

Three Christian families lost their homes in an arson attack against the indigenous Kogul village of Palmor on 10 March.



Christians in Palmor village

More than half of the village's 58 houses were destroyed in the attack near Cienaga, in the Magdalena region of northern Colombia. Two of the Christian families who lost their homes have since moved to the vicinity of Santa Marta.

Local Christian leaders say the attack was mounted in retaliation for a community decision that indigenous villagers who had become Christians could serve as community leaders. It is reported that traditional authorities are planning to arrest indigenous Christian believers, as they did in 2009 when several were imprisoned for two or three months.

The authorities' opposition to Christians could be partially motivated by their links with paramilitary groups, drug running activities and the operation of illegal mines in the region.

For the past few years, Open Doors has been documenting the ongoing harassment and abuse suffered by indigenous Christians and reporting it to government authorities. Despite the evidence that these believers are being subjected to torture, threats, displacement and imprisonment, their claims have not been investigated or confirmed by the state inspection bodies.

To draw attention to these ongoing violations, Open Doors is sponsoring a 'Forum on Freedom of Conscience for Indigenous People' this year where Christian representatives from various indigenous groups will present the realities of the human rights violations they have suffered for the past decade.

• PRAY

- For comfort and perseverance for the indigenous Christians who have lost their homes. Pray that they will be able to forgive those who attacked them
- That the Colombian authorities would make an honest and full investigation into this attack
- That the 'Forum on Freedom' will impact all who attend, and be reported positively in the Colombian media.

Give thanks for
Answered prayer

A year ago we asked you to pray for and write to Shiromi, the widow of Sri Lankan Pastor Neil Edirisinghe, who was shot dead outside his home. Shiromi and her son Seradh were also shot.

Over the past year, Shiromi and Seradh have been encouraged by the hundreds of messages of love and support sent to them by Christians worldwide who were praying for them.

Shiromi and her son still live in Ampara, in the same house where the fatal attack took place. Seradh, now 6 years old, is showing signs of recovery from his trauma. "He finds it difficult to get up each morning for school," Shiromi said. "But he enjoys being with other kids. I see his love for God... and he wants to be a pastor someday."

Even though it was risky to remain in the area following her husband's death, Shiromi chose to stay so she could continue the church that Pastor Neil started in Ampara. In 2000, Pastor Neil started a ministry among war-torn youths in Ampara district, and Shiromi counselled women facing domestic violence.



Believers worship at Shiromi's church in Ampara, Sri Lanka

"At first, I wanted to serve [the church] for about six months only," Shiromi explains. "Then, I would hand over the ministry to another. But as I started doing so, I realised that Ampara was my home – everything I love and cherish is here."

Shiromi admits that juggling home and ministry responsibilities is taking its toll on her. Moreover, she feels the social stigma of being a single mother – and a Christian one at that.

"Please pray for a church worker to help me in my regular visits to the believers," says Shiromi. "It's been difficult lately, because I must attend to duties at home. Pray also for God's provision for Seradh's education and for the rebuilding of our house."

Thank you to all of you who sent letters to Shiromi and Seradh. You can find details of other Christians in need of encouragement in our new Letter-writing Guide. Phone **01993 777300**, email **inspire@opendoorsuk.org** or go to **www.opendoorsuk.org/write**

IN THE NEWS...

• **Burma**

On 1 April, pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory in the country's by-elections, further fuelling hopes of significant political reform. However, it remains to be seen whether political change will lead to greater freedom for the Christian minority in this staunchly Buddhist nation.

Open Doors supports the Burmese church by providing livelihood grants and skills training to at least 20 pastors and church workers. By increasing their capacity to earn, ministers become more effective bearers of the gospel in their communities. We recently received a 'thank you' message from a pastor who had received a delivery of Burmese Bibles.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last December, I took time to talk to the military officers. I asked them if they wanted to celebrate Christmas. They accepted the offer, and even arranged the place and the food. They gave me permission to share what Christmas was all about. The whole event was held at a military camp a few days before Christmas.

Three families at the military camp accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour! They asked for Bibles so that they could read secretly. The Bibles you gave us were perfect timing, so I wrapped them with Christmas gift paper and gave them to the new believers. Thank you for giving them at the moment we needed them.

I'm struggling to continue meeting the new believers though. I was allowed once to enter the military camp because it was Christmas. Right now, they are coming to my house to hear more of God's Word. When housewives go out to buy provisions from the market, they pass by my place for prayer and fellowship. It's all uncertain and informal for now.

Please pray for these new believers to grow in their faith and understanding of God's Word. Thank you!

 For the **latest news** and to **sign up** for our weekly **email prayer alerts**, go to **www.opendoorsuk.org**



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**"GOD IS MY REFUGE,
MY SAVIOUR, THE
ONE WHO SAVES ME
FROM VIOLENCE"**

2 Samuel 22:3

PRAY

Arab World

Tuesday 1 May – Syria

Open Doors is providing emergency relief to 1,000 Christian families forced to flee their homes by extremist threats (see Magazine p12). Ask God to protect those distributing relief packs and pray that help will reach those who need it most.

Wednesday 2 May – Syria

Many Christians are fleeing areas such as Homs to escape the violence and intimidation. Pray that church leaders will have the courage to stay and will be empowered to shepherd their congregations at this difficult time.

Thursday 3 May – Syria

Pray for wisdom for international leaders dealing with the crisis. Pray that peace and stability will return to the country so that displaced Christians will be able to return to their homes.

Friday 4 May – Iraq

Open Doors supports many Christian activities, such as Bible distribution, training and small business development, throughout the country. Pray that these activities would strengthen and encourage Christians who have made the choice to stay in Iraq, despite the difficulties.

Saturday 5 May – Tunisia

Moufid placed his faith in Jesus after getting access to a Bible. It was a year and a half before he met another Christian, yet he continued to follow Jesus. Praise God for sustaining his faith through daily Bible reading, and pray that he would now be strengthened through fellowship with other believers.

Sunday 6 May – Egypt

Many Christians in Egypt are in mourning following the death of Coptic Pope Shenouda on 17 March. Ask the Lord to raise up a new leader who will lead his people spiritually and politically, and seek unity among the Christian denominations.

Monday 7 May – Algeria

Remember Karim Siaghi, whose appeal against his five-year prison sentence has been indefinitely postponed. Ask the Lord to sustain him and his family through this uncertain time.

Tuesday 8 May – Oman

Thank the Lord for a growing hunger for God's Word in Oman. Pray for protection for those involved in Bible distribution in remote areas of the Arabian Peninsula and pray for new opportunities to spread God's Word.

Wednesday 9 May – Arabian Peninsula

Pray for two isolated secret believers who do not have access to Christian teaching or fellowship. One lives with a secret police agent! The other is always being watched and cannot access a computer or phone without someone listening. Pray for opportunities for fellowship with other Christians.

Iran

Thursday 10 May

Ten Christians were arrested by the authorities in Shiraz in February because they had gathered for worship. Pray for their release and ask God to comfort and encourage their families.

Friday 11 May

Muslim-background believers are not permitted to attend traditional churches, and some believers do not have a fellowship or house church to go to. Ask the Holy Spirit to help them in their new faith and pray that they will get encouragement from Christian satellite TV programmes.

Saturday 12 May

Pray for protection and wisdom for pastors still ministering in Iran despite the severe government repression. Pray that more church leaders will have the courage and faith to remain in the country.

Sunday 13 May

Pray for Christians who lost their jobs after the authorities placed pressure on their employers. Ask the Lord to provide them with alternative employment.

Israel and Palestinian Territories

Monday 14 May

Reconciliation ministry Musalaha is holding a trauma debriefing training course for women in leadership this month. Pray that the women who attend will experience God's healing, and go on to be a positive influence on their communities.

Tuesday 15 May

Pastor Hanna Massad, former pastor of the Baptist Church in Gaza, plans to go to Gaza this month to offer relief to the Christian community with the support of Open Doors. Pray for safe travel opportunities and that he will connect with the right people in Gaza.

Wednesday 16 May

Messianic Christians are facing growing pressure from other groups in society, especially ultra-orthodox Jews. Pray for grace to respond in love, and pray that those who oppose them may come to faith in Jesus.



Women worship together at a Musalaha training conference

Secret Children

Thursday 17 May – Bhutan

College education is very expensive, and many pastors' children are unable to pursue their dreams of further studies due to lack of resources. Ask God to provide educational opportunities for these young Christians.

Friday 18 May – Lebanon

Pray for the Christian schools all over Lebanon, most of which attract children from all religious backgrounds. Pray that the name of Christ will be glorified through all these schools.

Saturday 19 May – China

Melih*, a 15-year-old Uyghur orphan, became a believer through contact with local Christians. His grandparents are taking care of him but are unable to pay for his study. Open Doors is helping him with vocational training. Pray that he will grow in his faith.

Sunday 20 May – Tajikistan

Pray for the ministry of Tajik Christians to families who have children with disabilities such as Downs syndrome. Ask God to draw many families to Him as they see His love through the care given to these children.



Africa

Monday 21 May – Kenya

On 31 March, an 8-year-old boy and a Christian woman were killed when Muslim extremists threw a grenade into an open air revival meeting near Mombasa (see Magazine p4). Pray for comfort for their families and healing for the 30 people injured.

Tuesday 22 May – Kenya

Pray for Open Doors partners serving in the volatile northern region of the country. The area is prone to al Shabaab militia attacks, especially now the Kenyan forces are actively engaged in a war with the militia group.

Wednesday 23 May – Sudan

Pray for Christians caught up in Sudanese aerial strikes aimed at church buildings and schools in Kauda, South Kordofan (see Magazine p4). NGOs believe the Islamic government is targeting civilians in the Nuba Mountains, which has a large Christian population, in an attempt to rid the area of Christians.

Thursday 24 May – Sudan

The Commission on Education in Khartoum and Omdurman has plans to close all Christian schools in the capital. Please pray that this will not happen.

*name changed for security reasons

Eritrea

Friday 25 May

In May 2002 the government outlawed all religious groups (other than Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran or Islam). Ten years on, pray that the government will reconsider this decision and that Christians will be free to worship.

Saturday 26 May

President Afewerki has been in office since 1991. Ask the Lord to miraculously intervene in his life and bring him to repentance. Pray that he would come to fear the Lord and to acknowledge that heaven rules.

Sunday 27 May

Over 1500 Eritrean Christians remain imprisoned for their faith in military camps and shipping containers. Ask the Lord to direct their hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Monday 28 May

Remember the families of prisoners, many of whom have not seen their loved ones for months or even years. Pray especially for the women who now have to care and provide for their families alone.

Tuesday 29 May

Pray for the thousands who have sought refuge outside Eritrea. Many are in dire need of income, stability and even refugee status.

Wednesday 30 May

Pray for John, Peter and Paul (see Magazine p18) and ask that they will find a secure place to live long-term. Ask the Lord to 'repay them for the years that the locusts have eaten' (Joel 2:25).

Thursday 31 May

Pray for the health of Abune Antonios, the deposed patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, who has been held under house arrest since 2007. A diabetic in his eighties, he collapsed in his house at the end of February and remains in a critical condition. Local Christians fear for his life.



Patriarch Abune Antonios was removed from office by the Eritrean government in 2005