

# JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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## **Criminal charges filed for peaceful meeting in Tajikistan**

KHUIJAND, Tajikistan—The Khujand City Prosecutor has revived a criminal case against 17 Jehovah's Witnesses and interested persons who were attending a peaceful religious meeting in a private home on June 4, 2009, in the northern city of Khujand. The new case was filed on May 6, 2010.

Almost eight months previously, on September 25, 2009, the Khujand City Prosecutor announced that he had launched a criminal case against those 17 persons under Article 189(2) of the Criminal Code because of their attendance at a peaceful religious meeting. The prosecutor then discontinued the criminal case on October 27, 2009, because the evidence did not support the criminal charges.

The criminal case claimed that the 17 had violated Article 159 (activities that "harm the health of citizens") and Article 189(2) ("exciting national, racial, or religious hostility") of the Tajik Criminal Code. A conviction under Article 159 is punishable by up to three years of imprisonment, while a conviction under Article 189(2) is punishable by imprisonment of from five to ten years.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan and around the world are deeply disturbed by the disregard shown by the local authorities in Khujand toward the fundamental rights of freedom of religion and association, guaranteed by the Tajik Constitution and international law. They request the authorities to stop this unlawful treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses hope senior Tajik authorities will agree to constructive meetings with them to restore official legal recognition of this peaceful religious community in the Republic of Tajikistan.

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