

WRITTEN STATEMENT ON UZBEKISTAN
BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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ABUSES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Jehovah's Witnesses continue to face serious human rights abuses in **UZBEKISTAN**. Currently three of their believers serve long prison sentences for peacefully meeting with fellow believers.

On April 25, 2008, the Samarkand Criminal Court sentenced **Olim Turayev**, a 34-year-old medical doctor and family man with three young children, to four years incarceration in a labour colony for practicing his Christian faith. He recently was moved to the Katagurgansk jail.

However, the reality of **Olim Turayev's** arrest and conviction are related to the complete fabrication of events by the police officers and officials from the local administration in Samarkand who on February 17, 2008 illegally raided 18 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, carrying out searches, and confiscating religious literature without search warrants. Eighteen persons were detained and at the police station, the detainees were coerced by threats of physical harm to write statements to the effect that Olim Turayev teaches them the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. A criminal case was then instigated and Olim Turayev was convicted under Article 229-2 of the Criminal Code (Violations of the Law on Teaching Religious Beliefs).

On July 23, 2008, the Margilan City Criminal Court in the Fergana Region found six Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of "forbidden" religious activity. Among them, **Abdubannob Ahmedov** (32) and **Sergey Ivanov** (22) were respectively sentenced to four years and three and a half years incarceration in a labour camp.

The court decision refers to the deregistration of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Fergana on August 24, 2006, which outlawed all its activities. It further describes how the defendants have continued their religious activities as Jehovah's Witnesses. Due to these religious activities they are labelled as dangerous criminals. Abdubannob Ahmedov was recently moved to the Tashkent prison while Sergey Ivanov is imprisoned in the Tuzelsky labour colony.

The amnesty announced by the Uzbekistan Parliament in connection with the anniversary of Uzbekistan's independence and the 2200 years anniversary of Tashkent was not applied to these imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses.

We appeal to the authorities of Uzbekistan to apply amnesties to the three prisoners of conscience and set them free so that they can be with their families. Please take into account that these peaceful citizens do not pose any threat to the government.

As a reminder to the participating states, since 1999 we have disclosed Uzbekistan's continuing intolerable treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses. We hope that our appeal will be favourably received. An amnesty for these three men and legal recognition of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Uzbekistan would demonstrate the willingness of the authorities to respect freedom of conscience and religion in Uzbekistan.

A delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses is ready to meet with representatives of Uzbekistan attending the present Human Dimension Meeting in order to clarify any misunderstanding and to promote a constructive dialogue.