



Open Doors' Ministry in Iran

Open Doors' aid projects in Iran, like all projects are focussed on meeting the most urgent needs of our persecuted brothers and sisters locally. Please support these projects with your donations and pray for the blessing and protection of God for all those involved.

Distribution of Bibles and New Testaments

The church in Iran grows continually and with it, the need for Bibles in Farsi, the country's language. Bibles, children's Bibles and copies of the New Testament are being distributed throughout the country in order to strengthen Christians and Muslim background Believers (MBBs) in their faith in Jesus and to give them new hope and joy.

Discipleship training for young Christians

Young Iranian Christians are looking for guidance and instruction in the Christian faith. Open Doors has developed a special training course for Muslims that have become Christians. These courses are extremely important as MBBs cannot attend traditional churches or can only do so at a high risk for their safety. Young Christians in Iran have little or no opportunity to meet other young believers apart from their own house group. They often feel isolated and have difficulty finding a Christian spouse. If it is known that they have become Christians, their wages are reduced, as Christians are generally paid less than Muslims. The training courses help them to connect and to grow in faith and enable them to meet and encourage each other.

Christian TV programs and websites

Muslims that have become Christians are often isolated from their families and surroundings. They are in need of being strengthened and encouraged. Assisted by Christian radio and TV programs as well as websites in the Farsi language, Open Doors helps MBBs to stand strong and grow in their faith in Jesus.

On the following pages, we've included recent press coverage by Open Doors on the situation in Iran...

Iranian Christians Refuse To Accept Election Results

SANTA ANA, CA (June 16, 2009) – In Tehran many Iranians haven't accepted the results of the presidential elections held last Friday. News reports show protesters streaming through the streets of Iran's capital. There are also reports that Ayatollah Khamenei has directed the Guardian Council to examine claims of election fraud after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the runaway winner.

Open Doors learned through its contacts that voters are frustrated and have lost trust in Iran's government in cities outside of Tehran.

Iranian Christian Daryush (not his real name) from Shiraz reports: "In my neighborhood there is no evidence of any skirmishes or demonstrations and also no celebration from the elections anymore. The streets have been swept clean. But the evidence that we have trouble in Shiraz is the constant presence of the various security forces and the military helicopter I saw flying overhead. But I have only driven around my own neighborhood, so I can't speak for the entire city."

In other districts of the southwestern city of Shiraz the situation is grimmer. Daryush shares: "Friends told me that young people in Shiraz are being arrested and that they've seen young men and women being beaten or worse. A friend who lives near the university and student dorms told me she heard screaming, shouting and gunfire in the early hours of the morning. The predominately young demonstrators are calling Ahmadinejad a dictator and yell chants like 'Ma dolate zoor nemikhaim' meaning 'we don't want a government of force.' They also yell at the security forces and call them traitors and vote-stealers. A friend said that within the security forces are pro-Mousavi followers, 'saying 'beechareh shodim!' or 'we are without hope.'"

Daryush shares that the "majority of people I spoke with consider the elections a fraud and don't accept the results at all. A friend of our family lives in Shahe Cheragh, which is a predominantly religious and conservative district of Shiraz. He said that even in that district a huge numbers of votes went to Mousavi."

Daryush continues: "There are those who have never voted, didn't vote this time and will never vote under this regime. They look at the rest of us as naive ones and say, 'See, we told you that the one who had been previously selected would win the election.' Others I speak with say they will never participate in an election again because 'it was a total fraud.'"

While some Iranians never accepted this form of government, a certain percentage has considered the Islamic Republic of Iran to being a "limited' democracy." Daryush explains that "although the candidates were hand-picked and had the regime's stamp of approval, at least we had a choice within those limits. This election, however, showed us that the Iranian people don't have a 'limited democracy,' but as some are now saying 'no democracy at all...we have an Islamic dictatorship.'"

Open Doors spokesman John Fox observes that Christians in general voted for Mousavi and hope for new elections: "We cannot generalize our observations to all Christians, but we asked 29 Christians from

Tehran, Shiraz and Isfahan and all voted for Mousavi. One of them said, “for us *bad* is better than *worse*. Mousavi also promised more religious freedom, so I hope he does not lie.”

Open Doors USA President/CEO Carl Moeller adds that “we need to continue to pray for the situation in Iran, especially for the Christians caught in the crossfire. This could be a pivotal point in the history of Iran and the future of believers who live there.”

Iran: Secret Believers Growing Despite Persecution

Many Iranians Frustrated By Islamic Rule; Searching For Spiritual Meaning

SANTA ANA, CA (June 24, 2009) – Many Iranian people feel frustrated by Islam 30 years after the Islamic Revolution – reflected by the current rioting in Iran after the controversial re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

They are searching for spiritual truth and finding it in Jesus. More than 100,000 are Secret Believers from a Muslim background who often meet together in rapidly growing house churches.

Such believers are actively targeted by authorities. In 2008 at least 50 Christians, mostly Muslim converts, were arrested, interrogated, tortured, intimidated and some even killed. It marked the toughest year regarding Christian persecution since the Islamic Revolution.

At the same time, the number of official Christians has halved from 250,000 Armenian and Assyrian Christians before the Islamic revolution of 1979 to around 125,000 now. Many have left Iran as a result of discrimination and persecution. Since the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, Christian persecution has increased with security forces rigidly enforcing anti-Christian legislation.

Churches monitored by secret police

Around half of the 125,000 belong to the officially recognized Armenian, Assyrian and Chaldean Churches. They are allowed to teach their own people in their own language but it is forbidden to use Farsi to preach the gospel. Many churches have a lot of visitors during their services which are monitored by the secret police.

The other half, mainly Farsi speaking believers, meet in small house churches or are reliant on satellite television for their spiritual nourishment. Often first generation Christians, they are desperate for Bibles and spiritual teaching in their own language.

While 99 percent of the 72 million Iranians are Muslims, Islam scholar Katajun Amirpur said that Iranian

society is the most secular in the Islamic world with many turning their backs on the mullahs. She also said, that according to recent research, 70 percent of surveyed respondents were dissatisfied with the Iranian state and advocated a separation of state and religion.

Former Muslims have said that many Iranians are suffering from spiritual emptiness, looking for a god they can't find. Those who haven't found Christ are resorting to drugs, fundamentalism or mysticism. Economically the country is suffering with rising inflation, high cost of food with comparatively low wages and increasing unemployment.

Socially, people are discontented also with many opposed to the enforcement of rules concerning dark, long clothing and head covering for women and conservative clothing and hairstyles for men. Drug abuse is a significant problem amongst the disaffected youth in particular.

Seed bearing fruit

New Christians often tell their family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues or fellow students about Jesus. One Iranian became a Christian while living away in Scandinavia. Within a month of his return home, 50 members of his extended family converted. By the time of his next visit one year later, the house church had grown to 250 members.

One burglar stumbled upon a sermon in the Farsi language while trying out his stolen satellite dish. He gave his life to Christ, told his friends who also worked in the world of crime and today they form a house church of 12.

According to an employee of the Iranian Home Ministry even children of government ministers and mullahs convert to Christianity.

Growing spiritually in hiding

Most house church members meet in secret to avoid the gaze of authorities, militant Islamists, informers and religious vigilantes. They rely on Christian radio and television programs, Internet and books in Farsi to grow spiritually.

"Once we sent Bible couriers into a remote town," says Stefan van Dijk (not his real name), Open Doors' operations head for Iran. "When they unpacked the Bibles in a house church the Christians there were overjoyed. Their leader said: 'Here are brothers and sisters who have converted through Christian radio programs and have been waiting for a Bible for years. So we decided to fast and pray for one week. Today it's the last day!'"

Muslim background believers from Iran tell about visions and dreams as a reason for converting, more than any other country in the Middle East.