

## **TURKEY, IRAN, SYRIA June 2005**

We have much exciting news to report from a recent visit to a number of brethren and sisters from the Moslem world. Their faith and enthusiasm to witness in the face of so much persecution is a great encouragement.

We began by visiting the UNHCR in Ankara, Turkey. We have made many appeals for them to positively consider our Iranian brethren who are still in Turkey, who are all at different stages of the asylum process. Some of them have been accepted by UNHCR but the Turkish Government refuses to give them exit visas. We have a number of quite urgent cases and we brought these before the UNHCR in letters and then followed this up with a visit. We were warmly received by them and were impressed with their awareness of all the cases we brought before them. Three Iranian refugee brethren came to Ankara but were unable to come in with us to the interview. They remained outside in a nearby café- worriedly waiting for the outcome. Beforehand we sat with them there and went through again all their cases and prayed earnestly for blessing. We believe those prayers were heard although there are still some worrying cases.



Photo:

In the café before going into the meeting, after prayer and getting all documents and facts in order

We saw the chief of the UNHCR mission in Ankara and were again able to present our community's case. We emphasized that all who are baptized by us are thoroughly taught the Gospel and interviewed before baptism, and that we have personal knowledge of each of our Iranian brethren seeking asylum, visiting those who are in Turkey regularly. Our interview lasted nearly three hours and we were able to answer and pose a number of questions about our faith and our process of preaching and ensuring that those we present to UNHCR are genuine brethren.

The outcome was as follows:

- The case of Br & Sis H. UNHCR have agreed to grant them asylum status but they cannot leave Turkey because the Turkish Government won't give them exit visas. This is because Br H. was in Iraq before coming to Turkey, and Turkey fears that if they let even one refugee from Iraq leave, then even more refugees will arrive. UNHCR cannot override this policy, but they did assure us that they consider Br & Sr H worthy of refugee status and will not allow them to be deported, which is what all the brethren fear.
- Br. M's case had been turned down initially, but UNHCR agreed to make an exception because of our involvement and re-open the case for re-consideration, which was good news.
- Br. S and his family had been given asylum status and understood they had been given a place in Sweden. However they had just received a deportation letter which they were very worried about. UNHCR assured us the Turkish Police had no right to issue such a letter if he had received asylum status from them and there must have been a 'misunderstanding'. Also, Sweden has stopped taking any refugees from Turkey, hence the confusion. In all these cases we received positive assurance that our brethren would not be deported to Iran and that ultimately they would be allowed to leave Turkey for a safe country.

- Br. Hussein's case was not able to be re-opened and he still awaits deportation. We really need to pray for him as he doesn't know what to do.

UNHCR asked us to submit an explanation of Christadelphians to them for their records and this we were happy to do. We were again able to genuinely express thanks to them for their especial interest in us and willingness to give three hours of their time to meeting. We thank all those who have been petitioning and writing on behalf of our brethren.

We were able to meet with our sister D, who was thrown out of her home by her parents after her baptism some time ago. She is now working part time to support herself as she finishes her studies, and also receives regular support from the brotherhood. We were again encouraged by her faith and commitment to the path she has bravely chosen for the Lord. She's unwell, however, with a hyperthyroid, and such health care has to be paid for now.

We moved on to a town in southern Turkey where we found mixed news. The ecclesia had recently baptized another 10 contacts, bringing their number to 36. They had raised money for one of the sisters to go to Iran, where a Russian sister has married an Iranian and is in difficulties. We encouraged them not to marry out of the faith, but they already see the dangers of this from her experience. Another sister had had her 38 year old Kurdish husband summoned to do army service, which he had not responded to. Military Police recently came to their apartment and took him away to a town in Kurdistan, where he is now 'under military supervision' whatever that means. Our sister and the two young children are very upset and of course this means they are left with no income much. We gave financial support as we could.

We were also able to meet two other sisters in the same area who have very difficult domestic situations on account of their faith. We did a study of the parables together and then broke bread. We really felt they had a firm faith and deep grasp of the height of our calling to be Christ's people.

Next we met up with our newly baptized brother Scotty. In the months since his baptism he has been very actively preaching and has endeared himself to the ecclesia in Antakya. He has been active in distributing New Testaments, Bible Basics etc, and has even written and photocopied his own tract in Turkish:



Photo:

brothers Scotty and Mehmet in Antakya with their box of literature. Scotty is holding his photocopied tract which he bravely distributes.

We were then able to meet with HASSAN from Syria, and after a very encouraging interview, we baptized him in the sea just over the Syrian-Turkish border. Our brother was raised in a Moslem school but then converted to Christianity, but having been through a number of churches he rejected the trinity, and having studied Bible Basics was eager to be baptized. We need to pray for our brother as he copes with a hostile environment and seeks to spread the true Gospel in Syria.



Photo:  
Scot and Duncan baptizing our first Syrian brother



Photo:  
... and receiving our first Syrian brother into our world-wide fellowship

There are other contacts very close to baptism.

We also had the pleasure of telephone contact with our newly baptized brother in Iraq. The situation is obviously pretty bad but he is holding up and determined to spread the Gospel further.

Finally we had the pleasure of meeting up with our brother K from the Tehran, Iran underground ecclesia who has been bravely preaching to his friends. He and one of his friends came all the way from Iran to Turkey to meet us, so that brother A his friend could be safely baptized. We spent several hours interviewing him, which was a pure pleasure. One cannot fail to be impressed with the conviction of these brethren, who not only have themselves converted to the truth, but risk so much in order to spread the Gospel yet further, despite the death threat. The two brethren informed us of the worsening situation in Iran given the new Government. Things are getting even more extremely Islamic. So it was a sobering experience to discreetly baptize brother A in a blow up paddling pool in an apartment. Cindy deserves an honorary degree in baptism technology- she took the tube off a vacuum cleaner in order to get the water from the tap into the paddling pool, which took up the entire floor of the small kitchen. We performed the baptism, and then had the arduous task of scooping all the water out of the pool into the sink. We concluded with a memorial service, recalling that all our sufferings are nothing compared to Him who walked this way before.

Our Iranian brethren are in touch with other contacts of ours in Iran and we are hoping they will be able to baptize them. They risked taking some copies of Farsi Bible Basics back with them and our prayer is they will not get in trouble at the border, as such material is considered contraband and worthy of lashes if not worse.



*The baptism in the paddling pool*

In all these things we give thanks to our Father and ask for your prayers for our dear and brave brethren and sisters, whose reward in the future Kingdom we believe shall be great.

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks Christadelphian Ministries

