

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN UZBEKISTAN
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

There is one legally registered congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses remaining in Uzbekistan, which is located in Chirchik (Tashkent region). No religious activity is allowed outside the territory of registration.

RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

2009-Present	Tashkent	Denial of Registration
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On February 19, 2009, the seventh application filed by Jehovah's Witnesses to legally register a congregation in Tashkent was denied. The main reason cited was the absence of a confirmation letter (letter of guarantee) of the local *Khokimiat*. The application for registration had been filed on December 22, 2008.

On May 26, 2009, the Department of Justice threatened to liquidate the Chirchik community of Jehovah's Witnesses on the basis of their finding seven violations during its annual inspection of Chirchik community from April 28 to May 5, 2009. The Chirchik community representatives have filed a response with the Department of Justice of the Tashkent Region on June 25, 2009. The matter is still pending.

ABUSES OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The main restrictions involve prisoners of conscience along with short-term detentions and administrative fines for "illegal religious activity."

Three of Jehovah's Witnesses are serving prison terms of either three and a half or four years. Last year all three applied for amnesty. Each was accused of violating the "prison routine," and were moved from the "open" regime settlement to the "general" regime colony which disqualifies them from being granted amnesty. They were not included in the amnesty this year.^(*)

2008-Present	Samarkand	Imprisonment for Religious Expression
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Olim Turayev, a 37-year-old medical doctor and father of three small children from Samarkand has been serving a four-year prison sentence since April 25, 2008. He was charged with teaching his religious beliefs to others and for organizing illegal religious activity.

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

2008-Present	Margilan	Imprisonment for Religious Expression
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Abdubannob Akhmedov (age 33, citizen of Margilan, Fergana region) has been serving a four-year prison sentence since July 23, 2008, for violating Article 216 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code, which penalizes activity of unregistered religions organizations.

2008-Present	Margilan	Imprisonment/ Denial of Amnesty
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Sergey Ivanov (age 23) was sentenced by the Margilan City Criminal Court on July 23, 2008, to three and a half years in an “open” labor colony for religious activity and violation of Article 216 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code. After applying for amnesty, he was transferred to the “general” regime colony “UYa 63/3”, Bostanlyk district (Tashkent region), where he still is confined.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OBJECTIVES

Jehovah’s Witnesses in Uzbekistan and their over 7 million co-religionists call upon the government of Uzbekistan to:

- (1) Grant amnesty to the three Witness men who are prisoners of conscience. This would be in compliance with the Uzbekistan Constitution and international guarantees of religious freedom.
- (2) Accept registration applications for congregations in the localities where these Witnesses live, which would eliminate the prison sentences for Jehovah’s Witnesses who were found guilty of “criminal activity.”