

OpenDoors

MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER 2023

UNDER SURVEILLANCE IN CHINA

Who's watching Christians
like Ming?

STRENGTHENING CHRISTIANS WHERE FAITH COSTS THE MOST

www.opendoorscanada.org



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GARY'S TAKE

Dear Friend,

Hardly a day goes by when we don't hear another story about the extreme surveillance being forced on Chinese citizens by their own government. Whether it is human rights lawyers being stripped of their licences, or everyday citizens being monitored through the Chinese social credit system, no one can escape the watchful eye of the ruling Chinese communist party. Now, church leaders are concerned about the impact of a new measure in China – an online database recording all registered church leaders, offering information to people willing to give their phone number.

House churches, or any church group outside the tightly controlled and monitored Three Self Church, already face increasing oppression from the Chinese authorities. China is number 16 on the Open Doors World Watch List and has moved swiftly up the list in recent years. Due to increasing surveillance and restrictions, many house churches ceased meeting in larger groups and have split into smaller groups. Others used to meet online, but this has become more difficult as Chinese authorities pay closer attention to online activities.

This increasing surveillance along with added restrictions are extremely concerning, especially to Christians who courageously live out their faith in a place hostile towards it. My faith is challenged as I see them take bold steps to continue to shine the light of Christ and to share the Gospel despite the risks to their own safety and the safety of their families. Our brothers and sisters in China need our prayers more than ever.

Please join me in praying, that as digital surveillance and persecution worsen, these family members will be able to continue worshipping God and sharing His gospel.

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Gary Stagg
 Executive Director



Who's watching Christians in China?



克里斯蒂安發現

Surveillance cameras in China monitor every movement. Christians like Ming are forced to take huge risks to follow Jesus. It's up to us to watch over them...

Glancing up and down the dark alley, Ming* quickly loads heavy boxes into his car. If caught, he would likely be arrested and sent to prison.

Ming pulls out his phone and messages his contact. "I'm on my way to the old place." It's code... the message won't only be seen by Ming's friend, so it's vital to be cautious. Then Ming turns off his phone and pulls out the SIM card. After all, he doesn't want his location tracked.

The car eases out onto a quiet, moonlit street. No one is around at this time of night. But as Ming drives away, the street's surveillance cameras twitch and turn. Someone is watching...

INTENSE MONITORING

There are a billion surveillance cameras in the world. Half of them are in China. And the authorities are using this ever-more sophisticated technology to keep eyes on the unregistered, underground church.

Facial recognition and artificial intelligence are dangerous tools in the hands of authoritarian regimes. Believers have had social media accounts blocked and bank accounts frozen. You can't buy a Bible online in China anymore. So Christians must take increasingly bigger risks to meet believers and share God's word.

And with China beginning to export surveillance systems to countries like Iran, India and Myanmar, could technology become a new tool of persecution?

MING'S STORY

But what was Ming doing that night? Why was he so cautious? The answer: his car was loaded with Bibles destined for rural ethnic minority people...

Ming was passionate about serving the ethnic community he grew up in. After returning to his hometown from the city, Ming met believers in little-known places and led secret Bible study groups. He launched a business as a cover for Bible distribution.

But it all came crashing down when the business was exposed and Ming's partners were jailed. Miraculously Ming was released after his arrest. It was a narrow escape – but the Bible smuggling cover was gone and the heightened surveillance which followed was oppressive.

"I knew it would be hard to dodge the police and I'd have to live even more cautiously. There may be spies sneaking into the Christian community, so I needed to stay vigilant," said Ming. "I had no one to trust. I felt insecure and isolated."

The threat reached a new level when the authorities started randomly searching his home. Ming took the hard decision to send his wife and daughter to live with his in-laws to protect them. But this sacrifice was used against Ming when his father-in-law refused to let the family see each other. It only added to Ming's misery and suffering.

Under such intense scrutiny, it would be easy for Ming to give up smuggling Bibles and meeting Christians. His faith in Jesus might be shaken. What would happen then to believers who depended on Ming for spiritual support?

WATCH AND PRAY

That's where you come in. You can watch over your brothers and sisters under surveillance, in China and elsewhere, by giving and praying.

You can help prepare Christians for the dangers of digital monitoring and provide Bibles and discipleship training to persecuted believers. With your support and encouragement, Christians like Ming will remain resilient, courageous witnesses for Jesus.

Thanks to people like you, Open Doors' partner Brother Hao Ran* came alongside Ming. They meet regularly to pray and read the Bible. Slowly, Ming's strength returned – and he learnt to trust again.

Now, despite the risk to his own life and freedom, Ming keeps sharing God's word. "No matter what happens I know it is predestined by our Heavenly Father," he said. "We listen and follow. He will guide our path."

*name changed to protect his identity

PLEASE PRAY

For Ming, that God will fill him with resilience and courage as a witness for Jesus.

That the underground church in China will remain strong under intense monitoring.

For Open Doors' partners in China, for protection as they minister to believers like Ming.

PLEASE GIVE

Every \$38 could provide discipleship training to a secret believer, to strengthen them as a witness for Christ.

Every \$66 could prepare three Christians for the dangers of being digitally spied on, to help them remain resilient and fruitful.

Every \$80 could give Bibles to 16 believers in a country like China so they can meet God.

Will you strengthen Christians under intense surveillance and heightened restrictions?

There are more than a billion internet users in China. Increasingly, the authorities are monitoring online activity to control the message and reach of the church.

And it's having an impact: since 2018, China has risen from 43rd in the World Watch List to become the 16th most dangerous country to follow Jesus.

So what's the situation?

- It's now mandatory for registered churches to install surveillance cameras inside their buildings.
- Sermons may be reviewed by the authorities. We've even heard reports that some registered churches can no longer fully preach the gospel.
- It's not possible to officially buy a Bible online.
- Christian groups must apply for a licence to publish religious content on their websites. Many sites have disappeared or been blocked.
- Pastors and well-known believers are carefully watched.
- It's almost impossible to find Christian resources for children online.



URGENT PRAYER NEEDED FOR PAKISTAN

Christians in Pakistan are asking for urgent prayer after a mob of Muslim extremists have attacked a Christian community and burned down several churches and homes.

The mob violence took place in the Jaranwala city in the Faisalabad district of Punjab province after two Christians were accused of blasphemy.

Hundreds of men then stormed the community, attacking churches, setting homes on fire and even destroying a cemetery. Early media and human rights groups estimate that at least 8 churches were burned—along with multiple homes

and Bibles—and 17 churches were targeted. Christians in the community were forced to run for their lives.

In addition to global prayer, Open Doors is calling on the international community to speak out about the dangerous situation for Christians in Pakistan. “No one should live in fear of an unruly mob that comes to destroy and kill,” says Open Doors’ global advocacy team. “We call on the international community to work with the government of Pakistan to build concrete plans to address the mob mentality brutally demonstrated against Christians in Pakistan.”

**PRAY FOR
PAKISTAN**

Pray for the people in the Christian community who are left to rebuild their homes and churches. Ask that God will bind up their wounds and give them comfort.

Pray for Pakistani Christians, who live under the injustice of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws and now witness yet another violent incident caused by a mere accusation.

ADDITIONAL PRAYER REQUESTS:

IRAN: There are further crackdowns on civil liberties in Iran as the anniversary of protests and unrests draws closer.

The number of Christians being arrested in Iran continues to rise. Most are being released, but are also being forced to sign commitments to refrain from further Christian activities. Some have even been ordered to leave the country, while one believer was fired from his job because of his faith. Please keep praying for all the Christians who have been arrested, and for their families. In recent months, there have been several instances of released prisoners being re-arrested on vague charges.

Article18, an organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of religious freedom in Iran, confirms that 69 Christians were arrested

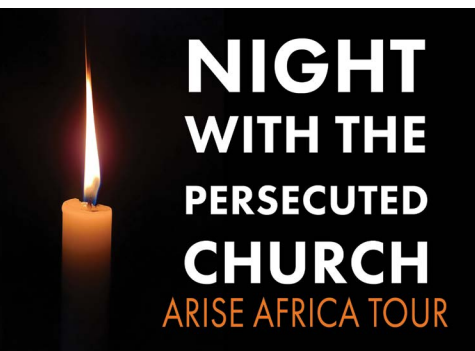
during a seven-week period in June and July. At this time, at least 10 of those arrested are still in detention.

INDIA: Lucy Marem (57), a Christian woman from the Naga tribe was shot dead in Imphal east Manipur by Hindu extremists on July 15. A video of her brutal killing was recorded and was recently circulated on social media. Marem, who had mental health issues, went missing from home – later her body was found on the streets, almost unrecognizable.

“It is appalling to see such brutality against the Christians and our hearts cry out for the victims and their families. I appeal to the global church to pray and intercede for Manipur, for peace and harmony in the state.” says Open Doors’ local partner in India, Priya Sharma.

EVENTS

We would love to see you! Come out to one of these in-person events. And if you would like us to visit your church, contact us at (905) 636-0944 or email odcevents@odcan.org.



Night With The Persecuted Church, an in-person event, is your opportunity to hear stories that will help you connect with your brothers and sisters who have sacrificed everything to follow Christ.

For more information, and to RSVP, visit: www.persecutedchurch.ca.

- > [Calgary Chinese Baptist Church](#), Calgary, AB
September 28 @ 7:00 pm
- > [Christian Fellowship Assembly](#), Grande Prairie, AB
September 29 @ 7:00 pm
- > [Redwater Alliance Church](#), Redwater, AB
September 30 @ 7:00 pm

“It was a pleasure to have Gary come and share about Open Doors and the worldwide persecuted church at Living Waters Church. Gary shared with passion and conviction which challenged us to consider those whose faith is under constant attack.”

PASTOR RYAN, LIVING WATERS CHURCH

OPEN DOORS AT SUNDAY SERVICES:

October 1 @ 10:30am
Tofield Community Church
Tofield, AB

October 22 @ 10:30am and 11:45am
Deer Run Church
Leamington, ON

October 1 @ 10am
Ebenezer CRC
Leduc County, AB

November 5 @ 10am **IDOP SUNDAY**
Pickering Pentecostal Church
Pickering, ON

October 15 @ 10am
Heartland A Church Connected
Mississauga, ON

November 5 @ 10:30am **IDOP SUNDAY**
The Lakeside Church
Scarborough, ON



Watching over Ko Aung



In Myanmar, authorities use surveillance and technology to put constant pressure on Christians. But when it got too much for one believer, you were there to help...

It was a chilling moment, the first time Ko Aung* realized he was being watched by the authorities.

This young believer had been working as an Open Doors' partner in Myanmar, delivering rice, oil, Bibles and hymn books to believers in remote villages. He had encountered persecution,

of course, but felt positive and upbeat.

Then in 2021, Myanmar's military leaders overthrew the democratically-elected ruling party in a dramatic coup. When Ko Aung next logged onto his online banking app... "It was blocked," he said. "A month later, another

mobile banking app was blocked. I couldn't take any money out."

Ko Aung was shocked. He tried to open a new account, but learned he'd been red-flagged by the authorities. It turned out the military had been watching him visiting ethnic minority communities (where he delivered aid to Christians) – and believed Ko Aung was a member of an enemy militia.

This label immediately put Ko Aung in grave danger. "There was a high possibility I could be monitored and arrested on false charges," he said. "There have been many instances of this. Some people even die behind bars."

And the fear began to take its toll... "I couldn't sleep, I woke up frightened every time a car passed. My health was deteriorating day by day. I lost weight, I lost my hair. When the militia came near our village, I hid in the jungle."

It became clear: Ko Aung could no longer stay in Myanmar. Thanks to you, he could escape.

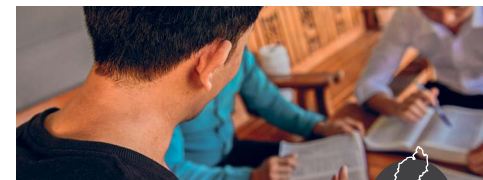
When Ko Aung was under intense surveillance, you were also watching over him. With your support, Open Doors partners helped Ko Aung flee his homeland and make a life in a new country.

He still must be careful. He doesn't put traceable information on

social media, for example, and he's cautious about which family members he contacts in case the military are listening into phone calls. But he's grateful for your gifts and prayers.

"I want to thank you for the help you've given me and the prayers that have been prayed for me," said Ko Aung. "At first, it was hard for me to forgive my persecutors. But now I can forgive them. Once the coup has ended, I want to go back to my home and continue to support ethnic Christians."

*name changed to protect his identity



PLEASE PRAY

- Pray for Ko Aung as he adjusts to his new life, separated from friends and loved ones.
- Ask God to give courage and strength to remote, ethnic Christians in Myanmar.
- Continue to watch over our brothers and sisters in prayer, as they face intense surveillance.

BECAUSE OF YOU...



Children at the House of Mercy in Central Asia were excited to receive cards, letters, and notes of encouragement from Christians all over the world.

CHILDREN IN CENTRAL ASIA ARE ENCOURAGED BECAUSE OF YOU!

You brought smiles to the faces of children in Central Asia! Open Doors partners had the opportunity to deliver your notes, letters, and handmade cards that you wrote to children in Central Asia. They were delighted to receive your words of love and encouragement. These children live at the House of Mercy, which is a centre for vulnerable women and their children to receive shelter and care. The kids were glad to know that people around the world are thinking of and praying for them. Visit opendoorscanada.org/write if you want to send a note of encouragement to a child of the persecuted church today.

THANKS TO YOU, RUKAYYATU OWNS A BIBLE AGAIN

Rukayyatu, 32, is an IDP – an internally displaced person from Touru, Cameroon. In February of 2022, she and her six children were all forced from their home when Boko Haram attacked her village and burned her house and property. For Rukayyatu, the biggest loss was her Bible, because it kept her away from the Word of God, “which is the source of my hope and strength”. Now, an Open Doors relief package that arrived for IDPs in Cameroon provided Rukayyatu with a brand new Bible. “The past year without a Bible has been empty, now I am filled,” she says.



Rukayyatu, a mother of six, smiles as she holds the new Bible she received as part of a relief package for IDPs in Cameroon.



Over 100 Venezuelan pastors gathered for an Open Doors leadership training workshop that will encourage them and strengthen them in a difficult ministry.

VENEZUELAN PASTORS ARE THANKFUL FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

You are strengthening churches in Venezuela! In the northwest of the nation, economic collapse and political corruption have created food insecurity. More than 7 million people have left the country since 2015, and church leaders are struggling to sustain their churches. Open Doors was able to provide a workshop focusing on ministry leadership skills for over 100 church leaders in Venezuela. Each one was presented with a new study Bible as well. Said one attendee, “Today we understand that we can be filled with more wisdom with the help of the Holy Spirit and with this material that you are giving us.”

COME AND MEET YOUR FAMILY THROUGH PRESENCE MINISTRY

2024 trips are now open to register!

North Africa: April 2024

Contact us for more details (905) 636-0944 or email: travel@odcan.org



克里斯蒂安發現

Every Christian in China is seen by God...



...but who else is watching?

There are a billion surveillance cameras in the world. Half of them are in China.

And they're watching, 24/7. For Christians in the underground church, it spells danger.

Whenever Ming* meets with other believers or smuggles Bibles, there's a huge risk he may be arrested. Even imprisoned.

It takes extraordinary courage and strength for Ming to keep going. That's why he needs you.

With your support, Christians like Ming will remain resilient, courageous witnesses for Jesus.

Will you strengthen Christians under intense surveillance and heightened restrictions today?

Every \$66 could prepare three Christians for the dangers of being digitally spied on, to help them remain resilient and fruitful.

Please watch over our brothers and sisters. Pray and give. Use the response form, phone (905) 636-0944 or visit www.opendoorscanada.org.

Thank you.

*name changed to protect his identity

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