

## **Bible Society officials say most translation work goes on without opposition**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quito, Ecuador--United Bible Societies officials say that with a few exceptions their work is carried out without opposition in most parts of the world.

Dr. John D. Erickson, General Secretary of the United Bible Societies said that other than in North Korea, Laos and Iran where there are no Bible Societies, "It would be the exceptional place where there is no Bible Society. Since the wall came down and the Soviet Union no longer exists, there are about 25 Bible Societies which have been formed in the last two to three years."

Dr. Erickson called the new expansion a "marvelous development."

The United Bible Societies, whose headquarters is in London, England, is helping to fund the translation of the Bible into 650 languages world wide.

While some Bible translation groups are completing their work in certain countries, Dr. Erickson told NNI that UBS and other groups such as Wycliffe Bible Translators, and the Institute for Bible Translation are transferring personnel to work on around 41 Bible translation projects in the former Soviet Union.

Dr. Erickson said when translations into new languages is complete, there will still be the need for the revision of older translations because of language changes.

He said he is most excited about three projects of UBS. He cited the Amity project in China where the 10 millionth Bible will be printed in June under a cooperative arrangement between the churches of China and the United Bible Societies.

He also pointed to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union where new societies are rapidly being developed. He said he met with 50 Bible Society secretaries in Cyprus in February. It was the first time for a Bible Society representative from Tajikistan to attend such a meeting. He reported that over 3 million Bibles, New Testaments and children's Bibles were distributed in the former Soviet influence countries last year.

The UBS Secretary said he was pleased with the way in which every Bible society is increasingly raising funds to purchase Bibles in other parts of the world. "It is not for the affluent north and west to take care of all of this," he said. "People all over the world are being mobilized in prayer and giving to give other people a Bible."

The countries of the Middle East are not closed to Bible Society work according to Gunnleik Seierstad, a Norwegian who is UBS Secretary for Europe and the Middle East.

Mr. Seierstad told NNI that there are severe restrictions, however, in some countries. But he emphasized the open nature of many nations.

"Saddam Hussein has given us permission to print 100,000 copies in Baghdad this year," he said. "There are lots of open doors. In Egypt we have an expanding publishing program where there is local production and a new Arabic Bible on the market."

However, Mr. Seierstad said it is sad that in Algeria the Bible Society staff has been forced to leave. Distribution continues there, he said, but under very difficult circumstances.

He said that the UBS is working in cooperation with the Institute for Bible Translation, based in Stockholm to complete many projects in Russia. The Institute had started their work during the Communist rule.

There is freedom of distribution and printing of Bibles in all the former Soviet influence countries, he said. In Russia more than 90% of the bibles distributed last year were produced in the country. Mr. Seierstad told NNI that in the former Soviet countries not only is there free distribution of Bibles, but local churches are able to form national Bible Societies which are autonomous. He said they are very interconfessional, involving Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, and 7th day Adventist groups.

Turning to the former Yugoslavia, he said that there is a new society in Slovenia, and one is forming in Croatia. Many Bibles are being distributed among refugees from the Bosnian war. There is also a new society in Macedonia. Mr. Seierstad said that there is pressure from the Archbishop of Sarajevo to form a new society there as well.

The Zapatista uprising in Mexico has brought one translation project there to a halt according to Robert Bascom, a UBS Consultant. Other projects are continuing, however, and Bascom says such work in a conflict situation is important because as people read the bible they "discover some forgiveness, some tolerance, and how to work together."

Citing rapidly changing conditions around the world, Dr. Philip C. Stine, Director of Translation, Production and Distributions Services for UBS says that there are Bible Societies being established in countries previously inaccessible to Christian work. Distribution is now allowed in Vietnam and Cambodia, a Bible Society was organized a year ago in Morocco, and there is a vast distribution system in the Gulf States. Kurdish scriptures have been supplied recently in Iran and Iraq.

Stine said that while there was the smuggling of Bibles into former Communist countries, that is not necessary today. He said the Bible Societies stayed away from that practice which paid dividends later when those countries welcomed their work.

"Today, smuggling is not necessary in most places in the world because there is access to scriptures through legal means," Stine said.

Stine said that one of the most exciting developments in Bible translation is the recent participation of Orthodox churches with UBS. He said that cooperation with Roman Catholics has been taking place for several years, but recently Orthodox bodies have joined in.

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