

# TAJIKISTAN: Jehovah's Witness jailed for four months for reading banned Bible

*Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov is a 68-year-old pensioner. He was arrested in February and was interrogated in the absence of a lawyer. The ban on the sacred text of his religion violates international norms on the treatment of prisoners.*

AsiaNews.it (08.06.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2IblK9o> – A 68-year-old pensioner, Jehovah's Witness (JW), will have to remain in prison for another month, having already spent three behind bars, and will not be able to have the Bible to pray.

This was established by the court of Khujand, in Tajikistan, extending the pre-trial detention regime until 26 June. The man was arrested in February on charges of "incitement to religious hatred", for which he risks going to jail for five to 10 years. However Forum 18 activists follow the case believe that he is a prisoner of conscience and is punished because he is considered the head of the local JW community.

The pensioner is called Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov and is a widower. The man is not the first JW to be targeted by the authorities of the Sogd region, who are carrying out a crackdown also against the Muslim community. The inmate has health problems: he suffers from high blood pressure and underwent a delicate leg surgery just before the arrest. Judge Abruniso Mirasilzoda, who ordered the first incarceration, did not want to explain the reasons for the

extension of the prison regime.

Khakimov was stopped because his cell phone number appeared in the phone book of two JW women arrested while proselytizing on the street. Activists complain that his detention is illegal because the interrogation to validate the detention in February took place in the absence of the lawyer. Furthermore, the subsequent sentence of extension of the arrest, in April, was pronounced without warning to the lawyer.

The lawyer was able to meet the pensioner in prison and reports: "His health is quite good and he is given medicine. He can pray but he is not allowed to have the Bible. " According to the group this violates the United Nations Rules on the minimum standard for the treatment of prisoners (known as "Mandela Rules"). The rule n. 66 in fact states that "so far as practicable, every prisoner shall be allowed to satisfy the needs of his or her religious life by attending the services provided in the prison and having in his or her possession the books of religious observance and instruction of his or her denomination".