

Turkmenistan has one of the most oppressive regimes of the world. The former president instituted a bizarre personality cult. He erected gold plated statues of himself all over the country and his portrait hung in every public room and on the outside of every public building. He wrote a book called “Ruhnama” whose teaching rules much of the daily life. Today, an entire generation has already undergone extensive brain washing.

The new president, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, has promised to continue Niyasov's political heritage. School children are still required to memozise portions of the former president's “Holy Book” Ruhnama. There is no critical voice or opposition allowed and the government continues to control all media.



Sept. 6, 2008



Day 6

*Population: 5,097,028 (July 2007 est.)
Muslim 89%, Eastern Orthodox 9%, unknown 2%*

Turkmenistan is not often a subject of the international news media but it did get some attention in December 2006 when its eccentric president, Saparmurat Niyasov, suddenly died. Turkmenistan is an independent nation between Iran and Uzbekistan. Almost 90% of its territory is sand or gravel desert, while the people live mainly alongside riverbanks and in various oases. The desert hides huge oil and gas deposits. Turkmenistan is the fifth largest supplier of natural gas worldwide. Even though the country receives large revenues from the hydrocarbon resources, inequality is rampant and most Turkmen struggle to survive. However, shiny marble luxury buildings pop up everywhere in the capital city of Ashgabat.

Persecution: Beginning in 1998, almost all missionaries were expelled by the Turkmen government. Since then all religious activities have been highly repressed. House group meetings of any kind are prohibited, and people found attending secret religious meetings risk losing their home and their job. The Turkmen intelligence services carefully watch those known to be believers as well as all foreigners.

Turkmenistan

Surviving in Central Asia



Nevertheless the church does continue to grow slowly in Turkmenistan. There are about 700-1,000 believers in the country and numbers of underground house groups that meet in secret. Two Russian-speaking Christian churches have been given official permission to gather. Unfortunately the registered churches and most of the underground house groups are Russian speaking - believers are still praying for the emergence of indigenous Turkmen speaking communities of believers. While a useable New Testament is available in the Turkmen language, the translation badly needs revision to correct some mistakes and make it more contemporary. The Old Testament translation is still in progress.

PRAYER REQUESTS

▶ *The Turkmen are disillusioned and are looking for the Truth. There is a huge need for people who can disciple believers and help form strong, multiplying communities of faith that speak Turkmen and are accepted as part of the culture.*