

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN UZBEKISTAN
ORAL STATEMENT BY THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL FOR JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN
WITNESSES

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Various international bodies oblige States to give all religious groups a fair opportunity to apply for registration in a non-discriminatory manner. In our written reports we are sad to report examples where failure to register Jehovah's Witnesses in several OSCE countries has led to serious human rights abuses. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses in **UZBEKISTAN** have become a target of state-sponsored persecution. All of their religious communities have been deregistered with the exception of Chirchik, where their religious community is currently under intense scrutiny from the authorities.

A pattern of disruption of meetings held in private homes by police and National Security Services has developed. Unwarranted searches have resulted in arrests, violence, confiscation of religious literature and fines. For example, on February 18, 2008, in Samarkand, police officers raided 18 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. A 17-year-old male was pulled by his hair and hit on the head. A 16-year-old female Witness was stripped and fondled by a police officer.

On April 25, 2008, the Samarkand Criminal Court sentenced Olim Turayev, a 34-year-old medical doctor and family man with three children, to four years incarceration in a labor colony for practicing his Christian faith.

On July 23, 2008, the Margilan City Criminal Court in the Fergana Region found six Jehovah's Witnesses guilty of forbidden religious activity. Among them, Abdubannob Ahmedov and Sergey Ivanov were respectively sentenced to four years and three and half years incarceration in a labor camp. They were labelled as dangerous criminals.

Svetlana Shevchenko, Aziza Usmanova and Raiya Litvinenko were sentenced to three years incarceration in a labor camp but their sentences were suspended. Should they participate in any further activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, their sentences will be carried out.

We appeal to the authorities of Uzbekistan *to take positive actions to resolve registration problems and to stop illegal harassment and imprisonments of peaceful Christians under the guise of protection against extremism*. As a reminder to the participating states, since 1999 we have disclosed the discrimination inflicted upon Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan. We hope that our appeal will be received. The willingness of the authorities to register our communities would solve the problems.

A delegation of Jehovah's Witnesses is ready to meet with representatives of Uzbekistan attending the present Human Dimension Meeting in order to clarify any misunderstanding and to promote a constructive dialogue.