



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S CHRISTIAN WITNESSES

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From The European Association of Jehovah's Christian Witnesses

**Contribution to the Report of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights  
prepared pursuant to the new review mechanism of the Human Rights Council,  
established by GA Resolution 60/251  
and by the Human Rights Council in Resolution 5/1 of 18 June 2007  
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# Tajikistan

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on Tajikistan highlights human rights issues over the past four-and-a-half years, and Tajikistan’s failure to implement accepted recommendations during the previous review.

As described below, issues of concern persist—namely that Jehovah’s Witnesses are discriminated against because of their religious beliefs and have not been allowed to register their religious organizations. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tajikistan, and as a worldwide organization, respectfully request the government of Tajikistan to:

- (1) Register the Religious Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Dushanbe;
- (2) Allow Jehovah’s Witnesses to import and share their Bible-based literature; and
- (3) Abide by their commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Tajikistan and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) for all citizens, including Jehovah’s Witnesses.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The European Association of Jehovah’s Christian Witnesses is a charity registered in the United Kingdom. It provides support to Jehovah’s Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world.
2. The Religious Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Dushanbe was first registered in the country of Tajikistan in 1994, and re-registered on 15 January 1997.
3. On 11 October 2007 Tajikistan’s Ministry of Culture cancelled the legal registration of the Religious Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses, effectively banning the activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the country. The Ministry of Culture justified its banning decision on two premises: (a) individual Jehovah’s Witnesses refused military service “asking instead that alternative service be provided,” and (b) individual Jehovah’s Witnesses shared their religious beliefs and religious literature in public and in residential places, which the Ministry of Culture claimed “annoyed people.”
4. The Religious Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Dushanbe appealed the banning decision. The appeal was dismissed at all levels of domestic courts despite the UN Human Rights Committee (CCPR) holding that the right to conscientious objection to military service is guaranteed by Article 18 of the Covenant, as is the right to peacefully discuss religious beliefs and share religious literature in public and in private. (CCPR General Comment No. 22; *Atasoy and Sarkut v. Turkey*, communications No. 1853-1854/2008, Views adopted 29 March 2012).
5. The 11 October 2007 decision of the Ministry of Culture has exposed individual Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tajikistan to arrests, detentions, beatings, searches, and deportations for alleged il-

legal religious activity. The police now view all of the religious activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses as illegal.

6. Furthermore, without a registered legal entity, the Witnesses are denied all rights guaranteed by law to religious organizations, including the right to conduct religious meetings and assemblies, to own or use property for religious purposes, to produce and import religious literature, to receive donations, to carry out charitable activity, and to invite foreign citizens to participate in religious events.
7. On 28 August 2013 the CCPR, in its Concluding Observations on Tajikistan’s second periodic report, expressed concern “at the absolute ban of several religious denominations . . . including Jehovah’s Witnesses” and called on Tajikistan to “reverse its discriminatory” decisions and grant registration to these religious denominations. (CCPR/C/TJK/CO/2, § 20) However, the Committee of Religious Affairs (which replaced the Ministry of Culture) continues to refuse to re-register Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tajikistan, relying on the 11 October 2007 decision of the Ministry of Culture.
8. This submission is based on information provided by Jehovah’s Witnesses in Tajikistan.

## **II. PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE GROUND**

### **Refusal to Register Religious Communities (ICCPR—Articles 2, 14, 18, 22, 26)**

9. The primary problem Jehovah’s Witnesses currently face in Tajikistan relates to the repeated denial by state officials of their applications to re-register their religious community.
10. Lacking legal status, authorities deny Jehovah’s Witnesses the right to conduct religious meetings and assemblies, to own or use property for religious purposes, to produce and import religious literature, to receive donations, to carry out charitable activity, and to invite foreign citizens to participate in religious events. All levels of the judicial system have dismissed the Witnesses’ appeals to re-register.
11. In its concluding observations adopted on 23 July 2013 and published on 22 August 2013, the CCPR expressed concern over Tajikistan’s “absolute ban” of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The CCPR urged the government to “reverse its discriminatory refusal to register” Jehovah’s Witnesses (CCPR/C/TJK/CO/2, para. 20).
12. Because Jehovah’s Witnesses are unregistered, they are harassed, searched, detained, and interrogated by authorities for practicing their faith. The State Committee of National Security (SCNS) in Dushanbe repeatedly summon local Jehovah’s Witnesses for questioning and pressures them to sign self-incriminating statements.
13. A new law on religion was enacted in Tajikistan in 2009 (“the 2009 Religion Law”). After positive discussions with senior Tajikistan officials on 14 November 2013, (Mr. Holikov, Chairman of the Committee of Religious Affairs (CRA), and Mr. Odinasho Valizoda, Director of the Department of Religious Affairs of the Executive Apparatus of the President of Tajikistan) Jehovah’s Witnesses applied for registration of a new religious organisation under the new law. They were assured that their registration application would be given favourable consideration.
14. All efforts to obtain registration under the 2009 Religion Law have been refused:

- a. In early 2014, Jehovah’s Witnesses applied twice for registration of a religious community in the capital city of Dushanbe to the CRA. Both applications were returned to correct alleged technical errors in the application materials.
  - b. On **8 August 2014**, the Witnesses resubmitted registration documents for a third time to the CRA. On **11 September 2014**, the CRA denied the registration under the pretext that copies of passports of some of the founders were not attached. The application was resubmitted for a fourth time, but was rejected in **October 2014** based on the technical objection that under Article 13(5) of the religion law the Sino District of Dushanbe had not issued a certificate confirming that over the previous five years the 10 founding members of the religious organisation had lived in the Sino District and had been “followers of the religious organisation.”
  - c. On **25 March 2015** Jehovah’s Witnesses met with the First Deputy of the CRA, Mr. Juma-khon Giyosov, in an attempt to resolve the delay in granting registration. However, the First Deputy now stated that the CRA would not accept a new application for registration by Jehovah’s Witnesses because they had been banned in October 2007. The First Deputy stated that the only remedy now available to Jehovah’s Witnesses would be to overturn the original banning decision (which was upheld by all levels of domestic courts).
15. Jehovah’s Witnesses have appealed the October 2007 banning decision to the UN Human Rights Committee and a decision on that appeal is pending.

**Police Harassment (ICCPR—Articles 18, 19, 21, 22, 26, 27)**

16. On **2-4 July 2014** the SCNS summoned Nassim Kurbonov, Khodzhamahsum Mubarakshoyev, and Firuz Normatov for interrogation and then repeatedly tried to get them to sign false statements about their religion. The SCNS subjected the Witnesses to humiliation and intimidation, and threatened them with physical harm and imprisonment.
17. On **8-10 July 2014** the SCNS repeatedly summoned and questioned Ruslan Babayev. Each time he was illegally detained for several hours.
18. On **10 July 2014**, the SCNS summoned Mrs. Gulnora Satimova, who hosts religious meetings in her home. The SCNS officers tried to recruit Mrs. Satimova as an informant, and asked her to provide information about her fellow Jehovah’s Witnesses.
19. On **7 January 2015**, Ms. Rohila Mahmudova, from Dushanbe, was expelled from the National Music School on the basis of the letter from the SCNS stating that Ms. Mahmudova belongs to an “anti-government organization” of Jehovah’s Witnesses. While the case was ongoing, her immediate family members, including the sick mother, were intimidated and threatened by the SCNS officers.
20. On **17 March 2015**, in the city of Hujand, police officers detained Ms. Dilfuza Nizomova and Ms. Rano Holmatova on the street. The police interrogated them and confiscated their religious literature.
21. On **26 July 2015**, in the city of Hudjand, two of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Ms Gulnora Tegneyeva and Ms Jamila Bozorboyeva, were detained by the police after speaking with a person at a bus stop. While at the police station they were interrogated and battered. One of the police officers introduced himself as Jamshed Jurayev, though his colleagues called him Azamat.

22. On **18 July 2015**, in the town of Gafurov, the private home of the Witnesses was raided and searched at the start of their congregation meeting. One police officer introduced himself as Manuchehr Ergashev. Eleven people, including a child were detained, interrogated, and taken to the police. All of their personal religious literature was seized. One of the detained Witnesses was an elderly person. The stress of the situation caused her to vomit. However, the police detained her for several hours before allowing her to receive medical treatment at the hospital. The Witnesses were not allowed to make a telephone call or call a lawyer.

### **III. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS**

23. During Tajikistan's previous review in 2011, recommendation No. 37 from Italy encouraged Tajikistan to guarantee freedom of religion and worship, and to fight all forms of discrimination against people belonging to religious minorities. The events reported in this submission demonstrate that Tajikistan has not implemented this recommendation despite having internationally accepted it.

### **IV. CONCLUSION**

24. Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan, and as a worldwide organization, express concern that the government refuses to legally register them, which has led to harassment by the authorities. They respectfully request the government of Tajikistan to take the necessary steps to:
- (1) Register the Religious Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in Dushanbe;
  - (2) Allow Jehovah's Witnesses to import and share their Bible-based literature; and
  - (3) Abide by their commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Tajikistan and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.