

## **Table of Contents**

- ***State-sponsored media attacks continue***
- ***Christian homes raided in Uzbekistan, Bibles confiscated***
- ***Koran translation banned, New Testaments destroyed, planted evidence and witness, large fines***
- ***Prison death result of accident, illness, torture, neglect?***
- ***No imam? No prayers***
- ***"We will continue fining you unless you stop storing religious literature in your home"***
- ***Why can't school-age children attend worship meetings?***
- ***Raids, religious literature seizures, passport confiscations and expulsions***
- ***Another jailing, large fines for meeting upheld, more confiscations***
- ***Almost incommunicado in Investigation Prison***
- ***"Legally" preventing human rights***
- ***"To prevent illegal religious materials"***
- ***"Let him pay the fine and we'll return the car"***
- ***Another 5 year prison term for sermons in mobile***
- ***"Those who accepted other religions may not be buried in same cemetery with Muslims"***
- ***Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for distributing homemade literature***
- ***Uzbekistan: Detained for religious materials in electronic devices***
- ***Uzbekistan: Seven Muslims amnestied, but ailing Muslim prisoner waits for operation***
- ***Uzbekistan: Anti-Terrorism Police seize religious literature, tear down religious posters***
- ***Concern over health of prisoners of conscience***
- ***New Decree gives "legal" basis to existing censorship***
- ***Unregistered Uzbek Baptists arrested for meetings in private residence***
- ***Massive fine for Muslim prayer mat, Christian book raid ordered by NSS secret police***
- ***Uzbekistan: art lessons, talking constitute "illegal" religious activity?***

---

## **State-sponsored media attacks continue**

Forum 18 (08.12.2014) - Uzbekistan's state sponsored media continues its long-standing routine of attacking named people who exercise the right to freedom of religion or belief which the state has made solemn international obligations to implement, Forum 18 News Service notes.

## ***Routine weapon against freedom of religion or belief***

Media attacks are a routine and long-standing part of Uzbekistan's attacks on freedom of religion or belief and other human rights, relying on the state's attempts to control all of society combined with refusal to investigate the truth of allegations, give victims of attacks any right of reply, or implement any legally-enforceable defences against the state and its compliant media's behaviour.

The culture of impunity for officials and their collaborators so created is reinforced by the state's strict censorship of all sources of information, including all books and material touching on anything to do with freedom of religion or belief (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

A small sample of past media attacks on named people and religious communities includes accusations that religious communities are a problem similar to terrorism and drug addiction (see F18News 23 May 2008 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1133](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1133)); attacks on Muslim, Protestant and Jehovah's Witness parents and children attending places of worship (including media approval of bullying of children by teachers) (see F18News 12 January 2009 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1239](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1239)); alleged "brainwashing" by a Baha'i who was deported (see F18News 16 February 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1409](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1409)); attacks on Baptists working at a children's summer camp (written with allegations from an NSS secret police informer) (see F18News 7 August 2011 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1600](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1600)); and attacks on a Shia Muslim for sharing her beliefs (see F18News 16 December 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1907](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1907)).

In the cases outlined below, Forum 18 has removed most of the names of the people attacked, as the state media has not given them the right of reply to the serious allegations made against them.

### ***A fair judge?***

The authors of media attacks are not only journalists. Judge Oltinbek Mansurov of Navoi [Navoiy] City Criminal Court on 26 August published an article in the Russian-language newspaper Znamya Druzhby (Banner of friendship), sponsored by Navoi Regional Administration. In it the judge attacked two named married couples.

Ten days later, on 5 September, the Judge fined one of the couples he named, Artur and Irina Alpayev, 50 times and 40 times the minimum monthly salary respectively for having allegedly "illegal" religious literature. Judge Mansurov threatened the couple that "we will continue fining you unless you stop storing religious literature in your home." (see F18News 18 September 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1998](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1998)).

Mansurov in his article calls Council of Churches Baptists (which do not seek state permission to exist) a "destructive sect", urging people to "be careful. Remember that often the activity of non-traditional religions is destructive. Do not come under the influence of these religious movements. Protect the immature minds of your children from their influence." The article claims that Baptists meet for "illegal" worship in their private homes, "illegally" keep religious literature in their homes, and "cloud the minds of young people."

Judge Mansurov also gave the names and addresses of the people he attacked, and claimed they had been under surveillance by Navoi Regional Police since 2012. Close

surveillance of people exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief is common (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

It is notable that Judge Mansurov totally ignores in his article the serious legal issues it raises, including his own duty as a judge to Uzbekistan's binding international legal obligations to implement and protect the rule of law and the human rights to a fair trial, to privacy, to freedom of expression, to freedom of association, and to freedom of religion or belief.

### ***"The Judge has the right to do this"***

Norbek (who would not give his last name), the Judge's Assistant who answered Mansurov's phone on 4 December, told Forum 18 that "the Judge has the right to do this" when asked why the Judge is forming a bad public image of the Baptists by writing such an article. Asked whether this did not make the Judge prejudiced against one party in a case he is trying, Norbek became agitated and replied: "Who are you to question the Judge's rights and what he can and cannot do?" Norbek then put the phone down.

Malika Buranova, Executive Secretary of Znamya Druzhby, did not answer when asked by Forum 18 on 3 December why the newspaper attacked people and did not provide a right of reply to unproven allegations. She claimed she could not reply as she is only responsible for the preparation of materials to be published. Asked who could answer these questions, Forum 18 was told "only the Chief Editor Kamola Adizova". Adizova's telephone was not answered on 3 December.

Abror Sultanov, Secretary of Gafur Musurmanov, Deputy Head of Navoi Regional Administration, on 4 December told Forum 18 that Musurmanov was unavailable to talk. When Forum 18 asked Sultanov why the Administration's newspaper and other state-sponsored newspapers attacked people exercising freedom of religion or belief, he replied: "We cannot answer such questions, please talk to the central authorities in Tashkent." He then put the phone down.

Such newspaper articles "aim to form a distorted view of Baptists as lawbreakers and dangerous people", Artur Alpayev, one of those named in Judge Mansurov's article, told Forum 18 on 28 November. He noted that such articles had caused some but not all new believers to leave a church. However, the articles did not discourage other believers as "we are not afraid".

### ***Many media attacks***

Those attacked by name within the last two months have included Baptists both of the Council of Churches and of Baptist Union congregations, members of the Full Gospel Presbyterian Church and of the Yonsen – Eternal Life Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Recent attacks on named Muslims, Baha'is, Hare Krishna devotees or Jews may have taken place but are at present unknown. As well as central and regional administration newspapers, the media agencies used to stage the attacks have included 12news.uz, uzinform.com, noviyvek.uz, podrobno.uz, vesti.uz, and the Ozbekiston state television channel.

For example, on one day – 13 November – 12news published four different articles attacking named Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses for exercising freedom of religion or belief. The articles including allegations that named people were "making zombies out of children", improperly associating with young girls, and drug dealing. One article even states "a sudden death awaits every member of the [named religious community] who owns any kind of property and lives alone". The article also attributes any care for individuals to "the organisation's mercenary interests".

### ***Did reported incidents happen?***

Various religious believers in Uzbekistan commented to Forum 18 on the contradiction between the state-supported media making serious allegations of crime, and the state's law enforcement agencies making no known investigations into these crimes. The religious community named by 12news categorically denied any knowledge of both the people 12news named as being associated with them, and the incident 12news claimed to have taken place.

### ***Why?***

Like Znamya Druzhby, other media agencies have not answered questions on why they attack people exercising their freedom of religion or belief. A 12news employee who would not give his name refused to talk to Forum 18 on 4 December. He then claimed he could not hear the questions – even though Forum 18 could hear the 12news employee clearly. He then put the phone down.

Various religious communities separately told Forum 18 that they thought the purpose of such articles was to discredit them in the public eye, and discourage people from – as is their right in international law – deciding to follow a particular belief. In addition to such obstacles, sharing any belief with other people is a crime in Uzbekistan (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

When the state-backed media publish full names and addresses, religious communities thought the purpose was to make their members afraid of physical attack. Forum 18 was told of cases where people named in the state media have been badly beaten by some of their neighbours, and have even had to flee Uzbekistan for fear of their lives.

The state-backed media has not published any articles about state investigations into these crimes or punishments of the perpetrators.

### ***Lost souls?***

Another typical example of a recent media attack was carried by the Navoi Region Zarafshan newspaper Oltin Vodiy (Golden valley) on 18 October. It published an article entitled Lost souls where the author Mansur Khusanov attacked by name four local Protestants.

The article starts by discussing a film shown on the Ozbekiston TV channel in July, claiming to show what happened to a husband and wife who left Islam and became Christians. The wife dies in an accident, the elders of the mahalla (local residential district) do not allow her to be buried in any district cemetery, the dead body is not washed, an imam refuses to pray over the body, neighbours reject the family and do not come to the funeral meal, and the dead body of the "apostate" was buried in a remote and abandoned location.

Such tragic denials of the right to freedom of religion or belief affecting the dead and their families take place with the active collusion and participation of the authorities (see eg. F18News 25 April 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1951](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1951)). Mahalla committees are a key part of the authorities mechanism of repression (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Oltin Vodiy then asks "are there really such people among us in our city?" It then claims that Zarafshan City Criminal Court answered this question, quoting a case in which two

local Christians were fined on 16 August for "illegally" having one Christian book, a Russian-Hebrew Dictionary, and three private notebooks in their home (see F18News 18 September 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1998](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1998)).

The article also quotes another case involving two different local Christians. The full names, years of birth and addresses of all those named are given, as well as the church attended and place of work of some of those named.

Protestants from Navoi Region, who know those involved and did not want to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 8 December that one of those named was fired from their job after the article was published. "It will now be hard for them to find employment," the Protestants commented.

***"It's true we have freedom of religion"?***

Oltin Vodiy claims: "It's true we have freedom of religion, everyone can choose their religion, but it does not mean that they can do anything they take into their head." Khusanov then asks: "Tell me now, can one store at home illegal literature, can religious organisations secretly distribute imported literature? Does this not violate the law?"

The article ends with a warning: "We must be cautious, and protect ourselves from unhealthy beliefs and misfortunes."

Asked why Oltin Vodiy attacked Protestants exercising their freedom of religion or belief, Deputy Chief Editor Zafar Ishkuvatov claimed to Forum 18 on 3 December: "All religions are free in Uzbekistan but perhaps they violated the Religion Law by illegally storing or distributing religious literature." Asked why the named people were not given a right of reply to the allegations, and were compared to an "apostate" who a film showed as being denied burial in a cemetery, Ishkuvatov did not answer. He paused for some seconds and then asked "Can we talk with you some time later?" When Forum 18 asked why he published named people's personal data and home addresses, he put the phone down. Subsequent calls to him went unanswered.

---

## **Christian homes raided in Uzbekistan, Bibles confiscated**

Barnabas Fund (03.12.2014) - Four Christians in Syrdarya, [Uzbekistan](#) were recently fined for allegedly holding a religious meeting without state permission after police raided the home of Denis Absattarov on 5 September. The court also ordered that two Bibles and two Christian songbooks be seized, and that a personal diary, a video-cassette tape and 26 DVDs be destroyed.

According to Forum 18, Mr Absattarov told the Syrdarya District Criminal Court on 2 October that the four friends were meeting to drink tea, and that the police "broke in when they were about to pray together". He also protested that a Bible in Uzbek, a personal diary, and a video-cassette tape that the police discovered, did not belong to him or his friends. A local Christian believes that the police planted the materials.

On 2 October Judge Nazarov issued a fine of 5,919,925 Soms (about US\$2,450 or 55 times the minimum monthly salary) to Mr Absattarov and fines of 10 times the minimum monthly salary to the other three. And on 28 October Judge Ulugbek Jumayev of Syrdarya Regional Court upheld the fines.

The punishments were given for breaches of Articles 240 Part 1 and 241 Part 1 which prohibit respectively the "carrying out of unauthorised religious activity ... the

unauthorised organisation and conduct of worship by religious ministers," and "teaching religious beliefs without specialised religious education".

Forum 18 also report that on 22 October, a flat was raided where Christians were meeting together. Nine believers were fined, as was the non-Christian landlord, Lutifya Rahimova, who had rented it to them. She was fined 2,152,700 Soms (about 20 times the minimum monthly salary).

In [Uzbekistan](#), all exercise of religion without state permission is forbidden. In this Muslim-majority country, Christian activity is closely monitored.

---

## **Koran translation banned, New Testaments destroyed, planted evidence and witness, large fines**

Uzbekistan has banned a poetic translation of the Koran into Uzbek by a well-known poet, Jamol Kamol, Forum 18 News Service has learned. The country has also continued to fine people for meeting to exercise their freedom of religion or belief, recently fining 15 Protestants and a non-Christian flat owner who rented her flat to Christians. The fines imposed varied between 10 and 55 times the minimum monthly salary, and books and other religious material were ordered to be confiscated and either destroyed or given to the Russian Orthodox Church. In one case resulting in a fine of 55 times the minimum monthly salary it appears that police planted "evidence" and a witness.

### ***Why should government ban a Koran translation?***

The Religious Affairs Committee has banned the publication of a poetic translation of Koran into Uzbek by Jamol Kamol, a poet who has also translated plays by William Shakespeare into Uzbek. In September the Committee wrote to the translation's sponsors, the Mufti Bobohonov Patron of the Arts Society, refusing to authorise publication, its Director Anvar Khusainov told Forum 18 on 19 November.

The Committee claimed that the Koran "was never translated into Uzbek in poetic form, and that Imam-hatyps from various regions of Uzbekistan gave a negative opinion of it". However, Khusainov told Forum 18 that the Muslim Board, the Mufti and Deputy Chief Mufti, Abdulaziz Mansurov had given their approval along with that of a number of other religious scholars in Uzbekistan.

All exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission is forbidden. Via the Muslim Board and other state agencies the government imposes total control of every aspect of the Muslim community's life (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Deputy Chief Mufti Mansurov refused to explain why the Muslim Board should be able to stop a translation, and why it first approved the book and then collected negative opinions from its Imams. "Why do you want to know this?" he replied to Forum 18 on 20 November. "It is Uzbekistan's internal matter." He claimed to Forum 18 that the book "may still be published in future" because "it is being studied".

In early November the Religious Affairs Committee was asked to authorise a limited print-run of up to 1,000 copies, for distribution among Muslim leaders, professionals, experts, scholars and others to gain backing for the verse translation. The Committee refused this request, telling Khusainov in a meeting that they "fear that the book may

divide society and cause public tension". Khusainov hopes that "one day we will be able to publish it".

Religious Affairs Committee Chair Artykbek Yusupov's Assistant (who would not give his name) claimed to Forum 18 on 21 November that Yusupov is busy. He would not give reasons for why the Committee should be able to ban a Koran translation and why people exercising freedom of religion or belief are punished for owning officially-permitted religious literature.

Zulhaydar Sultanov, Head of the Committee's International Relations Department also would not answer these questions on 21 November. Sobytjon Sharipov, Head of the "Expert Analysis" Department refused to talk to Forum 18. Begzod Kadyrov, Head of the Department for Work with Religious Communities, did not answer his telephone on 21 November.

Uzbekistan, against its international human rights obligations, imposes strict censorship on all religious publications and all aspects of their distribution (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Planted evidence and witness, real fines***

On the evening of 5 September police in Syrdarya in the centre of the country raided and searched Denis Absattarov's home. He is a member of the local Full Gospel Church. The police stated they launched the raid following information from the chair of the local mahalla [local district] committee the Pakhtakor-4 district.

Mahalla committees are a key part of Uzbekistan's apparatus of repression (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Police claimed in the subsequent court hearing (see below) that they found Absattarov, Kurbanay Abdiyeva, Arina Kim and Vladimir Mehseriyakov holding a religious meeting without state permission. All four (all of whom are Christian) deny this, insisting that they were meeting as friends to drink tea together. Absattarov told Syrdarya District Criminal Court on 2 October that the authorities "broke in when they were about to pray together".

Absattarov also told the Court that a Bible in Uzbek, personal diary, and a video-cassette tape the police claimed to have found did not belong to him or his fellow-Christians, and did not know how they appeared in his home. A local Protestant who knows the Full Gospel Church, and who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 20 November that they think that the police planted those books.

An Uzbek legal expert, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 22 November that they know of other cases where the police plant religious literature in the homes of people as "evidence". The planting of evidence and torture by the authorities is often credibly claimed by people targeted for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Kholmurod Yakhyayev told the Court that he works for the Narvuz-3 mahalla committee in Syrdarya, and was asked by Syrdarya Police to participate in the raid as a witness. Yakhyayev stated that police officers "did not act rudely or violate rights while apprehending the violators". He asked the Court to "stop and punish the illegal activity of the violators".

Yakhyayev, a local Protestant told Forum 18 on 21 November, "has collaborated with Syrdarya Police as a witness, and is often used in cases against religious communities". One such case they knew of was on 4 June when Judge Zafar Nazarov of Syrdarya District Criminal Court fined nine Baptists for the "offence" of meeting together. The court decision in that case, seen by Forum 18, records Yakhyayev's participation as a witness (see F18News 24 July 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1980](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1980)).

Judge Nazarov fined the four defendants on 2 October, according to the decision seen by Forum 18. Absattarov was fined 55 times the minimum monthly salary or 5,919,925 Soms (about 17,000 Norwegian Kroner, 1,950 Euros, or 2,450 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) under the Code of Administrative Offences' Articles 240 Part 1 and 241 Part 1. Each of the others was fined 10 times the minimum monthly salary under Article 240 Part 1.

Article 240 Part 1 bans: "Carrying out of unauthorised religious activity, evasion by leaders of religious organisations of registration of the charter of the organisation, the unauthorised organisation and conduct of worship by religious ministers, and the organisation and conduct of special children's and youth meetings, as well as vocational, literature and other study groups not relating to worship". Article 241 Part 1 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".

### ***Confiscated and destroyed***

Judge Nazarov also ordered two Bibles – one each in Uzbek and Russian - a Children's Bible, and another Christian book, and two Christian songbooks to be given to the Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Tashkent. He also ordered that a personal diary, one video-cassette tape and 26 DVD discs be destroyed. Judge Nazarov's Assistant (who would not give his name) on 25 November told Forum 18 that he "cannot comment on the case".

Religious literature seized from individuals – whether Muslims, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses or of other faiths – is frequently ordered destroyed by the courts (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Oybek Turdikulov, Syrdarya District officer of Syrdarya Regional Anti-Terrorism Police, claimed to Forum 18 on 24 November that he did not participate in the 5 September raid. He also claimed that others from the Anti-Terrorism Police were on the raid. He refused to give reasons for the raid and who had ordered it.

Within Uzbekistan's police apparatus it is often the Anti-Terrorism Police who investigate cases involving people of all beliefs exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Judge Ulugbek Jumayev of Syrdarya Regional Criminal Court on 28 October upheld the fines. The Judge did not answer his telephones on 25 November.

### ***Protestants or Jehovah's Witnesses?***

On 24 October the private home of mother and son Durdona Abdullayeva and Ulugbek Kenzhayev was raided. Both belong to the Full Gospel Church and on 11 November Judge Sherzod Yuldashev of Tashkent's Sergeli District Criminal Court fined each of them 30 times the minimum monthly salary or 3,229,050 Soms (about 9,000 Norwegian Kroner,



1,060 Euros, or 1,330 US Dollars) under Administrative Code Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons").

The prosecution claimed the two are Jehovah's Witnesses, although both testified that they are not. A local Protestant, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 21 November that the authorities may have deliberately misidentified the two as Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Judge also ordered the destruction of 30 Christian books, including three New Testaments (one in Russian and two in Uzbek), two booklets, one notebook with personal notes and 14 leaflets, as well as 125 video cassette tapes of films which have been shown on Uzbek television.

Judge Yuldashev on 11 November refused to explain to Forum 18 why he ordered the destruction of Abdullayeva's and Kenzhayev's personal books and imposed such large fines. He also refused to explain why the two were identified as Jehovah's Witnesses. "They can complain to higher authorities if they want", he replied.

When asked why he ordered the destruction of the Christian holy scriptures, Judge Yuldashev fell silent. When Forum 18 repeated the question he replied "I cannot explain these things to you over the phone" and then put the phone down.

### ***More fines and confiscations***

On the evening of 22 October Bektemir District Police in Tashkent raided a meeting of Protestants in Lutfiya Rahimova's home. She is not a Christian but had rented out her home. Judge Davron Narbayev of Bektemir District Court on 10 November fined nine members of the local Protestant Church of Jesus Christ Church under Administrative Code Article 184-2. He also fined the owner of the flat who rented it out.

Stanislav Ovsyannikov was fined 25 times the minimum monthly salary or 2,690,875 Soms (about 7,575 Norwegian Kroner, 890 Euros, or 1,120 US Dollars).

Lutfiya Rahimova (the homeowner), Madina Marajapova, Rustam Saksanbayev, Dmitriy Khramov, Sergey Shlufman, Ravshan Rahmanov, Yuriy Aleksandrov, Aleksandr Kyulminov and Dmitry Grebenkin were all each fined 20 times the minimum monthly salary or 2,152,700 Soms (about 6,060 Norwegian Kroner, 710 Euros, or 890 US Dollars).

Judge Narbayev ordered the handover of Christian books and magazines confiscated from the defendants, including eight Bibles and nine New Testaments, to the Russian Orthodox Church's Tashkent and Central Asian Diocese. He also ordered the destruction of confiscated notebooks, DVD and CD discs, a laptop computer and computer memory.

Diocesan spokesperson Fr Sergi Alakhtayev told Forum 18 on 25 November that he is not aware of the Court's order to give the confiscated books and magazine to the Diocese, describing it as "the first such decision". Asked what he thinks of the decision, he stated that "I do not know why the court decided this" He also stated that he did not know what the Diocese would do with the books, adding that "we will have to ask the Bishop as nothing like this has happened to us before".

### ***Other recent fines***

Among other known recent fines, on 27 October Judge Sanjar Dusmanov of Tashkent Regional Criminal Court fined: Nurman Shelmatov and Dilmurod Rakhmatullayev 80 times the minimum monthly salary each; Gulshad Ermanova 60 times the minimum

monthly salary; Lana Abushayeva, Zulaykho Rakhmatullayeva, Khadija Tilepova, Buaysha Muminova, Balkhiya Baytasheva, Shakhnoza Usmanova, Ibrahim Usmanov, Aliya Sek, Flora Li, Snezhana Li, Zaniya Kisenbayeva, and Kaldigul Kulshinbayeva 20 times the minimum monthly salary each; and Khidoyat Chinibekova, Albina Umarova and Gulbahor Shelmatova received five times the minimum monthly salary each.

The fines were imposed on appeal following initial fines imposed on 22 August, after a raid on Protestants from the Full Gospel Church meeting without state permission.

Judge Bekzod Ergashev of Samarkand City Criminal Court on 12 September fined Seventh-day Adventist Aleksei Meshkov 20 times the minimum monthly salary and ordered the confiscation of Christian materials, a laptop computer, and a tablet device. The punishments followed a 5 August raid on Meshkov's home. Local Protestants told Forum 18 that the raid was a reprisal for the Adventists' application to the local authorities for state registration (see F18News 18 September 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1998](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1998)).

Judge Rovshankhan Lutfullayev of Tashkent Region's Yangiyul District Court on 5 September fined Vladislav Potrapelyuk of the Full Gospel Church and Arkadiy Belik, Pavel Peychev, Sergey Zakharov three times the minimum monthly salary each; Gulnara Khokhlova was fined twice the minimum monthly salary. Books and other Christian materials were ordered to be destroyed. The punishments followed a 30 July raid on a Baptist summer camp being used by the Full Gospel Church (see F18News 5 September 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1993](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1993)).

---

## **Prison death result of accident, illness, torture, neglect?**

Forum 18 (22.10.2014) - Nearly three years after her arrest and just a day or two after her 37th birthday, prisoner of conscience Nilufar Rahimjanova died in a labour camp near Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent on about 13 September, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Relatives say the Muslim mother of four had been imprisoned on a return visit to her homeland as a way to punish her husband – a Tehran-based theologian and blogger – and her father – a Tajikistan-based theologian the Uzbek authorities do not like.

The cause of Rahimjanova's death in the camp for female prisoners in Zangiota District, just north of Tashkent, remains unknown. Forum 18 was unable to reach the Zangiota women's camp.

Rahimjanova's body was handed not to her husband or father, but to her Tashkent-based brother. He was told to bury it quickly in Uzbekistan without conducting a post-mortem examination, exiled human rights defender Nadejda Atayeva of the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia noted on 23 September. Relatives buried Rahimjanova in Tashkent.

Atayeva fears that Rahimjanova might have died of neglect or torture. Citing "independent sources", she notes that Rahimjanova did not suffer from any chronic medical conditions before her arrest. "But in prison she fell ill and was very frightened and tense. One day she admitted that she was constantly pressured to testify against her husband and father, which brought her to tears."

"No one has so far addressed our office about her," Saidbeg Azimov, Assistant of Sayora Rashidova, Parliament's Human Right Ombudsperson, told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 21 October. "If an official request is addressed to us, we will investigate the case."

### ***"I knew what your guilt consisted of"***

Rahimjanova's widower Yunus Burhanov, who also goes by the name Saiyidyunus Istaravshani (after his hometown in northern Tajikistan), addressed a letter to her after her death. "Ever since you were arrested and imprisoned on false charges, I had no peace even for a minute," he was quoted by Tajik news agency Newtjk.com on 19 September as writing.

"I knew what your guilt consisted of – simply this: you were the daughter of your father and my wife! In reply to my letter to the court, they asked me to wait just three years and to say nothing about anything and not to spread news through the media, as you would be freed under amnesty! I believed this and didn't open my mouth simply for the hope of seeing you again!"

Burhanov says that all the accusations against his late wife were "completely fabricated", with the one exception of charges of illegally crossing the border. "The biggest lie was the accusation of terrorism and preparing a terrorist attack, as my beloved wife could never have contemplated this," he told Forum 18 on 22 October.

He also insisted that Uzbek state allegations that he too was involved in terrorism were similarly untrue. "As a scholar of Islam, I have always tried to portray Islam as a peaceful religion and I always countered extremism," he added. "But they slandered me as well, claiming that I had incited my wife to conduct such actions."

### ***United Nations complaint being prepared***

On 25 September, Burhanov appealed in an open letter to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council – published on his blog – for an international investigation into Rahimjanova's death. He also called for those involved in her death to be prosecuted.

"I understand that my wife will not return," Burhanov wrote in his open letter. "However, if those responsible for her death receive harsh punishment, this could serve to save many men and women from slander, fabrications, falsifications, unjust verdicts and death."

Burhanov is preparing to send the letter as a formal complaint to the UN human rights mechanisms in Geneva once he has all the necessary documentation from his lawyer, he told Forum 18.

### ***Accident? Illness? Torture? Neglect?***

Uzbekistan's prisons are overseen by the Interior Ministry's Chief Directorate for the Enforcement of Punishments. Told that Rahimjanova's relatives insist that she did not have serious health problems before she was imprisoned, and asked why she died, Erkin Bobokulov, Deputy Head of the Chief Directorate, declined to talk about the case over the phone. "I don't know the details exactly," he told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 21 October.

Asked whether the prison authorities took steps to save Rahimjanova's life, Bobokulov did not respond. He asked Forum 18 to send further questions in writing.

The authorities can apparently deliberately put prisoner of consciences' lives and health at risk. For example, in the case of Muslim prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov – on a 16-year jail term for following his faith after Kazakhstan illegally extradited him to Uzbekistan – it appears that the Uzbek authorities tried to infect him with the potentially fatal disease of tuberculosis. The authorities have claimed to Forum 18 that he is cured

- but if so Forum 18 notes this has taken an unusually short length of time. A relative wondered what the authorities' reasons were. "If he did not have TB why was he moved to the TB prison - and if he did why was he moved back to his original prison in such a short time?", the relative asked (see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=19302](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=19302)).

### ***Torture "routine"***

Violence and torture, or threats of this, by police and other officials are "routine" the UN Committee Against Torture found in 2007. Women seem to be particularly targeted for torture and threats by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

The UN Committee Against Torture renewed its criticism in its concluding observations (CAT/C/UZB/CO/4), adopted on 14 November 2013, on Uzbekistan's record under the Convention Against Torture. "The Committee is concerned about numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations that torture and ill-treatment are routinely used by law enforcement, investigative and prison officials, or at their instigation or with their consent, often to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings," it noted (see [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en)).

Uzbekistan has no independent monitoring of places of detention. In April 2013 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that it had taken the very difficult decision to terminate all visits to detainees in Uzbekistan because it was unable to conduct such visits according to its standard working procedures and as a result, those visits were "pointless".

Uzbekistan's government has not responded to numerous requests over many years by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment to visit the country.

### ***Medical treatment withheld?***

Also held in the women's prison at Zangiota where Rahimjanova died are two Muslim sisters, Mehrinisso and Zulhumor Hamdamova. Both were arrested in Karshi [Qarshi] in 2009 for holding unauthorised religious meetings. The Hamdamova sisters and Shahlo Rakhmonova (a relative of the sisters) were sentenced to up to seven years in jail in April 2010. The trial was conducted with many violations of published law, as often happens in Uzbekistan (see F18News 26 April 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1436](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1436)).

Relatives have been worried about their health, particularly over Mehrinisso Hamdamova. She was reported in early 2014 as urgently needing medical treatment and even an operation on an apparent myoma. It is unclear how reliable the diagnosis is. A myoma is a tumour associated with uterine cancer which can be painful and is normally treated by being removed. Relatives feared that if she was left untreated in prison conditions this could endanger her life (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)).

Relatives of the Hamdamova sisters were able to make a three-day visit to them in the Zangiota prison, returning home on 20 October, relatives told Forum 18 on 21 October. The authorities had allowed the family to stay in prison with the sisters on previous occasions, they added. "Their health seems to be a little better now. Mehrinisso has not been operated on yet, but she was given some medicines," one relative told Forum 18. "She said she is feeling a little better at the moment."

Relatives recently wrote petitions to the authorities to amnesty at least Mehrinisso Hamdamova since several of her children "are supposed to get married, are waiting for her, and hoping she may one day be released on amnesty."

In its 2013 findings, the UN Committee Against Torture also expressed concern about officers' threats of sexual violence against "Mehrinisso and Zulhumor Hamdamova, who allege that they were forced to strip and threatened with rape by police while in custody in November 2009".

### ***Rahimjanova's family***

Rahimjanova, an ethnic Tajik, was born in the Uzbek city of Bukhara while her father, Maruf Rahimjanov, was teaching at the Mir Arab madrassah there. A noted theologian, Rahimjanov – who also goes by the name Domullo Marufjon Istaravshani – translated the Koran into Tajik and produced a commentary on it. In 1991, he wrote to Uzbek President Islam Karimov to criticise the removal of the then Central Asian chief mufti.

From 1990 to 1992 Rahimjanov served as imam of Tashkent's Kukeldash mosque and madrassah, before moving to Tajikistan. His wife (Rahimjanova's mother) remained in Tashkent with their children until her death in 2001, visiting him on occasion.

Rahimjanova married Burhanov in 1994 and moved to Tajikistan, where she gained Tajik citizenship without losing Uzbek citizenship. Her most recent Uzbek passport had been issued in 1997. Since 1994 she had lived with her husband and their children in the Iranian capital Tehran.

Burhanov teaches philosophy in Tehran and also writes and speaks on religious and political themes, including on his blog [kemyaesaadat.tj](http://kemyaesaadat.tj) (Formula of Happiness) and on his YouTube channel.

### ***Arrest***

Rahimjanova made a return visit to Tajikistan in July 2011. Once there she was invited to her brother's wedding in Tashkent. Against the advice of her husband, who feared she might be arrested given the Uzbek authorities known hostility to her father and to him, she decided to go. She crossed the border at Bekabad in November 2011. Since 1999, Tajik citizens have required a visa to visit Uzbekistan but, like many who cross the border daily without a visa and who bribe the border guards, Rahimjanova did not seek a visa. She had crossed the border in this way several times between 2009 and 2011.

Once in Tashkent and before the wedding had taken place, Rahimjanova – who wore the hijab headscarf - went to the Passport Office to register her presence at her relatives. She told them she had dual Uzbek-Tajik citizenship and lived in Iran. Uzbekistan does not recognise dual nationality. The Passport Office reported her to the Prosecutor's Office. The National Security Service secret police arrested her, accusing her of illegally crossing the border. However, she was then accused of terrorist activity.

"During the investigation, they persuaded her to appear on Uzbek state television to accuse her husband of links with the [terrorist group] Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," human rights defender Atayeva noted. The investigator told Rahimjanova that if she made such a statement she would be freed under amnesty.

### ***Televised "confession"***

During her televised statement, shown as part of a programme "Life lost in vain" on

Uzbek television's first channel on 5 June 2012, Rahimjanova said her husband had sent her to Tashkent to carry out a terrorist operation.

She claimed he had made her adopt Shia Islam and had taken her to Iran and Lebanon, where she participated in "religious extremist and fundamentalist" organisations. "I had to go to there as my husband was there," she claimed on camera. "I had financial and spiritual difficulties as well as various problems. My husband made me accept the Shia denomination." She said she had obtained education at a "radical" organisation in Iran and acquired skills to use guns and bombs. "I was forced to do these tasks," she said.

The broadcast made much of what it claims was Rahimjanova's move to Shiism. "Our madhhab [school of Islam] is the Hanafi madhhab and we should strongly uphold this madhhab," Tojihon Nazarova, aide to Tashkent's chief imam for women's issues, told the programme. "Our women should not convert to another madhhab saying that their husbands are forcing them, as our Sharia [Islamic law] stipulates that changing madhhabs is a sin. Our women have the right not to obey their husbands even if they are forced to change their madhhabs, because changing a madhhab is a sin."

Rahimjanova's widower rejects any suggestion he pressured his late wife. "My wife was an educated person and was free in her choice of religion and madhhab," Burhanov told Forum 18. He said neither his late wife nor he himself were Shia Muslims.

### ***Trial, but no verdict issued***

However, a court sentenced Rahimjanova to ten years' imprisonment, apparently on charges of terrorism, spying for Tajikistan and crossing the border illegally. Two of the Criminal Code Articles she was sentenced under are believed to have been Article 155 (terrorism) and Article 223 (illegal exit from or entry to Uzbekistan), though she was possibly sentenced under others also. She told the court that she had been forced to give testimony against her husband and her father.

The court did not give a copy of the verdict to relatives, even to those based in Uzbekistan, Burhanov complained to Forum 18.

Atayeva notes that no independent observers attended Rahimjanova's trial and that her lawyer made little attempt to defend her. "No one has a copy of the verdict. Nor was there any appeal, as her relatives were promised that she would be amnestied and were asked not to make a fuss."

---

## **No imam? No prayers**

Forum 18 (01.10.2014) - A community of Muslims in Uzbekistan's central Samarkand [Samarqand] Region was effectively banned from holding Friday prayers in early August because – in the absence of their Muslim Board-appointed Imam – no-one else was allowed to lead prayers and the authorities ban prayers in private homes, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. At the same time, National Security Service (NSS) secret police and Anti-Terrorism Police officers raided a Baptist community in the eastern Andijan [Andijon] Region as they held a meeting for Sunday worship.

The Muslims who attend the Toshkuprik Mosque in Samarkand Region's Pakhtachi District also complained that the District Imam's officials asked for a bribe to appoint an Imam to lead their Friday prayers each week. The Mosque is one of 12 Friday Mosques in the District, which has a population of more than 125,000 people.

Two months on, Forum 18 has been unable to confirm whether or not Friday prayers at the Mosque have been allowed to restart. Officials at Samarkand Regional Department of the state-backed Muslim Board refused to tell Forum 18 on 1 October. Toshkuprik Mosque is the only one in Pakhtachi District without an Imam listed on the official website masjid.uz, Forum 18 notes.

### ***"Do not exaggerate"***

Asked about the ban on Friday prayers in the Mosque, Abdulaziz Mansurov, Deputy Chief Mufti of Uzbekistan, told Forum 18 on 11 September: "Please, do not exaggerate - this is not a big problem." In the next breath, however, he admitted: "The thing is we do not have enough Imams."

Told that neither the Board nor its Samarkand Regional Department has resolved the issue, and that Pakhtachi District Imam's officials asked the local Muslims for bribes, Mansurov repeated his previous claim: "I have not heard about this." He promised that he would raise the problem before the Board. He added that local Muslims "should not complain to you or others but address the Muslim Board."

Mansurov told Forum 18 on 1 October that after he raised the issue with the Board it "is resolving the issue". He said he did not know if an Imam has now been appointed or whether Friday prayers have restarted at the Mosque.

Dilshod Sapparov, the official in charge of religious affairs at Pakhtachi District Hokimat (Administration), on 1 October claimed to Forum 18 "at the moment all Mosques in the District have Imams." He also claimed that he did "not hear that any of the Mosques was without an Imam."

### ***Threats***

During the 14 September raid on Baptist worship in Andijan, NSS secret police and Anti-Terrorism Police officers threatened that the private house where the Baptists met for worship could be confiscated. They also threatened church member and widow Zamira Kurbangaliyeva that her three children could be taken away from her. The authorities are preparing administrative fines against Kurbangaliyeva and another church member (see below).

Under Uzbekistan's harsh Religion Law, state permission is required before any religious community is allowed to organise any meetings for worship or any other activity. Those who continue to exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief without state permission are subject to administrative or criminal punishment (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey

[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***State-backed Muslim monopoly***

Unlike with any other faith in Uzbekistan, the government imposes a state-backed monopoly – the Muslim Board – on the Islamic community. The Board alone has the right to seek state registration (and thus permission to exist) for mosque communities and it names all imams, though senior appointments – at least down to Regional level - require state approval.

Deputy Chief Mufti Mansurov told Forum 18 that all Chief Imams of the regions of Uzbekistan are appointed by the Muslim Board with the consent of the government's Religious Affairs Committee. The regional Imams then appoint all Imams in the Districts.

Forum 18 is not aware of any published law that requires state approval for naming of Regional Chief Imams.

This state interference in the Muslim community contradicts Article 61 of Uzbekistan's Constitution, which declares: "Religious organisations and associations are separate from the state and equal before the law. The state does not interfere in the activity of religious associations."

### ***Friday prayers effectively banned***

The last time Friday prayers were known to have been held at Toshkuprik Mosque in Samarkand Region's Pakhtachi District was on 1 August. The Mosque has about 70 regular attendees when Friday prayers are allowed.

An unnamed older Muslim man, a regular worshipper at the Mosque, complained to Radio Free Europe's Uzbek Service on 18 August that on 8 and 15 August their Mosque community could not perform their Friday prayers. He explained that while the Mosque's Imam was "away attending religious courses", the community was not allowed to name anyone else to lead prayers and so they could not take place.

The Muslim lamented that on those Fridays the local religious authorities and the District Chief Imam (name not given) had "not allowed" him and his fellow Muslims gathered in the Mosque to "select someone from our ranks to lead us in the prayers". Their Imam does "not even have a Deputy, and we were not appointed an interim Imam", the Muslim added.

The Chief Imam even "threatened that if they choose someone to lead the prayers then he will complain to the Prosecutor's Office." However, the Chief Imam's officials told the community that an "Imam can be appointed to lead the Friday prayers if the community agrees to pay 400,000 Soms for each Friday". (This represents 1,000 Norwegian Kroner, 130 Euros or 170 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate.)

The Muslim lamented that the community "cannot gather at homes" of the believers for Friday prayers since prayers are "only allowed in the cathedral Mosques according to the law".

Asked whether the Toshkuprik Mosque's Imam, who left for Tashkent in early August, is back in Pakhtachi, or who else is substituting for him in his absence, officials of Samarkand Regional Department of Uzbekistan's Muslim Board on 23 September referred Forum 18 to Zayniddin Eshankulov, Deputy Head of the Department. On the same day Eshankulov refused to talk to Forum 18. After introducing himself, he put the phone down as soon as he heard Forum 18's question. On 1 October he put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 reached him.

### ***Without an Imam***

Usmon Mukhamadiyev, Secretary at the Muslim Board's Samarkand Regional Department, told Forum 18 on 11 September that Nurullo Islomov, Head of the Department, "is away in Tashkent running some errands." Mukhamadiyev confirmed to Forum 18 that the Mosque was without an Imam.

Asked why no one was leading Friday prayers in the Mosque, he told Forum 18 that the Imam was "attending courses in Tashkent, and no one is substituting at the moment." Asked why members of the community cannot choose one of their number, or have another Imam appointed to lead them in Friday prayers, he repeated his previous response.



Told about the local Muslims' complaint that the Pakhtachi District Imam's office asked them for bribes, Mukhamadiyev claimed to Forum 18 that "I have not heard this." Asked whether he did not think the effective ban on the community holding Friday prayers was a violation of the rights of local Muslims, he claimed, "I do not understand your question." Asked to whom else Forum 18 could speak about this Mukhamadiyev put the phone down.

Echoing Mukhamadiyev, Shovkat Khamdamov, Press Secretary of the government's Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent, claimed to Forum 18 on 11 September, "I have not heard" that the Muslims were asked for bribes to have an Imam for Friday prayers. Asked why then they had not been provided with an Imam, he claimed that his Committee "does not decide those issues," and referred Forum 18 to the Muslim Board. "Prayers and the appointment of Imams are the internal issues of the Board."

Told that neither the Board's Samarkand Department nor the Board itself had resolved the issue, and asked why the Committee did not raise this issue as a violation of the rights of the local Muslims, he again referred Forum 18 to the Muslim Board.

When Forum 18 asked why, under Uzbekistan's Religion Law, all mosques must register under the Muslim Board and why local Muslims have to depend on the central authorities even to be able to conduct Friday prayers, Khamdamov did not answer. He then put the phone down.

### ***Police and secret police raid***

Seven police and secret police officers raided the Sunday worship service on 14 September of Baptists in Andijan, church members, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of further reprisals from the authorities, told Forum 18 on 20 September. The raid was led by Rahmonzhon Ulmasov, Chief of Andijan Anti-Terrorism Police, and Avazbek (last name not known) of Andijan Department of the NSS secret police.

The Baptists complained that at 9:30 am, the officers broke into the private home belonging to them, where a group of their fellow believers from the registered Baptist Church of Fergana arranged a worship service for them. The local Baptists do not have registration with the state.

The officers halted the service. They wrote down the names of nine Baptists as well as confiscated six New Testaments and eight Baptist songbooks. The officers threatened 47-year old Kurbangaliyeva that "they will take her children from her and put her in prison." She has lived in the house with her three children since her husband died seven years ago, church members told Forum 18. Before leaving, the officials also threatened the Baptists that "they will take away the home from them."

### ***Will fines follow?***

Three days later, on 17 September, officers Avazbek of the NSS secret police and Ulmasov of the Anti-Terrorism Police came to the Baptists again. They took Igor Milentyev and Kurbangaliyeva, both of whom were present at the worship service to the Andijan City Criminal Court. There they asked Judge Sardor Abdusattarov to fine them under Administrative Code Article 240, Part 1 and Article 184-2.

Article 240, Part 1 punishes "Carrying out of unauthorised religious activity, evasion by leaders of religious organisations of registration of the charter of the organisation, the unauthorised organisation and conduct of worship by religious ministers, and the organisation and conduct of special children's and youth meetings, as well as vocational, literature and other study groups not relating to worship". Punishments range from fines

of 50 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage to administrative arrest for up to 15 days.

Article 184-2 punishes: "Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan with a purpose to distribute or distribution of religious materials by physical persons". Punishments are a fine of between 50 and 150 times the minimum monthly wage, "with confiscation of the religious materials and the relevant means of their production and distribution".

### ***No answers***

"When Milentyev told the Judge that the case is fabricated, and that they are not familiar with what is in the case materials, and that they do not have a lawyer, the officers and the Judge were worried," Baptists told Forum 18. The Judge then referred the case back to the Police for further investigation. No subsequent hearings are known to have taken place.

Officer Ulmasov on 24 September confirmed the raid to Forum 18 but refused to explain why police and the secret police had raided the Baptists and threatened Kurbangaliyeva and the other church members. "I cannot talk about this case over the phone to you," he replied. "You need to write a letter to us and we will answer your questions." He declined to talk to Forum 18 further.

Calls to secret police Officer Avazbek on 24 September went unanswered.

Avazbek is also known for pressuring in 2013 Murot Turdiyev, an Andijan Protestant, to cooperate with the NSS secret police (see F18News 24 October 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1889](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1889)).

Judge Abdusattarov's phones went unanswered on 24 September.

---

## **"We will continue fining you unless you stop storing religious literature in your home"**

Forum 18 (18.09.2014) - Raids on private homes of individuals by police and other state officials hunting for religious literature continue across Uzbekistan, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Police seized religious literature found during these raids – including a Koran, Bibles in Braille, and personal notes on religious themes. Some of those raided have already been fined up to six months' average wages, with more fines likely.

The early August raid on a Seventh-day Adventist couple in Samarkand may have been a reprisal from the authorities because of the church's request the previous month for official registration, local Protestants complained to Forum 18. The congregation has been seeking to regain the registration stripped from it in 2007. The police officer who led the raid told Forum 18 that it is illegal for the Adventist couple to have religious literature since the Adventist community does not have registration in Samarkand (see below).

Officials have repeatedly insisted to Forum 18 that keeping religious literature at home is illegal. Even though all religious literature in Uzbekistan is by law subject to compulsory prior censorship, Forum 18 can find no published law which broadly bans individuals from owning books or other materials on religious themes and keeping them at home.

The only specific ban is on materials intended to encourage people to change their beliefs or works which, in the state's interpretation, "distort religious canons". The ban was introduced in January, with the entry into force of a new Decree, entitled "Measures to improve order in the production, import and distribution of religious materials". This formalised the existing sweeping state controls on the production, distribution and import of all such materials (see F18News 25 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1942](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1942)).

The religious censorship is carried out by the government's Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Tashkent. Religious literature seized anywhere in Uzbekistan is usually sent there for "expert analysis".

Fines are routinely handed down under Administrative Code Article 184-2. This punishes "illegal production, storage, import, distribution of religious materials" with fines for individuals of between 20 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage, plus confiscation of the religious materials and any equipment used to produce or copy them.

Religious literature seized from individuals – whether Muslims, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses or of other faiths – is frequently ordered destroyed by the courts (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Navoi fine***

On 5 September, less than three weeks after a police raid, Artur Alpayev was fined for having religious literature at the family home in Navoi, fellow Council of Churches Baptists complained to Forum 18 on 11 September.

Council of Churches Baptists refuse to seek state registration in any of the former Soviet republics, insisting that they do not need state permission to meet for worship.

Judge Oltinbek Mansurov of Navoi City Criminal Court found Alpayev guilty under Administrative Code Article 184-2 for religious literature confiscated during the 17 August raid. The Judge fined him 50 times the minimum monthly wage.

Although the presidentially-decreed official minimum monthly wage rose from 1 September to 107,635 Soms, Alpayev was fined at the old rate, 4,805,250 Soms (13,000 Norwegian Kroner, 1,500 Euros or 2,000 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). Local people estimated to Forum 18 that this represents about six months' average wage for those in work.

On Sunday 17 August, police interrupted a meeting for worship in the Alpayevs' home. They confiscated the religious literature found in their and another church member's homes. They also expelled from Uzbekistan their guests from Israel and Russia (see F18News 1 September 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1991](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1991)).

***"We will continue fining you unless you stop storing religious literature in your home"***

The Baptists lamented that Alpayev's rights under Article 29 of Uzbekistan's Constitution to "search, receive and spread any information, except that which is aimed against the Constitutional order" have not been respected. Judge Mansurov threatened Alpayev that "we will continue fining you unless you stop storing religious literature in your home."

Though the Judge admitted that "there is nothing illegal in the [confiscated] literature,

and it is allowed to be used within the registered building of a registered religious organisation," he claimed that it is "illegal to keep it at home".

Judge Mansurov also stressed to Alpayev that he was giving him a larger fine this time. "Last time you were fined 20 times the minimum monthly wage, but this time we are fining you 50 times."

Alpayev had in fact been fined not 20 but 50 times the minimum monthly wage under Article 184-2 in June 2012. After he failed to pay the fine, court bailiffs seized the family washing machine, dining table, refrigerator, piano and DVD disk player (see F18News 18 September 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1744](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1744)).

On 5 September 2014, Judge Mansurov also fined Alpayev's wife Irina 40 times the minimum monthly wage or 3,844,200 Soms (at the old rate) for failing to register their foreign guests (who had registration in another town in Uzbekistan).

### ***Samarkand raid and confiscations***

Twelve police officers and other officials raided the Samarkand home of Adventist husband and wife Aleksei and Diana Meshkov on the morning of 5 August, local Protestants who know the couple, and who asked not to be named for fear of the authorities, told Forum 18 on 2 September.

Leading the raid was Captain Makhmud Nodyrov of Samarkand Regional Police. Present were other police officers, as well as the Chair of the local mahalla Committee (residential district administration) and an official of Samarkand City Administration. Also participating in the raid was Tatyana Masolapova, Chief of Samarkand Regional Justice Department's section responsible for registration of local religious organisations.

The officials "broke the doors of the storage rooms in the cellar, and took out old books from a chest, among which was a Koran," the Protestants complained. These books were seized. Confiscated also were 21 Christian books, which included two Braille Bibles for the visually impaired, as well as 132 leaflets.

Police then also searched Meshkova's car, from where they confiscated a laptop computer, tablet device and mobile phone.

Punishment for registration application?

"The reason of the officials' intrusion was because in July the Adventists officially wrote to Tatyana Masolapova, asking the Justice Department to register their Church," Protestants told Forum 18. Samarkand's Adventist Church had registration until 2007 but then the authorities cancelled it.

The Adventist congregation was one of seven Protestant churches in Samarkand known to have been stripped of registration between 2006 and 2010 (see F18News 15 June 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1457](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1457)).

Asked why the Meshkovs' home was raided, Captain Nodyrov told Forum 18 on 3 September that the Adventist Church is "not registered in Samarkand, and therefore it is illegal for them to have religious literature." He refused to tell Forum 18 why and which authority decided to check up on the couple's home. Asked why the Bible and Koran were seized, he responded that it is the police's duty to send all confiscated religious literature for a religious "expert analysis". "We already sent the literature to the Religious Affairs Committee," was all he would say. He did not wish further to talk to Forum 18.

Officials of Samarkand Regional Justice Department between 5 and 11 September

refused to tell Forum 18 whether the Department will register the Adventist Church. The officials, who would not give their names, also refused to put Forum 18 through to Masolapova.

Asked on 11 September why Masolapova, instead of responding to the registration request, participated in the raid on the Adventist Church members, Khusan Khojamkulov, Deputy Head of the Justice Department, took down Forum 18's question but put the phone down without answering. Subsequent calls to him on the same day went unanswered.

### ***Navoi Region raid, confiscations, fines***

In Zarafshon in Navoi Region, two local Protestants - Abdukahhor Kutbiddinov and his wife Obida Nazarova – have been punished for owning a religious book, a dictionary and personal notes on religion seized when their home was raided on 11 July.

Judge Utker Haydarov of Zarafshon Criminal Court fined the husband and wife on 16 August under Administrative Code Article 184-2. Kutbiddinov was fined 20 times the minimum monthly wage or 1,922,100 Soms, according to the verdict seen by Forum 18. Nazarova was fined 10 times the minimum wage or 961,050 Soms.

With the same decision, the Judge ordered to hand over the confiscated Christian book, entitled "Christian Alphabet", and a Russian-Hebrew Dictionary as well as three notebooks with personal notes on them, to an officially registered religious organisation.

Judge Haydarov claims in his short Court decision (on one page), without giving specifics, that "it was established on 11 July 2014 that Nazarova (..) and Kutbiddinov illegally stored" the confiscated materials in their home. Without giving any evidence, the judge claimed that Kutbiddinov and Nazarova's guilt is proven from the materials of the administrative case, and their statements in court.

Judge Haydarov was reluctant to tell Forum 18 on 3 September why the couple were fined for keeping one religious book in their home, and why the Police seized a dictionary and personal notes. "If they have a complaint they can refer it to the appropriate organs," was all he would say. When Forum 18 asked why individuals cannot even write in their notebooks their thoughts about God, Judge Haydarov repeated his previous answer. The Judge also did not say why both spouses were punished for the same "offence". He asked Forum 18 to send its questions in writing, and put the phone down.

### ***Tashkent raid, confiscations, fines to follow?***

In Tashkent on the evening of 21 August, four officers of Yunusobod District Police led by Major Murod (last name unknown) raided the home of husband and wife Maksim and Tatyana Kostin, members of the officially registered Faith Presbyterian Protestant Church. "They broke in under the guise of passport regime check-up," local Protestants who know the couple complained to Forum 18 on 2 September.

Police confiscated 65 Christian books and materials. These included two Children's Bibles, a Biblical Encyclopedia, a Bible commentary as well as 60 notebooks, 12 Children's magazines, 3 notebooks with notes on them, 22 audio-cassette tapes, a video-cassette tape, 40 CD and DVD disks, and two folders with texts of Christian songs.

Major Murod (who did not give his last name) adamantly denied that he had led the raid. "First of all it was not a raid - we were just checking up to see who live in the home," he insisted to Forum 18 on 3 September. "Second of all, there were my superiors from the Police, who participated in the check-up."

Asked why then the Police confiscated the Kostins' religious books and other materials, the Major retorted: "We did not confiscate the books, we only seized them and sent them for religious expert analysis." He then claimed that the books received a positive "expert analysis" from the government's Religious Affairs Committee, and that the Police have been "looking for Kostin for several days to return the literature to him" but that "we could not find him".

However, the Protestants denied this, saying that they heard that the Police opened a case under Administrative Code Article 184-2. "Police are looking for him to bring him before the Court to fine him," they told Forum 18.

Told about this, and asked why the Police opened an administrative case, and why the authorities want to punish Kostin, Major Murod claimed to Forum 18 that he is busy. "Call me back in one hour." Subsequent calls to him went unanswered.

---

## **Why can't school-age children attend worship meetings?**

Forum 18 (04.09.2014) - The second half of August, teachers and doctors were forced to help the police identify school-age boys attending worship in mosques in at least some parts of Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, Abdurakhmon Eshanov from Ezgulik (Goodness) human rights organisation told Forum 18 News Service from Tashkent on 4 September. Meanwhile, in eastern Namangan Region at the end of July, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Police raided religious meetings of the Baptist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. State-sponsored media attacks pointed out that "even under-age children" had been present at both meetings. In Tashkent Region, police raided the Baptist Church's summer camp.

Uzbekistan imposes tight control on all exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief. All unregistered religious activity is banned, the state keeps all religious communities under surveillance and all religious literature is subject to compulsory prior censorship by the state's Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent. Police and secret police frequently raid religious communities. Religious books are routinely seized during raids and often ordered destroyed by the courts.

Even though the Religion Law does not ban children from attending religious worship, communities and parents are frequently pressured not to allow children to attend meetings for worship (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### **Sharia or Religion Law ban?**

Shovkat Khamdamov, Press Secretary of the Religious Affairs Committee, categorically refused to clarify whether the Religion Law bans school-age children from attending religious worship, including in mosques. "Only written questions sent by email," he insisted to Forum 18 on 5 September. He also refused to answer any other questions over the phone.

Asked why the authorities raided the mosques and prevented boys from attending prayers, Uzbekistan's Deputy Chief Mufti Abdulaziz Mansurov claimed to Forum 18 on 5 September: "Boys under 15 are not supposed to attend mosques according to Sharia Law, and Uzbekistan's Religion Law bans school-age children from attending religious organisations."

Asked why children cannot attend mosques even during their summer holidays or at

other times outside school hours, Deputy Chief Mufti Mansurov told Forum 18, "I wish the Law would allow it."

### ***Doctors and teachers forced to search mosques***

Several teachers and doctors from various Districts of Tashkent complained that from mid-August until 1 September, on the instruction of the city authorities, teachers and doctors "helped the Police to identify school-aged children in the city's mosques in Chilanzar, Khamza [Yashnabod] and other Districts, and to prevent them from participating in prayers, especially Friday prayers," human rights defender Eshanov told Forum 18. Uzbek schools are on holiday during this period.

A doctor from Tashkent confirmed this to Forum 18 on 3 September, but declined to give more specific details of the raids on mosques for fear of the authorities.

The operation to try to stop schoolboys attending prayers in mosques appeared to come to an end after Uzbekistan marked Independence Day on 1 September, Eshanov told Forum 18. However, he noted that residents of different parts of the country have told him that the authorities in regions of Uzbekistan outside Tashkent also from time to time conduct such campaigns to prevent children from attending mosques.

In the run-up to Independence Day each year, the authorities impose security restrictions which also restrict individuals' right to exercise their freedom of religion or belief, including visiting mosques.

An unnamed teacher from Shaykhantaur District of Tashkent complained to Radio Free Europe's Uzbek Service on 18 August that "there are few male teachers in the schools, and we were loaded with this extra work." He added that his colleagues helped the Police in the hunt for children in mosques even during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which in 2014 fell from late June to late July.

### ***No answers***

Shukhrat Turdikulov, Deputy Head of Tashkent City Administration who oversees religious affairs, through his Specialist Agzom Abrorov, took Forum 18's question on 5 September on why the mosques were raided and boys prevented from entering. But without answering, he referred it to Abdularyz Ismayilbayev of the Administration's International Relations Department. Ismayilbayev's phone went unanswered on 5 September.

Officials at Chilanzar and Khamza District Administrations, where most the raids took place, refused to discuss them with Forum 18 on 5 September. The officials who answered the phones, who would not give their names, also refused to put Forum 18 through to Mukhayyo Saidikramova and Botyr Boboyev, Deputy Heads of Administration of Chilanzar and Khamza Districts respectively, who oversee religious affairs in their Districts.

### ***Worship meeting raided***

In the afternoon of 23 July, Namangan Regional and Pap District Anti-Terrorism Police raided the worship meeting of the District's officially registered Baptist Church. Eight officials, only one of whom was in Police uniform, broke into the private home in the District's Khalkabad village, of church member Valentina Razzakova, where the worship was held, a local Baptist, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 on 22 August. The police claimed to be conducting a passport "check-up".

The raid was led by Major Murod Khakimov of Namangan Region Anti-Terrorism Police. Participating in the raid also were Major Rustam Dadabayev of Namangan Anti-Terrorism Police Major Anvar Ganiyev of Pap District Anti-Terrorism Police. Along with members of the Church who are from Khalkabad village and some of their under age children, some guests, Baptists from Fergana Region, were participating in the worship.

The officials found and confiscated some Christian books, which included a Protestant study Bible and Commentary on the biblical book of Revelation.

The Baptists told Forum 18 that they heard that Pap District Police, "after getting an expert opinion on the confiscated books from Uzbekistan's State Religious Affairs Committee", will open a case against the Baptists under Administrative Code Article 240 (violation of the Religion Law).

As often happens when religious communities are raided, the Police raid on the Baptists was followed by a media attack. The state-sponsored 12news.uz news agency on 4 August reported that Pap District Police officials "exposed the illegal activity of Baptist Christians." It claimed that the Baptists "illegally taught the Baptist faith" to local residents as well as to eight underage children, and that the Police are preparing administrative penalties for the Baptists.

### ***Baptists "violated the Law"***

Major Khakimov, who led the raid on the Baptists, told Forum 18 categorically on 27 August that the Baptists "violated the Law, and I explained it to them. What is not clear to you?" When Forum 18 insisted, asking why peaceful and officially registered believers cannot meet for worship in their homes, and why the authorities confiscate their religious books, including Bibles, he refused to say. "You can come here, and we will explain to you," he claimed. He refused to say what punishments will be given to the Baptists.

Reached on 27 August, Lieutenant Colonel Boymyrza Usmanov, Deputy Chief of Pap District Police, took down Forum 18's details. But when asked why Razzakova's home was raided and why Baptists, who are an officially registered community, cannot meet for worship in their homes and cannot keep their Christian books in their homes, he responded: "Who gave you my number?" When Forum 18 insisted with the question, Usmanov asked to call back later since he is "busy at the moment." However, numerous subsequent calls to his mobile phone and office numbers on the same day went unanswered.

### ***Fines to follow Namangan raid?***

In late July, officers of Namangan Regional Police raided the Jehovah's Witness community in Namangan, Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18. A total of 19 Jehovah's Witnesses were detained during the raid. Jehovah's Witnesses fear that at least some of those detained will face administrative charges, though no cases had been heard in court by 4 September.

Major Khakimov also refused to discuss with Forum 18 the raid on the Jehovah's Witnesses and possible punishments.

Like the Baptists raided in Namangan Region, the Jehovah's Witness community was also criticised through the local media.

Namangan Regional Police "exposed a group of Jehovah's Witnesses who illegally drew a number of local Muslims into their ranks, and conducted underground meetings", 12news.uz news agency reported on 1 August. The Police sent the religious print and



electronic informational materials confiscated from the Jehovah's Witnesses to the state Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent, it added.

"All the identified members of the group turned out to be former Muslims, among which were even children of pre-school age," the agency said. "They will be given fines of up to a 100 times the minimum monthly wage."

The article also noted that the Jehovah's Witnesses were conducting religious meetings outside their registered legal address, which violates the Religion Law. Jehovah's Witnesses have only ever been able to register two religious communities in Uzbekistan – in Fergana and Chirchik. However, registration was stripped from the Fergana community in 2006 (see F18News 5 September 2006 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=837](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=837)).

"This is already the second case this year," the news agency pointed out, referring to police detentions in Bukhara Region "of a group of Jehovah's Witnesses, who conducted illegal meetings for their members."

Seven Jehovah's Witnesses were fined in Bukhara Region in January. Two of them were subsequently pressured to leave their jobs as teachers, but resisted this pressure (see F18News 4 July 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1974](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1974)).

### ***Church summer camp raided***

Authorities in Tashkent region on 30 July once again raided the summer camp of Tashkent City's officially registered Baptist Church, Baptists from Tashkent who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals complained to Forum 18 on 22 August. The Baptists were renting the officially registered Full Gospel Church's camp site in the village of Niyazbash of the Region's Yangiyul District. About 100 members of the Church and their children were having their summer holiday.

The Baptist Union had bought its own camp site in Bostanlyk in 2000. However, in September 2013, Tashkent City Economic Court ruled to expropriate the plot of land. Judge Malika Kalandarova upheld the claim of Tashkent Regional Department of Privatisation and Deregulation of Property (DPD), and ruled that the land is to be returned to its "lawful owner", in other words to the State. In 2009, 2011 and 2012 the camps had been raided and participants punished (see F18News 24 October 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1889](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1889)).

Fifteen officials of the law-enforcement agencies, five in Police uniforms from Yangiyul District Police, arrived at lunchtime on 30 July. "They climbed over the fence of the camp and broke into the territory," the Baptists complained. The Police took the names of 30 adults present and drew up a report. Officers confiscated one Baptist song book and another Christian book.

The Baptists said that they believe that Yangiyul Police are preparing an administrative case against the church's pastor, Arkady Belik, under Administrative Code Article 240.

Asked about the raid and possible prosecutions on 28 August, Yangiyul Police referred Forum 18 to Farkhod Kasimov, Chief of the Anti-Terrorism Police. Kasimov the same day denied to Forum 18 that he had been involved in the raid. "Please, talk to the Police Department, and they should tell you who led the case and other details."

Asked on 28 August the reasons of the raid and why the Baptists cannot enjoy a normal summer holiday like other people, and why Police must interrupt it so often, duty officer Ghulom Alimov refused to answer. He also refused to put Forum 18 through to any official in the Department. "Please send your questions in writing," he insisted. Alimov

also refused to say whether any or what punishment awaited the Baptists whose names were recorded by the Police.

---

## **Raids, religious literature seizures, passport confiscations and expulsions**

Forum 18 News Service (01.09.2014) - Uzbekistan's authorities continue to raid peaceful religious or non-religious activity by religious believers, confiscate all religious literature - even including Bibles and New Testaments - from private homes, collect information on members of both registered and unregistered communities, as well as punish them, Forum 18 News Service notes. Even personal notebooks with notes of religious teachings were confiscated, worship services, sports activity and summer holidays disrupted, and even visiting foreigners in one case were expelled from Uzbekistan.

In mid-August in the central Navoi Region, 11 Police officers and other officials raided a Baptist family as they and friends were meeting for worship. They confiscated the religious literature found in their and another church member's homes. They also expelled two visiting co-believers back to Russia and the mother, who is not a Church member, visiting from Israel. Administrative punishments are being prepared for the three local Baptists.

In early August in Chirchik in Tashkent Region, 15 police officers and officials of a variety of agencies raided the home of a Protestant pastor, while he, his son and their friends were playing volleyball. The pastor's religious books and other property were confiscated. All except the Pastor and his son were taken to the Police Station, kept there for more than four hours, questioned and released. It is believed that administrative punishments are being prepared against at least the Pastor and his son.

Elsewhere in the north-western Khorezm Region, police "fabricated" a case against a local Protestant, and in early June a regional Court fined him allegedly for sharing his Christian faith with his relative and one other person, in that relative's home (see below).

Police raids on other religious communities have continued. In late July, separate raids targeted Jehovah's Witnesses in eastern Namangan Region and a summer camp run by a Baptist Church in Tashkent. In both cases administrative punishments are also expected (see forthcoming F18News article).

### ***Tightening state controls***

The continuing raids came as the new Law on Prevention of Violations of the Law – which formalises the powers of a range of state agencies to prevent individuals from exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief – entered into legal force on 15 August.

State control over all religious literature was stepped up in January, with the entry into force of a new Decree, entitled "Measures to improve order in the production, import and distribution of religious materials". This formalised the existing sweeping state controls on the production, distribution and import of all such materials.

Religious literature seized from individuals – whether Muslims, Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses or of other faiths – is frequently ordered destroyed by the courts.

### ***Raid with no warrant, passport confiscation***

Mid-morning on Sunday 17 August, Anti-Terrorism Police and other officials raided the Navoi home of Artur and Irina Alpayev as they and fellow members of the Council of Churches Baptist congregation were meeting for worship, church member Nikolai Serin complained to Forum 18 on 19 August.

Leading the raid was Bakhrom Rakhmonov, Chief of Navoi Regional Terrorism Police and his colleague M. Usmanov along with officers M. Sharipov, D. Sattarov and Achilov (first names not given) from Navoi Criminal Police, as well as local Police officers Kholmurodov and Bazarov (first names not known). Accompanying the police were two officials of the mahalla Committee (local residential administration), Kh. Khayrullayev and Nurboyev (first names not known).

The officials "broke into the home and despite the homeowners' demands, made a search in the home without showing an official warrant." The officials "gathered in one room all the guests in the house". These included Artur Alpayev's mother visiting from Israel; Gulya and Sergei Solyanov, a married couple visiting from Vladivostok in Russia; and a local family, Nikolai and Larisa Serin with their three children.

The officials "spoke rudely to the homeowners". They photographed and filmed the search of all cases, shelves, chests, and cupboards. They confiscated all the Christian literature they could find.

Police officers then summoned Uchkun Akhatov, Chief of Navoi Police's Passport Registration Division, Serin told Forum 18. As soon as he arrived he confiscated the passports from all three guests. "He told them their passports would be returned when they depart Uzbekistan after their expulsion is formalised."

Later the officials took Serin with them and conducted a search in his home, which lasted several hours. They confiscated Christian religious materials as well as his laptop computer, he told Forum 18. "Though I presented a document that the literature had earlier been approved by the [government's] Religious Affairs Committee, the Police told me I can't keep these books in my home."

### **"Disrespect"**

The Sunday-morning raid, passport confiscations and literature seizures represent "disrespect to our guests and a gross violation of our basic freedoms and human rights," Serin complained to Forum 18. He added that the police and other authorities keep telling him and other Baptists – including during the 17 August raid - that he cannot keep his Christian books and even his Bible in his home. "Isn't this a gross violation?"

Serin said that he believes that both he and the Alpayevs are likely to be given administrative punishments. Alpayev similarly lamented to Forum 18 that he and his wife may be fined for the religious literature found in their home.

The official who answered Rakhmonov's phone on 27 August, and who introduced himself as Sadridin, Assistant Chief of Navoi Regional Terrorism Police, claimed to Forum 18 that Rakhmonov "recently retired." Asked why Rakhmonov and other Police officials raided the homes of Baptists, which resulted in the expulsion of their visiting foreign relatives, confiscation of their Christian books and possible administrative punishments, Sadridin claimed that he is "new in the Police Department, and I do not know the details."

Sadridin also claimed that "no one is available," when asked to whom Forum 18 can talk about the case. "If they are unhappy they can write a compliant to the Prosecutor's office," he answered, when Forum 18 insisted with the question.

### ***Expulsion of guests***

The Solyanovs were expelled back to Russia on 23 August, Alpayev told Forum 18 on 28 August. (Gulya Solyanova had been born in Soviet Uzbekistan.) Police accompanied them to the airport in Bukhara. Their passports, stamped with notices of expulsion, were returned to them just before they departed. As the Solyanovs were expelled rather than being formally deported, they will in theory be able to return to Uzbekistan.

Alpayev's mother (who was born in Soviet Uzbekistan) was similarly expelled back to Israel on 28 August, he told Forum 18 that day. An officer of Navoi Police accompanied them in the car on 27 August from Navoi to Tashkent when they took his mother to Tashkent for the flight. In the earlier hours of 28 August, the officer took her to the border authorities at the airport. There her passport was returned to her (eleven days after its confiscation) with a stamp "Expelled". She left at 6 am on a flight back to Israel.

Alpayev noted that his mother had been able to spend some time with them and that she will be able to return to Uzbekistan as she has been expelled, not formally deported. But he lamented that the raid "disturbed us and my mother, and disrupted our fellowship on 17 August."

Akhatov of Passport Registration Division, on 26 August introduced himself to Forum 18 and took down its details. However, when asked why the Alpayevs' two guests from Russia were expelled from the country and why the authorities were also expelling Alpayev's mother back to Israel, he claimed, "it's a wrong number," and put the phone down. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

Forum 18 also reached the Police officer accompanying the Alpayev family in their car while they were taking Alpayev's mother to Tashkent on 27 August. However, he refused to comment on the case saying that "I am only carrying out what I was told do." He also declined to give his name.

### ***Raid during volleyball game***

In Chirchik in Tashkent Region, a total of 15 officials broke into the private home of Stanislav Kim, pastor of a local unregistered Protestant Church, during the afternoon of 2 August, a local Protestant, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 22 August.

Leading the raid were officials of Chirchik Fire, Electric, Gas, Sewage and Architecture Departments accompanied by Chirchik Police Department's Investigator Muzaffar Nurmatov and local Police Officers Abbas Ismatullayev and A. Suleymanov.

The officials broke in while the Pastor, his son Valeri Kim and three other adults - Stanislav Pak, Vladimir Kovalchuk and Igor Li - along with 11 young people aged between 14 and 19 were playing volleyball in the yard.

During a search of Pastor Kim's home, officials confiscated 19 Christian books, including a Bible and New Testament, two computer hard disks, a photocopier, a printer and a hundred slides with Christian hymns. The officials then detained all those present, except Pastor Kim and his son, taking them in a bus to Chirchik Police Station. "There they were held illegally between 5 pm and 9.30 pm, questioned and then released," the Protestant complained to Forum 18.

Investigator Nurmatov categorically refused to discuss any details of the case with Forum 18 on 28 August. "Please send us a letter, and we will answer you." When Forum 18

asked why Police or other authorities needed to interfere when a group of church members were playing volleyball, he repeated his previous answer.

The Protestant told Forum 18 that he believes that administrative fines are being prepared against Pastor Kim and his son.

### ***Fined for "illegal" religious teaching***

Protestant Zokir Rajabov, a resident of Kushkupir District in Khorezm Region, has been fined for "illegally" sharing his faith on charges fellow Protestants insist were fabricated.

On 5 June, Judge Muzaffar Samandarov of Shavat District Criminal Court fined Rajabov five times the minimum monthly wage or 480,525 Soms (1,250 Norwegian Kroner, 150 Euros or 200 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

Rajabov was punished under Administrative Code 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"). Judge Samandarov heard the case in the building of Kushkupir District Criminal Court.

The verdict claims that Rajabov was questioned in the Court. However, Judge Samandarov heard the case in his absence, a local Protestant who knows Rajabov and the case, and who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 26 August. Rajabov learnt that he had been punished only two months after the hearing from a Court bailiff.

According to the verdict Kushkupir District Police officials "established that Rajabov on 3 June at 10 am without having special religious education and permission from a central religious organ shared his religious beliefs of Jesus Christ with his relative Z. Bobojanova and U. Allaberganov in Bobojanova's private home."

### ***Case "fabricated"?***

According to the verdict, Rajabov admitted to the Court he "shared his religious beliefs with his relative Bobojanova but that he does not know Allaberganov." Judge Samandarov claims in the decision that Rajabov's guilt is "proven" by his statement in the Court as well as the Police records of interrogations of Bobojanova and Allaberganov.

However, the Protestant told Forum 18 that Rajabov "actually does not know either of them [Bobojanova or Allaberganov]," and that "Kushkupir Police officials falsified the case against him just to punish him."

Told this and asked why he punished Rajabov without properly investigating the case, Judge Samandarov on 27 August told Forum 18 that he was busy, and asked to call back in 10 minutes. Judge Samandarov's phones went unanswered later on the same day and on 28 August.

Asked about the case and why the Police sought to have Rajabov punished, Rustam Sotyvoldiyev, the District's Deputy Police Chief, who oversees religious communities, on 28 August told Forum 18 that "he can address the Prosecutor's office, if he thinks there is a violation."

Told that Rajabov's fellow-believers say that the case was falsified by his Police Department, and asked, even if Rajabov shared his beliefs with his relative in a private conversation, how or why this is a violation, Sotyvoldiyev repeated his previous answer.

---

## **Another jailing, large fines for meeting upheld, more confiscations**

Forum 18 (24.07.2014) - Uzbekistan continues to impose penalties on people whose only "offence" is to exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief, using short-term jail terms, fines, confiscation and destruction of religious literature and other material, raids on and searches of private homes, intrusive state questioning and surveillance of people, and confiscations of private property.

### ***Baptist detained for three days***

Igor Kulyada, a member of an officially registered Baptist Church in the capital Tashkent, was jailed for three days from 3 to 6 July, Baptists who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 News Service on 22 July. He was stopped at 1 pm on 27 June in the Uchtepe District by Police Lieutenant I. Hoshimov while putting up posters with verses from the Bible. On 3 July Judge Nilufar Dadabayeva of Uchtepe District Court imposed three days' detention on him, under Article 240, Part 1 of the Code of Administrative Offences ("Carrying out of unauthorised religious activity, evasion by leaders of religious organisations of registration of the charter of the organisation, the unauthorised organisation and conduct of worship by religious ministers, and the organisation and conduct of special children's and youth meetings, as well as vocational, literature and other study groups not relating to worship").

In the verdict, which Forum 18 has seen, she also ordered that Kulyada be fined 43,245 Soms (about 115 Norwegian Kroner, 14 Euros, or 19 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) and that one memory stick, one CD disk with Christian materials, and 24 leaflets with Bible verses confiscated from Kulyada be destroyed.

Short-term detention of between 3 and 15 days is irregularly used against Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'is, in contrast to the long-term jailings routinely used against Muslims. Courts frequently order confiscated religious material – including Muslim, Christian and Jehovah's Witness literature – to be destroyed (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Judge Dadabayeva told Forum 18 on 23 July that "if he has anything against it he can challenge our decision in a higher court". Asked why Kulyada's property was ordered to be destroyed and why a fine was also imposed, she replied that "I need to ask my superiors before I can give you information on this case over the phone". She asked Forum 18 to call back the next day, but when rung back her Assistant (who refused to give his name) said that she is not available for comments.

### ***Large fines for meeting for worship upheld***

On 1 July Judge B. Boboyev In the eastern Syrdarya Region's regional Criminal Court upheld large fines imposed on local Baptists, a person who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 22 July. The fines had followed a raid on meeting for worship and a meal of a local Baptist Church on the evening of 13 April, Palm Sunday. The congregation is one of many that does not have state registration but which belongs to the state-registered Baptist Union (see F18News 9 May 2014

[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1957](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1957)).

The appeal verdict, a copy of which Forum 18 has seen, upheld the fines imposed on 4 June by Judge Zafar Nazarov of Syrdarya District Criminal Court. The Judge fined nine Baptists for the "offence" of meeting together:

- Andrey Shevchenko, Konstantin Malchikovski, Sergei Kozin and Sergei Yermakov were each fined 50 times the minimum monthly salary or 4,805,250 Soms (about 12,500 Norwegian Kroner, 1,500 Euros, or 2,100 US Dollars) under the Administrative Codes' Article 240 Part 1 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");

- Oleg Buzakov, Viktor Krylov, Stanislav Shegai, and Aleksandr Kolomeytsev were each fined 20 times the minimum monthly salary or 1,922,100 Soms each (about 5,200 Norwegian Kroner, 615 Euros, or 840 US Dollars) under Article 240 Part 1;

- and Nadezhda Matrosova was fined 10 times the minimum monthly wage, or 961,050 Soms (about 2,500 Norwegian Kroner, 300 Euros, or 400 US Dollars) under Article 240 Part 1.

The appeal verdict notes that the April raid was carried out by Syrdarya Police's Criminal Investigation and Struggle against Organised Crime Divisions who found that Shevchenko, Malchikovski, Kozin and Yermakov "illegally taught religion" to "15 adults and between 10 and 15 children." Shevchenko told the Court that "no one was teaching religion" but they "only gathered to eat pilaf together and celebrate Jesus Christ." Police had earlier told Forum 18 that they were acting on an "instruction from above" (see F18News 9 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1957](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1957)).

When asked about the case officials (who refused to give their names) of the Court Chancellery told Forum 18 on 23 July that Judge Nazarov is "on holiday." They refused to comment on the case.

### ***"Mahalla community vigilance"***

The nine Baptists and Shevchenko in particular were also attacked by the local newspaper "Syrdarya". An author under the name R. Islomov wrote an article published on 12 July with the title "Mahalla community vigilance". The names of all nine Baptists were given, and Shevchenko's alleged "illegal missionary activity" was attacked. The author claimed that the raid followed "written complaints by a group of active members of the mahalla" and ended with the injunction "Citizens, be watchful!"

Mahalla committees [local residential administrations] are a key part of the state's apparatus of repression (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)). Powers recently formally given to mahalla committees "legalises unofficial informers" a legal expert from Tashkent has noted to Forum 18 (see F18News 4 July 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1974](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1974)).

### ***Illegal raid and search***

On 11 July in the central city of Karshi [Qarshi] six uniformed police officers raided the private home of Gulzhahon Kuzebayeva, a local Protestant, even though she was not at home. Police conducted an illegal search, for which they had no search warrant, "for religious materials or a religious meeting but found nothing" Protestants who wish to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 18 July.

Relatives present in Kuzebayeva's home were questioned by police officers Olim Gulomov, Bakhtiyor Babayeva and Javlon Sharipov, "who did not answer when they were asked on what legal authority they broke in and made the search".

Police behaved in what was described as an insulting manner and questioned relatives about where Kuzebayeva was, how she made a living, who her friends and acquaintances are, and other information on her and her relatives. Local people described this as "an unlawful interference in her private life and an attack on her honour and reputation".

A woman's honour is a culturally extremely important and sensitive matter in Uzbekistan. Possibly for this reason, women seem to be particularly targeted for torture and threats by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Local Protestants have noted that local police officer Gulomov "keeps collecting information on Kuzebayeva from her various friends and acquaintances, and keeps them under constant pressure". Protestants commented that it would appear that the police "are making attempts to falsify a case against her".

Officer Gulomov put his phone down on 23 July as soon as he heard Forum 18's name. Subsequent calls to him on the same day went unanswered. Karshi police officers on 23 July claimed that none of the other officers who identified themselves in the raid worked for the police.

Covert and open state surveillance is carried out against members of all religious communities (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Yet more confiscations***

In the latest set of confiscations experienced by Lyubov Lyubivaya and married couple Alisher Abdullayev and Oksana Abdullayeva in the central city of Samarkand [Samarqand], court bailiffs Sadriddin Salahuddinov, Mamur Yuldashev and several others on 10 and 11 June confiscated private property from the homes of the three. All of them are members of the city's Baptist Church belonging to the Council of Churches Baptists. These churches refuse to seek state registration, or permission to exist, in the countries they operate in.

On 10 June the bailiffs told Lyubivaya that they were taking her property for an unpaid fine imposed on her in 2012 for her "illegal religious activity". They then gave her a copy of the confiscation report.

On 11 June the same bailiffs broke into the home of the Abdullayev family by "climbing over the wall, as Oksana refused to open the gate for them because her brother Alisher was not at home", local Baptist Veniamin Nemirov stated. The bailiffs told Abdullayeva that the confiscations they made in March were not enough to cover the fine given to them in 2012.

The latest confiscations follow earlier confiscations – which were illegal even under Uzbekistan's "legal" system – following large fines imposed on Nemirov, Abdullayev and Lyubivaya in 2012. The latest confiscations also followed other raids and fines on Nemirov and other Baptists for meeting together for worship without state permission (see F18News 9 May [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1957](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1957)).

Two mobile phones, a carpet, an oil heater, and a petrol-powered electric generator were confiscated from Lyubivaya's home, and two carpets and two sheets of iron for making cooking pots were confiscated from the Abdullayevs' home.



Nemirov stated that the bailiffs "threatened to break our door when we refused to open it on their demands" when the Bailiffs came to his home 10 days afterwards. "They left threatening us that they will come back again."

"We will keep knocking on their doors until they do so"

Shukhrat (who would not give his last name), head of Samarkand City Court Bailiffs, asked Forum 18 on 24 July "why don't they pay the fines. We will keep returning to their homes as long as we confiscate everything until they pay the fines". When Forum 18 suggested that all the confiscated items probably covered the amount of the fines, he angrily stated: "They need to pay the fines. That's it. We will keep knocking on their doors until they do so."

---

## **Almost incommunicado in Investigation Prison**

Forum 18 (08.07.2014) - Almost 10 months after he was detained by customs officials in Uzbekistan for having verses from the Koran and an Uzbek-language sermon on his mobile phone, and then given a five year prison term, Tajik citizen Zuboyd Mirzorakhimov remains almost incommunicado in Investigation Prison No.1 in the Uzbek capital Tashkent (popularly known as Tashtyurma), a relative told Forum 18 News Service from the Tajik capital Dushanbe on 4 July. Relatives have no idea why he has been held since being sentenced in Investigation Prison.

Mirzorakhimov has been in an isolation cell in the prison almost incommunicado since his transfer to the Tashkent Prison, his relative stated. Only when he was able to meet the recently-appointed new lawyer did Mirzorakhimov learn that his family are working to raise his case and have him released.

Mirzorakhimov was detained on 20 September 2013 and sentenced the following month (see F18News 25 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1942](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1942)). Earlier hopes that he would be amnestied appear to have been dashed (see below).

### ***Why no visits allowed?***

At the beginning of 2014, Tajikistan's Embassy in Tashkent obtained permission from the Uzbek authorities for Mirzorakhimov's wife, Firuza Aliyeva, to visit her husband in the Investigation Prison, the relative told Forum 18. She travelled to Tashkent on 23 January, her husband's 38th birthday. However, the next day, 24 January, when she visited the Investigation Prison, the prison authorities told her that Mirzorakhimov "is there but they did not allow her to see him without telling her why".

The family later engaged a new lawyer in Tashkent, who was able to see Mirzorakhimov in early July. "He told us that Zuboyd is in isolation under strict control, and that the authorities are not allowing anyone, including family members, other than a lawyer to see him." The relative told Forum 18 that he is "surprised" that Mirzorakhimov is "put under such strict control."

Mirzorakhimov is "no extremist, and is not an extremely devout religious believer", the relative insisted. His only guilt is that "he had these religious materials on his phone, which anyone in Tajikistan can freely download from the internet."

Asked why Mirzorakhimov's relatives cannot see or even talk to him over the phone, and why he is being kept in isolation, the official on duty (she did not give her name) in the the Interior Ministry's Department of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent, which

oversees prisons, transferred Forum 18 on 8 July to Erkin Bobokulov, Deputy Head of the Department. However, Bobokulov's phones went unanswered. Called back and asked whether Forum 18 could talk to any other official on the issue, she put Forum 18 through to a different number, which also went unanswered. Subsequent calls to the officer on duty went unanswered.

### ***Why wasn't Mirzorakhimov amnestied?***

Told that Mirzorakhimov's family had earlier spoken of their hopes that Mirzorakhimov could be amnestied, and asked where they received such information or why they were hopeful, the relative told Forum 18 that Ruzikul (last name not given), a Tajik shepherd who was convicted and imprisoned in Uzbekistan for illegally crossing into the country from neighboring Tajikistan with his cattle, had phoned Furuza Aliyeva after his release and return to Tajikistan. He told her that he had been held in the same cell with Mirzorakhimov in Investigation Prison in Khovos in Syrdarya Region in November 2013, before Mirzorakhimov was moved to Tashkent Investigation Prison.

Ruzikul told Aliyeva that both he and Mirzorakhimov signed "requests for amnesty, which were prepared for them by the Uzbek authorities." Ruzikul told her that he is "surprised to hear" that Mirzorakhimov had not been released.

Also as the relative noted, and as seen by Forum 18, Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry in its official response of 19 November 2013 told Mirzorakhimov's relatives that it had requested his lawyer to discuss with the Investigator in the case (names not given in the letter) whether amnesty for Mirzorakhimov was possible.

"Now we are not sure what went on, and why Zuboyd was not amnestied or released," a relative told Forum 18.

Credible information about torture of detainees held within Investigation Prison No. 1 has been presented by the Paris-based Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT) (see below).

### ***Tajik Consul testified against his countryman***

According to the copy of the 30 October 2013 Bekabad District Court decision sentencing Mirzorakhimov to five years' imprisonment, seen by Forum 18, Nurullo Bulbulov, who works in Tajikistan's Tashkent embassy as Consul General, testified in Court that the religious materials found on Mirzorakhimov's phone were "also banned in Tajikistan."

Ruzikul, Mirzorakhimov's former cell-mate in detention, told Aliyeva during the phone conversation that Mirzorakhimov told him that, instead of defending him, the Tajik Consul had testified against him in court, which affected the Court decision negatively. Mirzorakhimov told Ruzikul that he was "enraged in the Court room when he heard the sentence, and that Tajik embassy officials present at the hearing had said nothing in his defence."

Called several times between 4 and 8 July, Tajikistan embassy officials or Consul General Bulbulov did not answer Forum 18's question why Bulbulov testified against Mirzorakhimov during the hearing or why he or other officials had said nothing in Mirzorakhimov's defence.

### ***Has Tajik Embassy done anything to help family?***

Nurullo Bulbulov, Tajikistan's Consul General in Tashkent, confirmed to Forum 18 on 4 July that in early January, following a request from Mirzorakhimov's family to visit him in the place of custody, the Embassy received a note from Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry

permitting a visit. It stated that Mirzorakhimov was being held at Investigation Prison No.1.

When Forum 18 asked whether the Embassy investigated why Firuza Aliyeva was not allowed to see her husband and what further steps it took to make a visit by the family possible, the call was terminated at the Embassy's end. Subsequent immediate calls to the Embassy went unanswered. When the phone was answered again about 10 minutes later, a secretary (who would not give her name) said that Bulbulov is busy in a meeting, and she took down Forum 18's questions. She then asked Forum 18 to call back later.

Called back on 8 July, the same secretary told Forum 18 that "Bulbulov told me to tell you that you should call the Uzbek authorities, not him or the Tajik Embassy, with questions on this case."

### ***Imprisoned in Karshi***

Another individual imprisoned for "smuggling" religious materials, Zoirjon Mirzayev, is serving his sentence in Karshi [Qarshi] Labour Camp in southern central Uzbekistan in Kashkadarya Region. He was arrested at a Tashkent Region train station on returning to his native Uzbekistan, after customs officials found 29 recordings of Muslim sermons in his mobile phone. On 8 April he was given a five-year prison term (see F18News 2 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1954](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1954)).

Mirzayev's family visited him in early summer, and his health "seemed to be fine", relatives who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 7 July. Relatives can visit him once in three months.

Other Muslim prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief are also held in Karshi Labour Camp (see eg. F18News 26 November 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1900](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1900)). Uzbekistan continues to limit the freedom of religion or belief of all prisoners, whatever their religion or belief. For example, Muslim prisoners of conscience are not allowed to openly pray or read any Muslim literature - even the Koran (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Fine for possessing "illegal" religious materials***

Many people passing through Uzbek customs have been detained and punished when officers discover they have religious materials, including in their phones and computers. Some - such as Mirzorakhimov and Mirzayev - receive prison sentences under the Criminal Code.

However, officials chose to punish another individual, Uzbek citizen Ikhtiyor Yagmurov, using the Administrative Code instead, which carries lesser penalties. Travelling from Russia's Kaliningrad Region to Tashkent, he was detained by customs officials at Tashkent Airport and prosecuted for carrying "illegal" Muslim religious materials on his phone (see F18News 2 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1954](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1954)).

On 27 March, Judge Iroda Avazmetova of Tashkent's Sergeli District Criminal Court found Yagmurov guilty of violating Administrative Code Articles 227-12 and 184-2. She fined him 20 times the minimum monthly wage or 1,922,100 Soms (about 5,200 Norwegian Kroner, 615 Euros, or 850 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate), Noila Yakhshiboyeva, a Court Chancellery official, told Forum 18 from the court on 8 July.

Article 227-12 punishes failure to present customs with receipts for imported items. Article 184-2 punishes "Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons" with

finer for individuals of 20 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage, together with confiscation of the materials involved. Uzbekistan implements a severe state censorship regime (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Yakhshiboyeva of the Court's Chancellery declined to comment on the decision, referring Forum 18 to Judge Avazmetova. The Judge's phone went unanswered on 8 July.

### ***Health concerns for prisoners of conscience***

The state of health of three Muslim prisoners of conscience, all jailed for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief, continues to cause their relatives concern (see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)). Khayrullo Tursunov and his relatives Mehrinisso and Zulhumor Hamdamova (who are sisters) are all still in need of medical treatment.

Relatives of the Hamdamova sisters told Forum 18 on 7 July that they visited them in prison in mid-April and that their next visit is scheduled for mid-July. Mehrinisso Hamdamova needs surgery for a myoma in her uterus, and Zulhumor Hamdamova recently developed a "constant pain in the back of her eyes, inside her head, and she thinks it could be some serious disease." Relatives will try to help Mehrinisso Hamdamova have the operation and send medicines to Zulhumor Hamdamova. But they are not sure whether the prison authorities will allow this.

The Hamdamova sisters have previously been targeted for torture and threats by male officials (see below).

Tursunov was visited by relatives in mid-June. He told them that his health is generally fine, but that he suffers regular headaches. He asked them to bring him some medicinal herbs, with which he will try to cure himself.

Tursunov was exposed to the potentially fatal disease of tuberculosis (TB), when in mid-December 2013 the authorities moved him to a TB prison from Karavulbazar Prison 64/25 in Bukhara Region. Later he was moved back to Karavulbazar Prison 64/25, and the authorities claimed to Forum 18 that he was cured (see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)).

### ***Torture***

The United Nations (UN) Committee Against Torture found in 2007 that torture in Uzbekistan is "routine". In November 2013 the Committee reiterated its concerns, including over rape threats against the Hamdamova sisters. "The Committee is concerned about numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations that torture and ill-treatment are routinely used by law enforcement, investigative and prison officials, or at their instigation or with their consent, often to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings," (see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)).

Women such as the Hamdamova sisters seem to be particularly targeted for torture and threats by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

One of the 29 Uzbek refugees deported back to Uzbekistan by Kazakhstan against their will – and against international law – has told relatives of being tortured in Uzbek prisons. The men were extradited back to Uzbekistan in 2011 and all were detained. Most were given long prison sentences (see F18News 8 May 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1833](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1833)).

At least 25 of the 29 are still in detention, Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT) – which represents the 29 men – noted on 17 June 2014. ACAT published a translation of letters from relatives on 21 December 2012 (see [http://www.acatfrance.fr/public/acatcomments\\_followup\\_cat444-2010.pdf](http://www.acatfrance.fr/public/acatcomments_followup_cat444-2010.pdf)).

"How could we say that we were tortured, while we are on their hands? Therefore we were compelled to say that we were not tortured and that we are not under pressure now," one of the extradited and imprisoned refugees told relatives about his time in Tashkent Investigation Prison No. 1, where they were visited by a Kazakh government delegation.

"But you must deliver to the UN by any possible ways and make it publicly available that in reality we were subjected to unbearable tortures during the investigation," the relative continued. "There were all types of tortures. They used electric chair (tortured with electrocution). Therefore we were sentenced with fabricated charges (we were forced to confess those charges). Oppression is still continuing in prison camps."

The prisoner could not complain, he said, but told relatives he wanted the information made public. "There were all kind of torture, electric chair, plastic bag and other unbearable tortures .. When plastic bag is put on head and closed, it will suffocate a person. It will be held some time and released, to keep the person alive. And it is repeated. It is also very painful."

### ***Hoping for transfer***

Meanwhile imprisoned Baptist Tohar Haydarov is still serving as 10-year prison sentence given him in 2011 on drugs charges. His fellow-Baptists insist were fabricated to punish him for exercising his freedom of religion or belief (see F18News 2 August 2011 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1600](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1600)).

Andrei Serin, a fellow Baptist, told Forum 18 on 4 July that his brother Gleb and Haydarov's brother visited him in May. Serin told Forum 18 that there is "no change in the term or conditions" of Haydarov's imprisonment. "But he is praying and hoping that when, in 2015, he will have served half his prison term, he will be able to qualify for a change of the rest of his sentence to house arrest. He could then go to work from home and pay the state for the rest of his punishment."

Haydarov "is physically not doing well at the moment, has problems with his spine and cannot do hard work without pain in his back," Serin told Forum 18.

---

## **"Legally" preventing human rights**

Forum 18 (04.07.2014) - A new law formalising heavier state restrictions on individuals than those Uzbekistan already formally has enters into legal force on 15 August, Forum 18 News Service notes. The Law on Prevention of Violations of the Law gives wide-ranging powers to state bodies, including committees which run mahallas [local districts], as well as non-state and non-commercial public organisations and ordinary citizens. The new powers formalise what already happens in practice, and among the Law's targets are people exercising freedom of religion or belief or other human rights without state permission.

The Senate approved the Prevention Law on 10 April. President Islam Karimov signed it on 14 May and it was published on 15 May in the state newspapers Halk Suzi (People's Word) in Uzbek and Narodnoye Slovo (People's Word) in Russian.

The Prevention Law formalises existing close state restrictions on those convicted of breaking Uzbekistan's laws and citizens who have no court convictions, including people exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. People convicted by the courts will automatically be placed on a Preventive Register, thus subjecting them to police measures for one year or more.

### ***Existing state control of society***

Uzbekistan already imposes tight restrictions on all religious communities, including harsh restrictions on Muslims marking Ramadan and going on the haj, while all exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission is illegal. All religious communities also face covert and open surveillance by the National Security Service (NSS) secret police (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

As Uzbekistan is not a rule of law state, officials appear to regard the function of laws as being to provide officials with excuses to engage in oppression and control of all of society (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Formalising wider state restrictions***

Article 9 of the Prevention Law identifies the state agencies which carry out specified "prevention work" (see below), including the Police, Prosecutor's Office officials, NSS secret police, Justice Ministry, State Customs Service, Tax Police, Labour and Social Protection agencies, educational structures (kindergartens, schools, colleges, universities), healthcare institutions (hospitals, AIDS centres, neurological dispensaries) and nature protection agencies.

Mahalla officials are now encouraged to contact and inform these agencies about people exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. Mahalla committees are a key part of Uzbekistan's system of repression (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Article 21 of the Law gives mahalla committees wide powers in co-operation with the police. These include the requirement to "take measures to prevent the activity of unregistered religious organisations, ensure observance of rights of citizens to religious freedoms, not allow forced propagation of religious views, consider other questions related to observance of the Religion Law".

The Religion Law bans all exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission – including sharing beliefs and the production and distribution of uncensored religious literature and other materials.

Under the Prevention Law, mahalla committees are now formally required to enforce this – which they have already done for years – by ensuring that no one within their territory exercises any freedom of religion or belief (except for individuals praying on their own in private) outside the state-registered place of worship of a state-registered religious community.

### ***"Legalises unofficial informers"***

Under the Prevention Law, non-commercial organisations and citizens may help prevent violations of Uzbekistan's laws by helping official agencies. This "legalises unofficial informers" from mahalla committees or among the population, an independent legal

expert from Tashkent, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 17 June.

The NSS secret police already recruits informers and spies, including among religious leaders (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***"Prevention measures"***

Article 29 of the Prevention Law specifies the types of "prevention measures" used against individuals, including: prophylactic talk; official warning; "social rehabilitation"; placing on the Preventive Register created under the Law; referral for compulsory treatment; administrative supervision; and "other measures in accordance with the Law".

Under Article 31 individuals are required to sign any written warning they are given. If the individual refuses to sign, this is also noted. The official issuing the warning can also inform the individual's employer (if they are working), their educational establishment (if they are studying), and the mahalla committee where they live.

Article 34 states that those on the Preventive Register are subjected to a range of preventive measures from the police aimed at "correcting them and warning against the conducting of repeat offences". Those subjected to the Preventive Register include former prisoners, as well as those convicted of a wide range of administrative offences.

These include Articles of the Code of Administrative Offences used to punish people exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief, including: Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons"); Article 184-3 ("Production, storage or distribution of works promoting national, ethnic, racial or religious hatred"); Article 240 ("Violation of the Religion Law"); 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").

If an individual has been punished for more than one separate crime or offence, they are listed on the Preventive Register separately for each reason.

The Prevention Law's Article 38 allows the term of prophylactic registration, which runs for one year from the moment of registration, to be extended if new reasons are found by officials.

### ***How will Prevention Law be implemented?***

Based on what is known of the existing treatment of people punished for exercising freedom of religion or belief, the legal expert outlined to Forum 18 how the Prevention Law will be implemented. The Law itself appears to formalise existing official practices.

People punished for exercising freedom of religion or belief "will be taken to the local police chief, and then the Prosecutor's Office, where they will be given official warnings," the legal expert stated. "The employer will be officially informed of the warning, and asked to record all violations of work discipline and 'other activity' and inform police. Many employers have fired employees who have been given official warnings."

The legal expert added that "If the control of persons on the Preventative Register is done by district police it may be harsh. But if control is under local police it will not be as strict, as they are usually very busy."

Police and other officials are even more likely than before to demand that local mahalla

committees discuss and take measures against individuals exercising freedom of religion or belief, the legal expert thought. "Then officials will artificially create an intolerant atmosphere against such people where they live."

### ***- Increased visa exit visa problems***

The legal expert also noted that people so targeted will face more problems than normal if they apply for an exit visa to leave the country. The NSS secret police already maintains an exit blacklist – for example of human rights defenders – who may not be allowed to travel (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

"The police will send information to the Visa Department to check whether or not the individual is on the Preventive Register before putting the departure visa sticker in their passport," the legal expert told Forum 18. The police would also be able to make life more difficult for those seeking to change their registered address.

### ***- Increased restrictions and punishments***

Restrictions and punishments could escalate if an individual fails to obey any new restrictions. "The police will take fingerprints, photograph and video-footage of the registered persons," the legal expert stated. "They will be asked to sign a statement that they must report to a police station twice a month. If they fail to do so, they will be given a further administrative punishment for not following police orders."

### ***- Increased state surveillance***

Being on the Preventive Register could cause increased state surveillance of an individual's relatives. "Police will demand that persons provide a copy of their house registry book to investigate to see if other persons residing in the same house have previous convictions or other problems with the authorities," the legal expert told Forum 18. "The police will also compile a list of their close relatives residing in other locations to see if they have problems with the authorities. They will also inform the police in those locations to keep the relatives under surveillance."

Police stations are known to already have displays of photographs of those the police should pay close attention to, including convicted criminals such as drug-dealers - but also including people convicted or suspected of exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief.

### ***- Increased vulnerability***

As many agencies are able to initiate placing individuals on the Preventive Register, from health care agencies to nature protection agencies, there are many possibilities for officials to arbitrarily arrange for people to stay on the Register for many years.

The legal expert noted that one particularly vulnerable group is people recovering from drug or alcohol addiction under care from health care agencies, who also find help in following a religion or belief. Such people are particularly vulnerable to being harassed by police and other officials using the Prevention Law as an excuse.

### ***Victims***

Uzbekistan continues to punish people for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. Such cases, which will from 15 August be formally also subject to the Prevention Law, are highly likely to continue.



In Samarkand [Samarqand] on 24 April at 1.30 pm ten officials from the NSS secret police and the ordinary police – including from the police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department - guided by a local police officer named Aziz (last name not known) broke into Galina Sirotina's private home. She was meeting with fellow members of the city's registered Presbyterian Church, local Christians who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 25 June.

The officials confiscated personal Bibles, New Testaments and mobile phones from Sirotina, Ella Tsoy, as well as Fatima and Fiala Kim. They claimed that they were confiscating the phones as "the Bible's text was recorded on the phones". The authorities have also been targeting the mobile phones of known devout Muslims. For example, in April Zoirjon Mirzayev was given a five year jail term for having recordings of Islamic sermons on his mobile (see F18News 2 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1954](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1954)).

The police who raided Sirotina's home then went to the Kims' home and confiscated their remaining six Russian-language Christian books and a song book, all of which were legally bought from the Bible Society in the capital Tashkent. Even such legally-bought books are routinely confiscated during police raids (see eg. F18News 6 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1925](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1925)).

Judge Bahodiyr Alikulov of Samarkand City Criminal Court imposed large fines on the Presbyterians on 18 June.

Fatima Kim and Galina Sirotina were each fined 50 times the minimum monthly salary or 4,805,250 Soms (about 12,500 Norwegian Kroner, 1,500 Euros, or 2,100 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). The two were fined under Administrative Code Articles 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons"), 240 ("Violation of the Religion Law"), 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").

Fiala Kim, Lyubov Fomina, Yelena Pavlenko and Tsoy were all fined 20 times the minimum monthly salary or 1,922,100 Soms each (about 5,200 Norwegian Kroner, 615 Euros, or 840 US Dollars) under Article 184-2.

Judge Alikulov also ordered that the confiscated Bibles, New Testaments, Christian books, and mobile phones be permanently confiscated. Courts routinely order that confiscated Muslim, Christian, Jehovah's Witness or other religious materials be destroyed (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Judge Alikulov did not answer his telephone on 1 July and the Head of the Court's Chancellery Aziz (who refused to give his last name) refused to discuss the case, stating that ""I am not the Judge but even the Judge will not answer you over the phone".

"They can only have a religious meeting inside their registered building"

Police officer Aziz (he refused to give his last name) who guided the officials on the raid defended the fines and confiscations. "Religious believers are allowed to gather and talk about their religion only in their communities' legally-registered addresses, but not outside those buildings or in private homes", he told Forum 18 on 1 July.

"They were punished based on our law", officer Aziz stated. Asked why police broke into a meeting and confiscated legal books and mobile phones, he claimed that "we as law-enforcement agencies have the right to check up on anyone and any activity, and the law

says they can only have a religious meeting inside their registered building".

Similarly, in Tashkent Region Almalyk City Criminal Court in June fined Dmitry Chaplin and one other member of the Almalyk Full Gospel Protestant Church 100 times the minimum monthly salary or 9,610,500 Soms (about 25,000 Norwegian Kroner, 3,000 Euros, or 4,200 US Dollars) and 80 times the minimum monthly salary or 7,688,400 Soms (about 20,000 Norwegian Kroner, 2,400 Euros, or 3,360 US Dollars) respectively. Both were fined for leading a meeting for worship without state permission in a private home, a local Christian who asked to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 26 June.

Officials during the raid and in court insisted that "no meetings can be held in private homes", and that "each household can have only one Bible".

Police and court officials refused to discuss this case with Forum 18.

Pressure to leave work "voluntarily"

Following fines imposed on seven Jehovah's Witnesses for exercising freedom of religion or belief, their fellow believers have told Forum 18 that the authorities attempted in February and March to force two of those fined to leave their work as teachers "voluntarily".

On 16 January Judge Abdullo Allayev of Bukhara Criminal Court fined three Jehovah's Witnesses from Bukhara, in central Uzbekistan, five times the minimum monthly salary or 480,525 Soms (about 1,300 Norwegian Kroner, 150 Euros, or 210 US Dollars) each.

Dilorom Norova, her son Sherzod Rakhimov and Elnora Maksutova were all fined under Administrative Code Articles 240 Part 1 ("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") and 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons").

Judge Allayev on 23 January also fined Dilorom Rakhmatova, Sanobar Bikmullina, Dilbar Muminova and Muminova's son Oybek Khasanov 480,525 Soms. All four were fined under Administrative Articles 184-2, 240 Part 1, 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").

Asked why he fined the seven Jehovah's Witnesses for exercising their right to freedoms of religion or belief, Judge Allayev on 1 July told Forum 18 that "if they are unhappy with the decisions they can complain to higher authorities".

After the fines, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 30 June that the Bukhara authorities "pressured Rakhmatova and Muminova by summoning them to Bukhara City Police several times between February and March".

The city's Education Department called a meeting of 80 teachers in various schools, including the secondary schools where Rakhmatova and Muminova teach. At that meeting officials "put the two teachers to shame and reproached them for their religious beliefs and activity".

The Headteachers of the schools the two work in tried to pressure the two into writing

letters of resignation "as though they voluntarily want to be dismissed from their jobs", but the two refused to do so. Both are still employed.

Sabokhat Khaydarova, Headteacher of School No.1 where Rakhmatova works, denied to Forum 18 on 1 July that she tried to pressure Rakhmatova into leaving her job "voluntarily". Asked why the Education Department publicly put Rakhmatova and Muminova to shame for their faith, Khaydarova stated that "I will not say to you anything over the phone" and then hung up the phone.

Erkin Nigmatov, Head of Bukhara City Education Department, on 2 July denied to Forum 18 that he or other officials publicly pilloried the two Jehovah's Witnesses. "We have religious freedoms in Uzbekistan", he claimed. When Forum 18 asking what exactly was discussed in the meeting, Nigmatov admitted that "there was a letter to us from the Court saying that these teachers were fined for unauthorized religious activity". He then stated that "therefore we summoned the teachers to discuss the issue that unauthorised religious activity is not allowed".

Asked why Headteachers of schools tried to pressure the two teachers into writing resignation letters, Nigmatov claimed to Forum 18 that if the two teachers write complaints to him "I will reprimand the Headteachers for this".

---

## **"To prevent illegal religious materials"**

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (13.05.2014) - A court in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent has fined both Grigory Kasparov and his wife Yelena for "illegally storing" Kasparov's Christian books in their private home. This was despite Yelena Kasparova refusing to sign a "confession" police attempted to force from her for this "offence". The verdict in Kasparov's case states that the books were destroyed even before the Court had found Kasparov "guilty" and decided what to do with the books. A court official admitted to Forum 18 News Service that bailiffs destroyed the books, but refused to state whether bailiffs are allowed to do this before a verdict. In another case, the NSS secret police and ordinary police have ignored a court order stating that they must return confiscated books and other material. In the Kasparov case the court verdict states the fine followed "investigation and search operations with the purpose to prevent illegal religious materials". In a very similar recent case, the verdict states that the NSS secret police conducted "an operation ... to identify persons who illegally store religious materials".

Uzbekistan continues to punish the exercise of freedom of religion or belief by people having "illegal" religious literature in their homes, and confiscating such "illegally stored" literature, Forum 18 News Service notes.

Mirzo-Ulugbek District Criminal Court in the capital Tashkent on 25 March fined Grigory Kasparov of the officially registered Full Gospel Pentecostal Church for "illegally storing" his own Christian books in his private home. On 11 April his wife Yelena Kasparova was fined for the same "offence", despite refusing to sign a "confession" police attempted to force from her. The verdict in Kasparov's case states that the books were destroyed even before the Court had found Kasparov "guilty" and decided what to do with the books.

The authorities in Tashkent's Khamza District, despite a 26 December 2013 order from the District Court, have still not returned religious literature to the Full Gospel Church. It had been confiscated from Pastor Mikhail Neizvestny, who was also fined for "illegally storing" the literature.

### ***Tight censorship***

In defiance of its international human rights obligations, Uzbekistan imposes a strict censorship regime imposing severe limitations on access to religious literature, including the reading of the Bible and Koran in private homes and arbitrary destruction of literature found in frequent raids. Courts frequently order confiscated religious literature – including Muslim, Christian and Jehovah's Witness literature – to be destroyed (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Censorship is also imposed on devices such as mobile phones. For example, Zoirjon Mirzayev was given a five-year prison term in April for having Islamic sermons on his mobile phone (see F18News 2 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1954](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1954)).

### ***"To prevent illegal religious materials"***

On the evening of 17 March police searched Deacon Kasparov's home, describing this in the court verdict in his case as "investigation and search operations with the purpose to prevent illegal religious materials". Police found what they described as "illegally stored religious materials" - 19 Christian books including a songbook, and two computer hard discs. These were all confiscated.

On 25 March Deacon Kasparov was fined 50 times the minimum monthly wage, 4,805,250 Soms (about 12,500 Norwegian Kroner, 1,500 Euros, or 2,100 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate) by Judge Otabek Bazarov of Mirzo-Ulugbek District Criminal Court. He was convicted of "illegally storing" religious literature in his home under the Code of Administrative Code Offences' Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons").

Kasparov told the Court that he did not know that his books were "illegal", and that he had not intended to distribute them.

Begzod Kadyrov of the government's Religious Affairs Committee has previously insisted to Forum 18 that "according to the Religion Law, religious books are only allowed to be read within registered religious communities' buildings" (see F18News 12 September 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1875](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1875)).

It remains unclear whether police knew Kasparov possessed books, or whether they were randomly searching for "evidence" to convict him of exercising the human rights the state is obliged under international law to protect. Close surveillance of all religious communities by the National Security Service (NSS) secret police, using a wide variety of open and covert methods including the recruitment of informers, is a standard part of Uzbekistan's mechanism of repression (see eg. F18News 5 September 2007 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1014](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1014)).

In another very similar recent case, the verdict explicitly states that the NSS secret police conducted "an operation .. to identify persons who illegally store religious materials" (see below).

### ***Books destroyed before verdict reached***

The Kasparov verdict, which Forum 18 has a copy of, states that the confiscated

materials were already destroyed - i.e. before the Court issued the verdict. However, it does not say who destroyed them, which state body ordered the destruction, and exactly when the books were destroyed.

On 12 May a court official who identified himself as Judge Bazarov's Assistant (but refused to give his name) told Forum 18 that the court bailiffs destroyed the books. When Forum 18 pointed out that the verdict states that the books were destroyed before the verdict and asked whether bailiffs are allowed to do this before a verdict, he did not reply and then asked Forum 18 to send further questions in writing.

Officials often act against Uzbekistan's published law with impunity. For example, bailiffs in the central Samarkand Region on 26 March confiscated a car, a vacuum cleaner and other household items from two families beyond the legally-defined deadline for such punishments

(see F18News 9 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1957](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1957)).

### ***No "confession", no evidence, yet still fined***

On 11 April Kasparov's wife Yelena Kasparova was summoned to the local Mirzo-Ulugbek District Police Station by police Captain Ravshan Kayumov. He demanded that she write a statement and sign a police report accusing herself of "illegally" storing religious literature in her home.

Kasparova refused to sign the police report, telling Captain Kayumov that her husband had already been punished for the same "offence," a local Protestant who wished to remain anonymous told Forum 18 on 2 May. Despite this, Captain Kayumov asked Mirzo-Ulugbek District Criminal Court to impose an administrative fine. The Court rejected this on 11 April, but subsequently fined Kasparova one month's minimum wage, 96,105 Soms (about 250 Norwegian Kroner, 30 Euros, or 40 US Dollars). She was, like her husband, convicted under Administrative Code Article 184-2. She has paid the fine.

The same Court under Judge Tymur Kasymov on 7 April imposed the same fine for "illegally storing religious literature" on Vera Raupova, a member of the local Bethany Baptist Church. Her "offence" was to have Christian books in her home.

Captain Kayumov was asked by Forum 18 on 8 May why he opened a case against Kasparova. The Captain claimed that "she lives in the same home with her husband, and also carries responsibility for the illegal storage of the books". Asked why he tried to compel her to write a statement and sign the police report, he stated: "She did not write any statements neither did she sign the report."

Asked why Kasparova was punished, he referred Forum 18 to the Court. Captain Kayumov refused to say when and under what charges Kasparova had been fined. "They can complain if they want," he insisted to Forum 18 before declining to discuss the case further.

Women in particular are often targeted by officials for pressure. This can include torture by a variety of formal and informal methods, and the threat of this including rape threats (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***"I cannot answer these questions"***

Judge Bazarov was asked by Forum 8 on 8 May why he gave such a heavy fine to Kasparov for keeping his Bible and other Christian books in his home, and why the Court also fined his wife Kasparova for the same "offence. He replied that "I cannot answer these questions over the phone. You need to come to the Court". He then claimed that

he was busy and refused to answer further questions on who destroyed the books and on what authority this was done. Subsequent calls to Bazarov went unanswered.

Judge Bazarov's Assistant also refused to answer Forum 18's questions, including why Kasparova was fined with no evidence of "guilt".

### ***Court order to return books confiscated by NSS and police ignored***

On 26 December 2013 Judge Mukhtarama Turgunova of Tashkent's Khamza District Court ordered the transfer of religious material confiscated from Full Gospel Pentecostal Church Pastor Mikhail Neizvestny to his Church. At the same time Neizvestny was fined for on 19 December "illegally storing" religious literature. He was fined 10 times the minimum monthly wage, or 961,050 Soms (about 2,500 Norwegian Kroner, 300 Euros, or 400 US Dollars), under Administrative Code Article 184-2.

The verdict, which Forum 18 has a copy of, states that the NSS secret police was involved "in the course of an operation by Khamza District Police and the District NSS with the purpose to identify persons who illegally store religious materials". The ordinary police and NSS secret police "detected that citizen Neizvestny, pastor of a Church, kept in his home various religious materials". They then confiscated 32 Christian books, 4 magazines, 72 DVD and CD discs, 10 booklets, 2 notebooks, and 250 leaflets.

The authorities have still not transferred the confiscated material to the Church. The continued refusal to return the material is despite the Pastor paying the fine on 6 January 2014 – Forum 18 has seen a stamped copy of the payment receipt – and the Church sending two letters to Khamza District Prosecutor's Office and District Police asking for the books' return. No reply to the letters has been received.

### ***No answers***

Forum 18 asked Khamza Prosecutor's Office why the confiscated materials have not yet been returned to the Church and when they will be returned. An official who identified himself as the Chief Inspector but would not give his name told Forum 18 on 8 May that "we will look into the case and write a response to the Church".

Judge Turgunova's Assistant, who also refused to give his name, on 12 May told Forum 18 the Judge is "not available" for comments, and refused to say why Neizvestny cannot keep his own Christian books in his home.

Sanjar Haknazarov, Head of the Court's Chancellery, on 12 May also refused to say what happened to the books or when they will be returned.

---

## **"Let him pay the fine and we'll return the car"**

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (09.05.2014) - Court bailiffs in Uzbekistan's central Samarkand Region admit they confiscated a car, a vacuum cleaner and other household items from two families beyond the legally-defined deadline. "We and our colleagues can't keep up with the volume of work, so we were a bit late with these confiscations," bailiff Sadriddin Salahuddinov admitted to Forum 18 News Service. The seizures came after the two Baptists refused to pay fines imposed in 2012 to punish them for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief. "Let him pay the fine and we'll return the car to him," the bailiff added about Veniamin Nemirov. Meanwhile, 15 police and other officials raided a

church's Sunday meeting for worship in a home in Syrdarya. "When the officials broke in they were preparing a dinner, and getting ready to celebrate the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem," Baptists lamented to Forum 18. Police officer Oybek Turdiyev, who took part in the raid, told Forum 18 that they "received an instruction from above to go to check up on the gathering."

The authorities in Uzbekistan's central Samarkand Region confiscated a car, a vacuum cleaner and other home appliances from two private homes of members of a local Baptist Church, church members complained to Forum 18 News Service. The seizures came for unpaid fines given in 2012 for unregistered religious activity and teaching religion "illegally". One of the court bailiffs admitted to Forum 18 that the seizures were illegal as they occurred after the one-year deadline for punishing non-payment.

In late April, just weeks after the seizures, four members of the two families and another church member were given further fines for teaching religion "illegally".

Elsewhere in Syrdarya Region, 15 officials in mid-April raided and disrupted the celebration of the Easter week and shared meal of the local Baptist Church held in the private home of a church member. Police also confiscated religious literature from the home. The Baptists told Forum 18 that the authorities are preparing fines against their members (see below).

Uzbekistan insists – in defiance of its international human rights obligations – that only registered religious communities are allowed to hold meetings for worship or to teach religion even to their own members. Fines and other punishments are frequently handed down to those who exercise their freedom of religion or belief in ways the authorities regard as "illegal"

(see Forum 18's religious freedom survey of Uzbekistan [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Property seized for non-payment of fines***

Samarkand City Court Bailiffs Sadriddin Salahuddinov and Mamur Yuldashev seized property from two family homes of local members of a Council of Churches Baptist congregation fined in October 2012. Council of Churches Baptists refuse to seek state permission before they meet for worship.

On 26 March the two bailiffs came to the private home of Alisher Abdullayev, Baptists told Forum 18 on 5 May. They were accompanied by two witnesses, workers of the Mahalla committee (residential administration). The bailiffs confiscated a vacuum cleaner, electric heater and mobile phone. "These are indispensable for the everyday life of the Abdullayevs, who have six minor children," the Baptists lamented.

The bailiffs seized the household items in the absence of Abdullayev, and did not provide a copy of the official report of the confiscation to Abdullayev's wife, Oksana Abdullayeva.

On 7 April the same two bailiffs came to the home of Veniamin Nemirov in his absence. Despite his wife Yelena Nemirova's request to wait for him, court bailiffs Salahuddinov and Yuldashev seized the family car, a 1987 Russian-built Moskvich.

Confiscation of the car is "unjust", Baptists complained to Forum 18. "Veniamin Nemirov has a large family with 12 children and a very low income." The bailiffs told Nemirova that the confiscation was done because her husband did not pay the administrative fine given to him on 11 October 2012.

On that date, Nemirov and Abdullayev were fined together with another church member Lyubov Lyubivaya

(see F18News 29 November 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1773](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1773)).

### ***"We were late with the confiscation, but so what?"***

"What the bailiffs did was illegal," Nemirov complained to Forum 18 from Samarkand on 6 May. He pointed out that the one year time limitation to pay the fines expired in October 2013, and any confiscation or other penalty for non-payment must be given during that period. "Already roughly one and half years passed from the time of the Court decision, when the bailiffs made the confiscation," he lamented.

Bailiff Salahuddinov insisted to Forum 18 from Samarkand on 8 May that the confiscation was "lawful". "Though we confiscated the car, it is still in Nemirov's name. Let him pay the fine and we'll return the car to him." Asked why he and his colleague Yuldashev confiscated Nemirov's and Abdullayev's property after the time limit had expired, bailiff Salahuddinov contradicted his earlier claims that the seizures were lawful. "We and our colleagues can't keep up with the volume of work, so we were a bit late with these confiscations," he admitted to Forum 18.

Asked why the authorities took such harsh measures to punish them, Salahuddinov told Forum 18: "What's the problem here? They violated the law, and that's why they are punished."

Asked why he, a state official, finds no problem with violating legal procedures but justifies punishment given to individuals simply for praying and practicing their faith, Salahuddinov admitted: "Yes, we were late with the confiscation, but so what?" He then took Forum 18's details, but declined to discuss the confiscations further.

### ***New fines***

Just weeks after the property seizures over the unpaid 2012 fines, five church members - Nemirov and his wife Nemirova, Abdullayev and his wife Abdullayeva, as well as Lyubivaya - were again brought to Samarkand City Criminal Court. All were accused of violating Administrative Code Article 241. This punishes: "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". Punishments range from fines of 5 to 10 times the minimum monthly wage, or administrative arrest for up to 15 days.

On 28 April 2014, Judge Zafar Khalikulov fined each of them ten times the minimum monthly wage, 961,050 Soms (2,500 Norwegian Kroner, 300 Euros or 420 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). "We have not been provided a copy of the Court decision so far," Nemirov told Forum 18.

"We are not meeting in my home to teach religion as the Judge qualified under Article 241, but for prayer and Bible reading as is in our Baptist tradition," Nemirov complained. He said the five were fined even though neither he nor the other four wrote any statements or signed any police reports. He believes that the authorities are specifically targeting him, Abdullayev and Lyubivaya. "They see us as active participants of unregistered religious meetings."

### ***Repeated raids and repeated punishments***

The April fines on the five came as a result of the Anti-terrorism police raid on Nemirov's home during Sunday worship on 9 March (see F18News 18 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1938](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1938)).



As in August 2012, the Police raided his home, seized religious literature, and filmed and harassed his fellow believers present in his home.

Nemirov insisted to Forum 18 that neither he, his wife nor the three other church members will pay the fines. "We don't consider we violated any laws by praying in our home."

Nemirov had been fined 50 times the minimum monthly wage following the August 2012 raid on the church. Two other church members were also fined (see F18News 29 November 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1773](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1773)).

He had also been fined 10 times the minimum monthly wage in September 2010 (see F18News 26 October 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1503](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1503)).

### ***Meeting raided, literature seized***

Meanwhile on the evening of 13 April, authorities in the eastern Syrdarya Region raided the Sunday celebration and shared meal of the local Baptist Church. The meeting for worship was to mark Palm Sunday, one week before Easter. The congregation is one of many that does not have state registration but which belongs to the state-registered Baptist Union.

Fifteen officials, including three criminal police officers, Shukhrat Nazarov of the Regional Police, Oybek Turdiyev and Bekzod Yusupov of Syrdarya District Police, broke into the private house of church member Andrei Shevchenko, where the congregation was meeting. Also present were his wife Galina Shevchenko and eight other adult church members, together with their 12 children.

The Baptists complained that the officials climbed over the fence around the house and disrupted the church's celebration. "When the officials broke in they were preparing a dinner, and getting ready to celebrate the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem," Baptists lamented to Forum 18.

Officials seized a Bible, two children's Bibles, ten Christian song books, four children's song books, one notebook for piano lessons, four notebooks with personal notes, one video-cassette tape of a Christian children's cartoon, and ten pages of notes with Bible citations on them from the home, Baptists complained.

Officers then took all the adults and children present in the home to Syrdarya District Police, where they compelled them to write statements. Under pressure from officers, Stanislav Shegai, Nadezhda Matrosova, Sergei Yermakov and Aleksandr Kolomeytsev wrote statements. Others refused to write statements or sign the police reports.

### ***Police "received instruction from above"***

Officer Turdiyev of Syrdarya District Police defended the raid. The Baptists gathered together for prayer and Bible reading, which "according to our Law is not allowed", he told Forum 18 on 8 May. "If people want to pray they can go and do it inside churches and mosques which are officially allowed." Asked where exactly in the law this is written, Turdiyev responded: "If Shevchenko prayed and read his Bible alone in his home it would not be a problem."

Asked why the authorities did not allow individuals, such as the Baptists, to mark a religious festival in their homes, why they have to register for that, and whether he does not think it is a violation of their rights for the police to disturb such a sacred celebration, Turdiyev did not answer. He repeated his previous response that the Baptists "need to go to Tashkent or where they have a registered church, and do it there."

Asked how he and his colleagues determined that the Baptists were there not to have a common meal but have religious activity, Officer Turdiyev said that they "received an instruction from above to go to check up on the gathering." He refused to say who gave the instruction, and what punishments are being prepared against the Baptists.

Asked about the case, officers of Syrdarya Regional Police's Criminal Investigations Division told Forum 18 on 8 May that they do "not know any Officer named Shukhrat Nazarov" but that Officer "Shukhrat Babayev is working" for them, and referred Forum 18 to him. Officer Babayev told Forum 18 he did not participate in the raid but took down the details of the case, and asked to "call back in one or two hours." Subsequent calls went unanswered.

The authorities are preparing administrative fines under Administrative Code Article 184-2 (illegal import, production, distribution, storage of religious materials) and Article 240 (violation of the Religion Law) against several members of the Syrdarya congregation present when the authorities raided the meeting for worship.

"At the moment Syrdarya Police is waiting for the expert analysis [of the seized literature] from the State Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent." As many as ten adults may receive fines soon, the Baptists complained.

---

## **Another 5 year prison term for sermons in mobile**

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18 News Service

Forum 18 (02.05.2014) - Nine years after he moved to Russia to find work, Zoirjon Mirzayev was arrested at a Tashkent Region train station on his return to his native Uzbekistan after customs officials found 29 recordings of Muslim sermons in his mobile phone. The Religious Affairs Committee said the recordings were "extremist" and on 8 April Mirzayev received a five-year prison term, according to the verdict seen by Forum 18 News Service. Assistant Prosecutor B. Kamilov, who led the case in court, told Forum 18 "it's the minimum punishment that we could ask the court for". He was unable to say who had banned the sermons as "extremist" and when. "The sentence is not just and Mirzayev's relatives are preparing to file an appeal," human rights defender Surat Ikramov told Forum 18. Uzbek citizen I. Yagmurov was arrested on similar grounds at Tashkent airport and is awaiting trial, but officials refused to tell Forum 18 what charges he faces.

Uzbekistan authorities continue to prevent any spread of religious materials outside strict state control. In early April, another five-year prison term for smuggling "illegal" Muslim recordings on a mobile phone was handed down in Tashkent Region, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Officials have told Forum 18 that another citizen returning to Uzbekistan also faces court hearings on similar charges, but they refused to say if these are criminal or administrative charges.

Inspections for religious materials continue at airports and other border crossings, train stations, on the street as well as in individuals' private homes. Muslims and Christians have told Forum 18 in the recent past that their computers and mobile phones, including external memory devices, are thoroughly checked at airports and land borders when they depart from or arrive in Uzbekistan.

A growing number of individuals are being detained at Uzbek customs posts for "illegal"

religious works and recordings. Tajik citizen Zuboyd Mirzorakhimov was arrested in September 2013 for having verses from the Koran and an Uzbek-language sermon on his mobile phone. The following month he was given a five year prison term – two to be in jail and three suspended. Three other Tajik citizens were freed in February 2014 after being detained without charge on similar grounds (see F18News 25 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1942](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1942)).

Meanwhile, Protestants across Uzbekistan have received fines for "illegally storing" Christian books and materials in their homes. Also two Baptists' homes in Samarkand were raided, and their property confiscated by Court Bailiffs for unpaid fines, which were given in 2012, and which according to the Baptists must have expired back in 2013 (see F18News 9 May 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1954](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1954)).

### ***Five-year prison term***

27-year old Zoirjon Mirzayev, originally from Fergana Region in eastern Uzbekistan, was returning from Russia where he had been working since 2005. He was stopped on 19 January 2014 at Keles Train station in Tashkent Region on board the Moscow to Tashkent train. "Customs officials, who were specifically looking for religious messages or texts on passengers' phones, found sermons on Mirzayev's phone," human rights defender Surat Ikramov told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 29 April.

Mirzayev was then arrested, and the recordings were sent for "expert analysis" to the State Religious Affairs Committee. It ruled on 23 January – four days after his arrest – that they were "extremist".

On 8 April Judge Kosymjon Mukhamedjanov of Tashkent Region's Okkurgan District Criminal Court sentenced Mirzayev, a Muslim, under Criminal Code Article 246, Part 1, for "illegally smuggling into Uzbekistan sermons and speeches on his phone which are banned in Uzbekistan." He was given a five-year ordinary regime prison term, according to the verdict seen by Forum 18.

Article 246, Part 1 punishes "Smuggling – that is carriage through the customs border of the Republic of Uzbekistan, without the knowledge of or with concealment from customs control, using false documentation or means of customs identification, as well as coupled with non-declaration or with declaration under false name of virulent, poisonous, toxic, radioactive, explosive substances, explosive assemblies, armaments, firearms, or ammunition, as well as narcotic or psychotropic substances, or materials that promote religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism." Punishment is a prison sentence of five to ten years.

The decision says that - based on the State Religious Affairs Committee's "expert analysis" - the "materials on Mirzayev's phone, which included 29 sermons by Abduvali Kori [Mirzayev], Kobil Kori and Khairullo Hamidov, are extremist."

Ikramov notes that Mirzayev's phone also contained sermons by Obidkhon Nazarov [Obid Kori]. He said all of these were Muslim preachers "Uzbekistan's authorities punished and banned in the past. The sentence is not just and Mirzayev's relatives are preparing to file an appeal."

### ***"Minimum punishment we could ask the court for"***

Mirzayev's case was initially endorsed by Prosecutor M. Muzaffarov of Tashkent Regional Transport Prosecutor's Office. However, in the 8 April hearing the prosecution was represented by B. Kamilov, Assistant Prosecutor of Tashkent Region's Okkurgan District.

The indictment endorsed by Prosecutor Muzaffarov on 28 February and signed by

Lieutenant N. Iskandarova, Investigator of Tashkent Transport Police, seen by Forum 18, reads that the case was opened on 29 January under Criminal Code Article 246, Part 1. Mirzayev was charged with "concealing the smuggling" of his phone by "not indicating in the customs declaration" that he carried a mobile phone, which had "illegal religious information" on it.

The indictment says that Mirzayev told Investigator Iskandarova during the pre-trial investigation that the religious recordings were already on the phone when he bought it in 2013 from a Kyrgyz citizen in Russia. Mirzayev told the investigation that he listened to the sermons after he discovered them on the phone, but did not know that they were banned in Uzbekistan.

Asked why the prosecution asked for such harsh punishment for Mirzayev simply for having sermons on his phone, Assistant Prosecutor Kamilov (he refused to give his first name) insisted to Forum 18 on 30 April that "it's the minimum punishment that we could ask the court for under this Article." Told that Mirzayev insisted he had bought the phone with the recordings already on it, and that he was not aware that the sermons were banned in Uzbekistan, Kamilov dismissed Forum 18's questions. "If you are not happy with the decision, you or Mirzayev's relatives can file an appeal." He then put the phone down.

Mirzayev is still being held at Tashkent's Detention Centre No. 1 (popularly known as "Tashtyurma" - Tashkent prison), relatives of Mirzayev, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 30 April. They have not been able to see him since officials told them he is "under quarantine". Mirzayev is likely to be transferred to labour camp to serve his sentence.

### ***Appeal obstructed***

"We could not lodge an appeal so far because all six [state registered] defence lawyers in Fergana Region refused to take on the case to file an appeal," Mirzayev's relatives lamented to Forum 18. The lawyers claimed to the relatives that they could not take on the case because Mirzayev "admitted" to the investigators his guilt by saying that he knew that religious messages were on his phone but did not indicate that in his customs declaration.

When relatives pressed the lawyers as to the real reasons for their refusal to take on the case, some admitted that they "just do not want to deal with this case," without giving any specifics. The relatives, for the safety of the lawyers, did not give the lawyers' names.

The relatives insisted to Forum 18 that Mirzayev is not a smuggler or extremist. "He is a Muslim, like most of us, who believes in God but does not know how to perform the namaz prayer and did not attend mosque regularly. We want to save him but don't know who to write a complaint to and who can help us to defend him."

On 2 May an official who answered Judge Mukhamedjanov's number introduced himself as Judge Mukhamedjanov. Told about the 8 April decision, and asked whether Abduvali Mirzayev, Obid Nazarov and Khairullo Hamidov's works are banned in Uzbekistan, he responded "No, I don't know." Asked how then he could give a five-year prison term to Mirzayev, he claimed that he is not Judge Mukhamedjanov, and that he is the Judge's secretary Bahodiyar Nazarov. He told Forum 18 to call back in an hour. Called back an hour later the female official who had answered the phone on previous days said that both Judge Mukhamedjanov and his secretary are busy and cannot answer the call.

### ***"Banned" sermons***

Kobil kori is a prominent Tashkent imam, whose recordings circulate widely.

Abduvali Mirzayev (not known to have been related to Zoirjon) was an imam in Andijan [Andijon] in eastern Uzbekistan, whose recorded sermons became popular among Muslims across the country. He "disappeared" with his assistant at Tashkent Airport in 1995 and has never been seen again. Nazarov was a Tashkent-based imam who fled Uzbekistan in 1998. He gained asylum in Sweden in 2006. In February 2012 he was shot in the Swedish town of Strömsund in what some think was an assassination attempt initiated by the Uzbek authorities. He remains in a coma. Hamidov was a Muslim radio journalist and sports commentator sentenced to six years in jail in June 2010 (see F18News 26 November 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1900](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1900)).

"The sermons of Abduvali Kori and Obid Kori were freely sold in Uzbekistan until the late 1990s," Ikramov told Forum 18. "Many people bought these recordings and transferred them onto their phones and other devices. Many Uzbeks, especially those who have been outside Uzbekistan for some time, are not aware that they were banned, and that they may get into trouble with these sermons."

Ikramov added that Hamidov was not a Muslim cleric "but he also fell out of favour with the authorities, and after his arrest, I guess his works became 'extremist' for the authorities."

However, Ikramov said that he is not aware of any court decision or other official decision banning these individuals' religious writings or recordings. "Maybe in various cases, the authorities base their decisions on the expert analysis of the Religious Affairs Committee," he added.

Ikramov added that he personally has not read or seen anything extremist in the sermons of Imams Mirzayev or Nazarov. He also said that as a journalist himself, he was shocked when fellow journalist Hamidov was arrested, because he neither preached nor said anything extremist, and nor did he speak against the government. "He is a highly educated, intelligent person, and a very interesting sports commentator. People still say good things about him."

### ***When and who banned Imams' and journalist's sermons?***

Asked why she opened the case against Mirzayev, Investigator Iskandarova insisted to Forum 18 on 1 May that "banned extremist religious information was found on his phone". Asked when and by whom the sermons of Imams Mirzayev and Nazarov and Muslim journalist Hamidov were banned, she refused to say. "Send an official letter," she said and then put the phone down.

Assistant Prosecutor Kamilov also told Forum 18 that Mirzayev was arrested "because banned religious extremist messages of Abduvali Kori, Obid Kori and Khairullo Hamidov were found on his phone." He was unable to tell Forum 18 when and by which authority the authors' sermons and works were banned.

Uzbekistan's Supreme Court and State Religious Affairs Committee officials also refused to tell Forum 18 on 1 May whether and if so, when and by which authority the works of the authors were banned.

Bahodiy (he did not give his last name), Assistant of Sobytjon Sharipov, head of the Religious Affairs Committee's "Expert Analysis" Department, declined to respond to Forum 18's question by phone and asked it to send the question in writing. Forum 18 sent the question in writing on 1 May but had received no answer by the afternoon in Tashkent on 2 May.

Supreme Court officials referred Forum 18 to its Chancellery. The official there who answered the phone (who refused to give his name) refused to tell Forum 18 whether or when such a ban was issued. "If the defendant does not like the decision, he can appeal to the District Court." He then put the phone down.

### ***Tashkent Airport detention***

Detained by customs officials at Tashkent Airport was I. Yagmurov (first name not given), according to a 5 April article posted on the State Customs Committee website. An Uzbek citizen, Yagmurov was travelling from Russia's Kaliningrad Region to Tashkent and "had a mobile phone which contained religious materials". It said his case was being investigated.

The article does not specify what the materials were, though it says they were confirmed as illegal by the Religious Affairs Committee. Nor does it specify which religious community Yagmurov belongs to or what punishment he might have received.

Investigator Aliyev (he did not give his first name) of the Customs Department at Tashkent Airport confirmed to Forum 18 on 2 May that a case was opened against Yagmurov for "carrying illegal Muslim religious materials on his phone". He said the case had been handed to court and a hearing is due. Asked whether the charges were brought under Criminal Code Article 246, he said "No." Aliyev refused to say what court will hear the case, when the hearing will be, if the case is criminal or administrative, or whether Yagmurov is currently in pre-trial detention.

Investigator Aliyev said that when customs officers detect "illegal" religious materials, Customs Investigation Departments open cases based on an "expert analysis" of the materials by the State Religious Affairs Committee.

### ***Mass confiscations of religious literature***

The State Customs Committee has confiscated more than 13,600 pieces of religious literature across the country at airports and other customs posts since the beginning of 2014 in 284 separate incidents, the 5 April article also notes.

The article boasts about the successful prevention by the authorities of the free distribution of religious information, as hinted in the title "shattering the illusions" of those who wanted to import or transfer religious information on mobile devices. It cites the 1997 Presidential Decree on "Additional measures of enhancing export of goods (works, services)," which states that "import into Uzbekistan of (..) print products, manuscripts, pictures, photographs, photo-films, negatives, movie, video, and audio products, audio materials, aimed at undermining of State and public order, violation of territorial integrity, of political independence and state sovereignty, which propagate (..) religious hatred (..) is banned." It adds that according to the Religion Law, "delivery and sale of religious literature produced abroad" can only take place after it has been subjected to "expert analysis".

The article laments that "despite the measures taken", "illegal import" of religious literature into Uzbekistan continues.

### ***Investigations for "illegally" importing religious materials***

The Customs Committee article also laments that Tashkent City Post Office customs officials "often come across citizens living abroad, who attempt to send religious publications to the addresses of residents of our Republic." It says such materials are

confiscated at the Post Office. It adds that the cases are being investigated, but gave no specific details.

Confiscated were two consignments of 48 copies of "Holy Scriptures" sent from Germany, one to A. Kalitovskaya and the other to A. Morozov (first names not given).

Inspector Kafarova (who did not give her first name) of Uzbekistan's International Post Office in Tashkent told Forum 18 on 2 May that the publications sent to Kalitovskaya and Morozov were Jehovah's Witnesses literature. She refused to tell Forum 18 what charges were brought against the two individuals and other details of the cases, and referred Forum 18 to Tashkent City Customs Department.

---

## **"Those who accepted other religions may not be buried in same cemetery with Muslims"**

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (25.04.2014) - When Protestant Christian Gayrat Buriyev died on 9 April in a village near Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent, the local Imam – backed by the head of the district administration – refused to allow him to be buried in the state-owned village cemetery because he was not a Muslim, the imam and officials confirmed to Forum 18 News Service. "The cemetery is state property, but is under the management of the local Mosque, and if the Imam is against the burial then it will not take place," officials told relatives.

In two similar cases in Karakalpakstan Autonomous Republic in northwestern Uzbekistan, officials forced the families of two Protestant women who died in February to bury them in the local Russian Orthodox cemetery after the imam blocked their burial in the state-owned cemetery. "Those who accepted other religions may not be buried in the same cemetery with Muslims," a local official told Forum 18.

Authorities in Karakalpakstan in particular have made burial difficult for deceased non-Muslims, or even for deceased Muslims who have non-Muslim close relatives. They have also used the threat of burial denial to deter individuals from joining non-Muslim faiths.

No non-Muslim or non-Russian Orthodox religious communities are allowed to gain state registration in Karakalpakstan. This means the state authorities have disregarded their attempts to gain their own cemetery.

In Central Asian culture, being buried together with other relatives and with the participation of the local community are important. Families of those refused burial in the local cemetery or without wide community participation are regarded as social outcasts. Ethnic Uzbeks and Karakalpaks regard Russian Orthodox cemeteries as belonging to a foreign community.

### ***Cemeteries "belong to state"***

Jasur (who declined to give his last name), an official of Uzbekistan's human rights Ombudsperson's Office, insisted that cemeteries "belong to the state". He told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 25 April that he was not aware of the recent burial problems but said that members of the communities "should ask the local Administrations if such problems

arise". He could not say whether the Ombudsperson's Office will give its support to solve such burial problems. He then declined to talk to Forum 18 further.

(Uzbekistan's Ombudsperson's Office is not accredited with the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights as compliant with the Paris Principles on the independence of such national human rights bodies from government.)

An official of the Nationalities and Religions Department of the Presidential Administration in Tashkent (who declined to give her name) refused to comment on the burial denials on 25 April or put Forum 18 through to any officials. When Forum 18 asked to whom members of religious communities affected can address their complaints, she put the phone down.

### ***Tashkent Region burial denial***

Tashkent Region's Urtachirchik District authorities on 9 April prevented members of a local Protestant Church from burying deceased 68-year old Buriyev's body in one of the cemeteries in the village of Tuyabuguz, some 30 kms (20 miles) from Tashkent, fellow Protestants from Tashkent, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 21 April.

On the day of his death, after collecting the necessary documents for his burial, Buriyev's family tried to bury him in the local cemetery where his relatives were buried. However, local Imam Abdumalik Abdusattarov prevented them from doing so.

"The imam cursed the family for becoming Christians and insulted them with unquotable expressions, branding them unclean and defiled infidels," Protestants complained to Forum 18. When the family asked why they cannot bury the deceased where other relatives are buried, the Imam told them he is "acting based on Islamic Sharia Law". The family "tried to explain to him that Uzbekistan is a secular state and that the cemetery is state property," but the Imam "continued cursing them, and drove them out telling them he will not allow the burial in the cemetery."

Both the District Police and Prosecutor's Office refused to intervene, despite a request from relatives and Church members. That evening, relatives visited Bektemir Ibrahimov, Hokim (Head) of the District Administration, to complain and seek his support for the burial. Ibrahimov instead summoned Imam Abdusattarov and Jamoliddin Turanov, the District Mufti, to discuss the issue. The discussion went on until 11 pm but in the end Ibrahimov and Mufti Turanov supported Imam Abdusattarov's refusal.

Imam Abdusattarov "cursed the relatives even in Hokim Ibrahimov's presence", Tashkent Protestants complained to Forum 18. Ibrahimov then advised the family to bury Buriyev in the village's Russian Orthodox cemetery. Buriyev's relatives felt they had little choice and buried him there the following day, where a place was allotted them "in the corner far from the other graves".

### ***Sharia law or secular laws?***

Ibrahimov, Urtachirchik District Administration's Head, declined to tell Forum 18 on 22 April whether religious affairs in his District are governed by Sharia law or secular laws. Asked why a leader of one religious community is deciding who should and who should not be buried in the cemetery, which is state property, he responded: "I am in a meeting with fifty people and can't answer your questions at the moment." Asked when would be convenient for Forum 18 to call back, he replied: "I cannot answer such questions over



the phone, you need to come by my office so we could talk." He then put the phone down.

Imam Abdusattarov vehemently defended his decision to block the burial of Buriyev in the state-owned village cemetery. "He was a sectarian, a Jehovah's Witness, and he read the Injil [Uzbek-language New Testament] and not the Koran," he insisted to Forum 18 on 23 April. "So he couldn't be buried in a Muslim cemetery."

Told that the cemetery is state property, and asked why a person whose relatives were buried in the cemetery cannot also be buried there, and asked whether religious affairs in the District are governed by Sharia law, he replied: "We are a democratic state, and affairs are governed by state laws." Asked why an individual, regardless of their faith, cannot be buried next to their relatives, Abdusattarov repeated his previous insistence "because it is a Muslim cemetery". Asked why he was deciding who should and who should not be buried in the cemetery, he replied, "because it is a democracy."

### ***"Unclean and defiled infidels"***

Tashkent Protestants complained to Forum 18 that Imam Abdusattarov has been speaking locally for some time against Buriyev's family "saying that they are Jehovah's Witnesses and infidels, and that no one should associate with them or talk to them." They lamented that the authorities have failed to intervene. "Who will guarantee their safety? This is trampling on human dignity and any kind of human rights," they complained.

Asked why he called the Buriyev family unclean and defiled infidels, Imam Abdusattarov told Forum 18: "Because they left Islam for another religion. And it is not just them. I already preached in our Mosque that anybody who leaves Islam to join Jehovah's Witnesses or another religion is an infidel, and cannot be buried in our cemetery." Asked who can guarantee that someone who heard his message might not harm the Buriyev family, he replied: "I can. It's true that in a Muslim country run by Sharia law such a person can be hanged, but not in Uzbekistan."

Rasul Matkhalikov, Deputy Prosecutor of Urtachirchik District, refused to say whether the Prosecutor's Office would investigate whether Imam Abdusattarov's remarks constituted incitement of religious hatred, a crime under Criminal Code Article 156. "I don't have the competence to talk to you over the phone," he told Forum 18 on 25 April. "Please send your questions in writing." He then put the phone down.

"Muslims go to a Mosque, and Christians should attend the Russian Orthodox Church"

Told that Buriyev and his family belong to a Protestant Church and are not Jehovah's Witnesses, and asked why he misinformed the public, Imam Abdusattarov insisted: "Muslims go to a mosque, and Christians should go to the Russian Orthodox Church, but the Buriyevs do neither." Asked why other non-Orthodox Christians should attend the Orthodox Church, he replied, "Because it is the Church, and the others are not legal."

Asked who gave him the right to decide what people should or should not believe, and what Church they should attend, the Imam did not answer. He then put his phone down.

### ***Burial denials in Karakalpakstan***

Meanwhile in February a local Imam and state authorities in Muynak in Karakalpakstan similarly prevented two families from burying their relatives in a local cemetery. The authorities "pressured the families" to bury the deceased women, who were members of

the local Full Gospel Protestant Church, in the Russian Orthodox cemetery as in the case in Tashkent Region, local Protestants who know the families well, and who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 23 April.

Aygul Khamidullayeva died of cancer on 18 February at the age of 50. The other woman, Bibiazhar Zhanabergenova, died on 28 February at the age of 66. Both were residents of Muynak.

### ***Imam prevents burial and warns people not to attend burial***

As soon as Khamidullayeva died, "all relatives, neighbours, and acquaintances gathered to bury her," Full Gospel Church members told Forum 18. "Though Khamidullayeva was a Christian, on the advice of some relatives her husband Polat Sadullayev went to invite Aminjon Nabatov, the local Imam, to the burial to say Muslim prayers, thus hoping to receive his approval for the burial," the Protestants said, "because there were rumours that the Imam would not allow them to bury her in the cemetery when she would die." The family wanted to bury her in the cemetery "because her relatives are buried there".

However, Imam Nabatov refused to come, telling Sadullayev that his wife was a Christian and read the Injil [Uzbek language New Testament]. He also warned that he would not allow her to be buried in the cemetery.

The family immediately visited Makset Kozhaniyazov, Chief of Muynak District Urban Development Department, which manages the town's cemeteries, to ask him to allot a plot of land for the burial. "He gave an excuse that the cemetery was closed for maintenance works, and that they cannot bury her there at the moment," church members told Forum 18. When the family insisted that they saw others on the same day burying their dead there, Kozhaniyazov "admitted that Imam Nabatov called him, and warned that he should not allot them a plot of land in the cemetery, and that they cannot bury a Christian there."

Family and friends went ahead to try to bury Khamidullayeva in the cemetery, but a group of "unknown individuals" blocked them at the entrance, church members complained to Forum 18. They then had to bring Khamidullayeva's body back to the family home.

"Imam Nabatov went around warning people not to participate in the burial, because [Khamidullayeva] is Christian, and read the Injil," church members told Forum 18. He also called on the people to "boycott Christians and their families, and said that there is no place among the Muslims for locals who became Christians."

Protestants complained that Kozhaniyazov and Imam Nabatov "violated the family's rights, insulted their feelings, and incited hatred among the people against the family, which is a flagrant violation of Criminal Code Article 156." Article 156 punishes "Incitement of ethnic, racial or religious hatred".

### ***Officials force burial in Russian Orthodox cemetery***

The "atmosphere of intolerance" created around the family by the Imam, and fear of the authorities, made the family keep the dead body in their home for four days. On 22 February, a "group of local officials broke in their flat demanding" them to take the body for burial in the Russian Orthodox cemetery, Protestants told Forum 18.

"Under pressure the family - accompanied by officials - took the body and had to bury it next to the broken-down wall of the cemetery where a great amount of rubbish was

strewn," they complained. "People from the neighborhood throw rubbish there, and also domestic animals freely graze in the cemetery."

Imam Nabatov put his phone down each time Forum 18 called on 24 and 25 April. Phones of Muynak District Prosecutor's office went unanswered on 25 April.

Kozhaniyazov defended his decision. "I do not take decisions who can and who cannot be buried in the cemetery," he told Forum 18 on 24 April. He then claimed that "it was the family's decision" to bury Khamidullayeva in the Russian Orthodox cemetery. When Forum 18 told him that the family had not wanted that, he admitted that "yes at first they did not want that, but we came to an agreement with them she should be buried in a Christian cemetery."

Asked why Khamidullayeva was buried in the corner of the cemetery among rubbish, Kozhaniyazov was quick to reply: "We already cleaned up the rubbish, and will ensure that people stop throwing rubbish there." He also assured Forum 18 that his Department will repair the walls.

Local Protestants confirmed to Forum 18 that the authorities cleaned up the rubbish, but worried that more might be dumped there.

### ***Second Muynak burial denial***

Similarly, after Bibiazhar Zhanabergenova, another member of Muynak's Full Gospel Church, died on 28 February, her family was also refused the right to bury her in the local cemetery where her relatives are buried, Muynak Protestants told Forum 18. Then on the day she died, the family had to bury her in the Orthodox cemetery on the instructions of the local authorities.

### ***Will Protestants be given plot of land for burials?***

Protestants familiar with the recent burial denials, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, also expressed concern to Forum 18 that such denials may continue. In the past they asked the District authorities to allot them a plot of land for burials, but received no response. "Unfortunately all the registered Protestant Churches [in Karakalpakstan] lost their registration, and they exist under the constant threat of punishment from the authorities," one Protestant lamented to Forum 18. "Therefore we cannot even ask the authorities now officially for a plot of land."

Reached by Forum 18 on 24 April, Kudaybergen Uteniyazov, Head of Muynak District Administration, insisted: "Those who accepted other religions may not be buried in the same cemetery with Muslims."

Told that the cemetery is not the property of any religious community, he said: "It's not me who decides these issues but local residents and the Mahalla Committee [local residential administration]."

Told that local Protestants do not wish to bury their dead in the Orthodox cemetery and wish to have their own plot of land for burials, and asked whether the District authorities will provide it, Uteniyazov responded: "I cannot decide that on my own, we need to think about it."

---

## **Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for distributing homemade literature**

Interfax-Religiia - (11.04.2014) Six citizens of Uzbekistan, including two teachers, are accused of illegal missionary activity, a source in law enforcement agencies told Interfax on Friday.

"In Bukhara province, law enforcement agencies of Uzbekistan arrested members of one of the groups of Jehovah's Witnesses who were conducting illegal religious gatherings of members," the news agency's source said. He said the missionaries assembled in a home of a resident of Bukhara who has worked for many years as a teacher in schools. At the time of the arrest, there was another teacher here and two of her sons, a local resident, and a visitor from Tashkent.

The woman from the capital of the republic arrived in order to conduct propaganda of the ideas of Jehovah's Witnesses and draw new members into their ranks, the source noted.

During a search in the home, homemade booklets in Russian and Uzbek were discovered along with handwritten notebooks for the study of Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings and more than 80 leaflets with religious contents. Members of the cell of Jehovah's Witnesses printed the books in their home.

"The members of this group have been arrested several times by law enforcement agencies while they were distributing books and leaflets of a religious nature. It is noteworthy that all this literature was produced in Muslim and Eastern styles in order to catch the attention of representatives of the native nationality that for the most part professes Islam," the news agency's interlocutor stated.

In Uzbekistan there are more than 2,200 registered religious organizations, of which more than 90% are Muslim. (tr. by PDS, posted 15 April 2014)

---

## **Uzbekistan: Detained for religious materials in electronic devices**

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18 News Service

Forum 18 (25.03.2014) - Three Tajik transit passengers detained without charge by Uzbek border guards at the same railway station in southern Uzbekistan were freed on 4 February. The border guard who took Tojiddin Latipov off the train told him that an Islamic sermon he had on his mobile phone was in violation of Uzbekistan's Law, Latipov told Forum 18 News Service. Officials questioned him over how long he has been praying and whether he observes fasts. He was freed three days later. A mother and son were held for a month and had their computer seized after officials found a sermon on it. Makhmud (who refused to give his last name), Chief duty customs official at Boldyr station, refused to comment to Forum 18 on why Latipov and the mother and son had been held in custody for having religious materials in electronic devices. Another Tajik citizen is serving a five year sentence for a similar "offence", though his family hopes he will soon be freed under amnesty.

Three Tajik citizens transiting through Uzbekistan on their return to their homeland were taken off the train at the same Uzbek border station in two separate cases and detained without charge for having religious recordings in their electronic devices, one of the three told Forum 18 News Service. Tojiddin Latipov said he was freed on 4 February after three days, but a mother and son freed the same day had been held for a month. Uzbek railway, customs and border guard officials all refused to explain to Forum 18 why transit passengers were held simply for having religious recordings when travelling through Uzbekistan.

In the most serious such known case, another Tajik citizen, Zuboyd Mirzorakhimov, was arrested in September 2013 while crossing the land border from Tajikistan to Uzbekistan. His "offence" was to have verses from the Koran and an Uzbek-language sermon on his mobile phone. The following month he was given a five year prison term – two to be in jail and three suspended – for "smuggling" the Koran verses and the sermon into Uzbekistan.

Officials hinted that Mirzorakhimov had been included in the December 2013 prisoner amnesty, and his family in Tajikistan still hopes he will be released (see F18News 16 December 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1907](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1907)).

### ***Formalising state-imposed religious censorship***

The detentions come as Uzbekistan has formalised its long-standing severe state controls over all religious materials. A new Decree, entitled "Measures to improve order in the production, import and distribution of religious materials", which came into force in late January, imposed sweeping controls on the production, distribution and import of all such materials.

The Decree bans their distribution anywhere apart from in fixed commercial points of sale equipped with cash registers. Such materials, including those for personal use, cannot be imported without prior state permission. It also bans the production, storage or distribution of materials intended to encourage people to change their beliefs. It also bans works which, in the state's interpretation, "distort religious canons". The word "canons" is not defined in the Decree, but means the content of beliefs (see F18News 12 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1928](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1928)).

Uzbek customs and border guards have long seized religious literature from individuals entering Uzbekistan. Individuals are often then punished for trying to bring such literature in (see F18News 30 May 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1843](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1843)).

Religious literature is also frequently seized from people within Uzbekistan and individuals are often punished for owning such literature or for having religious texts on electronic devices. Courts frequently order confiscated religious literature – including Muslim, Christian and Jehovah's Witness literature – to be destroyed (see F18News 18 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1938](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1938)).

### ***3-day detention for sermon on mobile***

Latipov, a Tajik Muslim returning from Russia on the long rail journey to Tajikistan, was taken off the train on 1 February by Uzbek border guards at Boldyr station, the first station in southern Uzbekistan after crossing from Turkmenistan. This is where Uzbek border guards and customs officials board the train to check passengers.

Lieutenant Nasriddin Bahriddinov of Uzbekistan's border guard service took Latipov off the train, telling him that an Islamic sermon he had on his mobile phone was in violation of Uzbekistan's Law, Latipov told Forum 18 on 20 March from his home town of Vahdat in

Tajikistan. Despite Latipov's explanation that the sermon is "totally harmless, and that it only talks about how a Muslim should be a good person, help others," the Lieutenant told him that he "should listen to sermons in a mosque not a phone."

Lieutenant Bahriddinov then took him to the nearby Uzbek border post, Latipov told Forum 18. There he and two other officers (he did not remember the names) asked him numerous questions, including how long he had been praying Muslim prayers, whether he observes Muslim fasts, what Islamic movement he belongs to, and whether he knows any Muslim terrorists. Latipov told them that he has been "saying the Muslim prayers since childhood," that "I observe the fast," that he does "not belong to any movement," as well as does "not know any terrorists".

After three days in custody at the border post, border guards released Latipov on 4 February. They confiscated four memory sticks. Although the border guards "insisted" that he also "give away" the carburettor he had bought in Russia for his car, they "left me alone" when he categorically refused.

Latipov said that, while held in custody at the border post, he was given "a corner with a mattress on the floor" to sleep at night, he "ate together with the border guards," and that he was "not treated rudely". However, he had to pay 650 Russian Roubles (40,000 Uzbek Soms, 110 Norwegian Kroner, 15 Euros or 20 US Dollars) to the border guards for his food for the 9 or 10 meals.

### ***One-month detention for sermon***

While Latipov was at the Boldyr border post he "heard of other Tajiks being taken off" Tajikistan-bound trains under similar excuses. "I saw a woman and her son – aged about 17 and 18 - who were kept in custody at the same post for a month," he told Forum 18. The mother and son happened to be freed on 4 February, the same day as Latipov, and were waiting for a train at Boldyr station. "She told me that border guards released them after one month in custody, but took away their laptop computer, since they found a religious sermon on it."

An Uzbekistan Railways official in Tashkent (who did not give his name) declined to comment on 20 March on the removal of transit passengers from their trains because they have religious recordings in phones or computers. He referred Forum 18 to Boldyr Station's Customs officials.

Makhmud (who refused to give his last name), Chief duty customs official at Boldyr, refused to comment the same day on why Latipov and the mother and son had been held in custody, and told Forum 18 that it should put its questions in writing. Boldyr Border Post's phone went unanswered on 20 and 24 March.

### ***Intensified border inspections***

An unnamed National Security Service (NSS) secret police officer who works at an international airport told Radio Free Europe's Uzbek Service of intensified inspections of computers and mobile phones for religious materials in airports, it reported on 6 March. The NSS officer noted that "within the last two to three months several people" were given criminal punishments after being found carrying electronic versions of religious or other materials the authorities deemed illegal.

An Uzbek labour migrant working in Russia, Abdullo (last name not given), told Radio Free Europe that it took his brother several hours to go through the various inspections when he was visiting Uzbekistan in late February. Abdullo said that the authorities also examine passengers' computers to see the websites of which independent news agencies or organisations the owners have looked at, and then ask them why they did so.

"Uzbekistan's authorities have intensified inspections of individual passengers in airports and their personal computers and mobile phones," a legal expert, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 17 March. "They are mostly looking for religious materials."

The legal expert added that across Uzbekistan "in all the regions, when individuals cross from one region to another the Traffic Police inspect the identity documents, and individuals' names and personal data are recorded in special books, if they have a stamp in their passport for departure to go abroad."

When individuals return from abroad, they "are invited to the local Police Departments where they must write a statement on where exactly they visited, how long the visit was, and how much money they earned while they were abroad," the expert said. "Besides, local Mahalla [urban district] Committees collect information on residents who are absent, and refer the information to the local Police Departments. The Police then summon the relatives, and make them write statements explaining where their absent relatives are."

---

## **Uzbekistan: Seven Muslims amnestied, but ailing Muslim prisoner waits for operation**

By Mushfig Bayram and Felix Corley, Forum 18 News Service

Forum 18 (24.03.2014) - Relatives of imprisoned Muslim prisoner of conscience Mehrinisso Hamdamova are to ask the authorities to allow her to have an urgent operation on an apparent myoma outside the women's prison where she is being held. Her "stomach is swollen, and she loses consciousness often", they told Forum 18 News Service. Officials refused to discuss her case with Forum 18. Meanwhile, seven of Uzbekistan's many imprisoned Muslims who read the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi were freed under amnesty in February and March. The seven were among three groups of Muslims given long prison sentences in Bukhara in 2009-10.

Seven Muslims who read the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi were freed under amnesty in late February and early March, Muslims who asked not to be identified told Forum 18 News Service. The released prisoners are not allowed any contact with each other or with outsiders, they added. Meanwhile, relatives of Muslim prisoner of conscience Mehrinisso Hamdamova are hoping the prison authorities will allow her to be transferred to a hospital for urgently-needed surgery. Her relatives and friends have expressed growing concern about her health.

A Tajik citizen imprisoned after Uzbek border guards found the Koran on his mobile phone is expecting to be amnestied but has not yet been. Three other Tajik citizens transiting Uzbekistan were held – two for a month – after Muslim recordings were found on electronic devices

(see F18News 25 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1942](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1942)).

### ***Apparent tumour***

Hamdamova is being held in a camp for female prisoners in Zangiota District, just north of the capital Tashkent. Aged 46, she appears to need an urgent operation on an apparent myoma. It is unclear how reliable the diagnosis is. A myoma is a tumour

associated with uterine cancer which can be painful and is normally treated by being removed

(see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)).

Hamdamova was arrested in November 2009, apparently to punish her for teaching Islam in a mosque in Karshi [Qarshi]. She was sentenced to seven years in jail in April 2010. Also imprisoned at the same time were her sister Zulhumor and another female relative. The trial was conducted with many violations of published law, as often happens in Uzbekistan

(see F18News 26 April 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1436](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1436)).

### ***"Loses consciousness often"***

Hamdamova's "stomach is swollen, and she loses consciousness often", a relative who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 20 March. The prison authorities planned to perform surgery on her in February within the Zangiota prison, but she refused. "She is afraid she could die during an operation by prison doctors," the relative said, "or that after an operation she would still be placed in the prison and might die from internal bleeding there."

Relatives are intending to write to the prison authorities after the Novruz spring festival holidays to request permission to take Hamdamova for an operation to a hospital outside the prison. They are hoping to receive permission so that they can proceed with her operation as soon as possible in early April.

"Medicines are passed to Mehrinisso in the meantime from her relatives through the prison authorities to alleviate her pain," the relative told Forum 18.

An international organisation had sent 800 US Dollars (1,800,000 Uzbek Soms, 4,800 Norwegian Kroner or 580 Euros) from abroad for Hamdamova's operation, the relative added. However, relatives were unable to receive the money so far from Hamkor Bank (where the money was sent), because they took only a copy of the passport. "The bank demanded the original of the passport." The relatives are intending to take their passport to the bank after the Novruz holidays to receive the money.

By contrast, her imprisoned sister Zulhumor Hamdamova – who is 53 and has four children – has received medicine and her health has improved, relatives told Forum 18. In January she told visiting relatives that she was suffering from goitre. This is an abnormal swelling that causes a lump to form in the throat, in some cases affecting breathing and swallowing

(see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)).

The Hamdamova sisters' prison address is:

Uzbekistan

Tashkent region

Zangiota tumani

Uchr. 64/1

Hamdamova Mehrinisso Imomovna

or

Hamdamova Zulhumor Imomovna



## ***No visit***

Amid rising concern over Mehrinisso Hamdamova's health, Tashkent-based human rights defender Surat Ikramov wrote on 3 February to Abdukarim Shodiyev, Head of the Department of Execution of Punishments, which oversees prisons. Ikramov asked him to grant permission to visit Hamdamova and other prisoners of conscience to check their health. Ikramov has received no response to his written request, he told Forum 18 on 20 March.

Officials at the Department of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent on 20 March refused to answer Forum 18's questions on Mehrinisso Hamdamova or put it through to Shodiyev or any other official. The official who answered the phone in Shodiyev's office, who refused to give his name, asked numerous detailed questions about Forum 18 as well as about Hamdamova. When Forum 18 stopped the official and asked whether he would put Forum 18 through to any official, he responded: "You will receive an answer by post."

Told that Ikramov had received no response to his request to Department Head Shodiyev more than six weeks earlier to be allowed to visit Hamdamova, the official responded: "You can wait." He declined to talk to Forum 18 further.

## ***Seven Nursi prisoners amnestied***

Meanwhile seven Muslim Nursi readers were freed from prison in late February and early March. They were freed under a presidential prisoner amnesty declared in December 2013. Following their release, the authorities banned the seven men from associating freely with each other or with outsiders, a Muslim lamented to Forum 18.

Four of the seven had been sentenced in Bukhara in April 2009. They are Muzaffar Allayorov, Shuhrat Karimov, Salohiddin Kosimov and Yadgar Juraev. The other three had been sentenced in Bukhara in 2010 as part of the third group of local Nursi readers sentenced to long prison terms. They are Abdukakhkhor (last name unknown), Mirshod (last name unknown) and Mirzo Allayorov (Muzaffar's brother).

Two of the April 2009 group of Nursi readers - Alisher Jumaev and Bobomurod Sanoev - had been released under amnesty in spring 2013.

Three Nursi-related trials took place in Bukhara in 2009-10. During the first, nine Muslims were sentenced in April 2009 to prison terms of up to nine years. Their appeals were rejected in June 2009 (see F18News 4 June 2009 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1306](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1306)).

A second group of nine Muslims were sentenced in Bukhara in June 2010 to prison terms of up to eight years (see F18News 8 July 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1465](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1465)).

A third group of nine or ten Muslims was sentenced in Bukhara shortly afterwards. In addition to the three who were amnestied in spring 2014, those sentenced included: Akmal Abdullayev, Rustam Sharipov, Umid Juraev, and an elderly man named Abdulla (last name unknown).

---

## **Uzbekistan: Anti-Terrorism Police seize religious literature, tear down religious posters**

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18 News Service

Forum 18 (18.03.2014) - In two separate raids in early March, Anti-Terrorism Police and other officials seized religious literature from private homes, Forum 18 News Service has learned. In one raid in Uzbekistan's central city of Samarkand, Anti-Terrorism officer Makhmud Nodyrov "tore posters with Scripture texts from the walls, and kept threatening [home owner Veniamin] Nemirov that his home could be taken away from him, and that his children could be expelled from school," Baptists complained to Forum 18. Personal details of the 25 adults and the family's 12 children present after the Baptist congregation's Sunday service were taken. Four church members face administrative punishments. Asked why he tore down posters in Nemirov's home, and why he threatened that Nemirov's children would be expelled from school, officer Nodyrov referred Forum 18 to the Foreign Ministry, and put the phone down.

Anti-Terrorism Police raided two separate private homes in early March, Forum 18 News Service has learned. In the central city of Samarkand on 9 March, they raided a meeting for worship in a private home, seizing religious literature, ripping down posters with Scripture verses from the walls and preparing administrative cases against four individuals. The following day in the capital Tashkent, Anti-Terrorism Police raided a private home, also seizing religious literature.

Following a February raid on a private home, a court in Kokand in the eastern Fergana Region fined a local Protestant for having Christian materials in a computer seized during the raid.

During the raids, National Security Service (NSS) secret police officers may have accompanied Anti-Terrorism Police, ordinary police and other state officials, as not all the raiders would identify themselves.

A new Decree which came into force on 27 January formalises the pre-existing state censorship over religious literature and other materials and allows officials to conduct "joint actions to detect and prevent illegal distribution of materials" (see F18News 12 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1928](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1928)).

Olimjan Turakulov, Head of the Press Service of Uzbekistan's NSS secret police in Tashkent, declined to comment to Forum 18 on 18 March and asked to send written questions to the Foreign Ministry.

Begzot Kadyrov, the state Religious Affairs Committee's Chief Advisor, also on 18 March declined to comment on any of the cases, and asked Forum 18 to send questions in writing. Forum 18 asked the same day why individuals are punished for having religious materials in their computers and why police and other officials seize religious literature – including religious holy books – from individuals' homes.

### ***Administrative charges follow raid***

The authorities in Samarkand raided the Sunday meeting for worship of a Council of Churches Baptist congregation on 9 March. Police are preparing administrative punishments against four of its members – Veniamin and Yelena Nemirov as well as Alisher and Oksana Abdullayev, who are married couples. The worship service was held

in the Nemirovs' private home, where 25 adults and the Nemirovs' 12 children were present.

Council of Churches Baptists refuse to seek state registration in any of the former Soviet republics, insisting that religious activity does not need state permission.

Charges are being prepared under Administrative Code Article 241 (violation of order of teaching religious doctrines) and Article 184-2 (illegal production, storage, import and distribution of religious materials).

Article 184-2 punishes "Illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious materials". Article 241 punishes "Violation of the procedure for teaching religious doctrines". The maximum penalty under Article 184-2 is 150 times the minimum monthly wage as well as confiscation of the materials, and under Article 241 is a fifteen-day prison term.

### ***Raid***

Police and other officials broke into Nemirov's private home after the Church's Sunday morning service had finished and while members were having tea together, Baptists complained to Forum 18 from Samarkand on 12 March. Participating in the raid were six officers of Samarkand Regional Police and others from unknown state agencies. They were led by Makhmud Nodyrov of Samarkand Regional Anti-Terrorism Police, along with three officials of the local mahalla [local district] committee.

Mahalla committees, theoretically independent but in practice under state control, are used to maintain controls over religious believers of all faiths, and have been used to block communities' registration applications (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

First came "an insistent ring of the bell on the gates". The visitors claimed to Nemirov that they represented the City Gas Administration, and "insisted that he must open the door to let them in." As Nemirov suspected that the visitors were not telling the truth, he refused to open the door.

On Nodyrov's order, two officials then climbed over the gates and, taking Nemirov's keys, opened the doors for the other officials. The officials claimed to Nemirov that they came because a "signal was given to them from a school head teacher, who discovered in the school an invitation card to their Church service."

The officials "against the wish of the homeowners" inspected the two houses in the yard, and having found "nothing illegal or no visitors", broke into the basement of Nemirov's home, where Church members were having tea. "They immediately began filming all those present. Then they photographed each one, including small children."

### ***Literature seized, Scripture texts ripped from wall***

Officials demanded that the Baptists hand over their religious literature voluntarily. When they refused, officials began a search in the house "without showing a warrant", Baptists complained to Forum 18. "Searched were personal belongings, women's bags and purses, all cupboards, boxes, and Nemirov's children's school bags."

Officials then confiscated literature in Russian: a Bible, New Testament, Christian book entitled "Streams in the desert" and a Christian songbook. Nodyrov "tore posters with Scripture texts from the walls, and kept threatening Nemirov that his home could be taken away from him, and that his children could be expelled from school."

After recording the personal details of all the present, officials demanded that church members register the Church officially so the state "can control the believers", the Baptists told Forum 18. When church members told officials that they cannot do so, they took photocopies of the Nemirov and Abdullayev couples' personal documents and left, warning that they would soon be summoned for questioning. Police did not give Nemirov a copy of the official report.

### ***"Who gave right to children" to distribute leaflets in school?***

Nodyrov of the Anti-Terrorism Police told Forum 18 on 17 March that the Police referred the case to court, but refused to identify which court. He also refused to say what punishments he expects to be given and to whom.

Asked why the Police and other organs raided the Baptists' meeting for worship and why this was an issue for the Anti-Terrorism Police, Nodyrov claimed that "they distributed leaflets in school". "Who gave them the right to do so?" he asked.

Asked why Police took photographs even of small children, Nodyrov responded: "Those small children gave out leaflets in school." Asked why he tore down posters in Nemirov's home, and why he threatened that Nemirov's children would be expelled from school, he referred Forum 18 to the Foreign Ministry, and put the phone down.

### ***Head teacher tells police of "possible threat" by Baptists***

The raid was reported by state-sponsored 12uz.com on 11 March, a report followed up by other news agencies. They accused the Baptists of conducting illegal religious activity, and particularly attacked Nemirov.

12uz.com reported that Samarkand Regional Police and other law-enforcement agencies (possibly the NSS secret police) "prevented illegal activity of Evangelical Christian Baptists," and that "on a signal received from a director of a school the law-enforcement agencies uncovered an underground illegal Baptist organisation."

K. Narzullayeva, head teacher of Samarkand's Secondary School No. 48, "warned the Samarkand Regional Police of a threat that Baptist Christians are spreading in the school their religious literature and invitations to their secret gatherings," 12uz.com reported. "It turned out that ten-year old Nadezhda Nemirova, daughter of ardent Baptist Nemirov, is a pupil of the school. The girl was the messenger between the pupils of the school and illegal activity of her apology for a father."

"Neither the warnings by the local mahalla Committee nor the administrative fines given to him could stop Nemirov. Not even the fact that he has a family, for which he is responsible, would stop him," the agency claimed. "Besides that, citizen Nemirov established in his home an underground organisation and illegally distributed religious literature in the city's schools, he also involved family members in this criminal activity."

School head teacher Narzullayeva (who refused to give her first name) on 17 March insisted to Forum 18 that "Nemirov's daughter gave out invitations to the schoolchildren to their Church, and it is against the law." Asked what is wrong with inviting children to Church activity, she responded: "This is a school, and no religion or religious activity should take place here, and children must not be involved in religion."

Asked if she had been instructed to inform the authorities on similar incidents, Narzullayeva refused to say. "I do not want to talk to you about these questions." She told Forum 18 that she has not been invited yet as a witness before the court, but she will attend the hearing if invited.

### ***"Aggressive sorties of missionaries"***

Nemirov had been fined 50 times the minimum monthly wage following an August 2012 raid on the church. Two other church members were also fined (see F18News 29 November 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1773](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1773)). He had also been fined 10 times the minimum monthly wage in September 2010 (see F18News 26 October 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1503](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1503)).

In its report, 12uz.com insisted that "modern day trends require the State to protect itself from unsanctioned, illegal, and unregistered case of religious activity. (..) The current laws and Uzbekistan's Constitution above all, as well as the Religion Law do now allow anyone forcibly to impose on others their religious teachings. And therefore, any aggressive sorties of missionaries will be continually prevented, guaranteeing a just inter-confessional peace and accord in our country."

### ***Tashkent "anti-terrorism" raid, literature seized***

Seven officials in Tashkent's Mirzo-Ulugbek District, only one in police uniform, in the afternoon of 10 March raided the private home of Vera Raupova, a member of the unregistered Bethany Baptist Church. The raid was led by Alisher Nasyrov of the District's Anti-Terrorism Police Division and local Police officer Shukhrat Nurmukhamedov.

A local Baptist, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 that the authorities broke into her home without showing any identity documents or warrant "under the guise of a passport regime checkup".

Officers searched Raupova's home and confiscated Christian books and materials, the Baptist complained to Forum 18. Confiscated were 166 books in Russian, bought from Uzbekistan's officially registered Bible Society, including 5 Bibles, a New Testament, Bible Atlas, and Bible Dictionaries, as well as 200 brochures, 7 magazines, 4 notebooks with personal notes, and a pocketbook.

Asked why Raupova's home was raided without a warrant, Inspector Nurmukhamedov on 18 March told Forum 18, "These were the organs which oversee religious activity, and I was only accompanying them." He added that "they wanted to check her books, and sent them for religious expert analysis." Asked why the authorities must confiscate Bibles or New Testaments well known as Christian holy books, Nurmukhamedov responded: "I did not confiscate the books but the Anti-Terrorism Police did."

Asked which division Nasyrov represented, Nurmukhamedov said he did not know. Asked who it could discuss the case with from the Terrorism Police, he responded that, "I need to call the Division and ask them first," and asked Forum 18 to call back. Called back the Inspector declined to discuss the case or refer Forum 18 to Terrorism Police. "The Police Chief is busy, and I am only a small man in this case."

### ***Fine follows Kokand raid***

Judge Begzot Ergashev of Kokand City Criminal Court on 7 March, with a decision, a copy of which Forum 18 has seen, found Abdulhafis Ashiraliyev guilty under Administrative Code Article 184-2. The Judge fined Ashiraliyev, a member of an unregistered local Protestant Church, 10 times the minimum monthly wage or 961,050 Soms with confiscation of his personal computer.

The fine followed a raid by Kokand Police on Ashiraliyev's private home on 1 February, as seen from the Court decision. A local Protestant, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 that by raiding Ashiraliyev's flat, the Police

and other local authorities "infringed on the inviolability of the home". Only three of the ten raiders were in police uniforms. The officials searched his home, and confiscated a laptop computer.

As seen from Judge Ergashev's decision, according to the 14 February religious expert analysis (it does not indicate who wrote it), Ashiraliyev stored in his personal computer Christian materials, which do "not contain extremist teachings," but "contain teachings aimed at carrying out religious propaganda among the population." Thus the Court deemed it "adequate to punish" Ashiraliyev for "illegally storing religious materials on his personal computer".

Judge Ergashev on 18 March declined to comment on the case. Asked why an individual is not allowed to store Christian texts on his computer and read them, whether he has to ask the State Religious Affairs Committee each time what he can or cannot store on his computer, he wrote down the details of the case, and asked Forum 18 to wait on the line. However, no one returned to the phone.

After several further calls, an official of the Court (who refused to give her name) said that "Judge Ergashev is hearing a case, and we cannot answer your questions over the phone." She asked Forum 18 to send written questions to the Supreme Court.

### ***Tashkent Region raid, literature seized***

Meanwhile, six officials of Tashkent Region's Akhangaran District, three of whom were in police uniforms, broke into the private home in the village of Nurabad of Nadezhda Taymurzina, member of an officially registered local Baptist Church. This raid too - mid-morning on 31 January - was "under the guise of a passport regime checkup".

Among the raiding officials were Shavkat (last name not given), Chief of Nurabad Police, and Police Inspector Vakhit Azizov, as well as Bakhri Yuldashev, Deputy Head of the village Administration.

The officials "conducted an unapproved search in her flat, during which they confiscated 20 Christian books, including a Bible and New Testament in Russian as well as an Uzbek language New Testament. Confiscated also were 8 Baptist magazines, a local Baptist, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of State reprisals, told Forum 18. The Baptist pointed out that most of the confiscated literature was legally bought from the officially registered Bible Society.

---

## **Concern over health of prisoners of conscience**

Forum 18 (18.02.2014) - Relatives and friends of three Muslim prisoners of conscience in Uzbekistan, jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief, have expressed concern to Forum 18 News Service about their state of health. Khayrullo Tursunov and his relatives Mehrinisso and Zulhumor Hamdamova (who are sisters) are all apparently in need of medical treatment they appear not to be receiving.

Relatives of the Hamdamova sisters, who wish to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 17 February that they are particularly concerned about Mehrinisso. Aged 46, she urgently needs medical treatment and even an operation on an apparent myoma. It is unclear how reliable the diagnosis is. A myoma is a tumour associated with uterine cancer which can be painful and is normally treated by being removed. Relatives fear that if she is left untreated in prison conditions this could endanger her life.

Relatives told Forum 18 that on visits to the sisters in January, Zulhumor – who is 53 – reported suffering from goitre. This is an abnormal swelling that causes a lump to form in the throat, in some cases affecting breathing and swallowing. "They both feel ill but Mehrinisso's health is worse," relatives stated.

### ***Will authorities allow treatment for the Hamdamovas?***

Relatives do not know when or even whether the prison authorities will arrange an operation for Mehrinisso. They stated that prison authorities do not permit the family to hand over medicines for the sisters, as is normal in Uzbek prisons. "We do not know whether they are given any medicines in the prison," they told Forum 18. "Mehrinisso needs an operation, but her family does not have money for the operation."

Both sisters are being held in a camp for female prisoners in Zangiota District, just **north of the capital Tashkent**.

Surat Ikramov, an independent human rights defender from Tashkent, told Forum 18 on 18 February that he spoke about the case to the Department of Execution of Punishments Deputy Head Erkin Bobokulov on 1 February. He told Ikramov that Hamdamova's treatment will be in their prison, and that "convicts from the women's prison are not moved out of the prison for treatment since it has its own medical clinic". Conditions in labour camps such as the one the Hamdamovas are held in can be harsh, with unsanitary and dangerous living and working conditions, beatings by guards, and criminal gangs having a ruthless hold over other prisoners (see F18News 27 June 2007 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=982](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=982)). Prisoners in labour camps and jails are denied their right to freedom of religion or belief – for example to pray visibly, to have religious literature, or to receive visits from religious clergy (see eg. F18News 7 May 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1832](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1832)).

Violence and torture, or threats of this, by police and other officials are "routine" the United Nations Committee Against Torture found in 2007. Women seem to be particularly targeted for torture and threats by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

The UN Committee Against Torture renewed its criticism in its concluding observations (CAT/C/UZB/CO/4), adopted on 14 November 2013, on Uzbekistan's record under the Convention Against Torture. "The Committee is concerned about numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations that torture and ill-treatment are routinely used by law enforcement, investigative and prison officials, or at their instigation or with their consent, often to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings," it noted (see [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en)).

The UN Committee also expressed concern about officers' threats of sexual violence against "Mehrinisso and Zulhumor Hamdamova, who allege that they were forced to strip and threatened with rape by police while in custody in November 2009".

### ***Family prisoners***

Many Muslims have been given long prison terms for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. The Hamdamova sisters and Shahlo Rakhmonova (a relative of the sisters) were sentenced to up to seven years in jail in April 2010, after being arrested for holding unauthorised religious meetings. The trial was conducted with many violations of published law, as often happens in Uzbekistan (see F18News 26 April 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1436](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1436)).

Mehrinisso Hamdamova – a state official - and many of her family members were arrested for holding unauthorised religious meetings, by 12 officials from the National Security Service (NSS) secret police and the ordinary police. The arrests happened following a 06.00 am raid on her home on 5 November 2009 (see F18News 18 November 2009 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1376](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1376)).

Nurbek Kulturayev – Hamdamova's 25 year-old son-in-law - was arrested later, after women forced to give testimony against Hamdamova by the threat of rape disappeared (see F18News 27 January 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1399](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1399)). Kulturayev was kept in detention for fifteen days and was then released. He is understood to have left the country, for fear of the authorities.

### ***Does prisoner of conscience have tuberculosis or not?***

A related case to the Hamdamova sisters is that of 38-year-old Muslim prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov, illegally extradited by Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan on 13 March 2013 (see F18News 1 May 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1829](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1829)). He was given 16 years in jail in June 2013 for exercising his freedom of religion or belief. Tursunov was subsequently exposed by the authorities to the potentially fatal disease of tuberculosis (TB) (see F18News 5 November 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1893](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1893)). In mid-December 2013 he was moved from the prison for TB patients to Karavulbazar Prison 64/25. This is a special regime prison **in central-southern Uzbekistan**.

A relative, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, wondered what the reasons for the move were. "If he did not have TB why was he moved to the TB prison – and if he did why was he moved back to his original prison in such a short time?", they asked Forum 18 on 17 February.

Tuygun Kurbonov, Governor of Korovulbazar Prison 64/25, claimed to Forum 18 on 18 February that Tursunov "is fine and cured from TB". Treatment for TB normally takes a minimum of six months in good conditions and modern medical care.

Asked how it was possible to cure Tursunov in a relatively short period, and in what conditions he is being held, Governor Kurbonov refused to say. He then referred Forum 18 to the Department of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent.

Rustam Sharapov, the TB prison's Head Accountant, on 18 February claimed to Forum 18 that Tursunov "was treated and recovered from the illness, and therefore he was moved back to his original prison for especially dangerous repeat offenders". Asked how it was possible to cure Tursunov in under six months in poor conditions, Sharapov gave the phone to another official who stated he was Akhtam Khatamov, Deputy Prison Governor. Khatamov refused to discuss the case, and referred Forum 18 to the Department of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent.

### ***No comment***

Nurali Tagayev, a duty officer at the Interior Ministry's Department of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent, which oversees prisons, told Forum 18 on 18 February he would put Forum 18 through to Bobokulov, Deputy Head of the Department, when he was asked about the conditions of the Hamdamova sisters and Tursunov. Bobokulov's phone went unanswered.

When Forum 18 called Tagayev back and asked if he could put it through to Burkhan Akramov, Head of the Department, or another official, he told Forum 18 "please send



your questions in writing." Other officials of the Department on 18 February refused to talk to Forum 18.

### ***Christian prisoner of conscience***

The only currently known non-Muslim prisoner of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief is Tohar Haydarov, jailed in 2011 for 10 years. His fellow-Baptists told Forum 18 in October 2013 that "every two months we visit him, and the last time we found out that because of back pain he was confined to the prison". Haydarov "cannot go into town for work with other prisoners which can be depressing for him. He did not speak of having any problems with the prison authorities or inmates" (see F18News 5 November 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1893](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1893)).

### ***State vengeance?***

One reason suggested for the state's extradition and jailing of Tursunov was revenge for his wife Nodira Buriyeva's escape from Uzbekistan after she along with at least seven other women were interrogated and threatened with rape by police at the time the Hamdamova sisters were arrested. The sisters were relatives of Buriyeva. Several of the arrested women as well as Buriyeva also escaped. The authorities arrested and tortured Mehrinisso Hamdamova's son-in-law Kulturayev, who they suspected of being involved in the escape (see F18News 27 January 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1399](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1399)).

### ***"Justice" system***

As well as the Hamdamovas and Tursunov, very many other Muslims have been given long prison terms, but it is normally very difficult to impossible to identify whether freedom of religion or belief is a factor, as the Uzbek "justice" system strongly encourages arbitrary behaviour by officials including violence and torture. The planting of evidence and torture by the authorities is often credibly claimed, which makes it unlikely that the authorities – or anyone else - knows how many of these prisoners are guilty of involvement in violence or other criminality (as the authorities often claim), or are "guilty" of being devout Muslims who take their faith seriously, or were victims of official hostility for some other reason.

Legal charges brought against people do not necessarily reflect what they actually did. This can lead to people being charged using laws punishing the exercise of freedom of religion or belief, when the exercise of this freedom is not involved in the actions they actually carried out (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

---

## **New Decree gives "legal" basis to existing censorship**

Forum 18 (12.02.2014) - Uzbekistan has further formalised its existing de facto restrictions on the freedoms of expression, religion and belief by establishing a "legal" basis for its long-established de facto severe state restrictions on religion or belief-related literature, films, recordings, websites and other materials, Forum 18 News Service notes. The new Decree contains numerous violations of the conventions the country has under international human rights law promised to implement.

Entitled "Measures to improve order in the production, import and distribution of religious materials", a new Decree imposes sweeping controls on the production, distribution and import of all such materials. It bans their distribution anywhere apart from in fixed

commercial points of sale equipped with cash registers. Such materials, including those for personal use, cannot be imported without prior state permission.

The Decree also bans the production, storage or distribution of materials intended to encourage people to change their beliefs. It also bans works which, in the state's interpretation, "distort religious canons". The word "canons" is not defined in the Decree, but means the content of beliefs.

Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the Prime Minister, signed the Cabinet of Ministers Decree on 20 January. It came into force on its official publication on 27 January.

The Decree gives the state Religious Affairs Committee "together with interested ministries and agencies" one month to prepare changes to other laws to enforce provisions of the Decree. Supervision of implementation of the Decree was assigned to Deputy Prime Minister Adkham Ikramov, who covers cultural issues.

The Decree – which formalises the implementation of provisions in the 1998 Religion Law - tightens the already severe censorship regime (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

When the government ordered the preparation of a new Decree in July 2013, it was originally aimed at censorship of religious materials produced abroad and imported into Uzbekistan (see F18News 16 December 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1907](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1907)). But the January 2014 Decree also covers material produced in Uzbekistan.

#### ***No comments***

Officials from Prime Minister Mirziyoyev's office and the Religious Affairs Committee refused to discuss the Decree on 12 February.

The office of Deputy Prime Minister Ikramov referred Forum 18 to one of its officials, Arifkhon Zakirov. Asked for comments on the new Decree and asked what or when changes to other laws will be introduced, Zakirov asked Forum 18 to call back in half hour since "I am in a meeting". Called back later, his phone went unanswered.

Officials at the Religious Affairs Committee, including the Chair Artykbek Yusupov (through his Assistant) and Chief Specialist Begzot Kadyrov, refused to talk to Forum 18 and told it to send questions in writing.

#### ***Decree on printed, electronic and audio-visual religious materials***

The Decree has two main Appendices: the first specifies controls over the production, distribution in and import into Uzbekistan of religious materials, while the second covers the compulsory "expert analysis" of such materials by the Religious Affairs Committee "experts".

The Decree has two other Appendices. One depicts the hologram with the name of the Religious Affairs Committee which must be placed on religious materials that have successfully passed the Committee's censorship. The other has a schematic table of the Committee's religious "expert analysis" procedure.

Point 16 of the second Appendix on the compulsory "expert analyses" requires the Religious Affairs Committee no less than twice a year to submit to the relevant state organs a list of materials whose production, distribution or import into Uzbekistan is banned.

So-called "expert analyses" are frequently used by courts to justify the destruction of

books or magazines (see eg. F18News 17 September 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1743](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1743)). Legal procedures are often violated, the official who produced one such "expert analyses" allegedly managing to within one working day read 1,300 books, 2,100 brochures, 450 leaflets, 50 magazines, watch 200 videos, and listen to 350 audio cassettes. "This beats the Guinness Book of Records", a local Protestant observed to Forum 18 (see F18News 29 November 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1773](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1773)).

### ***Interference in religious communities' internal affairs***

Although the Decree ostensibly only concerns religious materials, it makes it formally possible for the Religious Affairs Committee and other state organs to directly interfere in the internal affairs of registered religious organisations.

Point 11 of the second Appendix gives the Religious Affairs Committee the right to inquire and receive from other state organs, civil and religious organisations information to investigate religious communities "on questions within its purview". Point 12 gives the Committee the right to visit religious and social organisations.

### ***Further punishments to follow?***

Point 20 declares: "Persons responsible for violating the provisions of the Decree shall be responsible in the established way."

The Code of Administrative Offences' Article 184-2 already punishes: "Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons". Punishments are a fine of up to 150 times the minimum monthly wage, "with confiscation of the religious materials and the relevant means of their production and distribution".

Criminal Code Article 244-3 punishes "illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious literature". It carries – if there has been a previous administrative conviction – a maximum sentence of three years' imprisonment (see Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

As the Decree requires the Religious Affairs Committee "together with interested ministries and agencies" to prepare changes to other laws to enforce the Decree, changes and further punishments may be introduced to the Administrative Code and possible also to the Criminal Code.

### ***Obstacles to production, distribution and import of religious materials***

Points 8, 12 and 17 formally enforces the existing major obstacles to the free use of religious materials as the prior consent of the Religious Affairs Committee is required for the production, import and distribution of them.

Point 8 declares: "Production of materials in Uzbekistan is allowed only after a [positive] expert opinion is given on them within ten working days."

Point 12 declares: "The Religious Affairs Committee in no more than 10 working days from the date when it received an advance copy of religious materials, shall present its expert opinion for a further decision on the import of the material into Uzbekistan."

Point 17 declares: "Religious materials can be distributed in Uzbekistan when a positive state religious expert opinion is given for a specific item."

In August 2011, Uzbekistan's Bible Society was finally allowed to bring through Customs

2,800 Russian-language Bibles which had been confiscated in 2010. It was forced to re-export a larger number of other Bibles confiscated both then and in 2008 (see F18News 27 October 2011 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1630](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1630)).

### ***Other obstacles to distribution of materials***

According to Point 14: "Distribution of materials in Uzbekistan is carried out by legal or physical persons at fixed sales points with electronic cash registers or payment terminals, provided all income from sales must be banked on a daily basis. Sales or distribution of materials at non-commercial sales points is banned."

This appears to prohibit registered religious communities from giving out religious literature to its members and non-members outside their legal addresses. However, it is not clear whether or not they will be able to do so inside their legal addresses. Unregistered organisations are banned under the Religion Law and so cannot distribute literature.

An independent legal expert from Uzbekistan, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, indicated to Forum 18 that even at fixed sales points the authorities are likely to create obstacles. "This will allow the tax authorities to fully control the distribution or sales of religious materials. They will at first force religious communities or believers to buy cash registers, and later will systematically carry out control of their [cash register's] serviceability," as well as "control of the sale of religious materials", the expert thought.

Point 3 requires those intending to distribute religious materials to receive prior Religious Affairs Committee consent to the number of copies to be produced or imported. Sales data collected by the tax authorities will make it possible for the authorities to punish those exceeding the quotas given to them.

In addition to requiring religious materials to have undergone the Religious Affairs Committee censorship, Point 3 requires products to be marked with "the full name and contents of a religious material, names of the author and producer, date and place of production, number of copies and other information in the state language". This formalises the Religious Affairs Committee's power to, for example, limit the number of copies of a book.

It is also not clear what will happen to the distribution of the Bible, or any other widely accepted religious books, which containing calls to readers to change their beliefs. According to Point 18 of Chapter 4, materials intended to encourage people to change their beliefs cannot be distributed.

Article 5 of the Religion Law already states that: "Actions aimed at attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) are forbidden, as is other missionary activity." Administrative Code Article 240 ("Violation of the Religion Law") Part 2 bans "attracting believers of one confession to another (proselytism) and other missionary activity". Punishments are fines of between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly salary, or administrative arrest for up to 15 days. Another ambiguous issue in the same provision is that "materials containing information inciting religious enmity, insulting or humiliation of religious feelings of believers cannot be distributed" (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Countrywide censorship of religious information***

According to Point 15, libraries across Uzbekistan whether state or non-state, including the Alisher Navoi National Library in the capital Tashkent, as well as information resource centres, are "banned from receiving religious materials from foreign producers without a positive prior expert analysis from the Religious Affairs Committee".

Point 16 specifies that the "Religious Affairs Committee and other relevant organisations shall carry out joint actions to detect and prevent illegal distribution of materials."

### ***How can advance copies of religious literature be produced?***

Point 6 demands that "an advance copy and all necessary information for the production of a religious material must be presented to the Religious Affairs Committee before its production for its religious expertise."

It is not clear how the advance copy of an item of literature – to be presented to the Religious Affairs Committee for endorsement – will be produced in Uzbekistan since the production of any literature without the Committee's authorisation is banned under the current Decree, and nothing is said on the production of advance copies.

"It is possible for the publisher or producer to be punished by the authorities for the production of an advance copy, especially if the Committee then bans it," the legal expert pointed out to Forum 18.

The expert also indicated to Forum 18 that Point 7 is contradictory since "the Religious Affairs Committee limits the number of copies of publications religious Communities may receive or produce," but the provision states that "Materials produced by legal or physical persons after prior expertise shall have information on the author and name of the material, address of the producer, number of copies, short content or interpretation as well as the date of production.". The legal expert noted that "the person ordering the production of religious literature cannot independently decide how many copies should be produced, since they must first ask the Religious Affairs Committee."

The legal expert also indicated that the Decree does "not specify where exactly DVD and CD disks may be produced or more specifically if they may be produced by private persons who do not have a legal address of a publisher."

### ***Import of materials formally obstructed***

Customs authorities' frequent confiscation of all religious literature – whether for personal or community use – appears to have been legalised by this Decree. Among many such seizures was the confiscation of about 30 religious books in May 2013 from four individuals returning from neighbouring Kazakhstan (see F18News 30 May 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1843](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1843)).

Point 9 "religious materials entering Uzbekistan seized by customs officials shall be in a timely manner sent to the Religious Affairs Committee for expert analysis," and according to Point 12, religious materials intended to be imported into Uzbekistan must receive prior expert opinion of the Committee.

Point 11 formalises the de facto difficulties of importing personal religious books difficult, even if they are not banned. It states that the "import into Uzbekistan of materials by physical or legal persons for personal use no more than three copies of each title, shall be allowed after their expert analysis." More than three copies will not be allowed for personal use, and it is not clear whether it will be allowed to bring in Uzbekistan an edition of a book, which consists of 4 or more volumes or a data carrier with records of more than three samples of a piece of literature.

Courts routinely order that confiscated Muslim, Christian, Jehovah's Witness or other religious materials - including items which are not banned such as the Bible or Koran - be destroyed. In January a Tashkent Judge who fined an individual also ordered the destruction of 593 leaflets and 119 Christian books, booklets, magazines, and notebooks

with personal notes. The books had been bought from the Bible Society (see F18News 6 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1925](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1925)).

Point 10 declares: "All banned materials, after their expertise shall be confiscated by customs or other state border organs,"

Point 13 formalises tight censorship of Muslim religious materials when haj or umra pilgrims return to Uzbekistan from Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The Decree states that "the Religious Affairs Committee and customs officials will jointly carry out censorship of religious materials during mass events of pilgrimage for the purpose of protecting the interests of Uzbekistan's citizens."

Also the legal expert pointed out to Forum 18 that it is "not clear what the authorities will do when items considered as sacred objects by Catholics or the Russian Orthodox are brought into Uzbekistan, since the Decree says nothing about them."

### ***Broad definition***

Point 3 of the second Appendix covering the "expert analyses" by the Religious Affairs Committee gives a broad definition of religious materials requiring "expert analysis": "books, magazines, newspapers, leaflets and other printed matter, audio-visual productions (such as TV, cinema and video films, music videos, records of concerts, cartoons, and etc.), electronic carriers of information (diskettes, CD and DVD discs, materials placed on the internet and other sources), which reflect on the foundation, history, ideology, teachings and commentaries as well as the practice of rituals of various religions of the world".

However, it does not specify whether or not religious symbols such as framed Koran suras (verses), crescents, crosses and icons are religious materials subject to prior compulsory censorship. It is also not clear whether or why Uzbekistan citizens will be responsible for religious materials placed on the internet.

### ***"Distortions" and "deviations" banned***

Point 3 states that the Religious Affairs Committee carries out theological study of religious materials with the participation of specialists, experts and representatives of religious organisations. The Committee produces a written opinion on whether or not the materials "contain deviations from or distortion of religious canons, which is necessary for permission of the production, import or distribution of those materials". The word "canons" is not defined in the Decree, but means the content of beliefs.

The international human rights standards and conventions Uzbekistan has formally undertaken to implement ban state interference with the content of beliefs.

According to Point 6, the Religious Affairs Committee "may establish an expert council of scholars, experts and specialists in the area of religious studies or theology."

The legal expert noted to Forum 18 that Point 3 does not allow a so-called "expert council", but Point 6 contradicts this by allowing it.

### ***Can individuals publish religious materials?***

According to Point 8, if legal or physical persons wish to produce, import or distribute materials, they must present to the Religious Affairs Committee copies of a registration certificate and charter, as well as a document confirming ownership of a publishing house, printing press or other production facility.

"This is nonsense: a physical person does not have such documents by definition, so how can a physical person present them?" the legal expert told Forum 18.

---

## **Unregistered Uzbek Baptists arrested for meetings in private residence**

Interfax-Religiia (12.03.2014) - In Uzbekistan an underground organization of Baptists has been discovered, a source in law enforcement agencies of the republic told Interfax on Wednesday.

"Following up on a report about increased activity of missionaries in one of the schools of the city of Samarkand, law enforcement personnel detected a private house in which illegal meetings of Baptists were being conducted," the news agency's source reported.

In the course of investigation work, 25 persons were arrested, including 12 minors.

One of the members distributed religious literature at the school and handed out invitations for attending secret meetings of the illegal Baptist parish. Her father had previously been held administratively liable for illegal religious activity in 2010 and 2012. (tr. by PDS, posted 12 March 2014)

### ***Appeal of the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists***

Dear brothers and sisters:

On 9 March 2014, after the conclusion of a morning worship service in the Samarkand church (republic of Uzbekistan), friendly fellowship of believers continued over tea in the basement portion of the home. A call resounded from the street. The persons who arrived identified themselves as workers of "Citygas" and insistently asked the home owner, V.A. Nemirov, to open the gates. Suspecting a trick, Veniamin Alexandrovich refused to fulfill their request. Then two of the men climbed over the gate and took a ladder and handed it over to the others on the street.

As was determined later, all were being led by Makhmud Nodyrov. On his orders, the keys were seized from the owner and the gate was opened for the remaining law enforcement personnel and three representatives of the Makhalin committee (administration), a total of nine persons. They said that they had received a report from the principal of a school who had discovered in the school invitations to attend a worship service at this address.

After inspecting the premises of two residences located on the parcel of land and not finding anybody in them, representatives of the government literally burst into the basement of the building where a dining room is located. They immediately began taking pictures of everyone there with a video camera and cell phones. Then they photographed each person, including small children. All of this was accompanied by uninterrupted demands to voluntarily surrender religious literature.

After a decisive refusal, they began a search without a warrant. They examined personal items, handbags, all the cabinets, boxes and briefcases (Brother Veniamin's family has 12 children). They seized a New Testament, songbook, and the book "Streams in the Desert." Then they climbed to the upper floor. Continuing to take a video they roughly ripped from the walls posters with texts from sacred scripture and they seized a Bible

and pamphlet. Makhmud Nodyrov continually threatened Veniamin Alexandrovich that they would deprive him of his house and the children of the possibility of continuing to go to school. They drew up a report, but refused to give the owner of the house a copy.

They wrote down the names of everybody there and urged them to register the church so that the government offices could monitor the believers. After receiving a refusal on registration, they demanded passports and photocopies of passports from Veniamin Alexandrovich and Elena Anatolievna Nemirov, Alisher Ravshanovich and Oksana Iliasovna Abdullaev, and Liubov Gennadievna Liubiva. After checking the information and making copies of the documents and also the literature and posters seized, the representatives of the government left, warning the believers of upcoming summonses.

We ask all children of God to pray for our fellow believers, that they will continue to serve God unashamed and that the confiscated religious literature will be returned to them and their constitutional rights will not be infringed. (tr. by PDS, posted 12 March 2014)

---

## **Massive fine for Muslim prayer mat, Christian book raid ordered by NSS secret police**

Forum 18 (06.02.2015) - An employee of a hotel in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent has been fined 150 times the minimum monthly salary after a Muslim prayer mat was found at the hotel during a search by the authorities. Also, on 20 January the National Security Service (NSS) secret police together with the police Anti-Terrorism Department raided a private home in Tashkent, Forum 18 News Service has learned. As well as hundreds of Christian books and other materials being confiscated from Natalya Gaiyer and ordered destroyed, she was fined three times the minimum monthly salary on 23 January. She is a member of an officially registered Baptist Church in the capital's Bektemir District.

Also on 20 January, the authorities issued a Decree tightening the already severe censorship regime (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### *Decree on printed, electronic and audio-visual religious materials*

Entitled "Measures to improve order in the production, import and distribution of religious materials", the 20 January Decree imposes sweeping controls on the possession, production and distribution of all kinds of printed, electronic and audio-visual religious materials. It bans the distribution of these religious materials anywhere, apart from in fixed commercial points of sale equipped with cash registers. The Decree also bans the production, storage or distribution of religious materials intended to encourage people to change their faith or beliefs (see F18News 12 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1928](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1928)).

### **Fined 150 times minimum monthly salary for prayer mat**

Law-enforcement officials searched Tashkent's Miran International Hotel in early January and confiscated a Muslim prayer mat. The mat was left by a past guest, and kept in the hotel's lost and found section, Fergananeews reported on 24 January. Despite the mat being identified as a past guest's property, Mirabad District Court fined a hotel employee 150 times the minimum monthly salary or 14,422,500 Soms (about 40,560 Norwegian Kroner, 4,815 Euros, or 6,550 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). An appeal against the fine was rejected, Fergananeews reported.

The minimum monthly salary was increased from 15 December 2013 to 96,105 Soms (about 270 Norwegian Kroner, 30 Euros, or 40 US Dollars). Prices per night at the hotel start at about four times that amount. Most of Uzbekistan's population is in poverty.



A hotel employee, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals, confirmed the fine to Forum 18 on 5 February. They declined to say whether another appeal to higher authorities will be made.

An official who refused to give his name of the Mirabad inter-District Court on 6 February claimed to Forum 18 that the Court did not consider the case. He referred Forum 18 to Mirabad District Criminal Court, whose phones on 6 February went unanswered. Another official who did not give his name of Tashkent City Criminal Court on 6 February refused to tell Forum 18 why it upheld the fine. "Please send your questions in writing", he said before putting the phone down.

It is possible that the past guest left the prayer mat in the hotel for fear of themselves being punished if the prayer mat was found by the authorities. For example, Zuboyd Mirzorakhimov, a Tajik citizen, was jailed for five years for "smuggling" Koran verses and a sermon into Uzbekistan. His "offence" was to have the verses and Uzbek-language sermon on his mobile phone while on a business trip to South Korea via Uzbekistan (see F18News 16 December 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1907](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1907)).

### ***Anti-terrorism passport raid?***

Tashkent's Bektemir District police Anti-Terrorism Department on 20 January at 6.30 pm raided the flat of Natalya Gaiyer, a member of a local officially registered Baptist Church. Three plain clothes and two uniformed officers were on the raid, Tashkent Baptists who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 24 January. Police claimed they were carrying out a passport check, but without showing the necessary legal authorisation for this.

Raushan Zakirov of the District police Anti-Terrorism Department led the raid. Gaiyer "possessed some unauthorised books" which were confiscated, he told Forum 18 on 5 February. Asked why this was relevant to the alleged passport check, Zakirov stated that the raid and confiscations "were ordered by Tashkent police Anti-Terrorism Department and the NSS secret police". Zakirov refused to say how the authorities knew she possessed religious books.

Close surveillance of all religious communities by the NSS secret police, using a wide variety of open and covert methods including the recruitment of informers, is a standard part of Uzbekistan's mechanism of repression (see eg. F18News 5 September 2007 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1014](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1014)).

### ***Fine and book destruction***

Judge Davron Narbayev of Bektemir District Court on 23 January fined Gaiyer three times the minimum monthly salary, or 288,315 Soms (about 810 Norwegian Kroner, 95 Euros, or 130 US Dollars). The judge's decision, which Forum 18 has seen, states that this was under the Code of Administrative Offences' Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons").

Judge Narbayev also ordered the destruction of 593 leaflets and 119 Christian books, booklets, magazines, and notebooks with her personal notes. Courts routinely order that confiscated Muslim, Christian, Jehovah's Witness or other religious materials be destroyed (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Baptists state that most of the books were "purchased legally from the officially registered Bible Society of Uzbekistan".

### **"Confiscation from Gaiyer's home was lawful"?**

Judge Narbayev on 23 January claimed to Forum 18 that he was not authorised to comment on his own decision. Asked why he fined someone for possessing legally purchased books, which he ordered to be destroyed, he replied that "she has already filed an appeal, and it will be heard in a higher court".

Zakirov of Bektemir police Anti-Terrorism Department claimed that "we will not confiscate literature authorised by the Religious Affairs Committee. We will only confiscate books that are not authorised".

An official at the NSS secret police headquarters on 6 February refused to comment on the raid and confiscation. He asked Forum 18 to send questions in writing through the Foreign Ministry.

Doniyor Sultanov, head of Tashkent's police Anti-Terrorism Department on 6 February told Forum 18 that he will "look into the case to see why the police made a search". Called back later the same day, Sultanov's Deputy Alisher (who would not give his last name) claimed that "the confiscation from Gaiyer's home was lawful".

---

## **Uzbekistan: art lessons, talking constitute "illegal" religious activity?**

Forum 18 (29.01.2014) - Rozalina Abyazova from Tashkent Region is trying to challenge in Uzbekistan's Supreme Court a fine handed down for allegedly involving her 12-year-old son in "illegal" religious education. Her petition, seen by Forum 18 News Service, points out that her son was only taking art lessons with two women who happen to be members of a Protestant congregation. The women and five other parents were also fined. Supreme Court officials refused to discuss the case or tell Forum 18 when the complaint will be heard. Elsewhere, three Protestant women in Fergana Region of eastern Uzbekistan are similarly preparing to challenge fines given to them by a local court merely for discussing their faith with each other. The NSS secret police referred the case to court alleging that the three women "illegally taught the Christian religion to each other". And a Protestant from Tashkent Region has been denied an exit visa.

In Tashkent Region a parent has filed a complaint to Uzbekistan's Supreme Court against the fine given to her for allegedly involving her son in "illegal" religious education, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Seven others were fined as part of the same case. In her petition, she complains to the Supreme Court that her son was taking art lessons from two local Protestant women, who did not teach them religion. Supreme Court officials refused to discuss the case or tell Forum 18 when the complaint will be heard.

Elsewhere, three Protestant women in Fergana Region of eastern Uzbekistan are similarly preparing to challenge fines given to them by a local court merely for discussing their faith with each other. The case was fabricated by the local branch of the National Security Service (NSS) secret police, which alleged that they had been teaching religion "illegally", local Protestants insisted to Forum 18. The Judge who gave the decision defended the fines to Forum 18, but could not substantiate his decision (see below).

Meanwhile the Ministry of Interior's Tashkent Regional Visa Department in late January refused Azamat Rajabov, a local Protestant, an exit visa or permission to leave Uzbekistan. An official of the Visa Department told him that there is an exit ban on him (see below).

### ***Why were parents and hosts fined?***

Challenging a fine for "illegal" religious teaching given to her by a Court in Tashkent Region is Rozalina Abyazova, a resident of Almalyk. On 9 January she appealed to Uzbekistan's Supreme Court against a conviction and fine of 50 times the minimum monthly wage for allegedly involving her 12-year old son Timur Abyazov in "illegal" religious teaching in a private flat.

Abyazova points out in her petition, seen by Forum 18, that her son was only taking art lessons with local women who happen to be members of a Protestant congregation. The case was brought illegally as she and her son are state-recognised as having a disability. Also, her son Timur is in the care of his grandmother as his mother Rozalina has been deprived of her parental rights, adding to the illegality of the case being brought against her.

Following a police raid on their flat, Judge Akmal Pirnazarov of Akhangaran Criminal Court on 26 September 2013 fined Rovza and Marina Sultanova, two Protestant women, 90 times the minimum monthly wage. The Sultanovas had opened their home to teach art to disabled children. Six parents of children who had attended, including Abyazova, were each fined between 60 and 40 times the minimum monthly wage. The court also ordered the confiscation of personal Christian books and Bibles, as well as CDs, DVDs, video-cassette tapes, a computer and other materials (see F18News 18 December 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1908](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1908)).

No comment Judge Pirnazarov refused to comment on his decision. Asked by Forum 18 on 14 January 2014 why he had punished the women, he replied: "I cannot say why because I do not know you." Asked why he ordered the confiscation of the books, which had been legally bought from the officially registered Bible Society, the Judge asked Forum 18 to send questions in writing and put the phone down.

Abyazova also points out in the complaint that all the children the police found in their raid have state-recognised disabilities. The children only learned to sew, knit and plait. They also played games and learned to dance in the flat.

She also complained that, as of 9 January, she had not received copies of either the 26 September 2013 Akhangaran District Court decision or the 1 November 2013 Tashkent Regional Court appeal decision – even though by then it was 70 days after her appeal was rejected.

Among numerous other violations of published law, Abyazova's petition notes that the case was not lawfully heard as the case materials do not name witnesses attesting to the alleged offence. Nor does the case indicate that the defendants had their rights explained to them. Other violations of published law noted in the petition included that confiscation of the Bibles and other books was illegal, as they had been legally purchased.

An official at the Supreme Court, who would not give his name, refused to comment on the case to Forum 18 on 29 January. He said he did not know when the Court would consider Abyazova's complaint, asking Forum 18 to call back in three days to find out when it would be heard.

### ***Fined for discussing their faith***

Three Protestant women, residents of Komilyulchi village in Fergana Region's Uzbekistan District, are also preparing to challenge fines. Judge Akram Toshpulatov of the District Criminal Court fined Oliyahon Haydarova, Mavzhudahon Azamova and Latifahon Zhurayeva on 11 November 2013 "for talking to each other about their faith," local

Protestants who know the women, and who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18 on 24 January.

Judge Toshpulatov with a decision, a copy of which Forum 18 has seen, found the three guilty under Article 241 of the Administrative Code. He fined each twice the minimum monthly wage, 183,060 Soms (500 Norwegian Kroner, 60 Euros or 85 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

Article 241 punishes: "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". Punishments range from fines of 5 to 10 times the minimum monthly salary, or administrative arrest for up to 15 days. Punishments for breaking Article 241 range from fines of 5 to 10 times the minimum monthly salary, or administrative arrest for up to 15 days.

The Protestants complained to Forum 18 that the District Department of the NSS secret police "fabricated the case". They also complained that the NSS referred the case to the court alleging that the three women "illegally taught the Christian religion to each other".

The accusation is repeated in Judge Toshpulatov's decision, which says that the NSS secret police's District Department received a "complaint (it does not specify from whom) and established by interrogating the three women that they were engaged in illegally teaching the Christian religion to each other without specialised religious education and without permission from the central organ of a [registered] religious organisation."

Though the court decision claims that the three women admitted to the court that they visited each other and talked about their faith, it provides no evidence that the three formally or unofficially taught religion.

The Fergana Protestants also complained to Forum 18 that the three women could not appeal against the decision until now because they received the copies of the decision only on 11 January 2014, two months after it was handed down.

### ***"It is not a problem"***

Judge Toshpulatov refused to explain why the three women were punished for talking to each other about their faith. He insisted to Forum 18 on 28 January that he had fined them "because they violated Uzbekistan's Religion Law". Told by Forum 18 that in his decision he found the three teaching religion illegally but gave no description or evidence of how the three taught religion, and asked how he concluded that they violated the Law, Judge Toshpulatov refused to say. "I do not know you or your organisation," he told Forum 18. "I am not obliged to answer you."

Judge Toshpulatov also played down the Protestant women's concern that the decision was provided to them only after two months. "It is not a problem, they can still complain to a higher Court," he said. The Judge refused to discuss the case further.

### ***Exit visa refused***

Azamat Rajabov, a Protestant who lives in Tashkent Region's Chirchik District, was refused an exit visa about one and half months after he officially requested it, a Tashkent-based acquaintance who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals complained to Forum 18.

Rajabov submitted the official request on 4 November 2013, and when in late January 2014 he contacted Tashkent Regional Visa Department of the Interior Ministry "an official of the Visa Department, who introduced himself as Major Nodyr Abdullayev told him that

he was refused a visa", the Tashkent-based acquaintance told Forum 18 on 24 January. Major Abdullayev told Rajabov that the NSS secret police has issued an exit ban on him.

"Azamat cannot leave Uzbekistan without the exit visa, and will be criminally responsible if he does so," the acquaintance complained to Forum 18.

Against international norms and standards, Uzbekistan uses exit visas – a Soviet-era idea - to control which of its citizens are allowed to leave the country. Citizens need an exit visa every two years to visit any other country apart from several former Soviet republics. The state has a blacklist of citizens who cannot leave Uzbekistan, which also includes members of various religious communities (see F18News Uzbekistan religious freedom survey

[http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Officials at Tashkent Visa Department refused to put Forum 18 through to Major Abdullayev or any other official to discuss the case on 28 and 29 January. An official of the Department on 29 January, after numerous calls, told Forum 18 that it should send its questions in writing.

---