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One district, four police raids, seven fines

By Felix Corley

[Forum18](#) (03.05.2024) - Police in Shu District of southern Kazakhstan raided four meetings for worship of three unregistered Protestant communities and issued six summary fines in March and April. A local court handed down another fine. The leader of one church, 77-year-old Pastor Andrei Boiprav, awaits a court hearing, despite his health condition. Church members say the situation is causing "a threat to his life and health". Forum 18 could not reach the police involved in the raids and fines. "The police are to blame," says regional religious affairs official Saule Baibatshayeva.

In one District of southern Kazakhstan, Shu District close to the border with Kyrgyzstan, police in March and April conducted raids on four worship meetings of three local Protestant churches. Officers filmed those present, demanded that some write statements explaining why they were present and issued six summary fines. One of the church leaders was also fined in court and another, 77-year-old Pastor Andrei Boiprav, is awaiting a court hearing.

Members of the church Pastor Boiprav leads complain that the situation is causing "a threat to his life and health", as well as to the rights of church members to continue exercising their freedom of religion or belief (see below)

The three churches subjected to police raids are all unregistered with the state. Two are of the Baptist Council of Churches, who choose not to seek state registration. Exercising freedom of religion or belief without state registration is illegal and punishable (see below).

Police summarily fined 47-year-old Pastor Valter Mirau of the Baptist church in the village of Konayeva and two other church members. Police also sent a case to court where Mirau was again fined for "illegal missionary activity". Each of the fines handed to Mirau was the equivalent of two months' average wages (see below).

Police summarily fined three members of the Baptist church in the village of Shu one month's average wage each. Police also sent a case to court to punish 77-year-old Pastor Andrei Boiprav, despite his health condition (see below).

"What has been happening in the last month in Shu has aroused serious concern among Evangelical communities, which have experienced persecution for their religious activity," local Council of Churches Baptists noted in late April. The Baptists' activity "is not illegal or extremist", church members insist.

Forum 18 was unable on 3 May to reach Shu District police or any of the officers involved in raiding the churches or issuing the fines (see below).

Saule Baibatshayeva, the official overseeing non-Muslim communities at the Religious Affairs Department of Zhambyl Regional Akimat [administration], says she knows about the raids and fines on Protestants in Shu District in March and April. "The police are to blame," she told Forum 18. "They take their own measures under the Administrative Code. There was no order from us." She claimed that she and her colleagues try to stop police from punishing unregistered Christian communities for meeting for worship (see below).

Shu District borders Kordai District, where officials have waged a campaign to punish Muslims from the Dungan ethnic minority who teach the Koran and Islam to local children without state permission. The District Court [fined two more in 2023](#), bringing to 15 the number known to have been punished since 2018

Meanwhile, the administrative case against a Protestant, Sergei Orlov, is due to resume in court in Almaty on 10 May. A Religious Affairs Department official Almaz Zhanamanov prepared the case to punish him for speaking in a flat in Almaty on 8 March to a group of church members who were meeting to mark international women's day. Zhanamanov refused to explain why he was seeking to punish Orlov.

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