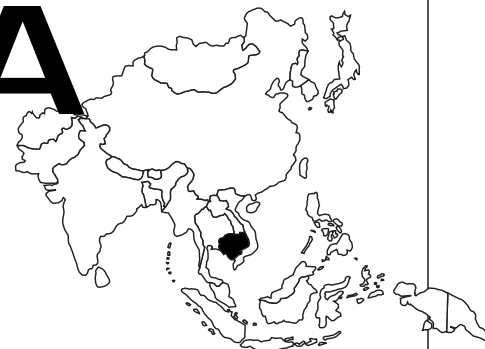


CAMBODIA



CAMBODIA, FORMERLY KAMPUCHEA, EMERGED FROM THE INTENSE SUFFERING OF THE 1970S WITH A SHATTERED ECONOMY AND A VULNERABLE CHURCH. CHRISTIANS SEEK TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL TOGETHER WITH AID AND DEVELOPMENT WORK.

population

- Population: 13.9 million
- Density: 79 per sq km
- 90% of the people are Khmer
- 42% are under 15 years old
- More than 85% of the population live in rural areas

Cambodia's population was reduced by between 2-3 million in the 1975-79 holocaust and accompanying wars, famines and flight of refugees.

religions

- Buddhist 82.6%
- Chinese religions 4.7%
- Animist 4.35%
- Muslim 3.9%
- Non-religious/other 2.9%
- Christian 1.2%
- Other 0.38%

Buddhism has been the national religion since the 15th century. The Khmer Rouge sought to eradicate all religion; 90 percent of Christians and most Buddhist monks perished. Since 1979 there have been periods of greater tolerance. Christians have been allowed to worship openly only since 1990.

language

The official national language is Khmer, or Cambodian, which is related to ancient Indian languages. French, formerly an important second language, is being discouraged and English is in great demand. Only 35 percent of the population is literate.

geography

Cambodia is on the Mekong River in southwest Indochina, covering a total area of 113,470 square miles. It is an extremely fertile, alluvial plain. Massive logging has reduced the rain forests which once covered much of the country.

climate

Cambodia has a tropical monsoon climate. Average temperatures are 22-28°C [71-81°F]. A rainy season extends from May to November.

history

From the 7th to 15th centuries, the Angkor priest-kings built up the country, built great temples, and controlled much of Southeast Asia. Cambodians today are nostalgic for this golden age when they were an independent and powerful people.

There followed 500 years of regional and global conflicts with Thai, Vietnamese, French, Japanese and U.S. invasions or occupations, before the Vietnam War spilled over to Cambodia in 1970-75. This opened the way for the extreme Marxist Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975. The Khmer Rouge tried to isolate Cambodia from all foreign influence. In bloody raids on neighboring Thailand and Vietnam, they also tried to restore to it the glory and size of the Angkor Period.

The Vietnamese army ousted the Khmer Rouge in 1979, but civil war

between four contending armies raged with superpower support until 1991. UN-supervised elections in 1993 were held despite opposition by the Khmer Rouge.

Since the election of July 1998, a form of democratic government has been established, though its work is severely hampered by corruption, civil service over-managing, little income and lawlessness. Millions of land mines remain, killing and maiming every day. Forty percent of villages have a mine problem and one person in every 290 is an amputee. Cambodia's economy is performing at only 40-50 percent of its pre-war capacity, and the country is among the world's poorest.

In 2004 King Sihamoni took over from his father, Sihanouk.

christianity

The gospel came late to Cambodia. The first Protestant missionary arrived in 1923, translated the New Testament in 1933 and published the whole Bible in 1953. Its message was not welcome and few believed or obeyed it.

In 1965 the government's anti-American crusade forced the missionaries to withdraw. After 40 years of work, they left the Khmer evangelical church with less than a thousand members.

In 1970, with the rise of the pro-American regime, the return of the missionaries, and the beginning of the war with the Khmer Rouge, there was freedom and growth for the church.



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Many turned to God. There were large evangelistic crusades and Christians labored with a sense of urgency. When war broke out there were three congregations in Phnom Penh; by 1975 this had increased to 30.

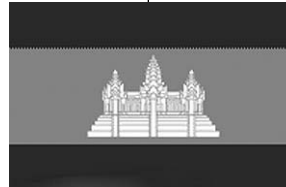
In response to urgent requests, OMF sent five members to Phnom Penh in 1974 to work alongside the church. But a year later all missionaries were forced to make a reluctant exodus, leaving a church of around 10,000 members. The Khmer Rouge assumed control of the country in 1975. The persecution was savage; 90 percent of the Christians and all Christian leaders were martyred or fled the country.

From 1975 hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fled to Thailand, where

they were housed in refugee camps. OMF workers previously expelled from the country went to the camps with the message of hope, and over the following years several thousand Cambodians were baptized.

Despite Pol Pot's attempt to crush the church and the pressures on it during the next decades, the small remnant has grown from a few hundred Christians to approximately 40,000 today. There are now around 750 churches.

By 1991 OMF and other missions once again had members resident in Cambodia, learning the language. In 1994 the government gave permission



to OMF to work in Cambodia as a church-planting mission, but also required OMF personnel to fulfill this in humanitarian terms. Therefore, at least

half of the OMF team membership are involved with development work as their principal ministry. The OMF team has grown rapidly in the last few years, though the opportunities grow even

faster. It is a relatively young team and welcomes short-term workers.

In the aftermath of the war and oppression, many are open to the gospel. But the infant churches need much support and prayer. All the leaders are young and most lack adequate biblical training. There are therefore many extremes of teaching due to a lack of biblical understanding. There is a lack of unity, with many divisions between congregations. Christian Khmer literature is in desperately short supply. OMFers work with the church in all these areas, seeking to build mature, self-supporting and self-propagating congregations.

OMF strategic priorities

- To train church leaders.
- To minister to physical and social needs. Half the OMF team is principally involved in development work.
- To plant churches. OMF is legally registered as a church-planting mission.
- University teaching.

opportunities available

- Christian professionals in university teaching, English teaching and a wide range of development work
- Evangelism and church planting
- Short-term openings

how to pray

- The terrible genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge and subsequent civil wars have devastated the people. There are many widows and orphans, and many families were decimated. The land is strewn with mines and many people are maimed physically and emotionally. Pray for a lasting peace with full political and religious freedom.
- Pray that God may raise up honorable leaders for the nation who will alleviate the sufferings of the people.
- For centuries Cambodia has been in spiritual darkness. There is strong opposition towards any ideological rival to Buddhism, many spirit shrines and hatred generated by 20 years of war.
- The church needs prayer:
 - For freedom from government manipulation and interference, and wisdom in relating to the authorities.
 - For trained and effective leaders. There is one interdenominational Bible school in Phnom Penh, plus several other small schools.
 - For effective Christian families in a nation where family cohesion, trust and love have been severely impaired.
 - For ministry to emotional and spiritual needs of both believers and non-Christians, and vision for evangelism.
- Christian ministry to physical needs:
 - Returning refugees from the Thai camps.
 - Most Cambodians with skills or an education were killed during the war, so expatriate input has been essential.
- The less reached:
 - The Buddhist majority.
 - The Vietnamese: they are receptive, and some are coming to Christ in Cambodia.
 - The Cham Muslims: several believers but no known churches.
 - Tribal peoples: pray for church-planting work to begin.
- Written teaching materials are desperately needed. False teachings and cults spread as the doors open wider; few of the believers have the background knowledge of Scripture to combat such error. Radio ministries are important.