

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN KAZAKHSTAN

ORAL STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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More than 32,000 persons attend the Bible-based meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan. On behalf of these citizens, we thank Kazakhstan for the freedom of worship Jehovah's Witnesses have now enjoyed for many years. However, they face a grave situation that requires an urgent solution.

In October 2011, a new Religion Law was passed requiring all religious associations to apply for re-registration. The law states that a religious association ceases to exist if it does not obtain re-registration by the deadline of October 25, 2012.

In compliance with the law, the national Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses and their fifty-nine (59) local associations applied for re-registration six months ago.

The latest meetings with the ARA on 31 August and 13 September 2012 seem to have resolved the issue and the adjusted charters were sent to the ARA. On 27 September the ARA informed that it had issued positive expert conclusions for 11 communities of Jehovah's Witnesses and sent them to local authorities for their further consideration. However, to the date none out of 60 religious associations has been re-registered yet.

A second concern we would like to mention is the biased expert studies on religious literature. Starting in November 2011, every single item of to-be-imported literature was submitted monthly to the ARA for examination under the rules of Kazakhstan's new Law on Religion. To this moment the ARA approved importing only 7 editions of the monthly magazines *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* (the most widely translated and internationally distributed religious magazines in the world) out of 47 submitted. Before that, Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan regularly received these magazines the last 20 years.

To eliminate religious censorship and constant concerns from all sides, it would be good that the ARA grants general approval for importing into Kazakhstan the world-known magazines *Awake!* and *The Watchtower* without preliminarily scrutinizing each item. The details can be mutually worked out.

Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully request the government of Kazakhstan to re-register their 59 religious associations and their national Religious Center [and to grant general approval for importing for believers into Kazakhstan the world-known magazines *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*].

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