

## **Table of Contents**

- ***Muslim faces 18-year charges, Jehovah's Witness prisoner denied Bible, Pastor freed***
- ***Tajik woman says police detained, threatened her over Islamic head scarf in anti-hijab raid***
- ***Tajik pastor freed after 3 years in prison for 'singing extremist songs in church'***
- ***Pensioner jailed until August 2026***
- ***Pensioner faces up to 10 years' imprisonment***
- ***Detention extended, no Bible reading allowed***
- ***Jehovah's Witness jailed for four months for reading banned Bible***
- ***Tajikistan mulls reopening more than 590 mosques that had been closed down in previous years***
- ***Jailed, awaiting trial on "incitement" charges***
- ***Children barred from attending church***
- ***Raid, torture, interrogations, fines, calendars destroyed***

---

## **Muslim faces 18-year charges, Jehovah's Witness prisoner denied Bible, Pastor freed**

**By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18, and Felix Corley, Forum 18**

***Prosecutors are seeking 18 years' jail for Sadriddin Mulloyev at his Dushanbe trial for membership of Muslim movement Tabligh Jamaat. Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov, who is 68, failed to overturn his seven and a half-year strict regime jail term. Prison authorities still deny him a Bible. Protestant Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov was freed on 17 December months before the end of his three-year jail term. However, an associated church in Konibodom remains closed after the regime forcibly closed it in 2017 after raiding and torturing church members, as well as firing them from their jobs.***

Forum18 (19.12.2019) - [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2530](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2530) - After returning to Tajikistan from Turkey in February 2019, the 35-year-old Sadriddin Mulloyev is now on trial in the capital Dushanbe facing charges which carry a jail sentence of up to 18 years. He had previously been jailed from 2008 to 2013 on charges of membership of the banned Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement.



Sino District Court, Dushanbe  
Radioi Ozodi (RFE/RL)

After being freed, Mulloyev went to Turkey where he learnt that he was being sought again by Tajikistan on "extremism" charges. He voluntarily returned to Tajikistan in February 2019 and reported to police, where he repented of having been a Tabligh Jamaat member and was granted amnesty. However in September he was arrested and held on serious criminal charges because of his earlier adherence to the Tabligh Jamaat movement (see below).

In October, Sogd Regional Court rejected the appeal of Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience Shamil Khakimov against being jailed for seven years, six months in strict regime custody for allegedly "inciting religious hatred". He was also sentenced to a ban on all exercise of freedom of religion and belief from his release (due in August 2026 when he would be 74 years old) until August 2029. "I am guilty of nothing," he told the court. His real "crime" appears to be that police think he leads Khujand's Jehovah's Witness community (see below).

Part of the "case" against Kakhimov was a "state religious expert analysis" of the Tajik translation of the Bible published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm. (The IBT is not linked to Jehovah's Witnesses and its translations are used by a wide range of Christians.) The "analysis" – conducted by three local Imams – concluded: "The book does not correspond to our society of Hanafi Muslims, its propaganda and distribution among the Muslim people does not meet the goals of our society, and its distribution among Hanafi Muslims causes confrontation and schism, and leads to misunderstandings" (see below).

On 9 October, a panel of three Judges rejected Khakimov's appeal in 30 minutes. "Although the court asserted that the hearing would be open to the public, court staff prevented representatives from both the German Embassy and the European Union Delegation in the country from attending, as well as 10 of Shamil Khakimov's friends," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 (see below).

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov was then sent to Strict Regime Prison YaS 3/5, where in November his health deteriorated. He had to dress his leg on his own and was not allowed nail scissors, which added to pain. His bed was broken, he was cold and the prison authorities provided no warm bedclothes or hot food. The prison authorities at that point refused to accept items brought for him by his lawyer. The prison authorities also obstructed meetings between Khakimov and his lawyer. But after international pressure Khakimov's conditions have now improved.

However, the prison authorities are denying Khakimov access to a Bible and other religious literature, in breach of United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules) which require governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners (see below).

However, Protestant Pastor and prisoner of conscience Bakhrom Kholmatov was released on 17 December after serving all but three months of a three-year jail sentence for allegedly "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting 'religious hatred'" (see below).

The National Security Committee (NSC) secret police arrested Pastor Kholmatov in April 2017 after they raided his Sunmin Sunbogym (Full Gospel) Protestant Church in Khujand, after the NSC forcibly closed it in 2017 after raiding and physically torturing church members, as well as firing them from their jobs (see below).

The authorities also closed the Sunmin Sunbogym congregation in the northern city of Konibodom in March 2017. "The church there remains closed," a Protestant told Forum 18 on 19 December 2019 (see below).

Despite [Tajikistan's binding international obligations under the United Nations \(UN\) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), no arrests or prosecutions appear to have taken place against officials who tortured Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, or followers of other beliefs.

Other known prisoners of conscience currently jailed for exercising their freedom of religion and belief are all thought to be Muslims (see below).

### ***Mulloyev: Return to Tajikistan, amnesty after "repentance"***

Sadriddin Hairiddinovich Mulloyev (born 1984), the son-in-law of a noted imam in the northern Kulyab region, returned to Tajikistan from Turkey in February 2019, local news agencies noted on 22 February, citing the Youth and Sports Committee.

Committee officials noted that the authorities had been hunting Mulloyev on charges under Criminal Code Article 307, Part 1 ("Public calls to carry out extremist activity").

Mulloyev was jailed from 2008 to 2013 on charges of membership of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement. Tajikistan's Supreme Court had banned the movement as "terrorist" and "extremist" on 30 March 2006.

[As well as the Tabligh Jamaat movement, the Salafi school of Islamic thought, Jehovah's Witnesses, and some Protestant groups were also banned – even though the regime has not provably linked any crimes committed allegedly because of their beliefs to followers of any of the banned beliefs.](#)

An independent human rights defender familiar with Tabligh Jamaat followers in Tajikistan [described it to Forum 18 in May 2009 as peaceful and said "they tell Muslims how to recognise dangerous Islamic movements \(..\) This is exactly what Tajikistan needs". Many Muslims allegedly associated with Tabligh Jamaat Islamic missionary movement were in 2010 given long prison sentences and huge fines. One of the Muslims complained to Forum 18 that he "does not understand why we should be prosecuted for peacefully praying in mosques and propagating Islam".](#)

After leaving Tajikistan soon after his release from prison in 2013, Mulloyev worked in Russia for a year. Only after he moved to Turkey in 2014 did Mulloyev learn that he was wanted in Tajikistan on "extremism"-related criminal charges. He read in the media that his country was offering amnesty to those who returned to Tajikistan and fully repented of any

wrongdoing.

Committee officials said Mulloyev then called the police Department for the Struggle with Organised Crime, told them everything and said he wanted to return home. He then returned from Istanbul to Dushanbe in February 2009 and presented himself to the Department, which granted him amnesty from prosecution.

The police arranged the video-recording of Mulloyev's confession, where he repented of having been a Tabligh Jamaat member, vowed to have nothing to do with it in future and called on other Tajiks abroad who had committed "crimes" to return home. The short video was posted on YouTube on 19 February.

### ***Mulloyev: September arrest***



General Prosecutor's Office, Dushanbe  
Radioi Ozodi (RFE/RL)

However, on 21 September, the General Prosecutor's Office summoned Mulloyev for questioning in Kulyab and then arrested him. It appears he was transferred soon afterwards to the capital Dushanbe, where he was held in the city's Investigation Prison.

Prosecutors accused Mulloyev of serious criminal charges because of his earlier adherence to the Tabligh Jamaat movement. He was accused under Criminal Code Article 307 ("Public calls for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order"), Article 187 ("Organisation of a criminal group") and Article 401 ("Mercenary activity").

The Department for Investigating Crimes of Special Importance at the General Prosecutor's Office in Dushanbe prepared the criminal case against Mulloyev, an official of the police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department told Forum 18 from Dushanbe on 19 December.

Rajabali Sodiqzoda, the head of the Department for Investigating Crimes of Special Importance, refused to discuss Mulloyev's case, telling Forum 18 on 19 December that he did not have the information to hand. He confirmed that Mulloyev's trial continues.

### ***Mulloyev: Trial begins***



Hairiddin Mulloyev, September 2019  
Radioi Ozodi (RFE/RL)

Prosecutors handed the criminal case against Mulloyev to Dushanbe's Sino District Court. The prosecutor demanded in court that the Judge hand Mulloyev an 18-year prison term, Radio Free Europe's Tajik Service noted on 31 October.

Mulloyev's lawyer told Radio Free Europe that the defendant had been expecting to give his last address to the court, but the session was postponed.

No official at Sino District Court would tell Forum 18 on 19 December when Mulloyev's trial is likely to conclude.

Mulloyev's brother Negmatullo told Radio Free Europe that an 18-year sentence would be "especially harsh". They hoped that Mulloyev would be freed under amnesty. However, those sentenced under such charges are not eligible for amnesty.

Sadriddin Mulloyev's father Hairiddin told Radio Free Europe that the family had hoped that the authorities had dropped all accusations against his son. He said he had asked the Judge: "Why aren't you fulfilling the president's promises about an amnesty?", to which the Judge reportedly responded: "It's as the Prosecutor's Office decided." Hairiddin Mulloyev insists that his son is "absolutely innocent".

### ***Khakimov: Appeal rejected in absentia***

On 9 October, a panel of three Judges at Sogd Regional Court chaired by the head of the Court, Bakhtiyor Okilzoda, rejected the appeal by Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov (born 30 January 1951) against his seven and a half year jail term in a strict regime prison, according to the decision seen by Forum 18.

The appeal hearing lasted just 30 minutes and Khakimov was not brought from the Investigation Prison for it. "Although the court asserted th

at the hearing would be open to the public, court staff prevented representatives from both the German Embassy and the European Union Delegation in the country from attending, as well as 10 of Shamil Khakimov's friends," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

### ***Khakimov: Arrest and jailing***



Shamil Khakimov  
Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov was arrested and placed in pre-trial detention in February 2019 for allegedly "inciting religious hatred", but his real "crime" appears to be that police think he leads Khujand's Jehovah's Witness community.

The 68 year-old widower, who is in poor health, was arrested after police found his phone number on the phones of two female Jehovah's Witnesses they arrested for sharing their beliefs on the street. Investigator Nekruz Ibromkhimzoda of the Sogd Regional Police Organised Crime Department called Kakhimov's number as well as other numbers on the phones, and then arrested Kakhimov.

Part of the "case" against Kakhimov was a "state religious expert analysis" of the Tajik translation of the Bible published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm. (The IBT is not linked to Jehovah's Witnesses and its translations are used by a wide range of Christians.) The analysis – conducted by three local Imams – was carried out at the request of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police, and concluded: "The book does not correspond to our society of Hanafi Muslims, its propaganda and distribution among the Muslim people does not meet the goals of our society, and its distribution among Hanafi Muslims causes confrontation and schism, and leads to misunderstandings".

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov's arrest was part of a series of raids and interrogations, in some cases involving torture, against Jehovah's Witnesses in Sogd Region and other religious communities nationwide.

While in pre-trial detention Khakimov was given medicines and allowed to pray, but not allowed to read his Bible. He is still in December 2019 not being allowed to read any Bible (see below).

This breaks the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3), which require governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners.

In a closed hearing in prison on 10 September, the 68 year-old Khakimov was jailed for seven years, six months in strict regime custody for allegedly "inciting religious hatred". He was also sentenced to a ban on all exercise of freedom of religion and belief from his

release (due in August 2026 when he would be 74 years-old) until August 2029. "I am guilty of nothing", he told the court.

Despite Tajikistan's binding international obligations under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, no arrests or prosecutions appear to have taken place against officials who tortured Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, or followers of other beliefs.

### ***Khakimov: Prison transfer, health improves, no Bible***

After the failure of his 9 October appeal, the authorities transferred Khakimov from Khujand's Investigation Prison to the strict regime prison YaS 3/5, also in Khujand, where he will serve his sentence, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Back in November, Khakimov's situation in prison was much worse and his health was deteriorating. He had to dress his leg on his own and was not allowed nail scissors, which added to pain.

Khakimov's conditions were also poor, Jehovah's Witnesses noted. His bed was broken, he was cold and the prison authorities provided no warm bedclothes or hot food. The prison authorities at that point refused to accept items brought for him by his lawyer. The prison authorities also obstructed meetings between Khakimov and his lawyer.

However, Khakimov's conditions in prison have improved slightly, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 18 December. He was transferred out of the medical unit and placed in Block 7 of the prison, where those convicted of fraud are held. "We believe the international community's attention to this case has its impact on the improvement of his condition."

Khakimov is "feeling better now", Jehovah's Witnesses added. "He doesn't do the dressing on his leg, but wraps it in an elastic bandage. Currently he does not take any medication, he will resume taking it in January."

The prison authorities allowed Khakimov's friends to provide him with a mattress, blanket, pillows, sheets and a duvet cover and the bed he has now is not broken.

However Khakimov is not able to read the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses complain. As was the case since he was arrested and placed in pre-trial detention in February 2019, "there is no Bible in the prison library," they note. Jehovah's Witnesses also state that the prison authorities took away from him a copy of the Jehovah's Witnesses' Russian-language New World Version. They say they hope he will at least be allowed to be provided with the Synodal translation of the Bible or another Russian Bible translation (Khakimov speaks little Tajik).

Forum 18 was unable to reach the prison administration on 19 December to find out why Khakimov's friends have had to provide adequate bedding for him and why he is being denied religious literature of his choice.

Denial of access to religious literature, poor bedding, inadequate heating and medical care all break the [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3\)](#), which require governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov's address in prison:

YaS 3/5 Muassisai

735700 Khujand

Sogd Region

Tajikistan

### ***Kholmatov: Freed three months early***



Bakhrom Kholmatov (in cage at trial), Khujand City Court, 2017  
World Watch Monitor

The prison authorities freed prisoner of conscience Protestant Pastor Bakhrom Khasanovich Kholmatov (born 20 July 1975) on the morning of 17 December, local Protestants told Forum 18. He had been held in Yavan Prison in the south-western Khatlon Region.

Kholmatov had been due for release in April 2020. "The prison court examined the question of Bakhrom's early release and reduced his term," a local Protestant told Forum 18.

"I'd like to express my huge gratitude to all the people who supported and prayed for me, my family and my church," World Watch Monitor quoted Kholmatov as declaring after his release. "All these three years I felt your prayers, they helped me to stand, they helped my precious wife and children, they helped the members of my church who were left without a pastor, then kicked by the authorities out of our building."

Prisoner of conscience Pastor Kholmatov, who led a Protestant Church in Khujand, was jailed for three years in July 2017 for allegedly "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting 'religious hatred'". The National Security Committee (NSC) secret police arrested Pastor Kholmatov in April 2017 after they raided his Sunmin Sunbogym (Full Gospel) Protestant Church in Khujand, and harassed and physically tortured its members.

The authorities also closed the Sunmin Sunbogym congregation in the northern city of Konibodom in March 2017, after the NSC secret police forcibly closed it in March 2017 after raiding and physically torturing church members, as well as firing them from their jobs. "The church there remains closed," a Protestant told Forum 18 on 19 December 2019.

### ***Other prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion***

The other prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion and belief

are all thought to be Muslims. In September 2017 42-year old Imam Ilkhomidin Abdulloyev of the Chorruxh-Dorun Mosque in a suburb of Guliston and four members of the Mosque community, one of whom is named Kasymov, were arrested. In November 2017 all were jailed for five and half years.

Human rights defender Faiziniso Vakhidova told Forum 18 in December 2017 that Imam Abdulloyev is "not an extremist at all, but a very peaceful believer" and a disciple of Imam Boltuyev who was imprisoned earlier under similar "extremism" charges. "Imam Abdulloyev may have been arrested for that reason", human rights defender Vakhidova commented.

Also jailed in Sogd Region between August and December 2017 were other male Muslim prisoners of conscience, including a well-known heart surgeon. All were accused of being adherents of Salafi Islam, a movement banned since 2009. None of those jailed appears to have called for or committed any violation of the human rights of others, and officials refused to explain what exactly they had done wrong. But it appears that their "crime" was to be identified by regime officials as being devout Muslims. All received prison terms of at least five years.

### ***Other violations of freedom of religion and belief***

Tajikistan's other violations of the freedom of religion and belief and related human rights include: a ban on all exercise of freedom of religion or belief without state permission; severe limitations on the numbers of mosques permitted and activities allowed inside those mosques; the banning of Central Asia's only legal religious-based political party, the Islamic Renaissance Party, and the arrest as prisoners of conscience of its senior party figures; forcing imams in state-controlled mosques (the only sort permitted) to preach state-dictated sermons.

The regime has also: forcible closed thousands of mosques; banned all public beard and hijab-wearing, enforced using police roadblocks among other methods; banned teachers and school pupils attending mosques on the Muslim festival of Id al-Adha, even though it is a public holiday, as well as banning customs such as haj pilgrimage returnees holding celebratory meals.; and denied religious funerals to about 50 prisoners killed while the regime suppressed a November 2018 Khujand Labour Camp riot.

---

## **Tajik woman says police detained, threatened her over Islamic head scarf in anti-hijab raid**



**Nilufar Rajabova says that one of the arresting officers threatened to rape her.**

RFE/ RL (18.12.2019) - <https://bit.ly/36resYL> - A Tajik woman has accused Dushanbe police of insulting and threatening her after she was detained along with some two dozen others at a raid targeting women wearing Islamic headwear.

Nilufar Rajabova says she was taken from a minibus by police and officials from the state Committee for Women's Affairs on December 14.

The officials told her the reason for her detention was her Islamic hijab and took her to the Sino district police station along with four other women passengers also wearing head scarves.

Tajikistan, a Muslim-majority country of some 9 million people in Central Asia, has banned the wearing of the hijab in schools, offices, and public places as part of a broader campaign against what authorities describe as religious extremism.

Rajabova said there were some 20 other women at the police station, rounded up from streets, bazaars, and other places for breaching the ban.

"Officials told us we should move to Afghanistan or Iran if we want to wear the hijab. They said we're ruining the city's look with our clothing," Rajabova **told RFE/RL** on December 16.

### **Hijab 'Hooliganism'**

The women were initially given a lecture about the ban, forced to remove their Islamic headgear, and were offered a smaller kerchief to wear instead of the hijab.

But on December 18, the Dushanbe city court ordered Rajabova to pay a fine of about \$56 after accusing her of "hooliganism."

The charge against Rajabova stems from an official complaint filed by Raano Abdulloeva, an official in the Sino district's Women's Affairs Department.

Rajabova rejects the charge.

The court and the Women's Affairs Department refused to comment.



Rajabova is the daughter of Rahmatullo Rajab, an official of the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) who currently is serving a prison term along with several other leading members of the party.

It is unclear if Rajabova's detention in the anti-hijab raid was connected to her father's case.

But Rajabova says the officers' attitude toward her changed when she told them her name and tried to take a photo of the forms police gave the women to fill out.

She also protested the detention as a breach of women's rights and the country's laws.

"Two officers then dragged me to the basement.... My legs still hurt from that. They told me they would lock me up for 15 days," Rajabova said, adding that one officer threatened to rape her.

After holding Rajabova for some 10 hours in the basement, officials contacted her mother who came and took her home.

When contacted by RFE/RL, the Sino district police office didn't deny Rajabova had been detained but rejected allegations of mistreatment.

### **'Not Uncommon'**

Interior Ministry spokesman Umarjon Emomali also denied that police "detain" women for wearing hijabs, and said the officials merely gather women for "explanatory" purposes.

Many Dushanbe residents, however, say the raids targeting hijab-clad women are not uncommon in the city.

One woman claimed she and several other hijab-wearing women were detained in Dushanbe's Korvon bazaar recently.

The woman said they were being taken to a police station but she managed to escape when the vehicle stopped along the way. She spoke on condition of anonymity citing security reasons.

Rajabova adds that she wasn't allowed to enter the Shohmansur district government office last year because of her Islamic clothing.

Tajik police have in recent years also detained young men with bushy beards and often have them shaved off before releasing them.

Tajik authorities began restricting the hijab in 2007, when the country's Education Ministry banned both Islamic clothing and Western-style miniskirts at universities.

The government eventually expanded the ban to all institutions and public places, while promoting traditional Tajik clothing instead.

In 2018, authorities introduced a 376-page guideline -- The Guidebook To Recommended Outfits In Tajikistan -- that outlines what Tajik women should wear for different occasions.

Tajikistan has also closed down all but one Islamic madrasah, prohibited minors from attending mosquos, and outlawed the IRPT -- which used to be an influential opposition party and also member of the governing coalition -- after declaring it a "terrorist" organization.

The government justifies the moves as necessary to curtail the threats of extremism. Critics, however, accuse the government of restricting citizens' freedom and rights.

---

## **Tajik pastor freed after 3 years in prison for 'singing extremist songs in church'**

World Watch Monitor (18.12.2019) - <https://bit.ly/34DjaRq> - A Protestant pastor sentenced to three years in prison for "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting religious hatred" has been freed three months early (he was due to be freed in March 2020).

Bakhrom Kholmatov, 42, was sentenced in July 2017 and has served his term in a prison in Yavan, 360km from the northern Tajik city of Khujand, where his family live.

Kholmatov, who was the pastor of the Sunmin Sunbogym (Full Gospel), or Good News of Grace, Protestant Church was arrested by the National Security Committee (NSC, known also as the secret police), who brought his case to trial.

Members of the church claimed they were harassed and tortured by secret police after the arrest of their pastor.

Kholmatov, who – with wife Gulya – has three children, was arrested on unspecified charges during an April 2017 raid on his church. Affiliated churches in the Sogd region were also raided and closed down earlier that year.

Freed at 10am today, Kholmatov said "I'd like to express my huge gratitude to all the people who supported and prayed for me, my family and my church. All these three years I felt your prayers, they helped me to stand, they helped my precious wife and children, they helped the members of my church who were left without a pastor, then kicked by the authorities out of our building. Your prayers helped us to stand strong through all these difficulties, to grow spiritually and to transform into the nature of our Heavenly Lord! Thank you from all my heart! Glory to God!"

Forum 18 reported that the Tajik authorities threatened family, friends and other church members if they reveal any details of the case, trial or jailing. But it says Kholmatov was sentenced under Criminal Code Article 189 ("Inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension, humiliation of national dignity, as well as propaganda of the superiority of citizens based on their religion, national, racial, or local origin, if committed in public or using the mass media").

The extremist charges were brought against Kholmatov after NSC claimed songs based on Bible passages, such as "Our fight is not against flesh and blood", and God's army is marching, are extremist and call on people to overthrow the government.

A book seized from the church – 'More than a carpenter' by American Protestant author Josh McDowell – was also claimed to be extremist, as judged by religious experts working for the NSC, said Forum 18.

Khujand City Administration's chief religious affairs official, Mukhsin Mirkamolov, said that the court that tried Kholmatov "was not prejudiced against him as a Christian... All religions are equal and free in Tajikistan. He violated the law and was therefore tried".

---

## **Pensioner jailed until August 2026**

**By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18**

*In a closed hearing in prison, a judge in Khujand on 10 September jailed 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov for seven years, six months in strict regime custody for "inciting religious hatred". On release in August 2026, aged 74, Khakimov would be banned from religious activity until August 2029. "I am guilty of nothing," he told the court and is expected to appeal.*

Forum18 (11.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2kmgMHc> - Six months after his arrest, a court in the northern city of Khujand yesterday (10 September) jailed 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov for seven years and six months in strict regime custody. In a closed hearing held in prison, the court convicted him of inciting religious hatred, a charge he denied.



**Shamil Khakimov**  
**Jehovah's Witnesses**

On his projected release in August 2026, when he would be 74, Khakimov would then be deprived of the right to participate in any religious organisation for three years, a period due to end in August 2029 when he would be 77 (see below).

Khakimov, a retired widower, is in poor health. He underwent major leg surgery not long before his arrest and suffers from high blood pressure. Despite this, he has been held in pre-trial detention for more than six months, since his 26 February arrest (see below).

Khakimov denied the accusations against him. "Yes I am a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and no one will convince me otherwise," Mavluda Rafiyeva of local news agency Asia-Plus quoted him as declaring in his final address to the court. "I love all people. I had no enmity for any nation or religion. I have no intention to renounce my beliefs. I am guilty of nothing" (see below).

Khakimov was jailed under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2 for allegedly "inciting religious hatred" carried out by a group or with the use of the media, which carries a jail term of between five and ten years. But his real "crime" seems to be that the regime thinks he leads Khujand's Jehovah's Witness community (see below).

The Court promised to provide Khakimov's lawyer a copy of the written verdict on 13 September. Khakimov is expected to appeal and will have ten days to do so from when he gets the written verdict, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Forum 18 was unable to reach the Judge, Nargis Nabizoda, to find out why Khakimov was jailed when no evidence was produced that he had harmed anyone. It was also unable to ask him why the trial was held in Investigation Prison, to which his son and his friends were not allowed access despite his promises (see below).

Trials are often held in prison in Tajikistan when defendants face serious criminal charges.

Khakimov was prosecuted for books, other literature, photos, videos, audios, computer files and mobile phone data seized from him and other community members. The Prosecutor's Office claimed these materials contain "features of extremist activity", according to the indictment seen by Forum 18. Khakimov denied any wrongdoing (see below).

The investigation into Khakimov revealed that in 2016, the Department for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals of Sogd Regional Administration commissioned a "state religious expert analysis" of the Tajik translation of the Bible published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm. (The IBT is not linked to Jehovah's Witnesses and its translations are used by a wide range of Christians.)

The analysis – conducted by three local Imams – was carried out at the request of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police (see below).

The imams and the Department for Religious Affairs concluded: "The book does not correspond to our society of Hanafi Muslims, its propaganda and distribution among the Muslim people does not meet the goals of our society, and its distribution among Hanafi Muslims causes confrontation and schism, and leads to misunderstandings."

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 of their "considerable concern" that the investigator included in Khakimov's case file the "expert analysis", "which concludes that the Bible incites religious hatred and should not be permitted for use in Tajikistan."

Jehovah's Witnesses "have not asked us for help", Saidali Bobokhonov of the Ombudsperson's Office in Dushanbe told Forum 18 on 11 September. "If they write to us, we will take necessary steps to provide them help," he claimed. (The Ombudsperson's Office does not comply in full with the Paris Principles on independence from the authorities, according to the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions.)

### ***Jehovah's Witnesses, other communities banned***

The Culture Ministry [banned Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country in October 2007](#). The banning order stated: "The religious organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses carried out its activity in violation of Republic of Tajikistan legislation by distributing in public places and at the homes of citizens, i.e. among members and followers of other religions, propagandistic books on their religion, which has become a cause of discontent on the part of the people".

The Supreme Court banned the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement (in an unpublished 2006 decision) and [Salafi Islam \(in 2009\)](#). Two Protestant communities were "temporarily" banned in 2007.

Prisoner of conscience Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov, who led a Protestant Church in Khujand, was [jailed for three years in July 2017](#) under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 1 for allegedly "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting 'religious hatred'". He remains in prison and is due to complete his term in April 2020.

### ***Interrogations, literature and passport seizures***

Jehovah's Witness Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov (born 30 January 1951), a retired widower, began facing harassment in early 2019. On 28 January an officer of the Organised Crime Department, Nekruz Ibromkhimzoda, phoned him when he was at home and called him onto the street. However, no one was there.

The following day, the Organised Crime Department began summoning for questioning people Khakimov knows, both fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and others. Such interrogations continued until May, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

On 1 February, Organised Crime Department officials summoned Khakimov. There, Lieutenant Colonel Sukhrob Rustamzoda led questioning over eight hours about how he became a Jehovah's Witness and the structure of the organisation. Officials did not allow him to seek legal assistance during the interrogation, Jehovah's Witnesses complained. Nor did officials allow him to seek a required change in his dressing on his leg following surgery.

Officials then took Khakimov home, where they seized his computer, tablet computer, religious literature and passport. Without his passport he was unable to access his pension funds which he needed to pay for necessary medical treatment.

On 3 February Khakimov filed a complaint with the Regional Prosecutor's Office about his treatment from the Organised Crime Department. However, the Prosecutor's Office ignored the complaint as well as a second complaint.

### ***Arrest, months in detention***



**Khujand Investigation Prison  
Radioi Ozodi (RFE/RL)**

Officials arrested Khakimov on 26 February. Khujand City Court approved his detention in pre-trial custody in Khujand's Investigation Prison for two months. Three successive court hearings extended the detention each time for a further month (at least once without his lawyer even being informed). Each time Khakimov challenged the City Court detention orders in the Regional Court, but without success.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov is still being held in Khujand's Investigation Prison. The address: Ya/T 9/2 Investigation Prison, Khujand, Sogd Region

Against international human rights standards, prisoner of conscience Khakimov has not been allowed to read his Bible in prison.

Navchavon (who did not give his last name), Deputy Chief of the Investigation Prison, claimed to Forum 18 on 11 September that "Khakimov has his Bible in his cell, and can read it".

Officer Navchavon also claimed that "Khakimov is given all the medicine he needs from the

prison doctors". Asked if the prison authorities will allow medicine provided by visitors, he responded: "Only his close relatives can bring medicines from outside, and we will pass these to Khakimov."

Khakimov's son has been able to hand over some medicines for his father in prison, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

### ***"Inciting religious hatred" charges***

Investigator Nosirkhuja Dodokhonzoda of Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office led the investigation. He commissioned a literary-political and psycho-linguistic "expert analysis" of books, other publications, photos, audio and video recordings and other information from the mobile phones and computers not only of Khakimov but other community members.

The "expert analysis", completed on 10 April, claimed that these materials "contained mass appeals and ideas, aimed at inciting religious, national and racial discord and at advocating superiority of citizens on the basis of religion, demeaning national honour and dignity, and advocacy of improvement for citizens due to their belonging to the religion and party". It claimed this contained "features of extremist activity".

The "expert analysis" based its conclusion on quotations from some of the seized materials, such as "The Kingdom will destroy the governments of this world", "What is God's Kingdom? The Kingdom of God is a heavenly government. It will replace all other governments, and will cause God's will to be done in heaven and on earth", "Jehovah will change the world through the Kingdom of the Messiah", and "No government has ever succeeded in eliminating violence, disease, or death. But there is good news. Shortly, God will replace all human governments with his own government. Its subjects will enjoy peace and good health".

Another part of the case relates to Khakimov's possession of a Tajik translation of the Bible published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm. An "expert analysis" by three Imams – commissioned by the regional Department for Religious Affairs at the request of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police in 2016 - concluded that distribution of the translation in Tajikistan would cause conflict.

Imam Ibodullo Kalonzoda – one of the three Khujand Imams the state brought in to conduct the analysis - [put the phone down when Forum 18 tried to ask him about it in August](#).

Investigator Dodokhonzoda accused Khakimov of violating Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2, Point d ("Inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension, humiliation of national dignity, as well as propaganda of the superiority of citizens based on their religion, national, racial, or local origin, if committed in public or using the mass media", when committed by a group). This carries a punishment of five to 10 years' imprisonment, with a possible additional ban on specified activity.

The indictment makes no claim and gives no evidence that Khakimov violated or called for the violation of others' human rights.

On 4 July, Investigator Dodokhonzoda completed his indictment, of which Forum 18 has seen the text. Khakimov rejected the charges and refused to sign the documents.

### ***Tried, sentenced in closed prison trial***



**Khujand City Court  
Radioi Ozodi (RFE/RL)**

The criminal trial of Khakimov under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2, Point d began under Judge Nargis Nabizoda at Khujand City Court on 5 August. The trial was adjourned until 19 August so that an interpreter from Tajik into Russian for Khakimov could be provided.

However, on 19 August no Court proceedings took place. Judge Nabizoda announced to the participants that the hearing of the case was postponed until 26 August, and that the trial would take place in the building of Khujand's Investigation Prison, where Khakimov was being held.

During trial hearings at the Investigation Prison between 26 August and 10 September, Khakimov was held in a metal cage in the courtroom.

At a 6 September hearing, Khakimov's lawyer submitted a motion for the case to be dropped and for him to be freed. However, at the final hearing on 10 September, Judge Nabizoda rejected the motion. State prosecutors asked the Court to hand Khakimov a nine-year strict regime jail term, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 10 September.

Khakimov denied the accusations against him. "Yes I am a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and no one will convince me otherwise," local news agency Asia-Plus quoted him as declaring in his final address to the court. "I love all people. I had no enmity for any nation or religion. I have no intention to renounce my beliefs. I am guilty of nothing."

That day, Judge Nabizoda convicted Khakimov of inciting religious hatred under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2, Point d. The Judge handed down a strict regime prison term of seven and half years. After release from prison, the Judge ordered that Khakimov be deprived of the right to participate in any religious organisation for three years.

Madina Mukumzoda, head of Khujand City Court Chancellery, confirmed to Forum 18 on 11 September that Khakimov's sentence will be counted from the day of his arrest and that each day in custody is equal to one day's sentence.

This means Khakimov is due to complete his prison term in August 2026, when he would be 74. He would then be deprived of the right to participate in any religious organisation for three years, a period due to end in August 2029 when he would be 77.

Mukumzoda declined to comment on the Court decision and referred Forum 18 to Judge Nabizoda.

Asked why Khakimov was harshly punished for peaceful religious activity, the official (who did not give her name or position) who answered Judge Nabizoda's phone on 11 September claimed to Forum 18: "The Judge is busy hearing a case". She refused to tell Forum 18 when the Judge will be available to talk about the case.

### ***Despite promises, no visitors allowed in trial hearings***

Jehovah's Witnesses lamented that no visitors were allowed into the Investigation Prison for the final court hearings, including Khakimov's adult son, who lives in Dushanbe.

"Judge Nabizoda indicated to our members that all visitors will be allowed to enter the detention facility to observe the hearing," they told Forum 18. "Unfortunately, during the last hearings held at the Investigation Prison, no unapproved visitors were allowed to enter the facility to observe the hearings. Only visitors approved by the judge and who were on a list provided to security were allowed to enter and observe the hearing."

Because Forum 18 was unable to reach Judge Nabizoda, it was unable to find out why the trial was transferred to the prison and why none of Khakimov's friends were allowed in to attend the hearing.

---

## **Pensioner faces up to 10 years' imprisonment**

***The criminal trial of 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov in Khujand resumes on 20 August. He faces up to 10 years' imprisonment for "inciting religious hatred", charges he denies. Prosecutors claim materials confiscated from him and others contained "features of extremist activity". The investigation revealed a 2016 state "expert analysis" by three Imams claiming the distribution of a Tajik Bible translation causes "confrontation".***

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (07.08.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2PdvCVI> - The criminal trial of 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience Shamil Khakimov is due to resume in the northern city of Khujand on 20 August. Khujand City Court held the first hearing on 5 August, but postponed the case to provide the defendant with an interpreter into Russian. Khakimov is facing charges of allegedly "inciting religious hatred", which carry a jail term of between five and ten years. But his real "crime" seems to be that the regime thinks he leads Khujand's Jehovah's Witness community.

Court officials refused to say how long they expect Khakimov's trial to last (see below).

Khakimov, a retired widower, is in poor health, Jehovah's Witnesses noted. He underwent major leg surgery not long before his arrest and suffers from high blood pressure. Despite this, he has been held in pre-trial detention for more than five months, since his 26 February arrest (see below).

Khakimov is being prosecuted for books, other literature, photos, videos, audios, computer files and mobile phone data seized from him and other community members. The Prosecutor's Office claims these materials contain "features of extremist activity", according to the indictment seen by Forum 18. Khakimov denies any wrongdoing (see below).

The investigation into Khakimov revealed that in 2016, the Department for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals of Sogd Regional Administration commissioned a "state religious expert analysis" of the Tajik translation of the Bible

published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm. (The IBT is not linked to Jehovah's Witnesses and its translations are used by a wide range of Christians.)

The analysis – conducted by three local Imams – was carried out at the request of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police (see below).

The imams and the Department for Religious Affairs concluded: "The book does not correspond to our society of Hanafi Muslims, its propaganda and distribution among the Muslim people does not meet the goals of our society, and its distribution among Hanafi Muslims causes confrontation and schism, and leads to misunderstandings."

Imam Ibodullo Kalonzoda – one of the three Khujand Imams the state brought in to conduct the analysis - put the phone down when Forum 18 tried to ask him about it (see below).

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 of their "considerable concern" that the investigator included in Khakimov's case file the "expert analysis", "which concludes that the Bible incites religious hatred and should not be permitted for use in Tajikistan."

Jehovah's Witnesses described it as "deeply troubling" that the Tajik authorities would consider the Bible to incite religious hatred. "That expert study confirms that Shamil Khakimov is being prosecuted for his peaceful minority religious views as one of Jehovah's Witnesses" (see below).

A Baptist in the capital Dushanbe told Forum 18 that the IBT Tajik translation was among Christian literature seized from church members in 2017. Although officials promised to return the literature they have not done so (see below).

The Culture Ministry banned Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country in October 2007. The banning order stated: "The religious organisation of Jehovah's Witnesses carried out its activity in violation of Republic of Tajikistan legislation by distributing in public places and at the homes of citizens, i.e. among members and followers of other religions, propagandistic books on their religion, which has become a cause of discontent on the part of the people".

The Supreme Court banned the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement (in an unpublished 2006 decision) and Salafi Islam (in 2009). Two Protestant communities were "temporarily" banned in 2007.

Prisoner of conscience Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov, who led a Protestant Church in Khujand, was jailed for three years in July 2017 under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 1 for allegedly "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting 'religious hatred'". He remains in prison.

### **Khakimov: Interrogations, literature and passport seizures**

Jehovah's Witness Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov (born 30 January 1951), a retired widower, began facing harassment in early 2019. On 28 January an officer of the Organised Crime Department, Nekruz Ibromkhimzoda, phoned him when he was at home and called him onto the street. However, no one was there.

The following day, the Organised Crime Department began summoning for questioning people Khakimov knows, both fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and others. Such interrogations continued until May, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

On 1 February, Organised Crime Department officials summoned Khakimov. There, Lieutenant Colonel Sukhrob Rustamzoda led questioning over eight hours about how he became a Jehovah's Witness and the structure of the organisation. Officials did not allow

him to seek legal assistance during the interrogation, Jehovah's Witnesses complained. Nor did officials allow him to seek a required change in his dressing on his leg following surgery.

Officials then took Khakimov home, where they seized his computer, tablet computer, religious literature and passport. Without his passport he was unable to access his pension funds which he needed to pay for necessary medical treatment.

On 3 February Khakimov filed a complaint with the Regional Prosecutor's Office about his treatment from the Organised Crime Department. However, the Prosecutor's Office ignored the complaint as well as a second complaint.

Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office phones went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 7 August.

### **Khakimov: Arrest, "inciting religious hatred" charges**

Officials arrested Khakimov on 26 February. Khujand City Court approved his detention in pre-trial custody in Khujand's Investigation Prison for two months. Three successive court hearings extended the detention each time for a further month (at least once without his lawyer even being informed). Each time Khakimov challenged the City Court detention orders in the Regional Court, but without success.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov is still being held in Khujand's Investigation Prison:

Ya/S 9/2 Investigation Prison  
Khujand  
Sogd Region

Against international human rights standards, prisoner of conscience Khakimov has not been allowed to read his Bible in prison.

Investigator Nosirkhuja Dodokhonzoda of Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office led the investigation. He commissioned a literary-political and psycho-linguistic "expert analysis" of books, other publications, photos, audio and video recordings and other information from the mobile phones and computers not only of Khakimov but other community members.

The "expert analysis", completed on 10 April, claimed that these materials "contained mass appeals and ideas, aimed at inciting religious, national and racial discord and at advocating superiority of citizens on the basis of religion, demeaning national honour and dignity, and advocacy of improvement for citizens due to their belonging to the religion and party". It claimed this contained "features of extremist activity".

The "expert analysis" based its conclusion on quotations from some of the seized materials, such as "The Kingdom will destroy the governments of this world", "What is God's Kingdom? The Kingdom of God is a heavenly government. It will replace all other governments, and will cause God's will to be done in heaven and on earth...", "Jehovah will change the world through the Kingdom of the Messiah", and "No government has ever succeeded in eliminating violence, disease, or death. But there is good news. Shortly, God will replace all human governments with his own government. Its subjects will enjoy peace and good health".

Another part of the case relates to Khakimov's possession of a Tajik translation of the Bible published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm. An "expert analysis" by three Imams – commissioned by the regional Department for Religious Affairs at the request of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police in 2016 concluded that distribution of the translation in Tajikistan would cause conflict (see below).

Investigator Dodokhonzoda accused Khakimov of violating Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2, Point d ("Inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension, humiliation of national dignity, as well as propaganda of the superiority of citizens based on their religion, national, racial, or local origin, if committed in public or using the mass media", when committed by a group). This carries a punishment of five to 10 years' imprisonment, with a possible additional ban on specified activity.

The indictment makes no claim and gives no evidence that Khakimov violated or called for the violation of others' human rights.

On 4 July, Investigator Dodokhonzoda completed his indictment, of which Forum 18 has seen the text. Khakimov rejected the charges and refused to sign the documents.

### **Khakimov: Jehovah's Witness pensioner on trial**

The criminal trial of Khakimov under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2, Point d began under Judge Nargis Nabizoda at Khujand City Court on 5 August, an official of the Court chancellery told Forum 18 on 6 August. The trial was adjourned until 20 August so that an interpreter from Tajik into Russian for Khakimov could be provided.

The official (who did not give her name) refused to give any other details of the trial, or say how long it is likely to last. "It will go on for some time," was all she would say. She also refused to put Forum 18 through to the Chief of the Chancellery or any other officials.

Asked about the case, the Chair of the Court Mavjuda Sharifzoda's Secretary (who did not give her name) said the Chair is on holiday. She refused to put Forum 18 through to any other officials of the Court.

### **Tajik Bible translation distribution "causes confrontation"**

The investigation into Khakimov revealed that in 2016, the Department for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals of Sogd Regional Administration commissioned a "state religious expert analysis" of the Tajik translation of the Bible published by the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Stockholm.

The IBT, now based in Moscow, is a non-profit organisation to translate and distribute Bibles in the non-Slavic languages of the region and functions with the blessing of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill.

The "expert analysis" was conducted at the request of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police of Sogd Region.

The Sogd Department for Religious Affairs assigned the "expert analysis" to three local imams, Haji Husayn Musozoda and Orifjon Bayzoyev (of Khujand's Sheikh Muslikhiddin central mosque) and Ibodullo Kalonzoda (of the city's Nuri Islom Mosque).

In the two-page decision dated 19 December 2016 (and seen by Forum 18), the imams and the Department for Religious Affairs recognise that the Bible is the main book for Christianity and that this Tajik translation had been approved in an "expert analysis" for the State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) in Dushanbe on 13 March 2012.

However, the Imams and the Sogd Department for Religious Affairs conclude: "The book does not correspond to our society of Hanafi Muslims, its propaganda and distribution

among the Muslim people does not meet the goals of our society, and its distribution among Hanafi Muslims causes confrontation and schism, and leads to misunderstandings."

The Imams gave no evidence that anyone had violated anyone else's human rights as a direct result of reading the IBT Tajik translation of the Bible.

The decision does not reveal where the NSC secret police or the Department for Religious Affairs in Sogd Region acquired the copy of the Tajik Bible translation which the imams examined.

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 of their "considerable concern" that the investigator included in Khakimov's case file the "expert analysis", "which concludes that the Bible incites religious hatred and should not be permitted for use in Tajikistan."

Jehovah's Witnesses described it as "deeply troubling" that the Tajik authorities would consider the Bible to incite religious hatred. "That expert study confirms that Shamil Khakimov is being prosecuted for his peaceful minority religious views as one of Jehovah's Witnesses."

A Protestant pastor, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 that "our Church in Dushanbe has not experienced such a problem so far with Tajik Bibles, and I have not heard of other Protestant Churches which faced such a problem."

However, the pastor was concerned both about the examination of the Bible and who it was assigned to. "Why should Imams give expert analysis of the Bibles? Even in Russia the authorities have decided not to question the books of the well-known world religions, such as the Koran and the Bible."

Bishop Pitirim (Konstantin Tvorogov) of the Russian Orthodox Synod of Dushanbe and Tajikistan told Forum 18 on 5 August that the Orthodox "Church or believers have no problems" to exercise their religious freedoms. "And our believers usually read the Bible in Russian."

"I know that Jehovah's Witnesses are banned in Tajikistan," the bishop added, "but it is strange that the experts would give such an opinion on the Christian Bible." He argued that "I do not think this will become a precedent or a law against the Bible, but the authorities are just using it in this case since the organisation is banned."

### **Imams "not competent to give their expert analysis of the Bible"**

Farrukhullo Olimzoda, Deputy Chair of the State Committee for Religious Affairs in Dushanbe, declined to talk to Forum 18 on 6 August and referred it to Khuseyn Shokirov, the chief official responsible for work with religious organisations and registration.

Shokirov confirmed that the Committee had approved the IBT translation of the Bible into Tajik in 2012. "The Imams are not competent to give their expert analysis of the Bible," he insisted to Forum 18 on 6 August. Asked why then the Khujand Imams did so, he responded: "You need to talk to them."

Told that one of the main reasons that Jehovah's Witness Khakimov is currently being criminally prosecuted is because of that "expert analysis", Shokirov repeated his previous answer.

When Forum 18 asked on 5 August about the "expert analysis", Imam Ibodullo Kalonzoda put the phone down. Called back later, his daughter (who did not give her name) answered

Kalonzoda's mobile phone. Asked why Imam Kalonzoda gave an "expert analysis" of the Bible, she said she will ask the question to him "when he is available".

Called back on 6 August, the daughter answered the phone again. "He is on an official trip, and left his phone at home," she claimed. When Forum 18 told her that it was told by Khujand City religious affairs Department on 5 August that Imam Kalonzoda has retired, she could not answer. Then she declined to talk further.

The official (who refused to give his name) who answered the phone of Mukhsin Mirkamolov, Head of Khujand City Department for Religious Affairs, claimed to Forum 18 on 5 August that Mirkamolov is "busy and cannot answer your questions." Asked when Forum 18 can call back he muttered, "I don't know."

The official then asked Forum 18 why it is looking for Mirkamolov, and when Forum 18 asked why "Imam Kalonzoda and the other Imams made an expert opinion that the Tajik Bible cannot be given to Tajik Muslims since it can create confrontations and schism," he answered, "Comrade Forum 18, you can ask Imam Kalonzoda or Rakhmatzoda about it."

The official refused to give numbers for R. Rakhmatzoda, who chairs the Sogd Department for Religious Affairs' "Expert Analysis" Commission and signed the December 2016 Imams' analysis of the Tajik Bible.

Asked why Muslim clerics gave an "expert analysis" of a Christian Bible, the official replied, "Comrade Forum 18, you can ask the Sogd regional authorities."

Numbers of the Head of the Sogd Regional Administration as well as Sukhrob Rustamzoda, head of the Regional Religious Affairs Department, went unanswered on 5 August.

### **Bibles, religious books confiscated, not returned**

The IBT Tajik translation of the Bible is among religious literature the authorities have seized in recent years.

In summer 2017, State Committee for Religious Affairs officials "confiscated from us some 300 books, including Tajik Bibles in the IBT translation, claiming that we may have extremist literature", Andrei Chumachenko of the Council of Churches Baptists in Dushanbe told Forum 18 on 5 August.

The officials also questioned the Baptists on why they carry out activity without the required state registration. The authorities did "not open a case against us, and left us alone. We have had our services unimpeded so far," Chumachenko said. "However, they did not return our books, though we asked them soon after the confiscation. They told us verbally that they will return the books to us, but have not done so until now."

Shokirov of the State Committee in Dushanbe on 6 August refused to discuss with Forum 18 the 2017 confiscation of books from the Baptists.

In December 2018 customs officers at Dushanbe Airport confiscated 5,000 calendars with New Testament verses that Dushanbe's state-registered Baptist Church was importing. The calendars were later destroyed and a fine equivalent to about four months' average wage imposed. One Customs official said that "after linguistic experts in the Culture Ministry .. found elements of propaganda of an alien faith, the calendars were confiscated". Officials refused to explain why the state might regard some faiths as "alien", or whether followers of "alien" faiths have greater or less freedom of religion and belief than followers of "non-alien" faiths. They also refused to explain why the calendars were confiscated and destroyed instead of being returned to sender.

---

## **Detention extended, no Bible reading allowed**

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (04.06.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2XM51Pg> - A court in the northern city of Khujand has again extended the pre-trial detention of 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience Shamil Khakimov until 26 June. He was arrested in February and is being investigated on criminal charges of allegedly "inciting religious hatred", which carry a jail term of between five and ten years. But his real "crime" seems to be that the regime thinks he leads Khujand's Jehovah's Witness community.

Khakimov, a widower, suffers from high blood pressure and underwent major leg surgery not long before his February arrest.

The court can legally continue extending Khakimov's pre-trial detention for up to one year – to 26 February 2020 – and an April extension of the detention took place illegally without his lawyer being informed (see below).

Against international human rights standards, prisoner of conscience Khakimov is not being allowed to read his Bible (see below).

In 2016 seven imam-hatyps of state-controlled cathedral mosques in Sogd Region were jailed, apparently for being educated abroad and being devout Muslims, and their sentences are due to expire between March and August 2019. But the regime is refusing to say when they will be released (see below).

However, relatives of alleged Salafi Muslim Mukhtadi Abdulkodyrov, arrested in December 2018, said a Dushanbe court released him on parole in mid-March 2019 (see below).

### **Pre-trial detention again extended**

Jehovah's Witness Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov (born 30 January 1951), a retired widower, arrested on 26 February and then put in pre-trial detention, has had his detention extended twice.

Khujand City Court in the northern Sogd Region extended his detention for one month on 23 April, and then for a further month on 24 May. His pre-trial detention will now last until 26 June, Jehovah's Witnesses who wish to remain anonymous told Forum 18 on 27 May.

They pointed out that the authorities can legally continue extending the pre-trial detention for up to one year – to 26 February 2020.

Judge Abruniso Mirasilzoda of Khujand City Court, who ordered the initial pre-trial detention, refused to explain the repeated extensions of the detention to Forum 18 on 29 May.

### **"Inciting religious hatred", no arrests or prosecution of torturers**

Khakimov is being investigated for allegedly "inciting religious hatred", but his real "crime" appears to be that police think he leads Khujand's Jehovah's Witness community.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov's arrest came after police found his phone number on the phones of two female Jehovah's Witnesses they arrested for sharing their beliefs on the

street. Investigator Nekruz Ibromkhimzoda of the Sogd Regional Police Organised Crime Department called Khakimov's number as well as other numbers on the phones, and then arrested Khakimov.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov's arrest followed raids and interrogations, in some cases involving torture, against Jehovah's Witnesses in Sogd Region and other religious communities nationwide.

Despite Tajikistan's binding international obligations under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, no arrests or prosecutions appear to have taken place against officials who tortured Jehovah's Witnesses.

### **Detention extended without lawyer, appeal refused**

On 23 April Khujand City Court extended Khakimov's pre-trial detention until 26 May, but illegally his lawyer was not informed of the court hearing. The detention was extended at the request of Investigator Nosirkhuja Dodokhonzoda of Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office, who is now leading the case.

Police had without explanation and illegally refused to allow a defence lawyer to be present during Khakimov's initial February interrogation.

On 29 April Sogd Regional Court rejected an appeal brought by Jehovah's Witnesses against the extension of Khakimov's pre-trial detention.

Madina Mukumzoda, head of Khujand City Court's Chancellery, refused on 29 May to discuss the case with Forum 18.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov is being held under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2 ("Inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension, humiliation of national dignity, as well as propaganda of the superiority of citizens based on their religion, national, racial, or local origin, if committed in public or using the mass media"). If tried and convicted he could be jailed for between five and 10 years, with an additional ban on specified activity.

Prisoner of conscience Khakimov is currently held in Khujand's Investigation Prison:

Ya/S 9/2 Investigation Prison  
Khujand  
Sogd Region

### **No Bible reading allowed**

Khakimov's lawyer can visit him in prison. "His health is comparatively good, and he is being given medicines," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 4 June. "He can pray but he is not permitted to read his Bible."

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules - A/C.3/70/L.3) require governments to respect the freedom of religion and belief and other human rights of prisoners.

"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",

Rule 66 notes.

Prisoner of conscience Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov, who led a Protestant Church in Khujand, was jailed for three years in July 2017 under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 1 for allegedly "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting 'religious hatred'".

A Tajik Protestant who wishes to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 27 May that Pastor Kholmatov "was visited in prison recently, and is seemingly doing fine".

### **Will jailed Sogd Muslims be released?**

In early March 2016, seven imam-hatyps of state-controlled cathedral mosques in Sogd Region were arrested on the initiative of the Regional Prosecutor's Office.

Sulaymon Boltuyev was Imam of the cathedral Mosque in Guliston (former Kayrakkum), Maksud Urunov Imam of the cathedral Mosque in Kanibadam, and Abdujamil Yusufi of the cathedral Mosque in Bobojon Gofurov District. The other arrested imams were: Abbos Abdurakhmanov, Imam Urunov's deputy at the Kanibadam Cathedral Mosque; Khuseyn Tukhtayev, another imam-hatyp from Kanibadam's Cathedral Mosque; Hamzaali Sultanov of Khujand's Takvo Mosque; and Makhdi Boltayev (an Uzbek citizen) of Isfara's Navgilem Mosque.

Bobojon Gofurov District Court sentenced all seven of the imams in June 2016 to between three years and three years and four months' imprisonment in strict regime labour camps.

The jailings appear to have been part of a State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) campaign to identify and fire all foreign-educated imams. Many other Muslims, including imams, were jailed at the same time for similar reasons.

The seven imams' sentences are due to expire between March and August 2019, but officials are refusing to say whether they will be released.

An official who refused to give his name, but is an assistant to Lieutenant-General Mansurjon Umarov, Head of the Justice Ministry's Chief Directorate of Enforcement of Criminal Punishments, told Forum 18 on 29 May 2019 that the seven imams were prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 307-3, Part 2, which punishes "participation in the activity of political parties, social or religious organisations, or other organisations, liquidated or banned by a court for extremist activity".

The official added that "those who are punished under such charges cannot be amnestied. They must serve their sentence till the end". However, he refused to say when the imams will be released, or if any have already been released.

Lieutenant-General Umarov's assistant asked Forum 18 to call back the next day, 30 May, but has not answered his phone then or subsequently.

### **2017 Sogd arrests, harsher jail sentences**

The jailing of the seven imams seems to have been the beginning of a wave of jailings in Sogd. In September 2017 42-year old Imam Ilkhomidin Abdulloev of the Chorruxh-Dorun Mosque in a suburb of Guliston and four members of the Mosque community, one of whom is named Kasymov, were arrested. In November 2017 all were jailed for five and half years.

Human rights defender Faiziniso Vakhidova told Forum 18 in December 2017 that Imam Abdulloyev is "not an extremist at all, but a very peaceful believer" and a disciple of Imam Boltuyev who was imprisoned earlier under similar "extremism" charges. "Imam Abdulloyev may have been arrested for that reason", human rights defender Vakhidova commented.

Also jailed in Sogd Region between August and December 2017 were other male Muslim prisoners of conscience, including a well-known heart surgeon. All were accused of being adherents of Salafi Islam, a movement banned since 2009.

None of those jailed appears to have called for or committed any violation of the human rights of others, and officials refused to explain what exactly they had done wrong. But it appears that their "crime" was to be identified by regime officials as being devout Muslims. All received prison terms of at least five years.

### **Alleged Salafi released on parole with restrictions**

About three months after his arrest, Dushanbe's Ismoili Somoni District Court handed alleged Salafi Muslim Mukhtadi Abdulkodyrov a term under probation. He was released on parole in mid-March, his relatives told Radio Free Europe (RFE) on 23 March. Tajikistan has banned Salafi Islam since 2009 as "extremist".

Abdulkodyrov must not change his permanent place of residence, work, or education without notifying the authorities, the Court told RFE. If he does not follow these restrictions he can be taken back into custody.

The National Security Committee (NSC) secret police arrested Abdulkodyrov on 1 December 2018 after his return from working in Saudi Arabia, despite writing a letter of "repentance" at the request of officials before his return.

Prosecutors originally investigated Abdulkodyrov under Criminal Code Article 307, Part 2 ("organising the activity of an extremist organisation"). However, in January 2019 this was changed to a charge under Article 189, Part 1 ("Inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension, humiliation of national dignity, as well as propaganda of the superiority of citizens based on their religion, national, racial, or local origin, if committed in public or using the mass media"). This carries a maximum jail term of five years.

An Ismoili Somoni District Court Chancellery official (who refused to give his name) on 29 May 2019 still refused to discuss Abdulkodyrov's punishment and referred Forum 18 to Court Chair Gayrat Sanginzoda. He did not answer his phone on either 29 or 30 May. Nor did Lieutenant-General Mansurjon Umarov, head of the Justice Ministry's Chief Directorate of Enforcement of Criminal Punishments, on 30 May.

---

## **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".

---

## **Tajikistan mulls reopening more than 590 mosques that had been closed down in previous years**

***Tajikistan reportedly plans to reopen 594 mosques that had been closed down in the previous years. The work is going on but it is unknown when the mosques will be reopened.***

The Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) under the Government of Tajikistan has sent the list of 594 mosques for consideration to President's Executive Office with solicitation to reopen them, an official source at the CRA told Asia-Plus today morning.

According to him, President's Executive Office has asked the CA to submit this list.

"We have received instruction from President's Executive Office to make a list of mosques that could be reopened. Such a decision was made by the President following numerous requests from citizens. It is about mosques that were closed down in jamoats," the source added.

Recall, the CRA head told reporters in Dushanbe on February 6 that a special commission has been set up to assess whether the country needs to build new mosques and reopen some of the places of worship that had been closed down by authorities in the previous years. The commission reportedly should submit its findings to the government, which will later decide where mosques should be built or reopened.

Authorities reopened dozens of mosques across the country last year.

About 10 years ago, the government launched a campaign that led to the closure of hundreds of

mosques across the country. Some were turned into tea houses, public baths, and beauty salons.

The move has been criticized by rights groups and many Tajiks, who complain that they don't have a place of worship close to where they live.

---

## **Jailed, awaiting trial on "incitement" charges**

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (20.03.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2PhKOBq> - On 28 February, two days after his arrest, a court in the northern city of Khujand ordered that 68-year old Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov be held in pre-trial detention for up to two months. Prosecutors are preparing a criminal case against him on charges of "inciting religious hatred", charges he rejects. Khakimov, who suffers from high blood pressure and recently underwent a leg operation, faces between five and ten years' imprisonment if eventually tried and convicted.

Khakimov is currently held at Khujand's Investigation Prison.

Judge Abruniso Mirasilzoda, who acceded to the Prosecutor's Office request to put Khakimov in pre-trial detention despite his medical condition, refused to explain her decision to Forum 18 (see below).

A panel of three judges at Sogd Regional Court upheld Khakimov's pre-trial detention on 12 March. None of the judges were prepared to discuss with Forum 18 why they approved the detention of the 68-year-old, given his serious state of health (see below).

Forum 18 was unable to reach Nosirkhuja Dodokhonzoda, Investigator of serious crimes at Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office, who is leading the criminal case against Khakimov (see below).

Police opened the case against Khakimov after widespread raids in January and February on homes and police interrogations of Jehovah's Witnesses across the northern Sogd Region. Some of the interrogations involved torture.

Organised Crime Police seized Khakimov's Bible and other religious literature during a raid on his home after they interrogated him (see below).

After the raids and interrogations, so far none of the Jehovah's Witnesses were given any punishments or faced any charges except for Khakimov. "The authorities probably want to punish a Jehovah's Witness more seriously in order for this to be a show case, a lesson for the rest of the Jehovah's Witnesses," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 19 March. "This may be why Khakimov was singled out."

Jehovah's Witnesses in Khujand are still being regularly summoned and questioned by the Organised Crime Police, Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18. The Police summon individuals for interrogation "without written notifications".

### **Organised Crime Police prepare Khakimov's arrest**

Trouble began for Jehovah's Witness Shamil Rasulovich Khakimov (born 30 August 1950), a retired widower, after police stopped two Jehovah's Witnesses on the street in Khujand in early January for sharing their beliefs with a passer-by.

"The Police seized the phones of the two women and called the numbers in the phone, and this is how they found Khakimov," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "The authorities allege that he is the leader of Jehovah's Witnesses in Khujand."

On the evening of 28 January, Khakimov received a call from an unknown person. "The caller requested him to leave his flat and come out onto the street. It was dark so he hesitated, but the calls kept coming," Jehovah's Witnesses said. "When he decided to come outside, there was no one on the street."

Later the caller identified himself as Nekruz Ibrokhimzoda from the Organised Crime Police of Sogd Region.

The next day, 29 January, Organised Crime Police officers summoned some of Khakimov's friends (who are not Jehovah's Witnesses) and fellow believers, and questioned them about him.

At lunch time on 1 February, three days after this, the Organised Crime Police's Khujand office summoned Khakimov, where officers searched him on arrival. Lieutenant Colonel Sukhrob Rustamzoda then interrogated him, including about his personal history, how he became a Jehovah's Witness, and the structure of the organisation.

"During the interrogation, officers refused to allow Khakimov to use the services of a defence lawyer," Jehovah's Witnesses complained.

Investigator Rustamzoda refused to comment on the case. "I cannot discuss it with you over the phone," he told Forum 18 on 19 March. "You need to talk to Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office. They are investigating the case now." When Forum 18 insisted, asking why Police opened a case against Khakimov and why he was refused a defence lawyer to participate during his interrogation, Rustamzoda put the phone down.

### **Officers seize Khakimov's property**

After the interrogation, the Organised Crime Police brought Khakimov to his flat in Khujand. Officers seized his tablet device, laptop computer, his Bible and several religious books and brochures, as well as his passport. Officers did not give him a copy of the seizure record, Jehovah's Witnesses said.

The Police "detained him overall for eight hours the same day," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18. "He had not fully recovered after the thrombophlebitis surgery on his legs and his bandages needed to be changed."

Moreover, Khakimov "could not receive money transfers to continue his necessary medical treatment, since officers seized his passport".

### **Prosecutor's Office ignores complaints, opens case**

On 3 February, Khakimov filed a complaint with the Regional Prosecutor's Office against the actions of the Organised Crime Police officers. "No answer has been received to this day," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

"Instead at around 9 am on 7 February, four days after his complaint, the Organised Crime Police officers once again arrived at Khakimov's home. They threatened him to open the door," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "As the Police officers refused to provide the official summons, he decided not to open the door."

During the same day, the Police "repeatedly called Khakimov demanding him to come to the police station."

Khakimov filed another complaint to the Regional Prosecutor's Office on 7 February against the actions of the Organised Crime Police. "At the Prosecutor's Office he was asked to write an additional statement on his faith and religious activity." The Prosecutor's Office, however, "refused to give him a note that he was asked to write a statement and that it had received his complaint."

The Prosecutor's Office has "not responded to this complaint to this day either".

### **Arrest, pre-trial detention**

On 26 February, 19 days after his second complaint, Police arrested Khakimov and put him in custody "despite his advanced age and poor health".

The following day, on 27 February, the Organised Crime Police went to Khakimov's flat again. "Without showing identification documents - in the absence of Khakimov and the presence of his roommate - seized Khakimov's international passport without drawing up a record of it," Jehovah's Witnesses said.

On 28 February, at the request of the Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office, Judge Abruniso Mirasilzoda of Khujand City Court ordered that Khakimov be held in pre-trial detention. He is being held in the Investigation Prison in Khujand.

Judge Mirasilzoda told Forum 18 from the court on 19 March that "his custody may last up two months while the investigation proceeds, and if need be his arrest can be prolonged." She refused to explain why Khakimov needs to be held in custody. Asked why he cannot be at home while his case is being investigated, she told Forum 18: "I gave my decision, and it entered into force."

Asked why she did not take into account that Khakimov is an old man who recently underwent an operation on his leg, Judge Mirasilzoda replied: "His lawyer informed us about this orally, but did not present documents." Asked whether had Khakimov had the documents, she would not have ordered the pre-trial detention, she responded: "I do not want to discuss my decision further."

Jehovah's Witnesses say the court was fully aware of Khakimov's medical condition. "On 28 February our lawyer did not yet have the documents from the doctors on Khakimov's operation, so they told Judge Mirasilzoda that Khakimov can open the bandage on his leg and show the wound, as well as producing the documents later. But she went ahead with her decision."

Khakimov's address in Investigation Prison:

Ya/S 9/2 Investigation Prison, Khujand, Sogd Region, Tajikistan

### **Why pre-trial detention?**

Jehovah's Witnesses appealed against the 28 February decision to place Khakimov in pre-trial detention. They presented in court documentation on his operation and health condition. But on 12 March, a panel of three judges at Sogd Regional Court, Ismoil Rakhmatzoda, Maftuna Rakhmatillozoda and Khotamsho Sattorzoda, upheld Khakimov's pre-trial detention.

Asked on 20 March why the Court upheld the pre-trial detention of Khakimov, an ailing old

man, Makhrambek Jumazoda, Secretary of Judge Rakhmatzoda, took down the question and Forum 18's name. Then, after consulting with an official in Judge Rakhmatzoda's office, claimed to Forum 18 that the Judge is "busy in a meeting". He then refused to talk further.

Judge Rakhmatillozoda on 20 March also refused to explain their decision. Asked why the Court did not take into account the official records of Khakimov's condition and upheld his pre-trial detention, she responded: "I just came into my office. Can you call back in 15 minutes?" Called back later, she told Forum 18 "I cannot talk to you," and put the phone down.

Judge Sattorzoda was adamant that the Court "correctly took the decision to put Khakimov in custody". Reminded that Khakimov presented to the Court the documents confirming his medical condition and that he is an old man, Sattorzoda repeated his previous response: "We took the decision correctly." He refused to explain the decision to Forum 18 and to answer further questions.

### **Inciting hatred?**

Nosirkhuja Dodokhonzoda, Investigator of serious crimes at Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office, is leading the case against Khakimov. On 7 March, one week after Khakimov's arrest, Dodokhonzoda officially informed him of the charges against him.

Dodokhonzoda is investigating Khakimov under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 2 ("Inciting national, racial, local or religious hatred or dissension, humiliation of national dignity, as well as propaganda of the superiority of citizens based on their religion, national, racial, or local origin, if committed in public or using the mass media" when performed repeatedly, by a group or by an individual using their official position). Punishment is imprisonment of between five and ten years, with the possibility also of a five-year ban on specified activity.

Prisoner of conscience Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov, who led a Protestant Church in Khujand, was punished under Criminal Code Article 189, Part 1 for allegedly "singing extremist songs in church and so inciting 'religious hatred'". Khujand City Court sentenced him to three years' imprisonment in July 2017.

Asked why the Prosecutor's Office asked for Khakimov's pre-trial detention, and why it did not respond to Khakimov complaints on the Police illegal actions, the official (who did not give his name) who on 19 March answered the phone of Khobibullo Vokhidov, Prosecutor of Sogd Region, took down Forum 18's name and asked it to wait on the line. Moments later, he told Forum 18 that "Prosecutor Vokhidov is busy; call back in an hour or so."

Called back later, the Prosecutor's phone numbers were all switched to a fax machine.

Prosecutor's Office Investigator Dodokhonzoda did not answer his phones on 20 March.

### **Health concerns**

Jehovah's Witnesses express concern over Khakimov's health. "He recently had an operation on the veins in his legs and suffers from high blood pressure," they told Forum 18 on 19 March. "At the moment he is still suffering from high blood pressure, and the doctors have told him not to stand for too long because of the operation."

Jehovah's Witnesses added that although Khakimov is "doing well", he still feels pain in his leg after the surgery. "Our lawyer talked to the prison doctor and he said that he will make sure that Shamil Khakimov would not have to stand up every time officers enter the cell

for checking."

### **Earlier raids, interrogations**

The Organised Crime Police Department of Sogd Region interrogated about 17 Jehovah's Witnesses for periods of up to 14 hours in January and February across the northern Sogd Region, including in Khujand and Konibodom. Police also confiscated mobile phones, personal computers or tablets, and internal passports from those they interrogated.

One female Jehovah's Witness was interrogated two days running for 14 hours. Because of the extreme stress imposed on her, she suffered a stroke, leaving her unable to walk or speak. She was then taken to hospital.

Jehovah's Witnesses lodged a formal complaint about the police actions and torture to Sogd Regional Prosecutor's Office. "But it has taken no action and given no response to this day," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

"After the female Witness complained to President Emomali Rahmon, Sogd Regional Police informed her in writing on 6 March that it is investigating the complaint," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "However, she has not been informed on the course or the results of the investigation to this day."

Asked on 20 March about the investigation of this case and Khakimov's case, officials at the General Prosecutor's Office reception (who did not give their names) referred Forum 18 to its international relations section's Makhmudzoda and Karimzoda (first names were not given). The officials' phones went unanswered the same day. Called back, the reception officials refused to put Forum 18 through to any other officials to discuss the cases.

---

## **Children barred from attending church**

World Watch Monitor (25.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2FO47tV> - Tajik authorities implementing a new religion law are barring children from attending religious services and have burned thousands of calendars with Bible verses.

Amendments to Tajikistan's Religion Law came into force in January last year, giving the state greater control over religious education, and increase the amount of information religious organisations must pass on to the state.

The State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) now demands "all kinds of information on the number of members, finances and activities", a member of a religious community told Oslo-based news agency Forum 18 anonymously, fearing reprisals.

They also gather information about the number of children under the age of 10 attending religious meetings, using the Religion Law and the Parental Responsibility Law to put pressure on parents and religious communities.

In December, Mukhiddin Tukhtakhojayev, the SCRA official responsible for non-Muslim communities, made an unannounced visit to a religious community to obtain information. Forum 18 did not reveal the name of the community, to prevent reprisals.

"While Tukhtakhojayev was present, a few children under the age of 10 came in to the meeting to see their parents briefly," a human rights defender who wished to remain anonymous, told Forum 18.

"Tukhtakhojayev did not say anything during the meeting, but a few days later summoned the leaders of the religious community for questioning. He then forced them to write a statement explaining the reasons why the children were present in the meeting."

A few days later, the community was fined the equivalent to almost eight months' average wage for violating the Religion Law.

### ***'Religious propaganda'***

In the same month, 5,000 calendars with Bible verses, which were imported by the Baptist Church, were confiscated by custom officials and destroyed. The Church also received a fine of about four months' average wage for "producing, distributing, importing, or exporting religious literature and items of a religious nature which have not passed through the compulsory prior state religious censorship".

A customs official told Radio Free Europe that inspection had shown the calendars had "elements of propaganda of an alien faith", Forum 18 reported.

SCRA spokesperson Afshin Mukim told the radio broadcaster that "propaganda of a religion must be done only within the Baptist Church, and the calendars had religious propaganda in them", and said the number of calendars was greater than the number of Baptists in the country, according to the news agency.

Tajikistan is a Central Asian country with the highest percentage of Muslims, approximately 97%, but the former Soviet republic is determined to be secular and to keep Islam under control.

### ***Target of persecution***

Of the eight "Persecution Engines" the international religious-freedom watchdog Open Doors measures, 'Islamic oppression' and 'dictatorial paranoia' has made Tajik Christians a target of persecution.

Christian converts from a Muslim background are most vulnerable to persecution in Tajikistan, in particular from family, friends and the community, Open Doors says. Non-traditional Christian communities, like the Baptist Church, also suffer from raids, threats, arrests and fines by authorities.

The Central Asian country is 29th on the 2019 Open Doors World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian.

### **HRWF Comment**

See our [FORB and Blasphemy Prisoners Database](#): 23 FORB Prisoners (22 Muslims, 1 Protestant).

---

## **Raid, torture, interrogations, fines, calendars destroyed**

***Religious communities including Jehovah's Witnesses meeting for worship continue to be raided, with interrogations lasting between 20 minutes and 14 hours and in some cases involving torture. Other religious communities also face***

***renewed questioning, especially on finances, and whether children under the age of 10 attend meetings.***

By Mushfig Bayram

Forum 18 (22.02.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2HklqoS> - Police in Tajikistan continue to raid groups of Jehovah's Witnesses meeting together for worship, with interrogations being carried out for between 20 minutes and 14 hours. During the interrogations police have forced people to sign statements that they were not tortured, yet some detainees have been tortured. Contrary to the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Tajikistan has neither arrested officials suspected of torture, nor put them on criminal trial.

From January 2019, State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) officials have renewed demands to religious communities of all beliefs to give the SCRA "all kinds of information on the number of their members, finances and activities", a member of one religious community who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. Officials have been particularly interested in community finances, as well as whether children under the age of 10 attend meetings (see below).

The demands follow January 2018 Religion Law changes, but officials act as if there are no legal controls on their actions. One religious community in early 2019 asked Mukhiddin Tukhtakhojajev, who is responsible within the SCRA for non-Muslim communities, for a formal written request for the information he wanted. He replied that he will not put anything in writing, claiming that "you need to obey my verbal commands". He also claimed: "My verbal commands are the law as I represent the law.

If you don't obey my verbal commands you will be in trouble. We [the SCRA] will come and take any documents we want" (see below).

After Tukhtakhojajev visited a community to demand information and saw children under the age of 10 present with their parents, a fine equivalent to almost eight months' average wage was imposed (see below).

"Mosques have stopped being a social institution, and have become some kind of state agency," a human rights defender who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. "Imams are known to share all information on mosque community members with state agencies" (see below).

In December 2018 customs officers at Dushanbe Airport confiscated 5,000 calendars with New Testament verses that Baptists were importing. The calendars were later destroyed and a fine equivalent to about four months average wage imposed. One Customs official told Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) that "after linguistic experts in the Culture Ministry .. found elements of propaganda of an alien faith, the calendars were confiscated". Officials have refused to explain to Forum 18 why the state might regard some faiths as "alien", or whether followers of "alien" faiths have greater or less freedom of religion and belief than followers of "non-alien" faiths. They have also refused to explain why the calendars were confiscated and destroyed instead of being returned to sender (see below).

Jehovah's Witness former prisoner of conscience Daniil Islamov, who was jailed for refusing to do military service, has filed a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee (see below).

### ***Raids, interrogations for up to 14 hours***

Police have continued to raid groups of Jehovah's Witnesses meeting together for worship. The regime banned Jehovah's Witnesses in 2007.

Across the northern Sogd Region, including in Khujand and Konibodom, the police Organised Crime Department has been raiding homes of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout January and February. Police are known to have interrogated about 17 people for periods of between 20 minutes and 14 hours, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 15 February. Police also confiscated some mobile phones, personal computers or tablets, and internal passports from those they interrogated.

Asked on 21 February why police are raiding Jehovah's Witnesses meeting for worship in their homes, and why Tajikistan has banned the community, Abdurakhmon Mavlanov of the State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) in the capital Dushanbe replied: "I am not competent to answer you on this question." He refused to put Forum 18 through to any official who could answer this.

### ***Torture***

During the interrogations, police in Sogd Region compelled those detained to complete a questionnaire about Jehovah's Witness beliefs, as well as to state in writing that they were not tortured by police during the interrogations.

Under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Tajikistan is obliged to arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture, and to try them under criminal law.

One female Jehovah's Witness was interrogated two days running for 14 hours. As a result of the extreme stress imposed on her she suffered a stroke, leaving her unable to walk or speak. She was then taken to hospital.

Jehovah's Witnesses lodged a formal complaint about the interrogation and torture to the Regional Public Prosecutor, but it has taken no action and has made no response.

The duty officer of Sogd Regional Police (who refused to give his name) told Forum 18 from Khujand on 21 February that freedom of religion and belief cases were dealt with by the Organised Crime Department. Khurshed Raupov, Deputy Head of the Organised Crime Department, told Forum 18 that "I understand you very well but cannot answer" when questioned about the raids and torture. He then put the phone down and did not answer subsequent phone calls.

### ***Earlier police torture unpunished***

In an earlier case of torture, on 21 January 2018 in Khujand a Jehovah's Witness was summoned to a police station where during a four-hour interrogation, police officer Husrav Usupov beat him until he suffered concussion. Police then released him and he went to a hospital for treatment. Police forced the hospital not to provide medical test results, and forced a doctor to write a false statement denying the injuries. The victim's wife complained to the Prosecutor's Office about her husband's torture.

However, on 1 February 2018 the chief of Khujand Police and the head of the police Criminal Investigation Department summoned the victim and his wife for interrogation. Police ordered the couple to write a statement that they were Jehovah's Witnesses, so fearing for their safety they moved elsewhere, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

### ***Large scale secret police raid***

In the capital Dushanbe on 5 October 2018, the National Security Service (NSS) secret police detained a group of 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, including some children, leaving a home after they met for worship. The NSS detained most of the men, women and children for questioning, apart from eight women. One of those detained was Russian, and the NSS threatened to deport him and suggest that Russia prosecute him for "extremism". (Jehovah's Witnesses are also banned in Russia.)

The 10 detainees were eventually released after many hours of questioning, and have been threatened with prosecution for their exercise of freedom of religion and belief.

### ***Fined for parents bringing children to meeting***

In December 2018, Mukhiddin Tukhtakhojeyev of the State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) visited one religious community without any warning or invitation to demand information, a human rights defender who knows the community but is not part of it told Forum 18. Tukhtakhojeyev is responsible within the SCRA for non-Muslim communities.

"While Tukhtakhojeyev was present, a few children under the age of 10 came in to the meeting to see their parents briefly," the human rights defender who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals stated. "Tukhtakhojeyev did not say anything during the meeting, but a few days later summoned the leaders of the religious community for questioning. He then forced them to write a statement explaining the reasons why the children were present in the meeting."

The community was then under Administrative Code Article 474 ("Violation of the Religion Law") fined 7,700 Somonis, which is equivalent to almost eight months' average wage. The religious community itself also does not want to be named for fear of state reprisals.

The regime through the Religion law and the Parental Responsibility Law imposes severe restrictions on freedom of religion and belief and related rights, such as the rights of the child and the freedoms of expression and association. This includes warning religious communities not to allow children to be at meetings for worship.

### ***5,000 Baptist calendars destroyed***

On 18 December 2018, customs officers at Dushanbe Airport confiscated 5,000 religious calendars that Baptists were importing, a human rights defender who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 14 February. The calendars had photos for each of the 12 months of 2019, and had one quotation from the New Testament for each month.

The calendars were being imported by Dushanbe's state-registered Baptist Church. However Rahmonali Rahimzoda of the Customs Service told Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL) on 14 February that "following the conclusion of linguistic experts in the Culture Ministry that found elements of propaganda of an alien faith, the calendars were confiscated".

"The Baptist calendars only had Bible verses on them," a local Protestant who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 21 February. "Unfortunately, this means that our authorities consider that the Bible is an alien book in Tajikistan."

Abdurakhmon Mavlanov of the SCRA did not answer when asked by Forum 18 on 21 February why the state might regard some faiths as "alien", or whether followers of "alien" faiths have greater or less freedom of religion and belief than followers of "non- alien" faiths.

The Church was fined 4,000 Somonis, which is about four months' average wage, under Administrative Code Article 474-1. This punishes producing, distributing, importing, or exporting religious literature and items of a religious nature which have not passed through the compulsory prior state religious censorship.

SCRA spokesperson Afshin Mukim told RFE/RL that the calendars were confiscated "because propaganda of a religion must be done only within the Baptist Church, and the calendars had religious propaganda in them". He also claimed that the numbers of calendars exceeded the number of Baptists in the country.

The authorities destroyed the calendars in January 2019, "as they were imported without prior censorship and the permission of the SCRA," Customs spokesperson Boymurod Faizulloyev told Forum 18 on 15 February. He would not explain why the calendars were destroyed, or why the Baptist Church was fined. Faizulloyev also refused to explain why the calendars were not sent back to the sender instead of being destroyed.

Sukhrob Odineyev, an "expert" of the Religious "Expert Analysis" Section of the Culture Ministry, adamantly denied that the Ministry gave an "expert opinion" on the calendars. "I don't know why Mavlanov and the Customs Service told you and the press that we gave such an expert opinion, but it is not true," he told Forum 18 on 22 February. He further declined to discuss the issue with Forum 18 or answer other questions.

Abdurakhmon Mavlanov of the SCRA also refused to explain why the calendars were destroyed and Baptists fined. "We have nothing to do with that," he claimed to Forum 18 on 21 February.

Mavlanov did not answer when asked why the SCRA did not raise with the Customs Service or other authorities whether the destruction of calendars with Bible verses on them was a legal and appropriate action.

### ***"My verbal commands are the law..."***

In January 2019 State Committee for Religious Affairs and Regulation of Traditions, Ceremonies and Rituals (SCRA) officials renewed demands to religious communities of all beliefs to give the SCRA "all kinds of information on the number of their members, finances and activities", a member of one religious community who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 in mid-January.

Officials have been particularly interested in community finances, as well as whether children under the age of 10 attend meetings.

The SCRA questions follow January 2018 changes to the Religion Law. An amendment to Article 19 requires all religious communities to provide the SCRA "on request with information on the sources of income, inventory of its property, expenditure of its

resources, number of its employees, salaries paid, the sums of taxes paid and other necessary information".

The amendment to Article 19 also requires religious communities to help SCRA officials to "familiarise themselves with their religious activity in connection with their carrying out of the goals in their statute and the observance of laws".

But even before these changes, the SCRA illegally demanded that religious communities had to complete a detailed SCRA questionnaire every year. The regime imposed the January 2018 changes without consultation, and break Tajikistan's legally-binding international human rights obligations.

Even after the changes, officials act as if there are no legal controls on their actions. One religious community in early 2019 asked Mukhiddin Tukhtakhojayev of the SCRA for a formal written request for the information he wanted, as he is responsible within the SCRA for non-Muslims communities. He replied that he will not put anything in writing, and claimed that "you need to obey my verbal commands".

Tukhtakhojayev then claimed: "My verbal commands are the law as I represent the law. If you don't obey my verbal commands you will be in trouble. We [the SCRA] will come and take any documents we want."

Tukhtakhojayev on 14 February refused to answer Forum 18's questions, claiming: "I cannot talk to you over the phone." Contradicting his behaviour towards various religious communities, he then demanded "please send your questions in writing" before putting the phone down.

### ***"Give us any information whenever we ask for it"***

A member of another religious community, who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 in February 2019 that some religious communities in December 2018 asked the SCRA to hold a round table explaining the January 2018 legal changes. After frequent raids in 2018, "religious communities wanted the SCRA to explain how they can carry out their normal exercise freedom of religion and belief without SCRA interference, and without the fear of being punished", the community member told Forum 18.

The SCRA refused to hold a round table, and replied that "religious communities must obey the law and give us any information whenever we ask for it".

### ***Mosques "have become some kind of state agency"***

Mosques and Muslims exercising freedom of religion and belief are targeted for particularly severe state restrictions, imposed through the state-controlled Council of Ulems [Islamic scholars] and other state agencies. These include restrictions introduced in 2017 on how Islamic festivals and the haj pilgrimage are marked. Beard and hijab-wearing bans continue to be enforced, forcing one couple to divorce. Police have set up roadblocks to enforce the bans, which are also been enforced in schools and universities.

The January 2018 amendments to the Religion Law also imposed tighter SCRA controls over building and opening new mosques. According to the amended Article 8, mosque communities require SCRA permission to use specific buildings for worship, while the SCRA also needs to approve the local authorities' plans to allocate land to build a mosque. SCRA

permission is required for the appointment of ordinary imams, imam-hatyps (who give sermons) and sar-hatyps (the head of a mosque).

"Mosques have stopped being a social institution, and have become some kind of state agency," a human rights defender who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 12 February 2019. "Imams are known to share all information on mosque community members with state agencies."

The human rights defender also pointed out that another sign of mosques becoming a state agency was that they now handed over "a big portion of their income to the SCRA". Corruption is widespread in Tajikistan, and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2018 ranks the country close to the bottom, in 152nd place out of 180 countries worldwide.

SCRA and Council of Ulems officials refused to discuss their control of mosques and restrictions on everyone's freedom of religion and belief with Forum 18, or put Forum 18 through to anyone who would discuss these issues.

Asked on 21 February why the SCRA collects money from mosques, Abdurakhmon Mavlanov of the SCRA in Dushanbe did not answer and put the phone down.

Haji Nigmatullo Olimov, Deputy Chair of the Council of Ulems, refused to say whether and how much money the Council collected from individual mosques. On 15 February he first asked to speak "after lunch", but then did not answer his phone that afternoon. On 21 February he claimed that "I cannot hear you well", although Forum 18 could hear him clearly. He then put the phone down and did not answer his phone again.

### ***Conscientious objector's complaint to UN Human Rights Committee***

Jehovah's Witness former prisoner of conscience Daniil Islamov was jailed for six months from April to October 2018 for refusing military service although he was willing to do a civilian alternative service. By the time of his release, Islamov had been held for nearly a year after being detained in a military unit in April 2017. The Tajik authorities ignored a call by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention just a week before he was jailed that he should be freed "immediately".

On 24 January 2019, Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee on behalf of former prisoner of conscience Islamov, they told Forum 18 on 15 February.