

# **Police conduct sexual harassment, threaten fines or jail for sharing faith**

Police and Struggle against Terrorism and Extremism police summon Jehovah's Witnesses who share their faith with others in public. Officers warn of fines of two months' average wages – and in one case of up to five years' imprisonment. In May, police interrogated and verbally abused a woman and her minor daughter, and instructed them to undress. The women refused. Officers forced them to sign that they "illegally shared their faith". "I don't think that could have happened," Mirjamol Miralimov of the Interior Ministry's struggle against extremism and terrorism Service claimed.

In at least ten cases known to Forum 18 between mid-May and mid-October, the regular police and Struggle against Terrorism and Extremism police in five Regions - including Tashkent, Samarkand, Navoi, Surkhandarya and Fergana - have summoned Jehovah's Witnesses to police stations. Officers warned them of fines of more than two months' average wages – and in one case of possible imprisonment for up to five years - for sharing their faith with their neighbours or in public places.

In one case in May, police took a Jehovah's Witness and her minor daughter to a police station. Officers interrogated and verbally abused the two, and instructed them to undress. The women refused to do so. After keeping them at the police station for many hours without allowing them to use the toilet and without providing drinking water, officers made them sign police reports that they "illegally shared their faith in public". Only then did they release the two women (see below).

"We can confirm that the victims [in all cases] did not [by the date] submit any formal complaints against the officers involved," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 10 November. "Consequently, no disciplinary measures against the officials involved were taken, and there is no documentation pertaining to such proceedings" (see below).

Concerning the sexual harassment case in May, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18: "We have not received any indication from the victims that they were contacted again by the authorities following that incident. We can confirm that no fines against the concerned individuals or other penalties were imposed. There is no record of any further official actions" (see below).

In Angren in Tashkent Region in August, the local Police officer warned a Jehovah's Witness that if he continues sharing his faith with others the officer will open a criminal case against him. "The officer warned him that he may receive up to a five-year prison sentence," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Before summoning the man to the police station, the Officer followed him over the previous two days at various public places and confronted him that he must stop sharing his faith. Telephones at Angren Police went unanswered each time Forum 18 called (see below).

In Samarkand in September, two officers from the Prosecutor's office, two local police officers, and the Chair of the mahalla Committee raided the home of a Jehovah's Witness. The officials "conducted a 30-minute 'preventive talk' and intimidated her", Jehovah's Witnesses complained. "She was photographed without her permission and asked to sign a police warning prohibiting her from inviting others to her home to read Jehovah's Witnesses literature and prohibiting her sharing her faith in public places." Officials warned her that if she is caught doing so again, they will fine her more than two months' average wage (see below).

Police Inspector Captain Firdavs Kuchkarov of Samarkand's struggle against terrorism Police division refused to answer Forum 18's questions. "I cannot talk to you about these issues," he told Forum 18 (see below).

Forum 18 asked Mirjamol Miralimov, First Deputy Chief of the Interior Ministry's Service of

struggle against extremism and terrorism, why the Ministry has ordered the police to take action against people – including Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists - who share their faith with others, including on social media. "This is our internal policy, and we do not need to give you an explanation," he told Forum 18 (see below).

Forum 18 also asked Miralimov why Police threatened female Jehovah's Witnesses, including a minor, with sexual abuse. "I don't think that could have happened," he claimed. He referred all questions to the State Religious Affairs Committee, even though its officials do not appear to have been involved (see below).

State Religious Affairs Committee officials did not answer their phones each time Forum 18 called (see below).

Police raided a Council of Churches Baptist meeting for worship in Fergana in early November. Officers complained that it meets without state permission. Police took several church members, including a boy, to the police station, interrogated them and made them sign police reports that they had violated the Law. It appears officials did not take further action against church members (see below).

Uzbekistan has banned Jehovah's Witnesses from conducting any religious activity outside their single registered place of worship in Chirchik District of Tashkent Region. In April the Supreme Court rejected their latest challenge to registration denials (see below).

## The regime's strict controls

The regime imposes strict controls on all exercise of freedom of religion or belief. Holding meetings for worship without state permission [is illegal and punishable](#). The regime [arbitrarily denies state registration](#) to communities it does not like. Muslim communities must be subject to the state-controlled Muslim Board (Muftiate).

Sharing faith without state permission – whether face to face or online – [is illegal and punishable](#). Courts have jailed Muslims for posting religious material online. On 8 October, a Tashkent court [jailed the 51-year-old Muslim scholar and blogger Alisher Tursunov \(Mubashir Ahmad\)](#) for two-and-a-half years and ordered all his online sites closed. Courts [often fine Jehovah's Witnesses](#) for sharing their faith in public.

The regime [strictly controls all religious literature and materials](#), whether in printed form or online. Article 10 of the Religion Law specifies that import into Uzbekistan, production, distribution and publication of books and religious materials in Uzbekistan without prior permission from the authorities is forbidden.

An April 2022 Cabinet of Ministers Decree sets out the way the religious censorship operates. This decrees that religious materials can be published only after prior "expert analysis" by State Religious Affairs Committee "experts".

## Police sexually harass female Jehovah's Witnesses

In May 2025, police took a Jehovah's Witness and her minor daughter to a police station. Officers interrogated and verbally abused them, and instructed them to undress. The women refused to do so, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 10 November. After keeping them at the police station for many hours without allowing them to use the toilet and without providing drinking water, them sign police reports that they "illegally shared their faith in public". Officers then released them.

"We are not in a position to provide details of the officers involved in the interrogations or alleged mistreatment," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "Given the sensitive nature of the situation, we

are concerned that disclosing such information could result in consequences for the individuals affected."

Forum 18 asked Mirjamol Miralimov, First Deputy Chief of the Interior Ministry's Service of struggle against extremism and terrorism, why Police threatened female Jehovah's Witnesses, including a minor, with sexual abuse. "I don't think that could have happened," he told Forum 18 on 12 December. "Do you have the details?" (Forum 18 did not reveal to Miralimov exactly when and where the abuse took place.) "Please, talk to the State Religious Affairs Committee and not us." (State Religious Affairs Committee officials do not appear to have been involved in the harassment.)

State Religious Affairs Committee officials did not answer their phones each time Forum 18 called between 11 and 15 December.

"We can confirm that the victims [in all cases] did not [by the date] submit any formal complaints against the officers involved," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 10 November. "Consequently, no disciplinary measures against the officials involved were taken, and there is no documentation pertaining to such proceedings."

Concerning the sexual harassment case in May, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18: "We have not received any indication from the victims that they were contacted again by the authorities following that incident. We can confirm that no fines against the concerned individuals or other penalties were imposed. There is no record of any further official actions."

## **Police warn, threaten Jehovah's Witnesses for sharing faith in public**

Between April 2023 and April 2024, "police officers detained 138 members of Jehovah's Witnesses for sharing their faith with others in a total of 46 incidents in 15 cities across Uzbekistan", Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "They were at various times taken to police stations, warned to stop sharing their faith and in some cases they were given fines. The family members of these Jehovah's Witnesses experienced anxiety, fear and stress, while they were interrogated at police stations."

Police moves to prevent individuals sharing their faith in public have continued. Between mid-May and mid-October 2025, the regular police and Struggle against Terrorism and Extremism police in five Regions - including Tashkent, Samarkand, Navoi, Surkhandarya and Fergana - have summoned Jehovah's Witnesses to Police stations to warn and threaten them about sharing their faith with others in public.

Local police officer in Denau in the southern Surkhandarya Region summoned a Jehovah's Witness husband and wife to the local police station on 4 October and interrogated them. He showed them video footage of them reading their religious literature to others in public. The officer did not explain how the video footage was produced.

"The officer warned the man and his wife not to read their religious literature to others in public places," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "He told them that they can personally read it, but if caught once again they will be punished for sharing materials in public, or encouraging others to read. The officer warned them verbally, but did not make a police report."

Denau Police again on 8 October warned two other Jehovah's Witnesses for talking about their faith to a woman in their neighborhood. The Jehovah's Witnesses understood that the Chair of the local mahalla Committee (residential administration) warned the police about their activity. "The police officer accompanied them to their home and checked their passports and warned them they should not talk about their faith to people in the neighborhood again."

Denau Police on 15 December referred Forum 18 to Shavkat Normuradov, Head of Denau Police's division for struggle against terrorism and extremism. Normuradov did not answer multiple calls on 15 December.

On 30 September, five male officials representing various authorities raided the home of a female Jehovah's Witness in the city of Samarkand. Carrying out the raid were two officers from Samarkand City Prosecutor's office, two local police officers, and the Chair of the mahalla Committee.

The officials "conducted a 30-minute 'preventive talk' and intimidated her", Jehovah's Witnesses complained. "She was photographed without her permission and asked to sign a police warning prohibiting her from inviting others to her home to read Jehovah's Witnesses literature and prohibiting her sharing her faith in public places. She was told that if she is caught doing so again, she will be fined 15 million Soms." This represents more than two months' average wage.

Forum 18 asked Samarkand City Police why officers are following and harassing Jehovah's Witnesses in the city. It referred Forum 18 to Police Inspector Captain Firdavs Kuchkarov, who works for Samarkand's struggle against terrorism Police division. Captain Kuchkarov refused to answer Forum 18's questions. "I cannot talk to you about these issues," he told Forum 18 on 15 December. He also refused to put Forum 18 through to any other officers who could talk about the cases.

In another case on 23 August in the town of Angren in Tashkent Region, the local Police officer warned a Jehovah's Witness that if he continues sharing his faith with others in his neighbourhood or in public places the officer will open a criminal case against him under Criminal Code Article 216 ("Illegal organisation of public associations or religious organisations"). "The officer warned him that he may receive up to a five-year prison sentence." This is the maximum punishment under this Article.

Before summoning the man to the police station on 23 August, the Officer followed him between 21 and 23 August at various public places and confronted him that he must stop sharing his faith.

Telephones at Angren Police went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 15 December.

Asked why Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent Region are being followed by Police and harassed to stop sharing their faith with others and are being threatened with criminal punishments, Tashkent Regional Police Department referred Forum 18 on 15 December to Lieutenant Colonel Sahib Norov, Chief of Tashkent Regional Police's division for struggle against terrorism and extremism Police.

Chief Norov at first answered the phone and confirmed his name and position. But when Forum 18 asked about the moves against Jehovah's Witnesses sharing their faith with others, he refused to answer and put the phone down. Called back immediately, Norov turned on an automated messaging program, which kept repeating the same phrase, "I don't know why you are calling me", for several minutes.

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Forum 18 asked Mirjamol Miralimov, First Deputy Chief of the Interior Ministry's Service of struggle against extremism and terrorism, why the Ministry has ordered the police to take action against people – including Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists - who share their faith with others, including on social media. "This is our internal policy, and we do not need to give you an explanation," he told Forum 18 on 12 December.

## **Sharing faith leads to entry ban until 2030**

On 15 June, while attempting to cross the border from Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan at the Kaplanbek checkpoint near Tashkent, the Uzbek authorities refused entry to a married couple — Jehovah's Witnesses and citizens of Kazakhstan. "Uzbek border officials told the couple that they were banned from entering the country until 2030. The officials did not provide a reason and did not place deportation stamps in their passports."

Police had previously detained the couple with other local Jehovah's Witnesses on 24 January 2024 in Taqiyatash in Karakalpakstan Autonomous Region of Uzbekistan for "illegally sharing their faith with others", Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

## **November Police raid on Baptist worship meeting**

Police raided a worship service of a Council of Baptists congregation in Fergana Region in early November. The police filmed church members while at worship and warned them they cannot meet without official registration.

Council of Churches Baptist congregations choose not to seek official registration in any country where they operate.

Police took several church members, including a boy, to the police station, interrogated them and made them sign police reports that they had violated the Law. Police released the church members the same day after they had held them there for several hours.

"So far there have been no fines or other punishments given to our members and we have been able to carry on with our worship services," Baptists told Forum 18. They declined to give details of the incident. "If otherwise, we will provide the public with more specific details."

On Easter Sunday, 9 April 2023, police raided the Council of Churches Baptist congregation in Karshi in the southern Kashkadarya Region [during their morning worship meeting](#). "Today police brutally beat David Ibragimov and a few more church members in front of our fellow believers," church members said. "They also used electric shock prods and other implements to incapacitate the brothers and sisters." Police took 10 church members, including young people, to the police station.

## **Officials again refuse to allow Jehovah's Witnesses to meet legally outside Chirchik**

The Jehovah's Witness Community in Tashkent Region several times between 2023 and 2024 unsuccessfully tried through the courts to guarantee their right to exist and carry out religious activity outside their only registered place of worship in the Region's Chirchik District.

The regional authorities as well as the central organ for religion, the State Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent, refused all their attempts to gain official registration for their communities outside Chirchik.

Jehovah's Witnesses tried to challenge these registration refusals through the courts. However, in the latest court decision, on 17 April 2025 the Supreme Court supported the Tashkent Regional Administration and lower court decisions, and rejected the Jehovah's Witnesses' suits.

An official at the reception of the Supreme Court (who refused to give his name) wrote down Forum 18's questions on 12 December as to why Uzbekistan has practically banned registration of Jehovah's Witness communities across the country outside their only registered community in Chirchik and why the authorities continue the nationwide crackdown on Jehovah's Witnesses for

sharing their faith. The official then refused to put Forum 18 through to any responsible official.

State Religious Affairs Committee officials did not answer their phones each time Forum 18 called between 11 and 15 December.

## **Regional Administration finally allows use of renovated place of worship**

The registered Jehovah's Witness community of Chirchik in Tashkent Region renovated its place of worship from June 2024. Once the work was complete, Tashkent Regional authorities initially refused to allow the community to resume using their registered place of worship.

It was not until October 2024 that Tashkent Regional authorities authorised the Jehovah's Witness community to use its place of worship once again after the involvement of the United States embassy in Tashkent, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

## **Seized books returned 17 years later**

On 28 January, after 17 years, the Uzbek authorities finally permitted the Jehovah's Witnesses to receive an imported container with copies of their New World version of the Bible. "The shipment arrived in Tashkent City international airport 17 years ago, in 2008, and it remained at the airport customs' storage since then," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "This is the first shipment of any religious literature of Jehovah's Witnesses to Uzbekistan in recent years. The last time our community there received literature was in 2006." (END)

[More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Uzbekistan](#)

For background information, see [Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey](#)

Forum 18's [compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\) freedom of religion or belief commitments](#)