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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH 2023

# Stand up to violent persecution with the power of prayer



## Your prayers are vital

How do our brothers and sisters in Sub-Saharan Africa keep going when the threat of violent persecution hangs over them every day?

When their daughters risk kidnap.  
When their homes are being torched.  
When church leaders are brutally murdered.

The answer: *prayer*.

Your prayers and the prayers of your church are powerful. When you pray, you sustain and strengthen your persecuted family. You stand up to violent persecution in Sub-Saharan Africa. And you embolden the African church in their Christian witness.

Thank you for committing your church to pray for Sub-Saharan Africa on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church 2023. This short guide will help you plan your service.



**“I ask for your prayers –  
because that sustains me.”**

Gertrude\*, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who lost her husband and son in an attack by Islamic extremists.

## Unprecedented violent persecution

More than 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith in Nigeria last year.

It's a shocking statistic. But in bandit-controlled areas in the north, attacks on both Christians and Muslims are rampant. Followers of Jesus are especially targeted for violent killings, kidnap, rape and intimidation.

The brutality isn't confined to Nigeria, either.

**“Arise, shine, for your light has come.”**

ISAIAH 60:1

As the jihadist movement seeks to expand Sharia/Islamic law across Sub-Saharan Africa, violent persecution has become systemic, widespread and cruel. Islamic extremists target believers and want to destroy the church.

Christians are under pressure like never before and the survival of the church is in real danger. You and your church have the power to stand up to violent persecution – *through prayer*.

At Open Doors, our aim is to provide spiritual, emotional and physical support to four million believers by 2027. We want to see a church in Sub-Saharan Africa which is resilient, resourceful and influential. A church that will persevere in persecution. A church to stand and shine God's light.

\*name changed for security reasons



**13 of the top 20 most dangerous countries to follow Jesus are in Sub-Saharan Africa**



**Out of every 10 Christians murdered for their faith, nine are killed in this region**

## **Your service**

Whether you're holding a special service for the persecuted church or a short slot, Open Doors will do all we can to resource you.

Here are our suggestions for your International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church service or slot:

1. Introduce the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, and share why our prayers are so vital. You can use the sermon guide provided.
2. Lead the congregation in prayer. You can use the PowerPoint slides provided or print out the information for a smaller group.
3. Run the all-age activity (details below) to encourage your community to reflect and pray.
4. Go the extra mile by taking a collection to support your church family facing persecution today.

## Tree of Prayer – Whole church activity

Encourage everyone to help create a Tree of Prayer for the persecuted church in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### Here's what you need to do:

1. Use the template in this booklet for your prayer leaves. Make photocopies so people can cut out their own leaf.
2. Encourage people to think about their persecuted brothers and sisters in Sub-Saharan Africa.
3. Get everyone to write a prayer, encouragement, or Bible verse on their leaf.
4. Hang your leaves on real or constructed branches in your church – or stick them to a display board.
5. Send us a picture of your Tree of Prayer at [info@opendoorsus.org](mailto:info@opendoorsus.org).
6. Your church's prayers will strengthen the faith of your persecuted family, and they will know they are not alone.



## Why create a Tree of Prayer?

This is a Camphor tree, the national tree of Nigeria. For us, it's a symbol of the persecuted church in Sub-Saharan Africa.



<b>The camphor tree in Nigeria</b>	<b>The church in Sub-Saharan Africa</b>
Large evergreen tree which can reach heights of 30m	There are more Christians in Africa than anywhere else in the world
It grows in scrubland, on roadsides and when other trees have wilted and died	The church is resilient in the face of violent persecution
Its glossy leaves release a smell of camphor when crushed	Under extreme pressure, Christians continue to follow Jesus with faith and hope
Its roots go deep and it offers shade to many	The church goes deep and wide, sharing God's love across many nations

## Let's pray

- Lord, we pray for the survival of the church in Sub-Saharan Africa. Help Christians to hold on to Jesus, knowing the global church has not forgotten them. Give wisdom and faith to believers under extreme pressure who continue to live lives that honour God.
- God of comfort, bring healing to believers suffering trauma because of violent persecution. We pray for the powerful work of Open Doors' trauma healing centers. Give strength to staff and church leaders as they minister to people who are grieving and full of sorrow.
- We pray against extremist ideologies and rampant violence which cast a dark shadow over parts of Africa. Lord, please bring stability and security to volatile places. Raise up wise leaders to shine your light in places of power.
- Lord, we pray with courage and boldness for an end to violent persecution in Sub-Saharan Africa. We ask that governments and leaders will engage meaningfully with the issue of persecution, and act rapidly to bring peace.

## GIVE

Please could you hold a collection or send a gift from your church, to stand up to violent persecution in Africa?

**Every \$48** could help three Christians who've experienced extreme violence by providing hope and healing at a trauma center.

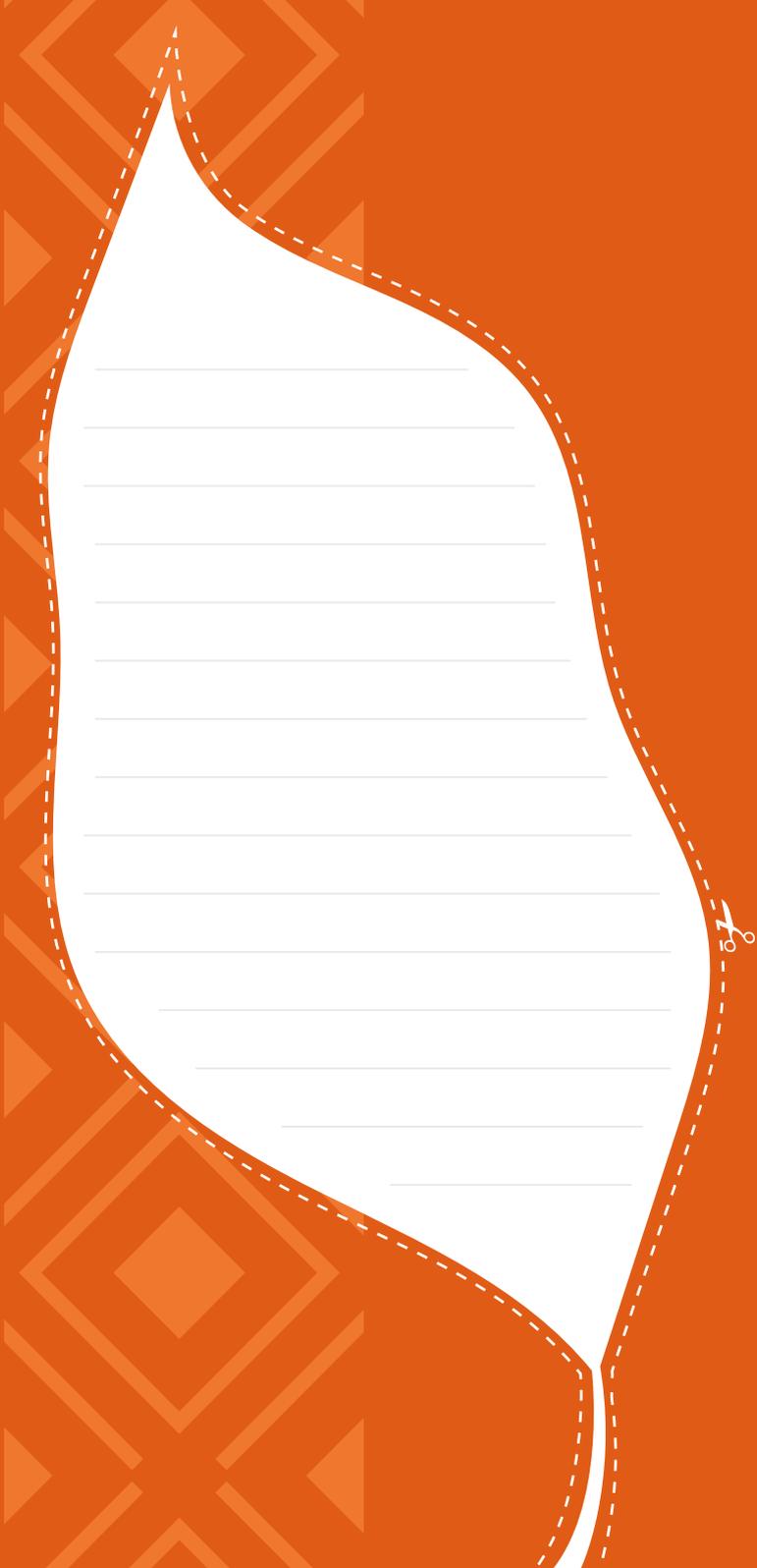
**Every \$124** could provide food, medicine and other emergency relief to help four believers displaced by persecution.

**Every \$208** could educate four young people from persecuted families for a year, giving them hope for the future.

**Contact us at [info@opendoorsus.org](mailto:info@opendoorsus.org), visit [OpenDoorsUS.org](https://OpenDoorsUS.org) or call 1-800-896-5285 to give a gift!** Thank you so much.

## KEEP IN TOUCH

Encourage your church to sign up to hear from Open Doors by visiting [OpenDoorsUS.org](https://OpenDoorsUS.org). People can receive weekly emails with inspiring stories of believers risking everything to follow Jesus, as well as news and prayer points to remember our persecuted family.





**Open *Doors***

**[opendoorsus.org](https://opendoorsus.org)**

**[info@opendoorsus.org](mailto:info@opendoorsus.org) | 800-896-5285**