

OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



Alone but not abandoned

Stand with isolated Christians in the most dangerous countries to follow Jesus

2022 | Issue 1

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In fact,
everyone who
wants to live a
godly life in
Christ Jesus
will be
persecuted

2 Timothy 3:12

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Alone. The one thing we all
felt during the lockdowns

Isolated. Excluded. Distanced. Separated. We all did it for our safety and our loved ones'. We sacrificed not seeing them as often as we like or used to. Staying in isolation felt like the best thing to do at the height of COVID-19, but it has badly affected our emotional and mental health.

For the Persecuted Church, the feeling of being alone is no longer new. They have been experiencing it even before the pandemic.

When one decides to follow Jesus, his immediate family disowns him; when one is discovered for her newfound faith in Christ, her community or neighborhood exiles her; when one 'converts' from his country's major religion, he is seen and treated as someone of lesser worth; and

when one flees her country to escape these threats. There is no turning back. Imprisonment, even death, awaits.

These are just some of the stories behind the World Watch List. For the first time in almost two decades, North Korea drops to #2 to give way to a new leader: Afghanistan. In this issue you read stories on Zabi* from Afghanistan and Bae* from North Korea.

This is more than statistics. They represents the lives of millions of our persecuted brethren. We pray that God will lead you to do one thing immediately: PRAY FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH.

Your prayers will surely make them feel less alone.

**Name changed for security reasons*

RUN FOR LIFE

Zabi's father was killed for his faith, her brother 'disappeared'. Now, her own future is uncertain.

Zabi escaped when the Taliban took over in Afghanistan. But how long can she keep running? Your support and prayers are needed more than ever, to keep hope alive for Christians facing the greatest persecution.

The Taliban know Zabi's* secret, so her life is in danger. "My family are secret believers," she says. "A few years ago, the Taliban came and they took my father away, because he was a Christian. They tortured him for months and then they killed him. A few months later, my brother also disappeared. We never heard of him again."

When the Taliban took over in August 2021, Zabi knew she had to run for her life. Zabi is young, well-educated and active in human rights: all dangerous qualities that make her a target. Some Christians like Zabi were able to escape Afghanistan in August along with the international forces leaving the country. But Zabi was left behind. Her life under threat, she was forced to gather whatever possessions she could find and run for the border.

"I may have to go into hiding, or be deported to Afghanistan. I may be killed if that happens"

Now, Zabi is living in another country. It's not safe for us to tell you where. But the danger isn't over for her. She says, "Our situation is desperate. I have money in my bank account, but cannot access it from here. I have a visa but it will expire soon.

What will happen to me? I don't know. I'm praying I can leave this country and go somewhere safe. I may have to go into hiding. Or I'll be deported to Afghanistan. I may be killed if that happens."

Strong faith remains

Thankfully, God led our frontline partners to Zabi and thanks to your help, we have been able to give her food, pay her rent and given her money to stay safe and survive. Our partners have prayed with her and encouraged her to stay strong in her faith. Thanks to your support, we can continue to help her – though we don't know what the future may hold.

Our partner tells us, "Zabi is grateful for the support, she's so thankful that we're helping, but at the same time, she's still in shock about what happened.. We just have to be with her and help her where we can. And we pray that God opens a door for her so that she can be safe."



Zabi's home is no longer safe for her, because she's a Christian



Immediate response

It's been shocking to watch the speed of deterioration in Afghanistan last year, and to understand just how vulnerable the church has become to extreme persecution in so short a time.

Open Doors' mission has always been covert, and we can't always give details about our work. We can tell you that your generous and reliable support enabled our partners to respond immediately to the crisis. They remain in close contact with secret believers, providing spiritual encouragement and emergency support as needed.

The situation is volatile, borders and camps remain closed. The church is small and scattered. Many are in hiding. But we

are continuing to do all we can to support vulnerable secret believers and are ready to scale up as the need and opportunity arises.

"You are a strand of hope to me. There's a chance I may live."

There's no question the needs of the persecuted church in the region are significant. That's why we're launching a year of prayer for Afghanistan.

And if you feel moved to give, you can contribute to a fund that will provide long-term support to believers facing extreme persecution in the countries identified by

Open Doors' research as the ten most dangerous. With your help, our field teams are determined to reach every secret believer with the support they need.

Your support means everything to persecuted Christians like Zabi. She says, "Thank God for your food and clothes deliveries, your financial support and your prayers and encouragement. You are a strand of hope to me. There's a chance I may live."

**Name changed for security reasons; images are illustrative.*

Stand as one with them so they do not face persecution alone.

Go to www.opendoors.org.hk to find out how persecution has changed in our 2022 World Watch List. Download our month of prayer for Afghanistan in February and join our year of prayer for the country.

PLEASE PRAY

For strength for believers who feel called to stay and be 'salt and light' in Afghanistan. Pray that God will open new doors for the believers.

Pray for our frontline partners ministering to believers who have fled their country. Pray for smooth processing of the relief aid, such as fruit, meat, rice, warm clothes and hygiene kits.

Pray against the spirit of violence in the country and ask the Lord to hinder any extremist attacks.

PLEASE GIVE

Every HK\$400 could provide one month of emergency food, medicine and clothing to a family of refugees fleeing extreme persecution in Afghanistan.

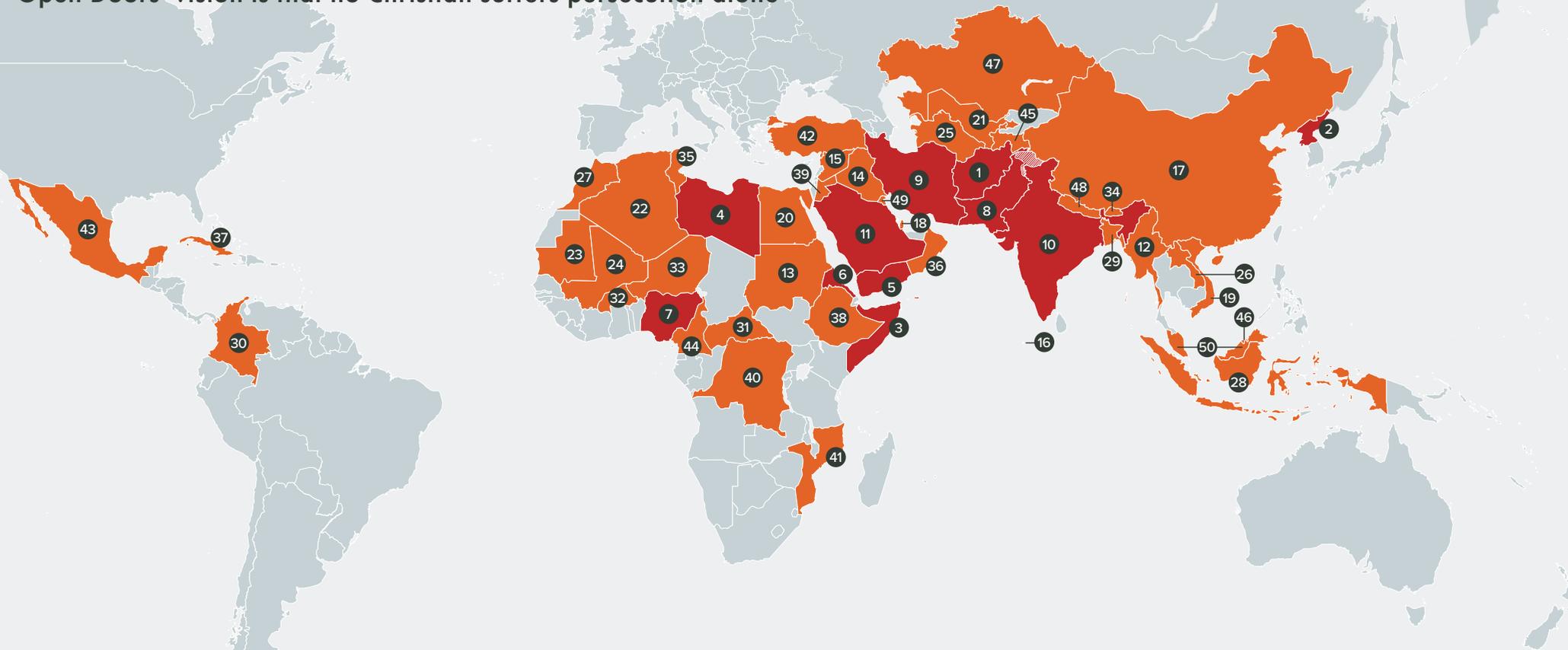
Every HK\$500 could give seven secret believers a Bible.

Every HK\$775 could provide discipleship training to 20 secret believers.

WORLD WATCH LIST 2022



Open Doors' vision is that no Christian suffers persecution alone



PERSECUTION LEVELS

- HIGH
- VERY HIGH
- EXTREME

- | | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 Afghanistan | 11 Saudi Arabia | 21 Uzbekistan | 31 Central African Republic | 41 Mozambique |
| 2 North Korea | 12 Myanmar | 22 Algeria | 32 Burkina Faso | 42 Turkey |
| 3 Somalia | 13 Sudan | 23 Mauritania | 33 Niger | 43 Mexico |
| 4 Libya | 14 Iraq | 24 Mali | 34 Bhutan | 44 Cameroon |
| 5 Yemen | 15 Syria | 25 Turkmenistan | 35 Tunisia | 45 Tajikistan |
| 6 Eritrea | 16 Maldives | 26 Laos | 36 Oman | 46 Brunei |
| 7 Nigeria | 17 China | 27 Morocco | 37 Cuba | 47 Kazakhstan |
| 8 Pakistan | 18 Qatar | 28 Indonesia | 38 Ethiopia | 48 Nepal |
| 9 Iran | 19 Vietnam | 29 Bangladesh | 39 Jordan | 49 Kuwait |
| 10 India | 20 Egypt | 30 Colombia | 40 Congo DR. | 50 Malaysia |

SECRET GIFTS

TO SUSTAIN A SECRET CHURCH

The unrelenting pressure on North Korea's secret Christians continues. Meet courageous secret believer Bae, and discover how your prayers and support for Open Doors will sustain her for years to come."

Bae felt called to swap relative freedom for a life of hunger and hard labour in North Korea.

"Whenever I open my eyes in the morning, I feel the presence of our Father," says Bae*, who begins each morning in a rustic shack in a rural village, somewhere in the mountains of North Korea. Her husband is groggy from lack of sleep, and she can hear the rustling of the other people in her house, getting ready for another day in the fields.

She hopes she'll meet her work quota picking crops. She doesn't want to risk additional punishment. The government provides food for people like her—but just enough to keep them alive to work. She knows her breakfast won't be enough to ease the gaping hunger in her belly. Like all the other people in her village, Bae is starving. She's not hungry enough to die—at least, not yet. But the hunger is always there, gnawing at her bones.

When Bae is able to take a short break, she heads for the woods. The mushrooms and plants she collects from the forest help stem the growling of her belly, but that extra food can never be guaranteed.

"From the perspective of other people, our life of suffering must seem like a cursed life; however, this suffering is a blessing from our Father who allowed it in our life because it is a shortcut to the Father."

Hungry all day

Finally, at dusk, she finishes her day. She gets another meal—some watery soup and, if she's lucky, some rice—and returns to her home.

And then Bae gets to her real work.

She waits for the moon to go behind the clouds, then silently pulls on her cloak. She slips out of the front door, careful to close it quietly so the neighbours don't hear. As she makes her way through the village, she sticks to the shadows and steals back to the forest.

But this time, she isn't foraging for food—what she's after is even more important.

She finds the tree with the gnarled roots and scrapes away a thin layer of dirt. She pulls out the Bible, tucks it under her cloak, and returns to her cabin as quietly as she left.

When she gets home, her housemates are waiting—they've already covered the windows with blankets and lit a small candle.

She opens the Bible and begins to read, in a voice barely above a whisper: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. It's another day in a North Korean church.

Arrested for a Bible

Bae has not always lived in this village. She was sent here after she and her husband were caught with a Bible. As soon as North Korean authorities realised the couple were Christians, their lives as they knew them were over.

Faith in Jesus can be a death sentence in North Korea. Open Doors estimates there are around 400,000 Christians in North Korea—and they are all secret Christians. If they're caught, they're lucky to escape with their lives.

Bae and her husband were two of the

“lucky” ones – alive, but sentenced to a lifetime of hardship and labour.

They were put into the “hostile class” in North Korea, which meant they are on the lowest rung when it comes to government aid, work assignments or any other official assistance. The couple was taken to the remote village and told they had to do backbreaking agricultural labor. They know they’ll live in the village until they die.

Bae says, “The thing I give thanks for the most is that Father God uses me to work as his servant. I desire to dedicate my life, until death, to glorify Him.”

“Hostile class”

Though it might seem like a light sentence to be placed in a rural village, it’s not—the region is more like a prison than a farm. People like Bae are watched and the roads in and out of these towns are monitored and guarded. Escape is a very dangerous prospect, and daily life becomes limited to the small area surrounding the villages.

Bae was able to escape one time. She made it over the border, where she contacted a safe house run by Open Doors partners. While there, she met with other Christians – a sweet experience of fellowship that would be impossible in North Korea.

“He knows our suffering and listens to our prayers. We thank our Father who has done such great things to prepare life for us.”

The leaders of the safe house gave Bae food, medicine and a new Bible. She



Bae keeps her secret Bible buried under a tree root in the forest.

sang, prayed and read the Bible with her friends at the house. And for once, she didn’t have to be quiet.

She was offered the chance to stay there – to live a freer life outside of the tight control back home.

She refused.

Faith sustained

Bae returned home with the food, medicine and Bible, and she shared them with her secret group of believers. These gifts, made possible by your support, will sustain the faith of these courageous Christians for years.

Open Doors’ goal has always been to ‘strengthen what remains and is about to die’ (Rev 3:2). This verse is especially applicable for the situation of the North Korean Church. Without our support, many Christians, like Bae, would starve.



Bae uses every spare moment to forage for food, before hosting her secret church at night.

Your gifts supply emergency aid such as food, medicines and clothes. Thanks to you, we can provide shelter, training and materials to North Korean believers in safe houses, some of whom, like Bae, make the brave decision to travel back to North Korea to bless their brothers and sisters who remain. Thank you.

**Name changed to keep identity secure; photos are illustrative. Note: Bae is a real person in North Korea, but her story has been edited to ensure she cannot be identified.*

Open Doors works to strengthen North Korean Christians like Bae. Your long-term support and prayers are vital to remind followers of Jesus they aren’t alone, even in places like North Korea.

Please pray

- Please pray for the secret believers in North Korea, who are risking everything to follow Jesus in the face of the most extreme persecution.
- Pray that God will keep them safe, provide for their needs, and use them to shine as lights in the darkness.
- Pray that Open Doors will reach even more North Koreans in 2022 through our safe houses, and that vital food aid will reach hungry people.

North Korea has been number one for 20 years on Open Doors World Watch of places most hostile to Christians. North Korea drops to number 2 in the new list for 2022, give way to a new leader: Afghanistan. Go to our website to explore: www.opendoors.org.hk

THE WORLD WATCH LIST 2022

THE SACRIFICE AND SECRECY OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Each year, Open Doors produces the World Watch List – ranking the countries where following Jesus costs the most.

World Watch List is more than a set of data or a collection of statistics – vital though that information is. It's a window into the world of the persecuted church, a world where surveillance is growing every day, where dictators and extremists hold a suffocating grip on society, where following Jesus means sacrificing so much.

Some sacrifice their safety, risking violence or attack to read the Bible or worship with their fellow believers.

For others, identifying as a Christian means giving up the chance of a decent education or a job. Or abandoning homes, or businesses, being driven out of the places where they live.

Many – far too many – must sacrifice their voice, their visibility. They must stay silent and secret, hide what they believe, what they think, who they really are.

Some sacrifice their freedom – choosing to go to prison or a labour camp rather than deny their faith. Some even pay with their lives.

Christians in these countries know the reality of taking up their cross and following Jesus.

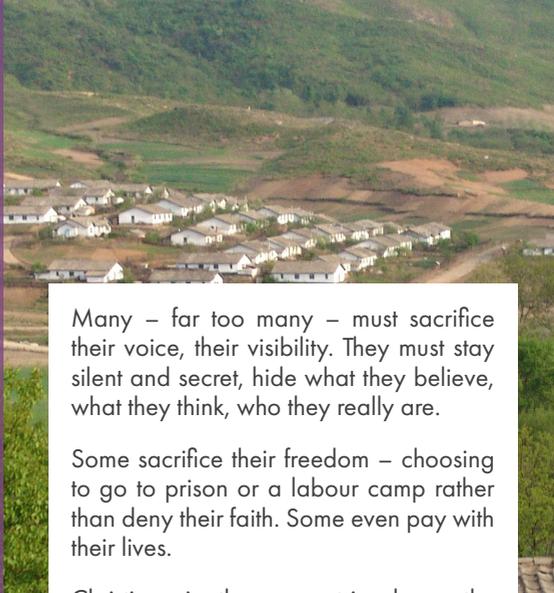
But what gives them the strength to walk this path?

First, they see the bigger picture. They have learned to look over the horizon of this world, and into the eternal story beyond. Their country might turn against them, but they know they are part of the strong, secret and victorious kingdom of God.

Second, they know that they are not alone. They know that God is with them. And many know that others are with them as well: praying for them, speaking up for them, supporting them. Their family might abandon them, but they are part of the worldwide family of Christ.

And that's what this list is really all about. It's about our family. It's a call to stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters and let them know that they are not alone.

The World Watch List helps you pray, support and speak up for the persecuted church.



LEAVE A LEGACY OF FAITH

Helping people follow Jesus for generations to come.

You can give your persecuted family hope of a brighter future by including a gift to Open Doors in your Will. It won't cost you anything right away but it will mean a lifetime of support for those who suffer for following Jesus.

You can make a Will for FREE using our partner "ForeverGift". To find out more, go to forevergift.hk/opendoorshk-eng or +852 5608 8729 (WhatsApp).

"It gives me wonderful peace of mind to know that Open Doors will use the money wisely and prayerfully." – Valerie, Open Doors supporter (pictured)

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 churches to serve Christians living under religious persecution.

If you want to know more about the work of Open Doors, or get involve to support our persecuted families, please do get in touch (see back page).

ALONE

With your help, she's not abandoned

"They killed my father, because he was a Christian, and my brother was never seen again," says Zabi*, who ran for her life when the Taliban took over. "I may have to go into hiding or be deported to Afghanistan. I may be killed if that happens."

Afghanistan has drawn the world's attention to the vulnerability of Christians who share our faith but not our freedom. Christians like Zabi, whose life and hope hangs by a thread. She told us: "You are a strand of hope to me. There's a chance I may live."

Persecution has been growing alarmingly around the world. Your long-term gifts and prayers are vital for the survival of the church.

You're showing Christians like Zabi, in the worst places to be a Christian, that they are not alone. You're supporting them to be salt and light.

Every HK\$400 could provide one month of emergency food, medicine and clothing to a family of refugees fleeing extreme persecution in Afghanistan.

Every HK\$775 could provide discipleship training to 20 secret believers.

Please continue to pray and give as you are able. Could you consider giving regularly today?

Thank You!

** name changed for security reasons; image is illustrative*



STAND AS ONE WITH THEM

Visit
our website
www.opendoors.org.hk
to see the new
World Watch List of
countries where
faith costs
the most.

We are a tax-exempt charity (under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue)

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