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July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report - Uzbekistan

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
September 13, 2011

[Covers six-month period from 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 (USDOS is shifting to a calendar year reporting period)]

The constitution protects religious freedom; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. The law restricts the religious freedom of unregistered groups and prohibits many activities, such as proselytizing; many members of minority religious groups faced heavy fines and short jail terms for violations of these laws. The government continues to deal harshly with Muslims who discuss religious issues outside of sanctioned mosques. However, the government did not interfere with worshippers at sanctioned mosques and permitted the regular operation of religious groups traditionally practicing in the country, including the Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Russian Orthodox communities.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. However, society generally is tolerant of religious groups, and religious groups were generally tolerant of each other.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy remained engaged in monitoring and advocating religious freedom and maintained contact with government and religious leaders and human rights activists. In January 2009 the secretary of state redesignated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 172,742 square miles and a population of 27.6 million. Approximately 80 percent of the population is ethnic Uzbek, 5.5 percent Russian, 5 percent Tajik, 3 percent Kazakh, 2.5 percent Karakalpak, and 1.5 percent Tatar. The

government reported that an estimated 93 percent of the population is nominally Muslim (the vast majority of which is Sunni Muslim, of the Hanafi school, with perhaps 1 percent Shia Muslims, who are concentrated in the provinces of Bukhara and Samarkand). Approximately 4 percent is Russian Orthodox, a percentage that is declining as ethnic Russians and other Slavs continue to emigrate. The remaining 3 percent includes small communities of Roman Catholics, Korean Christians, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Bahais, and Hare Krishnas, as well as atheists. In addition an estimated 10,000 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain, concentrated in the cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. At least 80,000 Jews emigrated to Israel and the United States over the past two decades, mainly for economic reasons.

As of December, there were 2,227 registered religious organizations of 16 religious denominations, including 2,051 Islamic organizations (including mosques, educational institutions, and Islamic centers). This is an increase of one from the 2,226 recorded in June. Among the Muslim groups were several Shia congregations. Registered minority religious groups include 52 Korean Christian, 38 Russian Orthodox, 23 Baptist, 21 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 10 Seventh-day Adventist, eight Jewish, five Roman Catholic, six Bahai, two Lutheran, four "New Apostolic," two Armenian Apostolic, one Jehovah's Witnesses, one Krishna Consciousness, one Temple of Buddha, one Christian "Voice of God" Church, and one interconfessional Bible Society.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution protects religious freedom; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these restrictions. The constitution also establishes the principle of separation of church and state. The government prohibits religious groups from forming political parties and social movements.

The law provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law grants those rights only to registered groups. It also restricts religious rights that are judged to be in conflict with national security, prohibits proselytizing, bans religious subjects in public schools, prohibits the private teaching of religious principles, and requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. The Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), a government agency accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers, must approve all religious literature. A Council for Confessions exists under the CRA to discuss ensuring compliance with the law, the rights of religious organizations and believers, and other issues related to religion. The committee includes representatives from various Muslim, Christian, and Jewish groups.

Although the law treats all centrally registered religious denominations equally, the government funds an Islamic university and the preservation of Islamic historic sites. The government provided logistical support for selected Muslims to participate in the November Hajj, but pilgrims paid their own expenses. The government controls the muftiate, which in turn controls the Muslim hierarchy, the content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials.

The law requires all religious groups to register and provides strict and burdensome criteria for registration. Among its requirements, the law stipulates that each group must present a list of at least 100 citizen members to the local branch of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The CRA oversees registered religious activity.

The criminal and administrative codes contain stiff penalties for violating the law and

other statutes on religious activities. In addition to the prohibited activities that include organizing an illegal religious group, the law also proscribes persuading others to join such a group and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal.

The criminal code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those that are not registered properly, and "prohibited" groups viewed as extremist, which the government bans altogether. The code makes it a criminal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison, to organize an illegal religious group or to resume the activities of such a group after it has been denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition the code punishes participation in such a group with up to three years in prison. The code also provides penalties of up to 20 years in prison for "organizing or participating" in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups. The law increases the fines for repeat violations of the law on religious activity up to 200 to 300 times the minimum monthly wage of approximately 49,735 soums (\$30). After a person is punished under the administrative code, he or she may be tried under the criminal code for a repeat offense.

The law punishes "illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of materials of religious content," with a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for individuals or 50 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for officials of organizations, together with confiscation of the materials and the "corresponding means of producing and distributing them." The criminal code also imposes a fine of 100 to 200 times the minimum monthly wage or corrective labor of up to three years.

The law prohibits religious groups from training religious personnel if the group does not have a registered central administrative body. Registration of a central body requires registered religious groups to be present in eight of the 14 provinces (including Karakalpakstan and Tashkent City). There are six entities that may legally train religious personnel. The law limits religious instruction to officially sanctioned religious schools and state-approved instructors. The law permits no private religious instruction and imposes fines for violations. The law also prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in public schools. Article 14 of the religion law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" (religious clothing) in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations."

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Kurbon Hayit (Eid al-Adha) and Roza Hayit (Eid al-Fitr).

The government allows those who object to military service on the basis of their religious beliefs, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, to perform alternate service.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom. By continuing to deny registration to some religious groups, the government effectively deprived their members of their legal right to worship, as provided in the constitution. The government restricted many religious practices and activities, punishing some citizens because they engaged in religious practices in violation of registration laws.

The government bans Islamic organizations it deems extremist and criminalizes membership in them, including Akromiya, Tablighi Jamaat, and groups the government broadly labeled "Wahhabi." In practice Nur is also considered a banned organization. The government states that it does not consider repression of persons or groups suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but rather of preventing armed resistance to the government. The Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan reported in December that between January and September, 36 individuals in the Fergana region were convicted of being members of extremist groups

and given prison terms of between five and 14 years.

Nur, founded by Kurdish Mullah Said Nursi and associated with the religious teachings of Turkish scholar Fethullah Gullen, remained a banned religious organization despite its consistent condemnations of violent extremism. After the Central Asian states gained independence, Gullen supported the opening of Turkish high schools throughout Central Asia. Authorities forced the Uzbek Turkish schools to close in 1999 following a series of bombings in Tashkent blamed on a former Uzbek opposition figure then living in Turkey. Arrests of Nur members started in larger numbers in 2006, when the government claimed Nur businessmen came from Turkey and resumed their activities in the country. Following an unusually high number of convictions for Nur membership during the previous reporting period, the number of arrests and convictions declined during the current reporting period.

The government repressed and prosecuted members of Akromiya (Akromiylar), an informal association that promotes business according to Islamic principles, since 1997; however, there were no known convictions of persons for membership in Akromiya during the reporting period. The government claims that the group attempted to overthrow the government through armed rebellion in Andijon in 2005.

Tabligh Jamaat, a Muslim missionary group with origins in South Asia, claims to be exclusively religious and apolitical. The government, however, continued to ban the group. There were no reported cases against alleged members of Tabligh Jamaat during the reporting period.

The government also bans alleged "Wahhabists," a term the government uses to describe Muslims whose intellectual or religious roots derive from the strict teachings of prominent imams of the early 1990s. Imams Obid-kori Nazarov, Nemat Parpiev, and Abduvali Mirzaev are among these. Nazarov was granted political asylum abroad; the others disappeared in custody. The government remained deeply suspicious of Muslims who worship outside state-approved institutions, were educated at madrassahs abroad, gather socially to discuss religious issues, or are tied to known "Wahhabi" imams.

The government formally bans as extremist eight lesser-known religiously based organizations. The government often accuses defendants of being "jihadists," but it is not clear whether the government considers them members of the terrorist Islamic Jihad Union or whether the government used the term generically to mean "extremist." The government informally bans other Muslim religious groups as they are identified, and defendants are convicted of sentences similar to those levied against the previously identified groups.

There were credible reports that the security services continued their covert surveillance of religious communities. Authorities raided several Christian gatherings of both registered and unregistered groups. Additionally, observers noted persons with cameras filming participants in Friday prayer services at local mosques.

Sources reported that the government instructed mahalla (neighborhood) committees and imams to identify local residents who could potentially become involved in extremist activity or groups, including those who prayed daily or otherwise demonstrated active devotion. The government controlled the content of imams' sermons and the volume and content of published Islamic materials.

The government and local imams discouraged some public displays of faith. For example, in some parts of Tashkent, authorities questioned women wearing the hijab and encouraged them either to remove it or alter it to reflect the more traditional style of tying the scarf at the back of the neck. In other parts of Tashkent, authorities imposed no such restrictions. Since June reports suggested that only imams selected from a government-approved list may be invited to give sermons at receptions for weddings and other social occasions. In the name of security, authorities continued to observe closely social gatherings where religious issues were discussed, particularly among men, with several arrests based on participation in such discussions. Sources

reported that for this reason, Muslims became more reluctant to discuss religion outside of the mosque.

Children continued to be discouraged from practicing their faith. School officials were known to discourage both Muslim and Christian parents from sending their children to mosque or church services, and some school officials questioned students about their religion and why they attended services. There were several reports of school officials sending home or rebuking girls for wearing the hijab and isolated reports of schools refusing to allow children to enter if their mothers' hijabs were not removed or altered. There were reports that local officials pressured imams to prevent children from attending Friday prayers and additional reports of local officials, teachers, and police officers turning students away from Friday prayer services. In a televised message on August 6, the chief imam of Tashkent advised against parents sending their underage children to evening prayers during Ramadan.

The government reported that during the reporting period, the CRA approved one application for registration, authorizing a Russian Orthodox church in Chinaz City. The government did not deregister any religious organizations.

After facing difficulties gaining registration in previous years, no known mosques applied for registration during the reporting period. Unregistered "neighborhood mosques" still functioned in some areas for use primarily by elderly or disabled persons not in close proximity to larger, registered mosques. The neighborhood mosques were limited in their functions, and a registered imam was not assigned. The government reportedly closed many such neighborhood mosques in Tashkent during the reporting period.

Two madrassahs in the Fergana Valley remained closed after the government converted them into medical facilities in previous years.

Minority religious groups continued to have difficulties registering during the reporting period. Since 1996 the government has denied or left pending Jehovah's Witnesses applications to register congregations in Tashkent at least 23 times and to register congregations in the provinces 13 times. Of the several Jehovah's Witnesses groups in the country, only the one in Chirchik had registered status at the end of the reporting period.

No Baptist church has successfully registered since 1999, and since 2000 four Baptist churches have lost their registered status. Baptist Union churches in Gulistan in Syrdarya province and in Gazalkent, Krasnogorsk, and Toy Tepa in Tashkent Province attempted to register several times in the past few years without success.

Other churches remained unregistered after unsuccessful past registration attempts. These included Bethany Baptist Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek district of Tashkent; the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik; Roman Catholic churches in Navoi and Angren; Emmanuel Church and Mir (Peace) Church of Nukus, Karakalpakstan; Hushkhabar Church in Gulistan; the Pentecostal church in Andijon; and the Adventist Church, Greater Grace Christian Church, Central Protestant Church, and Miral Protestant Church, all in Samarkand. Other congregations did not face similar difficulties.

Religious activity remained particularly difficult in Karakalpakstan, as no non-Muslim and non-Orthodox religious communities had official registration status. The last registered Protestant church in Karakalpakstan, Emmanuel Pentecostal Church, lost its registration in 2005. More than 20 Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in the region have been refused legal status, making their activity illegal.

During the reporting period, some churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, did not apply or reapply for registration because they did not expect local officials to register them. Other groups, including those with too few members, reported that they preferred not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that obviously would not meet legal requirements. Some groups did not want to give the authorities a list of member names,

especially ethnic Uzbek members, as they were harassed during previous attempts to register. A few groups refused on principle to seek registration because they challenge the government's right to require it.

In order to register, a group must report in its charter a valid legal address. In previous reporting periods, local officials denied approval of legal addresses or did not answer approval requests, thus preventing religious groups from registering. The MOJ also cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. Some groups were reluctant to purchase property without assurance that their registration would be approved. Others claimed that local officials arbitrarily withheld approval of the addresses because they opposed the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members.

Other problems that prevented registration included claims of falsified congregation lists; problems certifying addresses; improper certification by fire inspectors, sanitation workers, and epidemiologists; grammatical errors in the Uzbek text of a group's charter; and other technicalities.

The government does not prohibit a person from changing his or her religion, but there was social pressure, particularly among the majority Muslim population, not to do so. Ethnic Russians, Jews, and non-Muslim foreigners enjoyed greater freedom to choose and change their religion than did members of Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks.

Local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continued to express apprehension over the proselytizing activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, and an NGO reported that between January and the end of August, the government fined at least 104 Jehovah's Witnesses as much as 4,500,000 soums (\$2727) for various religious activities. NGOs accused by the government of proselytizing remained closed, along with most other foreign NGOs. A 2003 Cabinet of Ministers decree restricts the activities of faith-based NGOs, and the law prohibits "actions aimed at converting believers of one religion into another (proselytizing) as well as any other missionary activity." The MOJ controls accreditation, a necessity for any foreigner attempting to work for an NGO.

State-controlled media in some cases encouraged prejudice against certain minority religious groups. During the reporting period, state-controlled media accused missionaries of posing a danger to society and sowing civil discord.

Although the government requires that the CRA approve all religious literature, in practice a number of other government entities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, National Security Service, Customs Service, and local police may suppress or confiscate religious literature. The law restricts the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations, of which eight exist: the Bible Society of Uzbekistan (BSU); the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan; Tashkent Islamic University; Tashkent Islamic Institute; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices. The government may confiscate and, in some cases, destroy illegally imported religious literature.

During the reporting period, the government restricted the quantity of Christian literature in Uzbek that registered central religious organizations could import. The government continued to hold a BSU shipment of approximately 11,000 religious books and brochures – to which the CRA refused to grant importation permission in May 2008 – as well as a 2006 shipment of Jehovah's Witnesses literature. The BSU continued its attempt to gain approval to import a shipment of 3,000 copies of 59 Russian language books and to publish locally one book of the Bible in the Uzbek language.

Authorities also confiscated and, in some cases destroyed, Christian literature in Uzbek and Russian that had been legally imported. For historical and cultural reasons, evangelical pastors generally preach in Russian while offering limited services in Uzbek, the official national language and the one linked most closely to the majority Muslim population. In previous reporting periods, the CRA allowed some materials, such as limited quantities of Uzbek translations of some books of the Bible, to be imported.

The International Post Office in Tashkent continued to scrutinize all incoming packages and send examples of any religious material to the CRA for further examination and approval. When the CRA bans the materials, it mails a letter to the intended recipient and the sender explaining the rejection. The CRA has denied entry for both Christian and Islamic titles.

The government tightly controlled access to Islamic publications and required a statement in every domestic publication (books, pamphlets, compact discs, and movies) indicating the source of its publication authority. Many books were published with the phrase "permission for this book was granted by the CRA" or "this book is recommended by the CRA," indicating official sanction. Generally, books published under the Muslim Board's imprint (known as "Movarounnahr") contained these phrases, as did other religious works published under the imprint of the state-owned Sharq and Tashkent Islamic University Publishing Houses. A few imported works in Arabic occasionally were available from book dealers. More controversial literature generally was not available in the marketplace. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremists or of any literature illegally imported or produced may lead to arrest and prosecution. The government categorically prohibited Nur and other literature it deemed "extremist." A state newspaper reported on August 18 that during the first seven months of the year, customs officials uncovered 108 violations of law and stopped the smuggling of nearly 3,300 pieces of religious material.

The government blocked access to several Web sites that contained religious content, including Christian and Islamic-related news.

The private teaching of religious principles and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent is illegal. Only a religious group with a registered central office may legally provide religious instruction.

Eleven madrassahs (including two for women) provide secondary education on a full range of secular subjects. The Cabinet of Ministers considers diplomas granted by madrassahs equivalent to other diplomas, enabling graduates of those institutions to continue their education at the university level. In addition the Islamic Institute and Islamic University in Tashkent provide higher education religion programs. There is no other officially sanctioned religious instruction for individuals interested in learning about Islam. In response to strong demand, however, women's groups have been started at Tashkent Islamic University and the Islamic Institute, as well as at one men's madrassah in the Kashkadarya region.

Due to increased government attention to unauthorized instruction in Islam, imams no longer informally offer religious education, a practice that, although technically illegal, local authorities sometimes allowed in the past.

The government restricts Shia Islamic education by not permitting the separate training of Shia imams inside the country and by not recognizing such education received outside the country. The Russian Orthodox Church operates two monasteries (one for women, one for men) and a seminary, and offers Sunday school education through many of its churches. Other religious groups offer religious education through their religious centers. The Jewish community has no rabbinate because it does not have synagogues in eight different provinces and therefore cannot meet the requirements for a registered central office. It has also struggled to get a new rabbi appointed for an existing congregation. Seven synagogues continued to function (two in Tashkent, two in Samarkand, two in Bukhara, and one in Andijon), but each was struggling for financial support, and one Tashkent synagogue had to close its doors during the previous reporting period for financial reasons. The Jewish school in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy district provides instruction on Jewish culture.

The government limited the number of Hajj pilgrims to 5,080, or approximately 20 percent of the country's allowed number of pilgrims, although only 3,081 participated during the year. Local mahalla committees, district administrations, the National Security Service, and the state-run Hajj Commission, controlled by the CRA and the

Muftiate, reportedly were involved in vetting potential pilgrims, subject to a blacklist.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom in the country, including religious prisoners and detainees. The government continued to commit serious abuses of religious freedom in its campaign against extremists or those participating in underground Islamic activity. In many cases, authorities severely mistreated persons arrested on suspicion of extremism, using torture, beatings, and harsh prison conditions. The government imprisoned a significant number of individuals for membership in prohibited Muslim groups. Family members of prisoners convicted on charges related to religious extremism reported that prisoners often were not allowed to read the Qur'an or pray privately.

While prisons had special areas set aside for inmates to pray and prison libraries had copies of the Qur'an and the Bible, there were reports that prison authorities did not allow some prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism to practice their religion freely. Restrictions included not permitting inmates to pray five times a day or refusing to adjust work and meal schedules for the Ramadan fast. There were also reports that authorities punished prisoners for "violating internal prison regulations" by praying at certain times of the day.

Family members of prisoners reported deaths in custody of prisoners serving sentences on charges related to religious extremism. In a typical case, family members reported that the body of the prisoner showed signs of beating or other abuse, but authorities pressured them to bury the body before a medical professional could examine it. Reported cases that fit this pattern this year included those of Nurullo Musayev and Shavkat Alimhojaev. Additionally, in July Nigmat Zufarov was found dead in prison, officially due to suicide. Zufarov had conducted a six-day hunger strike in May 2009, demanding that he be allowed to pray in prison; guards reportedly mistreated him following the incident. There were no updates to the reported deaths that fit this pattern in 2009, including Sunnatillo Zaripov and Golib Mullajonov or to the 2008 case of Odil Azizov.

There were several reports of beatings and mistreatment of prisoners serving sentences for religious convictions. As in the past, reports indicated that prison administrators charged prisoners convicted of religious extremism for organizing extremist cells within prison or for other offenses that led to extended prison terms. Similarly, prisoners who would otherwise be eligible to apply for amnesty often were charged with internal prison violations, rendering them ineligible to apply. Jehovah's Witnesses Olim Turayev and Abdubannob Akmedov, both in the middle of four-year sentences that started in 2008, were charged and convicted for violating prison regulations, thus making them ineligible for amnesty under the September 2009 Amnesty Decree. During the reporting period, however, one NGO reported that authorities in the Andijan region released at least 10 religious prisoners under the August 28 Amnesty Decree.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. There were numerous reported instances of police raiding meetings of unregistered congregations and detaining their members. With a few exceptions, authorities charged those detained with unauthorized religious activity such as worshipping, teaching, proselytizing, or possessing unauthorized religious material, and imposed administrative fines of two million to 4.5 million soums (\$1,212 to \$2,727). In contrast with previous periods, several individuals were imprisoned for up to 15 days for such offenses during the reporting period.

On June 28, a Bukhara court sentenced seven men to six years and two others to eight years in prison for membership in Nur. This judgment followed a related trial in June in which a Bukhara regional court sentenced 10 persons to between five years and eight years for Nur membership.

On August 6, the Kashkadarya Regional Criminal Court extended the sentence of human

rights activist Gaybullo Jalilov by an additional four years on new charges of alleged "anticonstitutional" activity. Jalilov and three others had been sentenced in January to nine years in prison for membership in an extremist religious group that allegedly planned terrorist attacks against a regional airport. A known human rights activist, Jalilov had been active in assisting others accused of extremism and their families. Jalilov claimed he was mistreated in custody and coerced into signing a confession. His conviction was upheld on appeal.

There were several cases of persons being arrested or convicted of membership in religious groups labeled extremist by the government. On August 16, a Tashkent court found nine persons, all former students of a Turkish lyceum in Angren, guilty of membership in Nur, sentencing three persons to five years in prison and fining six others 3,315,000 soums (\$2,009). On August 23, a human rights group reported that a Tashkent court found 11 defendants guilty of religious extremism, sentencing seven persons to three years of prison labor and four others to suspended sentences. On September 16, the Dyonat newspaper in Namangan reported that a Namangan court convicted 13 men of membership in a Wahhabi group, including Ravshan Umarbekov, who allegedly gathered young persons from his village every week to discuss religious matters. The sentences in these latter cases were not available.

Several sources reported that on November 10 an Andijon court convicted 25 persons of membership in the religious group "Shokhidiylar," reportedly an offshoot Islamic sect that recognizes the Prophet Muhammad but does not follow many of Islam's fundamental teachings. In contrast with other trials related to Islamic extremism, this trial was open, and there were no allegations of abuse while in detention. Sentences ranged from two to nine years in prison.

On December 2, a Termez online news source reported that a Surhandarya court convicted three female residents of "extremism" based on the finding that the women had delivered religious speeches with the use of CDs and books and imposed two-year suspended sentences.

On December 27, a Tashkent court convicted 12 persons of membership in a "jihadist extremist group" sentencing them to between three and 13 years in prison.

There was no further information on the arrest of as many as 200 persons in connection with three violent incidents in the summer of 2009 that were alleged by the government to have religious links. Between January and April, various courts in closed trials convicted at least 50 persons and imposed sentences ranging from suspended sentences to 18 years in prison. There were unconfirmed reports that an additional 150 individuals were convicted in related trials. During the same time period, authorities opened hundreds more cases against alleged extremists (particularly those labeled "Wahhabists" and "jihadists") on charges unrelated to the killings. Human rights activists reported that the families of several defendants accused authorities of using torture and coercion to obtain confessions, and many questioned whether due process provisions were followed.

There was no additional information on the following cases: The January arrest of 40 alleged Nur members in Bukhara and the arrest of 25 military personnel for Nur membership, 12 of whom faced courts martial, as reported by the NGO Forum 18; the April three-year suspended sentence given to Muhammad Ayubkhon Homidov, former rector at Tashkent Islamic Institute, to three years in prison for membership in Nur; the April sentencing by the Tashkent Regional Criminal Court of 25 men to between three and six years for membership in banned religious organizations; the April sentencing by the Jizzakh regional criminal court of 25 men to between two and 10 years in prison (with one suspended sentence) for membership in banned religious organizations; the May Termez court's sentencing of Obidjon Toshpulatov, Chori Tagaev, and Shavkat Mengniyezov to between four and eight years in prison for recruiting new Nur members; the May arrest of eight women for distributing books allegedly promoting religious extremism in the Fergana Valley; the May Fergana regional court's sentencing of 10 persons to between five and eight years in prison for Nur membership; and the June Fergana City court's sentencing of 17 men to five to eight years in prison for membership

in Tabligh Jamoat.

There were no developments in the case of Mehriniso Hamdamova, sentenced in April by a Kashkadarya regional court to seven years in a labor camp for attempting to overturn the constitutional order and distribution of materials threatening public order. Hamdamova was a teacher of Muslim women, officially appointed by the Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan to work at the Kuk Gumbas Islamic complex in Karshi. Hamdamova's sister and another relative who attended meetings with them, Zulkhumor Hamdamova and Shakhlo Rakhmatova, were sentenced to six-and-a-half years in a labor camp on similar charges.

There was no further information on the case of popular soccer journalist and religious commentator Hayrulla Khamidov, who was sentenced in May by a Tashkent court to six years in prison for being a "jihadist" and for illegal distribution of materials that threaten the public order. Three codefendants received the same sentence, two others were given four years, and 13 were released with suspended sentences or fines. Twenty others were convicted of similar sentences in three related trials, for a total of 39 convictions.

There were no further developments in the following cases: the July 2009 sentencing of 21 men to between five and 11 years in prison for Nur membership by courts in Samarkand and Khorezm; the August 2009 sentencing of five men to between 12 and 15 years in prison on charges of religious extremism by the Supreme Court of Karakalpakstan; and the August 2009 sentencing of Rustam Kuvandikov by a Jizzakh regional court to seven years in prison for Nur membership.

At the end of the reporting period, there was no information on the whereabouts of four suspected Nur members in Namangan, including Muhammadjon Sobirov, or of 12 suspected Nur members arrested in Khorezm Province.

There are no updates to the cases of nine individuals charged with Nur membership in Bukhara in December 2008, including Ikrom Merajov Muzaffar Allayorov, Botir Tukhtamurodov, Alisher Jumaev, Abdurahmon Musaev, Bobomurod Sanoev, Jamshid Ramazonov, Salohiddin Kosimov, Shuhrat Karimov, and another unidentified man arrested on the same charges.

The government continued to pursue the extradition of suspected Uzbek religious extremists from third countries, particularly from Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine, including those who had sought asylum. On September 18, Forum 18 reported that the country had requested the extradition of suspected Nur member Bobirjon Tukhtamurodov, who was arrested in the Russian city of Novosibirsk on August 18. There was no additional information on two individuals seeking political asylum in Kyrgyzstan who were extradited to the country and imprisoned on religious extremism charges in 2009.

Several members of minority religious groups were sentenced to 15-day jail terms under the administrative code and others given heavy fines. Forum 18 reported that between January and September, 22 members of religious minorities received jail terms of three to 15 days, including 19 Protestants and three Jehovah's Witnesses. This compares with 25 persons in 2009.

On March 9, a court in the Syrdarya region sentenced Tohar Haydarov to 10 years' imprisonment on questionable drug-related charges. Haydarov was a member of the Baptist Council of Churches but not part of a registered congregation. Friends who saw Haydarov briefly outside of the courtroom following his trial reported his face was swollen from apparent beatings. An appellate court rejected Haydarov's initial appeal of the conviction, and the Supreme Court had issued no decision on his appeal by the end of the reporting period.

There were no developments in the case of Pastor Dmitry Shestakov, leader of a registered Full Gospel Pentecostal congregation, who remained in a Navoi labor camp

serving a four-year sentence for his 2007 convictions on charges of "organizing an illegal religious group," "inciting religious hatred," and "distributing extremist religious literature;" the October 2009 conviction of Evangelical Baptist Union's chairman, a camp director, and the camp's accountant on criminal charges related to the operation of a summer camp for children; or the April sentencing by a Termez court of Protestants Azamat Rajapov and Abdusattor Kurbonov to 15 days in jail for "unauthorized religious activity."

On February 23, a court convicted 13 members of an unregistered Baptist church located in Almalyk of the unauthorized teaching of religion and fined them each 3.2 million soums (\$1,939) following a police raid on a private home. Police confiscated religious literature, including Bibles. In a protest letter to the court, the defendants alleged more than 60 violations of the law during the arrest and investigation against them, including that police beat several of the defendants at the time of arrest.

Raids against unregistered church gatherings and social gatherings of those belonging to registered churches continued. Several news sources reported that following a police raid of a social gathering in a private home on July 28, a Tashkent court on July 29 found 13 members of an unregistered Baptist group guilty of charges related to attending an unauthorized public gathering. The court sentenced nine persons to three days' detention, one person to five days' detention, and imposed fines on three additional participants worth 80 times the minimum wage or 3,014,400 soums (\$1,827). Police reportedly raided a meeting of members of the same church again on August 4. Four of those convicted appealed their convictions, but the Tashkent Criminal Court on August 20 upheld the earlier decisions.

There was no further information on the July 2009 raid of the officially registered Tashkent Bahai Center. Officials took six adults and 15 youth between the ages of 14 and 17 years old into custody for questioning. Two of the adults were arrested and detained for 15 days for resisting authorities and four others were fined 13,000 soums (\$8) for holding an unsanctioned meeting. In August 2009 officials again entered the center unannounced, demanding to see customs declarations for all books.

There were no developments in the May 16 raid of the Tashkent City Church of Christ during its Sunday service. Authorities questioned congregants and confiscated computers, CDs, DVDs, religious literature, and money from a collection box. One church leader and two employees were convicted of unauthorized teaching of religion and conducting illegal religious activity, while five other church members were convicted of lesser charges. Three of the defendants were sentenced to 15 days in jail; all were fined between 65,600 and 2.6 million soums (between \$40 and \$1,575).

On June 23, police reportedly raided a house in Chirchik where members of the unregistered Full Gospel Church were present, confiscating books, CDs, DVDs, notebooks, and a computer.

There were no further developments in the following cases of authorities raiding religious services, homes, or other religious gatherings: the August 2009 raid of the worship service at the registered Donam Protestant Church in Tashkent; the January raid of a Christmas celebration of the registered Holiness Full Gospel Protestant Church held in a private home in Tashkent's Yangiyul District; the March raid of 11 houses in Kagan belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses during the commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ; the April raid of two programs organized by Tashkent-based Protestant churches; the April raid of a private home in Tashkent where 10 Pentecostal women were celebrating a birthday; or the June raid of a youth meeting held by an unregistered Pentecostal congregation in Chirchik.

Authorities fined several persons illegally possessing or distributing religious materials. Forum 18 reported seven separate cases against Protestants for such activities during the reporting period, with courts imposing fines of between 119,000 and 396,000 soums (\$72 to \$240) against 18 different individuals throughout various regions of the country. In most of these cases, the court ordered the confiscated materials destroyed. In one

notable case, a Tashkent court on September 30 found Murat Jalalov guilty of illegally possessing religious materials following a raid on his home in which police confiscated 75 DVDs and CDs. After the CRA reportedly determined that a film about the life of Jesus could be used among local ethnicities for missionary purposes, the court imposed a fine of approximately three million soums (\$1,818) and ordered the confiscated materials destroyed.

On November 9, border guards stopped a group of 23 Baptist youth and their chaperones as the group returned from a church meeting in Kazakhstan. Border guards confiscated books and magazines but returned Bibles belonging to the youth. On November 29, customs officials detained three persons suspected of attempting to bring in illegal religious literature, confiscating 30 books of nine different titles that were considered to have a missionary purpose, as well as dozens of CDs. On December 1, the state press reported that authorities had confiscated religious materials from three individuals, confiscating many CDs and movies from one traveler arriving in Samarkand from Moscow; seven books from an Uzbek citizen in the Navoi airport; and more than 30 books in Tashkent that were considered to be missionary works.

Forum 18 reported two cases in June in which courts found three Baptists guilty of illegally possessing and distributing religious literature. A Fergana City Criminal Court imposed fines of 99,000 soums (\$60) against two persons and an Angren court imposed a fine of 165,000 soums (\$99), ordering books and DVDs destroyed.

In April an Andijon court sentenced Muhammadjon Yusupov to seven years in prison for keeping 10 illegal religious books in his home.

There were several reports in which authorities deported or canceled the visas of members of religious minority groups due to their believed religious activities or affiliation. Foreign nationals affected included Protestants from Great Britain, South Korea, and the United States, and one Bahai member from Kazakhstan.

There were no developments in the cases against eight members of the unregistered Greater Grace Protestant Church in Samarkand found guilty of teaching religion illegally in January; the cases against 17 Protestants in Urgench found guilty of possessing religious literature in October 2009; the cases against 11 persons in Surhandarya found guilty of teaching religion illegally and holding an unsanctioned religious meeting in October 2009; and 13 cases against individuals from various Protestant groups during the previous reporting period. Fines from these incidents ranged from 66,000 to 1.7 million soums (\$40 to \$1,030).

There were reports that officials have threatened lawyers who represented defendants accused of charges related to religion that they were at risk of losing their licenses.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Society was generally tolerant of religious diversity but not of proselytizing. Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish leaders reported high levels of acceptance in society.

Some evangelical or Pentecostal Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbek converts encountered difficulties stemming from discrimination. There were persistent reports that ethnic Uzbeks who converted to Christianity faced discrimination and harassment. State-controlled media in some cases encouraged societal prejudice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and government

officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. The ambassador and other embassy officials maintained regular contact with the CRA and with religious leaders, including imams, priests, and rabbis; they also regularly discussed religious freedom concerns with educators, journalists, and human rights activists. The embassy emphasized the importance of religious freedom by including religious leaders in its official events.

When the embassy learned of difficulties religious groups or faith-based foreign aid organizations faced, it intervened on their behalf where possible, taking such actions as contacting government officials and attending trials. Embassy officials frequently discussed religious freedom cases with diplomatic colleagues to coordinate efforts on monitoring cases and contacting government officials.

U.S. officials urged the government to allow more freedom of religious expression, more mosque registrations, and more amnesties of religious prisoners of conscience, consistently emphasizing that religious tolerance and political security are complementary goals.

In 2006 the Secretary of State first designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In January 2009 the secretary renewed the CPC designation.
