

OpenDoors NEWSLETTER

Open Doors Southern Africa – 50 years of service to the persecuted Church

**Join us
on a secret
mission**

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March / April 2021

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THANK YOU FOR HELPING AMINA HEAL

Like many other extremists, Boko Haram (loosely meaning “Western education is forbidden” in the local Hausa dialect) promotes a very particular version of Islam. This version forbids Muslims from taking part in any political or social activity associated with Western society like Christianity, which is considered a Western ideology.

In Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, Nigeria and birthplace of Boko Haram, Christians like Amina wear the scars of this Islamic insurgency’s attacks.

In 2021, Boko Haram forcefully entered the compound where Amina and her family stayed. They brutally killed her husband Daniel, and they attempted to kill two of her sons after they refused to deny Jesus.

“They slaughtered my husband...” she says. They then slashed her oldest son, Daniel, and second oldest son, Manga’s necks but they miraculously survived.

Shockingly, five years later, when Amina was on her way to her sister-in-law’s funeral, Boko Haram shot down the vehicle she was in. They killed all five men and captured Amina and the 10 women that were with her.

“I just said, ‘Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, have mercy on me! Lord, if I die today, what of my fatherless children?... Then I just said, ‘Lord, let Your will be done.’”

Amina lost consciousness after sustaining three gunshots. She woke up in the Sambisa forest (a well-known stronghold of Boko Haram) where the insurgents had her undergo surgery to remove the bullets.

Amina and the other captured women spent the next five weeks in prayer and fasting. After much negotiation between a Boko Haram leader and the government, the women were freed.

What Amina endured has forever changed her life. But through your support, Amina has healed.

“Open Doors helped me realise the love of God, most especially through this trauma healing and the other help... You showed love by caring for those that are suffering, those that are in trauma, those that are in trouble. You make them realise that God still exists.

“I pray that you’ll not get tired, as you are walking tirelessly towards making the people of God strong again and well in life. May the Lord reward you!”

YOU'RE DELIVERING HOPE TO OUR PERSECUTED FAMILY IN CHRIST

As followers of Christ, we are not of this world but were chosen out of the world by God, resulting in the world hating us (John 15:19). And because of this, we will be persecuted.

Thankfully, Jesus promises us this: *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world,"* (John 16:33). We can have peace and hope, because His victory on the cross has already accomplished a smashing defeat of the whole evil rebellious system, no matter what we may face.

While we endure for the name of Christ in a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to our faith, the Lord uses each one of us to deliver hope to those who face the greatest tribulation for our faith in Christ.

Your support continues to remind our family in Christ of the hope that we have in Him and love we have for one another as the Body of Christ.

Hellen and Ijanada are just two of the many people that you've helped through your support as they endure for the name of Christ on the frontlines of our faith...

Eden (13) and Dawit (5) from Ethiopia have seen more of the world's brokenness than children their age. Most days, they would come home from school to find their mother Hellen intoxicated from drugs and alcohol abuse. When she became a Christian after watching a Christian programme, her husband left them without saying goodbye or leaving any money to support them. No one wanted to give Hellen a job because of her faith. Through your support, we were able to help her start a small business to provide for her and her children, and we paid Eden's and Dawit's school fees. *"God knows where I was when you came to my help. I thought we were about to die. Thank you for your support. God bless you!"* says Hellen.

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"I thought we were about to die... God bless you!"
Hellen, mother of Eden and Dawit

*Photo taken in 2018.

Ijanada from Nigeria was only 14 when she was kidnapped, married off and fell pregnant twice. In captivity *"I faced so much suffering, hunger, maltreatment and pain,"* she says. One night in 2018, while Ijanada was about two months pregnant with her daughter, Warasani, she escaped with her son Luka. She was eventually reunited with her family, but sadly she and her children were mocked and rejected by her community because many superstitiously believe children fathered by Boko Haram soldiers carry seeds of the group's hatred, rebellion and radicalism. Thankfully, Open Doors trauma care programme helped her to be free from the bitterness she harboured. *"I didn't understand the importance of forgiveness, but now I do, and I have let those feelings go... To everyone who supported this programme, I want to say thank you."*

Thank you for all your prayers and support to our persecuted family in Christ like Hellen and Ijanada.

Please continue to pray for our brothers and sisters:

- Pray that the Lord will strengthen their faith and give them a deep sense of peace.
- Pray that the Lord will provide in their physical and spiritual needs.
- Pray that the Lord will use their testimony to bring others into a relationship with Him.
- Pray for Open Doors' work in the different parts of the world to glorify God and be useful in strengthening and encouraging the Church.



"To everyone who supported this programme, I want to say thank you."

Ijanada

How traditional religions are impacting Christians in Africa and beyond

The main source of Christian persecution in Africa comes from Islamic extremism, but there is also another kind of persecution engine known as ethnic antagonism that adds to hostilities against Christians in Africa. Ethnic antagonism comes from the followers of traditional religions or indigenous religions.

So what's so different about this source of persecution? Here are some things to note:

Rituals and ceremonies are more important than doctrine

Unlike Christianity and Islam that has written scriptures, traditional religions have oral sources that teach about their beliefs. Primary rites of passage are birth and naming, puberty, marriage, achieving elder status and death. This belief has resulted in many Christians from these ethnic groups being persecuted because they refuse to take part in these rituals and ceremonies.

Community is more important than the individual

"The individual only exists within the community and separation from it is sometimes worse than death," writes Jacob K. Olupona. Breaking the laws of the community are believed to offend their ancestors. A Christian's faith is seen as being in opposition to the beliefs of the community, which can cause "bad luck" for the community.



Immense suffering for Christians in Africa and Latin America

Christians have two choices: follow the family traditions to keep the peace, stay part of the clan and be allowed to fully benefit from family life, or choose Christ alone and face persecution that may include violent attacks and forced initiation, or social exclusion.

The Church affected by this kind of persecution needs our prayers and support. Please join us in praying to the Lord to strengthen Christians in Africa and Latin America who face persecution under this source. Pray that the hope of Christ will reign in their villages, regions and nations.

A traveller's testimony

A photograph of two young boys playing on a highly reflective, wet surface. One boy is lying on his stomach, laughing with his mouth open, while the other boy is crouching next to him, also laughing. Their reflections are clearly visible on the glossy ground. In the background, other people are blurred, suggesting a public outdoor space.

**“MY HEART WAS
CHANGED FOREVER.”**

Representative image used.

Peter*, who is an Open Doors partner shared:

“In the lead up to our trip to Southeast Asia, I felt distanced from God. The end of another tough year on the work front, a default tendency to self-medicate, a “chore mentality” to spending time in the Word and a seeming inability to pray sincerely, had left me feeling discouraged. Theologically I was not in doubt, but how can theology alone sustain you?”

But everything changed when he visited with believers in their destination country.

“I met a seven-year-old boy, who was injured in a church bombing. Andrew was badly burnt over 40% of his body and had 39 surgeries since the bombing.*

“We watched as he sang for our little group in his local tongue: ‘All I need is Jesus, all I need is Jesus.’ It was his father’s birthday. Andrew brought in a cake, held it before him and sang to him. I have never seen a more intimate moment between two people. I saw the love of Jesus in Andrew’s father’s eyes. I will never be the same again. My heart was changed forever.”

Looking back on this trip and other trips he took with Open Doors, where he witnessed first-hand the love and faithfulness of persecuted believers, he says: *“I wish to bear much fruit, and in so doing prove to be Jesus’s disciple, to the glory of the Father. If that too is your wish, I encourage you to go and find out where God is working and join Him.”*

**Names changed for security reasons.*

Tourists / on a Secret Mission

“Whenever, wherever, however You want me, I’ll go.
And I’ll begin this very minute. Lord, as I stand up
from this place, and as I take my first step forward,
will You consider this as a step toward complete
obedience to You? **I’ll call it the step of yes.”**

Brother Andrew, Open Doors Founder



Are you ready to take the step of yes?>>

Travel with Open Doors in 2021

Have you ever read stories of our persecuted family in Christ and wished that you could meet them face to face and let them know that you are thinking of them and are with them in prayer? Or perhaps the Lord has laid on your heart a burden for believers in a particular country?

This year, you can meet believers by becoming a tourist on a secret mission. Join us as we travel to pray, see, learn, comfort, encourage and deliver scarce resources to our persecuted family.

This adventure will encourage them. And it will also change your life as you meet with our brothers and sisters, hear first-hand their testimonies and see how God is at work amid the darkness.

Take the step of yes...



Representative image used.

BASE TRIPS

A base trip is led by workers of Open Doors Southern Africa. You will travel with a team from South Africa to the destination country.

CENTRAL ASIA June

A small group will have the opportunity to meet and encourage believers and church leaders. On this trip, you will take much-needed support for the Church into this country.

People with special dietary requirements cannot be catered for in this destination.

Approximate Cost: R37 710.00

EGYPT October

Egypt has the largest Christian population in the Middle East today and represents one of the oldest Church communities in the world. Go and encourage, pray for and support our brethren where the work of the Church is crucial in this hostile region.

Approximate Cost: R24 980.00

CENTRAL ASIA July

Meet believers from all over the region to pray for, encourage and learn about the Kingdom work that continues despite the restrictions on the Church. On this trip, you will deliver much-needed resources to the Church in the region.

Approximate Cost: R30 620.00

VIETNAM November

This trip will give you the opportunity to meet with church leaders, to attend church services and to see first-hand how the Church in Vietnam is responding to persecution. You will visit projects and pray for and encourage those who serve the Church in Vietnam.

Approximate Cost: R37 910.00



INTERNATIONAL TRIPS

You can also join our international trips, where you will travel with Christians from all over the world to the destination country. These trips are led by Open Doors workers from other countries.

ASIA* July

Go on a prayer trip to one of the most persecuted countries in the world. This trip will allow you to pray for many brothers and sisters who are isolated and afraid to live out their faith.

Cost: Disclosed on enquiry

SOUTHEAST ASIA* September

The persecution in this country has risen significantly over the past few years as the situation for Christians continues to deteriorate.

This country needs your prayers! On this trip you may have the opportunity to meet and encourage persecuted believers. You will be taken to strategic areas in the country, where you will participate in prayer walks.

Approximate Cost: R31 250.00

BANGLADESH November

The main purpose of this trip is to pray for and encourage believers who have come to Christ from another faith background. You will learn to understand the persecution dynamics in the country and have the opportunity to visit some projects assisted by Open Doors.

Approximate Cost: R29 010.00

COLOMBIA November (special trip)

Meet young believers who have had the opportunity to be educated and nurtured in a safe house. Come and witness the happy event of their graduation. Pray and encourage their families who travel from far and wide. Many families are pastors' families who face persecution because of their work among indigenous tribes and from the guerrilla groups operating in the outlying areas of Colombia.

Cost: To Be Advised



***Exact dates and costs are available on further enquiry. For additional information, kindly contact Samantha at travel@opendoors.org.za.**

WE'RE CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SERVING THE PERSECUTED CHURCH!

We, at Open Doors Southern Africa, are excited as we celebrate 50 years of serving our persecuted family in Christ.

Looking back on the past 50 years we can say with confidence that *"we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed,"* (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).

Through God's power and your support, our persecuted family have been able to stand strong in their faith amid persecution as they're reminded that they are never alone.

In celebration of 50 years of serving the persecuted Church, the month of May will be dedicated to remembering those Christians we serve and remembering all those who have stood alongside the persecuted Church over the last 50 years.

So keep an eye out for upcoming events in May as we celebrate the goodness of God and the love and support of you, our partners, in this ministry.

We look forward to celebrating this milestone with you and to continue serving the persecuted Church alongside you!



Through God's power and your support, our persecuted family have been able to stand strong in their faith amid persecution as they're reminded that they are never alone.



SAVE THE DATE
8 MAY 2021

FROM JAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Dear partner of the persecuted Church

Over the past two years, violence against the Church across sub-Saharan Africa has escalated with four African countries on the top five for violence against Christians.

Every Christian we help in Africa and beyond isn't just another number – they're our family. Each one of them and their needs are important to us!

Sadly, sometimes the sheer numbers of persecuted Christians overwhelm us, but then we hear the words of Jesus when he fed the five thousand: *"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."* (Matthew 14:16). Just like He performed a miracle that day, the Lord performed a miracle last year by providing us with support to help thousands of Christians survive.

This year, we pray that the Lord will enable us to help thousands more and to visit them. If ever you've wanted to meet them, I encourage you to look at our travel brochure (p. 7-10) and prayerfully consider where the Lord may be leading you this year.

Thinking of my travels to the persecuted Church, I think of a widow whose husband was killed by extremists in Africa. She said to me: *"Thank you! Your prayers and support gave me back my will to live."*

I was encouraged by her message. And as I think of the many Christians we've been able to serve for 50 years, I'm humbled that the Lord has used Open Doors Southern Africa to mobilise Christians in Southern Africa to assist in serving our persecuted family. That's why we can't wait to celebrate 50 years of serving the persecuted Church in May 2021 (see p.11).

Through your prayers and support over the past 50 years, we've been able to help uplift thousands of Christians and give them *"back their will to live"*. Thank you so much!

We look forward to seeing you at our celebrations and for you to join us on a trip!

Together in His service



Jan Gouws, Executive Director
Open Doors Southern Africa



Persecuted  But never alone.



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