



Libya



The Libyan revolution has not brought Christians protection and freedom

The future of Libya's Christians still hangs in the balance following the revolution that toppled the country's long-time ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, in 2011. Their position is highly insecure. The vast majority of the Libyan churches were comprised of expatriates, many from sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these Christians fled the country when the violence erupted. There are very few indigenous believers, all of them converts from Islam; they often suffer intense pressure from their families and communities and have few opportunities for fellowship or support.

There are some small signs of hope. Some of the restrictions on religious freedom imposed by the old regime are no longer being enforced. The draft constitution gives non-Muslims the freedom to practise their beliefs and outlaws discrimination based on religion with regard to legal, political and civil rights. The July 2012 elections saw Islamist parties trailing behind an alliance of more liberal and secular groups.

However, the constitution also makes Islam the religion of the state and sharia the principal source of legislation. Evangelism among Muslims is still prohibited, and the right to convert from Islam is not guaranteed. Although in April 2012 the National Transitional Council banned political parties based on religion, the ban was lifted a week later.

Libya was once a major seedbed for Islam in Africa, but the Islam that it promoted under Gaddafi was not extreme. However, there are now serious concerns that future political developments will see Islamists gain the ascendancy, leading to even greater oppression of Libya's Christians.

The country also remains unstable. Some regions are seeking autonomy; various militias are still in the field; and there have been many reports of human rights abuses. Vulnerable and isolated Christians and churches are still more at risk in such a context, especially from militant Islamists.

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