

# OPEN DOORS

MAGAZINE



## Counting the Cost

When faith spells danger, torture, or death...

### Light

*in the darkest places*

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### World Watch List 2024

*Just released*

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### Above & Beyond

*Your extraordinary support*

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**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.**

DEUTERONOMY 31:6



# Alex's Corner



**“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”**

JOHN 1:5

How did you come to know Jesus?

The first person to tell Ji Ho\* about Jesus was her father. But she never heard much from him as in North Korea, it is dangerous to make your faith known to anyone, even your children. And before he could tell her more, he was arrested, never to be seen again.

The 2024 Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) reveals that North Korea is once again the world's most hostile country towards Jesus and all who follow Him.

Yet in this darkest place on earth, the light of the gospel continues to shine. The darkness has not overcome the light.

Time and again, we witness God working in the most desperate situations, restoring and empowering His children to overcome horrifying acts of persecution against them. We see a courageous and victorious church going against all odds to be salt and light in spite of the fact that persecution against Christians continues to increase in intensity worldwide.

Through your prayers and support, millions of persecuted Christians were encouraged to stand firm in their faith and received much-needed help in 2023. Thank you.

As we look at the newly released 2024 WWL, may we remember each brother and sister that make up the statistics on the List, knowing that God calls the entire family of Christ to suffer and rejoice together (1 Cor 12:26).

*\*name changed for security reasons*



# LIGHT IN THE DARKEST PLACES

Ji Ho came to faith when she heard the words of Jesus on a tiny radio in North Korea. Believers like her need your support.

*Image is representative*



**Christian persecution is becoming more severe and more widespread. But even in the most dangerous places, God is not silent – and believers need your support.**

Uniformed policemen tore apart the small house in North Korea, ransacking drawers and smashing crockery. Others dug furiously in the garden, their shovels spraying dirt.

These officials needed evidence. Proof that the quiet man cowering in the corner with his daughter was a Christian. They got what they came for...

**“We knew we’d never see each other again.”**

“The men found a Bible wrapped in plastic, buried in the garden,” said Ji Ho\*, who was a schoolgirl at the time. “A policeman triumphantly threw the book at my father’s feet. We both sobbed. In that moment, we knew we’d never see each other again.”

Ji Ho’s father was bundled outside and led away. Ji Ho was all alone.

**Most dangerous place**

North Korea is the most dangerous place in the world to follow Jesus. The country again tops Open Doors’ World Watch List and Christians there are in a perilous situation. In this repressive regime, owning a Bible could lead to jail and faith could put you in a labour camp. Believers risk torture and even execution if discovered.

But even in North Korea, the voice of God cannot be silenced. Ji Ho doesn’t know what happened to her father, but years after he was taken, this young woman made an incredible discovery...

**‘Words of Jesus’**

Every night Ji Ho tuned into her father’s secret transistor radio, desperate for news of food so she wouldn’t starve like her neighbours. One day, a new voice interrupted the airwaves.

“I heard a man speaking Korean. It was unlike any state programme. ‘You are the salt of the earth,’ the voice said. ‘These are the words of Jesus, and they remind us never to lose our love for others.’”

Ji Ho was stunned, overcome by a powerful memory. “I nearly dropped my tea,” she said. “This was what my father told me, almost word for word, many years ago.”

### **Faith, despite the cost**

From then on, Ji Ho listened... and God spoke. “I became convinced,” she said. “This Jesus was the teacher my father had been trying to tell me about.”

### **“This Jesus was the teacher my father spoke about.”**

Ji Ho gave her life to Christ. But like the estimated 400,000 believers in North Korea, her faith remains secret and she faces a daily struggle for survival. Poverty is rife across the nation, and although customs doors have opened with Russia and China since the Covid-19 pandemic, food imports are directed first towards the elite and the military. Half the population has no secure food supply.

It’s a desperate situation – both spiritually and physically. Ji Ho says, “I might be the only Christian in my country.”

Believers like Ji Ho need to know they are not alone. Only the love, prayers and support of their global church

family can help courageous Christians follow Jesus in the darkest places.

### **Life and death**

For 25 years, Open Doors has stood with North Korean believers, working through secret networks to provide food and medicine. In fact, 100,000 Christians receive vital spiritual support thanks to the global church family’s generosity.

Your support can broadcast daily gospel radio programmes to strengthen the faith of isolated believers like Ji Ho, and provide emergency food to keep North Korean Christians from starvation. Your gifts and prayers are critical.

“Now I realise why my father was taken,” says Ji Ho. “Our leaders don’t want us to worship anyone besides them, and my father had a Lord who was bigger than our country’s leaders.”

She added, “I’m a Christian now, like my father. I hope someday I can meet another follower of Jesus. For now, I’ll keep listening to the radio. I’ll keep following Jesus. And I’ll keep being salt and light. Just like my father told me.”

*\*Ji Ho represents the real experiences of secret believers in North Korea, whose accounts of true events have been combined to protect their identities.*



**80,000**

**North Korean Christians are kept alive with food aid, thanks to you**



**100,000**

**Christians receive spiritual support, thanks to your gifts**



**400,000**

**Christians estimated to live in North Korea today**



## Will you help Christians survive in the darkest places?

### PLEASE PRAY

- For Christians like Ji Ho. Ask God to strengthen and be with them, so they will not feel alone.
- For Christians in North Korea facing starvation this winter, that support will reach them through Open Doors secret networks.
- For North Korean believers bravely passing on faith to their children. Pray for wisdom and courage.

### PLEASE GIVE

**Every HK\$440** provides a food package to a North Korean believer to keep them alive.

**Every HK\$210** means an isolated believer could hear God speak through a regular radio broadcast.

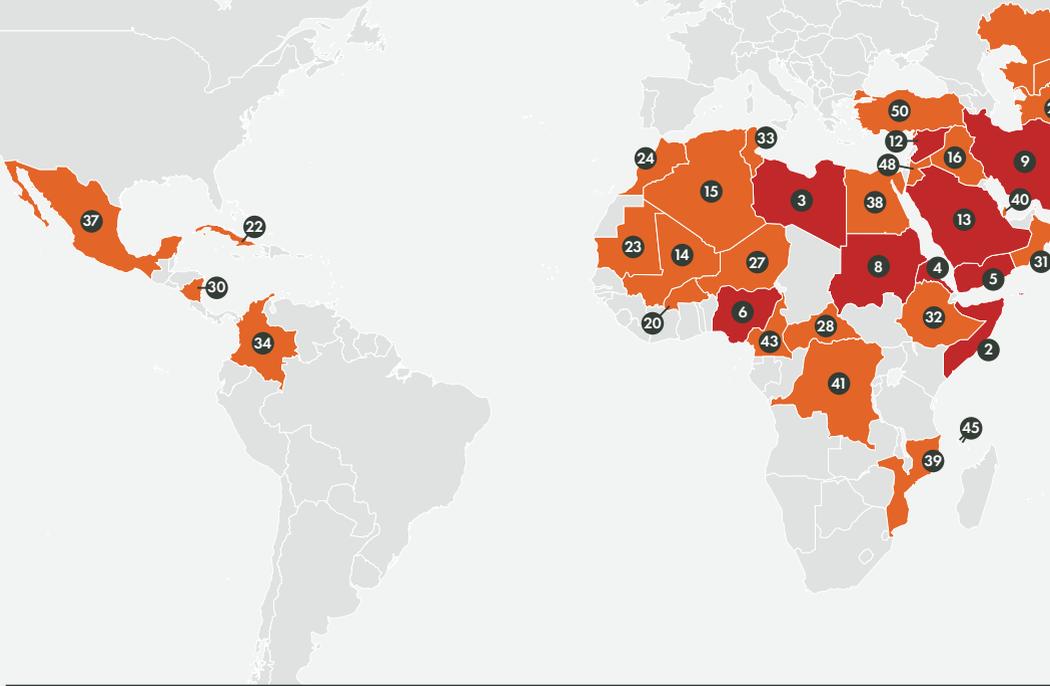
**Every HK\$670** trains a Christian to withstand persecution in one of the world's darkest places.



**DISCOVER THE TOP 10 MOST DANGEROUS PLACES TO BE A CHRISTIAN**

Look out for the World Watch List 2024, out on 17 January. Visit [www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk)

# WORLD WATCH LIST 2024



## ABOUT THE LIST

The World Watch List is compiled by Open Doors' analysts using real-world data from experts on the ground in 150 countries. Persecution in each country is recorded using a points system which tracks violence and pressure. This measures the number and severity of violent incidents against Christians and the degree of pressure exerted against the practice of their faith in 5 spheres of life.

VIOLENCE



PRIVATE LIFE



FAMILY LIFE



COMMUNITY LIFE



NATIONAL LIFE



CHURCH LIFE



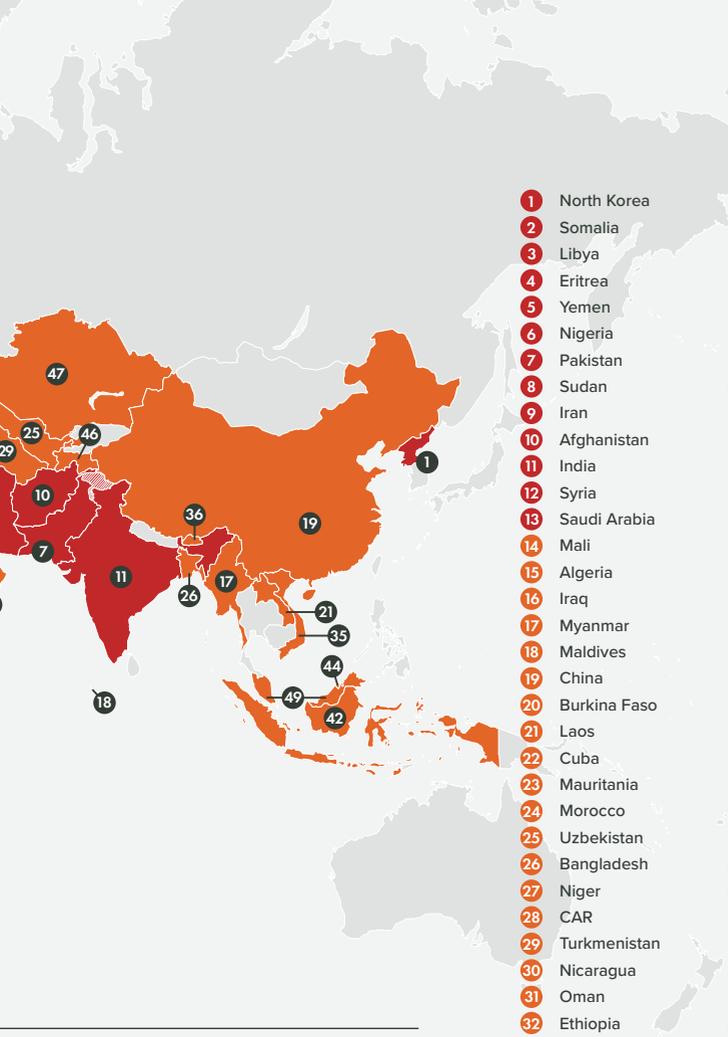
## PERSECUTION

**HIGH**  
41-60 points

Every country on the list is experiencing some form of persecution, so

Maximum score for each is 16.7, maximum total of 100 when combined. Each country's ranking is determined by its total score out of 100, giving an indication of severity of persecution.





TOTAL SCORE

1	North Korea	96
2	Somalia	93
3	Libya	91
4	Eritrea	89
5	Yemen	89
6	Nigeria	88
7	Pakistan	87
8	Sudan	87
9	Iran	86
10	Afghanistan	84
11	India	83
12	Syria	81
13	Saudi Arabia	81
14	Mali	79
15	Algeria	79
16	Iraq	79
17	Myanmar	79
18	Maldives	78
19	China	78
20	Burkina Faso	75
21	Laos	75
22	Cuba	73
23	Mauritania	72
24	Morocco	71
25	Uzbekistan	71
26	Bangladesh	71
27	Niger	70
28	CAR	70
29	Turkmenistan	70
30	Nicaragua	70
31	Oman	69
32	Ethiopia	69
33	Tunisia	69
34	Colombia	68
35	Vietnam	68
36	Bhutan	68
37	Mexico	68
38	Egypt	68
39	Mozambique	68
40	Qatar	67
41	Congo DR (DRC)	67
42	Indonesia	66
43	Cameroon	66
44	Brunei	66
45	Comoros	66
46	Tajikistan	66
47	Kazakhstan	65
48	Jordan	65
49	Malaysia	64
50	Turkey	64

PERSECUTION LEVELS

- **VERY HIGH**  
81-100 points
- **EXTREME**  
81-100 points

... on the list is ranked as having very high or extreme levels of persecution against Christians.



# Saleh's dangerous faith – and your amazing support

In Yemen, one of the most dangerous places to follow Jesus, your support is helping a remarkable man to bravely lead the underground church.



Saleh's\* phone beeps ominously. He picks it up... Another death threat. "They are searching for you," the message reads. "You are dead. Your days are numbered."

The words are shockingly sinister. But they won't stop this courageous Yemeni evangelist from telling people about Jesus.

"If we sit at home and do nothing, we would be safe," says Saleh with a shrug. "But what kind of Christians would we be if we weren't risking our life for others to know Life?"

Saleh is one of Open Doors remarkable partners in Yemen, the most dangerous country in the Middle East for followers of Jesus – and the fifth most dangerous in the world (according to Open Doors' World Watch List).

In this Islamic state, it's impossible

to live as a Christian. Persecution comes from government, family and community, and the influence of extreme and violent Islamic groups is growing. Around 70% of believers keep their faith secret and never meet another believer. If their faith is discovered, Christians risk abuse, imprisonment, torture and even death.

## **"What kind of Christians would we be if we weren't risking our life?"**

So how is it possible for Saleh, in this context, to share the good news of Jesus? The answer: with your support.

## **'The person who knows Jesus'**

Saleh was in a refugee camp in a neighbouring country, having fled Yemen's civil war, when he decided to start a house church network in his homeland. He'd come to faith as a

student in Yemen and had developed a reputation as a bold evangelist.

## **“Your prayers give us strength to keep going.”**

“In the refugee camp I became known as the person who knows Jesus,” recalls Saleh. “Many people came to know Christ as their Saviour and I encouraged them to return to Yemen to serve. We went to a safer part of the country and started a church, where leaders could come to train and be launched into ministry.”

Starting a church was a step of faith – but it was perilous. It wasn’t long before Saleh’s brother and another believer were captured by the Yemeni authorities and thrown into jail.

### **Going underground**

Saleh, at risk because of his high profile, went into hiding – and that’s when your prayers sustained him.

“I cried in my room for hours,” says Saleh. “Some days I was hopeful and strong. Others, I felt weak, guilty and depressed. In those dark times, I felt God’s presence. I received messages from brothers and sisters in the global church, encouraging me that they were praying.”

After two months, those prayers were answered. Saleh’s brother and the other Christian were released from jail. “God did a miracle!” said Saleh. “He even brought several prisoners to faith through my brother!” And Saleh was able to safely escape from Yemen.

### **‘The Madman’**

Today, Saleh travels regularly into Yemen to disciple, teach and pastor

other believers. Thanks to your gifts and prayers, he delivers medical help, transport, food packages and training to 70 Yemeni Christian families.

“We are grateful for you,” said Saleh. “Without these resources, we won’t be able to serve the church. Your prayers are important and uplifting, giving us strength to keep going.”

With you standing alongside him, Saleh perseveres in faith and the church in Yemen is strengthened. “I am nicknamed ‘The Madman’ because people know the threats I receive. But all these incidents renew my determination to proclaim the message of Christ,” he said.

And Saleh’s vision for the future? “I hope soon there will be Christians in every corner of Yemen.”

*\*name changed for security reasons*



WWL  
05

#### **PLEASE PRAY**

- Pray for hope and joy within the church in Yemen, and strength and encouragement.
- Ask for God’s protection over Saleh and other leaders, and wisdom in ministry.
- Pray our brothers and sisters will be guided by the Holy Spirit to bravely share the message of salvation with those who are ready to hear it.

# Above and beyond

THE IMPACT OF YOUR EXTRAORDINARY SUPPORT  
HAS BEEN FELT DEEPLY AND WIDELY IN 2023

“The words thank you are too little,” says Farah, reflecting on your role in helping her to rebuild her life in the Nineveh Plains in Iraq. This deep gratitude is felt worldwide as you continue to respond to different needs, during a difficult year. And last year, with emergencies like the Turkey/Syria earthquake and violence affecting Christians in Manipur, India, you’ve gone above and beyond to care for our persecuted family. Thank you! Here’s a further glimpse into the difference you’re making...

## Iran to the nations

Sahar\* clearly remembers the moment she felt God calling her to be a blessing among nations. “My response was, ‘God, I am just a woman, how can it be?’ But now, after 18 years, I look back and see how God transformed my life and is using it according to His purposes and promises.”



**“But now, after 18 years, I look back and see how God transformed my life and is using it according to His purposes and promises.”**

Sahar now lives in Turkey after her Christian activities made it impossible to remain in Iran. There remain challenges – not least the devastating earthquakes – but she treasures her role as leader of her church’s women’s ministry. This involves coming alongside women, mostly from Iran and Afghanistan, to show them how loved and valued they are by God.

“Christian women and girls have a lot of needs,” adds Sahar. “They need to be heard, they need prayer, they need to feel loved, they need counselling, teaching and resources. God gave me a vision, and I am pursuing it.”

Sahar’s journey beautifully encapsulates the heart and impact of your support. Thank you!

### Prayer, presence and no problems

In January 2021, Ajara from north Cameroon suddenly became the mother and provider for 11 children. An attack by Boko Haram killed her husband and several of her neighbours. It left Ajara not only responsible for her six children, but five left orphaned after their mother was killed.

Last year, a group of Open Doors supporters met Ajara and other women affected by ongoing violence. They listened, prayed for her health and responsibilities, and her grinding mill business that means she can provide for her children.

It was a simple gesture – and it’s made the world of difference. “During that time, I could barely see anything, I was sick every day. But after you prayed for me, everything is moving on very, very well with me. My body is fine. I have no other problems. At first, I did not have money to send the children to school, but now, I have sent my children to school. I have bought uniforms for them, sandals, socks, exercise books and other books. Now, no problem, God is guarding me.”

The attacks by Boko Haram in Cameroon have spilt over from neighbouring Nigeria, where rising Islamic violence had a catastrophic impact on millions of Christians. Arise Africa campaign – which began last summer in response to the escalating persecution – is providing crucial support for our sisters and brothers.

Other support includes emergency relief and livelihood support, as well as trauma care, which is where Ayuba\* – whom you might remember from last year – learnt to forgive.



“I am so happy to have a new Bible that I can call my own!” says one of the more than 130 young people in northern Nigeria given a Bible by local partners earlier this year. “To me, this Bible is a weapon to overcome and win the battle in life.”

## Emergency earthquake support

After the earthquakes first hit Syria on 6 February 2023, a church in Latakia was so full of people needing emergency accommodation that Samer, one of the leaders, had to sleep in his car.

"I would like to thank Open Doors very much, because it has truly been the helping hand for people," says Samer. "We were able to reach out to more than 1,000 families in Latakia. We helped them in all possible ways: food, healthcare, rent and home restorations.

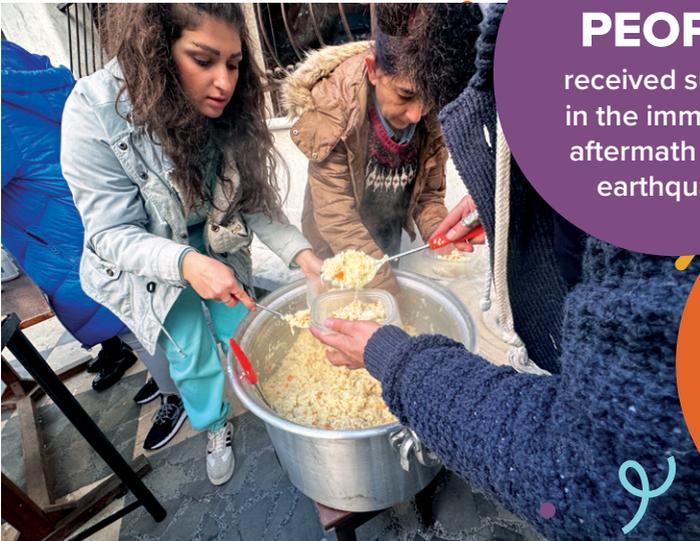
"The aid that you gave got the attention of the people," adds Samer. "They thought, 'A church this size is giving aid to people from different backgrounds, without asking for anything in return?' And this caused them to wonder: 'Why are these people different from the others?'

"People are coming to the church and they are listening to the Word of God," he continues. "They are hearing

something new. There are a lot of people here are people who believed [for the first time] in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour!"

## "People are coming to the church and they are listening to the Word of God."

Meanwhile, in Aleppo, your support meant that 12,300 people received help in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. According to Ibrahim\*, an Open Doors partner, more than 70% of the total needs of Christian families in the city following the disaster have been met by Open Doors.



**12,300  
PEOPLE**

received support  
in the immediate  
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earthquake.

**MORE  
THAN 70%**  
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Aleppo have been  
met by Open  
Doors.

## Meeting needs in Manipur and Jaranwala

In Manipur, India, where Christians faced devastating violence, your gifts have equipped local partners to deliver emergency aid and walk alongside with traumatized believers. “Thank you for coming and listening to my struggle,” says Hycinthe\*, who received a food kit.

“As I’m speaking on behalf of the people from Manipur, I have seen how happy they were, how grateful they were, and how thankful they were,” says Anjali\*, a local partner. “It is truly God who is doing this through you.

You’ve also come to the aid of Christians in Jaranwala, Pakistan, after homes and churches were attacked by an angry Muslim mob in August. “We are here because we never left; we will remain here with our people – serving God and washing their feet,” says a partner in Pakistan.

**“There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray.”**

Finally, there is prayer.

“Our prayers can go where we cannot,” said Brother Andrew. “There are no borders, no prison walls, no doors that are closed to us when we pray.”

Time and time again, our persecuted family tell us that, whilst their circumstances don’t always change, they feel your prayers. Whether using the prayer diary, Prayer News, emails or social media, or hearing about your persecuted family at an event, countless prayers have been raised, the impact of which can never be measured.

### THANK YOU!

Thank you for the instrumental support you give your persecuted family. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:12, “This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”

Please continue to walk with the persecuted church. Your support remains vital to the immediate needs of our persecuted family as well as the long-term survival of the church.

If you don’t already, why not consider committing to give regularly or receive weekly emails to inspire you to pray? Find out more at **[opendoors.org.hk](http://opendoors.org.hk)** or WhatsApp **+852 5608 8729**.

## Your support in the darkest places

When Pastor Zachariah came home to find his wife and son dead and his village destroyed, he was broken. But your support is bringing hope and healing.

Pastor Zachariah can't forget the day his life changed forever. Returning to his home in central Nigeria after a night away, he saw people coming towards him.

"Most of them were barefoot, their bodies covered in mud. The closer I got to home, the more I saw people with injuries. And then, dead bodies beside the road."

The scene was horrifying. But nothing prepared Pastor Zachariah for what he discovered next.

"My house was completely burnt down. I found the lifeless bodies of my wife and son in the kitchen. That moment, I cried like never before."

Pastor Zachariah's village in Plateau state had been attacked by Fulani militants who (we believe) were seeking to forcefully displace Christians. It was one of 27 villages in the Mangu area destroyed in May 2023, and 125 people were killed. The brutality of the attack reflects the extreme violence of persecution in Nigeria.

For Pastor Zachariah, what happened

was devastating. "I felt as if God had forsaken me. Why would he allow these people to attack us?"

Thanks to your support, Pastor Zachariah was invited to Open Doors trauma centre in Nigeria – and at last, he's finding peace. "Since I came to the centre, my mind is at rest," he said.

This faithful leader is now able to encourage and support his congregation, urging them to stay close to God. Remarkably, Pastor Zachariah has even found the strength to forgive the men who murdered his beloved wife and son. "Right now, I am asking God to forgive the attackers, and for them to enter the Kingdom of God and not to die in their sins," he said.

### PLEASE PRAY FOR:

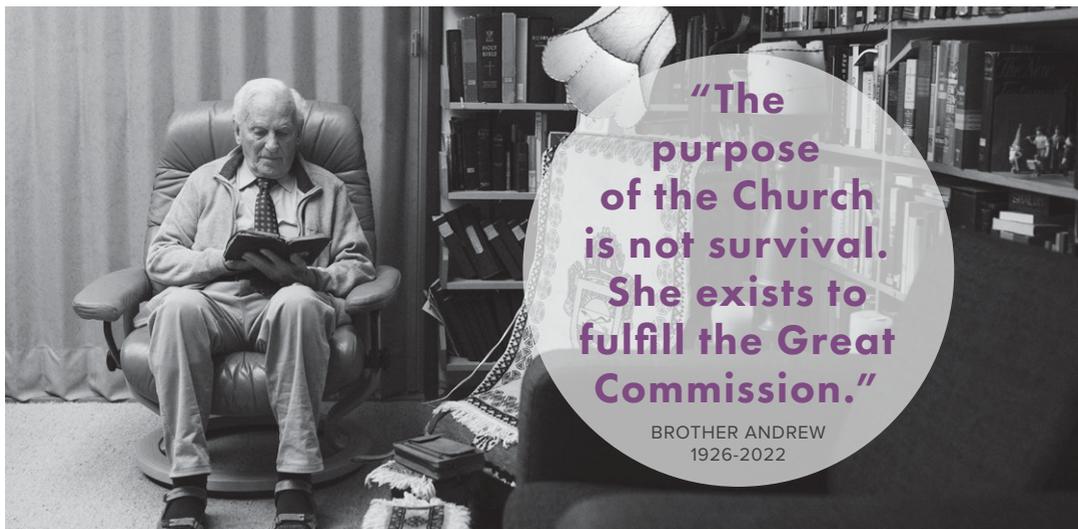
- Pastor Zachariah, that God will meet him in grief and bring healing and courage.
- Christians around Mangu, who are traumatised and displaced. Ask God to comfort them.



## ORDER YOUR FREE 2024 WORLD WATCH LIST **Top 50 Guidebook**

Discover the top 50 countries where following Jesus costs the most with our World Watch List guidebook for you and churches. Packed with the latest information and stories of courageous faith to help you pray for and support your persecuted family around the world.

Order your FREE copies today at: [enquiryhk@od.org](mailto:enquiryhk@od.org)



**"The purpose of the Church is not survival. She exists to fulfill the Great Commission."**

BROTHER ANDREW  
1926-2022

### **Make your Will for free**

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

You can make a FREE Will with *ForeverGift*.

Find out more at [www.opendoors.org.hk/getinvolved/leavelegacy](http://www.opendoors.org.hk/getinvolved/leavelegacy) or [www.forevergift.hk/opendoorshk](http://www.forevergift.hk/opendoorshk) or email [enquiryhk@od.org](mailto:enquiryhk@od.org).



# EVEN IN THE DARKEST PLACES, GOD'S VOICE CAN'T BE SILENCED.

Ji Ho\* hasn't seen her father since his secret Bible was discovered by North Korean security agents.

She grew up alone. Struggling to survive. Often starving.

Then one day Ji Ho found her father's tiny radio hidden in her home – and she heard God speak...

"I'm a Christian now, serving the same Jesus as my father," says Ji Ho. "I might be the only Christian in North Korea."

Christians like Ji Ho need your support and prayers today.

## **Please, will you help Christians survive in the darkest places on earth?**

Every HK\$210 helps another isolated believer hear God speak through a regular radio broadcast.

Christians counting the cost of faith are counting on you.

*Thank you*

*\*name changed for security reasons and image is representative*



Which countries are most dangerous places on earth to be a Christian?

Find out in this year's World Watch List.



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Open Doors Hong Kong Limited  
P.O. Box 78516, Mongkok Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong  
enquiryhk@od.org • (Tel) +852 3525 0820 • (WA) +852 5608 8729  
[www.opendoors.org.hk](http://www.opendoors.org.hk)



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