

Unprecedented gathering of 130,000 Christians in officially Islamic UAE



An event held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 5 February was attended by over 130,000 Christians; a startling occurrence in a region where Christian worship is tightly restricted and Christian converts from Islam risk imprisonment for apostasy.

The UAE has one of the fastest growing Christian populations in the world, mainly due to the inward migration of Christian workers. The country has recently gained a new cathedral, 16 new churches and has around 700 Christian congregations.

The 48-hour papal visit to the UAE this month is unprecedented for the Arabian Peninsula and may signal a softening of the government towards the Christian community, estimated to number over one million.

Individuals belonging to non-Islamic faiths may worship in private in the UAE, but face restrictions on practicing their religion in public. Proselytizing to Muslims or preaching against Islam is prohibited by law and carries a prison sentence of up to five years. Most of the Christians in the Arabian Peninsula are resident non-citizens who came to the region as migrant workers.

Source: Barnabas Fund