

WRITTEN STATEMENT ON TURKMENISTAN
BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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ABUSES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In 2009 the **TURKMENISTAN** authorities resumed imprisonment of conscientious objectors to military service. Currently four Jehovah's Witnesses are each serving prison sentences of up to two years because their religious conscience does not allow them to serve in the army. At present, Turkmenistan does not offer genuine alternative civilian service that would be acceptable to many young Jehovah's Witnesses.

On April 16, 2005, Turkmenistan's former president granted a special amnesty to four Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned for conscientious objection. In 2007, three Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned for conscientious objection, but their prison terms were later commuted to suspended sentences and at least two of them were fully pardoned.

However, on November 25, 2008, two fleshly brothers who are Jehovah's Witnesses in the city of Serdar, **Annamamedov Sakhemurad** (21) and **Mukhammedmurad** (20), were sentenced by the Serdar City Court because of their refusal of military service. Both received a two-year conditional sentence. For unknown reasons, six months into their conditional sentence, Annamedov Sakhemurad and Mukhammedmurad were called to the draft office on May 21, 2009, and asked if they still maintained the conscientious objection to military service. Since they had not changed their position, they were immediately brought before a trial judge who changed the conditional sentence to a two-year prison term. Both were denied legal representation and their father was not allowed into the courtroom. On June 30, 2009, on appeal, Judge Ahmed Agoyliyev of the Nebit-Dag (Balkanabad Region) upheld the trial judge's decision.

On July 13, 2009 the City Court of the northern town of Dashoguz [Dashhowuz] heard the case of **Uchotov Shadurdy** (21) because of his refusal to serve in the army. The judge sentenced him to two years imprisonment. Shadurdy appealed and the District (Appeal) Court of the city of Dashoguz heard the appeal without him being present in court. The panel of 4 judges decided to keep the decision unchanged. Shadurdy had been moved to the Seydi labour colony already three days after the first-instance decision.

On July 29, 2009 **Yegendurdyev Akmurat** (19) was sentenced by the Dashoguz Court to a one-and-a-half year prison term for his conscientious objection to military service. Akmurat's appeal was also heard without him being present in court; the decision was left unchanged. An appeal has been filed with the Supreme Court that has not yet reviewed the case. In the meantime Akmurat was moved to the Seydi labour colony.

We appeal to the authorities of Turkmenistan to apply amnesties to the four prisoners of conscience and set them free so that they can be with their families. The introduction of a genuine alternative civilian service could help these young men to be of benefit to their country without violating their conscience. We hope that our appeal will be received. An amnesty for these four men would demonstrate the willingness of the authorities to respect freedom of conscience in Turkmenistan.

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