

GLOBAL PEOPLE PROFILES: Tosk Albanians of Albania, Kanuri of Nigeria, and Achenese of Indonesia.

—V. David Garrison

Tosk Albanians of Albania

Albania is one of the most tightly restricted Communist nations on earth. Situated on the northern peninsula of Greece between the Greek Republic and that of Yugoslavia, Albania is a curious anomaly when compared with other nations of Western Europe. Formerly Orthodox Muslim, since 1946 the country has been under a Stalinist-styled government which has heavily repressed all religions over the past four decades. Recent trends, in concert with changes in Eastern Europe, could significantly change this.

The citizens of Albania are divided into two major ethnolinguistic groups: the Tosks and the Ghegs. Together, these two peoples constitute nearly 95% of the country's population. The larger of the two are the 1.4 million Ghegs, but the dominant and official language of the country is Albanian Tosk which is also called by its native speakers shqip, arber or zhgabe. The Tosk and Gheg languages are mutually unintelligible. The Tosk are primarily located in the south with the Gheg in the north. Along with the Gheg, the Tosk are one of the largest language communities in Europe which have no complete Bible in their own language. Portions of the Tosk Bible were translated in the early part of this century and according to *Ethnologue* a modern translation work is in progress.

Following its conquest in 1478, centuries of Turkish Ottoman rule resulted in a majority of the Albanian population claiming allegiance to Islam prior to the anti-religious policies of the modern Communist government. While the country today claims that 97% of its citizens are atheists, indications are that many quietly cling to their Muslim and Greek Orthodox faiths. Research indicates that as many as 57,000 Tosks may secretly be practicing Christians. Many of these have received the gospel through radio broadcasting in their language which has continued for many years. Others may have heard the gospel through contact with some of the 55,000 Tosks living in Greece, or the 115,000 Tosks living in Italy. Despite the existence of these Christian believers, it is estimated that 61 percent

of the Albanian Tosks have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Kanuri of Nigeria

There are nearly 4.5 million Kanuri people living primarily in the Borno state of northern Nigeria with 200,000 living across the border in Niger and an additional 100,000 living in Chad. Others are scattered across Cameroon and Benin. Most Kanuri live in non-urban settings: hamlets, villages and small towns.

Despite their great population, less than 500 Nigerian Kanuri claim Christianity as their religion. This leaves more than 8,000 Kanuri individuals who have never heard the Gospel for every single church member. Estimates indicate that as many as 3.6 million Kanuri have yet to be exposed to the Gospel for the first time. Internecine hostilities between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria in recent years have made it difficult for the many Christians in the southern part of the country to effectively communicate the gospel to Muslim peoples such as the Kanuri living in the north. The great majority of the Kanuri people are Muslim. As one of the official languages of Nigeria, kanuri is widely spoken and read. Consequently, there is some Christian radio broadcasting in the language. However, the Kanuri still do not yet have a New Testament translated into their own language, though small portions of the Bible were translated into kanuri in 1949. According to *Ethnologue*, no further translation work is in progress.

Achenese or Aceh of Indonesia

There are more than 3 million Aceh or Achenese people live in Northern Aceh Province, on the northern coast of the island of Sumatra. Ethnographically, the Aceh are an Austronesian Malayo-Polonesian people. The Achenese language has been classified as Austronesian and seems to be related to Cham. Achenese, however, has been strongly influenced by Malay, which was used both as a court language and the language of trade.

The Achenese for centuries were

involved in, and at times dominated, sea trade in the eastern half of the Indian Ocean. The Achenese were among the first peoples to accept Islam, and as staunch Moslems, they were able to oppose Portuguese control of trade as well as to resist Dutch incursions into their territory. Achenese adhere strongly to traditional values. However, they often do not distinguish between Islamic and pre-Islamic ideas. The Achenese are known throughout Indonesia for the zealotry of their belief in Islam. Many consider them fanatics. Aceh itself is known as Serambi Mekah, the front porch of Mecca. The fanaticism, however, is mostly a matter of emphasis on the necessity of being a Muslim rather than a faithful observance of all the tenets of the faith. Islamic duties in Aceh are often observed in the breach. While modernist reform movements have been active since the 1930s, the practices of many people, both urban and rural, are still far from the ideal espoused by the reformers. Many Adat practices, such as visits to graves and mystical practices, continue, having been incorporated into Islamic belief.

The Achehnese people are one of the least evangelized peoples in the world. There is presently no New Testament in the aceh language though Scripture portions were translated in 1973. There is also no radio broadcasting in the aceh language, secular or religious. There may be as many as 290 Christians from this people though there are no known Achehnese churches. These believers are predominantly related to Christianity through intermarriage with Christians of other ethnic descent. Research indicates that nearly 87% of the Achehnese people have yet to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time. This translates into more than 2.5 million Achehnese men, women and children who have never heard of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

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