



Turkmenistan



Copies of Ruhnama, the "sacred" book of former President Niyazov

In August 2012 five Christians in the Lebap region of Turkmenistan were taken to court and fined for taking part in unregistered religious activity. One of them who tried to appeal was told that this was not allowed, and officials threatened to seize the family's property if the fine was not paid.

Even though persecution has eased slightly after the death in 2006 of President Niyazov, an eccentric, megalomaniac dictator, the Turkmen authorities still do their best to suppress Christian activity. A strict Religion Law passed in 2003 requires all religious groups in Turkmenistan to register. Unregistered churches are forbidden to conduct any religious activities, including services, evangelism or literature distribution, or to provide religious education. Their meetings may be raided and their property confiscated, and they are liable to fines and imprisonment. Pastors and members have sometimes been abused or beaten by the authorities.

The procedure for registration is cumbersome, and some churches fail to obtain it despite repeated efforts. Even registered churches experience close scrutiny by the government, and they face difficulties in renting or buying property for worship and meetings. They also have to obtain permission from local authorities for every activity, and this is sometimes denied.

The publication of religious literature is forbidden. In early 2012 an elderly Christian was detained and questioned for six hours by police after he tried to print copies of a small book of his Christian poetry. He was forced to sign a statement and banned from travelling outside his home region of Dashoguz while the case was investigated. Imported literature is approved only rarely by the authorities and is allowed only for registered groups.

Turkmenistan is mainly Muslim (96%), and ethnic Turkmen Christians who have converted from Islam are treated with suspicion and ostracised to pressure them to return.

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