



# Prayer for the Persecuted Church for January 19, 2024

## **Prayer for the Persecuted Church: Our Best Practices**

*Our focus in this hour is on prayer for the global church, not ourselves or our local issues. We can talk and even pray for those other things after prayer meeting is over at 1:00 p.m.*

*We strive to start our prayers by 12:10.*

*We are blessed to have a growing number of praying people join us. Let's all offer short prayers throughout our prayer time, allowing time for everyone to pray out loud if they wish. We are blessed by prayers when we can hear them, but silent prayers from our people are as valued as spoken ones.*

*Thank you for praying for the persecuted church. Encourage friends to pray, too!*

## **Pray for imprisoned or kidnapped Christians**

**CHRISTIANS IN PRISON:** This list is only a sample: CAMBODIA: Theary Seng; CHINA: Li Jie, Hang Xiaodong, Wang Qiang; John Cao, Yan Hwa, Goa Zhisheng, Wang Yi; Hao Zhiwei, Zhang Shaojie, Li Juncai, Lian Xu Liang; ERITREA: Meron Gebreselasie, Mussia Ezas, Dr. Kifly Gebremeskel, Kidane Weldou, Haile Nayzgi; INDIA: Pastor Sawan; KAZAKHSTAN: Pastor Maximov; NORTH KOREA: Zhang Wen Shi PAKISTAN: Zafar Bhatti; VIETNAM: Nguyen Nang Tinh, Nguyen Trung Ton

**KIDNAPPED VICTIMS:** Raymond Koh, Gilbert Biswas, Leah Sharibu, Sarah Atef, Joshua Hilmya & wife Ruth Sitepu, Hormoz Diril.

### **UPDATE on the special prayer request from out congregation:**

Thank you for praying for the lady and her daughter from Iran. We received great news ... that their passports were renewed and they can move on to their next stage, which is to seek to travel to a more neutral country and from there to apply for UNHCR asylum status.

There is still a long way to go for them, but we are so thankful that the Lord graciously provided this first means of travel, as it was essential for moving forward and not being returned to their country of origin. Obviously, they are praising God and want to pass on thanks to everyone who prayed.

*From International Christian Concern*

## **Middle East War Escalates, Fighting Spreads to Yemen**

**01/12/2024 Yemen (ICC)**

Nearly three months of daily strikes exchanged between Israel and Hezbollah on the Israel-Lebanon border continue without any sign of abating. On January 11, the U.S.-led maritime coalition struck a dozen military targets in Yemen in response to shipping attacks on

merchant vessels in the southern Red Sea, disrupting a major global commerce route.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for protection for all those caught in the crossfire of this conflict.*
- *Pray for a quick, peaceful resolution.*
- *Pray for the gospel to spread throughout the region.*

## Proposed Bill in Ireland Threatens Free Speech

**01/10/2024 Ireland (ICC)**

A proposed bill in Ireland, if passed, would criminalize any speech that incites “hatred or violence” against a protected group. The bill interprets protected groups to mean an individual or class of people based on certain characteristics such as race, religion, gender, sex characteristics, and sexual orientation. At face value, the bill sounds virtuous, but in reality, it significantly restricts free speech.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for free speech to remain a priority in Ireland.*
- *Pray for equal rights for all groups in the Western world.*
- *Pray for growth within the church in Ireland and across Europe.*

## Worries About Indonesian Candidate’s Ties to Strict Islam

**01/11/2024 Indonesia (ICC)**

Anies Baswedan, Indonesian presidential contender, is facing criticism for his connections to hardline Islam in the run-up to the February 14 national election. Indonesia is considered the third-largest democracy in the world. Baswedan is currently polling quite well in the leadup to the election, but current Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto is leading the polls with a wide margin.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for equal rights for all minorities in Indonesia.*
- *Pray for God’s will to be done in the election.*
- *Pray for godly wisdom for elected leaders across Southeast Asia.*

## DRC President Elected for Second Term

**01/10/2024 DRC (ICC)**

President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Felix Tshisekedi, recently won re-election, ushering him into his second term as the nation’s president. Tshisekedi was first chosen in 2019, marking the first peaceful transition of power in the DRC since its independence in 1960. In 2023, Tshisekedi took significant strides to support religious freedom.

- *HOW TO PRAY: Pray for wisdom and guidance for President Tshisekedi.*
- *Pray for effectiveness in combatting terrorism in the DRC.*
- *Pray for protection for the DRC’s Christian community.*

*From Voice of the Martyrs*

## Global Prayer Guide TUNISIA

### CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IN TUNISIA

#### OVERVIEW:

Tunisia has a rich Christian history. It was the home of notable church fathers Tertullian and Cyprian as well as the Christian martyrs Perpetua and Felicity. The third Council of Carthage ratified the New Testament canon in Tunisia in A.D. 397. However, there are now few churches or Christians in Tunisia. Since the Arab Spring uprising, which began in Tunisia, the country has grown increasingly democratic; the Tunisian government became the first in North Africa to enact religious-freedom reforms. But even with a rich Christian history and increased religious freedom, the gospel is opposed by many Muslims and has been slow to take root in modern Tunisia.

#### MAJOR RELIGION:

99 percent of Tunisians are Sunni Muslims. Less than one-half of 1 percent are Christians.

## **PERSECUTOR:**

Christian converts from Islam and Christians who share the gospel suffer persecution from their communities, family members and co-workers.

## **WHAT IT MEANS TO FOLLOW CHRIST IN TUNISIA:**

Although the government has begun to implement certain religious-freedom reforms, change will take time in a Tunisian culture that has long been dominated by Islam. Churches function openly, and Christian converts from Islam are free to worship in them, but open evangelism remains illegal. And while it is illegal for families to persecute their family members who leave Islam, such persecution still happens, and local governments still harass Christians. In rural areas, more severe persecution continues, as Muslim families feel shamed by family members who leave Islam.

## **ACCESS TO BIBLES:**

Bibles were readily available in the past, but today access is limited and Bibles are now scarce. It is possible to distribute and ship small numbers of Bibles with official permission.

## **VOM WORK:**

VOM responds to persecution and provides training and resources for front-line workers.

## **PRAYER REQUESTS:**

- *Pray that Bibles will become accessible to every believer.*
- *Pray for the protection of Tunisian believers.*
- *Pray for the unity and collaboration of Tunisian churches.*
- *Pray for Christians who are isolated by distance from other Christians.*
- *Pray for house churches throughout Tunisia.*

*From Voice of the Martyrs*

*icommittoprayer.com*

**Jan. 18, 2024 | Algeria**

## **Christians Struggle Amid Government Crackdown on Churches**

In 2019, the Algerian government permanently closed many churches, and several others that closed temporarily during the pandemic have not been allowed to re-open. “Many believers have gone for months or even years without gathering with their brothers and sisters in Christ,” a front-line worker said. While Christians in Algeria are receiving biblical training via the internet and Arabic Christian satellite TV channels, relying on the internet and other media sources can leave them vulnerable to false teaching and manipulation. One such heretical cult is targeting believers in Algeria, the front-line worker said.

- *He requested prayer that Christians in Algeria would hold fast to “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”*

**Jan. 18, 2024 | India**

## **Digital Resources Transform Hearts**

Bibles and SD cards that contain Bibles as well as other Christian materials are having a profound impact in India. One recipient, Angira, said, “I received an SD card that would change our lives. As we began listening to its contents, we discovered the teachings of Jesus Christ, which resonated deeply within us. Eventually, we made the decision to embrace our faith and received baptism. Today, we are proud members of the local church, actively engaging with our community by sharing the gospel with others.”

- *Pray for Angira and thousands of others in India who have come to faith*

*in Christ and grown in their walk with the Lord because of these resources. Pray also for those who produce and distribute them.*

**Jan. 18, 2024 | Korea, North**

## Convicted Murderer Growing in Faith

Mr. K, a student in a discipleship program for North Korean defectors, is currently serving time in prison for a murder he committed in South Korea. Mr. K had thought that he could never be forgiven for what he had done, but he was deeply encouraged when Christian friends told him the Lord had forgiven his sin and that he could still be used by the Lord. He began studying the Bible and reading inspiring books like *Tortured for Christ in prison*.

- *Pray that Mr. K will continue to grow in his faith through this discipleship program and that he will be a bold witness to his fellow inmates, bringing the light of Christ to a dark place.*

## Prayer Calendar from Open Doors

### Libya

#### January 19

In Libya, significant energy is spent trying to make people return to Islam. Pray for Christians there. Ask God to daily renew their strength (Isa. 40:31).

#### January 20

Christianity seems impossible in Libya. But God is at work there. Pray that He would pour out His Spirit on Libya.

### Yemen

Pray for Saleh as he discipled Yemeni believers.

#### January 21

Yemenis have lived through years of brutal war and humanitarian crisis. Ask God to bring about peace and a breakthrough in Yemen.

#### January 22

Pray for Yemeni Christians who live under death threats. Yemeni believer Saleh\* received frequent warnings to stop his ministry.

#### January 23

Saleh frequently travels into Yemen to pastor and disciple believers. Currently, he's serving 70 Christian families. Pray for his safety and discernment.

#### January 24

With the help of Open Doors partners, Saleh trains leaders and helps set up trauma and discipleship trainings. Ask God to encourage Saleh as he serves.

#### January 25

The church in Yemen is growing even in harsh conditions, Saleh says. Pray that God would raise up more leaders like him.

## From Barnabas Aid Prayer Diary

### FRIDAY 19

Children in Zimbabwe are showing marked improvement in their health since receiving daily servings of the nutritious porridge (similar to oatmeal) ePap, funded by Barnabas. More than 2,000 children under 6 years old are among nearly 12,000 people having their health transformed by the extra vitamins, minerals and protein contained in ePap. Conditions such as ringworm, patchy skin and discolored and sparse hair are being reversed.

- *Praise God for these gains and pray that many more needy Christians in Zimbabwe will receive this life-giving nourishment.*

### SATURDAY 20

In the midst of heavy shelling, all the children were safely evacuated from the village in an operation organized by the mayor – all except Michael (10) and Nver (8), the mayor's own sons, who were yet to leave the village. A few days after the attack began, both boys were



found dead. This family tragedy occurred in Sarnakbyoor village in Nagorno-Karabakh, as the Armenian Christian population of the enclave fled en masse following Azerbaijan's attack on September 19, 2023. Almost the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh (120,000 people) are now in Armenia. They arrived malnourished after a nine-month blockade. They are traumatized and grieving for their lost homes and homeland, now under Azerbaijan's control. Most have no work and nowhere to live long-term.

- *Pray that the God of endurance and encouragement (Romans 15:5 ESV) will meet their needs.*

#### **SUNDAY 21**

- *Dear Lord Jesus, we pray today for our Christian brothers and sisters in Sri Lanka. We rejoice that they come from across the spectrum of ethnic and religious backgrounds as well as from families who have faithfully followed You for generations, and we pray that this will be a powerful witness to You and Your love. We ask that You will protect them from harassment and persecution and will provide for the needs of the many who are desperately poor. Give them daily courage, hope and joy as they follow You.*

#### **MONDAY 22**

A Sunday morning worship service in Sri Lanka's Puttalam District was broken up by police after a complaint made by a resident via an emergency hotline. Two police officers came to the pastor's house, where his church was meeting. The officers ordered the congregation to leave, questioned the pastor, and warned him that he could be arrested if they were called again. This incident followed previous complaints made to police about the church.

- *Pray that a way will be found to enable the pastor and other Christians to live at peace with their neighbors (Romans 12:18).*

#### **TUESDAY 23**

A Christian leader in Pakistan wrote to Barnabas Aid about the mental anguish which the Christian community endures because of the way in which Christians are viewed by many other Pakistanis as "second class citizens" of little worth, suitable only for the lowest and most menial cleaning jobs. Even if highly qualified, non-Muslims are never given the most senior positions in government, police or military.

- *Pray that Pakistani believers will not be disheartened by this attitude towards them, but will rejoice in the knowledge that as Christians they are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (1 Peter 2:9).*

#### **WEDNESDAY 24**

The murderer of a Pakistani Christian woman has been given a 25-year prison sentence for his crime by the Islamabad Sessions Court. The man shot Sonia Bibi in November 2020 after she refused to become a Muslim and marry him. "We are Christians from generations, and Sonia was a true Christian and strong in her faith," said Sonia's father. Christian and Hindu women and girls in Pakistan remain at risk of abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion.

- *Pray that this prison sentence will act as a deterrent and thus protect these vulnerable women and girls.*

#### **THURSDAY 25**

Towards the end of last year, Pakistan began to crack down on allegedly illegal immigrants

from Afghanistan. Some Afghans were deported, while others made their own way back in response to the pressure being put on them by the Pakistani authorities. All are returning to a country of strong repression (especially for women and girls) and much hunger. Any Afghan Christians deported to Afghanistan also face the possibility of death if their faith is discovered.

- *Pray for all who are suffering in Afghanistan, especially our brothers and sisters. You might like to base your prayer on the words of David, whose life was often in danger: "I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me" (Psalm 31:14-15).*

## From Help the Persecuted

### ARASH, IRAN

Arash serves a home church in Iran. As persecution continues to increase, he is not sure what will happen to his church.

- *Lord, we ask that You protect Arash's church. Please shield it from the eyes of those who would disband it and persecute its members. Please give Arash strength as he serves the Body of Christ.*

### HADI, ALGERIA

Hadi was forced to divorce his wife after he declared his faith in the Lord. He is now forbidden from seeing his children.

- *Lord, please comfort Hadi as he grieves the loss of his entire family because of his faith in You. Raise up members of his church to surround him, showing him that he has an eternal family in the Body of Christ.*

### SAADEE, LEBANON

Saadee is struggling to find a job because

of his faith. He was forced out of his home because he could not pay his rent.

- *Lord, we ask that You provide Saadee with a job that pays well and fits his gifts and talents. Please provide it to him soon, Lord, so that Saadee can begin to live a life of dignity and independence despite the persecution he continues to face.*

### BASHIR, SYRIA

Bashir's family demanded he return to Syria and get his legal papers before moving permanently to Lebanon, where he is a theology student. It will be a dangerous trip because of the situation in Syria, and Bashir is not sure he will even be able to return to Lebanon.

- *Lord, we ask that You go before Bashir, providing him safe travels to and from Syria. Please help him get everything he needs so that he will not have to return to Syria again, and please bless his theology studies!*

### ABILA, LEBANON

Abila is studying theology in Lebanon, but her family reached out, saying that her father is dying and demanding to see her. At this point, Abila has been missing for three days, and our team members are following up with her.

- *Lord, we ask that You protect Abila as she is with her family. Please provide a way of escape if she is being held captive, and please help her return to Lebanon soon to continue her studies.*

### MAJID, IRAQ

After attending a Spiritual Retreat, Majid was locked up in his home by his father for declaring his faith. It has been two years... and our team recently learned that he is being tortured.

- *Lord, we praise You for Majid's steadfastness in his faith and courage*

*to cling to You. We ask that You make the persecution relent, shielding him from any more torture. Please soften his father's heart and even bring him to Yourself.*

### **SAFA, IRAQ**

Safa's husband refused to acknowledge Safa's newfound faith in Jesus Christ. Now, he is torturing her, trying to get her to revert to Islam.

- *Lord, we ask that You cover Safa with Your protection. We ask that her husband relent and that Safa can continue sharing the Gospel with him so that he may become a Christian, too!*

### **LENA & HER SON, LEBANON**

Lena lost her home because of persecution, and she is now looking for a place to stay with her young son.

- *Lord, we thank You for being a God who provides for all our needs. We ask that You open up a new place for Lena to stay that is stable or even owned by Christians so that she would not be evicted because of her faith in Christ.*

### **KAZEM, SYRIA**

Kazem's family in Syria threatened to kill him once they found out about his faith in Jesus. He had to flee to Iraq and is now trying to rebuild his life by finding stable work and a place to live.

- *Lord, we thank You for providing a way for Kazem to get out of Syria and away from his family. Please provide for him in this new country, giving him everything he needs to begin his new life. Please continue to sustain him in Yourself!*

### **ALL CHRISTIANS IN IRAN**

In Iran, eleven people from three house churches were arrested in one night. We do not know where they are or what happened to them.

- *Lord, we praise You for the faithfulness of these Christians. We ask that You surround them with a Hedge of Protection, guarding their every step. Please provide a way of escape for them.*

### **ANSWERED PRAYERS**

#### **ABD FOUND FREEDOM!**

Abd worked in a factory in Egypt until his employer found out about his faith in Jesus. He was forced to work like a slave, eventually dismissed from his job...and then tortured. Yet he refused to give up on the eternal hope he has in Jesus Christ! Our team helped him create a business plan and supported him as he established a laundry business, providing him with a stable source of income and freedom from oppression. He says, "You gave me my freedom! My body is now free from slavery and torture because of this support."

#### **AMER'S MIRACULOUS HEALING**

Sixteen years ago, Amer, who is from Egypt, was helping a friend fix his car when the battery exploded in his face. It caused burns... and for 16 years, he was totally blind. When he became a Christian, he asked the Lord to heal him, and the Lord did, restoring his sight! However, persecution also set in...and he had fled with nothing. With support from our team, Amer purchased a Tuk-Tuk and began working as a driver, enabling him to provide for his family.

He said "You gave me my life back. My kids went to school this year because of your support! Thank you."

#### **ANSWERED PRAYERS OF 2023**

As our team looks back on 2023, we are overwhelmed by the goodness of God. He opens doors we don't even know exist, provides connections that can be described only as divine, and strengthens our team and partners like you to be constant in prayer for the persecuted.

## Mission Eurasia Prayer Initiative

Our team in **Poland** has distributed thousands of Gift of Hope boxes to Ukrainian refugee children over the Christmas season. As these children open the Bible they find inside, please pray that they would read them and truly come to know Jesus Who promised to be their Shepherd and to walk with them as they trust in Him.

In the nation of **Georgia**, our School Without Walls (SWW) colleagues are welcoming a new national coordinator named Irakli. Please pray for wisdom for Irakli as he leads the program. Also, pray that the Lord would continue reaching the hearts of Georgian young people through the work of our national leaders.

For several years now, Mission Eurasia's SWW program has been successfully training Christian leaders among the deaf in the city of Almaty, **Kazakhstan**. Please pray for an upcoming meeting of roughly 25 ministry leaders and assistants who will discuss and plan ways to reach the deaf in Kazakhstan. Pray for the Lord to bring many people to Jesus Christ.

Our national leaders are working with local churches in **Tajikistan** to distribute Gift of Hope boxes among Tajik children. Please pray that God opens the hearts of these children and their families to the gospel, and protects them from harm or interference from the authorities. Please also pray for the children's health, as many children throughout Tajikistan are ill during this season and are struggling to find proper medical care.

*From Open Doors*

## Persecution is growing – but so is the church

The release of the latest World Watch List brings a familiar story – persecution is getting worse. What are the key trends contributing to this? And what's the good news?

### Christians flee homes in Myanmar

Last year, some 280,000 Christians were forced from their homes because of their

faith, which is double the previous year; most are from Myanmar (pictured) and Nigeria

One in seven Christians worldwide face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith – that's 365 million of our brothers and sisters.

The statistic comes from the latest World Watch List, an annual ranking of the countries where it's most dangerous to be a Christian.

But it doesn't tell the whole story. Five years ago, the figure was one in nine. In the past year alone, the number of persecuted believers has risen by about five million.

Put simply, the persecution of Christians is worsening.

### Nicaragua

Worshippers in Nicaragua, which has jumped 20 places in the World Watch List as the government's hostility towards Christians continues at an unnerving pace

One of the reasons that it's getting worse is because the church is growing. In the most hostile of environments, it continues to thrive. More than anything, it's a testament to the power of the gospel and the eternal truth that "God's word is not chained" (2 Timothy 2:9). But it's also because the global church is standing with its most vulnerable members. It's what family does.

However, as the findings of the latest report show, this help cannot waiver. Indeed, your prayers and support are arguably more crucial than they ever have been.

### Extremists exploit instability in Africa

A key trend is growing violence in sub-Saharan Africa. The region accounts for some 90 per cent of the estimated 5,000 believers killed for their faith worldwide, with the highest number of Christians killed being in Nigeria (4,118).

The last year has seen a sharp rise in attacks on churches and Christian homes and



buildings in places like Ethiopia and Burkina Faso. This explains why the number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa recording extremely high levels of violence has risen by two to 15.

The main driver of this is Islamic extremists capitalising on regional instability. In places like Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mozambique and Somalia, military coups and other fractures in governance and security have enabled militancy to flourish. Because of their faith, Christians are affected disproportionately.

Even when not specifically targeted for their faith, Christians caught up in regional conflicts – such as in Sudan and Ethiopia – are deemed soft targets who can be attacked with impunity.

### **Foreign influence bolsters autocratic regimes**

There's another threat emerging in sub-Saharan Africa – and its origins are in China and Russia.

African governments are spending £800 million per year on surveillance technology, mostly to strengthen the capabilities of autocratic governments. The main exporter is China, a country whose use of sophisticated surveillance technology is synonymous with repression of religious freedom (and one of the main reasons it's number 19 on the World Watch List).

Meanwhile, the Wagner Group – a private military contractor with reported connections to the Russian government – has been gaining a foothold in the region. The group is known for its ruthless activities in countering Islamic extremism, with civilians often deemed expendable. It has been increasingly active in countries including Burkina Faso and Mali, where speaking out against their activities is near impossible and even life-threatening.

### **Which countries are in the top 50 of the World Watch List – and why?**

Given Christianity's links to the West, believers in the region – particularly those from Protestant groups – fear the repercussions of being associated with

Western opposition to Wagner's actions.

The other crucial issue here is the Wagner Group's manipulation of key economic sectors in the region, notably mining. This threatens to bring yet more instability to sub-Saharan Africa – and that's the last thing Christians need.

### **Unprecedented attacks on churches**

#### **Pakistan**

A destroyed church in Pakistan; at least 15,000 churches or public Christian properties worldwide were attacked or closed in 2023

Two-thirds of all attacks and closures of churches and public Christians properties were in China, where tightening religious laws and intrusive surveillance have forced many churches to splinter into a myriad of small, less visible groups. Even many of those regulated by the state have been closed and amalgamated with larger churches.

Elsewhere, in Algeria, only four of the 46 churches affiliated with the country's Protestant umbrella organisation remained open in 2023 – and it's unlikely it will stay that way for long.

#### **Christians squeezed out of the Middle East and North Africa**

The story for our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and North Africa remains a sadly familiar one.

The situation in Syria has worsened, enough to now make it a country where believers face extreme persecution. Ongoing conflict, pressure from the Islamic majority, the influence of extremist groups and a collapsed economy contribute to the vulnerability of Christians. Last year's devastating earthquakes only exacerbated this.

In Iraq, waning political influence and an increase in incidents of incitement of hatred against believers has increased pressure on the country's embattled Christian minority. Another issue is Turkey's military incursions in north, where most Iraqi Christians live, which is preventing believers from returning to their homes.

Meanwhile, Libya has climbed to third on

the World Watch List, due to an increase in violence against Christians. And in Tunisia, pressure on Christians continues to grow as President Kais Saied's rule drifts into authoritarianism.

### **What's the good news?**

In Mali, changes to the country's constitution – which includes recognition of the country's Christian minority – were approved in a referendum. It's seen as a step towards elections in 2024 and a return to civilian rule and stronger governance.

In Karnataka State, India, the Hindu nationalist BJP were dislodged by the Congress Party, who have promised to revise or withdraw the 'anti-conversion laws' that are often used to target Christians.

Despite an increase in hostility in Sri Lanka, Open Doors partners say that church closures have been prevented because of teaching given to pastors on how to stand up for their rights.

Meanwhile, in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, the online sphere is increasingly a place for people to encounter Jesus and access fellowship and discipleship.

"In all my years working as a researcher, I never saw a clearer connection of a growing church with growing opposition"

### **WORLD WATCH LIST RESEARCHER**

And in Mexico, the translation of religious law into Tzotzil – a widely spoken indigenous language – was published, with support from Open Doors. It will enable believers to better understand their rights amid persecution.

### **Dare to declare**

The statistics and stories that highlight rising persecution are sobering, but they point to a greater reality: the church is growing.

A big riser in this year's list is Laos, jumping ten places to 21st, due to a spike in violence against Christians. "In all my years working as a researcher, I never saw a clearer connection of a growing church with growing opposition, resulting in higher scores," said a researcher. "I find it comforting that the

biblical verses predicting this connection are still true."

It's a similar story worldwide – one that began around 2,000 years ago, when persecution scattered the early church because of the impact of the gospel. Wherever believers settled, the church continued to grow.

"Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel," Paul wrote in Philippians 1:12, before adding his courage has enabled others 'dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear' (1:14).

As we remember and support our persecuted family, may Paul's words be true of us, too.

### **PLEASE PRAY**

- *That our persecuted family will be strengthened and encouraged in their faith, and guarded from harm*
- *Give thanks for all that God is doing amidst persecution, and pray that this will continue in increasing measure*
- *That the Open Doors local partners will continue to be equipped, empowered and encouraged in their work serving our persecuted family.*