

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONCERNS IN UZBEKISTAN**

### **STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES**

For the OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Astana, 29 and 30 June 2010

Three of Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison terms have applied for amnesty. When the first one sought amnesty in February 2008, he was immediately found guilty of "violating the prison routine" which now disqualifies his being granted amnesty. As noted below, a similar pattern was observed in 2009 and this year.

Olim Turayev, a 34-year-old medical doctor and father of three small children from Samarkand and one of Jehovah's Witness, has been serving a four-year prison sentence since April 25, 2008. He was charged with teaching his religious beliefs to others and for organizing illegal religious activity, acts that, according to the Uzbekistan law, are punishable crimes (Articles 216 and 229(2) of the Criminal Code). On August 12, 2009, Turayev's attorney filed an appeal for amnesty with the prosecutor's office of the Pastdargom district of the Samarkand region. That same day, Turayev was taken to the Kattakurgan jail and later the Pastdargom court found him guilty of "violating the prison routine." His sentence was changed from an "open" to a "general" regime labor colony. Later he was transferred to the "general" regime Tavaksay colony (Tashkent region). Hence, Turayev does not qualify for amnesty.

Abdubannob Akhmedov (age 32, citizen of Margilan, Fergana region) has been serving a four-year prison sentence since July 23, 2008, for violating Article 216 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code, which penalizes activity of unregistered religions organizations. When Akhmedov requested amnesty in 2009, he was moved from the "open" regime settlement to the "general" regime colony in the town of Navoi (KIN 29). Thus, he is not eligible for amnesty.

Sergey Ivanov, age 20, was sentenced by the Margilan City Criminal Court on July 23, 2008, to three and a half years in an "open" labor colony for religious activity under Article 216 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code. After applying for amnesty, he was accused of violating the "prison routine," and his sentence was changed from an "open" to a "general" colony. He was transferred to a prison in Tavaksay colony (Tashkent region). Thus, he is not eligible for amnesty.

**Prison sentences for Jehovah's Witnesses who were found guilty of "criminal activity" would be eliminated if the government would accept applications for congregations in the localities where these Witnesses lived. We call upon the government of Uzbekistan to free Jehovah's Witnesses who are prisoners of conscience. This would be in compliance with the Uzbekistan Constitution and international guarantees of religious freedom.**

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

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