

## **TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION IN TAJIKISTAN**

### **IN BEHALF OF COMMUNITY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN TAJIKISTAN**

Presented to the OSCE HDIM, Warsaw, 28 September to 9 October 2009

My name is Zafar Rahimov and I live in the city of Khujand, Tajikistan. Yesterday in my oral statement regarding situation with Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan I expressed my fear that authorities have now decided to hunt down and arrest Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country. This morning I have read Forum 18 news service article dated September 28, 2009, entitled *TAJIKISTAN: "IT SEEMS THAT READING THE BIBLE TOGETHER IS NOW A CRIMINAL OFFENCE"*.

The Forum 18 release states that Hamzaali Pulotov, the religious affairs official in Khujand, announced the criminal cases being instigated against up to 17 Jehovah's Witnesses on charges of inciting inter-religious hatred, which carry a sentence of between five and nine years of imprisonment.

Our Bible examinations encourage people to express love, respect and tolerance to others. The accusations in inciting inter-religious hatred, propagating against Constitution and inciting enmity between citizens are absolutely unfounded. Even on May 15 2009, local television broadcasted a program showing exemplary Tajik families. Among the thousands of families in Khujand, my family was selected. As you can see, I am not a criminal or someone representing a threat for the country, but only a peaceful Tajik citizen.

Three weeks later, on June 8, I was summoned to appear the same day at the local District Committee for National Security (CNS) where I was immediately insulted by the officer in charge. My family and I were then falsely accused of religious extremism and since I refused to make a written statement, I was punched in the head and stomach and threatened with imprisonment. The reason? Only because I am one of Jehovah's Witness in Tajikistan who were banned on October 2007.

The Forum 18 quoted the Khujand religious affairs official who stated, "When people break the law they are prosecuted. They [Jehovah's Witnesses] violated the law by meeting in an unapproved place". That was merely a prayer meeting at a private house of one of co-believers. Along with two other interrogated Jehovah's Witnesses, on September 25, 2009, we filed a complaint with the new appointed Ombudsman of Tajikistan Mr. Alizoda, in the hope that this will help to find a solution to this unfortunate situation.

I am afraid that by returning back from the OSCE HDIM meeting sixteen other Jehovah's Witnesses and myself would be arrested and jailed. I would like to appeal to the OSCE member states and the OSCE officers to invite the Tajikistan respected delegation to take action stopping unjustified harsh measures against the peaceful community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan.