

# THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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## From The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

**Contribution to the report of the U.N. High  
Commissioner for Human Rights on the  
implementation of the new review mechanism of the  
Human Rights Council, established by GA Resolution  
60/251 and by the Human Rights Council in Resolution  
5/1 of 18 June 2007 for the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the UPR  
(dates of the WG:1-12 December 2008).**

**Marcel Gillet**

**Chairman of the Religious Freedom Subcommittee**

# UZBEKISTAN

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# JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES – UZBEKISTAN

June 1, 2007, to May 31, 2008

The situation with religious freedom and human rights in Uzbekistan continues to deteriorate. Jehovah's Witnesses have become a target of state-sponsored persecution. Following are some recent examples. In cities where Jehovah's Witnesses have been refused registration, like Samarkand, serious problems have developed. In that city, Olim Turayev, a 34-year-old medical doctor and family man with three sons was sentenced to four years incarceration. The police and National Security Service have raided homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, confiscated religious literature, and verbally and physically abused Witnesses and non-Witnesses who were simply attending a peaceful religious meeting. There are over 1,100 documented cases of Jehovah's Witnesses having been arrested, detained, fined, or beaten.

## *Olim Turayev*

- On April 25, 2008, the Samarkand Criminal Court sentenced Olim Turayev, a 34-year-old medical doctor and family man with three sons, to four years incarceration in a labor colony for practicing his Christian faith. Turayev was charged for teaching his religious beliefs to others and for organizing illegal religious activity, acts that according to the Uzbekistan law are punishable crimes (Articles 229(2) and 216 of the Criminal Code). None of the witnesses questioned during the court hearings confirmed any of the charges. Further details on the events leading to Turayev's imprisonment are described under the Samarkand sections of this report.
- Turayev appealed the ruling, but on May 20, 2008, the Appeal Court upheld the decision.

## Samarkand

On February 17, 2008, between 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., police officers and officials from the local administration raided 18 homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, carrying out searches, and confiscating literature without warrants. The officers did not show identification and in most cases refused to identify themselves by their proper names. A total of 18 persons were detained. In one home, when the officials could not find any literature to confiscate, they planted copies of the *Watchtower* magazine in the Uzbek language. At the police station, the 18 detainees were subjected to strong pressure to write statements to the effect that Olim Turayev teaches them the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. A criminal case was instigated against Turayev under Article 229-2 of the Criminal Code (Violations of the Law on Teaching Religious Beliefs). Some examples of the treatment of those who were detained follow.

- Officers pulled Ozod Saidov, a 17-year-old male, by his hair and hit him on the head.
- A 16 year-old female Witness was stripped and fondled by a police officer who claimed to be doing a "body search".
- Fourteen-year-old Muhayo Abdulhakova was interrogated in a separate room without her parents and the authorities demanded she write a dictated statement accusing Olim Turayev of teaching religion. Her 12-year-old sister, Setora, was likewise interrogated and treated rudely. She was also required to write a dictated statement.
- Dilbar Saidova, an adult female Witness, was verbally abused along with her mother.
- Police officers searched the apartment of Vladimir Kuschevoy in his absence. His 86-year-old infirm mother lay helplessly in bed. The officers ignored her requests that they leave; instead they stole her son's passport, university diploma, utility bills, and personal literature.
- Police officers attempted to break down the door of Yuriy Khasanov's apartment. When they entered the apartment, they searched for several hours without finding any literature. The officers placed 11 magazines and a brochure in Uzbek under Khasanov's couch and claimed they had discovered them

during the search. A neighbor named Hanifa was called to be a search “witness” and she signed the protocol of confiscation, although she admitted that she did not see how the police officer had “found” the literature.

- One Witness woman, Akmaral Rahmonberdiyeva, was visiting a female fellow Witness friend, Yana Karimova, when the police arrived at her friend’s apartment. Both women were escorted to the police station. Police officer Zokir Narzikulov accused Rahmonberdiyeva of being responsible for literature deliveries to Samarkand and tried to force her to write a statement to confirm that accusation. The police officers verbally abused her, calling her an apostate and betrayer of Islam.

### **Registration Efforts in Kagan**

On August 10, 2007, an application for a legal address in Kagan (Bukhara District) was denied because of alleged opposition from the local populace.

- On August 31, 2007, police officers and National Security Services burst into the home of Shakir Mardanov and detained several of the founder members of the Kagan local religious organization, including the chairman, Sharif Ashurov. The officers escorted the Witnesses to the police station and held them for approximately eight hours, during which time they were interrogated, photographed, and fingerprinted. The Witnesses refused to give in to efforts to force them to write and sign statements dictated to them by the police. The police threatened the Witnesses with beatings, long-term imprisonment, and death if they continued their attempts to register the organization.

### **Karshi and Navoi**

In Karshi and Navoi, as in many cities throughout Uzbekistan, there are fewer than the mandatory 100 members required in order to apply for registration as local religious organizations, and the authorities in such cities view the activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses as illegal. In Karshi and Navoi, police officers have regularly raided the homes of Jehovah’s Witnesses, confiscated religious literature, and arrested members of the congregation for sharing their beliefs with others. Administrative and criminal cases have been instigated, and some Witnesses have been found guilty and given heavy fines or sentenced to up to ten days of detention.

### **2008 Memorial**

An international delegation was denied visa to monitor the annual Memorial observance.

### **Criminal Cases in Samarkand against Jehovah’s Witnesses**

Hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses were detained in connection with their 2006 Memorial observance. As their cases made their way through the courts they were charged for religious activity as interpreted under the Criminal Code. Among them was Irfon Khamidov who was badly beaten at least three times during his subsequent imprisonment. Also Dilafuz Arziyeva is serving two years of correctional labor.

- On June 6, 2007, Arziyeva was sentenced by the Samarkand City Court to two years of correctional labor, with 20 percent of her salary to be paid to the State for the period of her sentence. During the hearing, motions were filed by Arziyeva’s attorney for a representative of the Samarkand Region Justice Department and a religious expert to be called to give evidence. These motions were granted by the judge, but were not honored. The Justice Department informed the court that they would not attend the hearing because they considered that there was no need for them to get involved in the case. Several other motions were dismissed by the judge with no reasons given, and when witnesses summoned for questioning failed to appear at the hearing, the judge gave no reason for their failure to appear.
- An appeal hearing on the criminal conviction of Irfon Khamidov was held on June 19, 2007, in the Criminal court of the Samarkand Region, and on June 21, 2007, the court gave its decision to uphold the two-year prison sentence issued to Khamidov on May 14, 2007. The appeal court similarly

refused to hear the testimony of two observers present in the courtroom who could attest to hearing those “victims” deny under oath that Khamidov taught religion to them.

### Conclusion

The Christian Community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan reiterates once more their appeal to be registered in the cities where they don't have a legal statute. Referring to the international commitments accepted by Uzbekistan, they plead for the respect of their fundamental rights to worship God in peace and to assemble without any interference from the police. Furthermore, the International community of Jehovah's Witnesses addresses to the Uzbek authorities a solemn appeal for the liberation of Olim Turayev, a family man with 3 sons.