

Pakistan



The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is located in southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea. The country's name literally means "Land of the Pure" translated from the Urdu and Persian languages. It was first used in 1933 as an acronym for five northern territories under British control that longed to be a Muslim nation—



The Indus River cuts a path through the mountains

PAKISTAN. The "I" was added later for easier pronunciation. It covers an area that is just a bit larger than the state of Texas while its population is about seven times the size of that state's. The capital city is Islamabad.

Most people who live in Pakistan are Muslim (about 97%); the approximately 3% remaining are Hindu and Christian. The Roman Catholic community numbers about one million, which is

about 1% of the population; it was established between World Wars I and II when the area was under British colonial rule.

Although education is free and compulsory in Pakistan up to grade 8, literacy rates show that the laws are not enforced. About 60% of the population above age ten can read and write, but when broken down by gender, the gap is revealed—for boys, the literacy rate is 70.2%, while for girls it is 46.3%. In very rural areas, the rate for girls can drop to as low as 3%.

Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani teenager, has become world renowned for her efforts to shine a light on the issue of education for all children, especially girls in Pakistan. Taliban terrorists targeted and shot her, hoping to stop her advocacy. Her survival and recovery brought



Photo Credit: World Bank

further attention to the issue. Malala was a co-recipient of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize and now lives in England where she continues her work for children's educational rights.

Missionary Childhood in Pakistan

While ice hockey and cricket are the most popular sports in Pakistan, 2014 was the year many children closely watched the FIFA World Cup of Soccer held in Brazil. Although their national team is ranked a lowly 164th in the world—mainly because many outside teams will not come to Pakistan due to the risk of violence—Pakistani's were proud of their "participation". The balls used in the



Photo Credit: Sara Farid/Reuters

competition, called *Brazucas* to reflect Brazilians pride in their own country's lifestyle, were made in Pakistan!

Each year before the FIFA World Cup competition, a tournament called The Street Child World Cup is held in the same venue. Sponsored by a British human rights charity, the games bring children together from all continents to play soccer and engage in the arts and international solidarity. This year, the team from Pakistan placed third!

The Catholic Church in Pakistan is relied on to provide first class education. It runs 534 schools, 8 colleges, 7 technical/vocational institutes and 8 catechetical centers. Still, it is a persecuted Church.

According to the country's constitution, non-Muslims are not allowed to be president, prime minister, or hold any of the other 11 main governing offices. In many areas of the country, especially the poorer, rural areas, a tax is imposed on non-Muslims. If people are unable to pay, they are forced to leave their homes. Worse still, churches are burned and people are threatened with physical violence

because of their faith. Even children are not safe. False accusations of blasphemy—speaking ill of the Prophet Mohammed, whom Muslims revere—can be leveled at a Christian with no cause. Some pay for their faith in Jesus Christ with their lives.

Father Waseen Walter, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Pakistan, parent organization of the Missionary Childhood Association (MCA) makes sure that amidst the hardship, Catholic children learn about the missionary work of the Church through MCA. Father says, "For the love of Jesus, and in order to imitate Him, children should make the ideal of their life the call to mission. It saves children by making them children of God in order to become complete persons. Children become missionaries and make other children missionaries."



Each year, on the Feast of the Epiphany, International MCA Day, children gather at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, in Karachi, where the first

Catholic community in the country was formed. They sing and pray for other children, and they sacrifice—last year giving \$8,262.62 to help children in the missions.

In return, their fellow MCA members around the world sent over \$800,000 for scholarships to Catholic schools, for needy boys and girls, the upkeep orphanages, and parish faith formation programs.

Missionary Childhood Association

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