

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN TAJIKISTAN****STATEMENT by the EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES****For the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 23 September to 4 October 2013**

Jehovah's Witnesses have peacefully existed in Tajikistan for decades. They received state registration in 1994 and enjoyed national legal status.

However, on 11 October 2007, the Ministry of Culture of Tajikistan withdrew their legal registration, effectively banning Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country. The reason given for the ban was that individual Jehovah's Witnesses had shared their religious beliefs in public and in private with interested persons. All levels of court have dismissed the Witnesses' appeals.

Without a registered legal entity, Tajikistan denies Jehovah's Witnesses the rights guaranteed by its 2009 Religion Law, including the right to conduct religious meetings and assemblies, to own or use property for religious purposes, to produce and import religious literature, to receive donations, to carry out charitable activity, and to invite foreign citizens to participate in religious events.

Moreover, Tajikistan authorities have claimed that without registration the peaceful religious activity of Jehovah's Witnesses is "illegal." As a consequence, Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan have been the victims of police raids, detentions, arrests, beatings, and deportation. The most recent police raid and arrests took place in Dushanbe in September 2013.

On 22 August 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Committee addressed this serious matter in its Concluding Observations on Tajikistan's second universal periodic report. The Human Rights Committee stated that it is "particularly concerned at the absolute ban of . . . Jehovah's Witnesses" and called on Tajikistan to "reverse its discriminatory refusal to register" Jehovah's Witnesses.

On 17 September 2013, Jehovah's Witnesses opened with representatives of Tajik high authorities about the possibility of having peaceful Bible-based meetings and of submitting a new application for registration. We hope to be able to relay positive news in this regard in the future.

***Jehovah's Witnesses respectfully ask the Tajikistan government to implement the August 2013 Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee and restore the legal status of Jehovah's Witnesses so that they can manifest their religious beliefs in harmony with the guarantees of law.***