

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TURKMENISTAN****ORAL STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES**

For the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 24 September to 5 October 2012

Turkmenistan is known for its amazing handmade carpets, and cultural treasures. Sadly, the beauty of this country is being tarnished by persistent and numerous reports of serious human rights abuses.

Jehovah's Witnesses are among those in Turkmenistan experiencing serious abuses of their human rights. Individual members of Jehovah's Witnesses are being harassed by the police, their personal belongings seized, arrested on trumped up charges, beaten and imprisoned, in attempts to intimidate all Jehovah's Witnesses and stop their religious worship. Their young men have been sentenced for up to four years imprisonment and sent to prisons and labor colonies where they have been severely beaten by soldiers, police, and other prisoners.

Turkmenistan authorities have focused their harsh treatment especially on young men who are Jehovah's Witnesses and conscientious objectors to military service. Turkmenistan does not provide an alternative civilian service that would allow young Jehovah's Witnesses to serve their country in a dignified manner that respects their conscience. Instead, these able and willing young men who would gladly serve their country in civilian service have been mercilessly beaten by prison guards and soldiers. On release from prison, they are often charged again and sent to further imprisonment in a severe regime colony as repeat offenders.

Currently, four conscientious objectors who are Jehovah's Witnesses are imprisoned for the maximum term of two years. For two of these young men, this is the second time they have been arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced as conscientious objectors to military service.

Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully call upon the President of Turkmenistan to direct Turkmen authorities to respect the right to conscientious objector to military service, to amnesty to those imprisoned as conscientious objectors, and to allow Jehovah's Witnesses to be officially registered in Turkmenistan.

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