

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TAJIKISTAN**

### **STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES**

For the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 24 September to 5 October 2012

The Religious Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Dushanbe was first registered in the Republic of Tajikistan in 1994 and was reregistered on 15 January 1997.

#### ***Ban and its impact***

On 11 October 2007, the Ministry of Culture banned the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan. On 12 February 2009, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court ruled to reject Jehovah's Witnesses' appeal against the ban. Jehovah's Witnesses filed a supervisory appeal on 30 December 2009 with the Presidium of the Supreme Court. On 17 February 2010, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan refused to refer the discretionary application by Jehovah's Witnesses to the entire panel of the Supreme Court for supervisory review.

The decision of the Ministry of Culture to ban Jehovah's Witnesses has had a profoundly harmful impact on Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Tajikistan. They have been deprived of the right to rent or own a place of worship and to import Bibles and other religious literature. Witnesses have been subject to arrests, detentions, beatings, searches, and deportations. For example:

- On 22 July 2011 a peaceful gathering of Jehovah's Witnesses in a private apartment was interrupted when police officers forced their way in. The police seized personal Bibles and religious literature and interrogated those present, including two young girls ages 11 and 13. Two adults were taken to the police station where they were harshly interrogated by up to 15 police officers for more than 20 hours.

Sherzod Rahimov, who was present at that gathering, is disabled and yet was singled out for particularly harsh treatment. He was severely beaten in an attempt to force him to renounce his faith. Though a legal resident, he was deported on 17 August 2011.

#### ***Denial of registration***

On 26 March 2009, the 1994 Republic of Tajikistan Religion Law was repealed and replaced by the RT Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. On 1 December 2009 Jehovah's Witnesses applied for reregistration under this new law. On 18 January 2010 the Ministry of Culture denied the application. Jehovah's Witnesses then appealed to the Dushanbe Economic Court, the High Economic Court, and the Presidium of the High Economic Court, all of which dismissed the appeal. The Ministry of Culture informed an international delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses that they would never register Jehovah's Witnesses unless the banning decision is overturned by a higher authority.

On 2 March 2012 an application was submitted to the Constitutional Court requesting that it rule the 2007 ban unconstitutional. On 29 March 2012, the Constitutional Court of Tajikistan denied the application submitted by Jehovah's Witnesses. Having exhausted all avenues within the Tajik government for registration, Jehovah's Witnesses have filed an application with the UN Human Rights Committee.

#### ***A respectful request***

Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully request the government of Tajikistan to re-register their national organization and to allow their peaceful worship free from fear of punishment by the authorities.

***A delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses is ready to meet with representatives of  
Tajikistan attending the present conference in order to clarify any  
misunderstanding and to promote a constructive dialogue.***