Cambodia

Formerly Kampuchea, emerged from the intense suffering of the 1970s with a shattered economy and a vulnerable church. Over the past 20 years, God has been building his Church in remarkable ways, although the need for urgent evangelization and discipleship among the peoples of Cambodia remains.

Population
- Population: 15.1 million
- Density: 83 per sq km
- Almost 90% of the people are Khmer
- 33% are under 15 years old
- More than 75% 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 83.3%
- Chinese religions 2.9%
- Animist 4.8%
- Muslim 2.3%
- Non-religious 3.0%
- Christian 3.1% (*Only 1% evangelical)
- Other 0.6%

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.

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 71-81°F [22-28°C]. 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. Although Cambodia’s economy is growing, the country is still among the world’s poorest.

In 2004 King Sihanouk took over from his father, King 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 missionaries to withdraw. After 40 years of faithful work, the Khmer evangelical church had less than a thousand members when they had to leave.

In 1970, with the rise of a 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. 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 International 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...
almost 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 International and workers from other organizations previously expelled from the country went to the camps with the message of hope, and over the following years several thousand Cambodians were baptized. By 1991 OMF International and other missions once again had members resident in Cambodia, learning the language. In 1994 the Cambodian government gave permission to OMF International to engage in religious and humanitarian work. The team has grown rapidly over the last 10 years, but the opportunities for long and short-term work grow even faster. 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 150,000 today. There are now around 2,500 churches.

Despite this remarkable advance of the gospel, 99 percent of Cambodians are still living without Christ. Most church growth is taking place in larger cities and towns, while the vast majority of the population lives in rural locations. Many of these provincial areas remain unreached with the gospel. Recent research has shown that 12,000 of Cambodia’s 14,000 villages are still without a church.

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Vision
By God’s grace we see communities of disciples who are following Christ in every aspect of life and multiplying throughout Cambodia and beyond.

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Mission
To glorify God by the urgent evangelization and discipleship of the peoples of Cambodia.