

- Population: 2,300,000+ (2005 estimate)

Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, lies in a great oasis along the Chirchik River in the foothills of the Tian Shan Mountains. One of the oldest cities of Central Asia, Tashkent was a significant rest stop and trading center from the time of antiquity. It still has a strong influence over the whole region as the largest city and industrial center in Central Asia, as well as a major rail and highway junction and important air link. Although half the people in Tashkent are Uzbek, the city is home to significant Russian (30 %), Tajik, Kazakh, Karakalpak and Korean ethnic minorities.

Until the Arab invasion in the eighth century, the prominent religions in the Tashkent region were animism and Zoroastrianism. Today, most Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims who also practice folk Islam. Probably 60 % of the city's population has a Muslim background. As a result of communist influence, a significant minority also claim not to be religious.

The Uzbek proverb, "A guest is more honorable than your father" reveals two things about the country. First, hospitality is a high virtue. As they say, "What is a house for, if not for receiving guests? We must care for all those who God brings to our door." Second, the proverb tells us that family is greatly valued. Parents are highly regarded, and children are expected to take care of them as long as they live.

There are a few small but growing Uzbek fellowships in Tashkent; nationwide there are 5,000 to 10,000 Uzbek believers. Evangelizing Muslims is prohibited, and efforts to change religion are discouraged both publicly and privately. Persecution of practicing Christians by both the government and society is very real, and Uzbek believers, especially, have received harsh treatment including beatings and torture.



Pray

- ① Tashkent is preparing for a church-planting movement by training believers. Pray that each of the city's 11 districts will be evangelized.
- ② Uzbek believers are learning to open their homes to the body of Christ. Pray that the believers of Tashkent would be even more active, bold, intentional and Spirit-filled.
- ③ Pray that the Church would go forth from Tashkent and be a healing agent throughout Central Asia.