

Open *Doors*

MAGAZINE | March 2019

See. Change.

Your support can
bring restoration,
healing and hope

CAMPAIGN
LAUNCH
SPECIAL

Be a pilgrim

Step into a deeper relationship with God this Easter. Follow an ancient path on a prayerful journey from Winchester to Canterbury. It's a chance to pray for your persecuted family and raise money to bless your brothers and sisters – many of whom are forced to walk miles to find safety.

How you complete the pilgrimage is up to you. Do the whole route in two weeks, or spread the journey over several weekends. Walk in solitude or get a group together. You could even do a relay!

Order your Pilgrimage pack at
www.opendoorsuk.org/pilgrimage or contact
challenge@opendoorsuk.org to find out more.

"This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'"

- Jeremiah 6:16 -

What's your legacy?

Give a lifetime of hope to your persecuted family by prayerfully including a gift to Open Doors in your Will.

Find out more and order a pack at
www.opendoorsuk.org/legacy or phone
01993 460015.

"Whatever you did for one of my brothers or sisters... you did for me." Matthew 25:40



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.

Contact us:

England and Wales
PO Box 6, Witney
Oxon OX29 6WG
T 01993 460015

Ireland
PO Box 873
Belfast BT15 1WZ
T 02890 751080

Scotland
T 01292 800006

Email inspire@opendoorsuk.org

Find us on:

www.opendoorsuk.org



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Cover image: Aisha, a participant of a recent trauma care workshop in northern Nigeria. You can read her story on pp9-11.

Letter from Henrietta

Restoration

"Dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations"

Psalm 22:28

Politics and uncertainty are difficult to deal with - we have seen that with Brexit. But for Christians in countries where there is persecution, political change brings not just uncertainty, but violence and fear. Speaking about Nigeria's recent presidential elections, a Nigerian pastor says: "Every time there are elections, there is so much fear of the unknown among Christians, because they have been targeted so often. We appreciate all Christians abroad for praying for the election. You are showing us that we are one in Christ and that anything that affects us here in Nigeria also affects you."

Sadly, it's not only elections that reinforce persecution, as our main feature (p6) shows. In many countries - including Nigeria - on this year's Open Doors World Watch List, Christian women and girls are raped, abducted and forced into marriage, or used as sex slaves. Some are as young as ten years old. They are doubly vulnerable because of their faith and gender - and their stories are heart-breaking. Not only are they traumatised; they frequently have to live alongside the people who assaulted them, and are shunned by their loved ones. Too often, churches remain silent, ashamed of the stigma. That silence and stigma has to be broken.

It is shocking that our sisters are still treated like this in the 21st century - and even more shocking that so few Christians in other countries know about it. That's why we've launched the *See. Change* campaign, to restore hope, dignity and identity to persecuted women by raising awareness of their plight, and support for the work of our local church partners in the field (read more on p7). Through the vital work that our partners are doing - both to provide trauma counselling and therapy to persecuted women, and to equip church leaders to support women subjected to sexual violence - lives are being restored, marriages reconciled and hope reborn. It's a massive win and a witness to all.

Being persecuted because of your faith and gender is a huge injustice and Isaiah 51:5 says the Lord's arm will bring justice to the nations. I am so encouraged that Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has called for an immediate review to look at UK support for persecuted Christians around the world (more on p4). I am sure this review comes in response to all our prayers - so thank you for praying and please keep going!



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I



Powerful encounter:
Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt
with CEO of Open Doors UK &
Ireland, Henrietta Blyth, and
Rebecca from Nigeria.

The issue of our time

How *God's Smuggler*, a vote of no confidence and a wave of pressure from Open Doors supporters put persecution high on the agenda in Westminster. Zoe Smith, Open Doors' Head of Advocacy, reports on the impact of your actions and prayers.

Everyone was glued to the news on the eve of the World Watch List (WWL) launch. A collective moan rose up when the vote of 'no confidence' was announced. It clashed directly with the WWL launch! The Foreign Secretary wanted to speak – would he cancel? The Shadow Foreign Secretary was due to attend – would she come? Would anybody come?! We were incredibly aware that – as ever – the event was in the Lord's hands.

The following day... Hallelujah! Thank you Lord! A total of 98 parliamentarians came and five more sent representatives. A number of senior faces were amongst them, not least both Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt and

Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry. The voice of the persecuted church echoed around the corridors of Westminster.

"Freedom to worship is the 'litmus test of a free society'"

- Jeremy Hunt,
Foreign Secretary

In his speech, Jeremy Hunt said that freedom of religion is the 'litmus test of a free society'. He thanked Open Doors supporters for 'the fantastic work you are doing to highlight the fact that nearly a quarter of a billion Christians around the world are facing

persecution for their beliefs', sharing the surprising story that "One of the oldest books I've got – which I've had since about the age of ten – is called *God's Smuggler* by Brother Andrew."

Emily Thornberry recorded a message, highlighting the plight of Asia Bibi and sharing her serious concern that 'for the fifth year running, persecution of Christians has increased once more'. It was particularly encouraging to see such senior support for the persecuted church from both sides of the political spectrum.

YOUR ACTIONS ARE HAVING AN IMPACT

A huge thank you to everyone who prayed and invited their

MP! Thanks to you, this is the fourth year running that around 100 parliamentarians from across all parties have attended the WWL launch to hear directly from persecuted Christians. Even if your MP wasn't able to attend, be encouraged that your messages have made sure that they know about the persecuted church.

"You have given us hope to continue to hold onto the faith."

- Rebecca, speaker from northern Nigeria

Your faithful campaigning is having a real impact. Parliament has upped the heat – not a week goes by when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office isn't asked a question about religious persecution.

And in 2018 not only did the Prime Minister appoint a Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, but the Foreign Secretary announced an independent review into whether the UK is doing enough to support persecuted Christians worldwide. Thank you.

'A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS'

The Foreign Secretary said that "I want [Christians] suffering this terrible persecution to think there are people who understand what they're going through and are sincerely trying to do everything they can about it."

Henrietta, Open Doors' CEO, shared how denying the right to freedom of religion or belief plays a 'central and devastating role' in global crises across the world, and highlighted the rise of both India and China on this year's list.

This theme was picked up by Brother Sam, an Open Doors partner from Malaysia, who said: "It saddens me that persecution is increasing in Asia. In some of these countries, even owning a Bible in the native language is a crime... Persecuted Christians need support from others who are able to be their 'voice' to the voiceless."

Rebecca, an Open Doors' partner from Northern Nigeria, shared powerfully from her experience of working with around 2,000 widows, orphans

and victims of rape: "The groups that bear the brunt of the persecution are women and children," she said. "The generous contributions of organisations like Open Doors are invaluable. You have given us hope to continue to hold onto the faith."



ABOVE Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry delivers an impassioned plea for religious liberty.



Spotlight on the UK government's independent review into the persecution of Christians

What is the review?

The Foreign Secretary has commissioned a review into the plight of persecuted Christians around the world and how much help they are receiving from the UK. The review will be independent and led by the Bishop of Truro.

What is the timeframe?

The review was announced on Boxing Day 2018 and officially launched on 30 January 2019. Open Doors has been informed that the final report is planned for summer 2019.

What does Open Doors think?

We welcome the review as a great first step, but wait to see its findings and impact. Our hope is that it will lead to concrete change that positively impacts the lives of persecuted Christians around the world.

How will Open Doors be involved?

Open Doors' CEO, Henrietta Blyth, met with the Foreign Secretary and others in the week before the review was announced and Open Doors has regularly engaged the FCO for the last decade. We intend

to actively contribute to the review from our expertise and experience, along with other organisations.

What can you do?

Please continue to stand with the persecuted church through your prayers, generosity and actions! Please pray that the review will lead to real change that positively impacts the lives of persecuted Christians.

Watch messages from
Jeremy Hunt and Emily
Thornberry at
www.opendoorsuk.org

“I want everybody in the world to see the tears in our eyes and know the pain we have – so that people who have the resources can help so that other women will be encouraged, just the way I was encouraged.”

– Esther, aged 20, Nigeria



UNSEEN

Campaign launch special

This is Esther, a hidden victim of persecution. Like many Christian women around the world, she is doubly at risk, both because of her faith and because of her gender. And, like many Christian women around the world, her suffering goes unseen.

New global research conducted by Open Doors has revealed the shocking truth that women are twice as vulnerable to persecution as men. But what is even more shocking is that their suffering is invisible, that they are largely unseen and ignored by the world around them.

This has to change.

Open Doors' vision is that every woman who is persecuted for her faith and gender is seen, valued and empowered to reach her God-given potential. That's why we are launching the new *See. Change.* campaign, to restore the hope, dignity and identity of women like Esther who face violent persecution both because of their faith and because of their gender.

Will you see these women, and act to make this vision a reality for women who are paying the price twice for following Jesus?



Esther's two-year-old daughter Rebecca has become 'my joy and laughter'.

When Boko Haram militants attacked Esther's village in Borno state, Nigeria, she desperately hoped that they would not see her. But they did.

Esther was carried off with other women from her community into three long years of captivity. At their camp, Boko Haram separated the Christians from the Muslims, and told the Christians (including Esther) that they had to make a choice: marry, or become a slave. Esther chose slavery – but was eventually married off to a man who already had three wives. Terrible intimidation and sexual abuse followed.

"Each passing day, I hated myself more and more," Esther says. "I felt that God had forsaken me."

In sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic militants are using sexual violence as a weapon against courageous Christian women, stripping them of their security, identity and self-worth, and challenging the notion of God as their protector and good Father.

Since the start of their insurgency in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram has abducted thousands of women, holding

them captive for years on end, subjecting them to sexual violence, forced Islamisation and forced marriage. Sadly, sexual violence has also been employed by Fulani militants as they attacked Christian communities in the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

"Each passing day, I hated myself more and more. I felt that God had forsaken me."

But even in the midst of the horror, Esther found she could not let go of her faith. "There were times when I was so angry with God, but I still could not get myself to renounce Him. I found myself remembering His promise to never leave me or forsake me."

Esther eventually escaped with three other women – but her trials were not yet over. She left Boko Haram pregnant, with no idea who the father was. Although she was reunited with her family, it was not the happy reunion she'd hoped for.

"At first, my grandparents were very happy to have me.

But a lot of people poisoned their minds, asking them, 'How can you allow her to enter your house? She is pregnant, and the baby belongs to Boko Haram. She should be sent away or forced to have an abortion.' I told them that I will never abort this baby. 'What will I tell God if I die? ... I think this pregnancy is a blessing in disguise... I'm going to keep the baby...' My grandfather supported me, but not my grandmother."

Esther gave birth to a baby girl, Rebecca. But even after she was born, people in Esther's community would not call Rebecca by her name – they referred to her as 'Baby Boko', which upset Esther greatly. "Anytime Rebecca cried, they would say that she has trouble just like Boko Haram and they say many other cruel things about her."

Yet today, Esther is a confident 20-year-old, and Rebecca is a beautiful, healthy baby. And it is your support that has made this transformation possible.

"THE TEACHING ENCOURAGED MY HEART"
Esther was one of several



SEEN

women invited to join a trauma care programme run by Open Doors local church partners for women who have experienced severe trauma and persecution. There, Esther received compassion, trauma counselling and Bible teaching.

"Even if they make fun of my daughter, I just see that I don't feel pain anymore because I know that's not who my baby is."

"The first programme I attended I received a lot of teaching, and the teaching encouraged my heart. Those things that used to pain my heart suddenly stopped meaning anything to me. And when I went home I was able to

encourage others who couldn't come."

Before the programme, Esther struggled to deal with people's animosity towards her daughter. "How people treat her really made my heart ache. Before I came to this programme, if you called my daughter 'Boko Haram baby' I fought a lot with people. Whenever they said that, it hurt a lot, and I saw myself fighting." But now she says, "Even if they make fun of my daughter, I just see that I don't feel pain anymore because I know that's not who my baby is."

Esther and Rebecca's story is just one example of the double persecution that Christian women in Nigeria and around the world face. But thanks to your prayers and support, more women are being seen, heard and cared for through trauma care workshops.

"I SAW HOW GOD LOOKS AT ME"

Aisha, a mother of three, also attended the trauma care programme. When Fulani herdsmen attacked her village and briefly took her husband away (presuming he was a pastor), two of them beat and raped Aisha. She was left shaken and traumatised and at times was unable to eat or sleep.

But through the workshop, God ministered to her and she began her journey towards healing.

"After that seminar I began to feel peace of mind. Even when I see the man that looked like one of the rapists, I didn't feel hatred towards him anymore. God taught me to forgive.

"And when I went home I spoke to my other (spiritual) sisters, who had the same experience, and they too

received peace of mind. God has promised that one day He will wipe away all our tears, all the pain and worries we have faced.”

Patience* is a trauma care worker in Nigeria who helps to run these workshops for women.

“I will never forget this programme... I have seen the love of God”

“Trauma healing is a journey,” she says. “For some people it’s a long journey, for some it’s a short journey... The first time we met [Aisha and Esther] it was a really painful experience for them. They were in tears.”

But after the second workshop they attended, Patience saw a huge change. “On the last day, when we pinned their pains to the cross, it was a really wonderful experience. Aisha and Esther were able to express their pains... But after the trauma healing they have left everything to God. They are no longer ready or willing to take revenge, but they leave everything to God.”

PAINTING A NEW PICTURE

Hannah Rose Thomas, an artist from the UK, recently flew out to Nigeria to attend one of these workshops. She taught the women to paint self-portraits, to help them along the road of healing from their trauma. Patience, Esther and Aisha also attended this workshop.

“While they were drawing, it’s like people who have been rejected by society, rejected by their families, have been accepted into the body of Christ,” Patience says. “Some of them have never had the experience before of holding

a pencil, but now here they are drawing and painting themselves. It was like, ‘Oh, so I am worth something.’”

For Esther, drawing her self-portrait was an important step in helping to restore her dignity and self-worth.

“I was very surprised to see that I drew myself very fine for the first time,” she said. “I feel so happy in my heart, and I am so eager to make mine the finest drawing. Seeing that I could draw myself looking so beautiful makes me feel so happy. When I was in school I could not even draw!”



Aisha proudly holding her self-portrait complete with golden tears

Aisha painted golden tears on her self-portrait as a symbol of God exchanging her mourning for joy, and ashes for beauty.

“While I was drawing I started feeling happy because now the world will know about our pain. God has brought you so that you will help us,” she said.

“If I hadn’t attended this programme I don’t know how my life would have been. I would still have been in pain because there is nobody around me to strengthen and encourage me. But now that



Aisha: “God has brought you so that you will help us.”

I have received this trauma healing, I am so happy. I am so overwhelmed with the love and compassion you showed us.

“I will never forget this programme. I really thank God because I have seen the love of God. And I have learned that even when I go back home I want to show this love to the people around us. We came here with heavy hearts, but we leave with joy and we ask God to bless you richly.”

“WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT”

Aisha has a message for Christians around the world who will see her portrait and read her story.

“I drew my picture without a smile on my face because I want everybody who sees it to know the pain I experienced and still have, because this evil has not stopped happening in my community. I want people in the world to know it is very painful when you have been raped. It is a wound that takes a gradual process to heal.

“And, as I said before, I’m not the only one in my community – many other women have been raped. We are weak, as women. We do not have strength to fight back, and the attackers have great advantage over us. We are not

educated and don’t have the money to reach out and tell the world what is happening. But God has brought you to hear from us and to tell the world these things we are going through in Nigeria.”

And Esther?

“I want people to know that women here need trauma help because of the things that have happened. And those with resources can give the support so that many more women may be helped.

“Women are of great value and without women life will not have meaning... There is a great need back home and we need your support – also, we need you to speak out on our behalf.

“I know that God loves me, and I cannot describe all the good things He has done for me. God loves me so much, I think I am the one God loves most in the world... All I can say is, ‘May God bless you and thank you so much.’”

PAYING THE PRICE TWICE: THE DOUBLE VULNERABILITY OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN

Christian women are often doubly vulnerable to persecution because of both their gender and their faith. Open Doors’ ground-breaking new research

reveals for the first time that Christian women face twice as many persecution pressures as Christian men. Research by Open Doors experts, drawing on data from 30 of the countries on the Open Doors World Watch List, shows that:

- Persecution is gender-specific. Persecution of men and boys is focused, severe and visible. Persecution of women and girls is complex, violent and hidden.
- Persecution exploits the vulnerabilities specific to women, making them twice as vulnerable to persecution as men. They face twice as many persecution pressures.
- Persecution of women frequently involves sexual violence and its impact affects the whole community.

Now is a golden moment of opportunity to speak out and ensure that the suffering of women like Esther and Aisha is no longer ignored. Turn the page to find out how to act and *See. Change.*

See. Change.

Esther and Aisha now know that they are seen, heard and loved by their heavenly Father – but there are hundreds of thousands of Christian women around the world who are doubly at risk of persecution, unseen by the world and unable to see their true value. Will you see these women, and commit today to change their reality?

I SEE YOU.

I see your suffering. You are my sister.

We, the global church, cannot allow the suffering of our sisters to go unseen and ignored. This is why we have launched the *See. Change.* campaign to restore the hope, dignity and identity of persecuted women worldwide.

Open Doors' vision is that every woman who is persecuted for her faith and gender is seen, valued and empowered to reach her God-given potential. You can help us to make that vision a reality with your longterm support, prayers and actions.



I'M WITH YOU.

I will stand with you and speak out.

This year, the UK government will hold a conference on preventing sexual violence in conflict. It's vital that women like Esther are visible there, so that government policy can effectively tackle the persecution faced by women who are doubly vulnerable because of their faith and gender. When you speak out, our leaders listen. Show Esther and other persecuted women that you see them and stand with them – visit www.opendoorsuk.org/seechange to be part of a huge, hand-made petition.

I HEAR YOU.

I respond with my support and my prayers, knowing that God hears us too.

Trauma-care worker Patience says, "We really need more hands for the trauma needs. We need more volunteers and, if possible, more paid workers." Your gifts can make that possible.

A monthly gift of £21 could provide food and housing for a woman and child for a month, as well as education for the child.

You can also give towards providing immediate trauma care for a persecuted woman. It costs **£288** to provide trauma healing in all areas of their lives.

Esther and Aisha continue to need your prayers for healing and provision. Esther says: "Please pray that God will help us to stand for Him and never deny Him."

PRAY

- For protection for Christian women who are doubly vulnerable to persecution
- For healing and restoration for those who have experienced violence and trauma
- For wisdom and strength for those who are caring for persecuted women.



I'M FOR YOU.

You can write a short message of encouragement to Esther and Aisha, and our local church partners will deliver it for you. Order the latest edition of our Letter-writing Guide or go to www.opendoorsuk.org/write to write today.



Meet your extraordinary family from Nigeria, Asia and the Middle East

STANDING STRONG
Open Doors Celebration 2019

Book today for Standing Strong!

Join us for a jam-packed day of worship, prayer, inspiration and challenge from the persecuted church. Our guest speakers from Nigeria, Asia and the Middle East will leave you with a fresh understanding of how God is at work in their lives, through your support. It will blow your mind - and grow your faith!

Book before
1 August and
save £5 per
ticket!*

"My reservation was that it would be quite a sombre event, but actually it's been really uplifting." – Standing Strong delegate

GLASGOW

9 November - 10am-4pm
Findley Memorial Church
Early bird adult ticket - £10
(after 31 July this will be £15)

IRELAND

12, 13 and 14 November- 7:30pm-9:30pm
(locations to be confirmed)
Tickets will be £5 (*no early bird pricing)

BIRMINGHAM

16 November 2019 - 10am-4pm
Bethel Convention Centre, West Bromwich
Early bird adult ticket - £10
(after 31 July this will be £15)
£5 per child at Birmingham

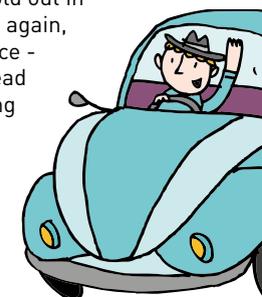
Children's programme

Back by popular demand, there will be a children's programme for ages 5-11 years at Birmingham. Here's what one parent told us in 2018: "My three children really loved it and my daughter insisted on doing her Bible time under her duvet last night, with a torch, so that she could feel what it was like to live in North Korea!"

Standing Strong Birmingham sold out in 2018 and spaces will be limited again, so book now to secure your place - and bring others with you! Spread the word. Tell your church. Bring your family and friends. Group bookings get 30% off.

How to book

For more details and to make your booking, go to www.opendoorsuk.org
Early bird price available until 31 July.





16 new believers prepare to be baptised

Hope for the Middle East campaign update

“No turning back”: Revival in Syria

Thank you to everyone who responded so generously to Open Doors’ Syria Christmas appeal, part of our global campaign to ensure the survival of the church in Syria and Iraq. Your support is keeping hope alive for 12,000 families in Syria, providing vital aid, trauma care and training to help the church survive through the crisis of war and persecution. But the church is not just surviving – in many parts of Syria it is thriving! And your support is enabling churches like Pastor David’s* to strengthen new believers through church retreats.

As she rises up out of the water, she shouts, “Glory to Jesus!”, her arms raised high. The people around the pool clap their hands and shout for joy, too. This lady is the first of 16 to be baptised on a sunny Sunday morning in Lebanon.

Pastor David from Syria has brought his small church – about 60 members – on a retreat, made possible with your support. This church is unusual in that the whole congregation, including Pastor David, are converts from the Druze, a branch of Shia Islam and a minority religion in Syria. Christians from a Muslim

or Druze background are especially put under pressure by their family, as it brings great dishonour to them if a family member leaves their religion.

“I see the start of a revival amongst the Druze and the Kurds in Syria,” says Pastor David, who felt a specific call to serve these people after he became a Christian. “Hundreds have been saved during the war: before the war there were only some hidden and secret believers. In my city we now have four churches of mainly new believers.” Elsewhere in Syria, too, former Druze and

former Muslims are turning to Christ in significant numbers.

“THE GOD I WAS SEARCHING FOR”

Pastor David was born a Druze. But God touched his heart after a friend challenged him to read the gospels. “I was totally surprised, this felt like the real God, the God I searched for... God could forgive sin, any sin, even big sin. I hadn’t heard that in my religion... And God wanted to be my Father, my Father who loves me.”

He started attending church, and a year after his conversion, he was baptised.

“My conversion changed everything, my goals, my objectives. I wanted to follow Jesus, to serve Jesus. I also wanted all my family and friends to be saved.”

Pastor David is seeing the fruit of his labours, and thanks to your support, he can now meet the needs of these new believers, providing them with Bibles, Christian literature and leadership training.

On this retreat, as well as being given the opportunity to be baptised, families received biblical training on topics such as marriage, communication and raising children.

“We had a problem with forgiving each other. That has changed,” says one participant, Darine, her face shining with joy. “After the first day of training, a miracle happened. My husband came to me and

asked me for forgiveness for the first time in 20 years of marriage.”

“Hundreds have been saved during the war”

Part way through one session, the teaching pastor stops and asks church members recording the meeting on their phones not to post it on the internet. “That would endanger your pastor and your church,” he says – a solemn reminder that becoming a Christian in Syria runs the risk of persecution, especially for church leaders.

Syria is number 11 on the Open Doors 2019 World Watch List and Christians here face extreme persecution. In areas controlled by Islamic

extremists, Christians are forced to pay protection money, must follow a strict dress code and dietary rules, and cannot express their faith publicly. In other areas of Syria, church leaders are targets for abduction.

And yet the church in Syria continues to shine as a light in the darkness.

As the baptisms come to an end, the church sings, “I have decided to follow Jesus; I have decided to follow Jesus; no turning back, no turning back.” For them, conversion may mean paying a high price. It could cost them their family, their friends, even their jobs. But it is a powerful song of determination. They are determined to follow Jesus whatever it might cost.

*Name changed for security reasons

PLEASE PRAY:

- Give thanks for Pastor David and his church, and for all those who have come to know Jesus through his ministry. Pray that he will be able to reach more Druze, Kurds and Muslims with the gospel
- For Open Doors local church partners supporting new believers, for God’s provision and protection around them and the work they are doing
- That the church in Syria will continue to grow and for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on new believers.

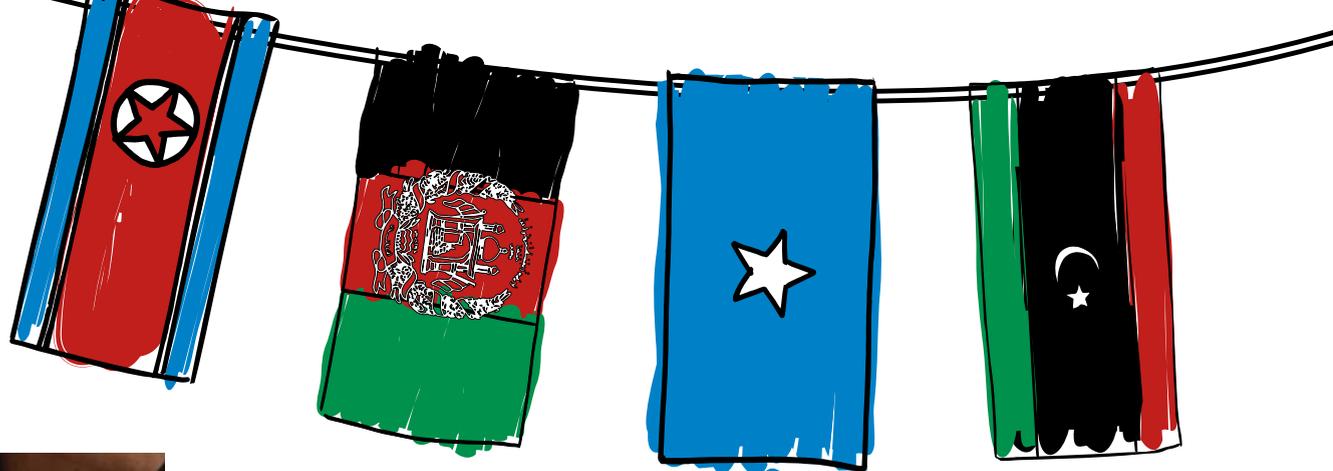
ABOVE This lady sings for joy after being baptised

BELOW Pastor David has to conceal his identity for safety reasons



From fear to faith

Does your church want to grow in faith in the year ahead? Are members of your small group longing to be more courageous in their witness to Jesus? Why not inspire your church with the courageous faith of their persecuted family around the world using the new *World Watch List Church Pack*?



Imagine, every Saturday evening, your home becomes a secret meeting place for Christians. The government forbids any unregistered churches of less than 50 to meet, so believers come to your house for 'dinner'. (The real reason is to read the Bible, take communion and pray.) One week, however, ten policemen turn up and raid your house. They shout at your children then arrest you and your visitors. What would you feel? Faith or fear?

For Christians in countries on the Open Doors World Watch List, such a scenario is a real possibility. It's like the pages of the New Testament coming to life.

"MY MOTHER THREATENED TO BURN DOWN MY CHURCH"

When Mubina came to Christ from a Muslim background, her husband divorced her and her parents rejected her. Her mother even threatened to burn down the church she attended. But Mubina stood firm. "I received power from God to endure. I just couldn't leave Jesus," she says.

When her mother reported the group to the police, the church was closed down by the government. But the love of the Bible that they had given her enabled her to keep going. "From the very beginning, God healed me with His words. I had a lot of pain and worry in my

heart, but with His words He restored me. Every time I read the Bible, I feel God is close to me."

"God taught me that I can always trust in Him. My husband might have left me, my parents don't accept me, but the Lord is my husband, and the Lord is my father. He takes care of me."

Now Mubina has found a new house group, but her parents' are threatening to close that one as well. So does Mubina feel faith or fear? "God taught me that I can always trust in Him. My husband might have left me, my parents don't accept me, but the Lord is my husband, and the Lord is my father. He takes care of me."

WHY SHOULD YOUR CHURCH CARE?

Mubina is from Central Asia, but persecution is a global issue. The number of Christians experiencing 'high' levels of persecution or worse has grown by 30 million in the last year - to a total of 245 million. MPs have woken up to the need to take action (see p.4). The church needs to wake up, too. Our persecuted family need our support. As a global body - mobilised and praying



House church in Central Asia

- we have the power to make a difference in their lives and in their nations.

But the need is not all one way. Because of the courageous witness of our persecuted family, the church is growing. We need their example so we can learn to be bold in our faith. They need us. We need them. The *World Watch List Church Pack* gives you everything you need both to support the persecuted church and to learn from them.

Share the courageous faith of the persecuted church...

...with your church

The new *World Watch List 2019 Church Pack* includes imaginative resources to help everyone in your church, young and old, to stand with their persecuted family in prayer and action. The pack includes:

- World Watch List 2019 Top 50 Guide
- Family-friendly map with activities for children
- 50 simple country flag stickers to encourage all ages to pray
- Drawing campaign for children in Central Asia
- Youth leader's session outline
- Simple ten-minute presentation outline to include in your church service.



Order the church pack today and find downloadable films, PowerPoints and other World Watch List resources at: www.opendoorsuk.org

...with your children

The World Watch List inspires young and old alike to pray and support our persecuted family. Here's what one young supporter told us when he sent in his gift:

Dear Open Doors

My name is J. I'm seven years old. Roughly about a couple of months ago we got your *World Watch List 2018*. We've been praying for North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia and the Maldives and so on.

Over Christmas some people gave me money and I did a tithe and I put it in a money box. It came to £17.58 and my dad gave extra money to make it £20. I would like the money to be spent on Bibles.

From J



World Watch News

PAKISTAN

Joy as Asia Bibi's acquittal upheld

Christians in Pakistan are overjoyed after the Supreme Court upheld its decision to overthrow Asia Bibi's conviction and death sentence. After being falsely accused of blasphemy, Asia spent eight years on death row before being acquitted. Now a challenge against her acquittal has been rejected by the Pakistan Supreme Court.

"We have been praying for over ten years," an Open Doors partner said. "And finally it's a 100 per cent certain that she will be free. We thank everybody who has stood with us in prayer for all these years."

PHILIPPINES

Open Doors staff help victims of church bomb attack

Open Doors staff are bringing aid to believers in the Muslim-majority region of Mindanao southern Philippines, after 21 Christians were killed and 81 wounded in bomb blasts at the cathedral in Jolo.

As well as visiting victims in the hospital, Open Doors workers are providing financial help to some of the affected families. They are also starting to provide trauma care.

"In this worst of times we have someone we can hold on to, no matter what," said a team member. "So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.'"

INDONESIA

Freed former governor 'thankful' for time in prison

Ahok, a former governor of Jakarta, has thanked Christians around the world for praying for him after his early release from prison. "Thank you for your prayers and support," Ahok said. "Your love to me is better than gold and silver."

Governor Ahok was accused of blasphemy during his re-election campaign.

"I am very thankful to God for allowing me to spend time in prison. I am grateful that I was not elected... I would have become a man who controlled the city. But here, I learn to control myself."

IRAN

Crackdown on Christians continues

Christians in Iran continue to be arrested, following a major crackdown on believers over the Christmas period.

In January, Sina Moloudian (26) was violently arrested in his house. Sina (LEFT) was reportedly told that he had been 'under surveillance for months'. The same week, Ismaeil Maghrebinejad (64) was also arrested. A follower

of Christ for 40 years, he is no stranger to persecution. Ismaeil has contacted his family, but he does not know where he is being held, nor on what charges.

Open Doors organises trauma care conferences for former prisoners now living outside Iran. Thanks to your support, over 30 ex-prisoners from Iran received trauma care

training last year.

"The training has offered me long-lasting refreshment," shares former house church leader, Saman*. "My friends say I have become stronger since I attended."

"I'm still talking with God about my future. It is in His hands. I would most prefer to go back to Iran and serve the Lord there. But there is a prison sentence waiting for me. I would be willing to do it, but I know it would destroy my mother to know I was in prison. It's a difficult choice. Maybe God is teaching me something here that I can use when I am back in Iran."

Source: Article 18, Open Doors



CENTRAL ASIA

Miracle in the minefield

In some Central Asian countries the Bible is banned. One group of brave Christians were trying to deliver Bibles across the border into another country. The border was highly guarded, so they had to find a place with no watchtowers. They eventually found a gap with a path across.

For two months they were able to take Bibles into that country. Then, one day, they were caught by border patrol.

"How did you enter the country?" the soldiers asked. "Where are you from? How did you get here?" They pointed to the path.

"No, you cannot have come that way," said the guards. "That's a minefield." For two months they

had been walking through a minefield! The guards let them go: "If Allah has protected you, we cannot imprison you," they said.

Open Doors strengthens Christians in Central Asia by distributing Bibles and Christian books to those who are hungry for God's Word.

You can put a Bible into the hands of a persecuted believer – and receive a daily devotional to inspire you in your own faith in return. The Secret Church Devotional is a great way to spend time with your persecuted family each day and support persecuted believers with prayer and the gift of God's Word. Go to www.opendoorsuk.org to order a copy today.

INDONESIA

Diva is 'willing to pay the price'



Diva* (19) discovered Jesus when a Christian friend encouraged her to read deeper in the Quran.

"In Islam, people are forbidden from talking about Isa (Jesus), despite Him being mentioned all over the Quran," she says. "Only curious, open minds will connect the dots and find Him."

She has to hide her faith from her parents. "But every time I have the chance, I point my parents to Jesus in the Quran, even if it leads me and my dad to heated arguments," she says.

Diva attends a weekly discipleship session facilitated by Open Doors.

"It builds my character and faith. I can pray freely and find myself loving Isa more every day," she says.

Over 800 new believers are reached through the classes annually.

Attending is risky. Once, she was followed by her father. "She came anyway – she managed to cover her trail," said an Open Doors staff member. "It shows she is willing to pay the price for Jesus."

"Jesus is my inspiration. He helped the people. I want to do the same too."



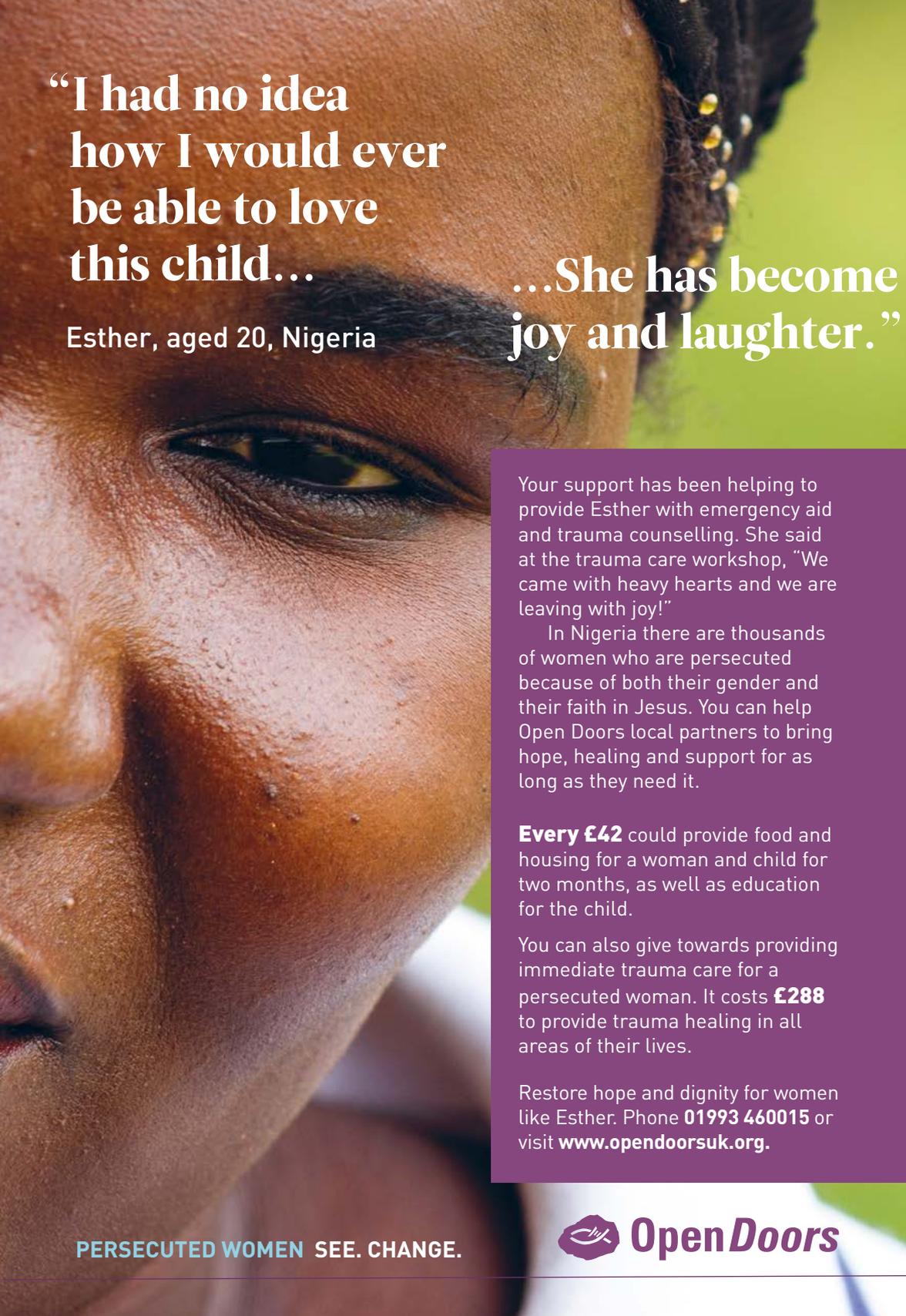
Mansuri is a convert from Islam who lives in Bangladesh. Open Doors discipleship training was crucial in helping her face persecution. Small groups of Christian women support one another and learn to share the good news.

Mansuri now leads her own class, and also runs a literacy project for slum children.

"We are supposed to be different as children of God. Jesus always helped the poor. I am inspired by that and I want to help the poor too," she says.

Read more of Mansuri's inspirational story at www.opendoorsuk.org/bangladesh

For the latest news and stories of courageous faith visit www.opendoorsuk.org



“I had no idea
how I would ever
be able to love
this child...

Esther, aged 20, Nigeria

...She has become
joy and laughter.”

Your support has been helping to provide Esther with emergency aid and trauma counselling. She said at the trauma care workshop, “We came with heavy hearts and we are leaving with joy!”

In Nigeria there are thousands of women who are persecuted because of both their gender and their faith in Jesus. You can help Open Doors local partners to bring hope, healing and support for as long as they need it.

Every £42 could provide food and housing for a woman and child for two months, as well as education for the child.

You can also give towards providing immediate trauma care for a persecuted woman. It costs **£288** to provide trauma healing in all areas of their lives.

Restore hope and dignity for women like Esther. Phone **01993 460015** or visit **www.opendoorsuk.org**.

PERSECUTED WOMEN SEE. CHANGE.

 **Open Doors**