Open Doors' founder, Brother Andrew, Open Doors has been supporting believers in the Palestinian Territories and Israel through partner organisations for decades. Recently, Open Doors helped the Palestinian Bible Society (PBS) publish 20,000 New Testaments for Orthodox Christians – in less than a year, every book had been distributed to churches and Christian families, many of whom had never owned their own Bibles.

"The Word brings us together," said Nashat Filmon, Executive Director of the PBS. "My prayer is that we as Christians will be united and able to lead the way in a process of reconciliation in the Holy Land, in showing that there is hope and forgiveness. Our calling is to spread just a little bit of light. That is enough to cast out the darkness."



And through youth camps organised by Musalaha, an Open Doors partner, Christian teenagers from Jewish and Arabic backgrounds

are being encouraged to become friends and understand one another. "What we experience here is friendship built upon the love of Jesus Christ," shares 16-year-old Miriam from Jerusalem. "My prayer is that our generation will lead the way towards full reconciliation between our people."

HOPE SCHOOL BETHLEHEM

"I have been here for five years now. I really feel part of the community," L shares, timidly. Open Doors has been sponsoring children like L through Hope School ever since Brother Andrew visited the school 35 years ago. N, a cheerful, open-hearted 14-year-old boy, has recently started boarding with the school because of his difficult home situation. His favourite subjects? Sports and science. His favourite hobby? His eyes light up. "Football. Supporting Manchester United."

The school's chairman explains how the school aims to educate vulnerable children and arm them with positive attitudes towards their neighbours. "We hear from former students after they've graduated that their behaviour has become more peaceful and they are better able to live together in society," he says.

L is now 16. Her dream for the future is to become a Christian Education teacher at a school just like this one. "I would like to teach others about the Bible."

PRAY

- For BMBs to know God's sustenance and protection
- That God would equip and strengthen Open Doors partners supporting Palestinian believers
- For reconciliation and unity between Christians in the Palestinian Territories and Israel.

INVITE YOUR MP TO THE OPEN DOORS 2017 WORLD WATCH LIST LAUNCH!

It's vital that we keep persecution a priority for our new Prime Minister and her government. If you haven't already, please invite your MP to the parliamentary launch of the 2017 World Watch List using the postcard included or by visiting www.opendoorsuk.org/wwwlaunch





BRING COMFORT AND JOY THIS CHRISTMAS

How would you celebrate Christmas in a war zone?

Pastor B, one of Open Doors' local partners in Syria, says, "We celebrate by bringing our church members together and by bringing things to give to the children who don't have anything."

Open Doors partners are working across Syria – even in Aleppo – to provide vital aid to 12,000 displaced families every month, including food, medicines and winter supplies.

"There are children who have neither food nor shoes," Pastor B says. Your gift today could help Pastor B give these families comfort and joy this Christmas.

Every £42 can provide a food pack and winter supplies for a family of five in Syria or Iraq to last a month and bring them comfort.

An additional £11 could enable an Iraqi child to go to a special Christmas party and receive a present, bringing them joy this Christmas.

Join the global *Hope for the Middle East* campaign to unite the church in prayer and action for people like Pastor B and the families he serves.

To give a Christmas gift, please use the enclosed response form, visit www.opendoorsuk.org/SaveME or call our Inspire Team on 01993 460015.

GIVE to send hope

PRAY as never before

SIGN the global petition



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted Christians worldwide

#SAVE ME

BRING HOPE TO THE MIDDLE EAST