

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

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Legal Status

The Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Kazakhstan has been registered as a religious association since January 22, 1997. Overall Jehovah's Witnesses are able to carry on their worship peacefully without official interference. However, there remains one area where religious freedom is being impeded.

Problems in Atyrau Region

The Atyrau Region is the only region in Kazakhstan where Jehovah's Witnesses do not have official registration. The Atyrau Region Justice Department has unlawfully delayed the registration of the local community of Jehovah's Witnesses for six years. Since May 2001, Jehovah's Witnesses have made four attempts to obtain registration in this predominantly Muslim part of the country.

- The last attempt to register the local community of Jehovah's Witnesses was in March 2007, when the application documents required for registration were filed with the Atyrau Justice Department. The Atyrau Justice Department later informed Jehovah's Witnesses that the process of registration had been suspended in order to conduct a religious expert study—the fourth time such a study has been conducted—and that all documents had been forwarded to the Committee of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice in the capital, Astana. Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan wrote to the Atyrau Justice Department asking why the expert study had been ordered, and where and when it would take place.
- On July 11, 2007, Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the regional Prosecutor's Office against the unlawful action of the Atyrau Region Department of Justice. To date there has not been any response to this complaint.
- On May 6, 2007, six officials from the regional Prosecutor's Office disrupted a religious meeting that was being conducted at the home of one of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Atyrau. All of the approximately 30 persons in attendance were filmed and had their personal literature confiscated.
- On May 10, 2007, Mr. Aleksander Rozinov, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who was not even at the aforementioned meeting, was accused of violating Article 374-1 of the Kazakhstan Republic Code of Administrative Violations—for organizing the activity of an unregistered religious association. Five women who are Jehovah's Witnesses were also accused of violating the same article for participating in the activity of an unregistered religious association. In the registration application, Rozinov was listed as the chairman of the local religious organization, while the five women were indicated as founding members.
- The court cases were heard on May 29 and June 4, 2007. The Administrative Court of the City of Atyrau fined Rozinov 109,200 tenge (\$910 U.S.), the other five were fined 54,600 tenge (\$455 U.S.) each. The court found them guilty despite all the evidence presented at the trial of the lawfulness of the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan and the Atyrau region.
- On June 14, 2007, Jehovah's Witnesses filed their appeals with the Atyrau Regional Court, which heard all the six cases on June 25, 2007. The appeals were dismissed.

- On August 18, 2007, a collective motion addressed to the Kazakhstan Prosecutor General's Office was filed to appeal the above-mentioned ruling. According to Kazakhstan law, only a regional or general prosecutor's office can appeal rulings of regional courts.

The Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses carries out its activities in the entire territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, including the Atyrau region, and all the above-mentioned citizens are currently members of the Religious Center, which has been registered with the Ministry of Justice of Kazakhstan. The 67 local religious associations of Jehovah's Witnesses registered throughout Kazakhstan are all part of the Religious Center. Members of a religion have the right to register their groups as local religious organizations, but they are not obligated by law to do this. Jehovah's Witnesses in Atyrau are trying to obtain registration because of the frequent incidents where the law enforcement agencies have disrupted their religious services. Instead of taking steps against the Atyrau Region Department of Justice for delaying the registration process and obligating it to register Jehovah's Witnesses within the legal time limit, the Atyrau Region Prosecutor's Office has prosecuted Jehovah's Witnesses for continuing to meet together for religious services and for continuing to share their religious beliefs with others.