

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN KAZAKHSTAN
ORAL STATEMENT BY THE RELIGIOUS CENTRE OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN
THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

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

In our oral statement at the Human Dimension Meeting last year, we reported that the activity of Jehovah's Witnesses was suspended in three regions of **Kazakhstan**. More than 2,000 of our believers live in these regions.

We are happy to report that in the months following last year's Human Dimension Meeting these problems were resolved with the assistance of different governmental organs, including the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, the Prosecutor General's Office and the Ombudsman's Office. We are sincerely thankful to the Kazakhstan government that they took our concerns seriously and took steps to restore our freedom of religion and association in these three regions. Jehovah's Witnesses are now officially registered in all 16 regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan and we have no reports of new administrative cases against our believers for their religious activity.

On the threshold of the present Conference we again faced serious interference with our peaceful religious activity. The Taldykorgan Akimat sent to the local community of Jehovah's Witnesses in that city a letter enclosing a statement from the Committee of Religious Affairs which claimed that our religious literature "presents a potential threat for the security of the state" and that our religious magazines are "not to be distributed on the territory of Kazakhstan." Our religious magazines—*The Watchtower* and *Awake!*—have a worldwide monthly circulation of over 70 million copies in more than 160 languages, including in Kazakh.

Over the past two weeks we met with different governmental bodies in Astana, including the chairman of the State Committee of Religious Affairs, Mr. Doszhan. We are happy to report that right before the session today the letter of the Committee of Religious Affairs making the unfounded claim our magazines present a "potential threat for the security of the state" has been reversed. Our believers can continue to receive our magazines without hindrance and may share and discuss the same religious information as the more than 7 million other Jehovah's Witnesses do worldwide

We take the opportunity to thank the government of Kazakhstan for the positive actions taken to resolve problems that we were facing. At the same time, to avoid similar problems in the future, we appeal to the authorities of Kazakhstan *to take care that any concerns or accusations against the teaching and activity of Jehovah's Witnesses are first discussed with representatives of our Religious Center. This will ensure that our peaceful religious community does not again become the victim of illegal harassment and unwarranted administrative prosecutions simply for practicing our religious faith.* A delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses is ready to meet with representatives of Kazakhstan in order to clarify any misunderstanding and to continue our constructive dialogue.
