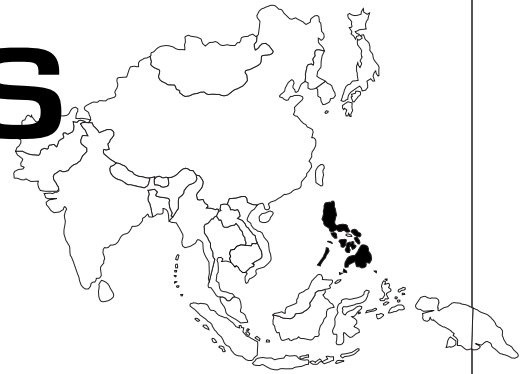


PHILIPPINES



KNOWN AS THE ONLY CHRISTIAN COUNTRY IN ASIA, THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES IS STILL RECOVERING FROM ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SETBACKS AS IT SEEKS TO ESTABLISH ITSELF IN TODAY'S WORLD.

population

- Population: 89.5 million
- Density: 300 per sq km

The term Filipino, originally denoting a person of Spanish descent born in the Philippines, has been applied since the 19th century to the "Christianized" Malay-Indonesian peoples [95 percent of the population].

Population distribution is uneven; large areas are virtually uninhabited, while others have a relatively high population density. Over 10 million people live in the capital, Metro Manila.

religions

- Roman Catholic 80.9%
- Evangelical Christian 2.8%
- Iglesia ni Kristo sect 2.3%
- Philippine Independent Church 2%
- Other Christian 4.5%
- Muslim 5%
- Other 1.8%
- Unspecified 0.6%
- None 0.1%

language

In the Philippines there are eight major languages and about 170 smaller language groups. The official language is Filipino, which is based on Tagalog, a Malayo-Polynesian language influenced by Spanish, Chinese and Arabic. English is used for government, business and tertiary education. There is no universal language.

geography

There are over 7,000 islands, with Luzon [north] the largest and Mindanao [south] the next. The islands are of volcanic origin and all are mountainous. Earthquakes are fairly common and there are about 20 active volcanoes.

climate

The Philippines has an average annual temperature of about 27°C [81°F] but inland areas are hotter. The rainy season occurs from May to November; the dry season occurs from December to April. From June to October the islands are struck by an average of 20 typhoons.

history

The Filipinos are of mixed descent, but predominantly Malay. They also have Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, European and American heritage. Islam spread to the southern islands from the 13th century when 13 ethno-linguistic groups embraced Islam. They still have a strong Muslim identity.

In 1521 the islands were seen by a European and in 1542 the Spanish claimed the archipelago and named it in honor of their King, Philip II. Missionaries arrived on the next boat.

Conversions were rapid. Some were forced, but many were from seeing the ceremonial splendor of the Roman Catholic rites which aroused fear and admiration. The work of the missionaries established Spanish rule

and united most of the Filipinos through a common religion.

Conflict with Muslims in the south began in the early days of Spanish influence and continues today. Some ethno-linguistic groups in mountainous areas did not embrace Islam or Christianity and remained animistic.

The islands were relatively quiet until the late 19th century when several societies formed to rebel against the Spanish and claim independence. The Filipinos were gaining ground in their battle for freedom, and just when independence seemed within reach the islands were ceded by Spain to the USA. Filipinos found themselves facing a new colonial government. The U.S. established military rule and tensions resurfaced.

American policies changed direction several times, but by 1936 agreement was reached to grant independence. The Second World War intervened, and Japanese occupation caused widespread destruction. However, the Republic of the Philippines was formally proclaimed on July 4, 1946.

Rebuilding the country economically, socially and politically took decades. The corner seemed to have been turned when Ferdinand Marcos was elected president in 1965. But unrest followed and in 1972 Marcos declared martial law, by which he ruled until 1986. He then fled the country after rigged elections brought the population to the streets. He took undetermined amounts



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of illegally-gained wealth with him.

Corazon Aquino, wife of the murdered opposition leader, became president. Her government survived seven coups, but had limited success in addressing the economic situation, taming the excesses of the military or lessening the impact of the communist and Muslim secessionist guerrilla wars.

Fidel Ramos was elected president on a minority vote in 1992; the first democratic change of government for 26 years. [Aquino's government was democratically elected but only recognized after the people power



revolution that drove out Marcos.]

Under Ramos the country saw a measure of economic growth and stability. In June 1998 Joseph Estrada was elected president for six years. However he was ousted after corruption scandals in early 2001 and replaced by Gloria

Macapagal Arroyo. Mrs. Arroyo faced strong opposition after being accused of cheating in the 2004 election.

christianity

Most Filipinos mixed the Catholicism of their Spanish conquerors with their own animistic [spirit worship] beliefs. Even

today Filipino Catholicism, or more accurately "Folk Catholicism," is mixed with animism.

With American rule in the early 1900s came religious liberty. Evangelicals came to the Philippines and began to plant churches. By the end of the Second World War these had become liberal.

Together with a number of other mission societies, OMF began work in 1951. Workers were initially assigned to assist Chinese churches in Manila and Davao and to share the gospel with the Mangyan tribes of Mindoro. Many churches have since been planted which support their own pastors. The churches are members of the Alliance of Bible Christian Communities of the Philippines [ABCCOP], an affiliation of independent, evangelical churches.

OMF is involved in essential services to the church in the Philippines: theological training [training Filipinos as they launch out in cross-cultural missions both within the country and abroad], literature production, Bible translation, work with the urban poor, primary health care, literacy and other support functions. There are many fast-growing cults. The church needs to present a clear message of biblical Christianity.

OMF's strategic priorities

- Urban church planting
- Christian education and leadership training
- Ethnic Muslim minorities
- Missions training

opportunities

- Evangelism and church planting
- Theological teaching
- Development work
- Teaching missionaries' children
- Short-term placements

how to pray

- The turmoil, suffering and rapid changes in the nation have prepared millions to seek a personal faith in Christ. Praise God that growth has been marked in all evangelical groups.
- The government needs prayer. Courageous and unpopular decisions on moral, social and economic issues need to be taken. Pray for Christians in positions of power.
- The church faces critical challenges:
 - How to give a biblical response to the gross inequalities and corruption in society.
 - Rapid growth with inadequate discipling. The proliferation of new groups, often led by those with minimal training and almost no accountability, has given rise to doctrinal distortions, fanciful interpretations and problems such as corruption.
 - Praise God for outstanding Filipino leaders, but their numbers are too few. Pray for the theological and Bible colleges [there are over 100].
 - The lack of spiritual unity across denominational lines.
- Pray for a humble sensitivity on the part of Western missionaries as Filipino Christians are seeking an identity of their own.
- Pray also for safety. Missionaries have been threatened, kidnapped and even killed by guerrillas and criminal gangs.
- People who have not heard the gospel:
 - Muslims: Five million in 14 ethnic groups.
 - Mindanao: The 18 Manobo tribal peoples are isolated, and outreach to them is limited by warfare and intimidation.
 - Settled central mountain peoples of Luzon.
 - In Manila 3 million people live in squalid shanty-town slums, some living on and from the city rubbish dumps. There are 900 depressed areas in the city, 400 of which have no church. Most of the churches are in the more affluent areas.
 - Of the Chinese population, 3 percent are evangelical Christians.
- Student ministry has developed despite obstacles to open evangelism. Pray for the development of strong witnessing groups in schools and universities.
- There are over 100 Christian bookstores in the country. Few countries are better served by Christian television and radio.