

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TAJIKISTAN
STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

For the OSCE Human Dimension Sessions of the 2010 Review Conference, Warsaw, 30 September – 8 October 2010

From 1994 till 2007, Jehovah's Witnesses enjoyed legal recognition in **TAJIKISTAN**. During that time, they had a good relationship with the authorities. They even openly organized public meetings in some of the most prestigious buildings in the capital. The authorities were thus able to observe them as peaceful and law-abiding people. This was particularly obvious from their non-participation in the terrible civil war that ravaged the country. Therefore, the decision taken by the Ministry of Culture in 2007 to ban Jehovah's Witnesses was as surprising as it was shocking.

At the Human Dimension Meeting last year, Zafar Rahimov from the city Khujand reported in an oral statement about a criminal case that had been launched against him and 16 others who had gathered in a private flat for reading the Bible in April 2009. After the conference, the General Prosecutor's office in Dushanbe interfered and all 17 criminal cases were closed. This seemed to indicate that the authorities wanted to undertake steps to respect the religious freedom of their citizens.

However, we learned recently that in March 2010 all 17 criminal cases were reopened by order of the General Prosecutor's office. After several interrogations of the accused Jehovah's Witnesses the investigator stated that he had sent literature confiscated from the flat of one of the believers to the State Committee of Religious Affairs in Dushanbe for an expert examination. As soon as he has the results of the examination he is determined to bring the matter to court in Khujand.

We appeal to the authorities of Tajikistan to stop criminal prosecution of peaceful citizens in Khujand. At the same time the request for re-registration of the community in Dushanbe is still pending. We ask the Tajikistan government to facilitate the registration of our organization in the country, as was the case until 2007. This would demonstrate the willingness of the government to respect freedom of religion in Tajikistan.

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