

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN UZBEKISTAN

STATEMENT by the EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

For the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 23 September to 4 October 2013

Over the past year Jehovah's Witnesses have seen some improvement on the part of the government of Uzbekistan towards their peaceful religious activity. There are currently no Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned in Uzbekistan. Local and international representatives have several times discussed their concerns with the Committee of Religious Affairs in Tashkent.

However, registration remains an issue of great concern. At present, there is only one legally registered congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the entire country, located in Chirchik (Tashkent Region). Uzbekistan forbids religious activity outside the territory of registration of Chirchik. Repeated attempts to legally register a congregation in Tashkent have been denied. While Jehovah's Witnesses greatly appreciate the recent positive developments, we must mention some of the negative results that come from lack of registration outside of Chirchik.

### ***Arrests, Searches and Administrative Fines***

- **Tashkent:** On 16 October 2012, eight police officers came to the house of Lyudmila Homenko while she was enjoying a visit from some of her friends who are also Jehovah's Witnesses. The police searched the apartment without a court order or prosecutor's warrant and seized some of Ms Homenko's personal Bible literature from her library. The police then took Ms Homenko and her guests to the local police station for interrogation. On 18 October, a court penalized two of those present to fines of EUR 2,900 each.
- **Kagan:** On 30 November 2012, police officers entered the apartment of Ms Fazil Ibodova and arrested her and five guests who are also Jehovah's Witnesses. The police searched the apartment and seized all of Ms Ibodova's personal Bible literature. Soon thereafter a court penalized all six to fines of EUR 2,900 each.
- **Samarkand:** On 15 February 2013, police summoned Ms Farida Aminova to the police station and then took her to her apartment where they searched it, without court order or prosecutor's warrant. They seized her personal Bible literature and her computer. Thereafter, a court tried Ms Aminova and her mother, Umeda Rasulova, who is also one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and fined them approximately EUR 600 each. That same day police did similarly with Mr Savlat Shakirov, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, summoning him to the police station, then taking him to his apartment where they conducted an illegal search and seized his personal Bible literature and computer. On 5 March 2013, a court fined Mr Shakirov approximately EUR 800.
- **Tashkent:** On 8 April 2013, police officers came to the apartment of Ms Dinara Hosiyeva, ostensibly to check passports. Claiming that she allowed illegal tenants to live in her apartment, they entered without Ms Hosiyeva's permission, twisted her arms and screamed obscenities at her. They searched the apartment without court order or prosecutor's warrant and seized her personal Bible literature, notepads, and computer. Five days later a court ordered Ms Hosiyeva to pay a fine of EUR 1,200 and forfeited her computer to the State.

***Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully call upon the government of Uzbekistan to  
(1) legally register their congregations outside of Chirchik, and  
(2) discontinue illegal home searches, confiscation of personal property, arrests,  
and exorbitant fines imposed on its members simply for peacefully practicing  
their religious freedoms guaranteed under the Uzbekistan Constitution.***

A delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses is ready to meet with representatives of Uzbekistan attending this conference in order to promote a constructive dialogue.