

MOHAMMAD FROM YEMEN

Mohammad*, a secret Yemeni believer, became a Christian when he bought a Bible in a second-hand shop. Curious about the contents, he read it, and gave his life to Christ.

“When I came to faith, I thought I was the only believer in Yemen,” he says. In many countries like Yemen, where believers have to keep their faith secret, new Christians can feel very isolated in their faith. It’s hard to find a community.

“For a long time, I didn’t know any other Yemeni Christians. Now I know many, and there are many more like us.”

Yemen remains number 8 on the Open Doors World Watch List for the second year in a row. All Yemenis are considered Muslims and leaving Islam is forbidden, so Muslims who decide to follow Jesus risk the death penalty. There are no open church activities or private worship.

“WE STAY SEPARATED”

And yet, knowing they risked their lives, Mohammad and Alima*, his wife, started not one, but four secret house groups in their home: two for women, two for men. The meetings, which lasted around three or four hours, usually consisted of prayer, reading the Bible and singing songs together using worship found on YouTube. The danger of meeting together for Christians is very real.

Mohammad says, “There was a lot of noise coming from the streets where we lived, and that helped disguise our singing. Our neighbours didn’t recognise our singing as being Christian songs.”

Although meeting in groups is usually possible (though Covid-19 has obviously restricted this), there is still a strong sense of isolation in the Yemeni church: house groups do not have contact with each other. “We stayed separated, and each group didn’t know the whereabouts of other groups. That’s so there could be no betrayal of others if a group was discovered,” Mohammad explains. “Security is very important for all of us. It’s always a major concern.”

But it’s not just governing laws that impact believers in Yemen – the ongoing civil war adds another dynamic of persecution. Because aid relief is mostly distributed through Islamic organisations and local mosques, who allegedly discriminate against citizens who are not considered to be pious Muslims, Christians can miss out on vital emergency aid.

The Covid-19 crisis is of particular concern in Yemen, whose healthcare systems are already under terrible strain from years of civil war. Other diseases like cholera and malaria are rife, and Yemen is said to be experiencing the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The country has already reported a handful of coronavirus cases – but the country is in no way able to cope with a full-on outbreak of the virus.

Despite the dangers, Mohammad and Alima have developed a deeper understanding of what it means to trust in God. “We understood how God took care of us. He continued to do so. For example, in this time of war, many times we could only buy small amounts of food, but we always managed to find enough for our family.”

“THE CHURCH IN YEMEN IS DEFINITELY GROWING”

The couple have had to flee Yemen with their children because of their faith. Even though they are now far away, they stay closely connected to the church in their homeland. Mohammad says, “When the war is over, I hope we can return to Yemen. I hope that one day I will see the church growing, bearing a lot of fruit.

“We hope that the Word of God will spread in Yemen and that Yemen will be won by Christ. That is our daily prayer. The church in Yemen is definitely growing. That is what you hear everywhere... We often hear of whole families coming to Christ.”

“Because of terrorism and war, people abroad might have negative thoughts about Yemeni people,” says Mohammad. “But they are good people, they need to hear the gospel; their hearts are willing to receive. I believe that when we work and pray, we will see big results, we will see much more fruit.

“Please pray for the Yemeni people. Pray that the number of leaders will grow and that the church will be united under one umbrella, the one Head of the church: Jesus.”

PLEASE PRAY:

- That the coronavirus would not spread in Yemen, and that relief aid would get through the borders and be distributed fairly and without discrimination
- That the church in Yemen will continue to grow in faith and boldness, and that God would provide opportunities for believers to be salt and light
- For God’s peace and healing to be poured out on the nation.

*Names changed for security reasons