

# Market Drayton Churches Together: Prayer for Persecuted Christians - 9 August 2018

## Somalia

*\*names changed for security purposes*

### 7 Aug - Open Doors UK:

#### Five Somali believers to pray for in the Horn of Africa

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/horn-africa-180807>

For these Somali believers in the Horn of Africa, a region which includes Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Eritrea, choosing to follow Jesus is a huge risk. Most Somali Christians keep their faith completely secret, and those who dare to share their faith with others must do so very carefully. Islam is an important part of Somali identity, and for a Somali person to decide to leave Islam and follow Jesus is seen as a huge betrayal – and one that could lead to immediate execution by extremists.

Our courageous Somali brothers and sisters believe that following Jesus is worth the risk – but that doesn't make it easy. These five secret believers all attend Muktar's secret church in the Horn of Africa – please pray for protection, strength and encouragement for them today.

#### Saleh, one of the first believers

Saleh\* is in his 40s. He's been attending Muktar's secret church for the ten years it has been running. At times he has been filled with fear and dread – not surprising given the consequences if his secret faith is discovered. But he says, "Through the teaching at this fellowship, I found peace of mind."

#### Fistum, the bold evangelist

Fistum\* is an energetic young man of about 20. He says, "As I grew up I did not believe in God. And I used to be addicted to drugs. After I lost my dad, I showed disrespect to everyone, including my mother who was a Christian.

"But one day I had a dream about John 14:1 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.' I realised that I was in darkness. I went to church and accepted Christ. From that day onwards my life was stable.

"Here at the fellowship I learned how to connect with God, how to read the Bible and how to share the gospel with others. It has changed my life!"

Despite the risks he faces if he is discovered by Islamic extremists, Fitsum is bold in sharing his faith with his friends. He says, "I tell all my friends that God is our strength if we are His. I gave some of them Bibles and took them to church. A few received Jesus. I am so excited!"

#### Aziza, the new believer

Aziza\* has just been attending Muktar's secret church for a few months. "Before I started attending, I never prayed or read the Bible; I just spent my time watching movies. But now I understand how important it is to do these things."

#### Birtukan, whose life was turned around

Birtukan\* is a mother two. "I was in a storm, especially when I got pregnant with my second child. I could not tell my problems to anyone. One day I planned to throw my newborn into the ocean, but on my way to the beach I met a Christian woman who tried to preach to me. I told her, 'I have no home, I have no job, I have argued with my husband... I am irritated; please don't talk to me now. I cannot listen to your gospel now.'"

But the woman would not leave Birtukan alone, and brought her to Muktar's secret church. Since then, she has become a follower of Christ, and the believers in the church have been by her side and helped her all the way. She loves studying the Bible. "I did not think I would survive; I used to drink, I used to smoke... It's Jesus that changed my whole life! This fellowship has helped sustain my faith and has kept me close to the Lord."

### Zemzem, who prays for you

You may remember Zemzem\* from our May 2015 magazine. When she became a Christian, she was imprisoned for a time, and her husband divorced her, leaving her to care for their two young sons without any help. Your support enabled Open Doors to provide for her practical needs, such as buying her a bed and cooking utensils.

Despite everything that she has been through, Zemzem loves to share her faith with others, and really appreciates the teaching she receives in Muktar's group. She says, "This training taught us to preach the gospel in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is deeply rooted in my heart, so I preach the gospel. And my children and I pray every morning and evening for those who make these discipleship classes possible."

*Cont/...*

### 3 Aug - Open Doors UK: Jesus calls eight-year-old Farah to follow Him in the Horn of Africa

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/horn-africa-180803>

Farah was the son of an imam, but amazingly, he heard the voice of Jesus calling to him at a young age. Farah says, "When I was eight, I heard a voice that I could not recognise telling me to follow Him. After that I had a longing to know more about Jesus.

"At the time we had foreign Christian neighbours. I used to visit them. When my parents found out, they warned the Christians to not allow me to visit their home anymore, but I started (secretly) climbing over the fence to be with them."

Farah is from the Somali community in the Horn of Africa, a region that includes Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Kenya. Most Somali Christians keep their faith completely secret. Islam is an important part of Somali identity, and for a Somali person to decide to leave Islam and follow Jesus is seen as a huge betrayal – and one that could lead to immediate execution by Islamic extremists.

When Farah first decided to answer the call of Jesus, he probably had no idea of the risks he was taking or the persecution that lay ahead of him. But he has stood firm in his faith through it all – and the support and prayers of his global church family have helped him to keep going.

#### Bold faith and big consequences

As well as learning from his Christian neighbours, Farah also grew in his faith as a young boy by listening to the radio. He says, "I listened to Christian radio programs in Somali and corresponded with them."

Farah soon began to share his faith with others. He says, "By the age of about 13 I had started preaching to my friends at school. There were 40 children in my class and I brought three of them to Christ."

His bold faith was met with opposition. He says, "The school expelled me. Afterwards, some of my fellow students told my parents that I had become a Christian, and that is when persecution started from their side."

But that didn't stop him – he continued to share the gospel with others. Farah says, "When I was 17, I was imprisoned because I preached the gospel. At the time, my father announced that I had to be killed, but my mother and brothers were against his decision. Instead, I was kept in jail for six months."

Even after his father had threatened to kill him, he kept preaching to the other prisoners. "Nothing could stop me from preaching the gospel, so the officers said I had to be kept alone."

But he felt God's presence with him, even in prison, alone and rejected by his family. "God spoke to my heart. He strengthened me all the time."

### 'My brothers in Christ help me'

Farah is now 43, but the persecution against him hasn't ended. He recently had to flee his home to escape being imprisoned again - and this is how he first came into contact with Open Doors. He says, "I went to hide in a remote area. While there, I got sick. While I missed everything I had, I met Open Doors. They helped me with medication and often connected with me. They comforted me through my trouble and set my mind at ease."

Farah's condition worsened, so he returned to the city for treatment. It was four months after he had fled and he knew the authorities had given up on their plan to imprison him.

He is safe from arrest for now, but continues to experience rejection from his community and his family. It's a lonely existence. "People I did not know called and insulted me; I could not find a single job because everybody knew me. My entire tribe disregarded me. My family asked me to choose, but I told them I need the truth, not their wealth."

Today Farah attends a secret church. He advises other new believers, "Always read the Bible and fix your eyes on Jesus. Pray fervently, and give all your anxiety to God. We must understand that our fate is God himself. When suffering comes to your life, be persistent."

## Rwanda

### 2 Aug - Open Doors UK: More than 8,000 churches closed by the government in Rwanda

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/Rwanda-180731>

It should have been a day of celebration. But the wedding in the village church in Rwanda came to an abrupt end, when, in the middle of the celebrations, local government representatives marched in and stopped the service. The couple and all the guests were ordered to leave. The government had decided that the church was to be closed.

This is just one story among thousands – over 8,000 in fact. According to a report by Rwanda's pro-government KT Press, more than 8,000 churches have now been closed, and the number is growing every day.

#### Aggressive secularisation

The ostensible reason is that the Rwanda Governance Board is clamping down on churches which it says fail to meet building regulations laid down at the beginning of the year. But many people believe that a more sinister agenda is at work: they claim that the church closures are part of a systematic, aggressive programme of secularisation.

"On checking which churches were included, we learned that all churches are suffering the same fate, and that even churches considered luxurious by local standards have had to close," said a local source, who wished to remain anonymous. "In one district authorities banned all meetings of a closed church, and congregants are not even allowed to meet in home groups."

In most cases it is almost impossible for churches to make the required changes within the given time frame of 15 days. But even those churches which try to comply with the regulations find themselves in trouble – because new regulations are being added all the time.

One church which had already borrowed money in order to meet the initial requirements, was then told that it needed to change its roof and rebuild one of the brick walls. Another church which thought it had complied with the regulations

suddenly discovered that their toilets were too close to the entrance.

One congregation now meets in a church building in another neighbourhood. Another congregation's members have to walk 20km to attend church in a neighbouring community.

#### Politically influenced church closures

It seems clear that the problem is not so much the buildings themselves, but the nature of the churches. Many of the closed churches are small Pentecostal congregations, a denomination that has grown rapidly in Rwanda and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. "Pentecostalism is growing exponentially," Phil Clark from SOAS, University of London, told the German newspaper Deutsche Welle. "The church closures are much more politically influenced than the government says. It signals to the churches that they are under observation, just like other social organisations in Rwanda. I take that as a clear warning."

Human rights groups have long criticised the Rwandan government for clamping down on freedom of expression. This clamp down on churches seems to be an extension of that.

The government is also clamping down on pastors and theological education. All pastors now need to have a theological degree from an officially accredited institute. What's more, another new law states that only institutions that also teach science and technology can teach theology, meaning that few of the many (often highly regarded) theological institutions or Bible schools are regarded as valid.

Understandably, there is a high level of anxiety among church leaders. Shortly after the new requirements began to be implemented, officials arrested six pastors accused of plotting to defy the government orders. Although the pastors have since been released, a senior church leader explained that the arrest served as a stern warning to others to not resist the new laws.

#### Please pray:

- That churches would have the financial resources to at least try and meet the requirements
- For wisdom and courage for Christians in how to engage the government over these requirements
- For Christians and churches to live out clear testimonies for Christ in the midst of these challenges
- That Rwanda's international trade partners would not turn a blind eye to the obvious infringement on religious rights taking place.

Also see: *World Watch Monitor: More than 8,000 Rwandan churches closed following government directive*  
<http://tinyurl.com/y77kjo06>

## Comoros

### 3 Aug - World Watch Monitor: Religious minorities fear backlash as Sunni Islam declared state religion of Comoros

<http://tinyurl.com/y8384awa> (see link for text)

Comoros's Constitution grounds all public policy in Islamic beliefs. Propagating any religion except Islam is illegal; converts to Christianity can be prosecuted and face intense social backlash, leaving them little option but to practise their faith underground. Despite a trend towards democracy, the influence of radical Islam is growing. Radical scholars, many of whom are trained in other Muslim nations, are pushing for stricter Islamic laws.

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/comoros>