



PRAY FOR PERSECUTED BROTHERS & SISTERS

Pray for the Persecuted Christians in AZERBAIJAN

Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the Body also.

(Hebrews 13:3)



Total Population: 10,139,177

Self-Proclaimed Christian Population: 3% – **Evangelical Witness: >1%**

Death Rate: 7.04/1000 per year: Just today: 196

Azerbaijan Doubles Down on Religious Freedom

06/29/2021 Azerbaijan (International Christian Concern) - This past month Azerbaijan's President and National Assembly passed new Religion Law and Administrative Code regulations which placed tighter restrictions and oversight on the rights and affairs of religious communities. Included amongst these revisions is a requirement for all non-Islamic religious leaders to be approved by the State Committee for Work and Religious Organizations. Spokesperson for the Russian Orthodox Diocese, Fr Konstantin Pominov, explained, "The appointment will have to be agreed with the Sheikh [Allahshukur Pashazade of the Muslim Board], the President [Ilham Aliyev] and the Patriarch [Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church]."

Composed in secrete by the President's office with no public consultation, debate, or scrutiny, such amendments to the law that have such a profoundly negative effective upon the lives of Azerbaijan's religious communities "violate all international standards"

according to human rights defender Rasul Jafarov. Even for Azerbaijan's Muslim majority, state control is heavy handed as no Muslim cleric is allowed to hold religious services outside of the official approval process, and mosques are closed until they are appointed a replacement. For religious communities without a "religious centre", they are banned from granting religious titles to clergy entirely, along with establishing religious educational institutions, or organizing pilgrimages abroad. No pathway is provided for religious communities without a "religious centre" on how to obtain one.

These new regulations build upon an already highly restrictive framework governing religious freedom in Azerbaijan. Human rights defender Elshan Hasanov explains, "as usual, all these amendments have a restrictive character, the result: pilgrimages - only with permission; mass religious rituals - only with permission; religious education - only with permission; literature - only with permission." Greater control of what the state views as a potential security liability seems to be the aim of President Aliyev's regime that has traditionally treated religious communities with suspicion. According to lawyer Subhan Hasanli, "this amounts to the installation of a new, state-centred religion."

Persecution in Azerbaijan (Voice of Martyrs)

- ① Owning and giving a Bible are punishable offenses against the State.
- ② **Families are the main persecutors of Christians.** Azerbaijan has a shame-honor culture in which those who leave Islam are considered to have brought shame on the family. The government also pressures Christians with heavy fines.
- ③ All exercise of freedom of religion and belief without State permission is illegal.
- ④ Secret or underground churches are targeted by police and authority.
- ⑤ Christians are losing human and civil rights.
- ⑥ According to law, "Foreigners and persons without citizenship shall be prohibited to conduct religious propaganda."
- ⑦ Religious associations/communes greater than nine persons must register with the government or risk a conviction of illegal assembly.