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Release of all conscientious objectors and other Jehovah's Witnesses

[JW.ORG](http://www.jw.org) (13.11.2014) - <http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/turkmenistan/amnesty-jehovahs-witnesses-in-prison/> - In a surprising turn of events, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov amnestied eight of Jehovah's Witnesses who were imprisoned in Turkmenistan for practicing their faith. They were among other prisoners who were released on October 22, 2014. Six of the Witnesses had been imprisoned for their conscientious objection to military service and two on fabricated charges for religious activity.

The conscientious objectors, young men between the ages of 18 and 23, were imprisoned in the Seydi Labor Colony, located in the Turkmen desert. Merdan Amanov, Pavel Paymov, Suhrab Rahmanberdyev, and Amirlan Tolkachev were in the general regime camp. Matkarim Aminov and Dovran Matyakubov (not pictured) were in the more punitive strict regime camp, as they had been reconvicted as "repeat offenders." While in prison, these young men endured abusive treatment and deplorable living conditions.

The two Witnesses imprisoned under fabricated charges, 35-year-old Aibek Salayev and 42-year-old Bahram Shamuradov, were also in the general regime camp at Seydi. Both were serving four-year prison sentences because of their religious beliefs and activities. They suffered severe mistreatment while in detention, in addition to the injustice of false imprisonment based on planted evidence.

Only one Witness, Ruslan Narkuliev, remains imprisoned in Turkmenistan. He was sentenced as a conscientious objector to military service only a few weeks prior to the amnesty, and his name may not have been known to the Presidential Administration

when the amnesty was announced. His legal representatives are working with the Turkmen authorities to secure his release.

President Berdimuhamedov took commendable and decisive action when he amnestied these eight imprisoned men of faith. Those who cherish religious freedom hope that this is a harbinger of change in Turkmenistan, a change that will allow Jehovah's Witnesses to live in harmony with their conscience without fear of persecution or imprisonment.

Eight prisoners of conscience amnestied

Forum 18 (28.10.2014) - Late in the day on 22 October, eight of Turkmenistan's nine known imprisoned prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief were released under presidential amnesty, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. All were being held in a labour camp in eastern Turkmenistan. Six were conscientious objectors to military service and two had been imprisoned on charges that their fellow Jehovah's Witnesses insist were fabricated to punish them for exercising their freedom of religion or belief.

One newly-sentenced conscientious objector was not released, and nor was a Protestant imprisoned on what his friends say were disproportionate charges brought because of his beliefs. Two Jehovah's Witnesses serving suspended sentences appear also to have not been amnestied (see below). There are also other prisoners of conscience who are not known to have been jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief (see eg. http://www.iphronline.org/uploads/9/0/2/7/9027585/eng_central_asia_monitoring_report_oct_2014.pdf).

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 that they are "relieved" that most of their imprisoned fellow believers have been released. They noted on 28 October that the amnesty is an "encouraging" development and are hopeful that it will now result in recognition of the right to conscientious objection to military service. This would be in line with recommendations in the 19 April 2012 Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee on Turkmenistan (see http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR/C/TKM/CO/1&Lang=En) and the 5 July 2013 report by the Human Rights Council's Working Group on Turkmenistan's Universal Periodic Review (see <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/24/3&Lang=E>).

Prisoner amnesty

The Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience were freed as part of the prisoner amnesty to mark the 23rd anniversary of Turkmenistan's independence from the Soviet Union on 26 and 27 October. President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov signed a decree on 21 October, the government website noted the same day. The decree notes that amnestied prisoners are to be released from prison and freed from further punishment.

Unlike in some earlier years, no lists of freed prisoners were published in the state media, nor the number of prisoners being freed, sources told Forum 18 from the capital Ashgabad [Ashgabat]. None of the known prisoners of conscience was freed in the last prisoner amnesty in July, when the government claimed that more than a thousand prisoners were freed.

Latest prisoner of conscience

However, the most recent imprisoned conscientious objector, Jehovah's Witness Ruslan Narkuliyev, sentenced to two years' imprisonment on 30 September, was not freed under

amnesty. "We are hopeful that he will also be released in the coming days," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "It seems that his name might have been missed on the list of prisoners that should be released based on the amnesty, since he had only been imprisoned a few weeks before the amnesty was proclaimed."

On 30 September, less than three weeks after his 21st birthday, Narkuliyev was imprisoned by a court in Turkmenabad [Turkmenabat] (formerly Charjew) in eastern Turkmenistan for refusing the call-up to compulsory military service, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Like all the other sentenced conscientious objectors, he was punished under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1. This punishes refusal to serve in the armed forces in peacetime with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment (see Forum 18's Turkmenistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1676).

Turkmenistan offers no alternative to its compulsory military service. Article 41 of the Constitution describes defence as a "sacred duty" of everyone and states that military service is compulsory for men. Military service for men between the ages of 18 and 27 is generally two years. A proposed Alternative Service Law was reportedly drafted in 2013, but officials have been unable to tell Forum 18 if and when it might be adopted (see F18News 29 September 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2002).

Soon after his sentencing, Narkuliyev was transferred to the general regime section of the Seydi Labour Camp, in the desert in the eastern Lebap Region. This is where most religious prisoners of conscience – including conscientious objectors serving their first jail sentences – have been held. Prisoners of conscience who have experienced Seydi Labour Camp have documented harsh conditions, including the torture of prisoners by the authorities (see F18News 18 February 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1802).

Eight amnestied prisoners

Of the eight amnestied Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience, six are conscientious objectors:

1. Dovran Matyakubov, aged 22, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, December 2012;
2. Matkarim Aminov, aged 23, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, January 2013;
3. Amirlan Tolkachev, aged 21, 18 months, Turkmenabad Court, July 2013;
4. Suhrab Rahmanberdiyev, aged 19, 18 months, November 2013;
5. Pavel Paymov, aged 24, 1 year, Ashgabad Court, February 2014;
6. Merdan Amanov, aged 19, 1 year, Ashgabad Court, July 2014.

The two other amnestied Jehovah's Witness prisoners of conscience were imprisoned on charges of possessing pornography, which fellow Jehovah's Witnesses insist were fabricated:

7. Aibek Salayev, aged 35, 4 years, Dashoguz Court, April 2012;
8. Bahram Shamuradov, aged 42, 4 years, Dashoguz Court, July 2014.

All eight of these prisoners had been held in the general regime section of Seydi Labour Camp, except for Matyakubov and Aminov. The two men (who were both serving second

sentences on the same charges) were in the strict regime section of the same camp (see F18News 29 September 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2002).

Those amnestied have to report regularly to police, apparently on a weekly basis, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Protestant thought not to have been freed

A 32-year-old Protestant imprisoned on charges of hooliganism, Umid Gojayev, appears not to have been freed, Protestants in Turkmenistan told Forum 18 on 28 October. He is serving a four year prison term imposed by a Dashoguz court in May 2012. Local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs (see F18News 25 March 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1817).

Like almost all the Jehovah's Witness prisoners, Gojayev has been held in the general regime section of Seydi Labour Camp (see F18News 29 September 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2002).

Others jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief

There are also an unknown number of Muslim prisoners of conscience also jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief. Musa (last name unknown), a Muslim from Ashgabad who seems to have been imprisoned for teaching the Koran to children, was being held in Seydi Labour Camp at the beginning of 2012 (see F18News 20 February 2012 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1669).

Those on suspended sentences not amnestied

Ashgabad-based Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector Murat Sapargeldyyev was also not amnestied. He was given a two-year suspended sentence, where one fifth of his income is to be handed to the state, by an Ashgabad court in January 2014 under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1 (see F18News 21 March 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1940).

Nor was fellow Jehovah's Witness Bibi Rahmanova amnestied. Sentenced to four years' imprisonment on 18 August, after the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police found her collecting religious literature. Officials also assaulted her and her husband and detained her four-year old child (see F18News 20 August 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1987).

Rahmanova had her sentence suspended on appeal on 2 September. She was freed from prison in Dashoguz that evening after nearly four weeks' detention, and is serving her four-year conditional sentence at home, living on probation for three years. During that time she must maintain "good behaviour" and needs permission from the authorities to leave her home city of Dashoguz or move to another location. No action has been taken against officials who assaulted her and her husband and detained her four-year old child (see F18News 29 September 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2002).

Those serving suspended sentences are under tight restrictions. They must be home each night, cannot travel outside their home city without special permission, and one fifth of their income is handed to the state (see eg. F18News 18 February 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1802).

Prison terms for conscientious objectors and members of unregistered religious groups

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting - Working Session 14 : Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

HRWF (06.10.2014) - Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l recommends to the government of Turkmenistan:

- 1) To release objectors to military service and to adopt a legislation creating an alternative civilian service
- 2) To grant all religious communities the right of association, assembly and worship
- 3) To allow believers of any religion to share their beliefs individually or collectively
- 4) To lift censorship on the publication, production and import of religious literature
- 5) To decriminalize the religious activities of unregistered religious groups and their members

In **Turkmenistan**, young Jehovah's Witnesses are in prison for conscientious objection to military service. They have no opportunity to perform alternative civilian service as it is the case in almost all the OSCE Participating States. They are usually sentenced to terms of 12 to 24 months. Upon release, the same men have at times been prosecuted as "repeat offenders" and then placed in a strict regime prison.

While several objectors were released in the first semester of this year, others were arrested:

Pavel PAYMOV, Suhrab RAHMANBERDYEV and Admirlan TOLKACHEV are in the general regime section of the camp while Matkarim AMINOV and Dovran MATYAKUBOV are in the strict regime section.

On 7 July 2014, Merdan AMANOV was given a one-year prison sentence and was being held in pre-trial detention in Yashlyk, 40 km from Ashgabad.

Other prisoners of conscience punished for merely exercising their right to religious freedom:

Bibi RAHMANOVA (33), a mother of a four-year-old son, was sentenced under fabricated charges of "assaulting a policeman" and hooliganism on 18 August to four years in a general regime colony, a prison for criminals.

Bahram SHAMURADOV (42) was sentenced on 2 July to a four-year prison term on the fabricated criminal charge of distributing pornography in the northern city of Dashoguz.

Aibek SALAYEV was sentenced to four years' imprisonment in April 2012 on the fabricated charge of "hooliganism".

Local Jehovah's Witnesses accuse the law enforcement forces of fabricating charges so that they can put an end to their proselytism activities and deter the other believers.

The government goes on denying registration to a number of Protestant communities and Jehovah's Witnesses. Unregistered religious groups and unregistered branches of religious groups cannot legally conduct religious activities, including establishing places of worship, gathering for services, disseminating religious materials, or proselytizing. Unregistered religious activity is punished as an administrative offense, with fines ranging from the equivalent of \$125 to \$500.

Although no laws expressly prohibit holding religious services on residential property, the housing code states that communal housing should not be used for any activities other than living. The religion law states that religious services must be held at the religious group's designated location.

The domestic publication of religious literature is prohibited by decree, and the Committee for Religious Affairs must approve imported religious literature. Only registered religious groups can import literature, though with a lot of restrictions.

Freed after four weeks, but court "failed to correct an injustice"

Forum 18 (29.09.2014) - Jehovah's Witness Bibi Rahmanova – sentenced to four years' imprisonment on 18 August – had her sentence suspended on appeal on 2 September, according to the court decision seen by Forum 18 News Service. She was freed from prison in Dashoguz in northern Turkmenistan that evening after nearly four weeks' detention. She will now serve her four-year conditional sentence at home, living on probation for three years. During that time she must maintain "good behaviour" and needs permission from the authorities to leave her home city of Dashoguz or move to another location.

Jehovah's Witnesses welcome Rahmanova's release from prison, which they note "improved her situation". "The family is delighted to be reunited again," they told Forum 18. However, they lament that the appeal court decision "failed to correct an injustice" by rejecting her appeal for an acquittal.

The 33-year-old Rahmanova – who is married with a four-year-old son – suffered "severe physical abuse" while in detention, both from staff and from some of her fellow prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The appeal court verdict notes that criminal charges against her husband, Vepa Tuvakov were dropped. It gives the date for this as 2 July, but this appears to be a mistake, as Rahmanova and Tuvakov were detained only on 5 July and criminal charges against both were lodged after that.

Rahmanova's release from prison leaves nine other individuals known to be in prison because of their faith. Six are conscientious objectors to compulsory military service (all Jehovah's Witnesses). Two other Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned on charges their fellow Jehovah's Witnesses insist were fabricated to punish them for their faith. One Protestant is in prison on charges his fellow Protestants say should not have led to imprisonment (see below).

Although a parliamentary deputy told Forum 18 that a draft Alternative Service Law was prepared in 2013, he said he did not know if and when it might be adopted (see below).

Also a Protestant has been fined for possessing religious literature which has not passed through the compulsory state censorship (see below).

The telephone of Gurbanberdy Nursakhatov, Deputy Chair of the government's Gengesh (Council) for Religious Affairs in the capital Ashgabat [Ashgabat], went unanswered each time Forum 18 called on 29 September.

Arrest, criminal charges

Trouble began for Rahmanova at Dashoguz train station late in the evening of 5 July. She, her husband and their son had gone there to collect religious literature sent to them from Ashgabad. Officials of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police, Transport Police, Police 6th Department and the local Religious Affairs office seized the family as they picked up the consignment. The MSS secret police had learnt at lunchtime that day that the couple would be collecting the literature. It remains unclear how they found this out.

The couple's son was freed on the morning of 6 July and Rahmanova in the evening. Tuvakov was released only on 11 July. Rahmanova heard police discussing how they would fabricate a criminal case against her husband, who was also beaten at the police station.

However, although criminal charges were lodged against both, Rahmanova was arrested on 7 August. She had been accused the previous day of violating Criminal Code Article 211, Part 1 ("resisting the police with violence not risking life or health" with a prison sentence of up to two years) and Article 279, Part 2 b (which punishes hooliganism "connected with resisting a law enforcement officer" with a prison sentence of up to five years).

On 18 August, Judge Gaigysyz Orazmuradov of Dashoguz City Court sentenced Rahmanova to four years' imprisonment in a general regime labour camp. She was held in Dashoguz Investigation Prison while awaiting her appeal (see F18News 20 August 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1987).

Appeal

In her 27 August appeal, filed the following day and seen by Forum 18, Rahmanova insisted she had not assaulted any of the officials at the train station and was not guilty of any crime. She therefore called for the conviction to be overturned. She said she had responded "instinctively" when officers touched her inappropriately when seizing her mobile phone which she had hidden inside her shirt.

Rahmanova noted that the officers "had not hidden the fact that they had come to the railway station because of our religious affiliation". She pointed out that they already knew that she and her husband were Jehovah's Witnesses without needing to ask and that the religious affairs official of the hyakimlik (administration) also "happened to be there".

A panel of three judges, headed by Judge G. Agoyliyev, heard Rahmanova's appeal at Dashoguz Regional Court on 2 September. She was given no notice of the appeal hearing, so no lawyer was able to represent her, Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

The Judges rejected Rahmanova's insistence she had not assaulted the officers, claiming that her assertions were "unfounded". In its account of the events on the evening of 5 July, the court decision claims that the Jehovah's Witness literature Rahmanova and her husband were collecting from the station was "prohibited for reading or distribution in Turkmenistan" as it had not been approved by the Justice Ministry.

The decision claims that Dashoguz Regional Prosecutor G. Balliyeva had deemed the four-year prison sentence "too harsh", given that Rahmanova is a woman and the mother of a four-year-old son and had no previous criminal record. The Judges therefore upheld the Prosecutor's Office request to amend the verdict to a suspended sentence.

No one at Dashoguz Appeal Court would discuss the case with Forum 18 on 29

September or put Forum 18 through to any of the three judges who rejected Rahmanova's appeal.

Nine known religious prisoners of conscience

Six of the current known religious prisoners of conscience are conscientious objectors, all of them Jehovah's Witnesses:

1. Dovran Matyakubov, aged 21, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, December 2012;
2. Matkarim Aminov, aged 23, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, January 2013;
3. Amirlan Tolkachev, aged 21, 18 months, Turkmenabad Court, July 2013;
4. Suhrab Rahmanberdiyev, aged 18, 18 months, November 2013;
5. Pavel Paymov, aged 23, 1 year, Ashgabad Court, February 2014;
6. Merdan Amanov, aged 19, 1 year, Ashgabad Court, July 2014.

Two other prisoners – both Jehovah's Witnesses – were imprisoned on charges of possessing pornography, which fellow Jehovah's Witnesses insist were fabricated:

7. Aibek Salayev, aged 35, 4 years, Dashoguz Court, April 2012;
8. Bahram Shamuradov, aged 42, 4 years, Dashoguz Court, July 2014.

A Protestant has been imprisoned on charges of hooliganism. Local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs:

9. Umid Gojayev, aged 32, 4 years, Dashoguz Court, May 2012.

All the known religious prisoners of conscience are in the general regime section of the labour camp in the desert near Seydi, in the eastern Lebap Region, except for Matyakubov and Aminov. The two men (who are both serving second sentences on the same charges) are in the strict regime section of the same camp

No alternative service

Turkmenistan offers no alternative to military service. Article 41 of the Constitution describes defence as a "sacred duty" of everyone and states that military service is compulsory for men. Military service for men between the ages of 18 and 27 is generally two years.

Those who refuse military service on grounds of conscience are convicted under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1. This punishes refusal to serve in the armed forces in peacetime with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment (see Forum 18's Turkmenistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1676).

Turkmenistan's refusal to recognise the right to refuse military service, which is part of the right to freedom of religion or belief, breaks the country's international human rights commitments, and was criticised in March 2012 by the United Nations Human Rights Committee (see F18News 18 April 2012 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1691).

Will Alternative Service Law ever be adopted?

Murad Atabaev, Deputy Chair of the Mejlis (Parliament) Committee on the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms, claimed that a proposed Alternative Service Law had been drafted in 2013 but that he had not seen the text. "When it will be adopted – I don't know," he told Forum 18 from Ashgabad on 29 September. Asked if President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov wishes such a law to be adopted, he responded with a laugh: "I don't know."

Atabaev referred all further questions to Pirnazar Hudainazarov, Chair of the Mejlis Legislative Committee. However, the same day Hudainazarov absolutely refused to answer any of Forum 18's questions on whether such a Law will ever be adopted. "You have to go via the Foreign Ministry," he kept repeating, without explaining why adoption of laws is an issue for the Foreign Ministry.

Atabaev told Forum 18 in September 2011 that an Alternative Service Law would be considered in 2012, though he admitted that work on drafting such a Law had not begun (see F18News 5 September 2011 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1609).

Jehovah's Witness young men have repeatedly expressed a readiness to perform an alternative, civilian service not under military control.

Fine for electronic religious literature

A Protestant away from Ashgabad was fined in early September after electronic versions of religious literature were found on a relative in August. Police and local hyakimlik officials had detained and questioned the relative about the literature for some hours.

The Protestant – who asked not to be identified for fear of further state reprisals – was found guilty of violating Article 76, Part 1 of the Administrative Code. The Judge fined the Protestant 200 Manats (450 Norwegian Kroner, 55 Euros or 70 US Dollars).

Article 76, Part 1 of the new Administrative Code – which came into force on 1 January - punishes "violation of the procedure established by law for conducted religious rites and rituals, the carrying out of charitable or other activity, as well as the production, import, export and distribution of literature and other materials of religious content and objects of religious significance" with a fine on individuals of 1 to 2 base units, on officials of 2 to 5 base units and on legal organisations of 5 to 10 base units. Each base unit is 100 Manats (see F18News 20 December 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1911).

Religious literature is under tight state censorship. The Gengesh must approve any religious literature before it is used. Gengesh officials stamp copies of books they have approved. Literature without such a stamp is liable to confiscation and individuals can be subject to punishment (see Forum 18's Turkmenistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1676).

Mother released from prison in Turkmenistan

JW (22.09.2014) <http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/turkmenistan/dashoguz-court-frees-bibi-rahmanova/> - Bibi Rahmanova walked out of prison at 8:00 p.m. on September 2, 2014, free to go but not cleared of charges. Earlier that day, the judges of the Dashoguz Regional Court considered her appeal. Though they did not acquit Bibi of the false charges, they changed her four-year prison sentence to a conditional sentence * and ordered her immediate release from prison. The decision stated that the judges took

into account the mitigating circumstances—that Bibi was a woman and the mother of a four-year-old son and that she had no previous criminal record.

Bibi had filed a cassation appeal with the court after her August 18 conviction on fabricated charges of “assaulting a policeman” and “hooliganism.” Police had accosted Bibi and her husband, Vepa, on July 5 at a train station in Dashoguz after they collected their personal luggage, which included some religious literature. The charges against Vepa were later dropped. Bibi, however, was sent to prison on August 8. While imprisoned, Bibi was subjected to severe physical abuse.

Bibi’s foreign attorney attributes her unexpected release, at least in part, to the international outcry over the injustice of her imprisonment.

Her case is not unique for Jehovah’s Witnesses in Turkmenistan. Witnesses routinely suffer serious violations of their fundamental human rights. Eight Witnesses are serving prison sentences for adhering to their faith—six as conscientious objectors and two under fabricated charges. They live under grim conditions and experience an assortment of abuses.

Commendably, the judges of the Dashoguz Regional Court improved Bibi’s situation, but they failed to correct an injustice. Those who value human dignity hope that Turkmenistan authorities will consider the broader picture and apply international human rights norms to allow for religious freedom in their country.

Repression of Jehovah’s Witnesses

HRWF (29.08.2014) - Turkmenistan imprisons young Jehovah’s Witnesses for conscientious objection to military service. Conscientious objectors have no opportunity to perform alternative civilian service and are convicted and sentenced to terms of 12 to 24 months. Upon release, the same men have at times been prosecuted as “repeat offenders” and then placed in a strict regime prison. The government also imprisons Witnesses under fabricated charges to punish their religious activity.

Timeline

1. **July 25, 2014**

Total of seven Witnesses imprisoned; five for conscientious objection to military service and two under fabricated charges for religious activity.

2. **April 6, 2014**

Twenty-six Witnesses detained, of whom 13 were arrested without proof of any crime committed. The 13 Witnesses were sentenced to pay a fine. An appeal is pending.

3. **November 2013**

Total of nine Jehovah’s Witnesses imprisoned; eight for conscientious objection to military service and one under fabricated charges for religious activity.

4. **August 29, 2013**

Three Witnesses file complaints with the CCPR against Turkmenistan for failure to recognize their right to conscientiously object to military service.

5. **May 1, 2013**

Two Witnesses file complaints with the CCPR against Turkmenistan for failure to recognize their right to conscientiously object to military service.

6. **January 24, 2013**

Thirty police officers raid the home of Navruz Nasrylayev within weeks after CCPR complaint communicated to Turkmenistan government. The police repeatedly beat the family and guests that were at the home.

7. September 7, 2012

Ten Witnesses file complaints with the CCPR against Turkmenistan for failure to recognize their right to conscientiously object to military service. Navruz Nasrylayev is the lead complainant.

8. August 21, 2008

Jehovah’s Witnesses apply for state registration in Turkmenistan.

Other Jehovah’s Witnesses in prison

NAME	AGE	LOCATION	TERM / RELEASE	REASON
Aminov, Matkarim	23	Seydi labor colony	24 months; 2015/01/08	Conscientious objection
Matyakubov, Dovran	21	Seydi labor colony	24 months; 2014/12/24	Conscientious objection
Paymov, Pavel	23	Yashlyk remand prison	12 months; 2015/02/16	Conscientious objection
Rahmanberdyev, Suhrab	19	Seydi labor colony	18 months; 2015/05/18	Conscientious objection
Salayev, Aibek	35	LBK-12 prison colony	48 months; 2016/03/09	False charges
Shamuradov, Bahram		40	False charges	
Tolkachev, Admirlan	21	Seydi labor colony	18 months; 2015/01/10	Conscientious objection

Source: JW.org

Mother of four-year-old receives unjust prison sentence

JW.org (27.08.2014)

<http://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/turkmenistan/dashoguz-judicial-police-abuses/> -

In a makeshift courtroom in Dashoguz, Turkmenistan, Judge Gagysyz Orazmuradov unjustly sentenced 33-year-old Bibi Rahmanova to prison under fabricated charges. On August 18, Bibi, a mother of a four-year-old son, was found guilty of “assaulting a policeman” and of “hooliganism.” The judge imposed a severe punishment—four years in a general regime colony, a prison for criminals.

Seized at the train station

Bibi’s ordeal began on the evening of July 5, 2014, when she and her husband, Vepa Tuvakov, along with their son, went to a train station in Dashoguz to pick up religious literature and personal possessions sent by a friend from Ashgabad. Just after the Tuvakovs retrieved the luggage, six male police officers in plain clothes detained them and demanded to see the bags’ contents. Finding a laptop computer and religious literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses, the police screamed obscenities and threatened that their son would soon be an orphan.

Bibi started recording the encounter on her cell phone and hid the phone under her blouse when the officers tried to take it from her. The officers grabbed her by the hair,

kicked and beat her, and seized her by the hands. While she was under restraint, one officer lifted up her blouse and touched her inappropriately as he retrieved the phone. Bibi fended off the assaults but did not resist arrest or attack the police.

The officers then took the Tuvakov family to the police station. The police demanded that Vepa sign a prepared written statement. He refused. The police beat him repeatedly while Bibi and their son were in another room. Vepa still refused to sign. Bibi also refused to sign the prepared statement and was beaten as well. The police kept Bibi and her son overnight, releasing them the following day. * After Bibi filed complaints with Turkmen officials, Vepa was released a few days later, on July 11. Undaunted, the Dashoguz City Police soon began a criminal investigation against both Bibi and her husband.

Arrest, detention, and trial

Bibi was charged on August 6, placed in a detention center on August 8, and stood trial on August 18. During the trial, Judge Orazmuradov demonstrated a clear bias. He repeatedly cut off Bibi's attorney when she attempted to defend her client. When the police gave contradictory testimony, the judge prevented Bibi's attorney from questioning them. The judge also stopped Vepa from testifying when he spoke of the abusive treatment of Bibi by police and refused to consider the audio recording of the events. The judge rendered a guilty verdict and sentenced Bibi to four years in prison.

- Bibi must enter her appeal by August 28, and until then she is confined in the DZD-7 detention facility. If her appeal is rejected, she will be transferred to a general regime colony, likely in the desert in Seydi. She will be deprived not only of her liberty but also of the opportunity to nurture her son during his formative years.
- Although Vepa has not been formally charged, there is a strong probability that he will be indicted, tried under false charges, and unjustly sentenced to prison. If this occurs, their son will be deprived not only of his mother but also of his father. There are no grounds for this injustice.

Plea for justice

- Turkmenistan has a history of mistreating Jehovah's Witnesses and denying their basic human rights. Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide, along with many others who respect human dignity and the right to worship freely, look to the government of Turkmenistan to right these wrongs.

Eleven-year wait on haj pilgrimage list?

Forum 18 (25.08.2014) - Muslims in Balkan Region of western Turkmenistan have to wait on average between eight and eleven years to reach the top of the waiting list to join the state-organised haj pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, an official of the regional Religious Affairs office told Forum 18 News Service from Balkanabad on 21 August. Turkmenistan's government is allowing just under a seventh of the haj quota allocated by the Saudi authorities to travel this October to Mecca. "Turkmenistan is one of the governments not doing all it can to help pilgrims," a Saudi consular official told Forum 18 from Ashgabat [Ashgabat].

Azad (who did not give his last name), the Balkan Region Religious Affairs official, said 21 pilgrims from the Region will be joining this year's haj in early October, exactly the same

number as last year. He said the 21 successful applicants would be chosen within the next week. He declined to say how many names are on the Regional waiting list.

Balkan Region is one of six administrative divisions of the country (five Regions and the capital Ashgabad). State Religious Affairs offices in other Regions either refused to discuss anything with Forum 18 or else did not answer their phones when Forum 18 called.

The man who on 20 August answered the telephone of Gurbanberdy Nursakhatov, Deputy Chair of the government's Gengesh (Council) for Religious Affairs in Ashgabad, repeatedly put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 introduced itself. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

Azad also noted that although "the state helps" with the costs, each pilgrim will be required to pay 5,000 Manats (11,000 Norwegian Kroner, 1,300 Euros or 1,800 US Dollars) through the bank to cover their cost.

The haj pilgrimage - expected this year to fall between 2 and 7 October - is an obligation for all able-bodied Muslims who can afford it at least once in their lifetime. The government has severely restricted its citizens' participation in the past two decades. It has never explained why it does so (see below).

Tight state control

All religious communities in Turkmenistan face tight government restrictions, with frequent punishments for those who exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief without state permission. Bibi Rahmanova, a Jehovah's Witness from the northern city of Dashoguz, was given a four-year prison term on 18 August on charges her community insist were fabricated to punish her for her faith. Her husband too is being investigated on criminal charges (see F18News 20 August 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1987).

However, Islam is under even tighter state control than other faiths. The government controls all appointments of imams at national and regional level, transferring and removing imams as it sees fit with no apparent consultation with Muslim communities (see F18News 25 February 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1805).

Imams – both at national and regional level – also have a dual role as state Religious Affairs officials. This means that leaders appointed to restrict the freedom of religion and belief of the Islamic community also have a state-appointed role to restrict the freedom of religion and belief of non-Muslim religious communities (see F18News 13 October 2009 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1361).

One seventh of country's quota

Turkmenistan's government is preparing for 650 of its citizens to travel in the government-organised pilgrimage in October, a Saudi consular official in the embassy in Ashgabad told Forum 18 on 20 August. Although a more than three-fold increase on recent years, this remains just less than one seventh of the quota of pilgrims for Turkmenistan, which the Saudi official put at 4,600.

By contrast, the republic of Ingushetia in Russia's North Caucasus – with a population of about 450,000 - has this year received a quota of 1,400 pilgrims. This is more than double the number of pilgrims than from Turkmenistan for a population less than one tenth of the size.

Azad of the Balkan Region Religious Affairs office said he did not know the total number of haj pilgrims who will be travelling from Turkmenistan this October.

Forum 18 can find no public announcements from Turkmen government agencies or the state media as to the number of haj pilgrims the government will allow to travel this year. In previous years, such public announcements have usually come only in the weeks before the pilgrims set off on the government-sponsored aeroplane.

Only state-organised pilgrimage

For the 2014 haj, the Turkmen authorities asked for and received 650 haj visas, the Saudi consular official told Forum 18. The official said the Turkmen authorities are allowing pilgrims only from the state-organised party, which is coordinated by the Gengesh.

In most previous years, Turkmenistan has limited the number of pilgrims allowed to travel on the haj to one aircraft-full (usually 188 pilgrims, including state officials conducting surveillance on the other pilgrims). In 2009, the government allowed no haj pilgrims to travel at all, citing alleged health concerns (see Forum 18's Turkmenistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1676).

The Saudi consular official attributed the rise from 188 to 650 to the surge in demand in 2013. "Many people came to our embassy last year requesting haj visas outside the state-organised group," the official told Forum 18. "We had to help them." The official said a total of 1,277 visas were issued for the October 2013 haj, including the 188 from the state-organised group. "The rest travelled independently, paying for themselves."

The official confirmed that this was the first time that the Turkmen authorities had allowed any haj pilgrims not in the state-organised group to make the pilgrimage.

Who chooses pilgrims?

Azad of the Balkan Region Religious Affairs office insisted to Forum 18 that Muslims who want to go on the haj need to write an application to the Regional imam. "The Regional imam draws up the list of pilgrims from the Region," he told Forum 18. "I'm his assistant." He said only the Muftiate in Ashgabad needs to approve the applications of those eventually chosen. He made no mention of any role by the Gengesh, the police or the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police.

However, local people have repeatedly said otherwise. Would-be pilgrims have to gain "recommendations" from the religious leadership in their place of residence. "All the names of candidates then go to the Gengesh and there they draw up the final lists," one Ashgabad resident explained to Forum 18 in 2012 (see Forum 18's Turkmenistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1676).

An Ashgabad-based source told Forum 18 in 2008 that the Cabinet of Ministers approves the list of those authorised to travel on the haj. The source said would-be pilgrims have their documents processed through the local religious affairs official in the hyakimlik (administration) where they live, though all the decisions on who may or may not travel are taken in Ashgabad. The MSS secret police is also involved (see F18News 19 November 2008 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1219).

State control of pilgrimage

Official pronouncements have repeatedly made clear that the government regards it as its duty to control all aspects of the haj pilgrimage. An adulatory message to President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov – published by the state news agency on 10 January

2014 - noted that "with your lofty blessing and with your support a representative group of Turkmen pilgrims undertook the haj to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to holy Mecca". The message was signed by the three leading officials of the Gengesh – the Chair Imam Charygeldi Seryaev, Deputy Chair and Chief Mufti Myrat Akyev and Deputy Chair Nursakhatov.

Just before the pilgrims left in October 2013, President Berdymukhamedov signed an "instruction" authorising them to do so, state media noted on 27 September 2013. He also ordered that an airliner be provided to take them to and from Saudi Arabia at the airline's expense. The instruction was prepared by Deputy Chair of the Cabinet of Ministers, Sapardurdy Toylyyev, who was described as being in charge of this issue.

Forum 18 has repeatedly been told that MSS secret police officers go as part of the state-sponsored pilgrimage group. However, officials have never acknowledged this.

Turkmenistan "not doing all it can to help pilgrims"

The Saudi consular official noted that even the 1,277 pilgrims in 2013 or the 650 pilgrims in 2014 the Turkmen government has allowed is far below the quota the Saudi government allocates to Turkmenistan. "The ratio is a thousand pilgrims for every one million inhabitants," the official explained to Forum 18. "So if Turkmenistan's population is 4,600,000, its quota is 4,600."

The official made clear that the restrictions on numbers were on the Turkmen, not the Saudi side. "Turkmenistan is one of the governments not doing all it can to help pilgrims," the official told Forum 18, "unlike the governments for example of Turkey, Indonesia or Malaysia. We're trying to help them."

Because no official at the Gengesh was willing to talk to Forum 18, it was unable to find out why – even if the number of state-organised pilgrims has increased this year – the government limits the numbers of haj pilgrims.

Can Shia Muslims be pilgrims?

For some years, complaints have been heard from the minority Shia Muslim community – mainly found among the Azeri and Iranian minorities in western Turkmenistan – that it is all but impossible for them to get on the approved list of haj pilgrims.

Azad of Balkan Region Religious Affairs office adamantly rejected this. "Shia Muslims can go also," he claimed. "There is no difference." He said that Balkan Region has one Shia Mosque, in the Caspian port city of Turkmenbashi.

In about 2005, the Mosque's imam – an Azerbaijani citizen – was forced to leave Turkmenistan after serving the Mosque community for more than a decade (see F18News 5 August 2008 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1167).

Police violence, forcible injections, fabricated charges

For the third time in three years, a Jehovah's Witness in Turkmenistan has been given a four-year prison term on a criminal charge of distributing pornography. His fellow believers insist the charge was fabricated to punish him for exercising his freedom of religion or belief. The latest victim is 42-year-old Bahram Shamuradov, sentenced on 2 July in the northern city of Dashoguz, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 News Service. He is already believed to have been transferred to the Labour Camp in the desert near

Seydi in eastern Turkmenistan, where other prisoners of conscience are held.

In a separate case, criminal charges of hooliganism have been lodged against Jehovah's Witness husband and wife Vepa Tuvakov and Bibi Rahmanova. They also live in Dashoguz. If convicted, they could each be imprisoned for up to five years (see below).

During their detention in police custody, all three were beaten, Jehovah's Witnesses said. Also beaten in police custody in early July was another local Jehovah's Witness Mansur Masharipov. He was forcibly transferred to a Drug Rehabilitation Centre, and injected against his will with an unknown substance which caused partial paralysis, vomiting, fever and headaches (see below).

Planted "evidence"

Prisoner of conscience Shamuradov's fellow Jehovah's Witnesses reject the accusations against him. "It is well known that Jehovah's Witnesses shun pornography," Jehovah's Witnesses insisted to Forum 18. "The material allegedly found on Bahram Shamuradov's computer was planted, as was the case with two other Jehovah's Witnesses, Aibek Salayev and Vladimir Nuryllayev," Jehovah's Witnesses added.

Current prisoner of conscience Salayev was convicted in Dashoguz in April 2012 on framed charges and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He is being held in Seydi Labour Camp and has been repeatedly beaten since his arrest. Former prisoner of conscience Nuryllayev was sentenced on 18 January 2012 to four years' imprisonment on framed charges but was freed under amnesty in May 2012. His attempts to clear his name were rejected in a "damaged and opened" official letter.

In all three cases, the police seized their victims' computers and then privately inspected them, without any independent witnesses, Jehovah's Witnesses note. After the inspection, which Jehovah's Witnesses note allowed ample opportunity for the planting of evidence, the police claimed they had found evidence for their charges.

In all three cases, the police subsequently "found" a witness who claimed to have purchased pornography from the accused. "In all three cases the alleged witness did not testify at the trials but the judges nonetheless relied on their written statements - which was prepared by the police - as 'evidence' that the accused is 'guilty'", Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

Arrest

Two police officers – one in uniform and one in plain clothes - detained Shamuradov as he was walking in central Dashoguz on 14 May. One of the officers had been involved in beatings of Jehovah's Witnesses on 24 January 2013 (see below) and immediately recognised Shamuradov. They stopped him and demanded to know where he was going. They claimed to be investigating a rape and demanded that Shamuradov be a witness to a search of a nearby house, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. With no choice, Shamuradov agreed.

After the search, the police then took Shamuradov to the police station near the central park in Dashoguz. There they pressured him to renounce his faith. When Shamuradov refused, the police demanded to inspect the bag he was carrying, which included his laptop computer. The police seized the laptop and took it to another location to "inspect" it. The officers later returned with the laptop claiming to have "found" pornography on it and stating that he would be charged with distributing this material.

Prosecutors lodged a criminal charge against Shamuradov under Criminal Code Article 164, Part 2. This punishes repeated preparation or distribution of pornography with up to five years' imprisonment.

"There is no such case"

Shamuradov was then taken to Dashoguz City Police Station where he was kept in pre-trial detention until his trial.

The duty officer at Dashoguz City Police refused to discuss any aspect of Shamuradov's treatment. "There is no such case," the officer – who would not give his name – insisted to Forum 18 on 31 July. "Don't ring here again," he added, before putting the phone down.

Four-year prison term

Shamuradov's trial began at Dashoguz City Court at about 4 pm on 2 July and was completed the same day. Judge Gaigysyz Orazmuradov rejected a motion by Shamuradov's lawyer for an expert study of the laptop.

The prosecution presented two "witnesses", but both testified in court that they had never met Shamuradov. They explained that they had each been called to the police station on 14 May as witnesses to the presence of the police's "evidence" on Shamuradov's computer, but neither was present when police first searched the computer.

The prosecutor also cited a written statement by a person called Rejep Saparbayev, who claimed to have bought pornography from Shamuradov on two occasions. However, the prosecution did not present him in court to be subjected to cross-examination by Shamuradov's lawyer, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. They state that the police prepared Saparbayev's statement.

Despite the lack of verifiable evidence, Judge Orazmuradov found Shamuradov guilty and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment, both Jehovah's Witnesses and the Court confirmed to Forum 18.

"It was all done in accordance with the law"

Judge Orazmuradov refused absolutely to discuss why he had convicted Shamuradov when there appears to have been an absence of evidence for the charges. "It was all done in accordance with the law," the judge claimed to Forum 18 from the court on 31 July. He then put the phone down. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

No written verdict

As of late July, the Court had not yet issued the verdict in writing, so the limited period allowed for lodging an appeal has not yet begun. Any appeal would have to be submitted to Dashoguz City Court to be passed on to Dashoguz Regional Court. The Chancellery of the City Court and also the Regional Court both confirmed to Forum 18 on 31 July that they had no record of the receipt of any appeal.

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 that an appeal on Shamuradov's behalf is due to be lodged in early August, whether or not the verdict is issued in writing.

Transfer to Seydi?

At some point after his sentencing, prisoner of conscience Shamuradov is thought to have been transferred to the Seydi Labour Camp from the Detention Centre in Dashoguz where he had been held. However, Forum 18 has been unable to find if and when Shamuradov was transferred from Dashoguz. The telephone of the duty officer at the Dashoguz Detention Centre went unanswered on 31 July and 1 August.

Seydi Labour Camp also holds other prisoners of conscience. In addition to Salayev – also serving a four-year sentence on fabricated charges – the Camp also holds at least five of the six known imprisoned Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors to compulsory military service. Three are in the general regime section of the Camp (Amirlan Tolkachev, Suhrab Rahmanberdiyev and Pavel Paymov). The other two (Dovran Matyakubov and Matkarim Aminov, who are serving second sentences on the same charges) are in the strict regime section of the Camp.

Also being held in the general regime section of Seydi Labour Camp is Dashoguz Protestant prisoner of conscience Umid Gojayev. He was sentenced in 2012 to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism. His arrest followed an argument with neighbours, and local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs.

Retaliation for complaining to UN Human Rights Committee

Shamuradov was among a group of Jehovah's Witnesses detained and beaten by Dashoguz City police on 24 January 2013, apparently in retaliation for 10 complaints Jehovah's Witnesses filed against Turkmenistan with the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee. About 30 police raided the lead complainant's family home and six people were taken to a police station. All six were beaten and tortured, one of them severely. One detainee was threatened with being raped on a table in the police station. Three were then fined. Such official violence is common in Turkmenistan.

Jehovah's Witnesses submitted a further complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee on 6 February 2013 about the January 2013 attack. They also complained to Turkmenistan's General Prosecutor's Office.

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 they are "particularly concerned that Bahram Shamuradov was targeted by Dashoguz Police" because of the complaints.

More police beatings

In a separate case, six Dashoguz Police officers – only two of them in uniform - raided the home of 32-year-old Masharipov on the morning of 3 July, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. At least one officer held him while other officers search his flat, seizing his religious books and laptop computer.

Once the search was complete, one of the plain-clothed police officers grabbed Masharipov from behind by the neck, "choking him so he could not breathe, and then dragged him into a waiting vehicle". Once in the vehicle, the officers "began to beat him repeatedly on his head and on his body above his kidneys".

At 12 noon the police took Masharipov to Dashoguz City Police Station, where he was again beaten. From there he was taken to a supervisor's office where the police began to openly discuss what pretext they would use to justify placing him in detention. They brought in police officer Ruslan Jumaniyazov (who had been present during the raid), who said he would claim that Masharipov had ripped off his shoulder insignia while resisting arrest.

At 1 pm Masharipov was returned to Dashoguz City Police Station, where he was again beaten. "The police threatened they would place him in a 'harem' cell with male prisoners where he would be raped," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The police gave Masharipov a document in Turkmen, which he does not understand, and forced him to sign it. They claimed the document contained a report that they had seized religious books during the search of his flat. The officials included three officers from the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police and one representative of the religious affairs department of the Regional Hyakimlik (Administration).

Police again threatened that they would charge Masharipov with ripping off the insignia of a police officer, which under Criminal Code Article 211 is punishable by imprisonment of up to two years. If inflicted with "violence" it is punishable with imprisonment of from three to eight years. Local policeman Merdan Khanov (also present during the raid) stated that he would testify to this effect.

In the afternoon, the police took Masharipov to Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office. The prosecutor took a statement from Masharipov and he was then returned to Dashoguz City Police Station and again beaten.

The police duty officer refused to discuss any cases with Forum 18. Forum 18 was unable to reach Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office.

Forcible injections

At 6 pm, police took Masharipov to the Drug Rehabilitation Centre in Dashoguz. "This was done as a pretext to justify his detention," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "The medical staff administered four injections to Mansur Masharipov, one in each buttock and two below his shoulder blades". His arms and legs became paralysed and he vomitted throughout that evening and the following day. He also began to suffer a high fever and severe headaches.

Forum 18 was unable to reach the Drug Rehabilitation Centre to find out what substance Masharipov was injected with, and what the medical reason for such injections (if any) might have been.

Masharipov was detained at the Drug Rehabilitation Centre from 6 pm on 3 July until 5 July. Fearing that he would again be drugged and beaten, he fled from the hospital. "He now fears for his life if he is caught by the police," Jehovah's Witnesses warn.

Forum 18 has seen photographic evidence of scars on Masharipov's arms, legs, stomach, back and one cheek which Jehovah's Witnesses say were inflicted on him in police detention. This evidence is also included in an urgent appeal about this and other cases lodged with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva (see below).

Masharipov was sentenced in 2004 for refusing to do compulsory military service. He was freed in April 2005 under amnesty.

There is evidence of the forcible "medical" injections of people exercising their human rights in Turkmenistan in the cases of: Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience Kurban Zakirov, who was, like former Baptist prisoner of conscience Shagildy Atakov, injected with psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs; and in the case of non-religious prisoner of conscience Kakabai Tejenov.

Yet more police beatings and detentions

Dashoguz Police also detained 28-year-old Jehovah's Witness Tuvakov, his 33-year-old wife Rahmanova, and their four-year-old son late in the evening on 5 July. The family had gone to the city's train station to collect several bags of personal possessions sent to them from the capital Ashgabad [Ashgabat].

As soon as they had collected the bags, six male police officers in plain clothes approached the Tuvakov family. The police demanded to know the contents of the bags. "When the police discovered the bags contained religious literature and a laptop computer, they screamed obscene words at Vepa Tuvakov threatening that his son would soon be an orphan," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

When Rahmanova began to record the police action on her mobile phone, the officers demanded that she hand it over. She refused and put her phone under her shirt. "The male police officers grabbed Bibi Rahmanova by the hands while another officer put his hand in her shirt," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18. "She fell to the ground and the police grabbed her by the hair and began to beat her. They then lifted her shirt and took the mobile phone from her." The police also beat Tuvakov.

In the early hours of 6 July, the police took the family to Dashoguz City Police Station. They prepared a written statement which they demanded that Tuvakov sign, but he refused. The police then repeatedly beat him. The police detained Tuvakov in an office at the police station while they held Rahmanova and the couple's four-year-old son at the entrance of the police station.

At 9.30 am on 7 July the police released the Tuvakov's four-year-old son into the custody of a relative. At 5 pm that day Rahmanova was released. The following day, 8 July, she filed a complaint with the Dashoguz Prosecutor's Office against the police.

While at the police station, Rahmanova heard the police planning that they would charge her husband with assaulting a police officer, an offence under Criminal Code Article 211 (the same accusation police planned to use against Masharipov).

Tuvakov was later freed from Dashoguz City Police Station. Both he and his wife had to sign statements not to leave Dashoguz.

The police duty officer refused to discuss any cases with Forum 18. Forum 18 was unable to reach Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office.

Criminal charges brought against the police's victims

On 31 July, Dashoguz Prosecutor's Office lodged charges against both Tuvakov and Rahmanova under Criminal Code Article 279, Part 2. This punishes hooliganism "connected with resisting a law enforcement officer" with a prison sentence of up to five years.

"Dashoguz Prosecutor's office alleges that husband and wife both tore off the insignia of a police officer when they were detained at the train station in Dashoguz," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "This of course did not happen."

"Repeated target"

Tuvakov has been a "repeated target of the police", Jehovah's Witnesses note. In July 2004, he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector to military service, but was – like

Masharipov - released in April 2005 under a presidential amnesty. He was detained by police in September 2010, March 2012 and October 2012.

UN appeal

Jehovah's Witnesses have lodged an urgent appeal about all these cases to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva. The 11 July appeal was after Shamuradov's sentencing and the arrest and beating of Tuvakov, Rahmanova and Masharipov, but before criminal charges were lodged against Tuvakov and Rahmanova.

The appeal – seen by Forum 18 – gives details of the abuses in the three cases and includes photographs of scars on Masharipov's arms, legs, stomach, back and one cheek which Jehovah's Witnesses say were inflicted on him in police detention.

Same court, same judge, same four-year prison sentence

Forum 18 (20.08.2014) - <http://www.forum18.org> - Another Jehovah's Witness has been given a four-year prison term on charges her fellow-believers insist were fabricated to punish her for exercising her right to freedom of religion or belief. Prisoner of conscience Bibi Rahmanova was sentenced on 18 August by the same judge in Turkmenistan's northern city of Dashoguz who had handed down a four-year sentence on another Jehovah's Witness less than seven weeks earlier. Criminal charges have also been instituted against Rahmanova's husband, Vepa Tuvakov, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 News Service. If he too is imprisoned, their four-year-old son will be deprived of parental care.

The accusation of assaulting a police officer and two train station employees - which Rahmanova denied - was raised after officials of the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police, Transport Police, Police 6th Department and the local Religious Affairs office seized the family as they collected religious books which had been sent to Dashoguz train station for them.

"This decision is particularly shocking considering that Bibi is the mother of a four-year-old boy and was clearly the victim of police abuse," Jehovah's Witnesses added. They point out that she was one of the victims of abuses whose cases were detailed in an 11 July complaint to the United Nations (see below).

Another Jehovah's Witness conscientious objector has been imprisoned, bringing their number to six (see below).

The man who on 20 August answered the telephone of Gurbanberdy Nursakhatov, Deputy Chair of the government's Gengesh (Council) for Religious Affairs in Ashgabad, repeatedly put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 introduced itself. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

Seized at train station

Dashoguz Police detained 33-year-old Jehovah's Witness Rahmanova, her 28-year-old husband Tuvakov, and their four-year-old son at Dashoguz train station late in the evening on 5 July.

As soon as they had collected the bags sent from Ashgabad, six male police officers in plain clothes approached the Tuvakov family. The police demanded to know the contents of the bags. "When the police discovered the bags contained religious literature and a laptop computer, they screamed obscene words at Vepa Tuvakov threatening that his son would soon be an orphan," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

When Rahmanova began to record the police action on her mobile phone, officers demanded that she hand it over. She refused and put her phone under her shirt. Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18 that officers touched her inappropriately when seizing the phone. The police also beat Tuvakov.

At Dashoguz City Police Station, Tuvakov refused to sign a statement prepared by the police. Officers then repeatedly beat him.

On the morning of 7 July, the police released the Tuvakov's four-year-old son into the custody of a relative. That afternoon they released Rahmanova. The following day, 8 July, she filed a complaint with the Dashoguz Prosecutor's Office against the police.

While at the police station, Rahmanova heard the police planning that they would charge her husband with assaulting a police officer, an offence under Criminal Code Article 211 (resisting the police).

Tuvakov was later freed from Dashoguz City Police Station. Both he and his wife had to sign statements not to leave Dashoguz.

Criminal charges

The eight-page indictment against Rahmanova - seen by Forum 18 - was prepared by senior investigator Muhammad Jummayev on 5 August. It was countersigned by the head of Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office A. Gulyev the following day.

Rahmanova was accused under Article 211, Part 1 and Article 279, Part 2 b (which punishes hooliganism "connected with resisting a law enforcement officer" with a prison sentence of up to five years).

The indictment notes that officers of the Dashoguz MSS secret police had learnt at lunchtime on 5 July that Rahmanova and her husband were due to collect a shipment of books and other religious materials sent by friends in Ashgabad. Together with Transport Police officers, Police 6th Department officers and Hudainazar Artykov, an official of the Religious Affairs Department of the Regional Hyakimlik (administration), the secret police seized the couple and their son at the train station after they had collected the books.

Artykov's testimony does not reveal how the MSS secret police had learnt that religious books were on their way from Ashgabad to Dashoguz and that Rahmanova and her husband would be collecting them from the train late that evening. Neither Artykov nor the officers who testified to the Prosecutor's Office explained why they needed to examine religious literature which local people were collecting from the station.

Artykov, echoing the testimony of other officers, alleged that during an altercation, Rahmanova had torn buttons and shoulder insignia from the uniform of one police officer, bitten one of the official witnesses and scratched the hand of the other. Artykov called for her to face punishment.

The duty officer at Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office refused to put Forum 18 through to Investigator Jummayev or anyone else on 20 August.

The man who answered Artykov's phone at the Hyakimlik the same day put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 began asking about the case. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

Arrested, tried, sentenced

Rahmanova was arrested on 7 August and taken to the Interior Ministry's Investigation Prison in Dashoguz, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Her trial was due to have begun at Dashoguz City Court on 14 August, but did not eventually take place until 18 August.

At the trial, Judge Gaigysyz Orazmuradov found her guilty and sentenced her to the four-year general regime labour camp term. "The judge repeatedly interrupted Bibi's lawyer and would not let her ask questions," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

The man who answered Judge Orazmuradov's telephone on 20 August repeatedly hung up as soon as Forum 18 began asking about Rahmanova's imprisonment.

Rahmanova is believed still to be held in Dashoguz Investigation Prison. She is intending to appeal against her sentence as soon as the written verdict is handed down, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The boy is currently being cared for by his father, Tuvakov, who is also being investigated under the same charges as his wife.

UN complaint

On 11 August, as Rahmanova was awaiting trial, Jehovah's Witnesses sent a further complaint about her maltreatment to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva.

The complaint was lodged exactly a month after an earlier complaint which had detailed abuse against her and other local Jehovah's Witnesses.

In January 2013, seven weeks after the UN Human Rights Committee sought a response from Turkmenistan to complaints by 10 Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors, about 30 police officers raided the lead complainant's family home in Dashoguz. Six people were detained, beaten and tortured, one of them severely. In what Jehovah's Witnesses state was "particularly despicable treatment", one detainee was threatened with being raped on a table in the police station. Three were then fined.

Same court, same judge

On 2 July 2014, less than seven weeks before Rahmanova was sentenced, the same Judge Orazmuradov had sentenced another Dashoguz Jehovah's Witness, Bahram Shamuradov, to four years' general regime labour camp. The 42-year-old Shamuradov was found guilty of distributing pornography under Criminal Code Article 164, Part 2. He rejected these accusations vigorously, insisting files had been planted on his computer after police took it from him.

Judge Orazmuradov took some time to issue the written verdict. In the verdict - seen by Forum 18 - Shamuradov's testimony denying the allegations entirely is dismissed as "groundless". Although he remained in prison after the sentence, an appeal was sent to the Court on Shamuradov's behalf on 1 August, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. No date has yet been set for the hearing.

Where are confiscated religious books?

Shamuradov's verdict notes that police seized from him a number of religious books. Along with several unidentified Jehovah's Witness texts, these also included a named text "What Does the Bible Really Teach?" in Uzbek translation, published in Germany. (Shamuradov is from Turkmenistan's ethnic Uzbek minority.) Also seized was a 613-page translation of the Bible into Uzbek, printed in Turkey. The verdict says that the books were handed to the local Religious Affairs Department. It does not explain why these books were seized or if they will be handed back.

Because Artykov of the Religious Affairs Department in Dashoguz refused to answer any of Forum 18's questions, it has been unable to find out why the books were seized, not what will happen to them.

Already in labour camp

Although Shamuradov had been arrested on 14 May, the verdict also notes that the sentence is deemed to run from 16 May. He had been held in Dashoguz Investigation Prison, but after the sentence he was transferred to the general regime labour camp in the desert near Seydi, in the eastern Lebap Region.

Seydi Labour Camp already holds other prisoners of conscience punished for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. These include Aibek Salayev, convicted in Dashoguz in April 2012 on framed charges and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He has been repeatedly beaten since his arrest.

The Camp also holds at least five of the six known imprisoned Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors to compulsory military service. Three are in the general regime section of the Camp (Amirlan Tolkachev, Suhrab Rahmanberdiyev and Pavel Paymov). The other two (Dovran Matyakubov and Matkarim Aminov, who are serving second sentences on the same charges) are in the strict regime section of the Camp.

Also being held in the general regime section of Seydi Labour Camp is Dashoguz Protestant prisoner of conscience Umid Gojayev. He was sentenced in 2012 to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism. His arrest followed an argument with neighbours, and local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs.

The address of the general regime Seydi Labour Camp is:
Turkmenistan
746222 Lebap vilayet
Seydi
uchr. LB-K/12

New conscientious objector prisoner

The 19-year-old Ashgabad-based Jehovah's Witness Merdan Amanov has become the sixth known imprisoned conscientious objector. After he refused the call-up to compulsory military service on grounds of religious conscience, prosecutors brought a case under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1.

This punishes refusal to serve in the armed forces in peacetime with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment.

Amanov was tried, convicted and given a one year prison sentence on 7 July, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. He was being held in pre-trial detention at Yashlyk, 40 kms (25 miles) south-east of Ashgabad. Forum 18 has been unable to find out if he has already been transferred to labour camp.

Police violence, forcible injections, fabricated charges, four years jail for prisoner of conscience

Forum 18 (01.08.2014) - For the third time in three years, a Jehovah's Witness in Turkmenistan has been given a four-year prison term on a criminal charge of distributing pornography. His fellow believers insist the charge was fabricated to punish him for exercising his freedom of religion or belief. The latest victim is 42-year-old Bahram Shamuradov, sentenced on 2 July in the northern city of Dashoguz, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 News Service. He is already believed to have been transferred to the Labour Camp in the desert near Seydi in eastern Turkmenistan, where other prisoners of conscience are held.

In a separate case, criminal charges of hooliganism have been lodged against Jehovah's Witness husband and wife Vepa Tuvakov and Bibi Rahmanova. They also live in Dashoguz. If convicted, they could each be imprisoned for up to five years (see below).

During their detention in police custody, all three were beaten, Jehovah's Witnesses said. Also beaten in police custody in early July was another local Jehovah's Witness Mansur Masharipov. He was forcibly transferred to a Drug Rehabilitation Centre, and injected against his will with an unknown substance which caused partial paralysis, vomiting, fever and headaches (see below).

Planted "evidence"

Prisoner of conscience Shamuradov's fellow Jehovah's Witnesses reject the accusations against him. "It is well known that Jehovah's Witnesses shun pornography," Jehovah's Witnesses insisted to Forum 18. "The material allegedly found on Bahram Shamuradov's computer was planted, as was the case with two other Jehovah's Witnesses, Aibek Salayev and Vladimir Nuryllayev," Jehovah's Witnesses added.

Current prisoner of conscience Salayev was convicted in Dashoguz in April 2012 on framed charges and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He is being held in Seydi Labour Camp and has been repeatedly beaten since his arrest (see F18News 17 August 2012 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1733). Former prisoner of conscience Nuryllayev was sentenced on 18 January 2012 to four years' imprisonment on framed charges but was freed under amnesty in May 2012 (see F18News 28 May 2012 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1706). His attempts to clear his name were rejected in a "damaged and opened" official letter (see F18News 31 October 2012 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1761).

In all three cases, the police seized their victims' computers and then privately inspected them, without any independent witnesses, Jehovah's Witnesses note. After the inspection, which Jehovah's Witnesses note allowed ample opportunity for the planting of evidence, the police claimed they had found evidence for their charges.

In all three cases, the police subsequently "found" a witness who claimed to have purchased pornography from the accused. "In all three cases the alleged witness did not testify at the trials but the judges nonetheless relied on their written statements - which was prepared by the police - as 'evidence' that the accused is 'guilty'", Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

Arrest

Two police officers - one in uniform and one in plain clothes - detained Shamuradov as

he was walking in central Dashoguz on 14 May. One of the officers had been involved in beatings of Jehovah's Witnesses on 24 January 2013 (see below) and immediately recognised Shamuradov. They stopped him and demanded to know where he was going. They claimed to be investigating a rape and demanded that Shamuradov be a witness to a search of a nearby house, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. With no choice, Shamuradov agreed.

After the search, the police then took Shamuradov to the police station near the central park in Dashoguz. There they pressured him to renounce his faith. When Shamuradov refused, the police demanded to inspect the bag he was carrying, which included his laptop computer. The police seized the laptop and took it to another location to "inspect" it. The officers later returned with the laptop claiming to have "found" pornography on it and stating that he would be charged with distributing this material.

Prosecutors lodged a criminal charge against Shamuradov under Criminal Code Article 164, Part 2. This punishes repeated preparation or distribution of pornography with up to five years' imprisonment.

"There is no such case"

Shamuradov was then taken to Dashoguz City Police Station where he was kept in pre-trial detention until his trial.

The duty officer at Dashoguz City Police refused to discuss any aspect of Shamuradov's treatment. "There is no such case," the officer – who would not give his name – insisted to Forum 18 on 31 July. "Don't ring here again," he added, before putting the phone down.

Four-year prison term

Shamuradov's trial began at Dashoguz City Court at about 4 pm on 2 July and was completed the same day. Judge Gaigysyz Orazmuradov rejected a motion by Shamuradov's lawyer for an expert study of the laptop.

The prosecution presented two "witnesses", but both testified in court that they had never met Shamuradov. They explained that they had each been called to the police station on 14 May as witnesses to the presence of the police's "evidence" on Shamuradov's computer, but neither was present when police first searched the computer.

The prosecutor also cited a written statement by a person called Rejep Saparbayev, who claimed to have bought pornography from Shamuradov on two occasions. However, the prosecution did not present him in court to be subjected to cross-examination by Shamuradov's lawyer, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. They state that the police prepared Saparbayev's statement.

Despite the lack of verifiable evidence, Judge Orazmuradov found Shamuradov guilty and sentenced him to four years' imprisonment, both Jehovah's Witnesses and the Court confirmed to Forum 18.

"It was all done in accordance with the law"

Judge Orazmuradov refused absolutely to discuss why he had convicted Shamuradov when there appears to have been an absence of evidence for the charges. "It was all done in accordance with the law," the judge claimed to Forum 18 from the court on 31 July. He then put the phone down. Subsequent calls went unanswered.

No written verdict

As of late July, the Court had not yet issued the verdict in writing, so the limited period allowed for lodging an appeal has not yet begun. Any appeal would have to be submitted to Dashoguz City Court to be passed on to Dashoguz Regional Court. The Chancellery of the City Court and also the Regional Court both confirmed to Forum 18 on 31 July that they had no record of the receipt of any appeal.

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 that an appeal on Shamuradov's behalf is due to be lodged in early August, whether or not the verdict is issued in writing.

Transfer to Seydi?

At some point after his sentencing, prisoner of conscience Shamuradov is thought to have been transferred to the Seydi Labour Camp from the Detention Centre in Dashoguz where he had been held. However, Forum 18 has been unable to find if and when Shamuradov was transferred from Dashoguz. The telephone of the duty officer at the Dashoguz Detention Centre went unanswered on 31 July and 1 August.

Seydi Labour Camp also holds other prisoners of conscience. In addition to Salayev – also serving a four-year sentence on fabricated charges – the Camp also holds at least five of the six known imprisoned Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors to compulsory military service. Three are in the general regime section of the Camp (Amirlan Tolkachev, Suhrab Rahmanberdiyev and Pavel Paymov). The other two (Dovran Matyakubov and Matkarim Aminov, who are serving second sentences on the same charges) are in the strict regime section of the Camp (see F18News 21 March 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1940).

Also being held in the general regime section of Seydi Labour Camp is Dashoguz Protestant prisoner of conscience Umid Gojayev. He was sentenced in 2012 to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism. His arrest followed an argument with neighbours, and local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs (see F18News 21 March 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1940).

Retaliation for complaining to UN Human Rights Committee

Shamuradov was among a group of Jehovah's Witnesses detained and beaten by Dashoguz City police on 24 January 2013, apparently in retaliation for 10 complaints Jehovah's Witnesses filed against Turkmenistan with the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee. About 30 police raided the lead complainant's family home and six people were taken to a police station. All six were beaten and tortured, one of them severely. One detainee was threatened with being raped on a table in the police station. Three were then fined. Such official violence is common in Turkmenistan (see F18News 14 February 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1801).

Jehovah's Witnesses submitted a further complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee on 6 February 2013 about the January 2013 attack. They also complained to Turkmenistan's General Prosecutor's Office.

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 they are "particularly concerned that Bahram Shamuradov was targeted by Dashoguz Police" because of the complaints.

More police beatings

In a separate case, six Dashoguz Police officers – only two of them in uniform – raided

the home of 32-year-old Masharipov on the morning of 3 July, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. At least one officer held him while other officers search his flat, seizing his religious books and laptop computer.

Once the search was complete, one of the plain-clothed police officers grabbed Masharipov from behind by the neck, "choking him so he could not breathe, and then dragged him into a waiting vehicle". Once in the vehicle, the officers "began to beat him repeatedly on his head and on his body above his kidneys".

At 12 noon the police took Masharipov to Dashoguz City Police Station, where he was again beaten. From there he was taken to a supervisor's office where the police began to openly discuss what pretext they would use to justify placing him in detention. They brought in police officer Ruslan Jumaniyazov (who had been present during the raid), who said he would claim that Masharipov had ripped off his shoulder insignia while resisting arrest.

At 1 pm Masharipov was returned to Dashoguz City Police Station, where he was again beaten. "The police threatened they would place him in a 'harem' cell with male prisoners where he would be raped," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The police gave Masharipov a document in Turkmen, which he does not understand, and forced him to sign it. They claimed the document contained a report that they had seized religious books during the search of his flat. The officials included three officers from the Ministry of State Security (MSS) secret police and one representative of the religious affairs department of the Regional Hyakimlik (Administration).

Police again threatened that they would charge Masharipov with ripping off the insignia of a police officer, which under Criminal Code Article 211 is punishable by imprisonment of up to two years. If inflicted with "violence" it is punishable with imprisonment of from three to eight years. Local policeman Merdan Khanov (also present during the raid) stated that he would testify to this effect.

In the afternoon, the police took Masharipov to Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office. The prosecutor took a statement from Masharipov and he was then returned to Dashoguz City Police Station and again beaten.

The police duty officer refused to discuss any cases with Forum 18. Forum 18 was unable to reach Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office.

Forcible injections

At 6 pm, police took Masharipov to the Drug Rehabilitation Centre in Dashoguz. "This was done as a pretext to justify his detention," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "The medical staff administered four injections to Mansur Masharipov, one in each buttock and two below his shoulder blades". His arms and legs became paralysed and he vomitted throughout that evening and the following day. He also began to suffer a high fever and severe headaches.

Forum 18 was unable to reach the Drug Rehabilitation Centre to find out what substance Masharipov was injected with, and what the medical reason for such injections (if any) might have been.

Masharipov was detained at the Drug Rehabilitation Centre from 6 pm on 3 July until 5 July. Fearing that he would again be drugged and beaten, he fled from the hospital. "He now fears for his life if he is caught by the police," Jehovah's Witnesses warn.

Forum 18 has seen photographic evidence of scars on Masharipov's arms, legs, stomach, back and one cheek which Jehovah's Witnesses say were inflicted on him in police

detention. This evidence is also included in an urgent appeal about this and other cases lodged with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva (see below).

Masharipov was sentenced in 2004 for refusing to do compulsory military service. He was freed in April 2005 under amnesty (see F18News 22 April 2005 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=548).

There is evidence of the forcible "medical" injections of people exercising their human rights in Turkmenistan in the cases of: Jehovah's Witness prisoner of conscience Kurban Zakirov, who was, like former Baptist prisoner of conscience Shagildy Atakov, injected with psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs (see F18News 25 October 2004 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=438); and in the case of non-religious prisoner of conscience Kakabai Tejenov (see F18News 4 December 2007 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1057).

Yet more police beatings and detentions

Dashoguz Police also detained 28-year-old Jehovah's Witness Tuvakov, his 33-year-old wife Rahmanova, and their four-year-old son late in the evening on 5 July. The family had gone to the city's train station to collect several bags of personal possessions sent to them from the capital Ashgabat [Ashgabat].

As soon as they had collected the bags, six male police officers in plain clothes approached the Tuvakov family. The police demanded to know the contents of the bags. "When the police discovered the bags contained religious literature and a laptop computer, they screamed obscene words at Vepa Tuvakov threatening that his son would soon be an orphan," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18.

When Rahmanova began to record the police action on her mobile phone, the officers demanded that she hand it over. She refused and put her phone under her shirt. "The male police officers grabbed Bibi Rahmanova by the hands while another officer put his hand in her shirt," Jehovah's Witnesses complained to Forum 18. "She fell to the ground and the police grabbed her by the hair and began to beat her. They then lifted her shirt and took the mobile phone from her." The police also beat Tuvakov.

In the early hours of 6 July, the police took the family to Dashoguz City Police Station. They prepared a written statement which they demanded that Tuvakov sign, but he refused. The police then repeatedly beat him. The police detained Tuvakov in an office at the police station while they held Rahmanova and the couple's four-year-old son at the entrance of the police station.

At 9.30 am on 7 July the police released the Tuvakov's four-year-old son into the custody of a relative. At 5 pm that day Rahmanova was released. The following day, 8 July, she filed a complaint with the Dashoguz Prosecutor's Office against the police.

While at the police station, Rahmanova heard the police planning that they would charge her husband with assaulting a police officer, an offence under Criminal Code Article 211 (the same accusation police planned to use against Masharipov).

Tuvakov was later freed from Dashoguz City Police Station. Both he and his wife had to sign statements not to leave Dashoguz.

The police duty officer refused to discuss any cases with Forum 18. Forum 18 was unable to reach Dashoguz City Prosecutor's Office.

Criminal charges brought against the police's victims

On 31 July, Dashoguz Prosecutor's Office lodged charges against both Tuvakov and Rahmanova under Criminal Code Article 279, Part 2. This punishes hooliganism "connected with resisting a law enforcement officer" with a prison sentence of up to five years.

"Dashoguz Prosecutor's office alleges that husband and wife both tore off the insignia of a police officer when they were detained at the train station in Dashoguz," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "This of course did not happen."

"Repeated target"

Tuvakov has been a "repeated target of the police", Jehovah's Witnesses note. In July 2004, he was imprisoned as a conscientious objector to military service, but was – like Masharipov - released in April 2005 under a presidential amnesty (see F18News 22 April 2005 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=548). He was detained by police in September 2010, March 2012 and October 2012.

UN appeal

Jehovah's Witnesses have lodged an urgent appeal about all these cases to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Geneva. The 11 July appeal was after Shamuradov's sentencing and the arrest and beating of Tuvakov, Rahmanova and Masharipov, but before criminal charges were lodged against Tuvakov and Rahmanova.

The appeal – seen by Forum 18 – gives details of the abuses in the three cases and includes photographs of scars on Masharipov's arms, legs, stomach, back and one cheek which Jehovah's Witnesses say were inflicted on him in police detention.

OSCE course in Turkmenistan addresses freedom of religion and belief

OSCE (29.05.2014) – International standards on freedom of religion and belief were in focus of an OSCE-organized training course that concluded in Ashgabat today.

The three-day event brought together 23 participants, including members of the Mejlis, representatives of the Council of Religious Affairs under the President of Turkmenistan and the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan, as well as officials of law-enforcement bodies.

The training course introduced participants to the major treaties and standards on freedom of religion and belief and the social, political and human context of the implementation of these instruments.

"The 2013 OSCE Ministerial Council called on participating States to fully implement OSCE commitments on the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief," said Vardon Deniz Hoca, the Human Dimension Officer of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat.

"This course is part of a project initiated by the OSCE Centre to promote best practices related to the exercise of individuals' rights and freedoms in the area of religion and belief."

In their presentations, international experts from the United Kingdom addressed the theories of plural and diverse societies and the nature of religious violence and extremism. They also introduced two divergent models for managing religious rights and freedoms.

The interactive nature of the training course enabled participants to exchange their views on the relationship of human rights and religious freedoms, social cohesion in multi-faith societies and ways to prevent religious radicalization.

Turkmenistan: One-year prison term for latest conscientious objector

By Felix Corley, Forum 18 News Service

Forum 18 (21.03.2014) - A 23-year-old from the capital Ashgabat [Ashgabat] is the latest conscientious objector to Turkmenistan's compulsory military service to be imprisoned. Jehovah's Witness Pavel Paymov was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in February, Forum 18 News Service has learned. His imprisonment brings to seven the number of known jailed conscientious objectors. He is the second young man known to have been sentenced so far in 2014 to punish him for rejecting military service on grounds of conscience.

The man who on 20 March answered the telephone of Gurbanberdy Nursakhatov, Deputy Chair of the government's Gengesh (Council) for Religious Affairs in Ashgabat, repeatedly put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 introduced itself.

No alternative service

Turkmenistan offers no alternative to military service. Article 41 of the Constitution describes defence as a "sacred duty" of everyone and states that military service is compulsory for men. Military service for men between the ages of 18 and 27 is generally two years.

Forum 18 was unable to find out whether the Mejlis (Parliament) has any plans to change the law to introduce an alternative service for those unable to serve in the armed forces on grounds of conscience. On 20 March Forum 18 was unable to reach Pirnazar Hudainazarov, Chair of the Mejlis Legislative Committee, or Atamurasd Tayliev, Chair of the Mejlis Committee on the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms. The Novruz spring holiday began on 21 March.

Turkmenistan's refusal to recognise the right to refuse military service, which is part of the right to freedom of religion or belief, breaks the country's international human rights commitments, and was criticised in March 2012 by the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

At the end of the review of Turkmenistan's human rights record during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in April 2013, the Turkmen delegation promised to respond to the Human Rights Council by September 2013 on many UPR recommendations submitted by other governments, including one to "protect the rights of conscientious objectors."

In its 4 September 2013 response to the UN (A/HRC/24/3/Add.1), the Turkmen government claimed to accept the recommendation which included a commitment to "protect the rights of conscientious objectors". It added that "the matters raised therein are currently being examined".

Jehovah's Witness representatives have repeatedly sought dialogue with the Turkmen government to try to end the imprisonment of young men who cannot serve in the military on grounds of religious conscience.

Imminent transfer to labour camp?

Paymov was sentenced on 26 February to one year's imprisonment at Ashgabad's Rukhabad District Court, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

Like the other six other imprisoned conscientious objectors, he was convicted under Criminal Code Article 219, Part 1. This punishes refusal to serve in the armed forces in peacetime with a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment.

The chancellery of Ashgabad City Court told Forum 18 on 20 March that no appeal has been lodged in Paymov's case. Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 that Paymov was waiting for the written verdict.

Paymov is believed still to be held at the pre-trial detention prison at Yashlyk in Akbugday District, 40 kms (25 miles) south-east of Ashgabad. He is likely to be transferred to serve his sentence in the labour camp in the desert near Seydi in the eastern Lebap Region, where imprisoned conscientious objectors have generally served their sentences.

Forum 18 was unable to find out when Paymov is to be transferred to labour camp. The duty officer at Akbugday District Police in Annau refused to give Forum 18 the number of the Yashlyk pre-trial detention prison.

Suspended sentence

Paymov is the second conscientious objector known to have been sentenced since the beginning of 2014.

On 6 January, 18-year-old fellow Ashgabad-based Jehovah's Witness Murat Sapargeldyyev was also brought to trial under Article 219, Part 1, Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. Judge S. Gurbanova found him guilty at the city's Bakhtiyarlyk District Court. However, she gave him a two-year suspended corrective labour sentence where one fifth of his income is to be handed to the state. Sapargeldyyev did not appeal against the sentence.

Seven known imprisoned conscientious objectors

Following Paymov's imprisonment, the seven current known imprisoned conscientious objectors (all Jehovah's Witnesses) are:

1. Navruz Nasyrlyayev, aged 23, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, May 2012;
2. Dovran Matyakubov, aged 21, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, December 2012;
3. Matkarim Aminov, aged 22, 2 years, Dashoguz Court, January 2013;
4. Arslan Dovletov, aged 21, 18 months, Dashoguz Court, January 2013;
5. Amirlan Tolkachev, aged 21, 18 months, Turkmenabad Court, July 2013;

6. Suhrab Rahmanberdiyev, aged 18, 18 months, November 2013;
7. Pavel Paymov, aged 23, 1 year, Ashgabad Court, February 2014.

Dovletov and Tolkachev are in the general regime section of the Seydi labour camp. Nasyrlyayev, Matyakubov and Aminov (who are all serving second sentences on the same charges) are in the strict regime section of the same camp. The address of the general regime Seydi Labour Camp is:

Turkmenistan
746222 Lebap vilayet
Seydi
uchr. LB-K/12

The special regime camp has the same address, but with the code:
uchr. LB-K/11

UN appeals

Fifteen current and former conscientious objector prisoners lodged applications to the UN Human Rights Committee between September 2012 and August 2013 protesting against their imprisonment and maltreatment. The complaints note that especially in the Seydi Labour Camp, where most of the conscientious objector prisoners are held, they were regularly subjected to spells in the punishment cell and some were brutally beaten.

Jehovah's Witnesses regard a subsequent raid on the family home of one of the applicants and a second prison sentence on another as state reprisals for lodging the application.

"The Turkmen government has given brief responses to some of the applications," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 on 21 March. "We are waiting for the government response to a few additional cases." After these responses have been received or the deadline the government was given passes, the cases will go to the UN Human Rights Committee for decision.

Prison sentences end

Since December 2013, three conscientious objectors have been released from labour camp at the end of their sentences.

Yadgarbek Sharipov was freed on 25 December 2013 after completing a one-year sentence. Zafar Abdullaev was freed on 6 March after completing a two-year sentence, while Atamurat Suvkhanov was released on 13 March after completing a one-year sentence. All three are from Dashoguz Region of northern Turkmenistan. For Abdullaev and Suvkhanov, these were their second prison sentences for refusing compulsory military service.

Five suspended sentences

Following the suspended sentence handed down to Sapargeldyyev, the five current known conscientious objectors serving suspended sentences (all Jehovah's Witnesses) are:

1. Merdan Tachmuradov, Dashoguz Court, 2 years, May 2012;
2. Nazargeldy Chariyev, Bereket (formerly Gazanjyk), 2 years, June 2012;

3. Jamshid Kurbanov, Dashoguz Court, 2 years, July 2012;
4. Begench Nabatov, Ashgabad Court, 2 years, August 2012;
5. Murat Sapargeldyyev, Ashgabad Court, 2 years, January 2014.

During their suspended sentences, the young men are under tight restrictions. They must be home each night, cannot travel outside their home city without special permission, and one fifth of their income is handed to the state.

Other religious prisoners

Two other religious believers are known to be serving prison terms on criminal charges which their communities insist were imposed to punish them for their religious activity.

Jehovah's Witness Aibek Salayev was convicted in Dashoguz in April 2012 on apparently framed charges of "distributing pornography" and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. He is also being held in Seydi Labour Camp.

Protestant Umid Gojayev was arrested in Dashoguz in April 2012 and sentenced the following month to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism. His arrest followed an argument with neighbours, and local Protestants insist the criminal charges were brought disproportionately because of his religious beliefs. He too is being held in Seydi Labour Camp.

Fellow Protestants had been able to visit Gojayev in labour camp until late 2013. At that time they were also not allowed to hand in a parcel for him, Protestants told Forum 18. They complain that, like most other religious prisoners, Gojayev has been "deliberately" excluded from the regular prisoner amnesties.

There are also an unknown number of Muslim prisoners of conscience also jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief. Musa (last name unknown), a Muslim from Ashgabad who seems to have been imprisoned for teaching the Koran to children, was being held in Seydi Labour Camp at the beginning of 2012.
