

Iran Begins National Christian Church Shutdown

Earlier this week, international leaders praised Iran for closing down some of its nuclear program. The U.S. and EU are both reportedly easing some economic sanctions on Iran as a result, one of the conditions of an agreement made last year.

According to Michael Wood of Open Doors USA, a nationwide church shutdown is also underway.

“It’s basically illegal to even go to a church,” Wood explains. “Those that have been going—the government has their names, their addresses; they’re really being scrutinized and followed.”

Believers began meeting in houses instead, but even then they weren’t safe.

“Anything that draws large crowds to a home brings attention and investigation,” says Wood. “I know of one church leader who is encouraging his people to ... just go out and have coffee or something, and that’s their church. They share what God’s doing in their lives one on one.”

Wood says the situation has gotten increasingly difficult for believers since the last presidential election. More people are coming to Christ, he says, which results in resistance from Iran’s Islamic government.

Shortly after Christmas, Farsi-speaking members of a major church in Tehran were told they can no longer attend service. Farsi is Iran’s official language, and the majority of this church’s congregation are Farsi-speakers.

“[The government] thought that would prohibit or inhibit people from wanting to come, but it did the opposite: More

people were trying to attend a worship service,” Wood explains.

When government officials became aware of this reaction, they ordered a nationwide church shutdown.

It’s the latest move in a nation holding the ninth spot on the Open Doors World Watch List. The annual publication is a ranking of 50 countries where persecution of Christians is most severe. Iran’s Shiite-led government views Christianity as a threat, and any Muslim who becomes a follower of Jesus faces the death penalty.

And yet, “Under the persecution that’s going on, you see a growing church,” Wood says.

A knee-jerk reaction to this story might be to pray for persecution in Iran to stop. However, as Wood points out, “The only way that you’re going to stop persecution is to stop sharing your faith in Jesus Christ.”

Instead, ask the Lord to protect Iranian believers. Pray for perseverance and strength for believers who are tortured in prison for their faith. Pray that more Muslims will discover the truth of the gospel.

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