

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TURKMENISTAN

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

For the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 26 September to 7 October 2011.

BACKGROUND

Jehovah's Witnesses have never been officially registered in Turkmenistan. On August 21, 2008, Jehovah's Witnesses submitted an application for registration with the *Gengeshi* (Council) of Religious Affairs. To date, no response from the authorities has been received.

RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Turkmenistan offers no genuine alternative civilian service program to young Jehovah's Witnesses whose conscientiously-held religious beliefs preclude them from performing compulsory military service.^(*)

ABUSES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

May 5, 2010	Seydi Labor Camp	False Accusations and Brutal Beatings During Imprisonment
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In March 2009, one of Jehovah's Witness, Navruz Nasyrlyayev, was drafted to the army. He had refused to serve on three previous occasions due to his religious beliefs. His case was brought to the Dashoguz City Court. On December 7, 2009, Nasyrlyayev was sentenced to two years in an open colony. He appealed, and on January 3, 2010, the Regional Court upheld the decision and Nasyrlyayev was brought to the Seydi labor colony. He also served a one-month punishment cell sentence on fabricated violations. For example, while he was sleeping, someone put a knife in his bed. In the morning they forced him to write an explanation on how the knife came to be in his bed. Although Nasyrlyayev wrote that the knife was not his and that he did not put it there, this incident was construed as one of the "violations."

Four of Jehovah's Witnesses, Navruz Nasyrlyayev, Akmurat Yegendurdyev, Sakhetsmurad Annamamedov, and Shadurdy Uchetov were sentenced to one-month imprisonment in a punishment cell by a special commission in the Seydi labor camp. The four men faced charges on many fabricated accusations resulting in each of them accumulating three "violations." Our representatives believe that these fabricated charges were alleged only to exclude them from an amnesty in May of 2010. During their confinement, they were beaten by the security forces. Afterward, the Prison Chief Executive Warden insisted that the four men be beaten an additional time. Sakhetsmurad Annamamedov was so severely beaten by the soldiers that he sustained injuries to his kidneys. Several days following the beatings he was continuing to pass blood.

DATE 2010	CITY/TOWN Nationwide	CATAGORY Discriminatory Denial of Amnesty
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On May 9, 2010, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov issued a general prisoner amnesty to commemorate the end of World War II. However, the five imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses at that time were not included. Initially, Mukhammedmurad Annamamedov, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was on the list of those amnestied. He had signed a document regarding his release and was waiting for his discharge. He was later informed by the prison administration that they received an order from "above" not to release him. On July 10, 2009, Mukhammedmurad Annamamedov filed an appeal with the Turkmenistan Supreme Court. On July 25, 2009, the Prosecutor's Office in Turkmenbashi verbally informed Annamamedov's family that their appeal had reached the Supreme Court, but that no hearing date had

^(*) Press release is available at <http://www.jw-media.org/tkm/index.htm>

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been established. However, this was not true. The father of the young men filed a petition to the General Prosecutor so as to reinstate the appeal period. On **January 28, 2011**, Akmurat Yegendurdyev was released. On **May 21, 2011**, Sakhetsmurad and Mukhammedmurad Annamedov were released. On **July 21, 2011**, Shadurgy Uchetov was released. All four fully served their sentences from 1,5 to 2 years. Ashirgeldy Taganov was imprisoned on July 7, 2011, and was amnestied on **August 25, 2011**.

2009-Present	Nationwide	Denial of Right to Conscientious Objection
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Presently, in 2011, there are eight remaining detained prisoners of conscience being held in the Seydi labor colony. Their personal details are as follows:

№	Name (age)	Date of imprisonment/ Preliminary date of release	Sentence, Grounds	Location
1.	Navruz NASYRLAYEV (19)	December 7, 2009/ December 7, 2011	Two years *	Seydi labor colony
2.	Aziz ROZIYEV (20)	August 4, 2010/ February 4, 2012	1 year-and-half *	Seydi labor colony
3.	Dovleyet BYASHIMOV (22)	August 30, 2010/ February 30, 2012	1 year-and-half *	Seydi labor colony
4.	Akhmet KHUDAYBERGENOV (20)	September 20, 2010/ March 20, 2012	1 year-and-half *	Seydi labor colony
5.	Sunet DZHAPBAROV (20) Turkmenabad	December 14, 2010/ June 14, 2012	1 year-and-half *	Seydi labor colony
6.	Matkarim AMINOV (19) Dashoguz	December 27, 2010/ June 27, 2012	1 year-and-half *	Seydi labor colony
7.	Dovran MATYAKUBOV (18) Dashoguz	December 28, 2010/ June 28, 2012	1 year-and-half *	Seydi labor colony
8.	Mahmud HUDAYBERGENOV (21) Dashoguz	August 9, 2011/ August 9, 2013	Two years *	Dashoguz remand prison

** Under article 219 part 1 (Army service avoidance) of Turkmenistan Criminal Code, which stipulates: Avoiding army service without lawful grounds of exemption from this service shall be punished with a correctional labor up to two years or up to two years of imprisonment.*

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OBJECTIVES

Jehovah's Witnesses in Turkmenistan call upon President of Turkmenistan as the ultimate Guarantor of the Constitution and human rights to:

- (1) Grant amnesty to the eight men who are imprisoned as conscientious objectors.
- (2) Consider the introduction of a genuine alternative civilian service.