

# Christians in Iran Don't Expect Positive Changes After Rowhani Election

Hasan Rowhani won Iran's presidential election over the weekend. President-elect Rowhani often is portrayed as being a "moderate" Iranian cleric, but because of his loyalty to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, Open Doors contacts from the region don't expect positive changes.

"The Christians I recently spoke with seemed rather apathetic about the elections," says an Open Doors fieldworker in response to the election of the new president. "They don't seem to expect significant changes in Iran's policies against Christians."

This is corroborated by an Iranian believer who told Open Doors last week, "In your Western media, the candidates are divided into conservatives and reformers, as if there is a choice, but let me tell you this: There is no choice. All of the candidates are from Ayatollah Khamenei's team."

Christians as well as minorities, such as Baha'i and Dervishes, have seen an intensification of **religious persecution** in Iran since 2005, when former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected for the first time. Ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, and therefore ethnic Persian Christians are seen as apostates. But even officially registered churches of the Armenian and Assyrian groups in Iran face harsh treatment when conducting activities in Farsi, the country's national tongue.

In pre-election meetings, Rowhani seemed intent to transform the damaged relations between Iran and the West and called for the release of political prisoners. In the theocratic country of Iran, it is yet to be seen how much latitude the new

president will have under the rule of Ayatollah Khamenei.

The fieldworker comments, "The question is, Can Rowhani make a change? At least he is an intellectual, who graduated in the United Kingdom and has called for less confrontational relations with the West. I guess we just have to see in order to know, according to Iranian standards, how moderate he is."

It is too early for Iranian Christians to know if they should be encouraged by the election of Rowhani.

"I really don't know what will be next," the Iranian believer said after the elections. "I pray for a lasting joy for all Iranians, freedom for prisoners of conscience, comfort for the victims of political violence, [and] justice, liberty, equality and prosperity for the future of our land."

Iran is ranked No. 8 on the Open Doors 2013 World Watch List of the worst persecutors of Christians around the world. For almost 60 years, Open Doors has worked in the world's most oppressive and restrictive countries, strengthening Christians to stand strong in the face of persecution and equipping them to shine Christ's light in these places.