

Rebecca's Story

"I awoke one night and saw that the streets were brightly lit by the many churches that had been set ablaze. In the weeks that followed, we heard gun shots every night. It felt like war. The following morning I saw corpses on the streets."



This was Rebecca's terrifying experience in 2009, as Boko Haram attacks began on Maiduguri, the city where she lived in Borno State in the north east corner of Nigeria.

Eight years on, while Boko Haram have been pushed back by the Nigerian army in some areas, their attacks on Christians and all who refuse to conform to their radical brand of Islam continue. In August 2016, Boko Haram's new leader Abu Musab al-Barnawi vowed to eradicate Christianity in Nigeria. He said that militants will blow up 'every church that we are able to reach... killing all of those who we find from the citizens of the cross'. The group have killed thousands of people, leaving many desperate widows and orphans behind, and forcing an estimated 2 million people to flee their homes.

Rebecca and her family fled Maiduguri and went to their home village of Gavva. However, as the Nigerian army drove Boko Haram from Maiduguri, the militants began attacking more rural areas, and the violence reached Gavva too. Rebecca's house in Gavva was destroyed along with all of her family's possessions.

Rebecca now supports more than 2,000 widows

They fled once again, and returned to Maiduguri in 2011. At a time when many international organisations were evacuating the area, and Maiduguri was effectively cut off from the outside world, Rebecca decided she needed to help those who were in even greater need than her. "We were all refugees at that time and we all needed help, but I saw that many widows needed more help than I did," Rebecca says.

With financial support from a friend who lived abroad, Rebecca began distributing food and paying for medical care for some of the widows she knew. Her work soon grew, and when Open Doors workers heard about what she was doing, they began to provide her with financial support too. Today she has a team of volunteers who

care for 2,000 widows, build simple housing and provide school fees for orphans. "Now with the aid of Open Doors I can give more help to the widows and orphans," she says.

CARE FOR WIDOWS



Miriam and her children receive support from Rebecca

Rebecca says, "Many women ended up in IDP (internally displaced people) camps, alone with their children. They own nothing and do not have any kind of job. Most of them do not have any form of education. That's why I wanted to help. I felt the need to stand with these women who sometimes fought bitterly to survive."

The widows that Rebecca works with have often endured terrible trauma and abuse at the hands of Boko Haram extremists. She says, "The stories of the widows are dreadful, each one of them. For example, the story of a woman who was kidnapped by Boko Haram. She had seen them killing her husband. She spent four days sitting next to his body, until some others came to help her bury the body. Then she had to live for one and a half years with Boko Haram and was abused in a small village. She had to do hard domestic work there."

One of the widows that Rebecca supports is Miriam, a mother of four whose husband was murdered by Boko Haram. She fled her village with her children to escape the militants and came to Maiduguri with nothing. "It is only thanks to the support Rebecca gives that we are still surviving," Miriam says. "I pray with my children every morning to ask God to help us. So far we have had something to eat most days. I can feed my children thanks to this help I receive."

NEW CLOTHES

An Open Doors worker was recently visiting Rebecca when she was giving some of the widows a surprise, thanks to the financial support of Open Doors - new clothes. It's a treat most of the women haven't had in years. "It is important for women to

have good and nice clothes. It helps them to regain self-respect," explains Rebecca. Miriam is given a colourful yellow dress - she looks radiant. "You all look so wonderful," the Open Doors worker tells the women. They smile proudly.

But Rebecca cautions, "Good looks can be deceiving. Most of these women can't afford to pay school fees for their children. They have all lost their husbands. Some of them have seen their husband being cut to pieces.

"Through coming to church and through your prayers and assistance, God is helping them to forget some of the things that have happened to them. We give them food and very rarely when there is money we give them new wrappers (clothes). We are grateful to God for all the help. And yes, as you can see, they are very beautiful.

"God is hearing. Sometimes when a widow comes to me with a specific need, I can help because of the support I get from others. This is God who is hearing. Also with school fees for some of our orphans: we prayed about it and money came, and now the orphans go to school. All this is God answering prayers."

Miriam says, "In the Bible it is written that God is a father to the orphans and a husband to the widows. The fact that these words are in the Bible comforts me.

"Rebecca helps us widows with everything she can get for us. We often pray for Rebecca, her children and husband, that God will help and protect them, and also for the people who are sponsoring her."

STAND WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Here are three ways you can stand with your church family in sub-Saharan Africa:

- **Pray.** Use the prayer points below.
- **Give.** [Every £60 can provide food aid to a family in sub-Saharan Africa for six weeks](#), to help them simply survive.
- **Speak out.** Raise your voice for our persecuted church family in Nigeria. [Write to the Nigerian High Commission](#) and ask the Nigerian government to do more for persecuted believers.

PLEASE PRAY:

- Praise God for Rebecca and other Open Doors workers and partners who are caring for our persecuted church family
- For provision and protection for displaced people in sub-Saharan Africa.