

IRAN

Iran was known as Persia until 1935 and is now officially the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its population of 78 million makes it the second most populated nation in the Middle East. Iraq borders to the west. Saudi Arabia is directly across the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan and Pakistan border on the east.

Iran has been a quasi-theocracy since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which deposed the Shah of Iran. Democratically elected President Hassan Rouhani is head of the republic, but divine leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei controls the military, the judiciary and the state broadcasting services. Shiite Islam is the state religion of Iran, with Sunni Muslims constituting a very small minority of the nation. ½ of 1% of the population is Christian but there is much religious persecution. According to the state, only Armenians and Assyrians can be Christian – ethnic Persians are by definition Muslim, and therefore ethnic Persian Christians are by definition apostates. This makes almost all Christian activity illegal.

Iran continues to face international criticism for not adhering to the requirements of United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding its nuclear facilities and its uranium enrichment program. The current negotiations by our administration with Iran over its nuclear program have resulted in political disagreement here in the US. There is speculation that Iran sponsors terrorist groups throughout the world.