

Religious Freedom Concerns

Statement by the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, Vienna

14 and 15 April 2016

Tajikistan revoked legal registration for Jehovah's Witnesses in 2007, and authorities view all religious activity of the Witnesses as illegal

As an unregistered religious community, Jehovah's Witnesses are—

- subject to harassment by local officials when they worship privately or with others;
- not allowed to manifest their religion in public;
- not allowed to legally produce, import, export, or distribute religious materials;
- denied the right to own or use property for religious purposes, to receive donations, to carry out charitable activity, and to invite foreign citizens to participate in religious events.

The UN Human Rights Committee recommended in its Concluding Observations on the Republic of Tajikistan's second periodic report (22 August 2013) that Jehovah's Witnesses be granted reregistration (CCPR/C/TJK/CO/2 at paragraph 20), stating that "the State party should reverse its discriminatory refusal to register certain religious denominations."

Legal Recognition Withheld

Background. In a 14 November 2013 meeting with government authorities, Jehovah's Witnesses were asked to submit a new application for registration. The Witnesses made application in December 2013. This application and a subsequent resubmission were rejected. The Witnesses submitted to the Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA) on 8 August 2014 a third request to register a religious community in Dushanbe. On 11 September 2014, the CRA rejected the application on a technicality. After the Witnesses corrected the defect, the CRA again refused to issue the registration in October 2014.

- On **20 March 2015**, foreign representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses met with the CRA in an effort to resolve the matter of legal recognition. Mr. Jumakhon Giyosov, First Deputy Director of the Committee of Religious Affairs, stated that the CRA had reversed its position and would *not* register a religious community in Dushanbe.
- On **1 October 2015** in Warsaw, the Tajikistan delegation at the OSCE HDIM Conference stated publicly that Jehovah's Witnesses had not fully exhausted domestic remedies to the decision of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan dated 11 October 2007.
- On **25 February 2016**, in response to the direction given, the Witnesses filed an appeal of the banning decision, submitted to the Chairman of the Supreme Court.
- On **8 April 2016**, the Supreme Court informed the Witnesses that the Chairman of the Supreme Court had rejected the appeal. They have not yet received the written decision.

- The Witnesses expect to soon receive a decision from the UN Human Rights Committee (CCPR) on their complaint submitted in 2012.

Police Harassment

Because Jehovah's Witnesses are unregistered, authorities believe they can ignore their religious freedom rights and harass the Witnesses for practicing their faith. The State Committee of National Security (KGB) in Dushanbe often summons local Witnesses for questioning and pressures them to sign self-incriminating statements.

- On 6 March 2016, in Tursun-Zade (Regar) the police officers raided a congregation meeting held in a private home and arrested all of those in attendance. During the interrogation the police officers beat, threatened, and assaulted many of men and women, even minor children. Police officers tortured some of the male Jehovah's Witnesses with Tasers, causing one man to lose consciousness. The officers were forced to call to the Emergency Medical Service (EMS). However, the officers paid 150 somoni to the EMS and asked them not to report the harm to those in attendance.
- On **5 January 2016**, Ms. Salima Ruzieva decided to bury her deceased husband not according to the Muslim's customs, but according to her religious beliefs as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The relatives knew that the members of this family are Jehovah's Witnesses, yet they insisted they be given the body of her husband in order to bury him in the Muslim cemetery. When the wife asked the relatives not to intervene in the funeral process, they agreed. However, they filed a complaint with the head of the Housing Services Department (HSD), and HSD representatives recorded the funeral proceedings.

On **13 March 2016**, the KGB summoned Mr. Suhrob Maksudov, who was helping during the funeral. During the interrogation, the KGB representative accused Jehovah's Witnesses of instigating religious strife and threatened Mr. Maksudov. When KGB representatives tried to search his apartment without a prosecutor's warrant, his wife did not permit them. The KGB agent informed Mr. Maksudov that the KGB had sent his case to the Prosecutor's Office and that the prosecutor will charge him under Article 189 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan.

- On **26 July 2015**, in the city of Hudjand, police officers detained two of Jehovah's Witnesses, Ms. Gulnora Tegneyeva and Ms. Jamila Bozorboyeva. The officers took the women to the police station, where they interrogated and battered the women.
- On **18 July 2015**, in the town of Gafurov, police officers raided a congregation meeting held in a private home. The officers interrogated eleven people, including a minor, and then took them to the police station. Police seized all of their personal religious literature and did not permit any of them to make a telephone call. One of the elderly Witnesses became ill because of the stress and was later admitted to the hospital.
- On **17 March 2015**, in the city of Hujand, police officers detained two of Jehovah's Witnesses, Ms. Dilfuza Nizomova and Ms. Rano Holmatova, interrogated them at the police station, and confiscated their religious literature.

Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully request the government of Tajikistan to:

- (1) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to register their local religious organization
- (2) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses legally to import and use their religious literature
- (3) Recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service and provide for alternative civilian service so that Jehovah's Witnesses may serve their country with a clean conscience
- (4) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to peacefully practise their religious beliefs and share them with their neighbours

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

For more information:

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

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