

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TAJIKISTAN

STATEMENT by the EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

For the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 22 September to 3 October 2014

## Restrictions of religious freedom

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### *Denial of re-registration*

Jehovah's Witnesses have been without legal registration in Tajikistan since 2007, and as a consequence Tajikistan authorities view all religious activity of the Witnesses as illegal. The Witnesses are denied the right to conduct religious meetings and assemblies, to own or use property for religious purposes, to produce and import religious literature, to receive donations, to carry out charitable activity, and to invite foreign citizens to participate in religious events.

### *Ongoing efforts to re-register*

All levels of the judicial system have dismissed the Witnesses' appeals to re-register. However, over the past year, Tajikistan officials have been more receptive to discussions on the issue of registering religious associations of Jehovah's Witnesses.

- On **8 August 2014**, the Witnesses resubmitted registration documents for a third time to the CRA, requesting registration of a religious community in Dushanbe. On September 11, 2014, CRA denied the registration under the pretext that copies of passports of some of the founders were not attached. The attempt to file them on September 19 was rejected by CRA.

## Abuses of religious freedom

### *Harassment, Interrogation, and Intimidation*

Because Jehovah's Witnesses are unregistered, the authorities have detained, harassed, searched, and even beaten some Witnesses for practicing their faith. The State National Security Services (KNB) repeatedly summons individual Jehovah's Witnesses for questioning. For example:

- **4 July 2014**, Nassim Kurbonov, Khodzhamahsum Mubarakshoyev, and Firuz Normatov, were summoned to the State National Security Services (KNB) for interrogations. They suffered verbal abuse and intimidation while being asked to sign false statements about their faith, which they refused to do.
- **8-10 July 2014**, Ruslan Babayev was repeatedly summoned for interrogation to the KNB. Each time he was illegally detained for several hours.
- **10 July 2014**, the KNB summoned Mrs. Gulya Satimova to follow up a summons from the previous year. The pattern of interrogation by KNB officers consisted of offers of recruitment in exchange for her cooperation and requests for information about local Jehovah's Witnesses.

## Positive developments

On 14 November 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses had a productive meeting with Mr. Valizoda of the Presidential Administration of Tajikistan; Mr. Holikov, Chairman of the Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA); Mr. Mukhtorov, Deputy Head of the CRA; Mr. Zavkiyev, Head of the Religious Department of the CRA; and their attorney about re-registering Jehovah's Witnesses. The result of that meeting was promising. Jehovah's Witnesses have requested a follow-up meeting with Mr. Valizoda and Mr. Holikov to continue the discussion on the pending application for registration in Dushanbe. They are awaiting a reply.

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*Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully request the government of Tajikistan to  
register them with full legal status,  
allow them to legally import their religious literature, and  
stop illegal interrogations and intimidations.*