

# OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



## Open Homes, Open Doors

Keep the doors open for Muslims seeking Jesus

2022 | Issue 2

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God sets the  
lonely in families.

PSALM 68:6

## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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In this issue of the Open Doors Magazine, you will find the story of Ruslan\* from Central Asia, a courageous brother who regularly ‘invites’ persecution each time he welcomes into his home those we call secret believers – new converts and believers living in isolation because of their faith in Jesus. His doors are always open for a cup of tea with the new ‘members’ of his family. But it is not just an ordinary bonding over tea, but a time for Christian fellowship, of worshipping God, of praying together, and discipleship lessons - things they cannot do anywhere else because of the hostility against Christianity in their country and region. Thus, Ruslan’s home is the place to be (almost like a house church!).

Because of your prayers and support, Open Doors is able to equip and support such ‘secret ministries’ for our dear secret believers. That’s why we are just so thankful for brothers

(and sisters) like Ruslan who risk not only their homes and freedom, but their lives just to care for and disciple persecuted Christians. Together as one family, they grow and mature in their faith and testify to their families and communities their Gospel-transformed lives through creative ways.

As one, big family in Christ, although miles apart at the moment, may we continue to welcome the Persecuted Church in our hearts, living out these lines from the song “Welcome to the Family” by 80’s singing songbook Psalty:

“May we always be to you, what God would have us be. A family always there, to be strong and to lean on.”

Thank you and God continue to bless you!

*\*Name changed for security reasons*



# OPEN HOMES OPEN DOORS

Ruslan, a church leader in Central Asia for 16 years. We can't show his face or print his real name to protect his identity.

**Imagine: every time you open your home to someone seeking Jesus, you risk inviting persecution in. That's the situation in Central Asia, where believers who convert from Islam face violent opposition. But your support keeps the door open to the Gospel – and you are family to isolated believers.**

Ruslan\* is sitting round a table, in an ordinary family kitchen, with a group of new believers who have converted from Islam. They appear to be drinking tea, and the gathering is quiet and still.

But really, they are worshipping. These secret believers are praising God with all their hearts, they are filled with love for Jesus and each other, and their eyes shine at the joy of being together.

This is Central Asia\*\*, where Christians face rejection, punishment, violence and even death – and where church leaders like Ruslan risk persecution every time they open their homes.

### **Wave of persecution**

Across this region, Muslims are coming to faith in Christ. They may become disillusioned with Islam and start searching elsewhere. Often, they have dreams and visions, or sometimes a close friend shares their faith.

But the decision to follow Jesus comes with a high cost. “Persecution is a growing wave,” says Ruslan. “It starts small then builds up.”

For new converts, their own family can be the greatest threat. Ruslan's mother was aggressively and publicly opposed to Christianity at first. Since coming to faith,

Ruslan has endured years of persecution. His home is routinely vandalised, the windows broken again and again. Ruslan's daughter was beaten up at school and Muslim classmates threatened to burn her face with acid.

**“You are not ordinary people, but an answer from the Lord.”**

In one village, Muslim clerics made life impossible for new believers. Converts were told: your children can no longer attend school, your cattle cannot eat the grass of Muslim livestock, and you cannot have water to irrigate your fields. For these families, their very survival is a struggle.

### **Inviting in**

With oppression so severe, faith must be strong. “If you open your house, it is imperative that you are a serious, firm believer,” said Ruslan. “You are opening your home to the risk of persecution.”

Ruslan, a church leader for 16 years, ministers to isolated Christians across his nation. He knows many homes where Jesus is secretly worshipped behind closed doors.

**“Our church is poor – but when we can't help people, you can.”**

As well as inviting people into his own family home, Ruslan visits living rooms and kitchens around the country. He drives an inconspicuous car and arrives late at night to stay hidden. Once inside, Ruslan prays and worships with the group (though seeing them, you would think they were simply drinking tea), and he shares the Gospel with men and women who convert from Islam.

It's dangerous, risky work – but without this vital support, new believers may become lonely and disheartened, and lose their faith.

Ruslan is committed and courageous, but he simply couldn't keep going without people like you. "Thanks to your prayers and support, we are able to survive in this hostile environment," he said.

You are the family Ruslan and other isolated believers depend on.

### **"An answer from the Lord."**

For more than a decade, your generous support has strengthened Ruslan's faith and ministry. "You took the first step to

find me," said Ruslan, "and you helped me personally when I could not afford medical treatment."

### **"Thanks to your prayers and support, we survive in this hostile environment."**

When isolated believers were banished from their community, Open Doors helped provide life-saving aid. "Some believers received hay, others received water, and others received sewing machines or tools that could help them earn a living," said Ruslan. "Our church is poor – but when we can't help people, you can."

Right across Central Asia, your support means secret believers stay strong in their faith. You are giving people the courage to speak out for Jesus, and be salt and light in their families. You ensure isolated believers are not alone.

For Ruslan, you are family sent by God. "What you do is essential," he said. "You are not ordinary people, but an answer from the Lord. We know we are not alone, but part of a large Christian family. And what does a family do? At the hardest moments, they support you."

*\*Name changed to protect his identity*

*\*\*We can't tell you the name of the country we are working in for reasons of security*



**"God sets the lonely in families."**

PSALM 68:6

Your gifts and prayers mean everything to isolated believers like Ruslan. | Photo © Getty



Ruslan preaches, worships and shares his faith in secret, to support new believers.

## **Will you be family to isolated believers like Ruslan – and keep the door open to the Gospel in Central Asia?**

### **PLEASE PRAY**

- Give thanks for Ruslan's courage, and ask for God's protection over his life and ministry.
- Pray for Ruslan's family as they bravely open their home to Muslims seeking Jesus.
- Pray that isolated believers across Central Asia will know their global church family stands with them.

### **PLEASE GIVE**

**Every HK\$800** could provide vital aid for an isolated Christian family struggling financially because of persecution.

**Every HK\$1,200** could run a training seminar for brave leaders like Ruslan, so they keep serving others.

**Every HK\$1,600** could train an isolated believer in a new trade, so they can provide for their family.



## Only prayer: surviving prison in Iran

**When an Iranian couple were interrogated and abused, they depended on prayer. Your support sustained them through years of persecution – and today their faith is as strong as ever.**



Ali and Zahra say your prayers helped them survive years of persecution in Iran.

Ali was freed from drug addiction the day he chose to follow Jesus. When his wife Zahra came to faith too, they knew the decision would change their lives forever. After all, the couple lived in Iran, where converts to Christianity are among the world's most persecuted believers.

It wasn't long before Ali and Zahra were arrested for the first time. "On the way to prison, I deleted numbers from my phone to keep other believers safe," said Ali. "I was taken to a cell with no lights, toilet or blanket. They interrogated and beat me. They wanted to infiltrate the church."

The couple were released – but two years of persecution, harassment, threat and violence followed. "Each day was suffering and torture," said Ali. No one would employ Ali, the children were banned from school, friends and family turned against them. They could be arrested and questioned at any moment.

One thing made a difference to Ali and Zahra: your prayers. Knowing the global church was standing with them in prayer meant everything – and God answered in powerful ways.

"In solitary confinement in prison, the only

thing that strengthened us was prayer," said Ali. "Nothing else. Only God can go into those dark places. We are part of the body of Christ, no matter where we are."

Zahra added, "While in prison, I thought to myself: there are people who love me and cry for my pain and, most importantly, pray for me. Without God's power, I could not have tolerated prison."

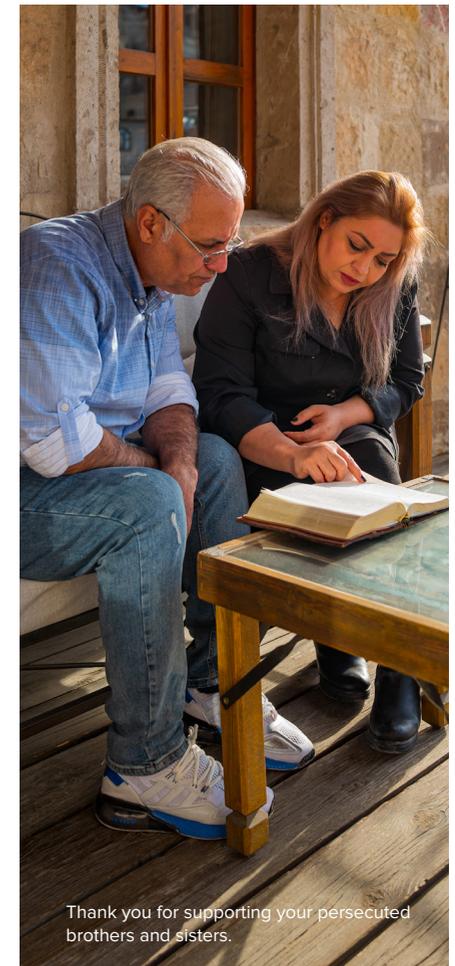
### **"If I went back, would I still choose Jesus? Yes!"**

The couple made the hard decision to leave Iran, and now live in Turkey. Here, your generous support helped the whole family. They attended a seminar to begin healing the deep wounds of persecution, and recover from the trauma of imprisonment and interrogation. The support and prayers of their worldwide family helped this couple know they are not alone.

Today, thanks to you, their faith is as strong as ever. "If I went back, would I still choose Jesus?" said Ali. "Yes! Through all these sufferings, Christ never left me alone. I cannot live without him, there is no other way around it."



The couple, with children Daniel and Samuel, now live safely in Turkey.



Thank you for supporting your persecuted brothers and sisters.

### **PLEASE PRAY**

**Lift up Ali and Zahra, and their two children Daniel and Samuel, before God. Give thanks for their steadfast faith, and ask God to heal their trauma and fill them with hope for the future. Pray too for the church in Iran, courageously persevering despite intense opposition.**

# The Perseverance of the Central Asia Church

After the fall of USSR, the Church  
in Central Asia perseveres.



The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) existed as a socialist/Communist state from 1922 to 1991.

All union republics became independent countries throughout the last two years of Communist rule, ending 70 years of sometimes brutal repression of religion and of Christians.

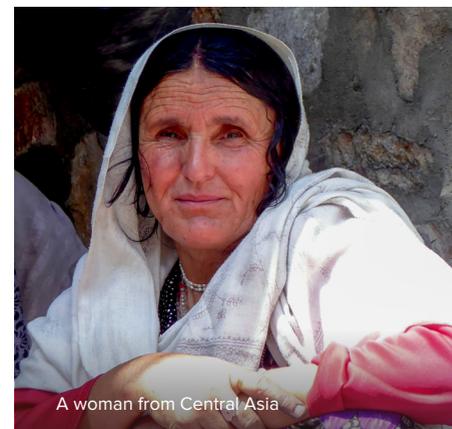
Although the fall of Communism heralded a new era of religious freedom, change has been painfully

slow in taking place for some former Soviet Union countries, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.

In these countries, the presence of Religious Committees, the never-ending influence of the security services, the emphasis on registration, the introduction of restrictive religious legislation, omnipresent bureaucrats and local family pressure make life difficult for many Christians.

## Olga's story

Olga\* has lived through the era of the soviet union and witnessed its fall in 1991. Here, she recalls family life, Christian life, and church life in those days.



A woman from Central Asia

As Christians, we always felt the tension of persecution. It was like being a fish in an aquarium – everything you did or said was monitored. Even your own apartment could be bugged; you did not feel free anywhere. You continually felt the hot breath of the KGB.

We also felt that we were not considered full citizens of the Soviet Union. We were second class people, enemies of the communist ideology, so we were enemies of society, of the country.

**"You continually felt the hot breath of the KGB."**

I saw the list of the martyrs of the Underground Evangelical Christian Baptists (ECB) brotherhood. They started the list during the sixties, and it had more than twenty martyrs on it. Some of them had died in prison, some in unknown circumstances which

nobody seemed to know anything about.

For some people in our churches the fear was overwhelming. We knew that in almost every big church of the ECB there were informers; we never knew who you could trust. The KGB made sure that division and mistrust were sown. Even with your own brothers and sisters you'd be very cautious. You can still see that same fear and mistrust among Christians nowadays in countries where there is persecution.

For me, personally, that period in my life has made me stronger. We were sustained by prayer; communication with the Lord Jesus was absolutely vital to us.



A Russian Orthodox Church in Almaty, Kazakhstan

**“My father used to say that prayer was your spiritual breath, your life, especially in prison and during persecution.”**



We all prayed that God would cause a change in the situation so that we'd have more freedom to preach the Gospel. We never prayed for a collapse of the communist system; we put it in a much milder form, but God gave us more than we asked.

The biggest challenge for us as a church was 'to be or not to be'. It was a matter of survival, of existence. There was a spiritual battle going on for the survival of the church.



A Russian Orthodox Church in Almaty, Kazakhstan

The challenge of finding the right position towards the authorities was always there. The position of the leadership of the official churches which were under state control was that you had to compromise with the authorities in order to survive. I think that about one third of the Protestant churches rejected this cooperation with the state and went 'underground'.



Secret believers meet in Central Asia

There was always the challenge of actual persecution for your faith: fines, harassment, discrimination, imprisonment. Even in the beginning of the sixties, when a new wave of persecution swept our country under Nikita Khrushchev, the authorities had the right to take children away from Christian parents and put them in an orphanage so they could be raised by the state.



Secret believers meet in Central Asia



Kazakhstan children



Elderly men playing chess in a market in Uzbekistan



Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Then there were the challenges of 'being a fish in the aquarium', of being a second-class citizen and facing ostracism from society, coping with the restrictions of your rights which severely hampered the development of your career. Entrance to university was almost impossible; involvement in politics or government functions was out of the question. It was all part of the package we had to deal with as Christians during the Soviet times.

### WINDS OF CHANGE

Before the Berlin Wall fell, we as Soviet Christians felt that the time of freedom was coming.

Two years after Gorbachev had become the leader of the Communist Party, he signed a special amnesty for the remainder of prisoners of conscience and political dissidents who were still in detention. On 18 June 1987 the Soviet government published a decree about the amnesty. The active waves of persecution had come to a halt.

The list was by family name. I heard the rumour that my father's name was on it. He came home in August 1987 after four years imprisonment. It was a time of great rejoicing! Finally, he was reunited with us, never to be imprisoned again!

***A spiritual spring was coming to our both physically and spiritually cold country. We felt the spring; we enjoyed it and we were waiting passionately for the Iron Curtain to fall. We all wanted to do something to hasten its fall.***

1988 was of special significance because it was the Millennium anniversary of Christianity in Russia. In the year 988 Prince Vladimir embraced Christianity and he, his servants and many others were baptised. The Russian Orthodox Church and also some Evangelical and Baptist churches asked for permission to celebrate this special Millennium year.



Brother Andrew with Russian Orthodox Church leaders after presenting them one million bibles for Russia. Danilov Monastery, Moscow, 1988.

I later heard that Open Doors had the opportunity then to send one million New Testaments to the Russian Orthodox Church as an anniversary gift!

Little by little we saw changes in the attitude of the authorities. I think God gave Gorbachev that role and used him somehow to open that curtain,

that Iron curtain which was around the Soviet Union.

We started to breathe again. Little by little the feeling disappeared that we were constantly being monitored. Instead of swimming in an aquarium, we began to swim in the ocean! We had that incredible sense of freedom. We had freedom to preach the Gospel. Especially in the first years of the nineties, we had so much freedom. In Yakutsk we could go to any school, any kindergarten, any prison and all doors were open to us to preach the Gospel. Nobody would stop us.

**Throughout much of the former Soviet Union, an indigenous church has been steadily growing in Central Asia since 1991.**

Open Doors have helped translate and produce Bibles and Christian literature in the language of the people, helped Christians start small businesses to support themselves and their families, and provided training and support for Christian leaders and evangelists.

*\*Name changed for security reasons*



# Every time Ruslan opens his home, he risks inviting in persecution.

## Will you help keep the door open to the Gospel across Central Asia?

If Muslims want to know Jesus, Ruslan (pseudonym) and his family welcome them in. Just like any church home group would.

But in Central Asia, it's a risk. Ruslan's home is routinely vandalised and his daughter was beaten up.

For new believers from Islam, faith in Christ comes with a high cost. It can mean no school for their children, no grass for their cattle and no water for their crops. "Persecution is a growing wave," says Ruslan. "It starts small then builds up."

*Isolated believers in Central Asia depend on you, their Christian family, for support and prayers.*

**Every HK\$800** could support a Christian family struggling because of persecution, by providing financial aid for things like medical bills, and training them for work.

## Will you be family to isolated believers like Ruslan – and keep the door open to the gospel in Central Asia?

Please pray – and if you are able, please give.

*Thank you*



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Open Doors Hong Kong Limited  
P.O. Box 78516, Mongkok Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong  
enquiryhk@od.org • +852 3525 0820  
[www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk)



@opendoorshk



+852 5608 8729



Website

