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A report about increasing religious limitations in Tajikistan

In 2015-2016 years the religious space had been limited in Tajikistan than before. The base of the religion is a problem for the recent government and It accelerated Its struggles against religious norms using disciplinarian and force structures. In this period officials destroyed more than 2000 mosques or turned them to social places, medical centers, departments of the disciplinarians and force officials, discos and privet houses. This process is continuous. As well as officials opened criminal cases against 1000 religious actives and until writing this report 870 of them were detained and imprisoned with different charges. But the result of the cases of 130 people of them is uncertain for the media yet. Also during this period 30 thousand men were detained from the streets and other social places and were forced to shave their beards.

The officials of the Committee of women and family of Tajikistan along with the disciplinarian and the force officials forced more than 10 thousand women and girls not to put on their religious hijabs. The officials of the government closed up all of the official and unofficial religious schools and didn't let the teachers and the pupils continue their lessons in such schools. The government charged with spreading extremist believes an only Islamic gymnasium, which had more than 1400 pupils and limited its pupils until 60 persons. The activity of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan has been banned too. This party was charged with extremism and terrorism.

Closing mosques

According to Constitution and other laws of Tajikistan, a mosque is one of the social union that will be built by local people, persons and gracious persons for praying and satisfying other religious demands of the people. The government hasn't any proportions in mosque building beside giving a plot and certificate for building a mosque. The other religious and unreligious unions haven't any proportions in mosque building too. But government's position towards mosques is as its position towards trade organizations; the servants of the mosques, the other religious unions pay taxes as the trade organizations do and mosques buy the most expensive electricity power too. In spite of Government of Tajikistan limited and made difficult founding and registration all of the religious unions after adopting the Law about freedom of conscience and religious unions in 2009, the Law about the responsibility of the parents in training and behaving of the child in 2011. According to two above mentioned laws, Muslims only can pray at home, in mosques, in shrines, and in cemeteries. As well as, the above-mentioned laws ban under 18-year-old persons' participations in worship and religious ceremonies, besides remaining ceremonies.

According to recent Constitution of Tajikistan, religious unions are apart from state and cannot interfere in state affairs¹. But in 2014 Government of Tajikistan assigned salary for Imam-Khatib (the orators of mosques) and bound them only to deliver the sermons which will be given by the Committee of religious affairs. Most of those sermons were political and especially were delivered against Emamali Rahman's rivals during two last years. So the government turned mosque's tribunes to Its agitation tribunes, though this measure was unlawful. Simultaneous the government strengthened its watch over the prayers and ordered the officials of the religious unions to fix cameras in mosques and give them necessary information about prayers when they need. July 3, 2015, the Chief of the Special Unit of the

¹ The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, article 8.

Ministry of internal affairs Barotali Hamidzadeh while his speech in Central Mosque of Dushanbe city said, this ministry has its spies among the prayers. He added: "Who doesn't observe praying discipline and walks out in the middle of the pray, he will be counted the member of the illegal groups and will be taken measures against his act"².

July 31, 2015, the Attorney General of Tajikistan proclaimed, that there are 1032 legal mosques were turned into culture and relief centers³. After 9 months, March 9, 2016, the Attorney General noticed once more again, that 927 mosques were changed to cultural centers, but 638 other illegal mosques are open for the prayers⁴.

One and half month before the Attorney General's announcement, on the 22nd of January 2016 the President Emamali Rahman proclaimed about an activity of the 1470 illegal mosques in Tajikistan too⁵.

As experts, corruption paralyzed economic infrastructures in Tajikistan and government cannot build culture, medical and relief centers for citizens' relax, for this it turns mosques to culture, medical and relief centers.

Limitations to hajj

Last years to a trip to Saudi Arabia from Tajikistan became one of the most expensive trips in Central Asia and even Russia⁶. A pilgrimage to holy Mecca became a source of corruption in Tajikistan. Several officials have been charged with corruption related to a pilgrimage to hajj. "Somon air" one of the companies of Tajikistan which monopolized to take pilgrims to hajj last years. The company's owner is Emamali Rahman's family and all pilgrims have to take return ticket from the company. Therefore everybody who wants to trip to Mecca easily can't get any quotas.

Before this, Committee of the religious affairs, regulation of the national traditions and ceremonies has taken other measures related to a pilgrimage to Mecca too. This Committee limited touristic organizations (besides Rasul Sokhtmon Ltd.) to take pilgrims to "Omra" (one of the types of pilgrimage to Mecca which it has not limited time as hajj or pilgrimage in a day of Korban Holiday)⁷.

In January 2016, Government of Tajikistan made a resolution which it bans under 40-year-old citizens to trip to hajj. Before, April 14, 2015, Committee of the religious affairs, regulation of the national traditions and ceremonies banned under 35-year-old citizens' pilgrimage to hajj⁸.

To shave beards and to ban to be bearded

To have a beard is one of the famous national tradition of the people in the World. Therefore Tajik men according to their wishes put a beard in various styles too. But the beard, the natural hair of men has been known as an enemy of the disciplinarian and force officials in Tajikistan. The officials claim bearded is extremism symbol. So they have begun their fight against bearded in 2013. This process was accelerated rather than expectation in 2014 -2015. Force and disciplinarian officials organizing raids on

² <http://www.ozodi.org/a/ministry-internal-affairs-of-tajikistan-about-juma-pray/27107824.html>.

³ <http://www.tojnews.org/tj/news/tabdili-besh-az-khazor-maschid-ba-choykhoi-chamiyativu-markazkhoi-farkhangivu-farogati>.

⁴ <http://www.ozodagon.com/25579-dodsitonii-kull-masidoi-ayrirasm-yake-az-manbaoi-pankunii-oyaoi-ifrotgaro-meboshand.html>.

⁵ <http://www.ozodagon.com/24963-eramon-masidu-interneti-oi-ifrotishavii-avonon-hond.html>.

⁶ <http://cm-1.tv/narxi-%D2%B3a%D2%B7-dar-to%D2%B7ikiston-%D2%9Bir%D2%93iziston-uzbakiston-va-rusiya>

⁷ <http://tojnews.tj/tj/news/narhi-safar-ba-khachchi-umra-dar-tochikiston-600-dollar-garon-shud>.

⁸ http://news.tajweek.tj/tj/view/mani-adoi-marosimi-haj-ba-shahrvandoni-sinni-to-40_solai-tojikiston.

bearded men detained them and got their fingerprints and their explanations. After such acts, of course, the beards of the detained bearded was shaved forcibly by officials. Such actions of the authorities were proclaimed as pressure by experts and media.

On the 19th of January 2016, the Chief of the Department of the Interior Ministry in Khatlon region Bahram Sahrifzadeh proclaimed that the officials of the Interior Ministry “set up” the beards of 12 818 men in this region (actually they were detained and their beards were shaven forcibly)⁹. The officials of this ministry took a widespread shaving beards action in Dushanbe city, in nearby districts of the capital, Sughd, and Badakhshan regions, but when the matter received massive amount foreign and local media coverage, the ministry didn’t announce its shaving-beards statistics in other regions of the country. According to our sources in Dushanbe, the officials of the Interior Ministry forced more than 43 thousand men to shave their beards from 2013 until 2016. Only in 2015, the officials could shave 30 thousand men’s beard. Even the teachers of the Islamic Institute and Imam –Khatebs (orators of mosques) was advised to shave their beards or not to have it high. Officials’ such fights are continuous yet, but the process decreased than 2014-2015¹⁰.

On the 28th of August 2015 officials of the Department of the Interior Ministry in Vahdat town detained and tortured 23-year old Omar Babajanov. As his relatives, he was detained and tortured for his beard by officials of the Interior Ministry Department. As a result, he died in a hospital on the 5th of September 2015.

Hijab and religious clothing problems

The government of Tajikistan, first of all, President Emomali Rahman have unlike attitude towards Islamic clothing. On the 7th of March 2015, President proclaimed “unlearned” to put on hijab and affirmed, “the women who put on hijabs have gone astray and don’t know what to do”¹¹. His speech was shown by “Shabakai Avval” (First Channel) of the governmental TV. It wasn’t the only insult of the Heads of the government to women who put on hijabs. Before Abdujabbor Rahmanzadeh, the former minister of education and recent advisor of the President said “monkeys” the women who put on hijabs. While he was a minister of science always had conflicts with the students who put on hijabs.

Women who put on hijabs can’t take part in governmental assemblies and also can’t go to schools and universities too. Even girls who are the students of the Islamic Institute of Tajikistan were advised to put on national clothes. They must don’t put on hijabs too.

The government of Tajikistan takes under pressure the Muslim women and insults them to offer excuses observing to develop national clothes. But they have not such attitude with the women and the girls who put on non-national, European clothes as the women who put on hijabs. Also, non-Muslim women who put on as orthodox Christians and Catholic missionaries are allowed.

According to President resolutions against women who put on hijabs, Committee of women and family, disciplinarian and force structures’ raids took place in Khujand and other districts too. Such raids called “house to house” for “heedful” national clothes. Such “heedful” raids took place in the parks too. “According to a report of “Asia Plus” News Agency law enforcement officials “agitated” to throw down their hijabs. They proclaimed, their agitation is a part of the national ceremony”¹². From the beginning

⁹ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/maqomoi-khatlon-taroshidani-rishi-mardon-az-sui-pulisro-rad-kardand/27507699.html>.

¹⁰ <http://www.ozodagon.com/23368-darguzashti-umar-boboonov-donishi-latukbshuda-baroi-rish.html>.

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joSTrKlvD1A>.

¹² <http://www.ozodi.org/a/27713012.html>.

2016 Interior Ministry Department in Sughd region organized 7 groups consisted of 222 officials of this department for raids against the women who put on hijabs. As a result, the officials of the Interior Ministry Department registered 643 women who put on hijabs (officials registered them as addicts and criminals)¹³. Before this, the Chief of the Interior Ministry Department in Khatlon region Bahram Sharifzadeh reported, in a result of “heedful” raids of the department 1772 women and girls gave up to put on hijabs in 2015 year. As well as was rejected 162 shops’ activities, which there was sold religious clothes¹⁴.

For proceeding such pressures Bevaliye Hakimbekova, one of the inhabitants of Babajan Ghafurov district told Radio Freedom, during last five years tried to take passport with the picture which she put on hijab in it, but couldn’t. Her interview was published on the 5th of March 2015¹⁵.

The government limited the shop's activities which have been sold Islamic clothes there during last two years. In the case many of the Islamic clothes sellers, who brought their goods from other countries are broke¹⁶.

Related to this problem the court of Isfara town imprisoned 31-year-old Oqil Sarifov for a year. His only “crime” was to take photos from the detaining process of the women who put on hijabs in Isfara town¹⁷.

Religious teaching limitations

The Muslim inhabitants of the Central Asian countries, particularly the citizens of Tajikistan will be taught by local priests in mosques or at home. In Soviet Union times when teaching religion prohibited, priests taught children in basements, because they felt afraid. The recent leadership of Government of Tajikistan who many of them are soviet personnel accelerated their fight. Such authorities are an opposition of the religion and they don’t want to develop religious mindful of the people.

The Government signed two above mentioned laws and limited religious teaching completely. Everybody who was detained was punished, of course, If the teacher or the priest hadn’t special license for teaching religion. There are eight legal religious schools and tens of Illegal were prohibited. Committee of religion along with Ministry of Education banned only Islamic gymnasium which had more than 1400 pupils. 60 of them who was last year pupils were transferred to Islamic Institute¹⁸.

As well as all of the students who studied in foreign Islamic universities abroad have been returned. Also who studied abroad without permission of the government and were not in accord with Ministry of Education and Science, has been returned and punished too.

In the beginning of February, authorities detained Shohrat Qazebaev with his 11 students. Qazebaev graduated one of the Islamic universities abroad. They were the habitants of Khujand city and Babajan Gafurov district. It was opened criminal cases against them¹⁹.

¹³ <http://news.tj/ru/news/v-khudzhande-vzyali-na-uchet-vsekh-zhenshchin-nosyashchikh-satr-i-khidzhab>.

¹⁴ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/maqomoi-khatlon-taroshidani-rishi-mardon-az-sui-pulisro-rad-kardand/27507699.html>.

¹⁵ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/tajik-girl-struggle-to-take-passport-with-hijab/26883642.html>.

¹⁶ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/islamic-dress-business-under-pressure-in-tajikistan/26710801.html>.

¹⁷ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/a-man-sentenced-to-jail-for-recording-video-tajik-police-arrested-women-with-hijab/27762458.html>.

¹⁸ <http://tojnews.org/tj/news/faoliyati-yagona-gimnaziyai-islomi-dar-tochikiston-kat-shud>.

¹⁹ <http://tojnews.org/ru/node/2712>.

In summer 2009, when the Law about freedom of conscience and religious unions was adopted, has been strengthened watch over the spreading religious audio, video, and printed materials; also has been found a special state center for checking religious materials before the print. According to Law about freedom of conscience and religious unions, article 17, all of the religious books and booklets, which will be brought abroad or printed in Tajikistan, must be checked out before the print. In this case, unchecked religious literature will not be given license for sell and considered outlaw²⁰.

Rejecting stranger names and relative marriage

According to statistic, 99% of Tajikistan's people are Muslims. Therefore many of the citizens choose Islamic names for their children, but they have not such right now. As new amendments to the Law about register a marriage, Arabic names were announced contrary to national culture.

Relative marriage is one of the Tajik people's traditional marriages. The God and Prophet Muhammad let such marriages. The 16th article of the UN Human Rights Declaration didn't ban relative marriages too. Though the government of Tajikistan adopted this declaration, parliament of Tajikistan adopted new amendments to Family code of Tajikistan, which prohibit relative marriage²¹.

Religious activities limitations

During two last years, religious activities have been limited more than past years. During this period were closed Turajanzadeh brothers' website. Nuriddin Turajanzadeh, Haji Akbar Turajanzadeh, and Mahmud Jan Turajanzadeh are the known and influential priests in Tajikistan. They teach and agitate religion. In addition, several Islamic websites were closed and their founders punished. Also, several other founders of the religious websites have been pressured to close their websites. Particularly the founder of the "Vasatiyat" website rejected its activity in a result of such pressures.

At the first time, the USA added Tajikistan in a list of "Special anxieties countries" (the countries which trample on the religious freedom) along with Iran, Sudan and North Korea on the 14th of March 2016²². Before the USA announced Tajikistan as the country which represses clergies to offer excuses extremism. On the 10th of August 2016 USCIRF criticized "Government of Tajikistan for limitations religious freedom not only for Muslims, even for Protestants and ... Christians"²³. Then Tajikistan was added in a list of "Special anxieties countries" by the USA.

Detaining and imprisoning

According to Constitution of Tajikistan, "everybody has a right to choose every religion, have a right to follow every religion alone or along with others, have a right to participate in religious ceremonies"²⁴. But during two last years religious actives who made a step out of force and disciplinarian officials' orders and wishes, were charged with membership in Muslim Brothers, Salafi Movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan and imprisoned. For example, on the 15th of July 2016, the public prosecutor of Sughd region Habibullah Vohidov announced that they opened criminal cases against 16 orators of mosques during last six months²⁵. Simultaneous 110 religious actives were

²⁰ <http://mmk.tj/legislation/base/2009/>.

²¹ <http://president.tj/node/10892>.

²² <http://www.ozodi.org/a/27678485.html>.

²³ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/uscirf-many-tajik-officials-turn-to-salafism-or-shia/27914420.html>.

²⁴ Constitution of Tajikistan, article 26.

²⁵ <http://www.ozodagon.com/27088-dodsitoni-sud-alayi-16-imomhatibu-sarhatib-parvanda-kushodem.html>

detained and imprisoned charging for following Salafi Movement²⁶. The court of Ismoil Somoni district of Dushanbe city sentenced Muharramov Muhammadi Rahmatulloevich (he was known as Muhammadi Rahmatulloh) to 8 years imprisonment. He was the head of Salafists in Tajikistan²⁷. As well as Interior Ministry Department in Sughd region announced about detaining of 245 persons charging for membership in the Hizb ut-Tahrir. Also, 226 persons were detained charging for following Salafi Movement. All of them have been imprisoned²⁸. In addition, 7 orators of mosques have been detained too. They were charged to follow Muslim Brothers and Salafi Movement²⁹. Religious active's detaining escalated rather than expectation in this region. For example on the 9th of August of 2016 Anvarjon Ibrohimov, the public prosecutor of this region announced detaining from 20 215 suspicious persons who only two of them were not found guilty by the court during first six months³⁰.

In the beginning of March of 2016 disciplinarian and force officials of Tajikistan detained 35 inhabitants from the mosque at once. On the 8th of August Court of Ismoil Somoni district sentenced 18 of them to 3,5 -10 years imprisonment. One of them is Rajabmurod Rajabov. He is 19 years old. He was detained for his bear. Officials charged him for putting bear as Salafists in 2009. But his brother refuted officials claim. He told Freedom Radio: "In 2009 my brother was in the sixth form. What kind of reality are the officials positions? All of us know that pupil in the sixth will not be bearded physically"³¹.

During 2015-2016 years about 200 members of IRPT, leaders and their relatives were detained. They were charged with participation in the criminal group, national, racial and religious hostility exciting, assassination, terrorism, to invite for overturning constitutional structure, keeping and transmission weapons, armed mutiny, and their court was held behind the closed doors. Of course, the details of their court process was hidden³². At last, 75-years-old Kurban Mannonov and 55-year-old Nozimjon Tashripov have tortured and died in prison³³.

The force officials of Tajikistan detained about 200 persons charging them to the partnership to the group of Haji Halim, former ex-minister of defense after the occasions on the 4th of September 2015. All of them who have been detained, imprisoned charging with the coup. Many of them were relatives or kept cooperation and friendship with the members of Haji Halim's group in the past, but official detained and charged them that eventuality they kept informed of the coup, but didn't inform the officials³⁴.

There are hundreds were imprisoned charging with extremism in Tajikistan last five years, but officials have no any true and logical definitions about this social phenomenon³⁵.

²⁶ <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13950429000437>.

²⁷ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/muhammadi-rahmatullo-sentenced-for-eight-year/27866614.html>.

²⁸ <http://news.tj/ru/news/v-khudzhande-vzyali-na-uchet-vsekh-zhenshchin-nosyashchikh-satr-i-khidzhab>.

²⁹ <http://tojnews.org/tj/news/bozdoshti-14-imomhatibi-salafi-va-ihvoni>.

³⁰ http://www.hakikati-sugd.tj/index.php/component/blog_calendar/2016/08/09?Itemid

³¹ <http://www.ozodi.org/a/27908405.html>

³² <http://www.notorture.tj/tj/news/hrw-vazi-khukuki-bashar-dar-tochikiston-badtar-shudaast>

³³ <http://payom.net/2016/08/16/shahodati-uzvi-hnit-tashripov-nozimjon-dar-zindoni-rezhimi-rahmon.html>

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgbvJKW5Z0c>

³⁵ <http://www.ozodagon.com/27379-suoli-2-yumi-basbarangezi-safiri-olmon-dar-dushanbe-oid-ba-ekstremizm.html>

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