



Afghanistan



A street scene in the capital, Kabul
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Afghanistan is one of the most hazardous countries in the world for Christians. They live in constant danger of violent persecution by armed groups and also by the government, which threatens to wield the death penalty against those who convert from Islam. Afghanistan has not experienced peace for many years, and Christians are particularly at risk of attack. For example, in early 2011, a video was circulated showing the beheading of Christian convert Abdul Latif by the Muslim Taliban in Herat Province.

In 1996 the Taliban, an extreme Islamist movement, seized power in Afghanistan. Their government, based on a very strict interpretation of Islamic sharia law, explicitly prescribed the death penalty for any Muslim converting to another faith and any non-Muslim trying to win converts. Although the Taliban were ousted in 2001, Afghan Christians, who are few in number and all converts from Islam or children of converts, remain highly vulnerable.

The conditions of Christians have not been much better under the current government than under the Taliban. Although the country's 2004 constitution guarantees religious freedom, it also states that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam". The death penalty can be imposed on the basis of sharia for those who leave Islam. Two Christians, Abdul Rahman and Said Musa, faced the penalty in 2006 and 2010 respectively, and both escaped it only after international pressure secured their release.

Afghan Christians, who are thought to number around 1,200 in the country, also risk losing their marriages, rejection from their families and communities, and loss of employment. Sharia law is effectively the law of the land. Although no Christians are currently known to be imprisoned for their faith, recent years have seen instances of harassment of those involved in Christian activity. Converts must follow Jesus alone or in great secrecy, as there are no church buildings and missionary endeavours meet with great hostility.

Despite the desperate situation faced by Christians, the Lord is working in remarkable ways in Afghanistan. Several sources reported last year that house churches there are seeing more people come to Christ.

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