

A WORLD IN MOTION



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PROJECT LIVING BREAD provides audio Bibles to Christian oral learners in their home languages.



THE NUMBERS: LONDON ELECTIONS



57%

The percentage of the mayoral vote won by Sadiq Khan (compared to the 43% won by Zac Goldsmith)



37.4%

The percentage of England and Wales' estimated 3.2 million Muslims who live in London



36.7%

The percentage of London's citizens who were born in foreign countries



70 to 100

The number of lawmakers in Western Europe with some link to Islam (out of a total of about 8,000)

SADIQ KHAN: FIRST MUSLIM MAYOR OF LONDON



London's new mayor, Sadiq Khan, has said he will "put London first" as he looked to move on from the divisive campaign run by his rival Zac Goldsmith. At his signing-in ceremony at Southwark Cathedral, backed by a secular choir, the Labour mayor said he wanted the moment to herald the start of a City Hall run for all Londoners and all communities. "I'm hoping the result on Thursday encourages young people to get involved in mainstream politics, encourages Londoners of Islamic faith and other minority communities, encourages British Muslims and others to get involved in civic society and get involved in mainstream politics," he said. "The decency of Londoners, the decency of British people will always cut through." (*The Guardian*)

Who is Sadiq Khan?

Sadiq Khan, a 45-year-old Labour politician, is the first Muslim to be elected mayor of a major European city and has become a key new face of the 'Islam vs. the West' debate. The son of Pakistani immigrants, he grew up in a south London housing estate and his father worked as a bus driver. Before entering politics, Khan worked as a human rights lawyer; in 2009, he was appointed as Transport Minister in Gordon Brown's government; and he managed Ed Miliband's successful campaign to become the Labour leader. In his public dealings, he has been open about his Muslim faith – he fasts, goes to a mosque, and has been on hajj to Mecca. Yet he is also a liberal, and voted in favour of gay marriage rights.

Some say that Khan's faith is of no relevance in multicultural London, while his opponents (in the run-up to the elections) made a big deal of his past connections to recognised Muslim extremists. In the wake of his victory, the debates continue.

Debated extremist ties

Maajid Nawaz (British activist, author and politician, and co-founder of the *Quilliam* 'counter-extremism think tank') says that Khan is a "liberal Muslim", not the extremist that his Conservative electoral opponent made him out to be. However, Nawaz says that Khan "has a record of terribly poor judgement in surrounding himself with Islamists and Muslim extremists, and in using them for votes". According to Nawaz, Khan appeared at a 2003 conference alongside Sajeel Abu Ibrahim, who belonged to a now-banned terrorist group and ran a camp in Pakistan that trained one of the bombers responsible for the 2005 London attacks. In 2004, Khan was serving as chair of the Muslim Council of Britain's legal affairs committee and argued in Parliament that Muslim Brotherhood cleric (and recognised extremist) Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawi was not as radical as was claimed. Khan also attended events organised by the 'jihadist rights group' Cage, which has since described Islamic State executioner 'Jihadi John' as a "beautiful man".

Nawaz sees these connections as attempts by Khan to gain political support, rather than indications of any extremist leanings in Khan himself. He also highlights the fact that Muslim extremists, including Khan's "old friends", are denouncing Khan for his "traitorous" stance on gay marriage, feminism and Israeli relations (Khan's first act as mayor of London was to attend a Holocaust memorial service). Some death threats made against Khan have already been reported.

An example of integration?

A word that comes up regularly in analyses of Khan's election is "integration". Nawaz believes that Khan's victory "speaks to the possibilities of integration". Roger Cohen, writing for the *New York Times*, says that "the world of the 21st century is going to be shaped by such... many-faceted identities [like Khan] and by the booming cities that celebrate diversity", and that Khan "represents currents in the world – toward global identity and integration". George Eaton, in *The*

NEWS HEADLINES



The 50th anniversary of the start of **China's** Cultural Revolution passed without fanfare, almost completely ignored by the Communist Party-controlled media. No official events were being held on Monday (16 May) to commemorate the anniversary of the decade-old revolution that historians say may have killed more than 1.5 million people.



The United States switched on an \$800 million missile shield in **Romania** that it sees as vital to defend itself and Europe from so-called rogue states but the Kremlin says is aimed at blunting its own nuclear arsenal. The full shield also includes ships and radars across Europe. It will be handed over to NATO in July, with command and control run from a US air base in Germany. Russia is incensed at such a show of force by its Cold War rival in formerly communist-ruled Eastern Europe.



A two-year **UN**-backed global study revealed that more children than ever before are being exploited by sex tourists, despite a 20-year multi-sector campaign to end such abuse in the travel industry.

New Statesman, wrote the following: "Khan will be a figure of global significance. His election is a rebuke to extremists of all stripes, from Donald Trump to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who assert that religions cannot peacefully coexist." Walter Bagehot, in the *Economist*, writes that "Khan has a unique platform, not confined to the city or even Britain, that he should use to promote a pluralistic sort of nationhood, ease tensions between ethnic and religious groups and highlight failures and successes of integration."

Khan has spoken up against extremism in the past, particularly after the November 2015 Paris attacks, and in an interview with *TIME Magazine*, he talked about the role he intends to play in this regard: "... being someone who is a Muslim brings with it experiences that I can use in relation to dealing with extremists... What I think the election showed was that there is no clash of civilisation between Islam and the West... What better antidote to the hatred [extremists] spew than someone like me being in this position?" Bagehot believes that Khan's victory made it "harder for Islamic State's recruiters to tour public housing estates in Europe and convince young Muslims from immigrant backgrounds that they have no place in the liberal West".

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

There are three key points for Christians to keep in mind regarding Sadiq Khan's election and the big picture.

Firstly, London is a highly diverse and multicultural city where religious affiliations have come to mean little, and most voters would have been more interested in Khan's public transport policies than his Islamic beliefs. However, Khan's religious affiliation is extremely relevant to today's political and spiritual world. He may not intend to lead London from an Islamic platform, but the fact that he is a high-profile Muslim will have ripple effects. Many non-Muslims may begin basing their understanding of Islam on what Khan portrays (an Islam compatible with Western

morality), while more radical Muslims are likely to be ever-more offended by his liberalism.

Secondly, Sadiq Khan's insistence that the London elections are proof that Western liberal values are compatible with mainstream Islam should not lull Christians into a false sense of complacency. Western liberal values are not necessarily Christian values, and Khan's values do not fully reflect the Islam of the Quran. Christian and Islamic beliefs continue to "clash" at their cores, and there is still much work for the Church to do among people of all faith backgrounds. Unless the Church actively maintains its visibility, relevance and value (especially to non-Christians) in society, it will continue to lose its voice and influence even further.

Thirdly, fears about "Londonistan" and "Eurabia" are no reason for Christians to isolate themselves from the growing Muslim population in the West. Bagehot writes that "in some corners of Britain, Muslims are dangerously cut-off and not like [Sadiq Khan] at all", and Khan has said in the past that "too many British Muslims grow up without really knowing anyone from a different background". This should be a wakeup call for all Christians in the West, not just in Britain. How can we hope that Muslims come to faith in Jesus if they never really know someone who believes in and follows Him? Mehdi Hassan, in an article for the *New York Times*, wrote the following: "The more you demonise Islam and Muslims, and the more Muslims are treated as 'them' and not 'us', the more you push people apart. Fear and loathing is not a strategy for integration." While Hassan (and much of the Western world) focuses on integration from a secular perspective, his words are true for Christianity as well: fear and loathing is not a strategy for displaying Christ's love to the nations.

PRAY > For God to work in the heart of Sadiq Khan, drawing him to the truth > For the Western Church to engage with Muslims in a Godly manner > For the UK Church to grow in influence

TURKEY AND THE EU'S COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP



Continued struggles for Merkel

In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was widely praised for her leadership in the midst of the EU's immigrant/refugee crisis. International media lauded her 'open door' policies implemented in Germany, which received the majority of those seeking refuge from the war in Syria and the brutality of the Islamic State in Iraq.

However, 2016 saw increased opposition to Ms Merkel's policies, with anti-immigration groups like PEGIDA renewing their efforts and organising mass protests against what they see as the 'Islamisation' of Europe through the large-scale immigration from Muslim countries.

In reality, only 22 percent of the more than 6 million refugees who fled the Middle East since the start of the civil war in Syria (2011) and the violent advance of the Islamic State (2014) have entered Europe. Most

German politicians accused Chancellor Angela Merkel at the weekend of making Europe overly dependent on Turkey in the migrant crisis, leaving the bloc vulnerable to blackmail by President Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey, refusing to bow to European Union demands to rein in its broad anti-terror laws, said on Friday that talks on a deal to provide visa-free travel in return for stopping illegal migrants reaching the EU had reached an impasse and the bloc must find a "new formula" to salvage the agreement. (*Reuters*)

NEWS HEADLINES



Yemen's Houthi rebels have carried out a "chilling campaign to quash dissent", arresting and torturing their political rivals, according to a rights group. The UK-based Amnesty International said that politicians, activists, journalists and academics were targeted and detained by the Houthis and their allies in 60 cases looked at between December 2014– March 2016.



Three bombings in **Baghdad** have killed at least 70 people and wounded more than 100, police and medical sources say, as a wave of violence continues unabated in the Iraqi capital. A suicide bombing (claimed by Islamic State) on Tuesday in a marketplace in the northern, mainly Shia district of al-Shaab killed 38 people and wounded over 70, while a car bomb in the nearby Sadr City neighbourhood left at least 19 more dead and 17 wounded.



A new study has found that Muslim migrants in **Germany** are forcing Christians to take part in Islamic prayers at refugee camps and threatening those who leave the religion. The report by Christian group Open Doors Germany claims that half of the 231 Christian refugees questioned said they felt bullied by Muslim migrants or guards, while in reception centres or refugee camps.

Muslim refugees have sought safety in neighbouring countries: Jordan (hosting more than 600,000 refugees), Lebanon (more than a million) and Turkey (more than 2 million).

Of the 1.3 million refugees seeking asylum in the EU in 2015, only 292,540 applications were approved (of which Germany received the most). And as the EU attempts to agree on a deal with Turkey – for the Turkish government to stop the flow of refugees to the EU and to take back those denied asylum in Europe – Angela Merkel is facing even more criticism. According to a recent *INSA* poll, almost half of Germany's population does not want Ms Merkel to stay in office after completing her current term.

Turkey and the EU

For years, Turkey has coveted EU membership. But this has not been granted, due to Turkey's human rights abuses and its broad anti-terror laws, which have made the country 'dangerous' to the EU.

However, March 2016 marked a turning point in the process, with the new EU refugee deal opening the possibility for Turkey's eventual inclusion in the EU. According to *BBC News*, "migrants arriving in Greece are now expected to be sent back to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or their claim is rejected." Another part of the deal is that for every illegal Syrian immigrant sent back to Turkey, one Syrian who has obtained legal asylum status via Turkey will be resettled in the EU.

One of the primary benefits for Turkey gained by the deal is the possibility of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens in EU countries, following Turkey's implementation of a list of 72 criteria. But on 13 May, Turkey said that they would not bow to European demands, and has, in effect, stepped away from the previous agreements made.

This has opened Angela Merkel to further opposition at home, with people claiming that in her efforts to ease the refugee crisis, she has left the EU vulnerable to 'blackmail' by Turkey. Many are fearing that the EU's hand may end up being forced, allowing Turkey to join the EU without amending its human rights laws.

PRAY > For God to guide world leaders as they made decisions about refugees > For agreements with Turkey to open doors for Christian outreach > For Angela Merkel's EU leadership

ALEPPO IS BURNING



The Syrian conflict is "in many ways out of control and deeply disturbing", said the US secretary of state, John Kerry, in early May, as he attempted to salvage a two-month-old fragile truce that was

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Turkey is a unique country, forming a geographical link between 'Christian' Europe and the Muslim Middle East. For many years, this has provided a strategic platform for Christian missionaries, who have used the country as a 'gateway' into the Muslim world. Likewise, the reverse is also true for Muslims, who can enter Europe more easily via Turkey.

Turkey's official religious demography shows the country to be 99.8 percent Muslim, but a 2012 *Gallup* report found that 73 percent of Turkish citizens identify as "not religious". Wanting to be secular and more 'European', many Turks protested the building of a new mosque in a public square in the capital (Ankara) in 2013. Sponsored by the government, the new mosque became a symbol of what protestors saw as the government's 'forced Islamisation' of the country and generated widespread civil unrest.

From the Turkish (secular) side, visa-free travel could be a means of expanding economic trade into the EU, but from the EU side, there are fears that Turkey's possible membership could make it easier for radicalised Muslims to enter Europe, leaving the continent further exposed to terror attacks.

Over the past century, the Turkish Christian population has dropped from 22 percent to 0.21 percent (2016 figures). So while EU analysts are asking whether a Turkish EU membership could eventually lead to the 'Islamisation of Europe', mission strategists are considering the possible benefits for Christianity in Turkey itself.

Throughout Europe (and especially in Germany), churches have started responding to the immense challenge and opportunity created by the many Muslims entering the region. With an estimated 60 Christian refugees entering among every thousand, churches have recognised the need to connect with these believers who know the language and culture of the refugee population, employing them to help reach their Muslim counterparts.

If the Church stops these kinds of initiatives, focusing instead on fears and personal interests, the concept of a 'Muslim Europe' becomes more of a possibility.

collapsing. Aleppo is one battleground of many, in a seemingly endless war of attrition; and yet the fate of a nation could hinge on this city. Aleppo is a key centre for the anti-Assad groups that are meant to be part of the UN-negotiated settlement, if that ever materialises. Aleppo is also a strategic location, close to the border with Turkey, which has acted as a lifeline for supplies and refugee movements. Some believe that if Aleppo falls, all hopes for a genuine peace negotiation will be crushed. (*The Guardian*)

Ancient significance, current crisis

Until recently, Aleppo was the most populous city in Syria and an important economic hub for the country. Its significance dates back to ancient times (it was a

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

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INcontext Team Details

Contact:

General - Mike:

Mobile - 0828657380

mike@incontextministries.org

AWIM - Andrew:

andrew@incontextministries.org

Communication - Cheryllyn:

cheryllyn@incontextministries.org

Seminars - Eric:

eric@incontextministries.org

Events - Hanlie:

hanlie@incontextministries.org

Prayer - Donnelly:

donnely@incontextministries.org

Projects - Gustav:

gustav@incontextministries.org

Resources / Travel - Stefan:

stefan@incontextministries.org



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SOUTH AFRICA

Bank: ABSA

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UNITED STATES

Account Name: M Burnard

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key centre on the Silk Road trade route between China and the Mediterranean), and it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

During the first year of the Syrian war (2011), Aleppo remained relatively untouched by the large-scale protests against President Bashar al-Assad and the deadly violence that shook other towns and cities. However, this changed dramatically in July 2012, when rebel fighters launched an offensive against government forces in order to gain control of northern Syria. Aleppo became a divided city, with the government regime controlling the western part and the rebels ruling the east. While an estimated 1 million people still live in the government-controlled western half, only some 300,000 remain in the eastern rebel areas.

The Guardian recently reported the following: "Aleppo has withstood more than six millennia of pillage and insurrection, but the past three years have damaged more of its civilisation and displaced more of its people than perhaps all its earlier conflicts." *Amnesty International* has accused both government forces and rebel groups of committing war crimes.

Despite a February ceasefire agreement for Syria, the conditions in and around Aleppo worsened as the bombardments intensified. Approximately 300 people were killed in the city since late April. This escalation of violence triggered a solidarity campaign via social media, with the hashtag #AleppolsBurning.

The complex search for peace

The 17-member 'International Syria Support Group' met this week in Vienna with the aim of trying to renew the collapsed ceasefire agreement and to reignite the talks between the government and opposition groups, but failed to reach a deal. The prospect for peace remains bleak, made evident by the sheer number of participants in this war, each with varying agendas. It has become increasingly difficult to formulate a strategy for stopping the fighting and resuming talks because the war is constantly changing shape. February's truce failed mainly due to Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda's Jabhat al-Nusra not being included in the arrangement – both are regarded as terrorist groups. As a result of their exclusion, government and other

rebel forces continued to attack them, and they in turn fought back, not wanting to lose territory gained.

Another stumbling block on the road to peace is the varying goals of key international role-players: the US and its allies ultimately want President al-Assad to step down by 1 August, the date they have set for the "transition" to begin. Mr Assad and his allies – Hezbollah, Russia, and Iran – do not agree with this requirement. Meanwhile, two other major role-players, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, threaten a more direct, on-the-ground involvement in the Syrian conflict. Syria therefore continues to be a battleground for much larger, regional issues involving multiple interest groups. And at the centre of the conflict is the ongoing ideological/spiritual divide between Sunni and Shiite Muslims directly involved in the battle. Until the highly elusive consensus is reached, the conflict is likely to continue and to evolve.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

On 11 May, the *Christian Post* reported that approximately 200 Christians had been killed in bombardments in Aleppo. *Barnabas Fund*, a Christian aid group, told *BosNewsLife* that "Christian areas in Aleppo were hit by 1,350 rockets between April 22 and April 30, which killed some 132 people, half of them women and children. Further bombardments on May 3 resulted in the deaths of 65 others, while hundreds more were injured."

Church leaders in Aleppo have lamented the intensity of the civil war, as a number of cities with Christian populations have been caught in the crossfire. "Never, since the beginning of this terrible war, were things as bad as they are now. I have no words to describe all the suffering I see on a daily basis," Father Ibrahim Alsabagh told *Aid to the Church in Need*, a Catholic charity. He said that an estimated 50,000 Christians are still living in Aleppo (considered to be about 10% of the city's Christian population before the war), and that "only the poor and those unable to escape" are left.

PRAY > For the protection of the remaining Christians in Aleppo > For a miraculous breakthrough in peacetalk negotiations and a willingness among key role-players to compromise

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION



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