

Table of Contents

- ***Conscientious objectors face indefinite prison sentence for refusing to renounce faith***
 - ***New haj pilgrimage, same old restrictions***
 - ***Did authorities block Russian Patriarch's visit?***
 - ***"We are a free country"***
 - ***Religious fines lead to travel bans***
 - ***More fines, physical abuse and religious literature destruction***
 - ***"Spiritually rich and for freedom of conscience and religion" ?***
 - ***USCIRF calls for freedom for thousands of religious prisoners after poet released***
 - ***April was the cruelest month***
 - ***Raids and confiscations as state wants "religious organisations which will stay quiet"?***
 - ***"Anti-terror" raid on old people's home***
 - ***"All talk about the Constitution and democracy is hypocrisy"***
 - ***More short-term prisoners of conscience***
 - ***"No need to import Bibles"?***
 - ***"It's our secret"***
 - ***Prisoner of conscience "released but not free"***
-

Conscientious objectors face indefinite prison sentence for refusing to renounce faith

JW Official Website (24.11.2011) / HRWF (01.12.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Prison officials are threatening to indefinitely extend the prison terms for three of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are prisoners of conscience in Uzbekistan. All three were sentenced for "unauthorized religious activities" that ranged from studying the Bible in a private home to merely talking about the Bible with others. While serving their sentences, all of them were visited by a prison official and told that they would not be released at the end of their terms unless they renounced their faith.

Olim Turayev is a 38-year-old medical doctor from Samarkand and a father of three small children. He has been serving a four-year prison sentence since April 25, 2008. On August 12, 2009, Turayev's attorney filed an appeal for amnesty. Shortly after the appeal, the Pastdargom court found Turayev guilty of "violating the prison routine." His sentence was changed from an "open" or less restrictive form of incarceration to a "general" regime which is considered more punitive. He was then transferred to the Tavaksay colony (Tashkent region). Turayev has been exempted from all other opportunities for amnesty throughout his imprisonment. He is due to be released in April 2012.

Sergey Ivanov (22 years of age) was sentenced by the Margilan City Criminal Court (Fergana region) on July 23, 2008, to three and a half years in an "open" labor colony. After applying for

amnesty, Ivanov was accused of violating the "prison routine," and his sentence was likewise changed from an "open" to a "general" colony. He was transferred to the Tavaksay colony and was informed that he would not be considered for amnesty. He should be released in January 2012.

Abdubannob Akhmedov (34 years of age), a citizen of Margilan, has been serving a four-year prison sentence since July 23, 2008. When Akhmedov requested amnesty in 2009, he too was moved from an "open" regime settlement to a "general" regime colony in the town of Navoi. Akhmedov was excluded from the list of all annual and semiannual amnesty reviews. His prison term should end in July 2012.

Media Contacts:

J.R. Brown, Office of Public Information, tel. +1 718 560 5600

Belgium: European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses, tel. +32 2 782 0015

Britain: European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses, tel. +44 208 906 2211

New haj pilgrimage, same old restrictions

By Mushfig Bayram,

Forum 18 News Service (07.11.11) / HRWF (14.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - In deciding whether or not applicants could travel on this year's Muslim haj pilgrimage to Mecca – now underway in Saudi Arabia – the Uzbek authorities continued to impose the same severe restrictions as in earlier years, Forum 18 News Service has found. The numbers were restricted to about one fifth of the potentially available quota, while would-be pilgrims under the age of 45 appear to continue to have been banned. Would-be pilgrims also needed to pass unwritten state controls, as well as to be able to afford high fees, including reported bribes. These restrictions again seriously limited the number of Muslims who could perform this obligation of their faith. Every able-bodied adult Muslim who can afford to do so is obliged to make a haj pilgrimage once in their lifetime.

With an estimated population of over 28,000,000, the government's Religious Affairs Committee stated on 15 October that 5,078 people would be allowed to go on the haj. The first flight left the capital Tashkent for Saudi Arabia on 19 October. The pilgrims are due to return to Uzbekistan later in November.

As in previous years, all pilgrims needed approval from local authorities, the National Security Service (NSS) secret police and other national authorities.

More pilgrims from Russia or Afghanistan than Uzbekistan

Worldwide the numbers per country permitted are based on a country's population and allocated on that basis by Saudi Arabia, as guardian of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The quota is set at 1,000 pilgrims per million Muslim residents of a country, giving Uzbekistan a possible quota of about 28,000.

Afghanistan with a population a little over Uzbekistan's of almost 30,000,000 has sent around 30,000 pilgrims this year, and Russia (with around 20,000,000 Muslims) has sent about 22,500 pilgrims. Kazakhstan, with a population of around 15,000,000 (perhaps two-thirds of Muslim background) has sent 4,000 pilgrims this year.

The closest Central Asian country to Uzbekistan in terms of numbers of pilgrims sent is Kyrgyzstan, which sent 5,072 pilgrims this year out of a total population of around 5,500,000. The lowest number of pilgrims sent from Central Asia came from Turkmenistan, which as in previous years sent "about 180" pilgrims (including secret police and other officials) this year.

Why can't Uzbekistan send its full quota?

Asked why Uzbekistan does not send its possible quota of between 20,000 and 30,000 pilgrims, Bahodiy Mamedkarimov, Legal Advisor to the Interior Minister, told Forum 18 on 4 November: "It is not we who decide this, but the Muslim Board."

A Saudi diplomat outside Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia said that Uzbekistan could have asked Saudi Arabia to increase its haj quota. "I do not believe that Saudi Arabia has asked Uzbekistan to lower the quota [to current levels]," the diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity as someone not authorised to speak to the media, told Forum 18 on 3 November. Forum 18 is aware that in the recent past Russia's and Turkey's quotas were increased at their request, while this year Kyrgyzstan successfully asked for an increase of 500.

Most other Saudi and Uzbek officials in Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia would not comment on the issue to Forum 18. Telephones at Uzbekistan's Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Tashkent were not answered on 3 and 4 November.

No young pilgrims

Mahalla workers in one district of Tashkent told Forum 18 that there was "an unwritten instruction from district authorities" that all haj applicants must be over 45 years old. An age limit has been among the restrictions in previous years.

Many are willing, few are chosen

State officials at a national and local level are highly reluctant to discuss how many pilgrims are allowed to travel on the haj and especially why numbers are so low.

Every single district in Uzbekistan's regions is allocated a quota for haj pilgrims, a human rights defender from Tashkent, who did not wish to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 4 November. This follows the practice of previous years.

An official of a mahalla committee in Tashkent's Mirza-Ulugbek District, who asked not to be named, complained to Forum 18 that their District has around 250,000 residents but can send only between 30 to 40 pilgrims each year. The official said that it is the Religious Affairs Committee which decides the numbers of haj pilgrims for each District.

Labar (she did not give her last name), an official of Mirza-Ulugbek District's Central mahalla committee, on 3 November refused to give the number of pilgrims from the District this year – or to discuss any other issue. She referred Forum 18 to the District Administration. The District Administration's phones went unanswered on the same day.

An Imam from Khorezm Region in western Uzbekistan noted that 200 people applied for the Haj in the Region. The Regional Administration "selected only 100 because that was the quota given for our Region from Tashkent," he lamented to Forum 18 in early October.

In Uzbekistan's central Samarkand Region, Khujakul Mukhamadiyev, the Administration's official in charge of religious issues, refused to give any information. On 3 November he took down Forum 18's name and the question why the number of pilgrims is so low. After repeating several times that he could not hear well, he put the phone down. However, Forum 18's end of the line was very clear. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

Imam Nurullokhon Ismoilov, Chief Imam of Samarkand Region, told Forum 18 on 3 November that 375 Muslims went on Haj pilgrimage this year. He said that the number of pilgrims was "about the same" as in 2010. Asked why Samarkand, which has more than 2,300,000 inhabitants, would send only 375 pilgrims, he claimed that the number of applicants is not much higher, but refused to say

what the number is. "And then many are turned down because of health and other issues," he said, not wishing to clarify what the other issues were.

Imam Ismoilov also argued that the country's quota of roughly 5,000 is a mutually agreed figure between Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan.

Objecting to this was another Sunni Imam from Samarkand, who asked not to be named, saying that the number of applicants from the Region this year was as high as 4,000. He said that the Religious Affairs Committee does not want high numbers of pilgrims. He declined to discuss with Forum 18 the reasons for this, fearing that it could lead to problems for him from the authorities.

Fakhriddin Khuseinov, Imam of Panjab Shia Mosque in Samarkand, told Forum 18 on 4 November that eight Shia Muslims were able to go on haj this year. Asked why so few pilgrims were chosen from Samarkand's Shia community, which estimates that it has about 200,000 members, he said that he does "not want" to complain. "Our pilgrims are given freedom" by Uzbek officials during the haj "to pray separately from the Sunnis, who have a different tradition," he pointed out.

The population of Andijan Region in eastern Uzbekistan is estimated to be around 1,899,000, thus making it the most densely populated Region of the country. An official of one mahalla committee in Andijan city said that of the 76 mahallas in the city, not every one can send a Muslim resident on the haj every year because of the waiting lists. "We could only send one haj pilgrim from our mahalla this year," the official told Forum 18 on 3 November. This mahalla has more than 3,000 residents.

The official declined to discuss the way pilgrims are selected or anything else and referred Forum 18 to Shavkatbek (the last name was not given) from Andijan city Hokimat (administration).

Shavkatbek in his turn told Forum 18 on 4 November that he does "not know" how many pilgrims from Andijan City or Region went on the haj in 2011. He refused to talk to Forum 18, saying that he does "not have any details" on the haj pilgrimage. He also said he was unable to refer Forum 18 to any official who knows such details.

Abdurahman Nazyrkulov, the official overseeing religious affairs in Syrdarya Region, which neighbours Tashkent Region, said that the quota given by the Religious Affairs Committee for his Region is 150. "And this year we sent 150 pilgrims," he told Forum 18 on 3 November. He said he could not comment on whether Syrdarya, which has more than 600,000 inhabitants, is planning to ask the Committee to increase its quota in future years. He put the phone down without answering Forum 18's other questions.

All applicants screened

Each mahalla committee submits to the local administration its list of applicants for the haj. (Mahalla committees, in theory locally-elected but in practice state-appointed, are a key part of Uzbekistan's structures of control and oppression. Local administrations, along with the NSS secret police, check each applicant and endorse or reject the application.

Mamedkarimov, Legal Advisor to the Interior Minister, told Forum 18 that haj candidates are screened by law-enforcement agencies to see whether they have criminal records and check whether they will pose any threat during the pilgrimage.

The application, officials of several mahalla committees told Forum 18 on 3 November, is in writing, with a copy of the applicant's passport. The central mahalla of a district compiles a waiting list of applicants. When applicants' turn to go on pilgrimage comes up, they are invited to the local district administration and instructed to collect more documents, including certificates of their place of residence, their health, and a reference letter from their local mahalla committee. The letter gives information about their personal qualities and charitable works.

"There were several officials who gave instructions"

Special instructions are given to successful applicants on how to behave on pilgrimage, including not to talk to foreigners. These instructions are typically given at meetings for all approved pilgrims, such as took place in Tashkent's House of Cinema on 8 October.

Asliddin (who would did not give his last name), the Director of the House of Cinema, told Forum 18 on 4 November that the 800-seat hall was full when the City Administration met with the pilgrims from Tashkent. "There were several officials who gave instructions" to the would-be pilgrims, he said, "and the rest were pilgrims." He said that these were only pilgrims from Tashkent, as the authorities held similar meetings with the other pilgrims in various Districts of Tashkent Region and other Regions. The Director said that he could not say more about the meeting as he did not participate in it.

Tashkent Region and City Administration officials overseeing haj issues refused to talk to Forum 18 on 3 November. Almardan Karimov of Tashkent Regional Administration on 3 November took down Forum 18's name and questions and then without answering put the phone down. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

"Officials are sent to provide for the security of Uzbek citizens"

Pilgrims have long noted the presence of unexplained additional people accompanying them on the haj. "Officials are sent to provide for the security of Uzbek citizens," Mamedkarimov, Legal Advisor to the Interior Minister, told Forum 18.

Asked why NSS secret police accompany pilgrims and try to ensure they do not mingle and talk with pilgrims from other countries, Mamedkarimov responded: "Uzbekistan is a free country, our citizens are free to talk to anyone."

One Muslim from Tashkent, who has been on the haj, told Forum 18 on 3 November that Uzbek cooks accompanying the Uzbek pilgrims did not prepare food for them, but supposedly were present to ensure that pilgrims would not get food poisoning. Identifiable NSS secret police also accompany the pilgrimage, but the Muslim did not wish to discuss what the NSS officials do, or what they tell pilgrims.

How much does haj cost?

One Mahalla committee worker in Tashkent's Sergeli District, who did not their name, told Forum 18 on 3 November that the official cost of the haj, including the air ticket, food and accommodation, is around 2,500,000 Soms (7,900 Norwegian Kroner, 1,020 Euros, or 1,400 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

One mahalla committee official outside Tashkent (who did not wish to publicly state their name or location) on 4 November told Forum 18 that the pilgrims deposit money in a bank account of the local administration. This follows the practice of previous years. But the official insisted that that no "unofficial payments" are made.

However, there have in previous years been suggestions that bribes are also demanded by officials. The Sergeli Mahalla Committee worker would not comment on these "unofficial payments".

An Imam outside Tashkent, who did not wish to be named for fear of state reprisals, complained that, with "unofficial payments", the cost of a haj pilgrimage is roughly 6,000,000 Soms (18,975 Norwegian Kroner, 2,450 Euros, or 3,380 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). "It is too much," he lamented to Forum 18 on 3 November. "The number of applicants would be much, much higher if the cost was not so high."

As the imam indicated, these costs are very high indeed for people in Uzbekistan. From 1 August

2011, the official minimum monthly wage has been 57,200 Soms (180 Norwegian Kroner, 23 Euros, or 32 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

Human rights defender Surat Ikramov, referring to the unofficial payments, told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 7 November that "there is strong corruption surrounding the Haj". He said those wanting to get on the list almost always have to pay bribes which increase the cost of the Haj significantly. "Especially for older pilgrims, their families often pay without questioning the sums demanded of them. Officials of the Religious Affairs Committee and the Muslim Board are among those who benefit."

"Our mahalla will be able to send pilgrims only in 2012"

Several officials of different mahallas told Forum 18 between 3 and 4 November that Tashkent's Sergeli District has usually been given 33 places on the haj. The District has 33 mahallas, and each mahalla has between 3,000 and 7,000 residents.

But an official of one Sergeli District mahalla, who wished to remain unnamed, told Forum 18 that "our mahalla will be able to send pilgrims only in 2012. Several people are on the waiting list but maybe only one will go." All the applicants are around 60 years old. (Life expectancy in Uzbekistan is a little over 70 years.)

Another mahalla committee chair in Sergeli District, who wished not to be named, said that the last time they sent pilgrims was several years ago, and that they have several applicants whose turn will come up in 2012.

Khakim Jabbarov, the Chair of the Sergeli District Central Mahalla, and officials of Sergeli District Administration declined to discuss the haj with Forum 18. Asked why not send 200 instead of 33 pilgrims from their District, which has roughly 200,000 residents, Jabbarov told Forum 18 on 3 November that "I am not the person who decides this." He refused to give Forum 18 the number of this year's haj pilgrims from the District. Several District officials refused on 3 November to talk to Forum 18, and also said that Batyr Sayislamov, the official who oversees haj issues, was not available to comment.

Did authorities block Russian Patriarch's visit?

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 News Service (02/11/2011) / HRWF (07.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - A visit to Uzbekistan by Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill now appears uncertain, Forum 18 News Service notes. The visit, to mark the 140th anniversary of the establishment of Tashkent Diocese in 1871, was thought by some to be due to begin today (2 November) and to have been cancelled due to the Orthodox Church reorganising its structures and changing bishops without state approval. However, an Orthodox priest in Uzbekistan has told Forum 18 that the Patriarch's visit will take place between 23 and 25 November.

Meanwhile, Sergei Kozin and Pavel Nenno, who belong to an officially registered Baptist Church in the region around the capital Tashkent, are now being prosecuted three months after a July police raid on a group of Baptists on holiday.

Also, another Protestant, Azamat Rajapov, has been fined 50 times the minimum monthly salary to punish him for his religious activity. His fellow-believers think that he may be being repeatedly targeted by the authorities.

An invitation, personnel moves, and a restructuring

The long-serving head of the Russian Orthodox Church's Tashkent Diocese, Metropolitan Vladimir (Ikim), announced in April 2011 that it was expected that Patriarch Kirill would visit the Tashkent Diocese in the autumn, the website of the Foundation of the Apostle Andrew the First-Called announced at the time. The reason was to attend the Tashkent Diocese's anniversary celebrations, and local media gave the visit date as 2-3 November.

On 30 June, Father Afanasy Koryugin told a press conference in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek that the Patriarch was planning to visit Tashkent in early November, though an onward visit to Bishkek was then in question, News-Asia reported the same day.

On 27 July the Orthodox Church's Holy Synod established independent dioceses for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, leaving the Tashkent Diocese only with direct jurisdiction over parishes in Uzbekistan. However, Tashkent became the centre for the new Central Asian Metropolitan Region the Holy Synod established the same day. The Archbishop of Tashkent also became the head of this Region.

Also on 27 July, the Holy Synod transferred Metropolitan Vladimir from Tashkent Diocese to the diocese of Omsk in Russia. He was subsequently removed as head of the Tashkent Orthodox Theological Seminary in early October. Appointed to head the Tashkent Diocese on 27 July to replace Metropolitan Vladimir was Moldovan-born Archbishop (now Metropolitan) Vikenty (Morar), who served as a bishop in Moldova from 1990 and in Russia from 1995. He appears not to have previously served in Uzbekistan.

Official displeasure at independent decisions

On 12 October the uzmetronom press agency, which is thought to have strong ties to the authorities, claimed that the Uzbek Foreign Ministry was unhappy about the bishops being moved and structures being reorganised without consultation with or approval from the authorities. The agency claimed that this led to the government not re-registering the new structure of the Metropolitan Region and the refusal to allow Patriarch Kirill to visit.

The article by the agency's editor Sergei Yezhkov - entitled "Render to God the things that are God's, but they forgot about Caesar" - accuses the Patriarch of "ignoring ordinary etiquette and diplomatic politeness", which the author claims "automatically complicated" the move of Metropolitan Vikenty to Tashkent. Vikenty, the article states, is "trying unsuccessfully to gain legal status for the new administrative structure of the Church", so that "in fact the Metropolitan Region exists, but legally it is still a Diocese".

The article concludes that "it is doubtful whether Patriarch Kirill realised that his political short-sightedness and conceited dignity would at best spoil the 140th anniversary celebration of the Russian Orthodox Church's presence in Central Asia, and at worst make it strictly a small-scale [event]".

Previous reorganisation and criticism of authorities

This is not the first change to the Moscow Patriarchate's structures in Central Asia in recent years. In October 2007 the Tashkent and Central Asian Diocese (covering Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) lost its jurisdiction over parishes in Turkmenistan, after pressure from former Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov. The parishes were then placed under the authority of the Patriarch.

Patriarch Kirill has previously spoken of the difficulties the Church faces in Uzbekistan, including that stated that "there is a ban on missionary activity, it is impossible to organise Orthodox secondary schools, and there are difficulties with registering new parishes".

In January 2005, the Uzbek authorities even banned the relics of two saints, recognised by the Russian Orthodox Church, from entering the country.

"Decisions are always made independently by our Church"

Roman Ovcharenko, Vice-Rector of Tashkent's Russian Orthodox Theological Seminary told Forum 18 on 1 November that the new structures had not yet been re-registered by the state. "It does not happen in one day," he noted when asked why the Religious Affairs Committee had not done this. "The process will take some time."

Father Vsevolod Chaplin of the Moscow Patriarchate told Forum 18 on 31 October: "Cadre and organisational decisions are always made independently by our Church, and without regard to the country in which the Church functions". For example, "the authorities of the Russian Federation are informed of decisions after they are made. But we are at the same time always ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with the authorities of any country on any question regarding the life and activity of our Church."

Will Patriarch Kirill be able to visit Uzbekistan?

Ovcharenko of the Theological Seminary told Forum 18 that the patriarchal visit "was not planned between 2 and 3 November, contrary to the announcements in news agencies". He stated that "in fact it is planned to be between 23 and 25 November". However, he did not know whether the planned visit will take place. "The Patriarch would like to visit but we still do not know whether it will happen." Asked who will make the decision on patriarchal involvement in the anniversary celebration, he said that this will be decided by Metropolitan Vikenty of Tashkent Diocese. "The Church here may decide to make the celebration either local or international."

Father Chaplin of the Patriarchate told Forum 18 that a visit will also depend on Uzbekistan's "readiness to hospitably receive His Holiness Patriarch Kirill". The timing of the visit depends "on the level of such readiness".

No official comment

An official (who refused to give her name) of the Presidential Administration's Department for Nationalities and Religions on 1 November refused to comment on whether or not Uzbekistan had blocked the visit. She referred Forum 18 to the Foreign Ministry.

A Foreign Ministry Press Service official (who would not give his name) on 1 November took down Forum 18's questions, and asked Forum 18 to call back in 20 minutes. He said that Adylbek Kaybergenov, Head of the Press Service, was out of the office. Subsequent calls to the Press Service on 1 and 2 November went unanswered.

A Religious Affairs Committee official (who also would not give his name) said that Chair Artyk Yusupov along with other officials were on the haj pilgrimage to Mecca. He referred Forum 18 to Committee official Sobitjon Nasimov. However, he did not want to comment on the visit of the Patriarch, or fines and raids on Protestants. He said that he "does not know" whether Uzbekistan will allow Patriarch Kirill to visit. "Only Chairman Yusupov could tell you this, but he is on the haj pilgrimage and will return only at the end of November," Nasimov told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 1 November

Summer holiday prosecuted illegally

Meanwhile, Tashkent Region's Yangiyul District Police have brought administrative cases against Sergei Kozin and Pavel Nenno, two members of the officially registered Baptist Church of the same region's Sergeli District. Captain Murat Yusupov of Yangiyul District Police Criminal Investigation Department in late October handed to the District Criminal Court an administrative case against Kozin and Nenno.

On 17 October police raided Kozin's home, Captain Yusupov arresting him and taking him to Yangiyul Police Station. Yusupov demanded that Kozin write a statement, sign several police reports, and tell police where Nenno was. Kozin refused to do this, so Yusupov then announced that the administrative case opened on 29 July against Kozin and Nenno would be handed to Yangiyul District Criminal Court.

The case was opened on 29 July by Yangiyul Police under the Code of Administrative Offences' Articles 240, Part 1 ("Holding unregistered religious meetings") and 241 ("Teaching religious beliefs without specialised religious education and without permission from the central organ of a [registered] religious organisation, as well as teaching religious beliefs privately"). This followed a raid that day on a group of Baptists spending their summer holiday together in the village of Niyazbash in Tashkent Region.

Six officers – five in police uniforms – at 13.00 "filmed everybody and even took photographs of children" while the Baptists were part of a holiday group. Police confiscated three Russian-language Bibles and four songbooks, later returning the Bibles but not the songbooks.

Nenno has previously been jailed for 15 days for feeding neglected children from poor families).

However other Baptists who wished to remain unnamed, for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 on 25 October that Captain Yusupov has violated the Administrative Code in handing the cases to court. They point out that Administrative Code Article 36 states that penalties cannot be given more than two months after an alleged administrative violation.

"Secret operational data"

Captain Yusupov told Forum 18 on 1 November that he had referred the case to court "approximately a week ago". Asked why he had violated the Administrative Code, he said that he would only explain this to the accused Kozin and their lawyers at the police station.

Yusupov refused to explain why police raided the Baptists during their summer holiday. "I cannot give you my secret operational data." When Forum 18 asked what law the Baptists broke, Yusupov said that he "does not have time", and put the phone down.

Fined again

Azamat Rajapov, a Protestant who lives in Chirchik, has been fined once more to punish him for his religious activity. Protestants, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 19 October that they think "the authorities are specifically targeting Rajapov".

On 3 October Judge Abdurahmon Tohirov of Tashkent Region's Chirchik Criminal Court fined Rajapov 50 times the minimum monthly wage, or 2,860,000 Soms (9,040 Norwegian Kroner, 1,165 Euros, or 1,600 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). This was for allegedly breaking Administrative Code Article 240 ("Violation of the Religion Law"). Judge Tohirov also ordered the confiscation of five Christian books and 33 DVD disks taken from Rajapov.

From 1 August 2011, the official minimum monthly wage has been 57,200 Soms (180 Norwegian Kroner, 23 Euros, or 32 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

Mirvahid Usmonov, Chair of Chirchik Court, did not want to comment to Forum 18 on why such a large fine was imposed on Rajapov. "If Rajapov and his lawyer make an appeal, we will see what we can do," he told Forum 18 on 31 October.

Previous punishments

Rajapov has repeatedly been punished for exercising his right to freedom of religion or belief. To

take some examples, he was in 2007 repeatedly questioned by police and fined 50 times the then minimum monthly wage; and in 2010 he was jailed for 15 days as well as being personally attacked in the state-run media. He was also forced to leave his home in Termez after police pressure.

Judge Usmonov refused to say whether Rajapov was specifically being targeted by the authorities. Asked to comment on why Rajapov was being repeatedly prosecuted, the judge replied: "I cannot comment on this".

"We are a free country"

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 News (05.10.2011) / HRWF (11.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan has been harassing people meeting peacefully for worship, local observers have told Forum 18 News Service. Police and the National Security Service (NSS) secret police in the region around the capital Tashkent stopped and questioned people attending mosques in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The authorities in the west of the country have prevented women and children from attending mosques, and in the central city of Samarkand [Samarqand] police raided and fined Baptists conducting worship.

In separate incidents, Baptists in Tashkent have been fined 50 times the monthly minimum salary for visiting a friend in hospital, and a Protestant has been fined 50 times the minimum monthly salary for possessing four books and two DVDs. He had earlier been fined 80 times the minimum monthly salary for possessing religious literature at home.

"We are a free country.."

During Ramadan, which this year almost coincided with August, uniformed ordinary police and plain clothed NSS secret police put mosques in Tashkent Region under surveillance, a local observer who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 3 October. The police and NSS officers "stood at the entrance of mosques, observing attendees and stopping some men wearing atypical short trousers or longer beards".

Uzbekistan has routinely imposed greater controls on Muslims in Ramadan. Followers of all faiths are subject to NSS secret police surveillance, which can often be highly intrusive, as well as the use of informers inside religious communities.

Bahodiy Mamedkarimov, Legal Advisor to the Minister of the Interior, denied that mosques in Tashkent Region had been and were under surveillance. "It's nonsense, we are a free country, and anyone can attend the mosque especially during the holy month of Ramadan," he claimed to Forum 18 on 4 October.

Surveillance by police was not noticeable, an imam in the west of the country, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 3 October. However, the authorities neither allow children to attend mosques without their parents, nor women in mosques without their husbands or very close male relatives.

Uzbekistan has targeted children and parents attending places of worship, including mosques, with overt threats and bullying at schools.

Mamedkarimov of the Interior Ministry denied this to Forum 18. "We have no such laws banning children or women at any time or under any circumstance from attending the mosque," he said. When Forum 18 noted that written laws and reality may be different, he claimed that "we have no

such practice in Uzbekistan".

Raid

In Samarkand, on 18 September, at 11 am police raided a Baptist Sunday worship service. Around 20 members of the Church, which is not registered, were present as some of the police officers climbed over a fence around the church building, followed by 14 police officers – only four in uniform – breaking into the service. Police then began filming all those present without their consent, and did not identify themselves when asked to do so.

Police also broke into the home of the Nemirovs, a church family living in the same courtyard as the church. After police recorded the names of all present at the service, six church members were detained and taken to a police station for questioning. The six were: Alisher Abdulayev, Nadezhda Chaplygin with her daughter Olesya and son Vyacheslav, as well as Vladimir Abramov and Timofei Nemirov. Four hours later they were released, but police opened a case against Abdulayev that day under the Code of Administrative Offences.

Local police officer Azamat who took part in the raid, who would not give his last name, refused to comment on the case to Forum 18. "I cannot answer you right now," he stated on 3 October when asked by Forum 18 why the raid took place. "I first need to check who you are." Subsequent calls to Officer Azamat on 3 and 4 October went unanswered.

Fine

Abdulayev was on 3 October fined 60 times the minimum monthly wage, or 3,432,000 Soms (11,500 Norwegian Kroner, 1,466 Euros, or 1,945 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). Judge Arif Pardayev of Samarkand Criminal Court found him guilty of breaking Article 240, Part 1 of the Code of Administrative Offences by leading unregistered religious activity and illegally teaching children religion.

Article 240, Part 1 ("Violation of the Religion Law") bans: "Carrying out of unauthorised religious activity, evasion by leaders of religious organisations of registration of the charter of the organisation, the organisation and conduct of worship by religious ministers and of special children's and youth meetings, as well as vocational, literature and other study groups not relating to worship". Punishments for breaking this Administrative Code article range from fines of 50 to 100 times the minimum monthly salary to administrative arrest for up to 15 days.

The official of the Samarkand Court who answered Judge Pardayev's phone on 3 October, who would not give his name, told Forum 18 that Pardayev was hearing the case. Told that the judge had finished Abdulayev's case more than 30 minutes previously, the official put the phone down.

Police actions unpunished

On 30 September a Samarkand Court official, who also would not give his name but said he was the Court's Secretary, refused to say what offence Abdulayev had committed and whether police officers who illegally filmed church members would be prosecuted. "He has his legal representative, and it will be an open trial," the court secretary insisted to Forum 18. However, Baptists told Forum 18 that Judge Pardayev conducted the hearing in his office and allowed only two Church members to participate. "The court did not see anything unlawful in the actions of the Police, and in fact used police video film of the church service as evidence," Baptists complained.

Fined for visiting a hospital patient

In a separate case, Baptists who belong to an unregistered church in Tashkent were fined for visiting a fellow Baptist in hospital in the city. Mariya Kim, Natalya Belan and her seven year old daughter, Larissa Permyakova and Lidiya Guseva were arrested by Mirabad Police on 25 September.

Kim and Permyakova were in the hospital waiting room when an apparently "drunk man in plain clothes came up to them, and asked them what they carried", Baptists told Forum 18. One of the two "was holding a New Testament in Kazakh in her hand, and she had a few Christian leaflets in her bag". Another man in plain clothes appeared, the men without identifying themselves began asking the Baptists who they were and what they were doing at the hospital. "We think the two are from the NSS secret police," Baptists told Forum 18.

About an hour later, at around 5 pm, Guseva and Belan with her daughter were also arrested at the hospital by officials while visiting their friend. They had gathered that Kim and Permyakova were in trouble, and were themselves arrested when they enquired what the problem was.

All the Baptists were taken to Mirabad Police Station and "were kept in the cold outside the police station in its courtyard until almost midnight", Baptists complained. They were then taken inside the building, and kept there until 5 pm the next day, 26 September. Belan's daughter was released before the remaining four were taken inside. "They were not provided with beds, and so could not sleep," Baptists stated.

At 5 pm on 26 September, police took the Baptists to Mirabad District Court for trial. After two hours, court officials could not say when the hearing would take place, and so at 7 pm the police released the Baptists.

Stop singing or be shot

While the arrested Baptists were in Mirabad Police Station's courtyard on 25 September, some members of their Church gathered outside the police station asking for their fellow-Baptists to be released. Police told these Baptists that the detainees would be held overnight at the station, and then taken to court and tried on 26 September.

The Baptists outside the station then began to sing hymns, at which two police officers on duty ordered the station ordered the singing to stop. "One officer warned us, saying that he would arrest all of us. The other one began applying pressure to the trigger of his machinegun, saying that he would shoot us all down," Baptists stated.

The fines

On 29 September Judge Sarvar Karimov of Mirabad District Criminal Court fined Permyakova, Guseva and Belan each 50 times the minimum monthly salary, or 2,860,000 Soms (9,590 Norwegian Kroner, 1,223 Euros, or 1,624 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) each. The three were claimed to have broken Administrative Code Article 184, Part 2 ("Illegal storage, production, import, or distribution of religious materials"), Article 240, Part 2 ("Violation of the Religion Law"), and Article 241 ("Violating the order for teaching religious beliefs"), church members who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 29 September.

Article 184-2 bans the "illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan with a purpose to distribute or distribution of religious materials by physical persons". This "offence" is punishable with a fine of between 50 and 150 times the minimum monthly salary, "with confiscation of the religious materials and the relevant means of their production and distribution".

Article 240 Part 2 bans "Attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) and other missionary activity". It imposes punishment for this of either fines of between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly salary, or administrative arrest for up to 15 days.

Article 241 bans "teaching religious beliefs without specialised religious education and without permission from the central organ of a [registered] religious organisation, as well as teaching religious beliefs privately".

Why?

A Mirabad Court official who did not give his name told Forum 18 on 30 September that Judge Karimov was not available to speak and could not comment the case. He asked Forum 18 to call later. Calls on 30 September and 3 October to Judge Karimov went unanswered.

Nygmatt Haydarov, Chief of Mirabad Police, on 29 September did not want to comment on the case. Asked by Forum 18 why the Baptists had been arrested, he put the phone down.

On 30 September Mirabad Police referred Forum 18 to Abdurahim Beknazarov, Chief of Mirabad Police's Criminal Investigation Division. Asked why Baptists cannot visit fellow believers in hospital, or carry Christian literature, Beknazarov, said he could not answer questions over the phone. Asked why a police officer threatened Baptists with a machinegun, he replied "have a nice day" and put the phone down.

Fined again for possessing religious literature

On 3 October Tashkent Region's Chirchik City Criminal Court fined Azamat Rajapov, a local Protestant, 50 times the minimum monthly salary for "illegally storing" religious literature in his home. This fine totals 2,860,000 Soms (9,590 Norwegian Kroner, 1,223 Euros, or 1,624 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). He was convicted under Administrative Code Article 240, Part 1 ("Violation of the Religion Law"), a source from the region who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 3 October.

Five officers of Chirchik District Police raided Rajapov's home on 5 September and seized four Christian books and two DVD discs. Rajapov will appeal against the court decision, the source said, as "he does not have so much money to pay the fine".

Rajapov was among a group of Protestants fined for possessing Christian literature in the southern town of Termez, where he was then living, in October 2007. He was sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment for his religious activity in Termez in April 2010.

Rajapov's brother Anvar, likewise a Protestant, has also recently been fined 80 times the minimum monthly wage for possessing religious literature in his home.

Religious fines lead to travel bans

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 News (09.09.2011) / HRWF (14.09.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Late on 3 September, Uzbek passport control officers took Lidiya Guseva, a member of an unregistered Baptist Church, off a train from Tashkent for Russia. The officials told Guseva that she had an unpaid administrative fine and could not leave Uzbekistan, Church members who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 News Service on 5 September. This was the second case known to Forum 18 since the beginning of September of an individual punished by an administrative court for their religious activity being denied permission to leave the country. In Guseva's case, the fine she had received had already been overturned on appeal seven months earlier.

Guseva had been fined on 24 December 2010 by Tashkent Region's Zangiota District Criminal Court for allegedly violating the Religion Law and the Customs Law for bringing Christian books and magazines from neighbouring Kazakhstan into Uzbekistan. Church members told Forum 18 that the fine was cancelled on 4 February 2011 by Muhabbat Khodjayeva, Chair of the Court, after Guseva appealed. "We don't understand why the Bailiffs imposed an exit ban on her," they said.

In addition to exit bans imposed by Bailiffs for unpaid fines, local Departments of Entry, Exit and Legalisation of Citizenship sometimes withhold Exit Visas from known active religious believers, as well as from human rights defenders and opposition activists. Exit Visas are needed to travel to almost any foreign country apart from some former Soviet republics, and are valid for only two years at a time.

Ban is the "Court's fault"

Guseva had to wait until Monday 5 September, after the weekend, to try to find out why she was on the blacklist. At the Bailiffs Department in Tashkent's Yakkasaray District, where her passport is registered, Bailiff Sanjar Sultanov told her that the Department had imposed the ban because of the December 2010 administrative fine. When she presented a copy of the Court's February decision cancelling the fine, and asked why the ban had not been lifted seven months later, Sultanov told Guseva that her name would soon be removed from the black-list.

Bailiff Sultanov told Forum 18 on 8 September that "within a few days" Guseva's exit ban will be lifted. Asked why she had been banned from travelling abroad and why the ban had not been lifted seven months after the fine had been cancelled, Sultanov claimed that it was the "Zangiota Court's fault since they did not send their final decision to the Bailiffs."

Dildora (who refused to give her last name), Assistant to Khodjayeva, Chair of the Court, told Forum 18 on 9 September that Khodjayeva was busy hearing a case. She rejected Bailiff Sultanov's claim that the Court was at fault. "That cannot be true - the Court is obliged to provide the defendant and the Bailiffs with copies of the decision within 10 days, and we did so already in February."

Will authorities compensate Guseva?

Guseva was travelling to Russia to visit relatives. Her train had departed from Tashkent at 10:15 pm, and stopped for passport control 20 kms (12 miles) later at Kiles on the border with Kazakhstan. By the time Guseva had been taken off the train and told to return to Tashkent, it was midnight, the Baptists complained. "She could not catch any trains that late at night and had to take a taxi back to the city." At the station she returned the tickets but was not reimbursed the full cost of them.

Baptists lamented that Guseva lost more than 130,000 Soms (404 Norwegian Kroner, 54 Euros or 74 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), at least 100,000 Soms on the tickets and 30,000 Soms for the taxi. "Now she will not visit her relatives since only tickets for distant dates are available, and she cannot afford it."

Asked on 7 September why Guseva is being punished in such a way and who will compensate for her losses, Bailiff Sultanov and Anvar (who did not give his last name), Head of Zangiota Court's Chancellery, could not say. Sultanov repeated his claim that "the Court is at fault".

Fined in her absence

In a 24 December 2010 decision seen by Forum 18, Judge Khudoyberdy Khojiev of Zangiota District Criminal Court found Guseva guilty in her absence under Administrative Code Article 184-2 (illegal production, storage, import and distribution of religious materials) and Article 227, Part 1 (violation of the Customs Law). Guseva was fined 226,075 Soms (then worth 850 Norwegian Kroner, 104 Euros or 138 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). The Judge also ordered 65 Baptist magazines and 6 Christian books confiscated from Guseva to be sent to the state Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent for an "expert analysis".

The Court decision notes that Guseva was stopped at Navoi City Customs Checkpoint on 24 November 2010 while she was entering Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan, and the religious literature she carried on her was confiscated.

Although Judge Khojiyev says, in the decision, that Guseva did not appear before the Court for the hearing and did not notify the Court why she was absent, the Baptists complained to Forum 18 that the Court had not notified her of the hearing. They say she only heard about the fine a month later, on 24 January, when Bailiff Sultanov called and demanded that she pay the fine. The Bailiffs Office then handed her a copy of the January court decision and on 3 February she lodged her appeal.

Fine cancelled but confiscated literature not returned

In her 4 February decision, seen by Forum 18, Judge Khodjayeva of Zangiota District Court not only cancelled the fine, but ordered that the religious literature to be returned to Guseva and referred the case back to Tashkent Regional Customs authorities for further investigation. Judge Khodjayeva noted that Guseva was not notified in time to appear before the Court, that the religious books confiscated from her were not for sale but for her personal use, and that according to the State Religious Affairs Committee's expert analysis that the confiscated literature did not contain calls against the constitutional order of Uzbekistan.

The Baptists told Forum 18 that although the Court's decision was a positive move, the literature had not been returned to Guseva by early September.

Taken off flight

On 2 September, the day before Guseva had been taken off the train, Border officials at Tashkent Airport prevented Tashkent Protestant Murot Turdiyev from boarding a Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul, claiming he had an unpaid administrative fine. He had already checked in for the flight, Turdiyev complained to Forum 18 on 7 September.

Turdiyev on 25 October 2008 was fined 500,800 Soms (then worth 2,616 Norwegian Kroner, 292 Euros or 376 US Dollars) by Fergana Region's Okhunbabayev District Criminal Court under Administrative Code Article 184-2 (illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious materials). With the same decision, 100 DVD discs of the "Jesus" film confiscated from him were also ordered destroyed, he said.

Although he had not paid the fine at the time - and it should have been cancelled, since almost three years had elapsed since the Court imposed it - he chose to pay it on 2 September. Turdiyev explained that because his passport is registered in Angren in Tashkent Region, he paid it at Angren City Bailiffs Department. "The Bailiffs promised me that soon my name would be removed from the black list," he told Forum 18.

Between the date of the fine in 2008 and January 2011 Turdiyev exited Uzbekistan several times, he said.

Removed from black list but why was ban imposed?

The Angren City Bailiff's Department decision, signed on 5 September by Ravshan Umirzakov, Chief of the Department and Bailiff Sarvar Sydykov, says that the "temporary exit ban" on Turdiyev was lifted. The decision, seen by Forum 18, says the ban was imposed on him on 15 March.

"At the end of 2010 the right to impose exit bans for unpaid fines was transferred from the Courts to the Bailiffs," Sydykov explained told Forum 18 on 8 September. "Turdiyev's ban was imposed in early 2011."

Told that more than two years had elapsed between the fine and the imposition of the ban, and asked why it was not cancelled and why such a ban was imposed on Turdiyev, Sydykov at first was silent and then said, "I sent the information to our Head Department in Tashkent to inform the Border Service that Turdiyev already paid the fine, and his name should be taken off the Border Service's database within 10 days." He refused to discuss anything further with Forum 18.

Turdiyev complained to Forum 18 that he did not understand why he was being punished by the authorities for peaceful religious activity. Although Turkish Airlines returned him the full cost of the ticket, "the authorities prevented me from travelling to Istanbul for vacation and seeing my friends, and compelled me to pay the fine." He also complained that the Bailiffs made him travel the 120 kms (75 miles) from Tashkent to Angren three times between 2 and 5 September, which meant "a waste of my time and money on a taxi."

Appeals fail

Appeals by eight of nine Baptists given administrative fines in July in Gulistan in Syrdarya Region have failed. And Tashkent City Prosecutor notified a local Protestant that no grounds existed to protest against the administrative fine given to him in April.

In a 5 August decision seen by Forum 18, Judge N. Karshibayev of Gulistan City Criminal Court upheld the same Court's 28 July decision to fine Bayram Murodov, a member of the local Baptist Church. In a separate decision on 18 August, also seen by Forum 18, Judge Karshibayev upheld the fines on seven other members of the same Church – Denis Bocharov, Dialfruz Muradova, Lyubov Bobkova, Ivan Prokhin, Yelena Aminova, Sarvar Jambazov and Zinaida Sadykova.

The 18 August decision indicates that Marat Utyaganov, a member of the same Baptist Church also fined by the Court on 28 July, did not appeal against his fine.

The nine Baptists were given fines in the wake of Gulistan City Police's raid on the Church's 19 June Sunday morning worship service. They were punished under Administrative Code Article 240, Part 1 (unregistered religious activity) and Article 241 (illegal teaching of religious doctrines). On 28 July, Muradov and Bocharov were given large fines, with smaller fines on the rest.

Also Tashkent Protestant Anvar Rajapov on 2 September received an official letter signed on 20 August by Tashkent City Prosecutor M. Obidov that the decisions of the City's Yakkasaray District Criminal Court from 14 April, of the City Court from 20 May and from 30 June were upheld. "The Court when imposing a penalty took into account the nature and degree of the public danger of the committed violations and imposed a penalty proportionate to the acts. There are no grounds for protesting the decisions."

Rajapov had been fined after a raid on his home, during which religious literature and his computer hard disk were confiscated.

Other case dropped

Meanwhile, in Khorezm Region of western Uzbekistan, the authorities dropped charges against Zoya Varakina, member of a local unregistered Baptist Church.

On 4 September, Investigator Sh. Igamov of Khiva [Khiwa] District Police, wrote to Varakina – in a letter seen by Forum 18 – to inform her that "based on the Court decision the Police conducted an investigation, and concluded that there are no signs of criminal or administrative violation in your actions. Therefore, a decision was made not to open a criminal case."

On 13 April Khiva District Court had fined Varakina 49,735 Soms (158 Norwegian Kroner, 20 Euros, or 29 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) under Administrative Code Article 184-2 for "illegally" distributing New Testaments. The Court also ordered the books to be destroyed.

Varakina appealed against the fine and two months later, on 16 June, Judge B. Palvanov of the Region's Shovot District Court cancelled the case and referred it back to Khiva District Prosecutor's office to qualify her actions as criminal violations, and open a criminal case against her, the Baptists told Forum 18. They welcomed the dropping of the case.

More fines, physical abuse and religious literature destruction

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 News (26.08.2011) / HRWF (29.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan's authorities continue to punish peaceful religious believers with fines, physical abuse and court-ordered destruction of religious literature, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Police in eastern Fergana Region raided the home of a Protestant couple in late July and are preparing an administrative case against them. The Police Inspector who led the raid told Forum 18 that the Police found and confiscated "banned" religious literature. Asked what literature found in their home was banned, he identified the Bible and the New Testament. Also in July, courts in the capital Tashkent and eastern Syrdarya Region have handed down fines of up to one hundred times the minimum monthly wage to ten Protestants to punish them for unregistered activity. In both cases the courts ordered that confiscated Christian literature - including Bibles and New Testaments - be destroyed. Another court in central Samarkand Region fined a member of an officially registered Baptist Church for "illegal" religious teaching.

Court officials in Fergana and Syrdarya Regions refused to discuss the two cases with Forum 18, while in the Tashkent case the Assistant to the Judge tried to explain away their decision.

Unwilling to talk

Also unwilling to talk to Forum 18 were officials of the state Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent, whose responsibility is to assist the country's religious communities to fulfil their religious needs and regulate relations between them and the State.

Forum 18 tried to find out from Committee officials on 25 August why peaceful religious activity continues to be punished, whether the Bible and New Testament are banned or cannot be stored in private homes, and why Bibles and New Testaments - among other religious literature - are ordered to be destroyed.

The Assistant of Committee chair Artyk Yusupov (who did not give his name) told Forum 18 that Yusupov was busy in a meeting. Zulhaydar Sultanov, Head of the Committee's International Relations Department, refused to comment, telling Forum 18: "I am no expert in those matters, and you called the wrong department." The official who answered the telephone of Sobitjon Sharipov, Head of the Expert Analysis Department, (who did not give his name) said that Sharipov was not available and he could not answer questions over the phone. "Please, come to our office, and we will give you information," he said. When Forum 18 insisted with the questions, he put the phone down.

Religious literature in Uzbekistan of all faiths remains under tight government censorship. Courts frequently order that religious literature confiscated during raids - including Bibles - be destroyed.

Assault during home raid

Police who raided a Protestant family home in Fergana physically abused the husband and confiscated Christian literature, a local Protestant who wished to remain unnamed for fear of State reprisals complained to Forum 18.

On the evening of 23 July, ten officers - three in police uniform and the rest in plain clothes - raided the home of married couple, Muradiljon Umurzakov and Dilrom Mamasidikova, who were entertaining a friend, Ravshan Muminov. The raid was led by Fergana City's Police Inspector Dilshod Ataugliyev from the Crime Prevention Unit, but other officers are believed to have been from the local National Security Service (NSS) secret Police.

When Umurzakov asked the officials on what basis they "intruded and violated their privacy, and asked them to show their identification documents" the Police officers "twisted his arms, and threatened that they could continue physically to assault him," the Protestant complained. "The officers also threatened that they could open a criminal case against him." As a result of the shock, Umurzakov developed high blood pressure and an ambulance was called, the Protestant told Forum 18.

Unlawful search and confiscation

While the doctors were examining Umurzakov, the officers "without the hosts' permission" unlocked his son's room in the house. The son is currently working in Russia. The officials "without witnesses" confiscated from the son's room a Bible, an Uzbek New Testament, a Proverbs of Solomon in Uzbek and a Koran in Russian. All of these have been "authorised" by the Religious Affairs Committee to be imported into and sold in Uzbekistan, the Protestant pointed out.

"We found out later that - in order to cover up their unlawful acts - the Police took an official letter from Akhat Akhmedaliyev, the chair of the local mahalla [residential district], saying that Umurzakov and his family were involved in illegal missionary activity among local Muslims," the Protestant told Forum 18.

Mahalla committees, the lowest level of administration in Uzbekistan, are used by the authorities as a key instrument in their attempts to control society, including by trying to prevent religious activity.

The Police are preparing to open a case against the couple and Muminov under Administrative Code Article 184-2 (illegal production, storage, import and distribution of religious materials) and Article 240, Part 2 (illegal missionary activity).

The Police told Umurzakov that the confiscated books will be sent to the Religious Affairs Committee for "expert analysis", after which the case will be opened against the three.

Are Bible and Injil banned?

Police Inspector Ataugliyev vigorously defended the raid which he had led. "We knew he [Umurzakov] stored banned religious literature in his home," he told Forum 18 from Fergana on 24 August. The Inspector refused to tell Forum 18 how the police knew this.

Asked what literature found in Umurzakov's home the police considered banned, Inspector Ataugliyev said, "the Bible, Injil [Uzbek New Testament], and other books". Asked whether the Bible and New Testament are banned in Uzbekistan, he refused to say. "The case is under investigation at the moment." He refused to talk further, and when asked whether he and his colleagues physically abused Umurzakov, he put the phone down.

Gulistan worship service raid ..

Nine church members in Gulistan in Syrdarya Region were punished in the wake of Gulistan City Police's raid on a local Baptist Church's Sunday morning worship service on 19 June, Baptists who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 18 August. Two uniformed Police officers and four plain-clothed officials – the Baptists believe they were NSS secret Police officers - broke into the church at 9.30 am while the Baptists were worshipping. The officers had video cameras and filmed the approximately 21 people present, the Baptists complained. The Police also confiscated Baptist magazines and brochures.

One of the officials who raided the Church identified himself as Shukhrat Nazarov from the Gulistan City Administration, but the Baptists believe he works for the NSS secret Police. One of the officers in police uniform identified himself as Dilshod Rasulov from the Criminal Investigation Department

of Gulistan Police.

.. is followed by mass fines

Cases were opened against the nine Baptists under Administrative Code Article 240, Part 1 (unregistered religious activity) and Article 241 (illegal teaching of religious doctrines). On 28 July, in a decision seen by Forum 18, Judge Ulugbek Jumayev of Gulistan City Criminal Court found all nine guilty.

Bayram Muradov (a Ukrainian citizen) was fined 4,973,500 Soms (15,392 Norwegian Kroner, 1,980 Euros or 2,850 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), 100 times the minimum monthly wage; Denis Bocharov, 2,486,750 Soms, 50 times; Marat Utyaganov, Ivan Prokhin and Sarvar Jambazov, each fined 149,205 Soms, three times; as well as Dilafuz Muradova, Lyubov Bobkova, Yelena Aminova, Zinaida Sadykova, each fined 49,735 Soms, one minimum monthly wage.

In his verdict, Judge Jumayev also ordered that 12 copies of the Baptist magazine "Tropinka" (The Path) confiscated during the raid be destroyed. By contrast, he ordered to return to Muradov five other brochures which had also been confiscated as "evidence".

Gulistan City Court told Forum 18 that Jumayev as of 1 August was appointed Chair of Gulistan District Criminal Court. Reached on 24 August at the District Court, Judge Jumayev took down Forum 18's name, and asked to call back in 15 minutes. Jumayev's phone went unanswered later the same day and on 25 August.

Five months earlier, on 16 March, Judge Jumayev had fined under the same charges Muradov and two other members of the same church, Natalya Utyaganova and Nadezhda Davydova, and ordered the confiscated literature to be destroyed.

Tashkent police raid, confiscation and pressure ..

On the evening of 16 April, Police of Tashkent's Hamza District, under the pretext of checking up on passports, raided the home of local Protestant Albina Bankova, according to the subsequent court verdict seen by Forum 18. Officers confiscated 3,529 religious books and brochures with 364 titles, as well as 155 audio cassette-tapes and CD discs. By contrast, a Tashkent-based source who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 20 August that the Police confiscated from Bankova 298 Christian books, 125 CD and DVD discs, 10 videotapes, and 40 audio-cassette tapes.

The source added that Bankova was immediately taken to Hamza District Police Station. She was held there for 18 hours and pressured to write a statement or sign the police records of the raid, which she refused to do. "The police made no records that she was brought to the station, and was released later."

.. fine, religious literature ordered destroyed

A case was then brought against Bankova under Administrative Code Article 184-2 and Article 240, Part 1. On 14 July, Judge Anvar Khusanov of Hamza District Criminal Court, in a verdict seen by Forum 18, found Bankova guilty. He fined her 2,486,750 Soms (7,692 Norwegian Kroner, 990 Euros or 1,425 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), fifty times the minimum monthly wage. The local source told Forum 18 that Bankova received the written copy of the court decision only on 16 August.

In his verdict, Judge Khusanov also ordered that all the Christian literature confiscated from her home be destroyed. This included five Bibles, 17 Russian and six Uzbek New Testaments, as well as two Children's Bibles.

Luisa Husnullina, Assistant to Judge Khusanov, told Forum 18 on 24 August that the Judge did not

want to discuss the case. Asked why Khusanov ordered the Bibles and New Testaments to be destroyed, Husnullina at first denied it saying: "That cannot be true!" When Forum 18 pointed out that it was in the written verdict, she responded: "I cannot evaluate the Judge's decision."

Did court violate Administrative Code?

The Tashkent source complained to Forum 18 that the Court made several violations, including the fact that the Court made the decision in Bankova's absence, as also seen in the court decision, and that she only received the court decision more than a month after it was issued. Another violation is that based on Administrative Code Article 36, Part 1, an administrative case must be heard by a Court no later than two months after an administrative violation was recorded. "It's nonsense, because three months had already passed after the record of a violation," the source told Forum 18.

Explaining why the hearing took place three months after the administrative case was opened, Husnullina told Forum 18: "The judge asked for permission to extend the deadlines for investigation." However, she refused to say who authorised the extension and on what basis the extension was made. "In special cases the judges may do so," was all she would say. Husnullina refused to talk further to Forum 18.

Fined for "illegal" teaching of religion

A member of an officially registered Baptist Church has been fined in central Samarkand Region under Administrative Code Article 241 (violation of the procedure for teaching religious doctrines). On 11 August, Judge Aziz Safarov of Nurabad District Criminal Court fined Shoira Allayarova, member of Nurabad Baptist Church, 57,200 Soms (177 Norwegian Kroner, 23 Euros or 33 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), one month's minimum wage (the presidentially-decreed official minimum monthly wage rose to 57,200 Soms on 1 August).

The court decision – seen by Forum 18 – says that Allayarova "illegally" taught religion to Zamira Yarkulova, a resident of the village of Jom in Nurabad District. However, local Baptists, who asked not to be named, told Forum 18 that they believe that the authorities specifically targeted Allayarova, who has hearing deficiency, and was born to parents who cannot hear or talk. "The authorities punished her because she was also giving material help to Zamina," they told Forum 18 on 17 August.

Reached on 25 August, Judge Safarov took down Forum 18's name. But when asked why he fined Allayarova, and whether it is illegal in Uzbekistan for individuals to share their beliefs with others, he put the phone down.

"Spiritually rich and for freedom of conscience and religion" ?

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (15.06.2011) / HRWF (16.08.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - After almost three months of criminal investigation by Investigator Alexandr Ten of the capital Tashkent's Hamza District Prosecutor's office, on 15 July an indictment against Konstantin Malchikovskiy of the officially registered Baptist Church was filed on 15 July, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Local Baptists, who wished to remain unnamed for the fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 22 July that the case was referred to Hamza District Criminal Court, and Judge Anvar Khusanov began hearing the case on 27 July.

The latest problems for the Church started in April, with two major ordinary police and National Security Service (NSS) secret police raids on the Hamza District Baptist Church. Money and tens of thousands of copies of Christian books were seized, together with printing equipment. Four church

members – including Malchikovskiy - were each fined between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage.

The latest case against Malchikovskiy was opened by police on 22 April and accuses him of not paying in "4,122,150 Soms [12,900 Norwegian Kroner, 1,700 Euros, or 2,400 US Dollars] collected from offerings and sales of books between 2003 and 2010". He faces a maximum of two years in jail if convicted. Local Baptists described the indictment as "absurd", disputing that church offerings must be made only via a cash register and a receipt given for each offering. "This violates the Religion Law and the Charter of the Church, since it is not engaged in commercial activity and there is no need to have cash registers", they observed.

Investigator Ten has during his investigations threatened church members with jail, in a bid to acquire falsified "evidence" against Malchikovskiy.

Baptists had earlier, on 21 June July, presented documents "proving the unlawfulness of the claim" to Judge Pavel Mazurkin of Tashkent City Economic Court. They also presented what they described as "exhaustive proofs of falsification and forgery of documents by the tax authorities". Baptists also told Forum 18 that the Hamza Tax authorities did not present to the Court all the documents they had claimed were evidence. "This is another proof of the unlawfulness of their claim", Baptist commented.

The Baptists petitioned the Court on 6 July to refer the case back to the Tax authorities, but Judge Mazurkin ignored it, and decided to fully satisfy the demands of the claim brought by the Tax authorities.

The Court refused to discuss the case with Forum 18, despite being repeatedly contacted on 1 and 2 August.

Hamza District Tax authorities have also alleged a claimed non-payment of tax, which led on 28 April to the Church being fined 6,988,500 Soms (22,620 Norwegian Kroner, 2,880 Euros, or 4,090 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

"Illegal training centre"

Malchikovskiy has also been subjected to media attacks. On 17 June the government-sponsored gorizont.uz website published an article entitled "Children are under threat!" The article states that police raided an "illegal training centre" and "discovered that the training centre belongs to Baptists such as Konstantin Malchikovskiy, who are known for their yearning to attract people to the Church from infancy." The article also names two other Baptists. "Apparently, these people did not draw the necessary conclusions, and continued their illegal actions," the article claims.

During the raid the authorities confiscated "a great volume of illegal religious literature, as well as those hand-made at the training centre." The books were in Uzbek and Russian languages for children of ages between 5 and 15.

Fictitious informer?

Sergei Yegorov, the author of the article, states that an "S. I. Tinin" at the beginning of April tipped off law-enforcement agencies about "illegal activity" by Baptists. The article claims that "it is not the first time" that "Tinini" reported "crimes of the Baptists". Yegorov states that "Tinini" in 2009 informed the authorities on the Baptists' summer children's camp Joy, where the Baptists "brain-washed our children with religion."

Forum 18 has been told by sources in Uzbekistan that the names of authors, or any other names given in such articles, may be fictitious. They may, Forum 18 has been told, be written by the NSS secret police and published with minor variations in different media under different names.

The article was reprinted by the regnum.ru Russian news agency a week later, under the title "Illegal training centre of Baptists exposed in the capital of Uzbekistan." The agency said that the information was provided by a source from the law-enforcement organs of Uzbekistan.

Summer camp cases

Referring again to the summer camp, the author states: "How else one can explain such audacious behaviour of those who after even being made accountable, already in a different district of the city organised children's and youth worship services, taught religious classes without having any authorisation to do so."

The children's camp cases were brought against Baptists who had run a legal children's summer camp (see F18News 7 December 2009 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1384). These cases led to the removal of the country's registered Baptist Union's leadership and the payment by them of large fines for alleged unpaid tax, which charges Baptists strongly refuted. As in the latest cases against Hamza Baptists, a campaign of media intolerance accompanied the earlier cases. The authorities also bullied parents and children, forcing children to write statements that they would not attend churches. This is part of frequent state-sponsored media attacks on religious believers of all faiths and freedom of religion and belief.

"Spiritually rich and for freedom of conscience and religion"

Ironically, the article states that Uzbekistan has "created an environment where all conditions exist for children to grow spiritually rich and for freedom of conscience and religion."

"Today we are trying to protect our children from all kinds of questionable religious doctrines (..) However, unfortunately, we come across people who against the laws at any cost try to capture the minds of our children and use them for their selfish purposes."

There do not appear to have been further media attacks on the Baptists, or other religious communities, since the 17 June article.

Property ordered to be destroyed

Following an earlier court hearing, Judge Kholmurod Berdyklichev of Tashkent's Yakkasaray District Court on 11 July ordered that a computer hard disk seized from Anvar Rajapov, a Protestant from Tashkent, should be destroyed. The court decision, seen by Forum 18, reads that an addition will be made to its decision from 14 April. "The computer hard disk confiscated from Anvar Rajapov shall be destroyed," it clarifies. A source from Tashkent who wished to remain unnamed, for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 15 April that when Rajapov asked the Court to return his hard disk about which no decision was made, Judge told him on 11 July that hard disk was "by a mistake not shown in the original decision as confiscated."

Following a raid on his home, confiscations of about 250 religious books and recordings, a computer and his passport, Rajapov was fined 80 times the minimum monthly wage. Police threatened to assault him if he appealed against this, stating that: "No one has the right in Uzbekistan to challenge court decisions". He was also the target of hostile media attacks.

Rajapov's passport had been returned on 1 July, but when on 10 July he asked for the return of his hard disk Judge Berdyklichev asked Rajapov to come to Court on 11 July. On that date Berdyklichev handed over the order that the hard disk be destroyed, an addition to the earlier court ruling on the case. Rajapov had twice unsuccessfully appealed to Tashkent Criminal Court, but Judges Arofat Alimova and Vahidjon Sharipov on 20 May and 30 June respectively upheld the earlier verdict.

The Court refused to discuss the case with Forum 18, despite being repeatedly contacted on 1 and 2 August.

Supreme Court upholds criminal conviction

The conviction of a Baptist prisoner of conscience on a ten year jail sentence, Tohar Haydarov, has been upheld for the second time by the Supreme Court. Judge Dilbar Suyunova, in an official letter dated 4 February, stated that she upheld the original sentence. Baptists, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 2 August that Haydarov only learned of the letter at the beginning of July. The letter, seen by Forum 18, was addressed to Zh. Abdullayev, head of Prison 64/49 where Haydarov is being held.

"Public danger"

"The Court correctly stated the criminal act of Tohar Haydarov, and the punishment was given in proportion to the act, taking into account the public danger of the act", Judge Suyunova's letter states. Forum 18 tried to speak to the Judge on 2 August, but officials refused to facilitate this.

Church members have consistently maintained that allegations against Haydarov were fabricated, as a way to punish him for exercising his freedom of religion or belief. He was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment on 9 March 2010 for "illegal sale of narcotic or psychotropic substances in large quantities", and Syrdarya Regional Court had upheld the sentence on appeal in April.. Baptists have twice appealed against the sentence to the Supreme Court, citing new evidence of Haydarov's innocence.

Baptists are preparing to appeal to the Supreme Court against Judge Suyunova's decision, as two more appeals can be made. They state that the Supreme Court "did not take into account statements from his mother, sister and neighbours of his innocence".

"I wish so much to attend worship services"

People who have met Haydorov say that he continues to hold his faith. Prison authorities have shown him a sack of letters sent to him, but he is not being allowed to read them. The authorities claim this is because there are "too many citations from the Bible in them". Haydorov has asked that parcels not be sent to him, as they are not delivered.

Letters can be sent to Haydarov at:

UYa 64/49,
otryad 13,
pos. Shaikh-Ali, g. Karshi,
Kashkadarya Region,
180020 Uzbekistan

Haydarov has asked Christians to "appreciate dearly your worship services, and listen attentively to the sermons. I so much wish to attend worship services, but alas I don't have the opportunity". Baptists in Uzbekistan have asked that Christians pray for Haydarov.

Police beating, axe threat, beating threat

By Mushfig Bayram,

Forum 18 (15.06.2011) / HRWF (23.06.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan continues to persecute people exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. One woman in eastern Uzbekistan was beaten into concussion by police while her parents were being questioned in a police station, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Elsewhere a Protestant has been threatened with possible use of an axe by a police officer, and a Baptist in the capital Tashkent, who was physically assaulted by police, was fined. Physical violence and even torture by the authorities is often experienced by people of all faiths in Uzbekistan, but many do not wish to speak of this

publicly for fear of state reprisals.

Police in eastern Uzbekistan in the second half of May summoned members of a local religious community for questioning, a relative of some of those questioned has told Forum 18. For fear of state reprisals, the faith, location, names involved and dates are not given.

While members of the community were being questioned at a police station, including the parents of a woman, police came to the home of some of those questioned and searched it. A daughter of the family was present, and when police wanted to examine the car she tried to stop them as she feared that evidence might be planted against her parents. Victims frequently state that evidence is planted by police.

The police officers then "kicked the woman and hit her on the head, giving her severe concussion", Forum 18 was told. Several hospitals in a number of places refused to treat her, "under pressure from the police". The woman has since made a mild recovery, but "she sometimes has headaches and vomits".

The parents hope that the authorities will eventually allow their daughter to be treated in a hospital.

Forum 18, while enquiring into a number of incidents, spoke to the relevant police station in June. Police refused to speak to Forum 18, a senior police officer asking Forum 18 to call back later the same day. He then refused to answer his phone, until a subordinate claimed that the superior officer was too busy to come to the phone.

Violence and torture by the authorities, or threats of this, are "routine" the UN Committee Against Torture has found. Women in particular are often targeted by such assaults.

Assault victim's appeal against fine rejected

In Tashkent the appeal of a victim of a police assault against a fine has been rejected. Judge A. Shamsutdinova of Tashkent City Criminal Court on 25 April upheld a fine imposed by the city's Hamza District Court on Galina Shemetova. She was fined 2,486,750 Soms (7,930 Norwegian Kroner, 1,015 Euros, or 1,465 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), or 50 times the monthly minimum wage.

Shemetova, a member of an officially registered Baptist Church, gave a children's Bible to one of her work colleagues at the Tashkent Metro. This led to her being fined under the Code of Administrative Offences' Article 240 Part 2 ("Attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) and other missionary activity"). As she was leaving a Tashkent hospital after medical treatment, police assaulted her and dragged her to the original court hearing.

During the appeal hearing, no notice was taken of the assault by police. Baptists told Forum 18 that Shemetova received the appeal verdict late, on 15 May.

"If need be get you"

Following the failure of an appeal by a Protestant in Tashkent against a fine of 80 times the minimum monthly wage, police have threatened him if he continues to challenge the sentence. Anvar Rajapov was fined on 14 April after a police raid, and literature taken from the home was ordered to be destroyed.

On 20 May Judge Alymova of the City Criminal Court upheld the fine, a Tashkent Protestant who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 14 June. Rajapov was not notified of the appeal hearing and only learnt of it when given the written decision on 30 May.

Police still hold Rajapov's passport. The Uchtepe District Bailiffs have warned him that unless the

fine is paid by 15 June, he will be fined again for not paying the original fine. He was summoned in writing to the Bailiffs' office today (15 June).

In attempt to stop Rajapov from appealing against the police actions and court decisions, Yakkasaray District Police on 25 May summoned Rajapov to the police station. Police Major Sunnat Adylov – who led the original raid on Rajapov's home - and his colleagues Major Zufar Rashidov, Major Shavkat Mirsafarov and Inspector Obid Mukhamedov all spoke to Rajapov.

Major Rashidov told Rajapov: "I have prepared an axe for you, which will be flying after you, observing you, and if need be get you."

Major Adylov refused to return Rajapov's passport, and told him: "No one has the right in Uzbekistan to challenge court decisions".

The other policemen present also threatened Rajapov, with comments such as: "How dare you complain?"; and "Other countries cannot help you, so you should stop complaining".

An officer of Yakkasaray District Police (who would not give his name) on 9 June refused to explain why Rajapov was raided, fined, had literature destroyed, and threatened. Major Adylov on 9 June through an assistant (who also did not give his name) told Forum 18 that he did not want to discuss Rajapov's case, or when Rajapov's passport will be returned.

Rajapov himself has, since the police threats, made written complaints about his treatment to President Islam Karimov, the Supreme Court, and other state agencies.

Prosecutor's Office attempt to extort false statements

The authorities in Tashkent are still attempting to find "evidence" that can be used against a registered Baptist church in the city, a Protestant who did not wish to be named for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 14 June.

The church in April suffered two large-scale raids by the National Security Service (NSS) secret police and the ordinary police. These led to the confiscation of thousands of Christian books, the taking of money that was the personal property of a church member, and fines of between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage.

Hamza District Tax authorities alleged a claimed non-payment of tax. This led on 28 April to the Church being fined 6,988,500 Soms (22,620 Norwegian Kroner, 2,880 Euros, or 4,090 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). If this fine is not paid, the church has been threatened with criminal charges.

In another case, Investigator Aleksandr Ten of Hamza District Prosecutor's office is leading a pre-trial investigation in a criminal case brought in Tashkent City's Economic Court against Pastor Konstantin Malchikovskiy and Anna Portova, the church bookkeeper. On 24 June the Economic Court is due to hear the case.

Threat to beat up son and jail him for three months

On 5 and 7 June, Investigator Ten attempted to force church members to write statements that Malchikovskiy and Portova sold religious books, and did not pay taxes on this, church members who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 7 June. In particular, Ten is seeking to acquire "evidence" that the two accused broke Criminal Code Article 189 Part 2 ("Violation of the regulations for trade or delivery of services"). If convicted, the Baptists face up to two years' imprisonment.

On 5 June, Aleksey Bochkarev, and wife and husband Angelina and Sarvar Seytshayev were detained as they were leaving a Baptist Sunday morning worship service. Hamza District police Senior Lieutenants Nabijon Abdurakhmanov and Senior Lieutenant Ulugbek Badalov were

described by witnesses as "without any authorisation and forcibly" taking the three to the Public Prosecutor's Office. "Despite psychological pressure" from Investigator Ten, the Baptists refused to sign any statements, Baptists told Forum 18. The three were released later the same day.

Similarly on 7 June the same two police officers brought Bochkarev's son, Vasily Bochkarev, to Investigator Ten's office for questioning. Ten threatened the son that he would "beat him up and put him in prison for three months" if he did not sign statements against Malchikovskiy and Portova. Bochkarev refused to do this and was released the same day, Baptists said.

Officials refuse to comment

A Public Prosecution official, who would not give his name, told Forum 18 on 14 June that he did not know whether the investigation was still going on. (Baptists insisted the same day that it is continuing.) He then referred Forum 18 to Investigator Ten. Told that Ten is not answering his phone, he said that the Investigator "did not come to work today." The official also did not know when Ten would be at work.

Ten had similarly been unavailable or not in work when Forum 18 had called earlier. Hamza District Police did not answer their phone when Forum 18 rang on 9 June.

Bibles and other literature confiscated, charges pending

Also in Tashkent, two police officers who did not give their names on 26 May detained Sergey Shilnikov at Amir Temur metro station. The officers searched Shilnikov and confiscated one Bible, two Gospels of John, and two other Christian books, Baptists told Forum 18. Shilnikov refused to either write a statement or sign a report written by the police officers.

As of 14 June, Baptists understand that the Metro Police Force are preparing charges against Shilnikov under Administrative Code Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious materials"). Baptists complain that both the search and the confiscation of books are illegal under Uzbek law.

Unregistered Baptists fined

Courts in Tashkent and western Uzbekistan's Khorezm region have fined three Baptists and warned one for "illegally" distributing Christian literature, and inviting people on the street to visit their churches, Baptists who wish to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. Their churches belong to the Baptist Council of Churches Baptists, who on principle refuse to seek state registration.

Unregistered religious activity is – against the international human rights standards Uzbekistan has committed to implement – illegal. The prosecutions were brought under Administrative Code Article 184-2.

On 10 April police found Vladimir and Larissa Permyakov, and Makhburata Kim, "illegally" distributing religious materials on the street in Tashkent's Mirza-Ulugbek District, and "illegally" trying to persuade citizens to take part in religious activity. The three state that they were giving out books sold in Christian bookshops to passers-by, and inviting people to their Easter service.

The Mirza-Ulugbek District Criminal Court on 27 April fined the Permyakovs 497,350 Soms (1,580 Norwegian Kroner, 200 Euros, or 290 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) each, and gave a verbal warning to Kim. The court also ordered that confiscated Uzbeklanguage Christian literature be destroyed, and Russian-language literature be submitted to the state Religious Affairs Committee for "expert examination".

Fellow Baptists told Forum 18 on 15 June that the Russian-language literature has not been

returned and no "expert analysis" of it has been given to the Baptists.

Such alleged "expert analyses" are routinely used as an excuse to confiscate any book the authorities decide to confiscate.

In western Uzbekistan, Khiva [Khiwa] District Court on 25 April fined Zoya Varakina, another member of the local unregistered Baptist Church 49,735 Soms (158 Norwegian Kroner, 20 Euros, or 29 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) for "illegally" distributing Uzbek-language New Testaments. The Court also ordered the books to be destroyed.

Varakina gave the books to two acquaintances, Ikram and Babajan Babajanov, who live in Khiva District. "Ikram came to Zoya's home and asked her for New Testaments for his relatives," Baptists told Forum 18. "Then he took the books to the Police." Baptists suspect that the case was set up by the local authorities to prosecute Varakina.

The NSS secret police very closely monitors all religious activity, with a network of paid full-time officers and informers.

USCIRF calls for freedom for thousands of religious prisoners after poet released

USCIRF (26.05.2011) / HRWF (31.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - While welcoming the Uzbek government's release of Yusuf Jumaev on May 18, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today called on Uzbekistan's government to free thousands of religious and political prisoners. Jumaev, a dissident poet, was serving a five-year sentence in the notorious Jaslyk prison after protesting the 2005 killing of hundreds of Muslim demonstrators in the town of Andijon. In its May 2011 Annual Report, USCIRF raised his case, along with those of others unjustly imprisoned.

"We welcome the Uzbek government's release of Yusuf Jumaev; he will now be able to reunite with family in the United States," said USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo. "Yet thousands more Uzbeks remain jailed due to their beliefs. The U.S. must continue to press President Karimov for their release and for religious freedom conditions in Uzbekistan to improve."

Jumaev's poems protested the government-ordered shooting of civilians in a largely peaceful May 13, 2005 demonstration in Andijon. While in Jaslyk prison, Jumaev, like many of the estimated 5,000 political and religious prisoners, was reportedly subjected to beatings which broke his ribs and fingers, his wife told USCIRF in 2010. Torture remains endemic in Uzbek jails, and reportedly includes the threat or use of physical violence and rape and the use of gas masks. Since the May 2005 atrocity, the Uzbek government has rejected numerous calls for an independent international investigation, and the number of trials against independent Muslims and anyone with alleged links to the Andijon tragedy has surged.

Uzbekistan has a religion law which severely limits the rights of religious communities, especially the majority Muslim community. The government arrests Muslims and represses Muslim groups that fail to conform to government requirements or that allegedly endorse political extremism. It continues to apply vague anti-extremism laws arbitrarily against nonviolent religious adherents and others who pose no credible security threat.

USCIRF continues to recommend in 2011 that Uzbekistan be designated a "country of particular concern," or CPC, marking it as one of the world's worst religious freedom violators. Since 2006, the State Department has so designated Uzbekistan, but after 2009 it placed a de facto indefinite

waiver on any punitive actions. Uzbekistan plays an important role in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) that supplies U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan.

"The United States should use the CPC designation of Uzbekistan to press for serious reforms," said Mr. Leo. "The current waiver of any sanctions against Uzbek officials sends the wrong message of impunity for lethal actions in Andijon and mass violations of religious freedom. Until conditions improve, real sanctions should be imposed."

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at tcarter@uscirf.gov or (202) 523-3257.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

April was the cruelest month

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (12.05.2011) / HRWF (16.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - April saw an upsurge in raids, literature confiscations and heavy fines – as well as court-ordered literature destruction – to punish Protestants in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, Forum 18 News Service has learned. In the wake of a 5 April raid on his home, Protestant Anvar Rajapov was heavily fined, while the judge ordered that the vast majority of the religious literature confiscated from him be destroyed. A registered Baptist church in Tashkent – twice raided in early April – had four members given massive fines. In late April the church itself was massively fined after tax authorities alleged it failed to use a cash register to record sales and donations. Officials told Forum 18 that one church member, Konstantin Malchikovskiy, now faces criminal prosecution with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment.

Uzbekistan's authorities keep all religious communities under very tight control and surveillance. In defiance of the country's international human rights obligations all unregistered religious activity is illegal. All religious literature is subject to compulsory prior state censorship.

Possibly fuelled by the authorities concerns about the impact of the Arab Spring uprisings for freedom, three Tashkent Muslim clerics who studied in Arab countries were dismissed from their posts in February and March (see F18News 15 April 2011 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1563).

Court fine and literature destruction in victim's absence

Judge Zh. Berdykilichev of Tashkent's Yakkasaray District Criminal Court on 14 April found local Protestant Anvar Rajapov guilty in his absence of violating Administrative Code Articles 184-2, 201 Part 1, 202, 240 Part 2, and 241, according to the verdict seen by Forum 18.

Article 184-2 punishes "illegal storage, production, import, or distribution of religious materials". Article 201 Part 1 punishes "violation of the procedure for organising and conducting meetings,

street processions or demonstrations". Article 202 punishes "creating the conditions for conducting unsanctioned meetings". Article 240 Part 2 punishes "attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) and other missionary activity", and Article 241 punishes "violation of the procedure for teaching religious doctrines".

Judge Berdykilichev fined Rajapov 80 times the minimum monthly wage, 3,978,800 Soms (12,880 Norwegian Kroner, 1,640 Euros, or 2,330 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). With the same decision the judge ordered that religious literature and materials confiscated from Rajapov's home be destroyed, "except for those that can be allowed for internal use of religious communities".

Courts in Uzbekistan frequently order that religious literature – including Bibles - confiscated during raids be destroyed (see F18News 22 March 2011 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1554).

Fine follows raid

The administrative case against Rajapov and fine followed a 5 April raid on his Tashkent home by up to ten police and National Security Service (NSS) secret police officers, Protestants told Forum 18. The raid was led by Police Major Sunnat Adylov and Police Inspector Obid Muhammedov of Yakkasaray District. They were accompanied by Ulmas Shukurov, head of the Rakat mahalla (city district) committee. Local Protestants told Forum 18 that Shukurov had called for Rajapov to be harshly punished and expelled from the mahalla "because he had left Islam and accepted Christianity".

Mahalla committees, the lowest level of administration in Uzbekistan, are used by the authorities as a key instrument in their attempts to control society (see eg. F18News 1 December 2005 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=698).

During the raid, police confiscated about 250 religious books and recordings, including Bibles, as well as a computer and Rajapov's passport. One officer took photographs of Rajapov's children without his knowledge.

The books were then sent to the government's Religious Affairs Committee for an "expert analysis". Such alleged "expert analyses" are routinely used as an excuse to confiscate any book the authorities decide to confiscate. A very strict censorship regime is applied against religious literature and other material of all faiths (see F18News 19 April 2011 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1564).

Yakkasaray Police officials refused to comment on the case on 12 May, adding that neither Major Adylov nor Inspector Muhammedov were available to talk to Forum 18.

"The whole case is fabricated"

Protestants who know Rajapov, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 on 12 May that "the whole case is fabricated." They said that the authorities did not reveal any religious meetings in Rajapov's home during an earlier raid but "only authorised religious literature". They added that Rajapov does not conduct religious meetings or teach religion in his home. "There is no evidence" for the charges brought against Rajapov, and the Court "did not prove any of it", they told Forum 18.

The believers said that Judge Berdykilichev did not "even investigate the case but just signed the hastily and carelessly prepared decision". They pointed out – as verified by Forum 18 - that in one of the paragraphs, among many errors in the verdict, the defendant's name (Rajapov) is indicated as Ahmedov.

Officials of Yakkasaray Court on 12 May refused to comment on the case or put Forum 18 through to Judge Berdykilichev.

Attacked through the media

On 3 May, the independent Moscow-based website Centrasia.ru published an attack on Rajapov, written by someone who gave their name as Ikrom Umarov. The article accused Rajapov, described as "one of the well-known leaders of the proselytising group Iso Masih", of spreading "ideological opium". It praised the "vigilance of the local law-enforcement agencies" for catching him and claimed he "will have to answer before the law" (the author does not mention the trial that had already taken place). The information in the article was widely picked up by other Russian-language news agencies.

Although the article does not appear to have been originally published by a state-run media outlet in Uzbekistan, it is written in a similar tone to many previous such attacks. In March 2010, Anvar Rajapov and his brother Azamat were attacked in an article published by the government-sponsored Press-uz.info news agency. One month later, Azamat Rajapov was given a 15-day prison term (see F18News 29 April 2010 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1438).

Church fined for lack of cash register

Meanwhile, Tashkent City's Hamza District Tax authorities on 28 April fined the officially registered Baptist Church 6,988,500 Soms (22,620 Norwegian Kroner, 2,880 Euros, or 4,090 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) for alleged violations of Uzbekistan's Tax Code, Baptists who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 12 May.

Officials claim the congregation violated Tax Code Article 119 Part 1, which punishes "Carrying out trade and rendering services without the use of cash registers with fiscal memory when their use is compulsory, as well as selling goods or providing services without giving a receipt".

The Hamza Tax Department sent the written decision on the fine to the Church. It warned the Church that if it failed to pay, a case against the Church would be brought to the Economic Court. The Baptists fear that their property could be confiscated if they do not pay the fine.

Church member faces criminal prosecution

On 22 April, six days prior to that decision, the Hamza Tax authorities also opened a criminal case against Konstantin Malchikovskiy, a member of the Baptist Church, local Baptists also told Forum 18. Madina Mirvaliyeva, Senior Investigator of Hamza District Tax Department, opened the case under Criminal Code Article 189 Part 2 for "violation of regulations for trade or delivery of services". This carries a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment.

The Baptists said that the Tax authorities brought charges against Malchikovskiy because "he did not cash in 4,122,150 Soms collected from offerings and sales of books between 2003 and 2010".

Nadyr (he did not give his last name), the Assistant of Investigator Mirvaliyeva, told Forum 18 on 12 May that they have referred the case against Malchikovskiy to Hamza District Prosecutor. He said that Investigator Ravshan Isabekov is now leading the case.

Asked whether it was necessary to open a criminal case against Malchikovskiy, and whether Malchikovskiy or the Church could not have been warned the first time and explained the regulations, Nadyr said that "the case is no longer in our hands". He did not want to answer whether this was not pressure on Malchikovskiy and the Church by the authorities, and declined to talk further to Forum 18.

Hamza District Prosecutor's officials on 12 May refused to discuss the case or put Forum 18 through to Investigator Isabekov.

Earlier raid, massive confiscation and huge fines

April saw two major raids on the Hamza District Baptist Church. On 7 April Police led a 12-hour raid on the church, confiscating thousands of copies of Christian books, as well as money belonging personally to one church member. On 11 April NSS secret police and the ordinary police made a second 14-hour raid on a church-owned private flat nearby. This time tens of thousands of copies of Christian books were seized, together with printing equipment. Four church members – including Malchikovskiy – were each fined between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage (see F18News 19 April 2011

http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1564).

While Muslims, Protestant Christians and Jehovah's Witnesses are among the many religious communities to be regularly targeted by officials, Baptists have been particular targets in recent years. In 2010 the authorities forced a change in the leadership of Uzbekistan's Baptist Union, by imposing large fines on Baptist leaders and denying them the legal right to hold office (see F18News 22 February 2010 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1411).

In a separate case in Tashkent in April, another Baptist Galina Shemetova – had been physically assaulted by police – was also fined 50 times the monthly minimum wage (see F18News 15 April 2011 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1563).

Raids and confiscations as state wants "religious organisations which will stay quiet"?

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (19.04.2011) / HRWF (04.05.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan's National Security Service (NSS) secret police with other officials have carried out two large raids on an officially registered Baptist church in the capital Tashkent, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Over 50,000 Christian books, printing and office equipment, and a sum of money personally belonging to one person were confiscated, the Church being left with "almost nothing" a Tashkent Baptist told Forum 18 on 19 April. Later, three church leaders and the caretaker were given massive fines. Officials have refused to comment on the case.

Raids

The fines followed two raids on the Hamza District Church on 7 and 11 April. The first raid was led by Major Khamid Kurbonov of Hamza District Police, and broke into the 12 Kungrad Street Church building at 10 am in the morning. They then searched the Church for 12 hours, ending at 10 pm (22.00 hours). Officials seized 7,110 Uzbek-language booklets entitled 'Jesus, the Son of Abraham and David', as well as 1,120,000 Soms (3,580 Norwegian Kroner, 460 Euros, or 660 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) which is the personal property of a church member.

The Confiscation Protocol, which Forum 18 has seen, is signed by Major Kurbonov – but it only lists the literature. The confiscated money is not mentioned, and the booklets are described as having been "kept in the building for fifteen years".

NSS secret police and the ordinary police made a second raid on 11 April at 10 am, breaking into a private flat on 87 Ashrafiy Street which belongs to the Church. The officials led by Hamza Police's Senior Lieutenant Nabi Abdurakhmonov carried out a search lasting 14 hours until midnight (24.00 hours).

Printing equipment and other material confiscated

The Confiscation Protocol, also seen by Forum 18, is signed by Senior Lieutenant Abdurkhmonov and records the confiscation of:

- 52,130 books comprising 2,644 individual titles. Forum 18 was told that this is approximately 10 metric tonnes (9.8 tons) of printed literature;
- 6 desktop computers, 7 computer processors (CPUs), 6 keyboards, 2 Uninterruptible Power Supply computer batteries, and 4 sets of audio speakers;
- 6 black and white printers and 1 laser-colour printer;
- 2 photocopy machines;
- 2 scanners;
- 1 book binding machine;
- 1 photo camera;
- 1 paper-cutting machine;
- 2 videotape recorders;
- 1 television set;
- 160 video tapes and 334 audio tapes;
- and 262 CD and DVD disks.

The Protocol does not list the confiscated books, but Forum 18 was told that they included:

- 426 Bibles and 638 New Testaments in Russian;
- 284 Uzbek-language New Testaments;
- 113 Bible Encyclopaedias;
- 26 Commentaries on books of the Bible;
- 15 Dictionaries of Biblical words and phrases;
- and numerous books of fiction, sports and technical manuals, and school textbooks.

A member of another registered Baptist Church of the Baptist Union in Tashkent, who for fear of state reprisals wished to remain anonymous, told Forum 18 on 19 April said that the confiscated books were "in fact the library of the Church collected for years." The Baptist asked "Does not a Church and Christians have the right to own Christian books and read them?" The Baptist commented that the officials left the Church with "almost nothing".

"Expert analyses" - and then what?

The confiscated literature was sent to the state Religious Affairs Committee for "expert analysis". "Church members are afraid that the Committee will decide not to return it to the Church", Forum 18 was told on 19 April.

Such alleged "expert analyses" are routinely used as an excuse to confiscate any book the authorities decide to confiscate (see eg. F18News 20 May 2009 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1298). A very strict censorship regime is applied against religious literature and other material of all faiths (see F18News 1 July 2008 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1153).

Fines

Judge Javdat Ubaydullayev of Hamza District Criminal Court on 14 April fined four Church members under the Code of Administrative Offences' Articles 184-2 ("Illegal storage, production, import, or distribution of religious materials"), and 240 Part 2 ("Attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) and other missionary activity").

Galina Shemetova, another Baptist from Tashkent – who was physically assaulted by police as she left hospital – was also in April fined 50 times the monthly minimum salary for allegedly breaking Article 240 Part 2 (see F18News 15 April 2011).

http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1563).

From the Hamza District Baptists: Church Pastor Konstantin Malchikovskiy and Church Secretary Dmitriy Arzhanov were each fined 100 times the minimum monthly salary, 4,973,500 Soms (15,860 Norwegian Kroner, 2,030 Euros, or 2,930 US Dollars);

- Choirmaster Boris Zabirko, the Choirmaster of the Church was fined 80 times the minimum monthly salary, 3,978,800 Soms (12,688 Norwegian Kroner, 1,840 Euros, or 2,344 US Dollars);

- and Caretaker Aleksey Teselkin was fined 50 times the minimum monthly salary, 2,486,750 Soms (7,930 Norwegian Kroner, 1,015 Euros, or 1,465 US Dollars).

Judge Ubaydulloyev's Assistant, who would not give his name, told Forum 18 on 19 April that he "cannot say why" the four Baptists were given such heavy fines. Judge Ubaydulloyev "is hearing a case at the moment," he added. "Please, call back in an hour and he will answer you." Called back, the Assistant refused to put Forum 18 through to Judge Ubaydulloyev saying that "he is busy." When asked if he could put Forum 18 through to the Court's Chair or one of the Deputies, he claimed that "everyone is busy" and put the phone down.

Why?

A Tashkent Baptist, who for fear of state reprisals wished to remain anonymous, was asked by Forum 18 why they thought the authorities had acted in this way. They replied that the Uzbek authorities "are increasingly reducing Christian activity". They commented that "the authorities are interested in having small pocket-size churches and religious organisations, which will stay quiet and not have much religious activity."

It is unclear why the authorities have decided to confiscate printing equipment, and no reason for this was given during the raids. However, the authorities have been adopting an increasingly harsh approach to the supply of all religious literature, Justice Ministry officials telling the Bible Society "there is no need to import Bibles" (see F18News 18 February 2011

http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1542).

Members of the Baptist Union in Tashkent have been accused in the state controlled mass media of turning people into zombies and encouraging people to sell their homes and give the money to the Church. One church member described the programme to Forum 18 as containing "outrageous lies". State-disfavoured Muslims, Protestant Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Methodists and Baha'is have been attacked in other broadcasts (see eg. F18News 22 February 2010 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1411).

In 2010 the authorities forced a change in the leadership of Uzbekistan's Baptist Union, by imposing large fines on Baptist leaders and denying them the legal right to hold office (see F18News 22 February 2010 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1411

"I cannot talk to you over the phone"

Senior Lieutenant Abdurakhmanov – who led the second raid - on 19 April asked Forum to call back in two hours later, saying that he "cannot talk at the moment". He evaded Forum 18's questions when called back and asked why did he other officials acted as they did. "I cannot talk to you over the phone," he stated. "Please, come to my office tomorrow, and I will tell you." He hung up the phone without answering, when Forum 18 asked whether the authorities are trying to strip the Baptists in Tashkent of all their printed literature and equipment to print literature.

Artyk Yusupov, Chair of the state Religious Affairs Committee, was according to other officials on 19

April not in the office to comment. Chief Specialist Begzot Kadyrov's telephones went unanswered that day.

"Anti-terror" raid on old people's home

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (22.03.2011) / HRWF (28.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - A Sunday worship service led by Baptists in an old people's home in Uzbekistan's Tashkent Region was halted by police and district administration officials on 13 March, Forum 18 News Service has learned.

Police claimed they were on an "anti-terror operation" and are preparing criminal and administrative case against the Baptists. Elsewhere, in the central Syrdarya Region a court in late January fined a local Baptist 50 times the minimum monthly wage for holding an unauthorised meeting in his home. Police in the same region in early March raided the Sunday worship of an unregistered Baptist Church, whose leader and two other church members were later fined. In the central Navoi [Nawoiy] Region, a District Court handed down a heavy fine on a local resident for carrying officially permitted Jehovah's Witnesses literature.

"Anti-terror operation"?

On 13 March Tashkent Region's Ohangaron District Police raided a Sunday worship service for elderly residents in the Sakhovat (Kindness) old people's home in Ohangaron. "Police unexpectedly broke into the foyer of the nursing home during the service, and halted it, saying that they were carrying out an anti-terror operation," local Baptists told Forum 18. The raid was led by Bakhtiyar Salibayev, Head of Ohangaron District Administration, and Major Sofar Fayziyev, Deputy Head of the District Police, accompanied by District Police criminal investigators.

Six Baptists - Igor Voloshin, Larisa Lankina, Irina Abdurahimova, Lidiya Guseva, Tatyana Balantayeva and Elvira Khabibulina - were leading the service. When they told officials that they had verbal agreement from the District Administration for the services, the police insisted that the meeting was unauthorised.

The six are members of the congregation in the capital Tashkent of the Council of Churches Baptists, who refuse on principle to register their congregations with the state.

Insults, threats

During the next four hours at the old people's home, police officers insulted the Baptists and threatened them with punishment, Baptists complained. Forum 18 notes that such insults usually consist of accusations that they are "traitors" and "spies", and are frequently accompanied by swearing.

The officials filmed everybody present with cameras and cell phones, despite their objections. Police then searched the Baptists and their car, and confiscated Christian cassette-tapes, CDs, song books, notebooks, leaflets, a digital camera, a personal Bible and money. The police did not give the Baptists a copy of the confiscation records.

Each church member was then separately photographed, and their personal data recorded. They were finally put in the police car and taken to Ohangaron City Police. The elderly residents of the nursing home accompanied the six Baptists to the door "with tears in their eyes," the Baptists told Forum 18.

At the Police Station the Baptists were asked to write statements, which they refused to do. Police brought charges against the six under Criminal Code Article 195 ("Resisting the orders of police officers") and Article 201 of the Code of Administrative Offences ("Violation of the procedure for organising and conducting meetings, street processions or demonstrations"), Baptists told Forum 18.

The Baptists were not released until after midnight, being given a written summons to return during the day on 14 March. When the six Baptists returned as instructed, they were detained for the whole day. Police only released them after taking Voloshin's fingerprints, and returning some of the personal items confiscated the previous day.

Police told the Baptists that there would be a trial in a few days.

"I don't know"

Salibayev of Ohangaron District Administration refused to discuss the raid and prosecutions, saying he was newly appointed to his position and "just familiarising" himself with the area. "I don't know if they [the Baptists] had agreement with the Administration, and I don't know what charges the [state] agencies will bring," was all he would tell Forum 18 on 17 March.

Police Major Fayziyev was also reluctant to talk. "We don't know whether we will open a criminal or an administrative case yet," he told Forum 18 on 17 March. "It will all depend on the results of the expert analysis of the literature we confiscated from them."

Asked why the authorities halted the service and harassed participants, he responded: "They could not produce any proof that they had authorisation for their activity." When Forum 18 repeated the question he said: "Look, I don't know you, and I already gave enough information." He then put the phone down. Forum 18 was unable to ask why an "anti-terror operation" had been launched against a religious service in an old people's home.

Charges follow raid on Sunday worship

In Syrdarya Region, twelve officers of Gulistan District Police broke into the building of the Baptist Church in the village of Dustlik on 6 March at 9.45 am. Members of the congregation - which is not registered - had already begun their worship service.

The officers did not identify themselves, but Baptists told Forum 18 one was the local Police Chief. Police confiscated 20 Christian songbooks, 3 Bibles, a New Testament and 20 copies of the magazine Herald of Truth. This was sent to the state Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent for an "expert analysis".

Police also opened an administrative case against Bayram Murodov, the church's leader, Baptists told Forum 18.

The Religious Affairs Committee's chief specialist who produces "expert analyses" is Begzot Kadyrov. Local Protestants who asked not to be identified claimed that each time Kadyrov produces an expert analysis, he violates the procedure laid down in Article 184 of the Criminal Procedure Code ("Opinions from an Expert Examiner").

This states in part that: "The opinion of the expert examiner shall include: his last, first name, patronymic, background, education, academic specialisation, length of service, academic degree and/or academic title, work position; notification of liability for refusal to draw up an opinion as well as for an opinion known to be false; grounds to conduct an expert examination and time taken; persons who were present during the expert examination; case papers studied by the expert examiner; physical evidence, samples, and other objects examined, methods applied and their reliability; valid answers to the questions posed and the relevant circumstances established on the initiative of the expert examiner.

Local Protestants claim that Kadyrov usually omits to give his full name, education, academic specialisation, his work experience, his occupation within the Committee, and on what criteria he - for example - "deems that a certain book could be used for missionary purposes among the native population and thus its import into Uzbekistan and its use is banned".

Article 187 of the Criminal Procedure Code ("Evaluation of an Opinion from an Expert Examiner") states in part that: "The expert examiner's opinion shall be evaluated by the inquiry officer, investigator, or the court, together with other evidence on the case, in terms of its scientific validity and compliance with all established procedural rules".

Kadyrov refused absolutely to discuss his analyses - or anything else - with Forum 18 on 22 March. "Anything you want to learn about our activity or our decisions, you can ask the Foreign Ministry." He then put down the phone.

"Expert analyses" are routinely used as an excuse to confiscate any book the authorities decide to confiscate. A very strict censorship regime is applied against religious literature and other material of all faiths.

Fines, Bibles and hymnbooks ordered destroyed

On 16 March, Judge U. Jumaev of Gulistan Criminal Court found Murodov and two other church members - Natalya Utyaganova and Nadezhda Davydova - guilty under Administrative Code Article 240 Part 1 ("violation of the law on religious organisations") and Article 241 ("teaching religious beliefs without specialised religious education and without permission from the central organ of a [registered] religious organisation, as well as teaching religious beliefs privately"). According to the verdict seen by Forum 18, each was fined one month's minimum wage, 49,735 Soms (165 Norwegian Kroner, 21 Euros or 30 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

Testifying to the church members' guilt in addition to the police was V. Akramova, the head of the mahalla committee, the lowest level of administration in Uzbekistan.

The verdict also ordered that the Bibles, hymnbooks and other Christian literature confiscated during the raid on the 6 March service be destroyed.

Courts in Uzbekistan frequently order that religious literature - including Bibles - confiscated during raids be destroyed.

Gulistan District Police referred Forum 18 to Deputy Police Chief Bahodiyr Kushbakov on 18 March. However his phone was not answered that day. The duty officer later told Forum 18 that Kushbakov was "in a meeting and unavailable".

Fine for literature "teaches respect for the law"?

A young resident of Navoi, Pavel Slivin, was stopped at a bus station in the town by Karmana District police officers while carrying a package of books. He was taken to the nearby Police Station where he was asked to show the contents of the package. This had 24 copies in Russian and 13 copies in Uzbek of "The Watchtower" magazine, as well as 17 copies of another publication, "Awake!" All the literature had been officially approved by the Religious Affairs Committee.

Despite this, Navoi Region's Karmana District Criminal Court fined Slivin 70 times the minimum monthly wage, 3,481,450 Soms (11,500 Norwegian Kroner, 1,455 Euros or 2,065 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

This was under Administrative Code Article 240 for carrying Jehovah's Witnesses literature, Znamya Druzhby (Banner of Friendship), Navoi regional administration's official newspaper, reported on 18 February. Judge Abdumumin Rahimov, who signed the article, did not give the date or other details

of the trial.

Judge Makhpirat Shodiyeva, Chair of Karmana Court, confirmed that Judge Rahimov tried Slivin but declined to comment further on the case. "I cannot explain his decision," Judge Shodiyeva responded on 18 March when asked why such huge fine for religious literature officially allowed in Uzbekistan.

She said Rahimov is not available to talk, and that he is "on vacation".

She also refused to give other details of the case.

"The authorities found out that the literature found on Slivin may be used for the internal use of officially registered religious organisations [Jehovah's Witnesses] but the intention was to use it in homes and other premises illegally," the judge noted in his Znamya Druzhby article, without explaining why he believed the publications were for distribution outside the Jehovah's Witness community. Slivin told the police that he was only carrying the books for someone else, and that he was paid to deliver the books, but the judge claimed that the police "did not believe his fairy story".

Referring to the fine, the judge wrote that his Karmana Court verdict "shows that first of all no law-breaking will be unpunished, secondly that ignorance of laws does not free one from responsibility, and thirdly that the main purpose of the punishment is not revenge against the offender, but teaching him to respect the law."

Fine for unregistered worship, Bibles ordered destroyed

On 6 January police raided Andrei Shevchenko's flat in Syrdarya and opened charges against him. On 19 January Judge Batyr Sorabekov of Syrdarya City Court fined Shevchenko under Administrative Code Article 240 ("violation of the law on religious organisations"). The fine was 50 times the minimum monthly wage, 2,486,750 Soms (8,215 Norwegian Kroner, 1,040 Euros or 1,475 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

The verdict, which Forum 18 has seen, also orders the destruction of several Christian books in Uzbek, Tajik, Kazakh and Russian, a Bible and New Testament in Uzbek, and a New Testament in Tajik. All the literature was confiscated from Shevchenko during the raid.

Judge Sorabekov's assistant (who did not give his name) on 18 March told Forum 18 that Judge Sorabekov was busy and asked Forum 18 to call later.

After several calls he told Forum 18 that he could not comment on the case, and that Judge Sorabekov was not available to talk.

"All talk about the Constitution and democracy is hypocrisy"

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (28.02.2011) / HRWF (07.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan continues to harass the officially registered Bible Society, Forum 18 News Service has learned. In the latest moves, officials have forced its General Assembly took place in the open air, after warning churches not to host the meeting. During questioning of Bible Society leaders, officials questioned the Society's existence as a legal religious organisation by stating that some of its founding churches have been closed down. "The officials tried to substantiate their claims by phoning the regional authorities during the meeting – in particular asking whether churches had been closed down," a Bible Society member told Forum 18.

General Assembly forced outside in the cold

The Bible Society's General Assembly was planned to be held on 16 February in a Protestant church in the capital Tashkent, as its offices are too small for a large meeting. However, just beforehand Tashkent Justice Department warned the church not to host the meeting, a source who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. "Other churches were afraid after this to host the meeting", Forum 18 was told.

The Assembly went ahead, but in the cold open air, attended by representatives of Baptist, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran and Catholic churches from 10 of Uzbekistan's 14 regions. It appointed a new President, new Board members and Aleksey Voskresensky as the new Director. This was to address issues raised by the Justice Ministry, Bible Society members who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18.

Voskresensky had previously, on 24 January, left his teaching position at the Tashkent Protestant Seminary under pressure from the state Religious Affairs Committee.

"I will not answer"

Umid Rasulov of Tashkent City Justice Department on 16 February denied that his Department warned anyone not to host the Assembly. He referred Forum 18 to the Justice Ministry, saying that the Bible Society "was registered by the Ministry. Please talk to them".

Akborhon Nabirayev, Head of the Justice Ministry's department responsible for religious organisations, and Umid Shadiyev, Chief Expert on religious organisations, refused to discuss the matter with Forum 18. Shadiyev's telephone was initially answered by a person who introduced himself as Shadiyev. But when Forum 18 introduced itself, he said it was a wrong number and put the phone down.

After numerous attempts between 11 and 17 February to reach Nabirayev – each Forum 18 was asked to call back – an official of the Justice Ministry on 17 February who answered the phone said Nabirayev could not come to the phone and asked what the question was. When asked why the Bible Society was pressured and is the Ministry planning to strip its registration, the official put the phone down.

Begzod Kadyrov, Leading Specialist of the Religious Affairs Committee on 15 February told Forum 18 that he will "not answer" any questions. "Hundreds of times I have told you to send your questions to the Foreign Ministry," he retorted when asked why the Bible Society was being pressured by the authorities. He then hung up the phone.

Earlier pressure

Bible Society Accountant Natalya Pitirimova was on 12 January fined in her absence for – allegedly - violating procedures for the import of two shipments of Bibles and Children's Bibles in 2008 and 2010. She has also been subsequently questioned by the Customs and National Security Service (NSS) secret police.

Board member Dmitri Pitirimov – in his role leading a children's holiday camp – was in 2009 convicted of evading taxes and involving children in religious activity without their or their parents' consent. He and his co-defendants insist that the charges were fabricated. They were given massive fines in October 2009 and banned from holding any responsible positions for three years. Appeals against the sentences failed.

Bible Society President and Director questioned

On 28 December 2010 the Justice Ministry summoned for questioning Oleg Muhamedjanov, the Bible Society's then President and Aleksey Voskresensky, the new Director. Nabirayev and Shadiyev of the Ministry, as well as A. Neymatov and Z. Mahmudov, and one more person who did not introduce himself took part in the questioning, which lasted nearly four hours. A Bible Society member, who wanted to remain unnamed for fear of the authorities, told Forum 18 that Muhamedjanov and Voskresensky were first questioned by the officials one by one, and then they continued to talk to the two together, and then forced them to sign a record of the meeting.

The officials told the Bible Society leaders that Dmitri Pitirimov cannot be a board member, as he had been convicted of a crime. Bible Society members told Forum 18 that Pitirimov has since resigned from the Board.

The officials also disputed the legitimacy of Voskresensky as the Bible Society's new Director, stating that its General Assembly needed to confirm him in office. The General Assembly on 15 February confirmed Voskresensky as the Director.

The officials also questioned the Bible Society's existence as a legal religious organisation, stating that some of its founding churches have been closed down and that the Bible Society did not hold religious ceremonies or services. "The officials tried to substantiate their claims by phoning the regional authorities during the meeting – in particular asking whether churches had been closed down," a Bible Society member told Forum 18. "However, the officials realised that there are still a legal – under the Religion Law – number of founding churches left with official registration."

"No need to import Bibles"

Justice Ministry officials also claimed that: "It is not necessary to import Bibles into Uzbekistan since there is an electronic version of the Bible on the Internet and this is enough," the officials told the two leaders.

"The Bible Society was established by the Churches of Uzbekistan particularly for the production and import of the Bibles," a Bible Society member lamented. "The authorities want to put pressure on us not to do our main task."

Officials told the Bible Society leaders "Do not waste time, waiting for permission to receive the Bible shipments," referring to two confiscated shipments of Bibles.

The officials also warned Muhamedjanov and Voskresensky that they will soon investigate the activity of the Bible Society further. Forum 18 understands that the Justice Ministry has not yet made further inquiries of the Society.

"Talk about the Constitution and democracy is hypocrisy"

Bible Society members complained to Forum 18 that the authorities "are determined to stop import of Bibles in the national languages, and to stop distribution of the Bible in the country. We can see that all the talk about the Constitution and democracy in Uzbekistan is hypocrisy."

The Bible Society was first registered in 1994, and its purpose is to produce or import Bibles for Uzbekistan's Christians. It was re-registered in 1998 under the then-new Religion Law. Before the 1998 re-registration, the Russian Orthodox Church left the Bible Society as a founding member. However the Catholic Church joined as a new founding member. The latest founding members include churches from eight of the 14 regions of Uzbekistan.

More short-term prisoners of conscience

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (23.02.2011) / HRWF (28.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - In a late-night hearing on 12 February, a court in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent handed down 15-day administrative arrests to Adylbek Utibayev, Kuanysh Asembayev and another man (whose name is not known) on charges of holding an "illegal" religious meeting, Protestants who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 News Service from the Uzbek capital. The three are members of Tashkent's Full Gospel Pentecostal Church.

At the same time, Judge Sagdulla Ashirmatov of Mirzo-Ulugbek District Court imposed fines of fifty times the minimum monthly wage, 2,468,000 Soms (8,315 Norwegian Kroner, 1,075 Euros or 1,473 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) each on ten other church members.

All were punished under Administrative Code Article 201 Part 2 ("violation of the procedure for holding religious meetings, street processions or other religious ceremonies") and Article 202 ("creating the conditions for conducting unsanctioned meetings"). In addition, Utibayev was punished under Administrative Code Article 184-2 ("illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious materials").

The same judge fined several Protestants in 2009 for religious activity, while in May 2010 he is known to have imprisoned three further Protestants for 15 days each and fined five more.

Bahodiy Yuldashev, Chair of Mirzo-Ulugbek District Court, said he could not say anything immediately about the case since he was "not familiar" with it. He asked Forum 18 on 22 February to call back, but when Forum 18 did so his assistant (who would not give his name) stated that Yuldashev was busy and could not talk to Forum 18.

Raid and police questioning

The court hearing followed a raid by police earlier that Saturday on Utibayev's private flat in Mirzo-Ulugbek District, where around 40 church members had gathered to celebrate his daughter's 18th birthday. "A large group of uniformed and plain clothes police broke into the flat when we were about to sit down to eat," one church member complained. Police searched the flat for two hours, and then took the three men and around twenty young people to the local Police Station.

After more questioning at the Police Station, the church members were taken to Mirzo-Ulugbek District Court. Despite it being 23.30 at night, the Court heard the case. Some of the young people, who were under 18, were warned and released.

Police Colonel Dilmurod Madaliyev, Chief of Mirzo-Ulugbek District Police, refused to say why police under his command staged the raid. "We will not give information over the phone," he told Forum 18 on 22 February. He then put the phone down.

Food and warm clothes refused

Relatives of the three imprisoned men took food and warm clothes to Tashkent Police Detention Centre. However police refused to allow the food and clothes in without giving a reason, a relative complained to Forum 18. "Later we found out that the three men are being kept not there, but in the investigation cellars of Tashkent City Police Station."

Appeal chances illegally denied

Only two of the fined Church members were given copies of the court verdict on 16 February – but they were compelled to sign a paper saying that they received it on 12 February. The others were not given a copy of the decision. "The authorities did this so that the believers could not file complaints on time since usually 10 days are given to do so."

Other prisoners of conscience

Short-term jail sentences of up to fifteen days are frequent punishments for those who conduct religious activity the government does not like. Forum 18 knows of 25 people – Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'is – who received prison terms of up to 15 days in 2009, and a further 22 in 2010.

In the most recent case known to Forum 18, two Baptists, Eduard Kim and Artur Alpayev, were given seven-day jail terms on 31 January in the southern Surkhandarya Region for distributing Christian literature.

Currently, there are also many long-term Muslim, Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestant prisoners of conscience, sentenced for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

Harassment in Samarkand Region

Meanwhile in the central Samarkand [Samarqand] Region, Protestants have told Forum 18 that regional authorities have increased harassment of churches. One local Protestant pastor, who did not wish to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum18 on 22 February that police had come to his flat to see if he was having a church meeting there. "I could see how he was surprised when he did not see people in our flat," the pastor said. The officer then asked him to bring copies of pages of his and his family members' passports to a police station.

A few days later, members of the same Church were summoned to the National Security Service (NSS) secret police, and asked to bring with them copies of their passports, the pastor said. An NSS secret police officer who interrogated the believers warned them that "we have many names from your Church on our list, and we will soon be calling them for questioning".

Repression of people exercising freedom religious activity is particularly fierce in Samarkand. At least seven Protestant churches have in recent years been stripped of state registration, rendering church members liable for punishment for any religious activity they undertake. A further Protestant congregation, as well as a local Jehovah's Witness group, have been repeatedly denied registration. A Hare Krishna festival was raided and halted in 2009. Eleven local readers of the works of the late Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi were given prison sentences of up to eleven years in 2009 after five months' pre-trial detention. Two local Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned in recent years.

Criminal charges against Protestant for trying to leave

A Protestant, Murot Turdiyev, has been charged under the Criminal Code Article 25 ("Preparation for, or attempting to commit, a crime") and Article 223 ("Illegal exit from or entry into Uzbekistan"). Article 25 specifies that prosecution should take place under the Article outlawing the alleged crime. The maximum penalty for breaking Article 223 is five years' imprisonment.

Turdiyev had been stopped while attempting to board a Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul without an Exit Visa, which he mistakenly thought was unnecessary. Several members of his family have been punished for exercising their freedom of religion or belief.

Senior Lieutenant Abdulla Malikov of Tashkent's Transport Police brought the charges against Turdiyev on 14 February. Asked by Forum 18 why criminal charges were being brought for a

misunderstanding of the law, Malikov responded: "There is the law, and everything must be dealt with according to the law." Asked what punishment he thought would be imposed, Malikov replied that "we have not finished the investigation, but it will be the court which will decide that".

Local Departments of Entry, Exit and Legalisation of Citizenship sometimes withhold such Exit Visas – which are valid for only two years at a time – from known active religious believers, as well as from human rights defenders and opposition activists. Natalya Kadyrova, the wife of the pastor of a Protestant congregation in Tashkent, finally received her exit visa in April 2009, four months after she applied. She had to lodge official protests to overturn the initial denial.

"No need to import Bibles"?

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (18.02.2011) / HRWF (21.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan's authorities continue to impose heavy censorship of religious literature, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Two shipments of Bibles and Children's Bibles totalling nearly 15,000 copies - seized by Tashkent City Customs on the instruction of Uzbekistan's Justice Ministry and State Religious Affairs Committee in 2008 and 2010 - are still under confiscation. Officials have given various reasons for refusing to release the literature, but particularly objected to Bibles in Uzbek and Karakalpak, a language spoken in north-western Uzbekistan. The authorities are stepping up pressure on the Bible Society of Uzbekistan, to whom the literature was sent, to return the shipments to the sender at its own cost.

A Tashkent City Court on 12 January fined Natalya Pitirimova, the Bible Society's Accountant, in a hearing in her absence, and obliged the Bible Society to re-export the literature, Pitirimova complained to Forum 18.

Members of the Bible Society also complained to Forum 18 that Justice Ministry officials summoned Oleg Muhamedjanov, the Bible Society's then President, and Aleksey Voskresensky, its new Director, in December 2010. Over a four-hour period, officials at first questioned the two separately, and then together.

Officials warned that "there is no need to import Bibles into Uzbekistan since there's an electronic version on the internet." (They did not explain why it was not wrong to read the Bible on the internet but wrong to acquire a printed copy.) The officials also gave the Bible Society other warnings, Forum 18 was told, leading some to fear that the government is seeking to close down the organisation altogether.

"I will not answer any questions"

The Religious Affairs Committee and Justice Ministry officials refused to discuss the issues with Forum 18. Asked why the Religious Affairs Committee does not allow 15,000 Bibles, the text of which it has already approved, to enter the country, and why the Uzbek authorities put pressure on the Bible Society, its Leading Specialist Begzot Kadyrov retorted to Forum 18 on 15 February: "I will not answer any questions. Hundreds of times I have told you to send your questions to the Foreign Ministry." He then hung up the phone.

Each time from 11 February Forum 18 tried to reach Akborhon Nabirayev, Head of the Justice Ministry's Department responsible for religious organisations, officials took Forum 18's name, and kept saying that he was busy and asking to call back. Finally, on 17 February an official said that Nabirayev could not come to the phone, and asked what the question was. Asked why the Bible Society was pressured and why 15,000 Bibles were confiscated by the authorities, the

official put the phone down.

Tight religious literature censorship

Religious literature in Uzbekistan is under tight state control. The import and production of literature – including the Koran and the Bible - is strictly controlled, with compulsory prior censorship by the state Religious Affairs Committee. Only registered communities can ask for permission to print or import material. Relatively little literature about the majority Islamic faith is allowed to be published, and none is imported officially.

Religious literature is often confiscated during police and National Security Service (NSS) secret police raids. Courts then often order that such religious literature – including copies of the Bible – be destroyed, as was ordered by Fergana [Farghona] Criminal Court in October 2010 to literature confiscated from three Protestants, who were also fined.

Tashkent Court fines Accountant and obliges Bible Society to re-export Bibles

Pitirimova, the Bible Society's Accountant, was tried on 12 January at Tashkent's Chilanzar District Criminal Court, in a hearing chaired by Judge Dilshod Suleymanov, under Article 227-13 of the Code of Administrative Offences (violation of the procedure for placing goods in storage, storing or conducting operations with them). According to the decision, a copy of which Forum 18 has seen, responsibility was put on the Bible Society "to return the confiscated two shipments of literature (..) to the sender in the Russian Federation." Pitirimova was fined 316,505 Soms (1,082 Norwegian Kroner, 140 Euros or 189 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

As seen from the Chilanzar Court decision, the first shipment of books to the Bible Society arrived at Tashkent City Customs on 18 May 2008 from the Russian Federation in eleven parcels. The court decision does not indicate the number of books but Pitirimova told Forum 18 that there are 12,000 books in the shipment – roughly 5,000 Russian Bibles as well as roughly 7,000 books – mostly Children's Bibles – in Uzbek and Karakalpak languages (the figures on the literature in Uzbek and Karakalpak were confirmed by the Religious Affairs Committee).

The second shipment from the Russian Bible Society arrived on 15 January 2010. The court decision indicates that 2,990 books in three pallets were sent from the Russian Federation to the Bible Society. Pitirimova said that the second shipment consisted entirely of Bibles in Russian.

Court hears case in Bible Society's absence

The court heard the case in the absence of the Bible Society's Director and Accountant Pitirimova, claiming – as seen in the decision – that "although Pitirimova was informed of the time of hearing she did not appear before the court without giving the reasons for failure to appear, and therefore the Court deems it possible to conduct the hearing in her absence."

Pitirimova rejects this, insisting that Judge Suleymanov made only one phone call to summon her on 12 January, the day of the hearing. "I told him that at that time the Director of the Bible Society was out of town and I could not appear before the Court as I do not hold a leading position," she told Forum 18 on 14 February. "I asked the Judge to postpone the hearing for a couple of days until our Director returns, but he would not listen to me. He said he would go ahead and hear the case in our absence."

Judge Suleymanov would not comment to Forum 18 as to why he only summoned Pitirimova for the hearing by telephone on the day of the hearing and not in writing.

Bible Society lodges appeal

Pitirimova complained to Forum 18 that the District Court violated several points. It did not send

the Bible Society a written summons to the hearing, in its decision it speaks of the Bible shipments as "confiscated" literature, whereas no literature was confiscated from Pitirimova or the Bible Society, and the court decision is not clear about how exactly Pitirimova allegedly violated procedures, she pointed out to Forum 18.

She said that the Bible Society lodged an appeal against the Chilanzar District Court decision on 3 February to Tashkent City Criminal Court. However, the Court has not responded yet to the appeal. She has not yet paid the fine.

Judge defends religious censorship

Judge Suleymanov argued to Forum 18 on 15 February that the "Bible Society did not present requests on time to the Religious Affairs Committee from churches in Uzbekistan that they need the literature, and subsequently as time passed this violated customs procedures."

Accountant Pitirimova rejected this, pointing out that neither the Religion Law nor the Bible Society's charter obliges it to collect requests from churches to import literature. However, she pointed out that in September 2010 the Bible Society sent a letter signed by Pastors of 38 churches to the State Committee requesting the literature "so that the authorities would have no excuses" not to release the literature.

However, Pitirimova said, the State Committee was not satisfied and demanded that the Bible Society collect individual requests from Churches. "Churches are closely monitored by the local authorities, and they afraid are to give details of how many new members they have, and how many more Bibles they need," she lamented. "It took quite some time to receive requests from 26 churches, and we sent those a few days ago to the Committee." Pitirimova said that the Bible Society received notification on 15 February that the requests reached the State Committee.

Asked why the Court fined Pitirimova and obliged the Bible Society to re-export the literature while the literature was not confiscated from her or her organisation, Judge Suleymanov merely pointed out that Pitirimova has already appealed against his decision.

Asked why the officially registered Bible Society cannot receive and have in store Bibles for future use in Uzbekistan, and why residents of Uzbekistan who are not members of any Church or are not Christians should not have the chance to obtain Bibles from the Bible Society, the Judge told Forum 18 on 15 February without further explanation: "There is an official Directive that religious literature must be imported based on the requests from religious organisations." Pitirimova said that she was not aware of any such Directive.

Judge Suleymanov declined to comment on why residents of Uzbekistan should have to ask for special permission from the State to obtain and read religious literature in their native languages. "This is the first time I have come across such a case, and I cannot comment over the phone." He asked Forum 18 to send further questions to the Supreme Court.

"Plot to flood Uzbekistan with illegal literature"?

About three weeks after the first shipment of Bibles arrived at Tashkent City Customs in May 2008, the State Religious Affairs Committee published an article on its official website on 6 June 2008 entitled "Plots failed".

The article alleged that "with concerted efforts of the Religious Affairs Committee and Customs and Justice authorities the attempt of the Bible Society of Uzbekistan to transport into Uzbekistan illegal religious literature was prevented." It said the shipment was "masterfully disguised under the Russian language literature". However, checking revealed that the shipment consisted of 3,495 books in Uzbek language in Cyrillic script, 1,495 books in Uzbek language in Latin script and 1,995 books in Karakalpak. The Justice Ministry officially warned the Bible Society that it should not in future commit such violations. "Thus the plot to flood Uzbekistan

with illegal literature in the languages of native peoples with the purpose to conduct large-scale missionary activity especially among children and youth failed."

Pitirimova rejected these claims, insisting that in 2008 the Bible Society did not give a list of books to or tell the authorities in which languages the literature was when they asked for the release of the books.

Bible Society members, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of the authorities, complained to Forum 18 of such state controls, asking why people of Uzbekistan cannot import and read Bibles in their native languages.

Why won't the authorities release the Bibles?

In a 16 December 2010 response to the Bible Society, seen by Forum 18, Sh. Irisbayev, Deputy Chief of Tashkent City Customs Authority, said that based on the letters of 12 June, 30 June 2008 and 14 December 2010 from the Religious Affairs Committee, the Bible Society was refused permission to import the concerned literature "as until now requests from religious organisations on the necessity of demand for this literature were not sent". Irisbayev added: "Taking this into account you need within 5 days to present all the documents to re-export this religious literature." The letter does not, however, specify whether both shipments or only the first must be sent back.

Pitirimova said that in 2010, customs officials showed her and Director Voskresensky an official letter signed by the Religious Affairs Committee banning the release of the two shipments, which said that one of the shipments has "Christian literature in the native languages."

Pitirimova said that later on 18 January, Officer Anvar (last name unknown) from the Customs Investigation Division summoned her without giving reasons. When she arrived, she was questioned by another Officer Jamshid (last name was not given) and asked which Customs official showed them the Religious Affairs Committee's letter banning the import of the literature. Among other questions, Officer Jamshid asked who else told the Bible Society that literature in the native languages may not be imported into Uzbekistan. Pitirimova said she believes that Officer Jamshid could be from the NSS secret police.

Reached by Forum 18 on 11 February, Officer Anvar (he did not give last name) noted down Pitirimova's name, but when asked why he summoned her, claimed "It's a wrong number" and put the phone down. Officer Nadyr (he did not give last name) from the Investigation Division said that he "personally did not invite Pitirimova, and Anvar is on vacation now." He referred Forum 18 to the Chief of the Division saying that "only he could comment on this case." Subsequent calls to the Investigation Division went unanswered on 11 February.

Will Religious Affairs Committee release second shipment?

Asked why the Bible Society ordered a second shipment of Bibles from Russia while they could not receive the first shipment, one Bible Society member said, "There are thousands of Christians in Uzbekistan, and the Churches need Bibles." The member said that they ordered Bibles only in Russian in 2010 so there would be "no excuses by the authorities." However, the customs authorities did not release this shipment either, the member complained.

Artyk Yusupov, Chair of the Religious Affairs Committee, told the Bible Society in a 4 February letter – seen by Forum 18 – that the 2008 shipment "cannot be imported into Uzbekistan, and must be sent back to the sender, because the literature in Uzbek and Karakalpak languages was presented as literature in Russian language, and at the same time no requests necessary to receive the literature were sent by the existing religious organisations."

Yusupov went on to write that the "second shipment may be released under appropriate procedures if the Bible Society positively resolves the issue with the abovementioned shipment."

One Bible Society member told Forum 18 that "If we send the first shipment back, then how can we be assured that we will receive the second shipment? Who can guarantee, for instance, that the State Committee will not place the books in the libraries instead of releasing it to us?"

"It's our secret"

By Mushfig Bayram,

Forum 18 (09.02.2011) / HRWF (10.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Uzbekistan continues to punish religious activity without state permission, as well as restrict the freedom of religion or belief of those in permitted registered organisations, Forum 18 News Service notes. In the central Syrdarya Region, police have raided and are preparing to prosecute members of an unregistered Baptist Church, and Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church has spoken of the difficulties his church faces in Uzbekistan. Elsewhere, a Protestant has been taken off a flight leaving the country for not having an Exit Visa, and two short-term Protestant prisoners of conscience have been released.

Baptists raided

Police in Syrdarya, after raiding a meeting of local unregistered Baptists, are now preparing to prosecute church pastor Andrey Shevchenko and other church members, local Baptists who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 8 February. They are being prosecuted under the Code of Administrative Offences' articles 240 ("Violation of the law on religious organisations") and 184-2 ("Illegal storage, production, import, or distribution of religious materials").

Bakhrom Nurmatov of Syrdarya Police's Criminal Investigation Department, along with eleven other police officers, on 6 January broke into Shevchenko's flat. Around 25 people, mostly Baptists, were present that evening to celebrate the baptism of Christ, a local Baptist told Forum 18.

Police made some of the Baptists write statements, and confiscated 192 Christian books, and 10 DVD and CD discs. Among the confiscated books were five Bibles, 90 copies of the Gospel of St. John, eight Christian song books, and five copies of the New Testaments in Uzbek.

Pastor Shevchenko showed police an official invoice that the confiscated material was bought from the officially registered Bible Society of Uzbekistan. However, police told him that the literature will be sent to the State Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Tashkent, for "expert analysis". Such alleged "expert analyses" are routinely used as an excuse to confiscate any book the authorities decide to confiscate. A very strict censorship regime is applied against religious literature and other material of all faiths.

Police officer Nurmatov refused to comment on the raid. "I will only talk to you about the case if you come to our office," he told Forum 18 on 8 February. Nurmatov refused to state on what authority or basis he and his colleagues broke into a private flat.

Orthodox face bans and problems gaining permission for parishes

Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church – which has state permission to exist in Uzbekistan - has spoken of problems it faces in Uzbekistan. Addressing the Bishop's

Council in the Russian capital Moscow on 2 February, Kirill thanked Uzbekistan's authorities but also stated that "there is a ban on missionary activity, it is impossible to organize Orthodox secondary schools, and there are difficulties with registering new parishes". The Patriarch said that he hoped to "resolve these issues through constructive dialogue" with the authorities.

Dimitri Khabarov of the Russian Orthodox Church's Alexandr Nevski Parish in Tashkent told Forum 18 on 9 February that "I think we have two parishes which we have not been able to register, but I am not sure". He referred Forum 18 to the Tashkent Diocese, but no-one was available to discuss the situation on 9 February.

Officials of the state Religious Affairs Committee refused to discuss the matter on 9 February. An official who answered Committee Chair Artyk Yusupov's telephone, who did not give his name, said that Yusupov was not available to talk. He referred Forum 18 to their specialist Begzot Kadyrov. However, neither Kadyrov's nor other telephones at the Committee were then answered.

Two short-term prisoners of conscience released

Two Baptists, Eduard Kim and Artur Alpayev, who on 31 January were given seven days in jail, were released on 6 February, Baptists told Forum 18 on 8 February. Kim and Alpayev were "treated normally" while in detention, the Baptists said. "We are not sure if we will make an appeal against the convictions," one Baptist, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18.

During their initial detention in Denau [Dinau], 120 km [75 miles] from their homes in Fergana [Farghona], Alpayev and Kim "had to sleep on tables overnight" before their trial.

"Seven or eight Christian books and three or four CDs" were confiscated, Baptists complained. All material in Uzbek was confiscated, but Bibles in Russian were returned. The Baptists "only gave one Christian book in Russian to a Russian lady in the Denau city bazaar", their fellow believers told Forum 18. "She was helpful to them giving them directions to the place they wanted to go, and so that's how they thanked her in return." Later, police stopped the two and searched their car, finding the Christian literature.

"It's our secret"

Major Asliddin Mirzayev of the Surkhandarya Regional Criminal Police, who stopped the two Baptists in Denau, protested when asked by Forum 18 what was wrong with presenting a Christian book as a gift. "It was not only one book", he claimed on 8 February. Asked why he stopped the Baptists, he retorted: "It's our secret". He then refused to talk further to Forum 18.

The National Security Service (NSS) secret police tries to maintain a close and intensive surveillance over religious believers of all faiths. Religious believers have identified the NSS Department to Fight Terrorism as the main branch controlling religious activity within the secret police. The NSS has refused to tell Forum 18 why it spies on religious communities.

Lieutenant-Colonel Nuriddin Tukhtashev, Chief of Denau Police, said on 8 February that the Baptists were stopped for distributing literature "without having documents allowing them to do so". Asked why the Baptists were kept for many hours in a police station and had to sleep on tables, Lt-Col. Tukhtashev laughed and said, "Believe me, nothing like that happened. We questioned them, and immediately sent to the court." He did not comment when told that the Baptists were detained on 30 January, and were taken to court next day on 31 January.

Judge Bobojonov of Denau city Court, as he initially identified himself on 8 February, wrote down Forum 18's name but then refused to comment on the case. Changing his mind about what his name was, he claimed that "actually I am not Judge Bobojonov, but the Court's Secretary". His change of mind about what his name was happened after Forum 18 asked him why such heavy punishments were given to Alpayev and Kim. Asked if Forum 18 could talk to Bobojonov, the newly unnamed official said that Bobojonov was not available to talk.

Exit visa regime still operating

Border guards at Tashkent International Airport stopped Murot Turdiyev, a Protestant from Tashkent, on 5 February at 4 am after he checked in for a Turkish Airlines flight from Tashkent to Istanbul, local Protestants told Forum 18 on 9 February. Turdiyev was then handed over to the Transport Police, where Captain Sultonmurod Baykobulov opened an administrative case under the Administrative Code's Article 224-1 ("Violation of regime at checkpoints at the state borders") against Turdiyev.

"A Border Guard stopped me because I did not have an Exit Visa in my Passport", Turdiyev explained to Forum 18 on 9 February. He said that he was questioned at a police station and questioned. "I was kept for six hours at the police station, and later was told that I should expect a call from the authorities to appear before a court on 14 February".

Uzbekistan is the only former Soviet state to have a formal Exit Visa requirement, Turkmenistan having on paper abolished its Exit Visa – but maintaining an exit blacklist to achieve the same goal – in 2004. Human rights defenders, active religious believers, and others the authorities dislike have long been targets of Uzbekistan's Exit Visa regime.

Turdiyev noted that he had previously had a standard two-year Exit Visa, which expired in January. He then asked the Tashkent Regional Visas Department on 7 January to extend his Exit Visa. The Department was "supposed within 15 days" to extend the Visa. "However, the Department took a long time with no explanation, although I called several times about it", he stated. "But yesterday, after I got into this problem the Visa Department called me saying that I could collect my Exit Visa".

Asked why he tried to leave Uzbekistan without an Exit Visa, Turdiyev said that he had heard recently that Turkey did not require an Entry Visa for Uzbek citizens, "so I thought maybe no Exit Visa was needed". Turkey does not require Uzbek citizens to have a Visa, so long as their stay in the country does not exceed 30 days.

Several members of Turdiyev's family have been punished for exercising their freedom of religion or belief, his niece Madina Turdiyeva, for example being fined in February 2010.

Tashkent Airport's border guards on 9 February declined to make any comments on the case, saying that it was being dealt with by the Transport Police. The Transport Police also declined to make any comment.

Prisoner of conscience "released but not free"

Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (04.02.2011) / HRWF (07.02.2011) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Former prisoner of conscience Dmitry Shestakov, who was recently released from a four-year jail

sentence continues to be under severe restrictions, Forum 18 News Service has learned. For one year Shestakov has to report to police in person almost every week, may not be outside his home between 21.00 in the evening and 06.00 in the morning, and cannot visit places where alcohol is served such as restaurants. "He was released from prison but is not free," one Protestant complained to Forum 18. Shestakov is the Pastor of an officially registered Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in the eastern city of Andijan [Andijon], who was imprisoned for exercising his right to freedom of religion or belief. Uzbek authorities are unwilling to explain to Forum 18 why they have placed Shestakov under these restrictions.

Shestakov was released on 21 January from Prison No. 29 in Navoi [Nawoiy], in central Uzbekistan, after a four-year sentence for allegedly violating Criminal Code articles:

- 216 ("Illegal establishment or reactivation of illegal public associations or religious organisations, as well as active participation in their activities");
- and 244-1 Part 2 ("Any form of dissemination of information and materials containing ideas of religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism, calls for pogroms or violent eviction of individuals, or aimed at creating a panic among the population, as well as the use of religion in purposes of breach of civil concord, dissemination of calumnious and destabilizing fabrications, and committing other acts aimed against the established rules of conduct in society and of public order").

He was sentenced, after an apparently rigged trial, in March 2007 to four years in an open work camp. The sentence was subsequently harshened to imprisonment in a labour camp where Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience are also held.

NSS secret police presence at release

A large number of prison officials and National Security Service (NSS) secret police in plain clothes were present when Shestakov was released, and they refused to allow his lawyer to be present. Officials filmed the release on a video camera. Shestakov walked out of the prison gates in prison clothes – a dark jacket, dark trousers, and dark cap – as his wife and three daughters met him. Apart from two members of his church, no people from other churches were present, for fear of state reprisals. His family and church members were all crying for joy at the release.

Mother's death

Shestakov's mother had a stroke and was paralysed after his arrest. On his way home after his release Shestakov visited her, although she was in a coma when he saw her. "Soon after Shestakov's visit she died on 24 January", a Protestant told Forum 18. Shestakov was, Forum 18 understands, allowed by police to bury his mother.

Current Muslim, Jehovah's Witness and Protestant prisoners of conscience

Uzbekistan has many prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. One Protestant is still a long-term prisoner of conscience, also after an apparently rigged trial. Tohar Haydarov was in March 2010 sentenced to 10 years in jail, and attempts to overturn his sentence have failed. There are also very many Muslim prisoners of conscience, notably readers of the works of Islamic theologian Said Nursi, jailed for long terms for exercising religious freedom.

Three Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience are also currently jailed. In April 2008 Olim Turaev was sentenced to four years in a labour camp (see F18News 29 April 2008 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1122). In July 2008 Abdubannob

Ahmedov was sentenced to a four year prison term and Sergey Ivanov to three and a half years.

There are also short-term prisoners of conscience, jailed for up to 15 days under the Code of Administrative Offences. These have so far been Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahai's.

The latest short-term prisoners of conscience are two Baptists, Artur Alpayev and Edward Kim, from an unregistered Baptist Church in the eastern city of Fergana [Farghona]. All unregistered religious activity is a criminal offence, against Uzbekistan's international human rights obligations.

On 30 January the two Baptists were detained by police in Denau [Dinaw] in the southern Surkhandarya Region for distributing Christian literature, and held for 15 hours in a police station. On 31 January they were sentenced in a short court hearing – lasting only a few minutes, local Baptists told Forum 18 – to seven days administrative arrest. The two were sentenced under the Administrative Code's article's 240 ("Violation of the law on religious organisations") and 186 ("Production and sale of home-made alcoholic drink").

It is thought that the use of Article 186 is a reference to Communion Wine used in worship.

Why 'administrative supervision'?

Soon after Pastor Shestakov's release on 21 January, Prison No. 29's administration asked Navoi Criminal Court to place Shestakov under administrative supervision, Protestants who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. The Prison claimed that Shestakov was a persistent violator of the prison regime, which people who know him have strongly denied to Forum 18. The Court decided to place Shestakov under supervision for one year.

An independent human rights defender, speaking to Forum 18 on 2 February on condition of anonymity, noted that terms of administrative supervision vary between one month on one year. Shestakov was given the maximum term. "Usually only thugs or violent religious extremists are put under administrative supervision," the human rights defender stated.

Nurmamad Ismailov, Governor of Prison Nr. 29, refused to talk to Forum 18 on 3 February. Asked what basis he had to ask the Court to put Shestakov under supervision, Ismailov said through his secretary (who did not give her name) that "the Prison is a closed place and I have no authority to comment". The Governor's Secretary then said that he "will not answer".

Sherzod Mamedov, Chair of Navoi Criminal Court, refused to comment on his Court's decision. He told Forum 18 on 3 February that "I cannot give you any information on the case over the phone". Asked what basis the Court had for its decision, he hung up the phone.

Ex-prisoners registered, suspected, and monitored

Like other released prisoners, Shestakov must be registered at Andijan Regional and Andijan City Police as well as the local Police inspector of his residential area, the human rights defender pointed out. He must be registered at the City Police's Crime-Prevention and Criminal Investigation Divisions. "In such cases the local police Inspector usually demands that the ex-prisoner finds a job, and presents a written testimonial about

himself from the authorities of a residential district or mahalla committee". Shestakov will also have to report to the police inspector every month.

Mahalla committees retain extensive records on local residents, especially on known active religious believers. These committees are used by the Uzbek regime as a key instrument in its attempts to control society.

If a crime is committed close to Shestakov's home, he can be summoned by the police to write a statement stating where he was when the crime was committed, the human rights defender said.

Before any major national public holiday, Shestakov will be summoned to the city police and asked to write a statement about himself.

What does administrative supervision mean?

As a person under administrative supervision, Shestakov must:

- 1. report in person to Andijan Regional Police no less than three times a month;
- 2. not visit places where alcohol is served, such as cafés, bars and restaurants;
- 3. not be outside the city of Andijan without the prior written consent of the Regional Police;
- and 4. not be outside his home between 21.00 in the evening and 06.00 in the morning.

Police have the right to, several times each night after 21.00, check that Shestakov is at home.

If Shestakov breaks the supervision regime, he may for a first alleged violation be given a fine up to three times the minimum salary under the Administrative Code's Article 206 ("Violation of the regulations of administrative supervision").

If Shestakov is given an administrative punishment, the police will ask a court to extend the term of the supervision, the human rights defender explained. Administrative supervision may be extended by up to three years.

If the alleged violation is repeated, a case can be brought under the Criminal Code's Article 226 ("Violation of the regulations of administrative supervision"). This states that: "Violation of the regulations of administrative supervision by a person subjected to such supervision, after an administrative penalty for the same act has been imposed shall be punished with a fine of up to 50 times the minimum monthly wage, or imprisonment for up to two years.

Violation of the regulations of administrative supervision by either:

- a.) leaving the place of residence with the purpose of evasion of administrative supervision;
- or b.) failure to be at the specified place of residence within the prescribed times without valid reasons, when administrative supervision is imposed after release from institutions of confinement;

shall be punished with imprisonment for between two to four years."

Administrative supervision has some similarities to the banning orders of apartheid South Africa, depicted in the film 'Cry Freedom', used against dissidents such as former President and Nobel Peace Prize holder Nelson Mandela.

Protestants complained to Forum 18 that "all this is done to crush Shestakov and his church". "He is trying to adapt to freedom again", one Protestant said. "He was released from prison but he is not free".

What will the police do?

Daniyar Hamidov, Andijan Regional Police Criminal Investigator told Forum 18 on 3 February that he was not well-informed about the case. "I was recently transferred here, I do not lead those cases", he stated. He referred Forum 18 to police officer Batyr, without giving his last name. Officer Batyr's phone went unanswered on 3 February.

"The police will do everything in their power to bring a criminal case against Shestakov, and send him back to prison," Protestants complained. "Police may arrange the planting on him of narcotic drugs, cartridges, explosives, guns, or religious literature. They have done this to Muslims," the human rights defender noted.

When current prisoner of conscience Tohar Haydarov was arrested in January 2010, it appears that drugs were planted on him. Religious leaflets alleged by police to be extremist have apparently been planted on devout Muslims as police arrest them.
