

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TURKMENISTAN
STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

For the OSCE Human Dimension Sessions of the 2010 Review Conference, Warsaw, 30 September – 8 October 2010

In 2009 the **TURKMENISTAN** authorities resumed imprisonment of conscientious objectors to military service. Currently seven Jehovah's Witnesses are each serving prison sentences of up to two years because their religious conscience does not allow them to serve in the army. At present, Turkmenistan does not offer genuine alternative civilian service that would be acceptable to many young Jehovah's Witnesses.

On 16 April 2005, Turkmenistan's former president granted a special amnesty to four Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned for conscientious objection. In 2007, three Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned for conscientious objection, but their prison terms were later commuted to suspended sentences and at least two of them were fully pardoned.

However, though having received two-year conditional sentences last year for their conscientious objection to military service, on May 21, 2009, Sakhetmurad (age 22) and Mukhammedmurad ANNAMAMEDOV (age 21) a court in Dashoguz ordered them to serve their two-year sentence in prison.

On 13 July 2009 Shadurdy UCHOTOV (age 22) was found guilty for "evasion of military service" and sentenced to a two-year prison term. Akmurat YEGENDURDYEV (age 20) was found guilty and the court sentenced him to a year-and-half term of imprisonment on 29 July 2009. They appealed their convictions, however, in vain.

Navruz NASYRLAYEV (age 19) of Dashoguz was drafted to the army, when he became 18 years old in March 2009. He refused on three occasions due to his religious beliefs. Thereafter his case was brought to the Dashoguz City Court. On 7 December 2009 he was sentenced to two years in an open colony. He appealed and on 3 January 2010 the Regional Court kept the decision unchanged. In the meantime he was transferred to the Seydi labour colony.

On 4 August 2010 Aziz ROZIYEV (age 20) of Seydi was sentenced by the Seydi City Court to a year-and-half term of imprisonment for his refusal of military service. He appealed but there is no information about the appeal hearing up to now. According the latest information he is still held in prison in the city Turkmenabad.

The last known case was decided on 30 August 2010 when the Turkmenabad City Court sentenced Dovleyet BYASHIMOV to a year-and-half term of imprisonment. He had been arrested on 12 August and for some time nobody knew about his whereabouts. Now he is still imprisoned in Turkmenabad and when his parents could see him shortly in the beginning of September, they saw that he had been beaten black and blue.

We appeal to the authorities of Turkmenistan to apply amnesties to the seven prisoners of conscience and set them free so that they can be with their families. In harmony with the directive of the Council of Europe, the introduction of a genuine alternative civilian service could help these young men to be of benefit to their country without violating their conscience. An amnesty for these seven men would demonstrate the willingness of the authorities to respect freedom of conscience in Turkmenistan.

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