

Open Doors

Women's Focus Week

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

August 2010

Thank you so much for committing to pray for our sisters in the persecuted Church during our Women's Focus Week. Our theme is *Pray without ceasing* and I would like to challenge you to do exactly that, especially from the 9th to the 15th of August. Let us unite with our sisters by praying with them and not only for them.

Day 1: Monday 9 August - India

Today we will focus our prayers on our sisters in India. Many of our friends are unaware of the affects of persecution on women like Ranni. Our cultures differ so much and sometimes we can't comprehend what they have to endure. We have the freedom to fall in love with the man of our choice. Ranni's situation was completely different... So why don't you cook an Indian curry and invite friends to your home and share Ranni's short testimony and ask them to pray with Ranni for unmarried women in her area.



Ranni: "If you are faithful to God, He will be faithful to you!"

Ranni is the daughter of a local pastor in a community dominated by Hindus. Read attentively as she shares her story with you:

"We encountered problems after my father began telling many people about Jesus. Approximately 250 people were attending our church services. This angered the high caste people in our village. They did not like the fact that so many villagers were accepting Jesus as their Saviour.

My sister and I were preparing to get married and these people did everything they could to get in the way. They tainted our names and reputation. They told the families of potential bridegrooms that we would create problems if they were to marry us. They chased these men away with their lies. The result was that nobody wanted to marry us anymore. We felt depressed, because we had no suitors.

Then we started praying that God would change our hearts, as well as the hearts of those who were persecuting us.

Soon a Christian family, consisting of two eligible sons, came to visit us. They

wanted to marry my sister and I. Our prayers were answered.

On our wedding day policemen guarded the premises and our persecutors stayed away. 900 people attended our wedding and of course my father used the opportunity to preach the Gospel.

My prayer is that any woman who is facing the same persecution as we did:

- Will not lose faith!
- Won't lose heart.
- Will pray and fast.
- Will remember that God is the Matchmaker.



Day 2: Tuesday 10 August - Egypt

For nearly two years, El-Gohary and his 16-year-old teenage daughter, Dina, have been living in hiding, because he abandoned Islam and embraced Christianity. During this time he has been beaten and forcibly detained, and his daughter has been attacked. I have a teenage daughter who has never experienced verbal abuse, because we are Christians, not to even mention assault. Dina's story sounds so unreal to us. After reading her story please lift Dina up in prayer.

Dina lives with her dad in a small, two-bedroom apartment across the street from a mosque on the outskirts of an undisclosed city in Egypt. Her father has taped over the locks, as well as taped shut the inside of all the windows and doors, to guard against eavesdroppers and intruders. He has taped over all the drain holes of the sinks to keep anyone from pumping in gas at night. Even the shower drain is covered with tape. Their porch is filled with rocks and pebbles thrown by area residents who recently learned that he lived here.

Dina spends her time reading the Bible, talking to her father or drawing the occasional dress in preparation to obtain her dream job of designing clothes. A reflective youth with a gentle demeanour, Dina is quick to smile. But at a time when her life should be filled with friends, freedom and self-discovery, she is instead confined between four walls.

Even going to school, normally a simple thing, is fraught with dangerous possibilities. Dina hasn't gone to school in about a year. She said that the last time she did, other students ridiculed her mercilessly, and a teacher hit her when she tried to attend religious classes for Christians instead of Muslims.

Dina and her father fear that she could be beaten, kidnapped and forcibly converted, or simply killed. She can't even go to church, she said.

Dina was a little girl when she started hearing about Jesus. Her father used to sit with her and tell her stories from the Bible. He also told her about his conversion experience. Like her father, she cites a supernatural experience as a defining event in her faith.

Under Islamic law, Dina is considered a Muslim, because her father was born as one. Like her father, Dina has decided to follow Christ and therefore she is considered an "apostate" under most interpretations of Islamic law.

One afternoon last month, Dina was walking to a market with her father. As the two walked, El-Gohary noticed smoke and vapors coming off Dina's jacket. The canvas was sizzling and dissolving. Someone had poured acid over her jacket. El-Gohary ripped her jacket off and threw it away. Luckily, Dina was not physically injured by the attack, but since then, she has been terrified to go outside.

As bad as things have been for El-Gohary and his daughter, their dedication seems rock-solid. They said they have never regretted their decisions to become Christians.

Dina says she doesn't feel like she has a future in Egypt, and she hopes to move to a place where she can get an education.

Whatever happens, both El-Gohary and his daughter said they are prepared to live in hiding indefinitely.

"There are days that I break down and cry, but I am not giving up," Dina said. "I am still not going back to Islam."

Pray for Dina:

- That when she falls in despair, she will not give up.
- That she will not feel alone and isolated, but that the Holy Spirit would be her Comforter and Friend.
- That God would provide in her educational needs.



A typical Egyptian girl

Day 3: Wednesday 11 August - Nigeria



Grace Yusuf

Grace Yusuf witnessed the brutal murder of her husband and saw her house burn to ashes in the violent clashes that rocked Jos, Plateau State in November 2008. Since last March when Open Doors asked supporters to write to her, Grace has received more or less ten kilograms of letters from concerned Christians around the world. These letters have truly ministered to Grace at the time of her greatest need.

“You can’t imagine how these letters have helped me through my situation. When my world almost crumbled, I was lifted by the wonderful words of these people. I almost lost hope, but I was strengthened. These people have touched my life in so many ways. Now I believe God is bigger than my problems. He used these people to minister to me in a special way. I cannot thank you enough for your concern. Please keep on praying for me. I am experiencing the power of your prayers and love,” said Grace in appreciation of yet another delivery.

After the attack, Grace and her other children moved in with her daughter and son-in-law. The plan was to live with them until she could find other accommodation. But then, her 33 year old son was involved in a vehicle collision that led to the amputation of his right hand. To Grace it felt as if her world was once again falling apart, because she hoped that her son would be able to take care of her after the decease of her beloved husband. Now it looked impossible.

There was another blow: almost a month after the accident, Grace’s accommodating daughter and son-in-law also had an accident with their vehicle. They were hospitalized for weeks. By now Grace’s health was taking strain under the constant stress. She developed hypertension. Grace has to undergo regular blood pressure tests, in order to regulate her condition and to avoid a stroke.

Amidst all this tension and uncertainty, Grace confesses that the multitude of letters she received has been her companion. “They have become my mirror and comfort. Though it has not been easy to get over my trauma, the messages in the letters reminded me that God is always by the side of those who trust in Him,” concluded Grace.

In the mean time, Grace moved into a rented house with her eldest son. She is reportedly in good health and remains strong in the faith. Grace’s son has also not been discouraged in the least by his disability. In fact, he is successfully running his interior decorating business with the help of some hired labourers.

Write a note of encouragement to a friend who is in need of comfort. Your words will uplift her.



Join Grace in prayer:

- Praise God for His faithfulness in her life.
- Praise God for providing in her need for a place of residence.
- Praise God for the remarkable healing of her son’s amputated limb. And also thank God for His healing power in the lives of her daughter and son-in-law.

Day 4: Thursday 12 August - Central Asia

Marina's husband, David, was imprisoned for four years in 2007 due to his religious activities. They have three children, named Masha (16), Sasha (14) and Vera (9) and live in a country in Central Asia.

During all these years they have been taken care of by various people, churches and organizations. Despite their ordeal, the girls are doing well at school. They are allowed to visit David eight times a year.

Thousands of cards of encouragement have already been sent to them and they have kept all of them. Will you pray with this family? Gather your family together, or ask some friends to join you whilst you pray for them.

Write your prayers on a handmade card and post your card to:

Letter-writing
PO Box 1771
Cresta
2118

We will ensure that they receive the cards, so that they will be able to read your prayers.

This family is experiencing two conflicting emotions: joy about David's upcoming release, as well as confusion and uncertainty about their future.

However, they believe the promise written in Romans 8:28 that all that happens to them is working for their good, because of the love of God and that they fit into His plans.



Day 5: Friday 13 August - Colombia

Open Doors organized a workshop for families of believers under persecution in Colombia's Arauca region. The initial training session was the first of four workshops developed to provide practical and Biblical steps towards personal healing for women and children who are recovering from the brunt of emotional trauma following the murder of their husbands and fathers because of their faith in Jesus.

After sitting under the ministry of the Word of God in the first session, the widows were able to tell their stories of pain through art forms on fabric. Each woman drew on paper all the characters and elements involved when her husband was murdered, and then cut them out on fabric to sew onto a quilt. This process of "memory reconstruction" proved to be a key step to healing. Each widow contributed to two different

quilts - one representing her own personal story, and a second to declare their united message: "Wounded but not defeated."

As the women worked to depict their stories on fabric, **Margarita** was very quiet, seemingly in another world. Since she arrived late on the first day of the workshop, the others had already shared their stories and no one else knew details of her tragedy. But her dedication as she drew and cut and sewed on the fabric, made it clear that four years after her husband's murder, she still had severe pain in her heart.

On the last day, when the quilts were all completed, each widow shared with the others the thoughts and emotions she experienced as she worked to depict her story. When Margarita's turn came, her voice cracked and her eyes flooded with tears.

"I never saw the body of my husband," Margarita said. "I knew he had been chopped in pieces and then thrown into the river, because many people saw it, but I never saw it. I lived a lie the past four years, because I did not really accept that my husband was dead," she admitted. "During this workshop, cutting out his body in the fabric and remembering that tragedy, I understand that God is telling me that it is time to step forward and overcome my past."

Maybe you have a friend or relative who has experienced a traumatic event. Share Margarita's testimony with her and encourage her that God wants her to deal with her trauma. She would know exactly how to pray with Margarita. Take time to pray together!

"I understand that God is telling me that it is time to step forward and overcome my past."



Day 6: Saturday 14 August - Iraq

“Okay, Leah,” Yusuf says, “You can pack this Bible, but pray while packing that God will protect your Bible and us, especially in the checkpoints. Now our travelling will be more and more a journey of faith, hope and trust.” And God did protect this family on their escape from Baghdad to Northern Iraq, some time ago. Nowadays, Leah 11 years old, is building up a new life with her father, mother and brother in a rural, agricultural area, with another language and school. But... her Bible is still with her, and she is still reading it, also to her illiterate mother. “Our flight was dangerous, but we arrived here safely. Our life here is very different from that in the city of Baghdad, and we are still working through our traumas, but in general we can handle it”, tells Leah with the help of her father.

them. There is often little time to think about a destination or what belongings to take along, when terrorists allow Christians only 24 hours to leave the house. That was also the dilemma of the family of Leah, when they were forced to leave within 24 hours. But they did, and after a long journey, stopping at many checkpoints, Leah and her family finally arrived in the North of Iraq to build a new life.

“I was so glad that my father allowed me to take my Bible with me, since it was the only valuable item I have and now it is with me.” But the family, and especially the father, was deeply hurt by the threats of the terrorists, and by the force to leave so suddenly. Leah’s mother also had emotional problems and issues to deal with. There was a lot to do in Northern Iraq to find a new life and future.

threatened, how some members of our extended family were killed in Baghdad, and how we had to run for our lives. That has an impact on my life and that of my parents and brother. I do not like to go to school, and hope and pray that things will get better. In a couple of years time it will be better, but now we have to go through all this trauma.”

Leah admits that she sometimes cries in her bed. “I miss Baghdad and my friends there, although I do not know if they are still alive or not. Our lives have been torn apart and now we are here trying to build a new life. It is not easy. I am so glad that I could take my little Bible with me from Baghdad, because I am still reading it and I will do that for the rest of my life, also out of remembrance of my life in Baghdad. **Please pray for my father, mother, brother and myself.**”



Leah and her family are one of the many thousands’ Iraqi Christian families who had to flee from Baghdad or Mosul to Northern Iraq or abroad. Iraq has been a country in despair and many Iraqis have been on the move. Many Muslims and Christians have been forced to leave their houses and were forced to say goodbye to their property and to their belongings. Many Christian Iraqis were threatened and had to leave their hometowns, their houses and their cities, often with only 24 hours’ notice. Then these Iraqis had to quickly determine where to go to and what to take with

Leah’s father had found some meaning and challenge in his life and for his family, but for Leah, a new world opened when she went to school. “School is so different here than in the big city of Baghdad. Firstly, they often speak a different language, like Kurdish or Syriac or whatever, but no Arabic. So I have to learn these new languages. Secondly, there are so many children in the schools who have gone through traumatic events and with emotional problems, that our school life is full of problems and outbursts. I realized that I too, have some emotional problems. It was awful how we were

Please pray with Leah and her family:

- That they would find a new life in northern Iraq.
- That they would all be able to work through these traumatic events that have greatly influenced their lives.
- That Leah would find friends and that they would be able to encourage and support her.



Day 7: Sunday 15 August - Right to Believe



Open Doors South Africa has launched an advocacy campaign called "Right to Believe" in collaboration with Open Doors International. It is a global campaign for religious liberty.

The plight of persecuted believers around the world may worsen if a resolution, presumably against intolerance, is approved at the United Nations this year.

The Defamation of Religions Resolution, originally "defamation of Islam" and first introduced to the Human Rights Commission in 1999, seeks to criminalize words or actions that are deemed to be against a particular religion, namely Islam. Although proponents justify the "defamation of religions" concept as protecting religious practice and promoting tolerance, it really promotes intolerance and violates the freedom of religion and expression for religious minorities, especially Christians, in these countries.

The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), an inter-governmental organization of 57 countries with majority or significant Muslim populations, has been the driving force behind the resolution. The OIC is expected to bring the Defamation of Religions Resolution to the UN General Assembly once again this year.

Many Christians living in these mostly Muslim countries are already severely impacted by restrictive laws, especially those living under strict Sharia law. From the right to worship freely, to the ability to share the Gospel, to validate blasphemy laws in countries like Pakistan, the Defamation of Religions Resolution threatens to justify local laws that already marginalize Christians. The Defamation of Religions Resolution is a blow against religious freedom. It gives a cloak of international respectability to persecution.

The Defamation of Religions Resolution has been voted on in the General Assembly every year since 2005. Support for the resolution has declined since 2008 with the number of no votes increasing.

Open Doors believes that every person, has the right to choose and practise their religion based on their convictions and conscience, rather than their family of birth, ethnicity or people group.

As a result, Open Doors is mounting a coordinated advocacy campaign under the heading "Right to Believe" to raise awareness of this resolution's danger to religious liberty and to prevent it from being passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Inserted in this prayer focus week, you will find a petition form. I want to challenge you to make copies of the form and to ask your congregation members to sign this form today after your church service.

Please also visit our website, www.opendoors.org.za and click on the "Right to Believe"-button to view an eight minute media clip about the "Right to Believe" campaign, explaining how it affects you and I, and also the persecuted Church. You are welcome to order this free DVD from our head office and to also share it with your family, friends and congregation. Contact Janine on 011 888 9341 or e-mail her on janinec@od.org

By doing this you will be making a difference in the lives of persecuted men and women.



Women to Women
a ministry of **Open Doors**

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