

Table Talk UZBEKISTAN

WEIGH IN

In the 1960s, the Aral Sea was the world's fourth largest lake. However, because of excessive irrigation, it soon began losing a significant volume of water. Today, the sea is extremely salty and a fraction of its former size.



People in Uzbekistan are known for their hospitality. Guests sit on floor cushions surrounding low-lying tables that contain a variety of food on platters. The small individual plates used by guests are not meant to be loaded, but to function like a party napkin.



The government of Uzbekistan, in an attempt to appear diplomatic, permits religion but requires individual groups to register. Unregistered churches are deemed illegal and, if discovered, attending believers risk severe fines and imprisonment. However, applying for registration exposes Christian groups to the likelihood of being denied and further persecuted.



In Uzbekistan, Christian converts from a Muslim background are commonly ostracized by family members. Ostracism is the intentional act of excluding someone from a social group or activity.



In the past, the area surrounding the Aral Sea hosted a vibrant economy, providing numerous Uzbeks with income. Since the lake all but disappeared, many people have sought jobs elsewhere. What effects would a receding lake have on the life of an Uzbek residing in the region?

Compare the hospitality demonstrated in Uzbekistan versus that which is typically practised in Canada. During your discussion, define and address the implications of individualism and collectivism. How comfortable would you feel eating a meal in either of these ways?

The members of most churches in Uzbekistan meet secretly under the guise of attending a social gathering in order to conceal their Christian activities from the authorities. Yet, despite governmental interference, the Uzbek church continues to grow. Why do you think Christianity is expanding in the midst of such hostility?

Being ostracized is extremely painful for many believers in Uzbekistan. Imagine having to face rejection from your family for following Jesus. Even if you chose to abandon your faith to appease your family, how would this influence your familial relationships in the future, knowing the conditions of their love? Compare this with the value of God's unconditional love.

ONE WAY

The Quran is the holy book of Islam. It affirms the first five books of the Bible, the Psalms, and the four Gospels as the inspired Word of God. However, Muslims believe that the modern copies of these books were corrupted and, therefore, no longer contain their original messages. What is unrealized by Muslims is that strong archeological evidence proves the Bible has not changed. Of all the ancient documents found, 99.5 percent of them confirm the accuracy of the Bible. Any minor differences are obvious slips of the pen, such as slight errors in spelling or grammar.

Inspired by God, the Bible was written by more than 40 different authors over a span of 1,500 years; those encompassing three continents and three different languages. Remarkably, considering these variables, the authors all support, agree and testify to the same unifying theme of God's redemption plan for humanity. While the Bible does warn people of God's coming judgement, it also offers hope and salvation in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Those who trust in Jesus are free from the fear of judgement and can enjoy inner peace (Romans 8:1).

WAY OUT

In the upcoming month, we challenge you to host a dinner party. At the gathering, you can share a cultural dish (*recipe to be featured in VOMC's March issue!*), explore the similarities between Islam and Christianity, and engage in a time of thoughtful discussion. The goal of this evening is to give you a launching point to share the Gospel with your friends and/or neighbours.

As the first step for this month, we encourage you to create a guest list and send out the invitations. To download a printable invitation, visit: vomcanada.com/TableTalkUzbekistan. In next month's issue of VOMC's magazine, there will be further instructions on how you can make this evening a success.

Recommended Reads:

- *Uzbekistan – Culture Smart!: The Essential Guide to Customs & Culture* by Alex Ulko and Culture Smart!
- *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi
- *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh and Sean McDowell

Sources:

- <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uzbekistan/>
- <https://uz.usembassy.gov/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom-uzbekistan/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/uzbekistan/>