

# PRAYER & PRAISE

*Quarterly news from Middle East Media*

ISSUE 97 JULY 2017

**STIRRING THE WATERS**  
CHALLENGING THE CULTURE  
OF EARLY MARRIAGE

**THE POWER OF PRAYER**  
WHY WE NEED YOU TO PRAY  
FOR OUR WORK

**RESPONSE FORM  
INSIDE!**

middle east  
**media**

Dear friends,

**"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."** – Romans 12:2

**An important part of MEM's work is to transform the way people in the Middle East think about God, themselves and others around them. It's one of our core values for all our productions and training - to challenge the status quo and show that in God's grace there is another way to live.**

Our North Africa team are working tirelessly to challenge the common practices of human trafficking and child marriage in North African communities. Our trainers often find that in these communities, it's people's mindsets that can be the main obstacle to lasting change. Renee, our North Africa director, says:

*As part of 'Open Arms', our project to tackle human trafficking, our trainer Rahma goes to the villages and sits with very poor and illiterate mothers and grandmothers. She attempts to shake their deeply rooted cultural beliefs, and challenges the practice of forcing young girls to get married. She does an amazing job.*

*Sometimes these workshops go very smoothly, but other times she gets all sorts of opposition. One time a group of village women totally rejected what she was saying and stood up and left suddenly!*

*These mothers have a genuinely deep belief that they are doing the right thing - they consider themselves to be protecting their girls from the unknown by getting them a husband who will protect them. What a lie!*

*Anyway, in one of these workshops an old mother at the end of the day came up to Rahma with crying eyes, patted her on the shoulder and said, "If only you had come to us one month ago, I wouldn't have forced my young daughter to marry."*

*This broke our hearts, because we were late and could have saved this girl if we had known or if we were there before the decision was made. How many other girls can we help save, if only we had the resources?'*

This heartbreaking story shows the vital importance of challenging damaging worldviews - it can actually change and save lives! Read more about the *Open Arms* project and how to pray on p4-7.

If you'd like to give to our work, we've **included a response form within Prayer & Praise itself** this time (see p11), rather than as a separate letter. We're so grateful for every donation we receive, and want to make it as easy as possible for you to give. If you have any questions or feedback, please do let me know!

In Him,



*Emily Shurmer*  
Communications Manager  
emily@mem.org

COVER PHOTO: UMKA\_1

ILLUSTRATION: VIVIDVIC

# Why pray for the Middle East?

**"From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armour."** - Nehemiah 4:16

The biblical story of Nehemiah gives us a powerful metaphor for the importance of prayer. The walls of Jerusalem were lying in ruins, and Nehemiah was called out of exile to rebuild them. But he and his men came under fierce opposition and attack, so as they built, Nehemiah had half the men standing watch with weapons while the other half rebuilt the walls.

**We believe this is why we need you to pray for our work!** While our team are faithfully building God's kingdom in the Middle East, we need another team of people, like you, to guard them in prayer - that God would protect them in their work and lives.

This issue of *Prayer & Praise* includes many ways to pray for our teams in North Africa and the Gulf. We really appreciate your prayers for our work - it's a vital part of what we do.

*"We know our work is building God's kingdom, and with that comes attacks. Please pray for protection for the team members, who are being attacked on many levels: physically, emotionally and spiritually."* - Leina, the Gulf team

## **Become an intercessor**

If you'd like to intercede for the Middle East on a more regular basis but don't know where to start, why not sign up to our Call2Prayer email? It goes out every 2 weeks with ideas on how to pray for different events and issues in the region.

**Visit [www.mem.org/pray](http://www.mem.org/pray) or email [emily@mem.org](mailto:emily@mem.org) to find out more.**

# Open Arms

RESTORING THE VICTIMS OF  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
IN NORTH AFRICA

PHOTO CREDIT: PALIS MICHALIS

PHOTO CREDIT: MEE/ORIOL ANDRES GALLART

**In a remote village in North Africa, a group of young girls stand in a line, staring out to the horizon with fear. They cling nervously to each other as a black car approaches in a cloud of dust. The car pulls up, and out steps a middle-aged man in an expensive suit. He has come to buy a wife...**

This is the opening scene of our latest media production - a poignant film about the reality of human trafficking for women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), based on real stories we have collected through our human trafficking workshops.

The film follows the stories of three young girls who are sold into marriage by their impoverished families. This is not uncommon in North Africa - according to UNICEF, approximately 1 in 5 girls in the MENA region are married off before the age of 18. Child marriage is a form of human trafficking, as marriages between wealthy men and underage girls are often arranged by the parents via brokers for financial gain. In some Middle Eastern countries there is also the issue of acceptable temporary marriages, a form of legal prostitution where girls as young as nine can be married for as little as a few hours.

The three girls in the film are subjected to violence, sexual exploitation and imprisonment before eventually escaping. But despite finding their way home after the ordeals they have suffered, not all the girls are welcomed back with kindness by their families, as they are considered to have brought shame on the family name.

Our North Africa team is fighting against the cultural norms of early marriage - by breaking the taboo, overcoming the 'shame culture' to give women a second chance, and empowering women to know their rights and value.

## BREAKING THE TABOO

Before attitudes can start to shift, it is vital that societies start to acknowledge the reality of human trafficking. Middle Eastern governments often refuse to admit that there is a problem in their country, and culturally the subject is deeply taboo, particularly when it comes to sexual exploitation.

One of our strategies is to raise awareness about human trafficking and child marriage, to break the silence on these under-reported issues through powerful campaign films. Through our *Open Arms* project, we work with governmental and legal entities in North Africa, and have established a network of over 20 organisations who are now using our films and accompanying curriculum to combat human trafficking in civil society.

# Stirring the waters

**"For an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the waters. And the first person to step down into it afterwards was healed."** *John 5:4*

The Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, where Jesus heals a paralytic man in John's Gospel, was known as a place of healing. People with diseases would wait by the pool for God to 'trouble the waters', as the first person who got into the pool after it was stirred up was cured of their ailments.

Rahma, the head of our human trafficking project, used the Pool of Bethesda as a metaphor for the work her team is doing to challenge the acceptability of human trafficking and early marriage in society.

"We believe we are 'stirring up the waters' of society, so to speak," Rahma said. "Open Arms is a long-term project, to shake up engrained cultural beliefs and traditions and challenge the way women are treated. By stirring the waters, we are bringing God's healing to the people."

## OVERCOMING THE SHAME CULTURE

Our team is also challenging the shame culture that is attached to victims of human trafficking. The sad reality in the MENA region is that even if a girl manages to escape from a situation of abuse, her ordeal is far from over. Once she returns home, despite being a victim, she will often be met with condemnation for the shame she is perceived to have brought on the family. These young women are often tainted with social stigma for the rest of their lives.

For the last few years, through our *Open Arms* project, our North Africa team has been introducing the radical idea that not only is it wrong to force girls into marriage, but that they must be welcomed back into the community with 'open arms' and given a second chance. This idea is often met with open hostility.

"I've noticed that in the workshops, only around 50% seem to accept the idea of welcoming women back into society," says Rahma, the head of the *Open Arms* project.

"The other 50% either reject it completely, or accept the girls back home but continue to punish them. Interestingly, it is usually more highly educated people, such as lawyers, who are more resistant to welcoming these women home. But gradually opinions are starting to change."

## EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH VALUE

A key step towards ending human trafficking is empowering young women to realise their true worth, so they have the courage to say no when they are under pressure from their families. Many young women don't even realise this is an option, because they have been brought up to simply obey rather than to speak their minds.

"In the past 3 years, we've noticed that young women are starting to realise they have value and a valuable role in society," says Rahma. "Often in these situations, it's the mothers inflicting marriage on their own daughters. But the daughters are now gaining the confidence to say no to their mothers."

Our work has a vital role to play in helping this shift come about – particularly through projects like *Nisa'a*, our women's website, designed to give women a safe space to speak their minds online.

**Ultimately through this project, we want to demonstrate the justice and forgiveness found in the Gospel, and point them towards the open arms of the God of second chances. Please keep this project in your prayers, and visit p11 to find out how to give!**

# Pray

**Our team in North Africa are always so encouraged to hear that we want to pray for them! Here are some specific prayer requests for *Open Arms* and the women of the region:**

- Please keep the vulnerable women and girls of MENA in your prayers. Poor and illiterate women are the most at risk of being targeted.
- Pray God's blessing on the new human trafficking film as production gets underway, that it would be a catalyst for real and lasting change in Middle Eastern culture.
- Pray that governments, communities and individuals would admit there is a problem with human trafficking and be open to change.
- Pray that the wider community would realize that everyone deserves a second chance in all areas of life.
- Pray for women to realize their real value - that their value comes from their Creator, not their situation or what they have or haven't done.
- Pray for the North Africa team, including Rahma, to be salt and light to these women and to the community. Thank God for the way they are 'stirring the waters' in their society and bringing healing.



# News from the Gulf

## On Bended Knee filming is underway!

In the last issue of *Prayer & Praise* we wrote about *On Bended Knee*, our new series of 365 short film clips of poetry, prose and prayer in the Gulf Arabic dialect. The clips have been written by local believers, and give them a safe way to share their thoughts, experiences and revelations about God with their own people and nations.

Many thanks to all who prayed and gave financially to this project! We were able to start filming some of the episodes in a safe country, and are now working on plans for distribution.

## PRAY:

- Thank God that local believers are getting fired up to take the Gospel to their own people through media!
- Thank God that filming for episodes of *On Bended Knee* went smoothly, and for the positive feedback we received.
- Pray for protection for the team - both physically and spiritually. In particular, **please pray urgently for our producer Basma and her 15 year old son.** Basma's son recently became a Christian, but was attacked so violently by his father that he ended up in a coma and is now unable to walk. Like Basma, he has now fled the family and is living in a secret location. We will give the full story in the October edition of *Prayer & Praise*, but until then please pray for swift healing for Basma's son and for God's protection on them both.

## We also conducted a consultation session with believers from a Muslim background, and showed them three episodes of *On Bended Knee*.

Leina, who works for our Gulf team, says: *"By the end, they were in tears. They said, 'Finally, God is using us to reach out to our people! It is from us and it expresses us.' They were excited that it gets the message through to people who cannot go to a Church or where it is unsafe to talk to a Christian. They never thought it could be done this professionally, and said that it was an answer to years of prayer! Pray for that spark in them to be nurtured."*



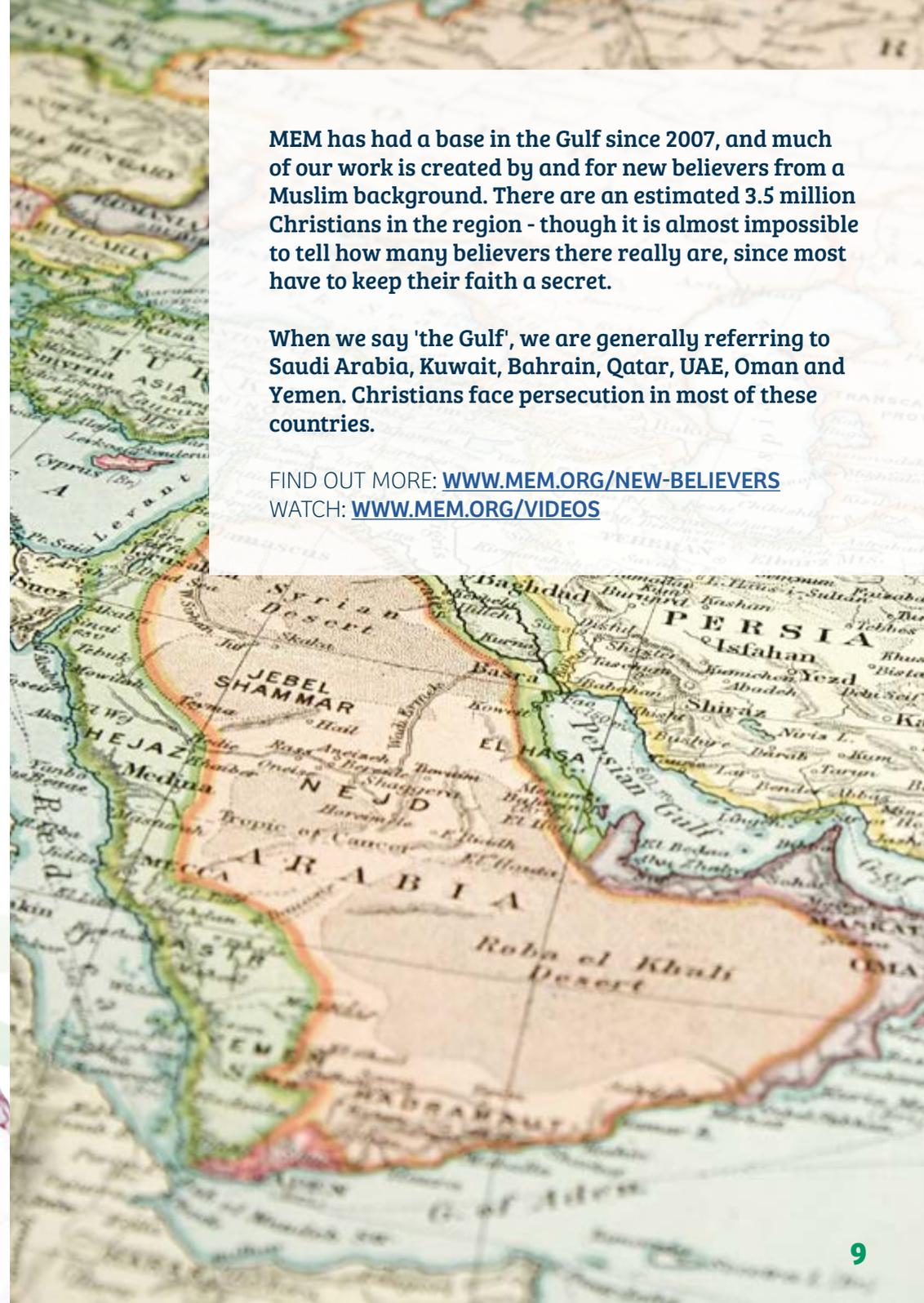
PHOTO CREDITS: P8 KOSTENYUKOVA NATALIYA, P9 CHAD MCDERMOTT

MEM has had a base in the Gulf since 2007, and much of our work is created by and for new believers from a Muslim background. There are an estimated 3.5 million Christians in the region - though it is almost impossible to tell how many believers there really are, since most have to keep their faith a secret.

When we say 'the Gulf', we are generally referring to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Yemen. Christians face persecution in most of these countries.

FIND OUT MORE: [WWW.MEM.ORG/NEW-BELIEVERS](http://WWW.MEM.ORG/NEW-BELIEVERS)

WATCH: [WWW.MEM.ORG/VIDEOS](http://WWW.MEM.ORG/VIDEOS)



# I support MEM because...

We asked friends of Middle East Media, including trustees and supporters, what inspires them about our work in the Middle East...



"When I first heard of the work of MEM I was intrigued and inspired by it. The Church needs models of courage, creativity and hope that strengthen our conviction that God transforms whole societies and lives. I think MEM is amazing example of that creativity." **Ben Care, Curate of St Mary's & St Chad's, Burton-on-Trent**

"I'm particularly encouraged by the work MEM is doing to challenge issues of gender inequality, helping women to find a sense of self worth and a safe place to share their concerns. At a time of unprecedented displacement of people around the world, I am also heartened by the work to support traumatized refugee children in dealing with their sense of loss and fear."

**Carolyn Lawrence, World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women**



"Media was one of the main tools God used to help me through my journey of faith. The *Arabian Dawn* project showed recorded testimonies from the Gulf, and it was very emotional to watch as a believer, as it spoke to me about my journey." **Hiba, Supporter & believer from a Muslim background**

"MEM's work is vital because there are groups of people trying very hard to spread messages of division and hatred in the world today. The Gospel messages of radical love and grace are a powerful alternative to that. As MEM's Chair of Trustees, having an opportunity to contribute to the organisation's activities is very rewarding!" **Graeme Johnstone, Head of Talent Acquisition for Technology Companies**



If you'd like to let us know why you support Middle East Media, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch with Emily at [emily@mem.org](mailto:emily@mem.org), or write to us at the address overleaf.

## Yes! I want to join with MEM to make a difference in the Middle East...

Full name

Address

Postcode

Email

I WISH TO DONATE:  £10  £20  £50  £100

Other amount: £

TO:  North Africa  The Gulf  Where most needed

### HOW TO GIVE:

**Cheque or Voucher (CAF/Stewardship):** Please make your cheque/voucher payable to Middle East Media and return to FREEPOST MEM.

**Card payments:** Visit [www.mem.org/give](http://www.mem.org/give) to pay by debit card, credit card or PayPal.

**Standing order:** Tick if you'd like us to send you a standing order form:

You can also download a standing order form at [www.mem.org/give](http://www.mem.org/give)

**Legacy:** If you'd like more information on leaving a legacy to MEM, tick here:

### GIFT AID DECLARATION (Extra 25%) Please tick as appropriate:

**I am a UK taxpayer and I want to Gift Aid my donation to MEM.** I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

**I am not a UK taxpayer.**

Signed

Date

Please detach this form and send to FREEPOST MEM along with your gift. **Thank you!**

If you are not in the UK, please visit [www.mem.org/give](http://www.mem.org/give) to donate online.

# What will your legacy be?

## Would you consider leaving a legacy to Middle East Media in your will?

Every gift we receive, large or small, is of vital importance as it contributes to our work of transforming lives.

By including a bequest to MEM in your will, your last gift will be one of lasting influence in the Middle East: enabling the message of justice, compassion and hope to reach millions of families in the region.

If you're interested in leaving a legacy to Middle East Media, please tick the box overleaf or get in touch using the contact details below.



## *Sowing seeds of transformation*

MEM UK/EU  
Unit 142, 23 King St, Cambridge CB1 1AH, UK  
emily@mem.org  
Registered UK Charity No. 271373

MEM USA  
PO Box 4949, Wheaton IL 60189-4949, USA  
director.usa@mem.org

*If you would like to subscribe, unsubscribe or change the way you hear from us, please contact Simon at [simon@mem.org](mailto:simon@mem.org).*

Middle East Media is a Christian charity using creative media to share God's justice, compassion & hope with the people of the Middle East in culturally relevant ways.



middle east  
**media**  
[www.mem.org](http://www.mem.org)