

Religious Freedom Concerns

Statement by the European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw

21 September 2015 – 2 October 2015

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 and cannot worship privately or with others.
- The State does not allow unregistered communities to manifest their religion in public.
- Unregistered religious groups are legally not allowed to produce, import, export, or distribute religious materials.
- The Witnesses are 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

In a 14 November 2013 meeting with government authorities, Jehovah's Witnesses were asked to submit a new application for registration.

- (1) The Witnesses made application in December 2013. This application and a subsequent resubmission were rejected.
- (2) The Witnesses submitted to the Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA) on 8 August 2014 a third request to register a religious community in Dushanbe.
- (3) 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.
- (4) Foreign representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses arranged a meeting for 20 March 2015 with the CRA 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.

Police Harassment

Because Jehovah's Witnesses are unregistered, they are harassed by authorities for practicing their faith. The State Committee of National Security (KGB) in Dushanbe repeatedly summons local Jehovah's Witnesses for questioning and pressures them to sign self-incriminating statements.

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

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 peacefully to practise their religious beliefs and share them with their neighbours
- (5) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses 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

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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