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In January 2009, a highly restrictive new religion law came into force, amid protests from human rights defenders, religious communities and international bodies, including the OSCE. Human rights defender Aziza Abdirasulova, of the Kylum Shamy (Candle of the Century) Centre for Human Rights Protection, told the news service of the Norway-based religious freedom organization Forum 18 that, 'The new law contradicts international human rights standards.' According to Shamy, the new law broke the Constitution's guarantee that, 'No laws restricting freedom of speech and freedom of the press may be adopted', as well as the guarantee of freedom of 'thought, speech and press ... [and] unimpeded expression of those thoughts and beliefs'. Some of the new restrictions, for example the wide-ranging bans on 'proselytism' and the distribution of religious literature, restrict both freedom of speech and freedom of the press. A legal challenge in the Constitutional Court was dismissed in July 2009.

The new law requires all religious communities to re-register with the State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA) by 1 January 2010. It bars communities not registered by the SCRA and the Justice Ministry from receiving legal status. Those with fewer than 200 members are prohibited from registering with the SCRA. All the 200 must be adult Kyrgyz citizens, who must provide personal data. The application also needs to include information about the organization's religious faith, form of rites, history in Kyrgyzstan and attitude towards marriage, family, education and military service. Finally, written permission is needed from the local authorities for the use of premises where the community meets.

Smaller religious communities, including some Protestants, Baha'is and Hare Krishna devotees, expressed concern to human rights monitors and international media that they did not have enough members to register. Throughout 2009, SCRA officials refused to process registration or re-registration applications in all but a handful of cases, citing the absence of approved regulations to enact the new law.

Officials of the Prosecutor's Office, police, national security service (NSS) security police, local executive authorities and the SCRA have visited many non-Muslim religious communities across the country. Jehovah's Witnesses in Maili-Suu faced raids and summonses in April 2009. In some regions, branches of Protestant Churches, which had been officially registered in Bishkek, were ordered by the local authorities in spring 2009 to stop their worship meetings, saying that their 'registration in Bishkek does not cover their activity' outside the capital.

The 2009 law banned the sharing of one's faith, required state examination of all imported religious materials and banned all distribution of religious literature and other materials in public places. It also required the registration of all religious education programmes, whether full- or part-time. Such religious education can only be conducted by registered religious organizations and with local authority permission.

Since the religion law was enacted, the SCRA has been drafting a new Law on Religious Education and Educational Institutions which, if adopted in its current form, would impose further restrictions on the activities of religious organizations and educational institutions. An autumn 2009 draft would reportedly impose sweeping controls on who could open religious educational institutions. It would ban all but approved and licensed institutions, limit the numbers of students in such institutions and ban individuals from seeking religious education abroad without state approval. A joint Council of Europe (CoE) and OSCE legal review of the draft law found that it imposes 'undue constraints on religious activity in the country' and that 'provisions are inconsistent with OSCE commitments and general international human rights standards'.

In August 2009, Kyrgyzstan established a state Coordinating Council on the Struggle against Religious Extremism. The execution of council decisions will be obligatory for the different parts of the government, but officials were unclear as to what they mean by religious extremism and what the council will do. It is led by the SCRA, the Interior Ministry and the NSS security police, and will have members from other parts of the government, the state-sanctioned Muslim Board and the Russian Orthodox Church.

A draft Strategy on State Policy in the Religious Sphere from 2009 to 2015, made public in October 2009, aimed to tackle 'external and internal threats connected with religion, and the rise of radical religious movements and inter-confessional contradictions in Kyrgyzstan'. It proposed a list of banned religious organizations, set out new restrictions and called for tighter monitoring of foreign missionaries. Visas for foreigners involved in religious activity have already been cancelled or denied.

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