

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN KAZAKHSTAN

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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

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Most of the local religious associations (LRA) of Jehovah's Witnesses have been registered in Kazakhstan since the early 1990's. The Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Republic of Kazakhstan (Religious Center) has been registered as a religious association since 22 January 1997.

## ***Denial of re-registration***

Due to the new Law on Religion, 59 LRAs of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Religious Center are seeking to be re-registered throughout Kazakhstan. If re-registration is not approved before 25 October 2012, Jehovah's Witnesses may be banned throughout Kazakhstan. As of August 2012, 34 LRAs and the Religious Center had filed documents for re-registration and received denials because of the negative conclusions of experts from the Agency of Religious Affairs (ARA). The latest meetings with the ARA on 31 August and 13 September 2012 seems to have resolved the issue and the adjusted charters were sent to the ARA. On 27 September the ARA informed that it had issued positive expert conclusions for 11 communities of Jehovah's Witnesses and sent them to local authorities for their further consideration. However, to the date none out of 60 religious associations has been re-registered yet. The decisions on re-registration are pending.

## ***Biased expert studies on religious literature***

In a letter dated 5 August 2009, the Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA) labeled *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* (the most widely translated and internationally distributed religious magazines in the world) as dangerous and stated that these journals presented a "potential threat for the security of the state." This raised the threat of a ban on the magazines' distribution throughout Kazakhstan. During the OSCE HDIM meeting that year, the CRA reversed their conclusion and requested a second expert study of the magazines. The results are not yet known.

However, starting in November 2011, samples of the literature were submitted monthly to the ARA for examination under the rules of Kazakhstan's new Law on Religion. The ARA approved only seven (7) editions of the monthly magazines for importing out of 47 submitted. Before that, Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan could receive these magazines on time during 20 years.

To eliminate religious censorship and constant concerns from all sides, it would be good that ARA grants general approval for importing into Kazakhstan the world-known magazines *Awake!* and *The Watchtower* without preliminary scrutinizing each item. The details can be mutually worked out.

## ***A respectful request***

Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully request the government of Kazakhstan to re-register their religious associations and the Religious Center and to allow the free exercise of their religion without harassment.

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