

## **Table of Contents**

- ***"Pardoned only after repenting and asking the President for forgiveness"***
  - ***Detention, fine, literature confiscation was "hospitality we got for bringing mandarins"***
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## **"Pardoned only after repenting and asking the President for forgiveness"**

Forum 18 (04.03.2015) - Uzbekistan in February freed six known Muslim prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief, Forum 18 News Service notes. The freed prisoners of conscience include sports journalist Hairulla Hamidov and five other Muslim prisoners of conscience who were jailed because they met to study the works of theologian Said Nursi. The five are: Rashid Sharipov, Akmal Abdullayev, Ahmad Rakhmonov, Ahmadjon Primkulov and Kudratullo (last name unknown). All six had served most of their long jail terms. Other prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief are known to be still in jail, including other Muslims who met to study Nursi's works and one Protestant. The five amnestied readers of Nursi's works were "pardoned only after repenting and asking the President [Islam Karimov] for forgiveness", a source from Uzbekistan who knows the men and who asked to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18.

Uzbekistan in February freed six known Muslim prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief, Forum 18 News Service notes. Other known freedom of religion or belief prisoners of conscience were not freed, including one Protestant. The freed prisoners of conscience include Hairulla Hamidov, a journalist and sports commentator, who was known for his popular football and Muslim religious radio talk-shows. Also freed were five other Muslim prisoners of conscience who were jailed because they met to study the works of theologian Said Nursi. These five are: Rashid Sharipov, Akmal Abdullayev, Ahmad Rakhmonov, Ahmadjon Primkulov and Kudratullo (last name unknown). All six were freed under a Presidential prisoner amnesty declared in December 2014, and had served most of their long jail terms.

There is reliable information that thousands more Muslims are imprisoned, usually on accusations of belonging to terrorist, "extremist" or banned organisations, or on other charges which may appear to relate to the exercise of freedom of religion or belief. But the nature of the Uzbek "justice system", in which the planting of evidence and torture by the authorities is often credibly claimed, makes it unlikely that the authorities – or anyone else - knows how many of these prisoners are guilty of involvement in violence or some other crime, are disliked by the authorities or an official for some other reason, or are "guilty" of being devout Muslims who take their faith seriously. Indeed, Forum 18 has spoken to police who arrested people but were unaware of any offence the people arrested had committed. The only reason for such arrests was that a higher official had ordered someone to be arrested without stating why (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Jailed***

Rashid Sharipov was jailed in 2010 for seven years along with other Muslims who read Nursi's works (see F18News 8 July 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1465](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1465)). Akmal Abdullayev was like

Sharipov tried in Bukhara [Bukhoro] but slightly later in 2010 among a group of nine or ten Muslims who read Nursi's works (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)). Ahmad Rakhmonov, Ahmadjon Primkulov and Kudratullo (last name unclear) are thought to have been sentenced around the same time.

Sports journalist Hamidov and 18 others were fined and jailed for up to six years in June 2010 (see F18News 8 July 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1465](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1465)). In July 2013 six Muslims were prosecuted for allegedly meeting in a local teahouse to listen to sermon recordings, discuss religion, and listen to talks by Hamidov. In what the indictment appears to see as an aggravating "offence", Ravshan Rahmatullayev – who

was jailed for six years - is stated to have prayed. The other five Muslims were given two to three year suspended jail sentences. Prisoner of conscience Rahmatullayev is still in jail.

### ***"Pardoned only after repenting"***

Sharipov, Abdullayev, Rakhmonov, Primkulov and Kudratullo (last name unclear) were "pardoned only after repenting and asking the President [Islam Karimov] for forgiveness", a source from Uzbekistan who knows the men and who asked to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 13 February. Some Muslim readers of Nursi's works who have earlier been amnestied are known to have had to promise to the authorities that they will not in future exercise freedom of religion or belief, including associate with other Muslims who read Nursi's works or foreigners.

Oppressive release conditions, including making statements on television supporting the state's repression, have been imposed on other Muslims (see F18News 4 July 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1717](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1717)).

Sports journalist Hamidov told Forum 18 on 25 February that in future he will "be engaged in sports journalism rather than covering religious topics". However, "if any media organs ask me to write on religious topics I will be available". He said that to be released he had to write a letter of apology to President Karimov.

Hamidov's ability to move from place to place is limited and he cannot leave Uzbekistan "until all the due process of documentation is completed". He does not know how long this will take.

Hamidov stated that before he was released he was moved from his prison in Navoi [Navoiy] to a prison in Chirchik in Tashkent Region for quarantine purposes. "At least 4 or 5 out of 15 Muslim prisoners, who were amnestied and moved to the same prison, were readers of Nursi's works", he stated. Hamidov said that he could not find out their names as "I was only there for 20 days".

This is not the first occasion Muslim prisoners of conscience who were jailed for reading Nursi's works have been amnestied. For example, Muzaffar Allayorov, Shuhrat Karimov, Salohiddin Kosimov, Yadgar Juraev, Abdukakhkhor Alimov, Mirshod Kakhkharov and Mirzo Allayorov (Muzaffar's brother) were amnestied in late February and early March 2014 (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)). Earlier, Alisher Jumaev, Bobomurod Sanoev and Jamshid Ramazonov were amnestied in spring 2012 (see F18News 4 July 2012 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1717](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1717)).

### ***Some other prisoners of conscience***

Among the other prisoners of conscience known to have been jailed for exercising their freedom of religion are two Muslim sisters, Mehrinisso and Zulhumor Hamdamova, jailed for running study groups on Islam in their home. Both were arrested in Karshi [Qarshi] in 2009 and with Shahlo Rakhmonova (a relative of the sisters) were sentenced to up to seven years in jail in April 2010. The trial was conducted with many violations of published law, as often happens in Uzbekistan (see F18News 26 April 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1436](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1436)).

Relatives inside and outside Uzbekistan have been very concerned about the sisters' health, particularly over Mehrinisso Hamdamova diagnosed with a possible cancerous growth called a myoma in 2014 which needs to be removed (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)). In October 2014 relatives told Forum 18: "Their health seems to be a little better now. Mehrinisso has not been operated on yet, but she was given some medicines. She said she is feeling a little better at the moment" (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)).

Relatives, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 25 February 2015 that: "Zulhumor is doing well, but Mehrinisso is ailing from her myoma although she has not experienced bad pains recently".

Conditions in labour camps such as the one the Hamdamovas are held in can be harsh, with unsanitary and dangerous living and working conditions, beatings by guards, and criminal gangs having a ruthless hold over other prisoners (see F18News 27 June 2007 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=982](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=982))

A relative of the sisters, prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov is on a 16-year jail term from June 2013 for following Islam after Kazakhstan illegally extradited him to Uzbekistan. It appears that the Uzbek authorities tried to infect him with the potentially fatal disease of tuberculosis. The authorities have claimed to Forum 18 that he is cured - but if so Forum 18 notes this has taken an unusually short length of time. A relative wondered what the authorities' reasons were. "If he did not have TB why was he moved to the TB prison - and if he did why was he moved back to his original prison in such a short time?", the relative asked (see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)).

The only currently known non-Muslim prisoner of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief is a Baptist, Tohar Haydarov. He is serving a 10-year sentence from March 2010 on alleged drugs charges, which his fellow church members insist were fabricated. Appeals against the conviction and sentence to the Supreme Court have been rejected (see F18News 2 August 2011 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1600](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1600)).

Fellow Baptists from Tashkent told Forum 18 on 23 February that they have visited him regularly several times a year, and "that he is physically fine". Haydarov appealed to be pardoned in 2014, but this was not granted as according to the prison authorities he had allegedly violated prison regulations. However, Baptists told Forum 18 that they hope that he will be released after he has served half his sentence in 2016.

### ***Other Muslims jailed for reading Nursi's works***

As noted above many Muslims have been jailed in Uzbekistan, although the reasons for their being jailed are unclear. Sports journalist Hamidov told Forum 18 that in his prison "about 100 or 150 out of the total of 2,000 prisoners were arrested on religious grounds. Some said they were Wahhabis, some Nursi readers, some were named Jihadists."

An expert from Uzbekistan, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals,

told Forum on 26 February that he thinks around 100 Muslim readers of Nursi's works were jailed between about 2007 and 2010. Some of these prisoners of conscience are known to be still in jail, including:

- Ikrom Merajov and Botir Tukhtamurodov jailed for nine years and six years respectively in April 2009 (see F18News 29 April 2009 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1209](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1209));

- Nutfullo Aminov and Ilkhom Rajabov jailed for eight years and seven years respectively in June 2010, along with Kamol Odilov and Anvar Zaripov who were jailed for six years each (see F18News 8 July 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1465](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1465));

- and Abdullo Rasulov jailed in 2010 along with Abdullayev who has now been amnestied (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)).

### ***No comment***

The Deputy for Organisational Issues (who would not give his name) of Erkin Bobokulov, Deputy Head of the Interior Ministry's Chief Directorate for the Enforcement of Punishments in the capital Tashkent, which oversees prisons, told Forum 18 on 26 February Bobokulov is "not available and out of the office". He refused to answer any questions relating to the amnestied prisoners or other matters.

Officials from the government's Religious Affairs Committee also on 26 February refused to comment on the amnesties. The Press Secretary Shovkat Khamdamov claimed that "I do not have that information" and refused to speak further.

### ***Prayer in one jail possible***

Prisoners in labour camps and jails are denied their right to freedom of religion or belief – for example to pray openly, to have religious literature, or to receive visits from religious clergy (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

A source from Uzbekistan, who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 that the released Muslims they know who read Nursi's works could not openly pray, read the Koran or talk about religion with others while in prison. "All that is banned in Uzbekistan's prisons", they stated.

However, sports journalist Hamidov stated that he personally could pray and read religious books in his prison in Navoi. "There were other Muslims arrested on religious grounds in my prison and they could also pray," he said.

Hamidov said that he lived in a barrack with 60 convicts but that there were other rooms for 10-15 convicts. He said that the "food and other conditions were acceptable."

### ***Torture, death***

The United Nations (UN) Committee Against Torture found in 2007 that torture in Uzbekistan is "routine". In November 2013 the Committee reiterated its concerns, including over rape threats against the Hamdamova sisters. "The Committee is concerned about numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations that torture and ill-treatment are routinely used by law enforcement, investigative and prison officials, or at their instigation or with their consent, often to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings," (see F18News 18 February 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1930](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930)).

This may lead to the death of prisoners. For example, it is unclear why Nilufar Rahimjanova died on about 13 September 2014 in the women's labour camp near Tashkent. Relatives say the mother of four was imprisoned for 10 years to punish her Iran-based husband and her Tajikistan-based father, both Muslim theologians the Uzbek authorities do not like. She died three years into her sentence (see F18News 22 October 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2007](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2007)).

Women such as the Hamdamova sisters seem to be particularly targeted for torture and threats by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

One of 29 Uzbek refugees deported back to Uzbekistan by Kazakhstan against their will – and against international law – has told relatives of being tortured in Uzbek prisons. The men were extradited back to Uzbekistan in 2011 and all were detained. Most were given long prison sentences (see F18News 8 May 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1833](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1833)).

Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT) – which represents the 29 men – noted many are still in detention. In December 2012 ACAT published a translation of letters from relatives documenting forms of torture experienced by prisoners in Uzbekistan (see F18News 8 July 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1975](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1975)).

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## **Detention, fine, literature confiscation was "hospitality we got for bringing mandarins"**

Forum 18 (11.02.2015) - After more than two months living under restrictions, one of two Russian lorry drivers was fined for "illegally" importing religious literature, Forum 18 News Service has learned. On 5 February, both were deported from Uzbekistan. The two were detained and confined near Karakalpakstan Autonomous Republic in northwestern Uzbekistan as the criminal case proceeded. Nurullo Zhamolov, Chair of Karakalpakstan's Religious Affairs Department, claimed to Forum 18 on 11 February that "no-one should be fined or punished" for importing a Koran, Bible or other "legally allowed" religious literature into Uzbekistan. However, he was unable to say why the lorry drivers were held for more than two months and one fined for having religious literature.

Asked whether he does not think Uzbekistan's strict restrictions on the import, production, storage and distribution of religious literature are in violation of its international religious freedom commitments, Zhamolov refused to comment. "Our role is only to give an expert analysis of confiscated religious literature when the authorities ask us. We can't do much when Prosecutors take action or the Courts punish individuals."

Karakalpakstan's authorities also in 2014 handed down large fines on at least two local Muslim men for importing Islamic literature printed in neighbouring Kazakhstan. They confiscated the books, after the home of at least one of them was raided, a local state-sponsored newspaper also reported. Asked why the authorities fined one of them for possessing the Koran and two books of Hadith, collections of sayings attributed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad, Zhamolov claimed: "I don't know the details of the case" (see below).

Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent numerous homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were raided between September 2014 and January 2015. At least 10 people were fined for "illegally" storing religious books in their homes as well as meeting for worship

without state permission (see below). Police and secret police officers frequently raid religious meetings in private homes. Religious literature is frequently seized in such raids, as well as by customs officials on the border and at airports. Penalties – often heavy – frequently follow (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Customs seize two Islamic books and three mobile phones

Trouble began for the two Russian lorry drivers, 39-year old Magomedseyid Khasayev and his 21-year old nephew Alisultan Abakarov, when they crossed into Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan on 28 November 2014, Khasayev told Forum 18 on 10 February 2015. The two were detained at Uzbekistan's Daut-Ata customs checkpoint in Kungrad [Qunghirot] District of Karakalpakstan.

Khasayev was transporting mandarins from Georgia to Urgench in Uzbekistan. He took his nephew Abakarov with him so he could make a pilgrimage to historical Muslim sites in Bukhara and Samarkand.

Officers seized two Arabic-language Muslim books published in the Lebanese capital Beirut: "Al-Mutamad" (Those who Depend on Allah) by Muhammad az-Zuhayli and "Sirazhulvazh" (Burning Light) by Muhammad Zuhri. Khasayev told Forum 18 that he had bought the books in an Islamic shop in Makhachkala, the capital of his native Dagestan in Russia's North Caucasus.

"When the customs officers asked if we had any religious books or materials with us, I immediately handed over my two Islamic books, which I took with me to read during the journey," Khasayev explained to Forum 18. "But when I handed over my books, they also wanted to see our mobile phones, and found Islamic songs and sermons on them."

The officials then told Khasayev and Abakarov that they "illegally smuggled religious materials into Uzbekistan," which also is indicated in the subsequent Court decision. However, Khasayev explained that his nephew Abakarov had not mentioned the songs and sermons on his phones in the customs declaration "because he did not know Uzbekistan's Laws".

According to the court decision (seen by Forum 18) Kuat Saparbekov, Customs Officer at the Daut-Ata border crossing point confiscated the two Islamic books and three mobile phones from Khasayev and Abakarov. They opened a preliminary customs investigation against the two under Criminal Code Article 246, Part 1, which punishes "smuggling".

### ***Police drop charges against one***

On 29 November 2014, the day after the detained the two men, customs officials handed the criminal case to Nukus police. They ordered the two men not to leave Uzbekistan while the investigation proceeded. They said the case would be brought before the court after the "expert analysis" of the confiscated religious materials, which were sent to the government's Religious Affairs Committee in the capital Tashkent.

"At first one Investigator was leading the cases, and he questioned me as well as my nephew," Khasayev told Forum 18. "But then Investigator Major Adilbek Utegenov, to whom the cases were handed, cancelled my case, and told me that I had not violated anything as I turned in the books immediately at the border." However, the criminal case against Abakarov proceeded for allegedly smuggling religious materials into Uzbekistan on his mobile phones. The trial was held in Nukus, Karakalpakstan's capital.

### ***Fined and freed after 67 days***

On 26 January 2015, Judge Sultan Atamuratov of Nukus City Criminal Court found Abakarov guilty under Criminal Code Article 246, Part 1 and Article 57. The Judge fined him 50 times the minimum monthly wage or 5,381,750 Soms (16,000 Norwegian Kroner, 1,900 Euros or 2,000 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate).

Punishments under Article 246, Part 1 (smuggling) range between five and seven years' imprisonment for, among others, smuggling religious materials propagating "religious extremism". However, according to Article 57 (imposition of a more lenient penalty) imposition of a penalty below the minimum specified in a particular Article is possible in special circumstances.

In deciding to fine Abakarov instead of imprisoning him, Judge Atamuratov took into consideration the positive letters sent on his behalf by officials and Dagestan's chief mufti, the fact that he is a fifth-year student of Dagestan State University, and that he was not previously convicted of a crime, the court decision noted.

The court decision makes no reference to the advocacy on the two men's behalf by the Russian human rights group Memorial (which lobbied Russia's Foreign Ministry and the Russian Consulate in Uzbekistan) and coverage by the North Caucasus news website Kavpolit and Radio Free Europe.

The Court decision also notes that Khasayev did "not mention in the customs declaration about the religious books." Though Judge Atamuratov's decision indicates that the Religious Affairs Committee's "expert analysis" claimed the materials found on Abakarov's phones propagate "extremism and the ideas of jihad", it does not specify what the "expert analysis" of the books said.

Judge Atamuratov ordered the destruction of the mobile phones and the transfer of the books to the government's Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent.

The uncle and nephew were freed from their restrictions – after 67 days – only after Abakarov paid the fine on 30 January, the day he received the verdict, Khasayev told Forum 18. Nukus Police returned the two men's passports on 4 February, and they left Uzbekistan on the night between 4 and 5 February.

Major Utegenov insisted to Forum 18 on 11 February that Khasayev and Abakarov were "not under arrest" as the criminal case proceeded. Asked why charges had not been dropped against Abakarov as they had been against Khasayev, he responded: "I cannot answer such questions over the phone." Forum 18 asked why Abakarov – who was not familiar with Uzbek legal restrictions on religious materials – was punished, and whether he could not have been warned for the first time. Utegenov repeated his previous answer and asked Forum 18 to send questions in writing.

Nukus City Court officials (who did not give their names) both from the Chancellery's office and reception of the Court's Chairman on 11 February refused to comment on the case or put Forum 18 through to Judge Atamuratov or any other officials.

On 30 November 2014, customs officials had accompanied Khasayev's lorry to Urgench customs checkpoint, to the final destination of the delivery of the goods. "There together with Urgench customs, they broke the seal and inspected the goods," Khasayev told Forum 18. "After being assured that we had indeed transported mandarins, they released the cargo. We then delivered and received payment for the goods."

However, the customs officials in Urgench demanded that the lorry remain in the town until the criminal case concluded. "We decided that we would rent a place in Urgench so

we could watch the lorry, and my nephew Alisultan would travel between Urgench and Nukus for his case." Khasayev said that Abakarov made numerous trips by taxi between Urgench and Nukus – a journey of 165 kms (100 miles) - in the two months when the case was under investigation and in the court.

### ***"We lost more than 6,000 Dollars"***

"We lost more than 6,000 (US) Dollars of our personal money in Uzbekistan, which we spent on rent of a flat, taxis and food, including 400 Dollars to our lawyer, as well as the fine given to Alisultan," Khasayev complained. "This was the Uzbek hospitality we got for bringing mandarins," he said with irony.

Khasayev told Forum 18 that Yugtrans, the Russian cargo company which hires him as a driver, "will not compensate our loss, but it will also not penalise me for the loss occurred to the company while the lorry stood idle for several weeks."

### ***Other Karakalpak religious literature import fines***

State-sponsored newspaper "Erkin Karakalpakstan" (Karakalpakstan News) also reported fines given in 2014 to two local Muslim men for importing Islamic literature printed in Kazakhstan.

On 20 February 2014, the authorities confiscated from Islambek Baymuratov, a resident of Nukus, Said bin Ali bin Waqf al-Qahtani's "Fortress of a Muslim", an Islamic collection of prayers published in Kazakhstan in 2004. Baymuratov was later punished under Administrative Code Article 184-2 (Illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious materials), the paper noted on 30 September 2014. It did not specify what the punishment was, nor when it was handed down. Maximum punishment for individuals under this Article is 100 times the minimum monthly wage and confiscation of the literature.

In a separate case, "during an anti-terror operation" in summer 2014, the authorities raided the Nukus home of Kuyandyk Ibadullayev, the newspaper noted on 12 November 2014. Police confiscated from him two books of Hadith, collections of sayings attributed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad. One of the collections was by al-Bukhari. Also seized was an edition of the Koran with parallel texts in Arabic and Kazakh transcription. The books were published in Kazakhstan from where Ibadullayev brought them into Karakalpakstan.

The newspaper said that though "religious extremist or fundamentalist ideas were not found in these books," Ibadullayev had imported them in violation of the Law, and he was "fined according to the requirements of the Law." It gave no other details of the case.

### ***Tashkent raids and fines***

Meanwhile, in the afternoon of 21 January, 18 officers of the police and other agencies raided the home of Jehovah's Witness Tanzilya Karkayeva in Tashkent's Yakkasaray District, Jehovah's Witnesses outside Uzbekistan told Forum 18 on 6 February. Officers confiscated religious books, copies of the Jehovah's Witness magazine "The Watchtower", notebooks with personal notes, as well as CDs and DVDs. "We do not know the exact amount of the confiscated materials," Jehovah's Witnesses complained. "None of the officers presented their documents to Karkayeva, or showed a search warrant."

A court later fined Karkayeva one month's minimum wage. "The case was heard without Tanzilya Karkayeva being in the room - she was out in the corridor of the court building and she only heard the decision from the local police officer," Jehovah's Witnesses told

Forum 18. " Karkayeva hasn't even received the written text of the decision. The local believers told us that she decided for personal reasons not to complain," They said they do not know the exact date of the hearing or other details of the Court case.

Another Criminal Court in Tashkent's Yashnobod (formerly Khamza) District on 30 September 2014 fined nine other Jehovah's Witnesses under Administrative Code Article 240 and Article 241, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. They explained that they do not know the exact details but that prior to the Court decision the local authorities raided a worship meeting and opened administrative cases against at least some of those present.

Article 240 punishes "violation of the Religion Law", including by holding unregistered religious meetings or sharing one's faith with others. Punishments are arrest for up to 15 days or a fine of between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage.

Article 241 punishes "violation of the procedure for teaching religious doctrines" with arrest of up to 15 days or a fine of 5 to 10 times the minimum monthly wage.

Nailya Gapparova, Zukhra and Nigora Shoakbarova received fines of 30 times the minimum monthly wage. Zulfiyya Shipova was fined 20 times, while Tatyana Tenyayeva, Elmira Adigamova, Alena Shakirova, Rita Mirzayeva and Oksana Kotova were each fined ten times the minimum monthly wage.

### ***"Don't call me again"***

Rizkul Jabborov of Yashnobod District's Anti-terrorism Police, responsible for controlling the District's religious communities, refused to say why the Jehovah's Witnesses were raided and punished. "If you do not agree with the official decisions, please file your complaint officially," he told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 11 February.

When Forum 18 asked why religious believers, including these Jehovah's Witnesses, cannot peacefully gather and hold meetings for worship, he responded angrily: "Please, don't call me on this number again. I can also make it uncomfortable for you. You are an educated person, and I hope you get my message."

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