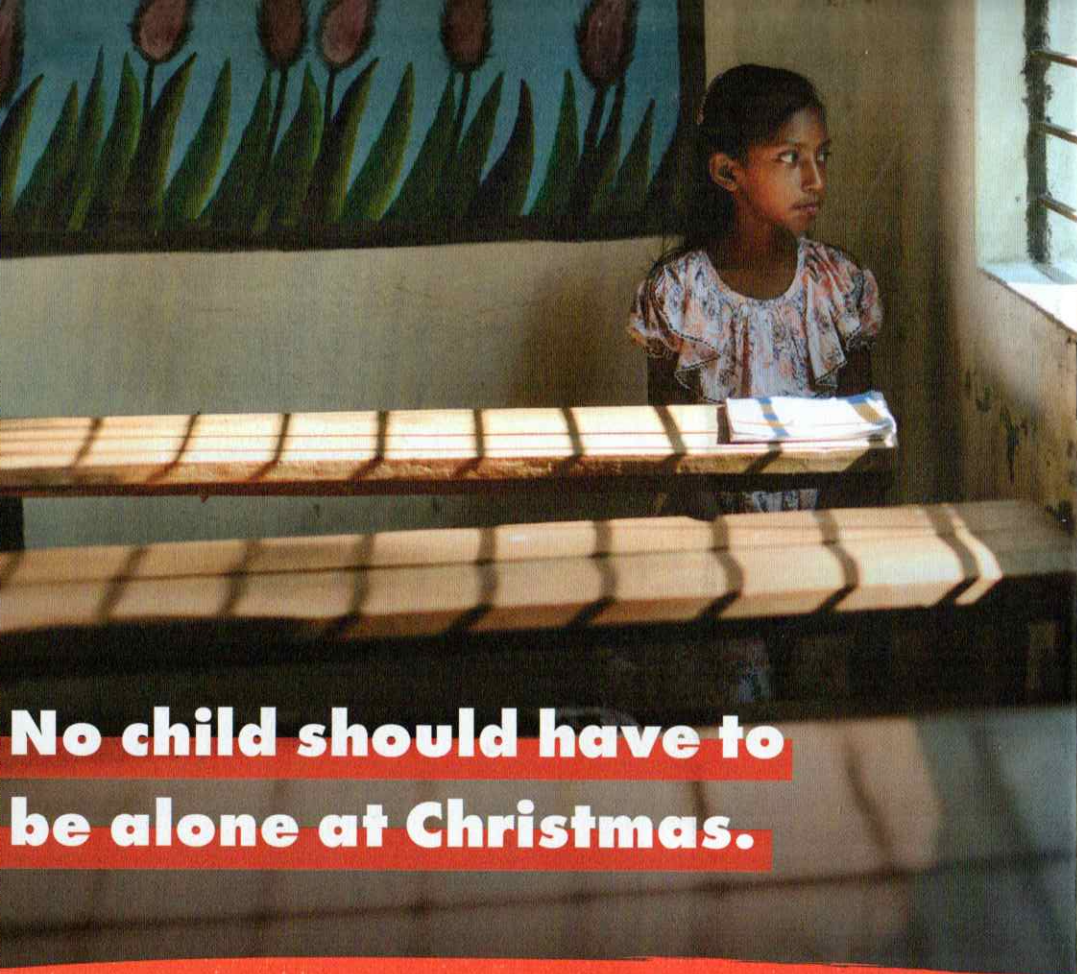


Open Doors

MAGAZINE | November/December 2024



No child should have to be alone at Christmas.

This Christmas, give the gift of joy to a child like Rumana, isolated and bullied for her faith.

Rumana in Bangladesh is bullied and rejected by her classmates, simply because her family follow Jesus. "I'm just alone," she says.

Today, will you give the gift of strong Christian community to vulnerable children like Rumana?

Every £35 could help an isolated child attend a special Christmas gathering, so they can celebrate Christ's birth safely and joyfully.

Every £62 could give immediate relief aid to persecuted Christians, including medicine, vital necessities and shelter for displaced families.

Visit opendoorsuk.org to make your Christmas gift today, return the enclosed envelope or phone **01993 460015**. Thank you.

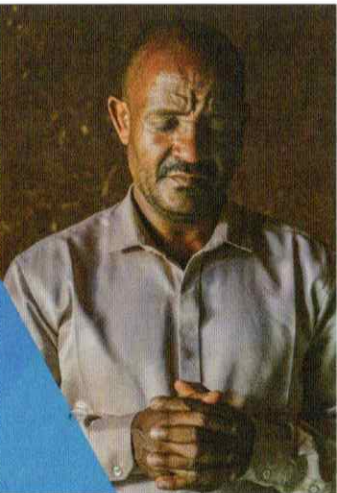


Give children joy

This Christmas, you can show persecuted children they aren't alone

 CHILDREN AT CHRISTMAS

 **Open Doors**

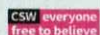


IDOP ONLINE 2024 UNITING IN PRAYER

Sunday 3 November 2024 | 7.30-8.30pm

Join us and pray for persecuted believers from North Korea, Egypt and Burkina Faso, along with our friends from CSW, Evangelical Alliance and Release International.

Register your free place at opendoorsuk.org/idop



LEAVE A LEGACY OF HOPE

You can give your persecuted family hope of a brighter future by including a gift to Open Doors in your Will. Your gift will mean a lifetime of support for those who suffer for following Jesus.

If you have not yet made a Will, you can make a Will for FREE using our partner *Farewill*.

To find out more, go to opendoorsuk.org/legacy or phone 01993 460015.

CHRISTMAS PRAYER WEBINAR

4 DECEMBER | 7.30PM | ONLINE

No child should be alone at Christmas – and one way you can show the children of the persecuted church that they aren't alone is through your prayers. Join a special Christmas webinar to hear stories from courageous children who follow Jesus no matter the cost, and pray together with others for these young believers.

Register today for you or your small group at opendoorsuk.org/webinars



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 and 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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COVER: Rumana and Moryom are young girls from Bangladesh who face persecution for their faith

LETTER FROM HENRIETTA

Joy and hope

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." JOHN 1:5 (NLT)

One of the best trips I've been on with Open Doors was in 2019 to a youth conference run by our partners in Bangladesh. I found it deeply inspiring: despite the persecution they experienced, these courageous young Christians were fizzing with their passion for Jesus! I see the same resilient faith in Rumana (p6).

At just nine years old, Rumana demonstrates extraordinary strength in the face of bullying, rejection and persecution. At school, she is ostracised and tormented for being a Christian. She is so alone. It really brings home how vital community is for believers – particularly for young believers like Rumana.

Sadly, persecutors can be much more intentional about destroying the church than we are about building it up. Let's change that. We have to protect children like Rumana, and defy those who seek to stifle the power of children's faith right now and undermine the future of the global church.

Ultimately, as I read Rumana's story, I see hope. Despite all she faces, Rumana is shining the light of Christ in the midst of darkness. Her faith is strong – but she needs your help. She needs her global brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers to support her. A whole generation of vulnerable young Christians need us to cheer them on this Christmas.

Thank you for all you do to support our persecuted family – you can see some of the impact you're having on p12. A blessed Christmas to you and your loved ones,



Henrietta

Henrietta Blyth
CEO, Open Doors UK&I



P.S. You can invite your MP to the World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch with the tear-off slip on the letter with your magazine. More than half of MPs are new to Parliament – this is our opportunity to introduce them to Christian persecution and galvanise them to action!

WORLD WATCH LIST BULLETIN

BANGLADESH

Converts at heightened risk amid national crisis

Christian converts and other religious minorities in Bangladesh continue to be targeted by radical groups amid nationwide political and social turmoil.

The upheaval stems from protests that broke out in July over a quota system for government jobs, leading to clashes with government forces which then escalated, forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Months later, with law and order not restored, religious minorities remain at heightened risk.

In one of many incidents facing Christians, two evangelists were beaten and detained after a Muslim group stormed a local house church. Elsewhere, homes have been attacked and looted, and church leaders have been threatened. Believers are living in fear and uncertainty.

"We are working to reach the persecuted immediately with food and emergency shelter so that they can survive amid this crisis," says a local partner.

PRAY For the protection of minorities in Bangladesh, and healing for all those

INDIA

Escalating violence in Manipur

Nearly 18 months after ethnoreligious violence broke out in Manipur, India, violence is again escalating in the region.

Despite an agreement made in June 2023 between the Meitei and Kuki communities to avoid further violence, the district of Jiribam, once a symbol of fragile peace amidst the conflict, has been rocked by attacks. At the time of writing, 11 people have been killed.

While they haven't been specifically targeted in these recent attacks, Christians from both tribes are still suffering the impact of violence last year, when they were disproportionately affected. Thousands remain displaced.

"We have been able to reach more than ten thousand victims with immediate support like groceries, utensils, clothes, blankets and other essentials," says Neeraj Kumar*, a local partner, highlighting the impact of your support. "After the violence, along with presence ministry, victims are being helped with long-term support

income-generation projects and persecution survival training."

PRAY For an end to the violence and that God's peace will sustain believers.

CENTRAL ASIA

Police officer baptised

Praise God for this precious moment, as a police officer called Roeslan* is baptised (BELOW). He became a Christian after attending a house church.

Given his job and Muslim upbringing, Roeslan is unsure whether to share his faith with his family and colleagues, knowing he could lose his job and face hostility from loved ones.

PRAY For wisdom, courage and protection for Roeslan as he navigates these challenges.



BURKINA FASO

50 children given educational support

Senou* and Combar* are amongst around 50 students in Burkina Faso who've been given educational support this year, thanks to your gifts.

By September last year, an estimated 13,200 schools in central and west Africa had been closed because of violence and conflict, affecting the education of more than 2.5 million children. Amongst them are Senou (BELOW) and Combar, both aged 13, who were forced to flee their homes when militants attacked their villages. Since being uprooted, Senou has also lost her father.

Unable to go to school, Open Doors local partners paid for the girls' school fees, uniforms and other school supplies. "We are very grateful to you," says Senou's grandmother. "We thank you for your good action. Truly speaking, we received the aid. May God reward you."

PRAY That all children helped will grow in faith, character and skills, and that more children will be able to return to school.



UK

Kiltwalk raises £600!

An Open Doors Activist has raised £616 for our persecuted family by doing a very Scottish challenge – the Glasgow Kiltwalk!

Ore Emmanuel (RIGHT) – who joined the Activist course after being introduced to Open Doors at university – was one of more than 14,000 people to don their kilts and walk three miles through the streets of Glasgow.

"It's a privilege to know that I've been able to help raise awareness about the plight of persecuted Christians with both Christians and non-believers, and join the fight to see our brothers and sisters free to live out their faith and transform their communities for God," he says.

The next Activist course, for young adults aged 18-25, runs from 14 January to 11 February. Head to opendoorsuk.org/young-adults to find out more.

Do you feel inspired to fundraise? Go to opendoorsuk.org/fundraise for all you need to get started.



*Names changed for security reasons

MORE STORIES

- Motorbikes for pastors in Ivory Coast have impact
- Equipping Chinese Christians for persecution
- Aid brings joy to 320 families in Mali

Head to opendoorsuk.org/news or follow us @opendoorsuk for more news and updates





No child should have to be alone at Christmas.

Every morning, Rumana starts her day like many other nine-year-olds around the world.

She washes her face and eats her breakfast. She prays about her day and asks God to bless her and her family. She packs pens, pencils and schoolbooks in her backpack, and she sets off for school.

But she walks the mile to school on her own. And when she gets to school, no one says hello or sits

near Rumana in class. She's surrounded by people at school, but she's also completely alone.

All because she's a Christian.

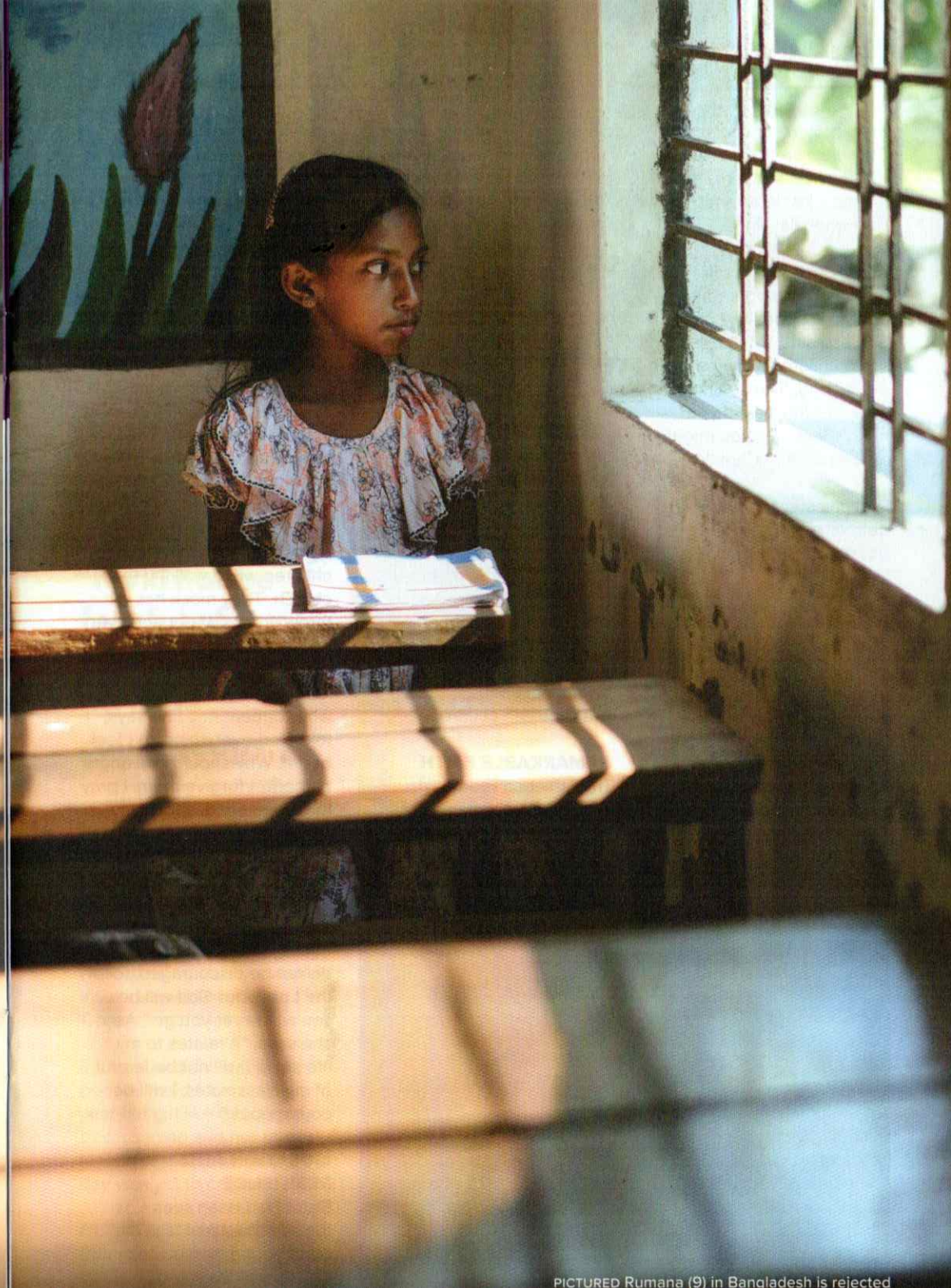
"I'M JUST ALONE"

In Rumana's village in north west Bangladesh, almost everyone is Muslim. When her family decided to follow Jesus, the community turned against them. Even people who don't hate Christians are reluctant to associate with the family,

because it could mean they are also rejected by the other villagers.

This ostracism doesn't just happen between adults. Children see how their parents behave, and they treat Rumana the same way.

"I don't have any friends in school because I'm a Christian and my parents are also Christian," she says. "If I sit with them, their parents scold them saying, 'She is a Christian. You can't



mingle with them because Christians are bad.' When the children say something unkind, I just keep smiling. But I cry when I'm alone."

You might think that Rumana's teachers stick up for her, but sadly the opposite is true. She explains, "My teachers scold children if they sit with me, saying, 'Don't mingle with the Christian. If you mingle with her, you might also become a Christian.'"

Rumana sums up her daily experience with heartbreaking simplicity: "I'm just alone."

YOUNG AND VULNERABLE "Christian children and youth endure considerable levels of violence as their parents choose to follow Jesus – including verbal, physical, psychological and sexual violence," explains Sister Hadassah, an Open Doors

partner in Bangladesh who supports Rumana and her parents, as well as many other persecuted children and their families.

"I don't have any friends in school because I'm a Christian."

She continues: "There are hundreds of young children of Christian converts facing similar issues. Bangladesh has a strong community-based culture, so when the community cuts off the converts and isolates them, that brings huge emotional damage to the Christian children."

REMARKABLE FAITH This isolation is a daily sadness for Rumana. When

students have breaks at school, they are allowed to run around in a field nearby. But other children refuse to let Rumana join in as they play.

"I play alone with my toys," she says. "I also made up a game. I draw a circle in my notebook and put some numbers inside. Then I close my eyes and try to randomly place my pen on one of the numbers. Then I award myself a gift based on the number I land on."

Rumana has also faced persecution from the village children while walking to church. They mock her, throw stones at her and slap her. But Rumana shows a remarkable generosity and forgiveness to the children who torment her. She says, "I told God everything so I feel better. Why should I be angry at them? I forgive them. I pray to God every day for them."

At just nine years old, Rumana's faith is so strong. Her favourite Bible verse is Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." As she says, "It relates to my life story. I will not be fearful of my classmates. I will be courageous."

ISOLATION AND RESILIENCE Sister Hadassah sees the same resilient faith in other young, persecuted Christians: "Even at this

them that these pressures or persecutions cannot separate them from the love of Jesus. They teach them to love and pray for those who persecute or push them down."

But it's clear that Rumana is very affected by the bullying she faces every day. And it comes from adults, too. One day, when Rumana's mother was away working, neighbours came to their house and started shouting at Rumana.

"I will not be fearful of my classmates. I will be courageous."

"They started verbally abusing me and then they began pushing against the iron wall of our house," she says. "It felt like they were trying to break it down. They were abusing me by shouting insults at me! They said, 'Come here, I'll kill you today.'"

It's hard to believe that people could treat a nine-year-old girl like this, simply because she and her family love Jesus. But the hardest day was yet to come.

BURNED TO ASHES Rumana was walking home from school when

You can watch Rumana's story at opendoorsuk.org



ABOVE Thanks to the gifts and prayers of people like you, Rumana received a much-treasured children's Bible

seriously wrong. There was a thick cloud of smoke in the sky – and she realised it was coming from her home. It was on fire.

"The fire was massive. There was nothing left from our house," she remembers with sorrow. "No one from our village offered to help. All of them were just watching."

Rumana's father was so overcome by trauma that he collapsed. The family asked if he could rest in a neighbour's home, but they refused – saying they'd be targeted by the community if they helped Rumana's family. Even her dad's cousin

"No one allowed us to stay," Rumana says. "With nothing to wear and no food, we were utterly helpless. We were all crying."

Eventually, one neighbour took pity and let them stay while Rumana's dad recovered. An old friend of his, a Muslim man, paid for initial medical treatment. After a short while, the neighbour asked them to leave: she, like others, feared being rejected by the community for helping the Christian family. Rumana's parents built a shed in the grounds of their destroyed house and had to live there until Open Doors partners came

BELOW Rumana plays on her own at school, and prays for the schoolchildren who torment her





ABOVE Rumana loves celebrating Christmas with other Christian children her age, and hopes to attend the big gathering for many persecuted Bangladeshi families

A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS

This brutal rejection, bullying and ostracism is hard every day for Rumana, but the isolation can feel worst of all at Christmas. Rumana knows it's a special time for Christians to remember the birth of Jesus, and she loves spending it with other Christian children.

With the help and prayers of people like you, Open Doors partners can host a special, three-day Christmas celebration for Christians from a Muslim background from across Bangladesh – like Rumana.

RUMANA'S JOY

It's not just a time when children like Rumana can celebrate the birth of Christ

that is so important – it's also a time when she can meet and play with lots of other young believers who understand what her life is

“I love to celebrate Christmas because all the Christians gather around together.”

like. Open Doors provides a regular Sunday school that she can travel to, meeting children from across her region – but this Christmas celebration is something even more special, with a much wider community.

“I love to celebrate Christmas

gather around together singing songs and reading from the Bible,” says Rumana. “Sometimes we read from a storybook. We recite the Bible verses we learned from Sunday school.”

Rumana knows the Christmas story from the Christian storybooks provided by Open Doors partners. “I like the part when they named him Jesus Christ,” she says. “Also, on the day

Jesus was born, there was a big star. I saw it in the Bible storybook you gave me!”

They share a birthday cake for Jesus and have a special meal. At the end of the time together, each family gets a Christmas gift from Open Doors partners.

practical ways – but the greatest gifts that children like Rumana receive are community, encouragement and love.

“JESUS LOVES ME”

No matter how alone she feels when she goes to school each day, Christmas reminds Rumana that she belongs to the body of Christ. It's why she can continue to walk with Him, even as she knows the path will be dangerous.

“Jesus loves me,” she says. “I'm very valuable to Jesus. It's only because of Jesus' love that I have survived until now, despite all the persecution. His love has guided me this far, and I know I am on the right path through His love.”

Sister Hadassah sees how important it is that children like Rumana are shown this love and support: “These children are the future Christian leaders,” she says. “If Christian persecutors can damage or destroy them, they can destroy the next generation of Christians.

“Please give your urgent attention to the Christian brothers and sisters in Bangladesh who are paying a huge cost to follow Jesus.

“Without your help, the persecuted church in Bangladesh would die. Without support from the global church, building resilience and sustainability of the persecuted church in Bangladesh is



YOU CAN HELP RUMANA

The next generation of the persecuted church need our support and love today. Rumana needs to know she isn't abandoned or ignored by her global church family. She needs to know that both right now and for the long-term.

Today, will you give Rumana the Christmas gift of joy and show her that she isn't alone?

PLEASE PRAY

- ✦ For Rumana to know that she is not alone this Christmas, but part of a loving, global body of Christ
- ✦ For vulnerable Christian children in Bangladesh and elsewhere to be protected, joyful and strengthened to be the future of the church
- ✦ For gentle wisdom for Open Doors partners as they follow their ministry with persecuted children.

You can find more prayer requests for children in

PLEASE GIVE

You can give to support the children of the persecuted church at opendoorsuk.org

✦ **Every £20** could give Bibles to ten children to help nurture their faith.

✦ **Every £35** could help an isolated child attend a special Christmas gathering, so they can celebrate Christ's birth safely and joyfully.

✦ **Every £62** could give immediate relief aid to persecuted Christians, including medicine, vital necessities and shelter for displaced families.

PLEASE INVITE

A Christian from Bangladesh will be sharing her first-hand account of persecution at the World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch on 15 January. Please invite your MP to attend at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy or with the tear-off on your

"THANK YOU FOR WALKING ALONGSIDE US IN OUR CHALLENGES"

"Thank you!" These are words we so often hear from our persecuted family in response to the countless ways you're impacting their lives. This year has been no different, and the messages here are but a glimpse into the gratitude our persecuted sisters and brothers worldwide have for you...

HOON, NORTH KOREA

At the beginning of the year, our campaign focus was on North Korea, which again tops the World Watch List. Much of your generous support for believers from the country is channelled through safe houses run by fieldworkers in China. After spending time at one, Hoon* left a thank you letter for you...

"Thank you, everyone! I am grateful to God. I could truly feel His and your love. Even though we do not know each other, it feels like we know each other in Jesus Christ from long ago."

"Your loving support has helped me to remove my burdens and I am so grateful that I can continue to do the work that He wants to accomplish through me."

"I have so much to thank, but I cannot express all my gratitude with words and pen. However, I would like to repay you all by doing everything I can to carry out God's ministry."



PASTOR LAXMAN, INDIA

You might recall Pastor Laxman* from India, whose church building was destroyed by extremists and he was jailed. When he first shared his story with you, 40 people still gathered secretly for prayer, but now the pastor oversees six house churches, each comprising between ten and 70 members! As local partners continue to stand with him and members of his church, he has this to say to you...

"Thank you for walking alongside us in our challenges. The extremists are still powerful and they continue to trouble the minorities, especially Christians and, therefore, churches continue to face attacks. Please keep praying for us."

"When Christ was doing His ministry in this earth, He constantly faced opposition, but that did not stop Him from fulfilling His purpose here. Then what can stop me from fulfilling the purpose of God, who has called me to serve Him?"



PASTOR TAHE ALEXIS AND EMMANUEL HIEN, IVORY COAST

Through the *Arise Africa* campaign, your support continues to have a monumental impact on believers in sub-Saharan Africa. This includes motorbikes for seven pastors in the Ivory Coast, enabling them to reach believers vulnerable to persecution from extremists and even their own communities and families. Two of the pastors say...

"I had difficulties in reaching these churches. To even go and greet the brothers and sisters, to make a pastoral visit, was very difficult. Since our arrival in this region, it has been a prayer point which we kept asking the Lord to do something about it." - Pastor Tahe Alexis

WWL 76



"Tiredness will be less and moving will be easy now thanks to this motorbike. I really don't know what to say: this dream became reality, thanks to my brothers and sisters. I can just say thank you; may God bless you. May God bless you abundantly." - Emmanuel Hien



SECRET BELIEVERS, YEMEN

Each year brings opportunities to write to your persecuted family. Earlier in 2024, you were invited to write online messages to secret believers in Yemen – many of you gladly responded, writing to encourage our Yemeni brothers and sisters and tell them that you are praying with them. In response, two believers wrote...

"Thank you so much for everything. I am doing great because of the prayers. We were really touched by them, and they indeed strengthened and encouraged us spiritually."



Believers secretly worshipping in Yemen

"Thank you so much for your prayers. We really appreciate everything you are doing. I was so happy to know that many people are praying for us. Again, thank you so much. Please pray for us here in Yemen."

THANK YOU!

Beyond your generous financial support, faithful prayers and encouraging messages, so many of you have served in other ways – including fundraising, volunteering and advocacy. Thank you, each contribution really does contribute to the long-term survival of the global church.

As we head towards a new year, how might your relationship with your persecuted family look in 2025? Perhaps you'd like to commit to daily or weekly prayer, telling others about the persecuted church or offering your financial support. Head to opendoorsuk.org to continue your journey.

“PLEASE RISE AND SUPPORT THE CHURCH”

INTERVIEW WITH DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

16.2 million Christians in sub-Saharan Africa are displaced by violence and conflict. In this interview with Rev. Jonathan Ugbede, deputy chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, he shares his view on the crisis in Nigeria, what life is like in displacement camps, and how the African church is asking you to respond.

WHAT SITUATION ARE YOU SEEING?

In the camps today in Benue State, we have over two million people. They are scattered across 13 camps in Benue State.

Look at Nigeria, especially north-central Nigeria. It is basically Christian populated, and that is the epicentre of the attacks against the church. We are witnessing a situation where armed militants come around and attack people, displace them in their sleep and

We – the church in Benue State – feel bad that the situation is not being reported. The fact is we are under attack. Millions of people are displaced from their ancestral homes. And if our government is not talking about it, the international community is not aware.

WHAT IS LIFE IN A DISPLACEMENT CAMP LIKE?

They are living from hand-to-mouth. They are living on the benevolence of people both local and international. And how long will a family continue to live like that? Most of them, the children aren't going to school for years.

The earlier these people go back home, the better for them and the better for the church. They've been there for years. Just imagine a

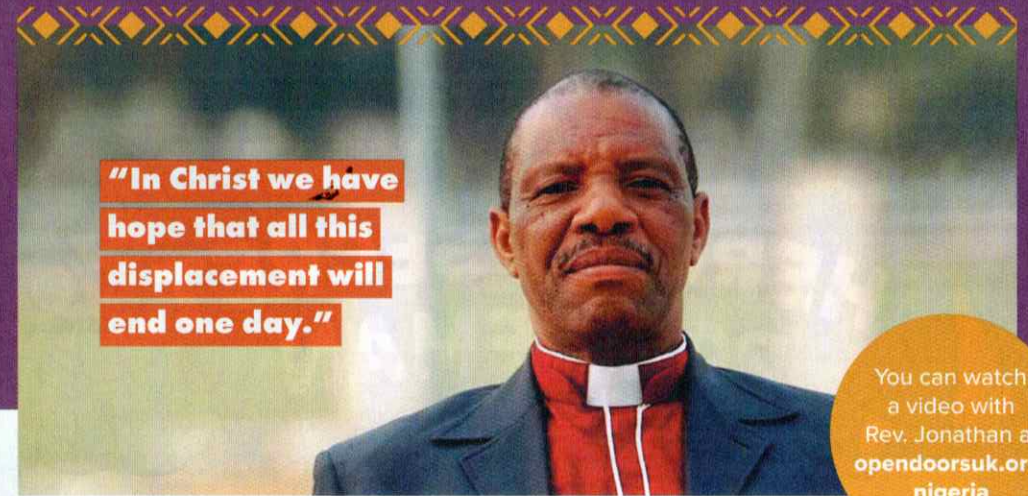


ABOVE Millions of Christians are living in displacement camps across sub-Saharan Africa

the camp for over five years. How are they sustaining themselves? How they are living is very pathetic. The government should provide a conducive atmosphere for them to return to their villages. But the settlements where they were, all the churches are closed.

HOW DOES DISPLACEMENT AFFECT THEIR FAITH?

The displaced Christians cannot worship freely like another person would worship. They have been incarcerated, so to speak, by circumstances that are not theirs. It's affecting their



“In Christ we have hope that all this displacement will end one day.”

You can watch a video with Rev. Jonathan at opendoorsuk.org/nigeria

ABOVE Rev. Jonathan Ugbede, deputy chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria

spiritual life is affected, it means the church in Benue is affected. Because the church is not the structure but the life of the Christian.

We visit them as regularly as possible to encourage them, to worship with them, to give them gifts, food stuff, toiletries, clothing. So, the body of Christ is always in touch with them and that is restoring hope in them.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE?

There is hope. In Christ we have hope that all this displacement will end one day and the church in Benue will be made stronger. All that are displaced, all that are attacked, all that are killed, by the grace of God their level of love and their sacrifice will not be in vain. The church in Benue will rise strong again in the name of Jesus Christ.

I see the Nigerian church advancing. I see the Nigerian

church taking the gospel to where it is supposed to go. But only if we have people to stand by us now.

HOW CAN OPEN DOORS SUPPORTERS RESPOND TO THIS DISPLACEMENT CRISIS?

I call on the Christians overseas. I appeal to them to rise and support the church in Nigeria. We need them to pray for us, we need them to stand by us and we need them to encourage us.

Rise up to our support. Stand with us because we are one, we are believers in Christ. Tell everybody, tell the powers that be, that the church in Nigeria is under persecution. I believe that if that happens, we will be delivered.

Jesus is Lord and He owns the church, so the church in Nigeria will not go into extinction. But the pains will be more. If the international

now, it will be better. If they rise for us now the pains will surely come to an end.

First and foremost, the church in Nigeria needs prayer. It is soothing when we hear anybody from outside Nigeria say we are praying for you. Secondly, they need material support. They need encouragement so they would not abandon the Christian faith. They need all the support that any Christian around the world can give. We need Christians around the world to stand by us, and to pray for us.

You can join with the church in sub-Saharan Africa to stop the violence and start the healing. Give your support, sign the *Arise Africa* petition and share a prayer at opendoorsuk.org/ariseafrica



THIS CHRISTMAS, MEET...

HEROD'S SECRET POLICEMAN



When Herod the Great met the wise men, he sent them on their way with instructions to return and tell him when they had found Jesus. But what if Herod also sent someone to follow them? What if Herod sent a secret policeman?

Herod's Secret Policeman is a fresh, funny reimagining of the Christmas story.

It tells the tale of Secret Policeman Number 3 (and his toy sheep Nellie) who is charged by Herod with the task of following the magi and reporting back to the king. Along the way, of course, he meets some familiar faces from the Christmas story – and these encounters change him forever.

With spies and shepherds, dictators and disguises,

Herod's Secret Policeman introduces children – in a gentle and engaging way – to some of the pressures faced by secret believers around the world. Perfect to put under the tree or even as a stocking filler, *Herod's Secret Policeman* is a great way for children to connect the truth of the Christmas story with the bigger journey of faith and, especially, the reality of life for secret Christians today.

Along with the beautifully illustrated storybook, there is also an animated video version you can watch with everyone. And, if you're looking for a craft activity to keep the kids occupied, why not download a cut-out-and-colour-in Nativity scene, featuring the characters from the book: Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the shepherds and wise men – and, of course, Secret Policeman Number 3 and Nellie the Sheep!

So, this year, invite Herod's Secret Policeman into your family Christmas, and see the celebration in a new light.

HEROD'S SECRET POLICEMAN INCLUDES:

- Free 24pp full-colour children's storybook
- Animated video
- Downloadable Nativity scene
- Order today at opendoorsuk.org/herod



NEW FOR 2024!

Invite *Herod's Secret Policeman* to your church. Find out about our church pack with free Nativity play version.



INVITE YOUR MP TO THE WORLD WATCH LIST LAUNCH

In a special editorial, the Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham, shares why it's so important to invite MPs to the World Watch List 2025 parliamentary launch.



"On 15 January 2025, Bishop Philip Mounstephen and I will have the privilege of hosting the parliamentary launch of the Open Doors World Watch List – and I want to encourage you to invite your MP to come to this crucial event.

"I've attended the World Watch List parliamentary launch for many years, and I'm always glad to see that many of my colleagues from across the political spectrum are there, hearing first-hand from persecuted Christians. Over the years, I've heard informative and inspiring speakers from countries such as North Korea, Nigeria, Iraq and many more.

"These Christians' stories of persecution are often distressing, but it's also heartening to hear accounts of courageous faith. This year, persecuted believers from Africa and Asia will share their experiences and call for change. Practically speaking, I greatly value Open Doors' World Watch List research, and its recommendations which help inform how MPs can respond. I'd love as many MPs as possible to hear these with me.

"It's more important than ever, this year, to invite your MP to hear this information and

House of Commons were newly appointed to their roles following the 2024 election. That means many MPs have yet to hear detail about the importance of freedom of religion or belief. Many don't yet know the shocking statistic that, around the world, one in seven Christians faces persecution or discrimination for their faith. Many won't have heard of the work that Open Doors partners are doing in more than 70 countries.

"You can help ensure that they do. MPs really value hearing from their constituents – it's the lifeblood of our day-to-day roles. If your MP knows that the Open Doors World Watch List launch matters to people living in their constituency, like you, it can help them make attending the event a priority.

"Thank you so much for raising awareness of Christian persecution. I look forward to hosting the Open Doors World Watch List launch, and I hope to see your MP there!"

You can invite your MP to the parliamentary launch of the Open Doors World Watch List 2025 at opendoorsuk.org/advocacy or with the invitation on your magazine letter.



Ailin's family are called cursed – but she knows their true worth is found in Jesus

PICTURED Thanks to you, deaf Christians like Ailin's parents are receiving the support they need in the face of persecution

From a young age, Ailin* from Central Asia attended church with her mum and dad. Now a teenager, Ailin considered Christianity for herself and decided that she wanted to follow Jesus – but her other Muslim relatives stepped in to stop her.

"They would purposely come on Saturday and stay over to keep me from going to church on Sunday," she says. "When I started going to church and praying more often, they forbade me from going there."

Her relatives put even more pressure on her: "They started to force me to say the *Kalimas* (Islamic declaration of faith), to renounce my faith, my Christianity. But I said: 'No, I know my God – it's Jesus.'"

"I know my God is Jesus."

Ailin's parents couldn't defend her – and she couldn't defend them. Her mum and dad were born deaf, and so many people in Ailin's community believe they're under a curse from Allah. "Because my parents

or say anything," Ailin says. "And when they humiliate my parents, then they also forbid me to do anything. 'Your parents can't hear, so they can't explain it to you. You have to be a Muslim because our whole family, our whole clan, are Muslim,' they said."

When Ailin still refused to comply, the community leaders reported her and her family to the police. "The next day, at 6.30am, more than 15 policemen came," she remembers. "It was just me, my mum, and my brothers at home. I asked if I could call someone – the pastor

you don't have any right to call anybody. Switch your phone off and put it away. We have permission to come into your house and look at everything."

On one of the bookshelves, they found a Christian book and questioned Ailin about it. The police then took her and her mother to the police station. She was afraid – but then she remembered the words of Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God" and found strength to face the police interrogation.

"I have never experienced the kind of love Open Doors has given me."

Eventually, Ailin and her mother were let go without charges. Since then, local Open Doors partners have supported Ailin and her parents spiritually and practically.

Ailin says, "I'm so glad I met Open Doors because I have never experienced the kind of love these people have given me. I can just tell them what moves me, and we can pray together. I have learnt a lot about Jesus through these people. Also, I can say that I'm becoming a strong believer because of these people."



PAUSE

Read Psalm 18:1-6; 16-19. King David wrote this psalm to celebrate God rescuing him from his enemies – including King Saul, who was trying to kill him. But the psalm also speaks of David's isolation and fear in the face of terrifying circumstances, such as Ailin faced when her whole community turned against her.

PONDER

- "The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me" (v.4). Sometimes we can try to minimise our struggles or put on a brave face. But God invites our honesty. If you're feeling overwhelmed, ask the Lord to grant you His peace.
- "They confronted me... but the Lord was my support" (v.18). Ailin had no idea what was going to happen to her or her mother in prison. But God strengthened her right when she needed it. Can you think of a time when you felt God support you? Thank Him for His strength.

as outcasts because of her parents' disability – but they know they are treasured and loved by God. Do you know someone who feels like an outsider? How can you demonstrate God's love to them?

PRAY

- For Ailin and her family, that the Lord will provide for all their needs, and that they will continue to grow in their faith
- For deaf believers in Central Asia who are often despised and rejected both for their faith and their disability. Pray that God will strengthen and reassure them of their worth in Christ
- That God will grant wisdom and compassion to Open Doors partners reaching out to the deaf community across Central Asia.

Find out how you can support and pray for the children of the persecuted church at opendoorsuk.org/children-at-christmas

- "...he rescued me because he delighted in me" (v.19). Ailin and

*Name changed for security reasons