



# PRAY FOR PERSECUTED BROTHERS & SISTERS

## Pray for the Persecuted in Turkey

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

(Hebrews 13:3)

### What does persecution look like in Turkey? What is life like for Christians?



Total Population: 84,339,067

Self-Proclaimed Christian Population: 0.2% – **Evangelical Witness: 0%**

Muslim: 97%

(Open Doors) In Turkey, religious nationalism is very strong and is growing, putting enormous pressure on Christians. In contrast with previous years, the government has not only targeted foreign Christians, but has also banned foreign Christians who are married to Turkish citizens—and who have children who are Turkish citizens. The atmosphere of increasing nationalism leaves precious little room for anyone to proclaim a different message, and Christians have to take great care in sharing their faith with others, as it can arouse suspicion.

Converting to Christianity from Islam is not illegal, but converts will likely face opposition and pressure from their family and the local community. In some cases, this can lead to divorce or disinheritance. The dangers mean some

believers lead a double life and hide their conversion. Religious affiliation on identity documents can be legally changed, but in truth it may be a stressful and difficult process. Even leaving one denomination for another can be problematic.

This cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects Christians from non-Muslim backgrounds, for example, ethnic minorities such as Greeks, Armenians and Syrians. They are barely recognized as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions. Christians have limited access to state employment, and experience discrimination in the private sector, especially where employers have ties to the government. Since religious affiliation is still recorded on old identity cards and the electronic chip of new identity cards, it is easy to discriminate against Christian applicants.

Turkey has jumped nine places since last year's World Watch List, reflecting the increasing and stifling impact of religious nationalism on Christianity and a clear increase in reported violence.

The repurposing of two historic churches from museums to mosques over the summer of 2020 reinforced growing nervousness among Christians over the Islamic and nationalistic direction in which the country is moving. In July, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul—a church built in the sixth century and converted to a mosque in the 15th century before being turned into a museum in 1935—would again be turned into a mosque. Two weeks later, the building was opened for Muslim prayers. This has led to fear among Christians, with some younger believers considering leaving the country and moving to the West. There is even evidence to suggest that younger people generally in Turkey are refusing to buy into the pervading religious nationalism.

Meanwhile, many foreign Christians are having to leave Turkey involuntarily. According to the Association of Protestant Churches, since January 2019 almost 60 foreign nationals—many working in Turkey as pastors or community leaders—have been told to leave or have not been allowed to re-enter the country.

## **Turkish Military Campaign Seemingly Targets Syrian and Iraqi Christians**

10/14/2021 Turkey (International Christian Concern) - Turkey's supposed fight against terrorism in Syria and Iraq coincides with their bombing of Christian and other minority communities. The long-standing fight against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a designated terrorist organization by Turkey, the EU, and the US, has spilled beyond Turkey's own borders and even PKK territory. The most recent campaign that began at the end of August has killed at least a dozen civilians.

"Turkey has had ambition to expand its territorial control of Syria for several years now. This recent escalation is pretty significant. They're doing this while the world is distracted by what's happening in Afghanistan," according to Dr. Amy Holmes, a fellow with the Woodrow Wilson Center. Although a ceasefire agreement was signed in October 2019, Turkey has continued its bombardment of Syria. In the first year after the ceasefire, Tel Tamer's Assyrian Christian region was targeted every month by Turkish airstrikes. Parallels are being drawn between Turkey's current actions and its Ottoman Empire predecessor and the Islamic State, both of the latter severely persecuting and driving out Christians. "The recent attacks on our villages brought back to our memory Safar Barlik in 1915, when the Ottoman Empire targeted us ... Now, here in Syria, history is repeating itself. Those who attack our villages ... are no different from ISIS because they are displacing us and destroying our villages," commented Elias Antar, the head of the Assyrian People's Assembly.