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Lent Prayer - Azerbaijan

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Country/Region: Azerbaijan, Central Asia

Harassment of Christians in Azerbaijan takes several forms. Religious literature is censored; congregations have been warned that they could face "unpleasantness with the law" if they continue to meet; and churches must register in order to rent or own a meeting place. Without such registration, they are likely to face raids, threats and further pressure.

Praise the Lord that Christianity is growing in Azerbaijan, despite the harsh treatment of Christians by the authorities
Source: Самый древний, Wikimedia commons

Azerbaijan is around 90% Muslim, and the government gives preferential treatment to those religions considered "traditional" (Islam, Russian Orthodox Christianity and Judaism), while other forms of Christianity are actively restricted. Christians often face pressure from government and local authorities. Azerbaijan has repeatedly amended its laws to restrict the exercise of religious freedom and other human rights. The country's Religion Law, which was fi rst adopted in 1992, has been amended 13 times.

In 2011, tough new changes were proposed to legislation affecting people who produce religious literature that has not been vetted by the state. These followed constitutional amendments in January 2010 that forced all religious groups that had already gained state registration (i.e. legal permission to function) to re-register. Some months later, several churches were informed that their re-registration applications had been refused. One such church was the Cathedral of Praise Church in the capital city, Baku. When the church attempted to re-register in 2010 as required by law, its application was refused, and it lost a subsequent appeal. In addition, its building was destroyed in a fi re. But in 2011 the p astor reported that while being interrogated recently by the authorities on another matter he took the opportunity to ask permission for the congregation to meet in another church building, and this was granted!

Despite the harsh treatment Christianity is growing in Azerbaijan, and the number of ethnic Azeri Christians has been increasing in recent years. However, many are converts from Islam and therefore liable to face hostility from family, community and authorities.

Pray for the churches in Azerbaijan, as they face legal limitations and harsh penalties; pray that the authorities will recognise the right to freedom of religion and that there will be an easing of these restrictions. Give thanks that Christianity is growing in Azerbaijan, but keep praying for greater religious liberty in this country, which is only 2% Christian; pray that the churches may be left alone to worship and witness freely. Pray especially for Azeri converts, that the Lord will enable them to stand strong in their new faith and that Christian witness to the majority Muslim population may be with humility, wisdom and love.

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