

# Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan

## Religious Freedom Concerns

Statement by the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw

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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.

2016 (the first six months)	
73	Fines for possessing religious literature
>117	Convictions for religious activity
90	Police raids on religious meetings and private homes
2015	
186	Fines for possessing religious literature
>239	Convictions for religious activity
100	Police raids on religious meetings and private homes

## Abuses and Restrictions of Religious Freedom

### Police Brutality

- (1) **Nukus.** On **25 April 2016**, police officers took a female Witness to the Nukus City Police Department. While she was there, the officers slapped her, grasped her by the neck, and pulled her hair.

On **10 May 2016**, she sent a complaint to the Presidential Administration, the National Human Rights Centre, and the Prosecutor's Office of Nukus City. Law-enforcement officials have failed to investigate and prosecute the incident properly.

- (2) **Samarkand.** On **28 May 2016**, police detained a female Witness while she was talking to others about the Bible. While she was at the police station, an officer named Furkat beat her on the head and hands. He threatened to have her gang raped and buried in the garbage. Then he made derogatory comments about her nationality, beat her, grabbed her by the hair and waist, and used obscene speech. He made a video recording and said that he would post it on the Internet. The female Witness feared to file a complaint.

- (3) **Samarkand.** On **12 April 2016**, a police officer beat a female Witness on the head with a book. She is a single mother and disabled. The officer threatened to fine her a large amount of money for engaging in religious activity. The officer demanded that she reveal information about Jehovah's Witnesses in Chirchik.
- (4) **Samarkand.** On **3 February 2016**, police officers interrupted a peaceful religious meeting of four female Witnesses and took them to the police department. While they were there, Officer Husrav Shamsiev slapped one of the women, and a lieutenant named Askarali pushed another. Officer Esanov took one of the women to a dark room and beat her, and he threatened to undress and rape her and put her out on the street for public display. Officer Esanov began to undress her, but he stopped when she resisted and screamed.

On **18 February 2016**, the women filed complaints with the Presidential Administration, the Regional Police Department, and the Regional and City Prosecutors' Offices. Later, on **15 March 2016**, three of the women were charged with an administrative violation and fined approximately 2,100 EUR each.

### Harassment by Officials

- (1) **Chirchik.** On **5 January 2016**, police arrested two female Witnesses engaged in peaceful religious activity. At the local police department, they were threatened with three days' imprisonment. On **18 January 2016**, they were fined five times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 203) and six times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 238) respectively, under Articles 184-2 and 240-2 of the Administrative Code.
- (2) **Namangan.** On **6 June 2016**, police officers conducted a search of the home of a female Witness. An officer named Murod threatened that in a future search, he would plant drugs and imprison her. On **17 June 2016**, she was fined 20 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 821), under Article 240 of the Administrative Code.
- (3) **Samarkand.** On **18 June 2016**, a female Witness was called to the Buhara City Police Department, where Major Bekzod Tashpulatov interrogated her. She refused to sign a previously prepared document that falsely stated that she was engaged in missionary activity and that she had refused to obey police department officials. Major Tashpulatov threatened to imprison her for 15 days.
- (4) **Tashkent.** On **23 April 2016**, a male Witness was arrested while engaged in peaceful religious activity. At the police department, he was interrogated and threatened with a 15-day jail sentence. When he asked to make a phone call, one of the officers beat him.
- (5) On **6 February 2016**, officers conducted a search of the home of a female Witness. As a result, she and her four guests were fined under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code. Three copies of the Bible, other publications, and even a copy of *Mowgli*, by Rudyard Kipling, were seized.
- (6) On **30 January 2016**, two female Witnesses were stopped by police while engaged in peaceful religious activity, and their house was searched. On **10 February 2016**, the court fined each woman 50 times the monthly minimum salary (approximately EUR 1,969), under Article 240-1 of the Administrative Code.

### Interference With Religious Services

Police frequently raid the meetings and private homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan. Listed below are some of the more recent examples.

- (1) **Angren.** On **28 May 2016**, police officers interrupted a religious meeting in the home of a female Witness and conducted a search. On **14 July 2016**, three of those present were fined 15 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 591), and six persons were fined 30 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 1,183).
- (2) **Bukhara.** On **27 January 2016**, police officers interrupted a religious meeting in the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. On **6 February 2016**, the Kagan Town Criminal Court imposed fines on all 30 persons in attendance.
- (3) On **22 January 2016**, police officers interrupted a religious meeting in the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. On **10 March 2016**, nine of Jehovah's Witnesses who were present were convicted under Articles 184-2 and 240 p. 1 of the Administrative Code.
- (4) **Fergana.** On **12 February 2016**, police officers arrested five of Jehovah's Witnesses during a religious meeting. The officers seized a tablet and religious publications from one Witness and a laptop from another. On **16 March 2016**, both of these Witnesses were fined five times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 203), under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code.
- (5) **Karshi.** On **12 February 2016**, police officers interrupted a religious meeting in the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The officers seized publications and a netbook with religious content. On **26 May 2016**, three of the Witnesses were fined 60 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 2,473), 30 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 1,236), and 50 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 2,031) respectively, under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code.
- (6) On **25 March 2016**, police officers interrupted a religious meeting in the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses. On **28 July 2016**, four of the Witnesses were fined 50 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 2,031), 8 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 318), 5 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 203), and 20 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 795) respectively, under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code.

### Interference With Manifestation of Belief

- (1) **Chirchik.** On **12 May 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity and were taken to the police department. Later their homes were searched. On **4 July 2016**, both women were fined five times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 197), under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code.
- (2) On **11 May 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity. Both women were taken to the police department, where they wrote a statement. The police seized religious publications and tablets from the women.
- (3) **Fergana.** On **11 June 2016**, two of Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity. The arrest was followed by a search of their homes. The police seized mobile phones and religious publications.
- (4) **Karshi.** On **12 February 2016**, two of Jehovah's Witnesses were detained while conducting a Bible study at the home of interested persons. The house was searched, and the Witnesses were taken to the police department. On **17 May 2016**, one of the Witnesses was fined 20 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 786), under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code, and the other Witness was fined 50 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 1,987), under Article 240 p. 1 of the Administrative Code.

- (5) **Samarkand.** On **3 January 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity, and their mobile phones were seized. The women were fined 10 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 406) and 12 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 485) respectively, under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code.
- (6) **Tashkent.** On **17 May 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity, and their homes were searched. On **1 July 2016**, the Yunusobod District Criminal Court fined each of the women three times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 114), under Article 184-2 of the Administrative Code.
- (7) On **3 April 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity. Their homes were also searched. On **20 April 2016**, the Uchtepa District Criminal Court fined each of them ten times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 406), under Article 202 p. 1 of the Administrative Code.
- (8) On **1 April 2016**, two of Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested while peacefully sharing their beliefs. A tablet, a notebook, postcards with Bible verses, and a mobile phone were seized. On **12 April 2016**, the Yakkasaroy District Criminal Court fined each of them five times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 204), under Articles 184-2 and 241 of the Administrative Code.
- (9) On **18 March 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity. On **24 March 2016**, the Chilonzor District Criminal Court fined both women ten times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 410), under Articles 202 p. 1, 240 p. 1, and 241 of the Administrative Code.
- (10) On **30 January 2016**, two female Witnesses were arrested during peaceful religious activity. They were taken to the police department, and their homes were searched. On **10 February 2016**, both women were fined 50 times the monthly minimum wage (about EUR 2,031), under Article 240 p. 1 of the Administrative Code.

### 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 eight years, the CRA forbade importation of any publications of Jehovah's Witnesses because of a detained shipment of Bibles at customs.

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

### Meetings With Officials

On **28 March 2016**, the Chairman of the CRA, Mr Artikbek Yusupov, met with international and local representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss their situation in Uzbekistan and the need for additional registrations of congregations, beginning with the congregation in Tashkent. As detailed above, the lack of registration results in numerous arrests and massive fines. Registration is still unresolved.

### Religious Freedom Objectives

**Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully request the government of Uzbekistan to:**

- (1) Grant registration to the local community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent and other cities
- (2) Terminate illegal searches of private homes and seizures of religious literature
- (3) Stop arrests and prosecutions for attending religious meetings and for peacefully and respectfully sharing one's beliefs with others
- (4) Cease harassing Jehovah's Witnesses for mere possession of religious literature
- (5) 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 a 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](mailto:generalcounsel@jw.org)

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