

TURKMENISTAN: Imprisoned for their faith

JW Headquarters (01.09.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2hE9xin> – From June through August 2018, Turkmenistan authorities imprisoned seven of Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscientious objectors to military service. Ihlosbek Rozmetov, Veniamin Genjiyev, Maksat Jumadurdiyev, Isa Sayayev, Ruslan Artykmuradov, and Sokhbet Agamyradov were sentenced to one year in prison, and Mekan Annayev was sentenced to two years.

These seven young men are the latest Witnesses to be imprisoned in Turkmenistan for conscientious objection. In January 2018, authorities convicted two others, Arslan Begenjov and Kerven Kakabayev, for refusing military service and sentenced each to one year in prison. *They were the first Witness men to have been imprisoned on this issue since February 2015. Both men, as well as four of the seven who were just convicted, are in the Seydi prison (LBK-12), where Bahram Hemdemov has been incarcerated for over three years.

Unjust imprisonment of Bahram Hemdemov

On March 14, 2015, police in Turkmenabad raided a peaceful religious meeting held in Bahram Hemdemov's private home. Thirty-eight Witnesses were arrested and charged with illegal religious activity. All were mistreated, 30 were fined, and 8 were sentenced to 15-day jail terms. The Lebap Regional Court later sentenced Mr. Hemdemov to four years in prison, and his health has suffered as a result of the infamously bad conditions within the Seydi prison. Until now, he has been overlooked in the amnesties that the president grants several times a year.

Respect for freedom of conscience, religion, and belief still at issue

In 2015 and 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR) released ten favorable decisions on complaints submitted by Witness men who had been imprisoned in harsh conditions as conscientious objectors to military service. At present, the Witnesses have seven other complaints against Turkmenistan pending with the CCPR.

In an April 2012 report, the CCPR exhorted the government of Turkmenistan to “ensure that its laws and practices relating to the registration of religious organizations respect the rights of persons to freely practice and manifest their religious beliefs as provided for under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights].” The Witnesses applied for registration in 2008, but the government has not acknowledged their application.

Prospects for improvement?

Jehovah’s Witnesses are grateful that the government of Turkmenistan has previously freed prisoners to correct injustices. With these latest convictions, however, Turkmenistan is again ignoring international calls to respect the rights of conscientious objectors. The Witnesses look for a positive response from the government to the CCPR rulings—greater respect for human rights in general and specifically for the right to freedom of conscience, religion, and belief.

Prisoner of conscience profile



Bahram Hemdemov

Mr. Hemdemov, 54 years old, is married and the father of four sons. At the time of his arrest, he served his congregation as an elder and was a well-respected member of the community. In May 2015 a court sentenced him to four years of hard labor in prison for holding an “illegal” religious meeting in his home. He is detained in a notoriously wretched labor camp in the town of Seydi, where he has suffered repeated interrogations and brutal beatings at the hands of the authorities. However, he has maintained his conscientious stand despite the mistreatment. Mr. Hemdemov’s wife, Gulzira, has been able to visit him periodically.

..... .
If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, click here for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

RUSSIA: Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

Statement of Human Rights Without Frontiers at the OSCE / ODIHR Human Rights Dimension Meeting in Warsaw

HRWF (13.09.2018)

Chairman,

In the Russian Federation, peaceful and law-abiding Jehovah's Witnesses are being violently detained by security forces who physically and verbally ill-treat them as if they are terrorists based on the government's assertion that their books and teachings "undermine confidence in Christian teachings." They are treated as violent, dangerous criminals, as members of an "extremist" organization.

We know of 54 prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 20.29 in 2017, resulting in 49 convictions, and the confiscation and destruction of literature. We know of 23 members of the faith who are incarcerated, all based on an April 2017 Supreme Court Ruling that banned all Jehovah's Witness groups.

Jehovah's Witnesses are under surveillance by wiretapping and videotaping.

More than 200 Jehovah's Witnesses have asked for asylum in Finland, fleeing police raids, criminal prosecution, and

beatings.

Russia's Presidential Council on Human Rights has questioned the legality and validity of the criminal prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses, stating that ***"There is a clear contradiction between the stated position of the Government of the Russian Federation and law enforcement practice. This is a cause for concern, as criminal prosecutions and arrests have become endemic."***

Denials by the Government of the Russian Federation in response to concerns raised by the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights, to the effect that there is no threat to freedom of religion posed by the Supreme Court Ruling and by the follow-up practices to which we have referred, lack credulity. The Jehovah's Witnesses in the Russian Federation are being arrested, detained and prosecuted because of their beliefs.

The legalistic denials are simply evidence of a profound contempt for international human rights law and for those institutions. And we are sorry to observe that the Russian Federation is also demonstrating its contempt for political commitments undertaken here, in the OSCE. The persecution of an entire religious community by a participating State is unique in the history of the Helsinki Process. It sets a terrifying precedent as evidence of the failure of this organization to protect human rights.

Recommendations

Like all of the main independent Russian human rights organizations, some of which were brutally persecuted by the Soviet Union but have illuminated principles that should inform civil society human rights activity, we demand that the Russian Federation:

- put an end to the prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses;
- release from custody of all charged with extremism under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code;
- overturn the Supreme court ruling prohibiting the activity of Jehovah's Witness organizations.

We urge all participating States to make the same points and to back them up with bilateral policies that make clear that no democratic state that truly honors human rights can have a normal relationship with the Russian Federation as long as its persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses persists.

Thank you.

.....

If you want to be regularly informed about different violations of human rights in the world, click here for a free subscription to our newsletters!

Also:

HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>