

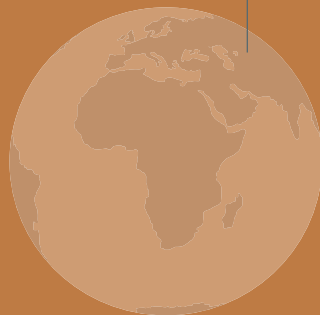
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S
CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL
WORLD HEADQUARTERS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

OSCE Human
Dimension
Implementation
Meeting, Warsaw

11-22 SEPTEMBER 2017



Uzbekistan

The government of Uzbekistan withholds religious freedom from Jehovah's Witnesses, and local authorities frequently harass and mistreat them.

- ✎ Uzbekistan has repeatedly denied Jehovah's Witnesses the right to register their congregations and considers illegal any religious activity outside the one registered congregation in Chirchik.
- ✎ Consequently, the authorities arrest Witnesses for attending religious meetings, mistreat them physically, and fine them for possessing religious literature or even having a copy of the Bible in their home.

Abuses and Restrictions of Religious Freedom

POLICE BRUTALITY

3

Seven men among Jehovah's Witnesses reported brutal treatment from police officers, and eight female Witnesses reported assaults by officers.

- 1. Nukus, Karakalpakstan Republic.** The Nukus District Criminal Court decision dated **12 January 2017** found MN liable under Article 241 of the Administrative Code and jailed him for 15 days. During interrogation the police officers beat him on his kidneys, chest, stomach, and face. They then demanded that he do 150 squats without taking a rest; when he was able to do only 120, the officers again beat him in the face. On the 11th day of his imprisonment, he was undressed and the officer, Mr. Ulugbek, kicked him on the back. On the 14th day of imprisonment, police officers poured cold water on the floor of the cell and kicked him in the head. The police officers included Mr. Ruslan Allanazarov, Mrs. Umida Kurbanbaeva, Mr. Anvar, and Mr. Yusup.
- 2. Uchkuduk. On 28 January 2017,** police officers arrested AT and EK at his home. After searching the home, officers took them to the police department, where they undressed AT and police officer Mr. Farhod Sagindikov threatened him with rape. He was then taken to another room, where one officer held his arms while the other officers subjected him to a severe beating with a belt, more blows, and much verbal abuse. When AT refused to write an explanatory note, the officers beat him on his face, head, and shoulders. They also beat EK on the shoulder and stomach, accompanied by verbal abuse. These beatings were inflicted

in such a way that the victims could not seek medical corroboration of the abuse because no vivid marks were visible.

3. **Namangan. On 5 February 2017**, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses gathered in a home for a peaceful religious meeting. Mr. Murod Khakimov and ten other officers burst in and conducted an unlawful search. Later, all the Witnesses were found liable under Articles 184-2, 241, of the Administrative Code, and four of them were fined five times the monthly minimum salary (approximately USD 200). Additionally, two of the male Witnesses were jailed for five days. During his detention MK was severely beaten by two drunk police officers who hit him on the ear, stomach, and face. While beating him, they threatened him with a longer period of detention and claimed that filing complaints would not improve his situation, since they would remain unpunished.
4. **Namangan. On 19 March 2017**, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses were gathered for a religious meeting at a café. Six police officers led by Mr. Murod Khakimov interrupted the meeting. During the search of personal belongings of the Witnesses and seizure of electronic devices and printed publications, the officers treated them rudely. Later, two male Witnesses were found liable under Article 241 of the Administrative Code and were jailed for 15 days. During their detention, police officers beat them on the back and the head, and one officer beat MK on the head with a chair and grabbed him by his hair.
5. **Bukhara. On 30 May 2017**, three female Witnesses gathered in a home for worship. Suddenly, police officers arrived at the house and conducted a search. The officers then took the women to the police department, where they faced rough treatment. Later, Mr. Bekzod Tashpulatov grabbed one of the women by the neck and dragged her upstairs. The other police officers included Mr. Lazizzhon Khamidov, Mr. Khakim Kamolov, Mr. Ganiev, Mr. Fozilov, and Mr. Dilshod Abidov.
6. **Karshi. On 31 May 2017**, a group of female Witnesses were gathered for a peaceful religious meeting in a private home when police officers interrupted them to conduct a search. During the search four police officers, Mr. Zhamol Sharopov, Mr. Zafar Obilov, Mr. Zokir, and Mr. Bunyod, seized electronic devices containing religious materials. In addition to this unlawful search, the officers grabbed their breasts, claiming that they needed to check for electronic devices.
7. **Urgench. On 28 June 2017**, DK was arrested for peaceful religious activity and taken to the police department. There an official from the City Administration (Khokimiyat), Mr. Ravshan Sobirov, twice strangled him and then grabbed him by the neck and beat his head against a table. Mr. Ravshan Sobirov threatened him with death if he filed a complaint.

SEPTEMBER 2016 THROUGH JULY 2017

>185

Police raids on religious meetings and searches of private homes

>153

Convictions for religious activity

>148

Fines for administrative offences, up to 100 times the monthly minimum wage

7

Jailed for religious activity

15

Severe beatings of men and assaults on women by police

INTERFERENCE WITH RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Police frequently raid the meetings and private homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan. At times, officers later search the homes of each person who has been present for worship services. Listed below are some of the more recent examples.

- 1. Almalyk. On 11 January 2017**, police officers interrupted the peaceful religious meeting that took place at the home of one of the Witnesses. The officers seized printed religious publications and a computer. The Almalyk City Court found the 11 Witnesses liable for committing administrative offences under Articles 201, p. 1, and 202 of the Administrative Code and ordered them to pay fines that were from 50 to 100 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 2,309 to 4,618 respectively). On 4 April 2017, the appeal court ruled to return the case to the respective investigation body for additional investigation.
- 2. Urgench. On 8 February 2017**, six of Jehovah's Witnesses gathered in a private home for a peaceful religious meeting. Police officers interrupted the meeting and conducted a search, seizing a tablet and a mobile phone, printed religious literature, and photocopies of various publications. On this basis, Judge A. A. Kahharov of the Urgench City Criminal Court ruled on 15 March 2017, finding four of the Witnesses liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and fining them from 80 to 100 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 3,423 to 4,279 respectively). Later, **on 18 April 2017**, Judge S. Toganov of the Khorezm Regional Court rejected an appeal of the decision.
- 3. Urgench. On 30 March 2017**, a group of Jehovah's Witnesses planned to gather for a peaceful religious meeting at the home of one of the Witnesses. However, before the meeting began, police officers burst into the house and searched it. During the search, they seized personal notes and a micro SD card containing religious materials and searched personal belongings. The officers verbally assaulted a male Witness, screamed at him and his relatives, and threatened them, demanding that he reveal the names of the other Witnesses and that he cooperate with the police. **On 19 April 2017**, the homeowner was found liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and was fined 100 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 4,072) by the Urgench City Criminal Court.

SOME AUTHORITIES PUNISHED WORSHIP EVEN IN CHIRCHIK

The authorities in Uzbekistan have withheld registration from Jehovah's Witnesses except in Chirchik and consider their worship illegal anywhere else. As a result, many Witnesses travel great distances so that they can worship without interference in Chirchik. Despite this effort to work within the restrictions imposed on them, some officials interfere with their worship.

- 1. Tashkent. On 18 September 2016**, police officers stopped a bus with a group of 16 of Jehovah's Witnesses returning from worship services

at the Kingdom Hall in Chirchik. Officers, including Mr. Rustam Saliev, searched the personal belongings of the Witnesses and seized their electronic devices (four tablets and seven mobile phones), three print copies of religious publications, and photocopies of religious literature. Later, the Mirzo-Ulugbek District Criminal Court decision dated **20 December 2016** found nine of the Witnesses liable for an offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code, and they were fined from two to five times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 81 to 207). **On 5 January 2017**, the chairman of this court reduced the fines to double the monthly minimum salary (about USD 40).

- 2. Tashkent. On 27 November 2016**, police officers stopped a bus with Jehovah's Witnesses who were traveling to a religious meeting in Chirchik and searched their personal belongings. Police officers seized two copies of the Holy Scriptures. Later, the Mirzo-Ulugbek District Criminal Court decision dated **29 November 2016** found three of the Witnesses liable for an offence under Articles 184-2 and 240, part 2, of the Administrative Code, and they were fined from 1 to 5 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 47 to 235 respectively).

INTERFERENCE WITH MANIFESTATION OF BELIEF

Police officers search the personal belongings of Jehovah's Witnesses when they find them sharing their religious beliefs with others. At times, they will search the homes of those Witnesses or take them to the police station to interrogate them.

There were 15 reports of police interference with manifestation of belief in the reporting period, resulting in 14 home searches and 14 administrative convictions and fines—for two of the Witnesses, fines of 100 times the monthly minimum salary.

SEARCHES OF PRIVATE HOMES

The Witnesses reported 142 incidents of home searches that were prompted only because the authorities knew that those residing there are Jehovah's Witnesses. In most cases, police officers seized personal belongings, particularly tablets and mobile phones, and especially where the police found personal copies of religious literature, courts imposed stiff fines on the Witnesses.

Authorities conducted more than 140 raids of homes in an effort to punish with abusive fines those who were found to possess personal copies of religious literature.

- 1. Akhangaran. In February and March 2017**, police officers searched the homes of two families of Jehovah's Witnesses and seized mobile phones containing religious materials. One of the Witnesses was found liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and was fined ten times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 392).

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2. **Almalyk.** In four separate incidents in the reporting period, police officers raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature.
 3. **Angren.** In three separate incidents in the reporting period, police officers raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Two of Jehovah's Witnesses were found liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and were each fined ten times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 400).
 4. **Bishkent. On 20 May 2017,** police officers searched the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses and seized some religious materials.
 5. **Bukhara.** In 21 separate incidents in the reporting period, 19 of them in **October 2016,** police officers raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Four of Jehovah's Witnesses were found liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and were fined from two to ten times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 94 to USD 480).
 6. **Denau district, Surkhandaryo region. On 27 December 2016,** police officers searched the home of a Witness and seized religious materials. **On 1 February 2017,** the Witness was found liable under Articles 184-2 and 241 of the Administrative Code and was fined 80 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 3,653).
 7. **Dzhizak.** In seven incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. In two raids in **November 2016,** officers found religious materials, including some stored on mobile phones, and two of Jehovah's Witnesses were found liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and were fined 5 and 20 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 229 and USD 931 respectively).
 8. **Karshi.** In 14 incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Where religious literature was found, police sought to have the Witnesses found liable under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code. This led to nine convictions and fines of up to 40 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 1,641) and averaging more than 20 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 795). These fines place a heavy burden on the Witness families, merely for the possession of a few items of personal religious literature.
 9. **Krasnogorsk. On 1 April 2017,** police officers conducted a search in a Witness home and seized religious materials.
 10. **Navoi.** In five incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Three of Jehovah's Witnesses were found liable for committing an administrative offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and fined from 1 to 7 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 41 to USD 289).

All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, and shall be equal before law without discrimination by sex, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, convictions, individual and social status.

(Excerpt from Article 18 of Uzbekistan Constitution)

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- 11. Namangan. On 25 January 2017**, police officers searched a Witness home but found no religious literature.
 - 12. Nukus**, Karakalpakstan Republic. In ten incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature.
 - 13. Samarkand. On 22 November 2016**, police officers searched a Witness home and seized printed religious publications and photocopies of religious literature.
 - 14. Tashkent.** In 35 incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Courts convicted 22 of Jehovah's Witnesses for committing an administrative offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and fined them from 1 to 30 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 40 to USD 1,221).
 - 15. Toytepa.** In four incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. In one incident, officers seized a computer without religious content, a copy of the Bible, and a disc with religious information. On this basis, the Pskent District Court convicted a Witness for an administrative offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and fined him two times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 79).
 - 16. Urgench.** In four incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Courts convicted nine people for committing an administrative offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and fined seven of them from 5 to 20 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 232 to 931 respectively). In one case, police officers falsely claimed that they had found religious materials and brought charges, and in another case, officers seized a few photocopies of religious materials and seized a mobile phone that had no religious content. But in both cases, a Witness was convicted and fined 100 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 3,978).
 - 17. Uchkuduk. On 28 January 2017**, police officers aggressively searched a Witness home and seized a copy of a religious publication.
 - 18. Fergana.** In 17 incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Courts convicted six of Jehovah's Witnesses for committing an administrative offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and fined them from 3 to 20 times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 135 to USD 867).
 - 19. Chirchik.** In eight incidents in the reporting period, police raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in search of religious literature. Courts convicted a Witness for committing an administrative offence under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code and imposed a fine five times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 229).

20. Yangibazar. On 16 February 2017, police officers searched the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses but seized nothing with religious content. **On 6 April 2017**, the Yukorichirchik District Court convicted the Witness of an administrative offence under Article 240, part 2, of the Administrative Code and imposed a fine of ten times the monthly minimum salary (about USD 413). **On 1 May 2017**, the Tashkent Regional Court rescinded the decision and forwarded it to the Prosecutor's Office for investigation.

21. Yangiyul. On 20 September 2016, police officers searched a Witness home but seized nothing with religious content.

STATE CENSORSHIP OF RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

The Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA) censors all imported religious publications. After State approval, such publications may only be used inside the registered religious building in the town of Chirchik. The use of or even the mere possession of the Bible outside this building is considered to be an administrative violation. For the last nine years, the CRA forbade importation of any publications of Jehovah's Witnesses because of a detained shipment of Bibles at customs.

The mere possession of the Bible outside the one registered religious building in Chirchik is considered to be an administrative violation.

9

Meetings With Officials

- **Tashkent. On 11 April 2017**, a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses from the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses (EAJCW) and a local representative met with Mr. Bekzod Kadirov, adviser to the CRA. They discussed the issues regarding the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan.
- **Tashkent. On 28 June 2017**, a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses from world headquarters, another from EAJCW, and a local Witness met with two CRA officials: Mr. Utkir Khasanbaev, deputy chairman, and Mr. Bekzod Kadirov, adviser. They discussed the issues regarding the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan.
- **Chirchik. On 30 June 2017**, with the kind assistance of high-ranking authorities, a special meeting with representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses who came from the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York was organized. Discussions were held regarding the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan.



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES RESPECTFULLY REQUEST THE GOVERNMENT OF UZBEKISTAN TO:

- Grant registration to the local community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent and other cities
- Terminate illegal searches of private homes and seizures of religious literature
- Stop arrests and prosecutions for attending religious meetings and for peacefully and respectfully sharing one's beliefs with others
- Cease harassing Jehovah's Witnesses for mere possession of religious literature
- Uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Uzbekistan and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses welcome the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with representatives of the Uzbekistan government.

For more information: Please contact the Office of General Counsel of Jehovah's Witnesses at generalcounsel@jw.org



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