



The Muslim Kazakhs of Western Mongolia

Majestically the eagles circle high above the gathered crowd. At the falconer's signal, one suddenly swoops down, glides over the heads of the spectators and lands with a loud shriek on the thick padded gloves of its master. "The Festival of the Golden Eagle" in Bayan-Olgii in the western-most province of Mongolia signals the opening of the hunting season. The feast is a zealously guarded part of local Kazakh culture, and in recent decades the Mongolian Kazakhs have been able to preserve their traditions and skills much more than their brothers in neighboring Kazakhstan.

Kazakh nomads have roamed the high mountains and valleys of Western Mongolia with their herds since the 19th century. Until 1930 they freely moved between Kazakhstan, Mongolia and the Chinese province of Xinjiang. However after the founding of the Mongolian People's Republic in 1924, many of them left their semi-nomadic lifestyle and began settling down in the western Mongolian highlands. Today the Kazakhs in the province of Bayan-Olgii number around 87,000 or about 88.7% of the provincial population.

The Kazakh culture differs in several ways from the Mongol culture. Traditionally the Mongolian Kazakhs are Sunni Muslims, whereas the rest of the population are associated with Tibetan Buddhism. In daily life, Islam actually plays a minor part in the lives of most Mongolian Kazakhs. Years of atheistic indoctrination by the government has left its mark on the people. Until the end of the 1990s there were practically no mosques at all in Bayan-Olgii. Places of Islamic worship only sprang up a few years ago in the villages and settlements. Some of these were paid for by foreign Islamic organizations.

Also pray for ...

▶ *Bradford in England has a very significant Muslim population (16+ percent). Pray for the Christians in the city to have a greater understanding of Islam and increased ability to witness among Muslims.*



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ *Pray that the Gospel will be presented in a culturally sensitive way to the Kazakhs of Mongolia and that they will put their hope in God (Isaiah 40:31).*
- ▶ *Pray that Mongolian Christians and others will make increased efforts to bring the Good News to the Kazakh minority in Western Mongolia.*