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## **Tortured till he lost consciousness**

Forum 18 (04.06.2015) - In early May, police in Navoi Region of central Uzbekistan stopped four Protestants from various Churches who were travelling together by car from Samarkand to Navoi. "We understood that the police was informed of their arrival in town, and were waiting for them there," a fellow Protestant from the capital Tashkent, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 News Service on 15 May. Officers at Karmana District Police Station then interrogated the four men, torturing one until he lost consciousness and threatening to rape another. The Criminal Police are believed to have already handed administrative cases against the four to court, the Protestant added.

The driver of the car, Murot Turdiyev, is under constant close police surveillance and his car has often been stopped. Like other individuals prominent in religious communities or punished earlier for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief, his name appears to be listed in the Preventative Registry. When they detained Turdiyev and his friends, officers specifically asked if they were listed in the Registry at their home addresses.

A very wide range of state agencies, from courts to health care and nature protection agencies, can put people on this Register, which was formalised in 2014. This subjects them to a variety of police "preventative measures" for one year or more. These measures can include someone being fired from their job and there are many possibilities for officials to arbitrarily keep people on the Register for many years (see F18News 4 July 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1974](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1974)).

Meanwhile in south-eastern Kashkadarya Region, the Criminal Police repeatedly visited the home in Karshi throughout May of Protestant Guljahon Kuzebayeva, banging on the gates of the yard and trying to climb over the wall. She has been in hiding since July 2014 fearing possible police brutality and arrest for allegedly talking to family members about her Christian faith. Officers appear to be trying to open a case against her and have issued a summons to the police, a local Protestant who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 25 May (see below).

The use of physical violence and torture, or threats of this, by the authorities is widespread in Uzbekistan. Most victims are, for extremely good reasons, unwilling to publicly discuss their experiences and women are often particularly targeted by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Cases prepared?***

Karmana District Police is believed to have prepared cases under Administrative Code Article 194 ("Failure to carry out the lawful demands of a police officer") against Turdiyev and his three companions, Anvar Rajapov, Khurshid Boymuradov and Khudoyor Mahammadiyev, members of various Protestant Churches from across Uzbekistan. Officers told the four the case was being opened because they refused to write statements explaining the purpose of their travel in the region as well as their religious activity, the Tashkent-based Protestant told Forum 18.

Punishments under Article 194 consist of fines of up to three times the minimum monthly wage or (for repeat offences within one year) a prison term of up to 15 days.

Turdiyev, Rajapov and Mahammadiyev have earlier been punished under the Administrative Code for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief. Turdiyev has also faced criminal prosecution. In November 2013, Andijan Regional Criminal Court overturned a fine on Turdiyev for "illegal" storage of religious literature handed down the previous month. The National Security Service (NSS) secret police had earlier tried to pressure him into becoming an informer (see F18News 18 December 2013 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1908](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1908)).

***"Constitution and laws are for Tashkent, here in Navoi we have our own laws"***

Trouble began for the four Protestants on the morning of 8 May, when they were stopped while crossing from Samarkand Region to Navoi Region. The four were travelling in the car driven by Turdiyev. The police "know Turdiyev vaery well as he was persecuted by the police and other authorities in the past, and fined several times before", the Tashkent Protestant complained to Forum 18. "The police know his car and licence plate, and seemingly they were informed about all four Protestants' arrival in town, and were waiting for them."

The Traffic Police Sergeant who stopped their car in Karmana District produced no identification document or search warrant. He asked the four to produce their identification documents and the registration certificate of the car. He then made the men get out of the car and inspected the car's passenger compartment and the boot. "When he realised he could find no fault with the brothers, he asked them to show the inside of their bags and pockets," the Protestant complained. When Turdiyev asked for two witnesses for the search, the Sergeant became "agitated and began shouting, and said that he does not need any witnesses".

Another police officer in plain clothes then came running. He too did not present his identification documents, but examined the Protestants' passports. Seeing stamps of foreign countries in them, he began questioning the men about who they were, why they travelled abroad, and what activity they were involved in. "Later we found out that this was Lieutenant Farrukh Khujakulov of Karmana Criminal Police."

To the Protestants' demands that the Sergeant tell them why he stopped them and that he show them the Traffic Police's warrant, Lieutenant Khujakulov responded: "I don't work for the Traffic Police. I am a police dog handler." Asked on what grounds a police dog handler stopped their car, and told that he had violated their constitutional rights, he shouted at them: "The Constitution and laws are for Tashkent, here in Navoi we have our own laws."

Then the two police officers again searched the car with a help of a dog, and inspected their mobile phones. When they could find no fault, Lieutenant Khujakulov demanded that the four men write statements about their travels abroad, the purpose of their visits, who they met, and what they discussed. When the Protestants refused to do so, he threatened to open a case against them for disobeying a police officer's order.

After keeping the four at the Traffic Police checkpoint for three and half hours, until 1 pm, Lieutenant Khujakulov called for a police car and took them to Karmana District Police Station.

***"Violation of honour and dignity, intrusion into their private lives"***

Once at the Police Station, officers interrogated the Protestants, torturing at least two of them. Interrogation was led by Khujakulov and a colleague from the Criminal Police, Feruz Ruziyev, as well as Olim Kunakov, a Crime Prevention Inspector from the District Police.

The officers "dragged the brothers into various offices in the Police Station, where officers illegally demanded that they say whether or not they were convicted before, whether they use drugs, whether they are on a special police register where they live, the lifestyle of their family members and other relatives, what they live on, where and why they travel abroad, and whether or not they have any disease."

"This is a violation of their honour and dignity, as well as intrusion into their private lives," the Protestant complained to Forum 18.

Traffic Police stopped Turdiyev's car on 8 May to "see if he had a TV monitor in his car, which he did", Gofur Namozov, Chief of Karmana Criminal Police, claimed to Forum 18 on 3 June. "According to the new order, cars cannot have TV monitors in the passenger compartment." Asked why the four Protestants were taken to the Police Station, he replied: "Because they refused to sign the police report."

Protestants denied to Forum 18 that Turdiyev's car has a TV monitor.

***Torture***

When Turdiyev asked why he and his fellow-believers were stopped, Officer Ruziyev punched him in his abdomen and two officers who did not give their names began strangling him. "He lost consciousness and those beasts in uniforms instead of calling for doctors just gave him some drops of valerian [heart medicine]," a Protestant from Tashkent told Forum 18.

When Boymurodov, another of the four Protestants, was brought into an office where five unknown officers were present he told them that he is physically handicapped, and also suffers from asthma. "All five officers began smoking, because of which Boymurodov choked and asked them to take him out for fresh air." The officers "threatened that they can rape him".

Officer Ruziyev introduced himself on 3 June, but immediately put the phone down when Forum 18 asked about the case and why he had beaten Turdiyev. Subsequent calls on the same day went unanswered.

Namozov adamantly denied that any of the four had been beaten and tortured. "We only questioned them about the many visas and foreign stamps in their passports," he claimed. Asked why the police do this to someone inside the country, Namozov told Forum 18: "We also have specialists who can investigate such issues." Asked why individuals who travelled abroad must be questioned about their travels time and again, he responded: "It is our duty."

The use of physical violence and torture, or threats of this, by the authorities is widespread in Uzbekistan (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Passports returned, but did police open case?***

The Protestants refused to sign any police reports or write statements. Officers finally released the four on the evening of 8 May after almost ten hours' detention. However, the police retained their passports, and asked them to come back for them the next morning, 9 May.

However, the next day the passports were not returned, and the four were told that they will be held responsible under the Administrative Code for "not writing statements". Police returned the passports "only after about a week", the Protestant told Forum 18. They said they believe that the Karmana Police have prepared administrative cases against the four and may already have handed them to court.

Though Police Chief Namozov claimed to Forum 18 that "We did not open any case," Inspector Kunakov who participated in the interrogation told Forum 18 that "investigation of the case is going on," but refused to give any details of the case.

### ***Police resume search for Protestant in hiding***

Police in Karshi in Kashkadarya Region resumed their search for a local Protestant Kuzebayeva. Between 7 and 23 May officers harassed her relatives and neighbour.

Kuzebayeva went into hiding in July 2014 following a raid on her home and faces possible prosecution for allegedly talking to family members about her Christian faith. "She fears police brutality during interrogation and also possible administrative arrest," fellow Protestants told Forum 18 in April 2015 (see F18News 14 April 2015 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2055](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2055)).

Every day between 7 and 16 May - at different times of the morning and evening - Karshi Criminal Police Officer Abdukhalil Buriyev came to her home, local Protestants told Forum 18 on condition of anonymity. He asked her relatives where she was, and demanded that she present herself at Karshi Police Station. However he refused to give the reasons for summoning Kuzebayeva or present an official summons.

On the afternoon of 16 May, Buriyev again came to Kuzebayeva's home, accompanied by Karshi Police Department's Police Inspectors, Ilhom Jabborov and Olim Rakhmonov. The officers again refused to present an official summons.

### ***Officials "acted like hooligans"***

Two days later, 18 May, seven people - including Karshi Police inspectors Fahriddin Jurayev, Dilmurod Boboyev as well as the Chair of the local Mahalla Committee (residential administration), Hanifa Panayeva - arrived in two cars outside Kuzebayeva's home. Accompanying them were four women who did not identify themselves.

The officials and the four women "acted like hooligans," Protestants complained to Forum 18. "They banged on the metallic gates to the yard of her home with their hands and kicked with their feet, yelled Kuzebayeva's name, and demanded that she open the door." The four women "shouted and named Kuzebayeva with all kinds of uncensored curse words." Police "tried to climb over the wall and enter the yard, but could not."

Then the officials gained access to the yard of Kuzebayeva's neighbor by pretending to be checking her gas and electricity meters. The police climbed over the wall between the two homes into Kuzebayeva's yard. "When they realised that someone from Kuzebayeva's home was filming their illegal intrusion, the Officers climbed back over the wall and hid behind it." From behind the wall the Officers "yelled that they will detain

Kuzebayeva at any cost, get her to the Police Station, and find anything to accuse her of." They then left.

Officer Buriyev claimed that "a complaint from citizens was filed to the police against Kuzebayeva," he told Forum 18 on 3 June. "The police just want to question her about the complaint." He adamantly denied that he or his police colleagues disturbed Kuzebayeva or her relatives. "This is all lies."

Officer Buriyev then asked Forum 18: "Why won't she come and see for herself what the complaint is about?" Told that she fears that she may be beaten or tortured in other ways, he brushed this off. "In Uzbekistan the Police never acts like that." Asked whether he also denies the film of the police officer climbing over the wall of Kuzebayeva's house and the swearing addressed to her, Buriyev immediately put the phone down. Subsequent calls to him on the same day went unanswered.

Women are often particularly targeted by male officials with violence, torture and threats (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***Official summons after 16 days' harassment***

On 23 May - "only after 16 days of harassing Kuzebayeva's relatives and her neighbour" - Officers Buriyev and Boboyev finally brought an official summons for Kuzebayeva, Protestants complained to Forum 18. She was ordered to appear before Karshi Police one hour later, "at 2 pm the same day". The officers "again shouted and demanded" that Kuzebayeva "open the door but then pushed the summons in the door" and left.

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## **Short-term jailings, fines and harassment**

Forum 18 (24.04.2015) - Three Protestants are known to have been jailed in different parts of Uzbekistan in March and April for between seven and 15 days to punish them for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief, local Protestants have told Forum 18 News Service. A Tashkent Region court also fined one of the prisoners of conscience - Council of Churches Baptist Doniyor Akhmedov - more than three years' official minimum wage after his release from 15 days in jail.

The two other prisoners of conscience known to have jailed for short periods in March and April for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief were: a Protestant in Bukhara who received seven days' imprisonment for "illegal" religious activity; and another Protestant elsewhere in Uzbekistan who received 10 days' imprisonment for "teaching religion illegally", fellow Protestants who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. They declined to reveal the identity of those short-term prisoners for fear they might suffer further state reprisals.

Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses are frequently fined and occasionally given short-term prison sentences, but Muslims who exercise their right to freedom of religion or belief often face much harsher penalties, including long prison terms. Although six known Muslim prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising their freedom of religion or belief were freed under amnesty in February after "repenting", many more remain imprisoned (see F18News 4 March 2015 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2045](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2045)).

### ***Raids, fines, literature censorship***

Another Protestant from Namangan, Murodjon Rakhimov, was summoned on 17 April by

the City Police and compelled to write a statement against his Church. He was released the same day but officers are thought to be preparing administrative charges against him for violating the Religion Law, local Protestants told Forum 18 (see below).

Raids and fines on members of various religious communities continue. Three courts across Uzbekistan between February and March punished nine members of three different families, who are members of various Protestant Churches. All were fined under Administrative Code Article 184-2 for "illegally storing" Christian literature and materials in their flats. All three families' homes were raided by police and various Christian books and DVD and CD disks were confiscated from them, members of those Churches told Forum 18 (see below).

Fines under Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons") are between 20 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage for individuals not holding official positions. But courts have in some cases have given much smaller fines, applying other Administrative Code Articles for mitigating factors. Uzbekistan, against its international human rights obligations, imposes strict censorship on all religious publications and all aspects of their distribution.

### ***Detained for 15 days – but under what law?***

On 16 March Akhmedov set off very early from his home in Almalyk in Tashkent Region by bicycle on the 175 km (110 mile) journey to Namangan Region's Pap District. Police stopped him in Ahangaran District, just north of Almalyk, after he gave a Christian leaflet to a passer-by, Baptists told Forum 18 on 20 April. Akhmedov's relatives found out about this only on 17 March. Only after several enquiries by relatives and Church members did Ahangaran Police claim to them on 19 March that Akhmedov was being held in custody for "illegal missionary activity".

Police Inspector Batyr (last name not known) of Ahangaran Police told church members that Akhmedov "illegally" gave a leaflet to a passer-by on the street. "When the Inspector was asked whether there was a court order for his arrest, Inspector Batyr claimed that Doniyor had not obeyed police orders, and that is why he was detained." The Baptists told Forum 18 that while in detention Akhmedov did "not sign any statements or reports, which police prepared and asked him to sign."

Akhmedov was held at Ahangaran Police Station for 10 days. On 26 March, he was moved to a Detention Centre in Tashkent Region, where he was held for an additional five days, Baptists told Forum 18. Akhmedov was "slapped on the face and pushed around a few times the very first day" after his 16 March detention. However, police "left Doniyor in peace, and did not beat or verbally abuse him later," they added. He was fed normally three times a day at the Police Station, and slept on a hard couch.

However, conditions in the Detention Centre were worse, church members complained. "He was held in a small cell with more than 10 people, where they were squeezed in and there was barely space to sleep on the floor." Akhmedov was freed on 31 March.

### ***Fined over three years' official minimum wage after release***

On 1 April, the day after his release from custody, Ahangaran Police summoned Akhmedov and brought him before Ahangaran District Criminal Court. Judge Akmal Pirnazarov fined him 40 times the minimum monthly wage, under Administrative Code Article 184-2. "It is unjust that our brother was deprived of his liberty for 15 days and then given a huge fine, simply for giving out a leaflet on the street," Baptists complained to Forum 18.

Inspector Batyr (who refused to give his name) claimed to Forum 18 on 21 April that Akhmedov had been detained and fined for "illegal missionary activity". The same claim was made to relatives and fellow Church members. Told that Akhmedov was fined not for "missionary activity" but "illegal distribution" of religious literature, the Inspector paused before responding: "Anyway, he violated the law."

Inspector Batyr did not explain how police had discovered so quickly that Akhmedov had offered a religious leaflet to a passer-by.

Asked why Akhmedov had to be held in custody and why such harsh measures were taken against him, Inspector Batyr claimed: "It's all in accordance with the law." Asked what law and what exactly necessitated Akhmedov's arrest, the Inspector asked Forum 18 to come to Tashkent for more details of the case. He then put the phone down.

Laziz Kurbonov, Deputy Chief of Ahangaran Police, also refused to comment on 21 April on Akhmedov's detention. "You need to come to Ahangaran so we can discuss the case," he told Forum 18. When Forum 18 insisted and asked why Akhmedov was deprived of his liberty for 15 days as well as being given a huge fine for giving out a Christian leaflet on the street, he brushed it off. "I have hundreds of cases, I don't want to talk about this over the phone." He then put the phone down.

Judge Pirnazarov and other Court officials also refused to comment on the case to Forum 18 on 21 April. Judge Pirnazarov's Assistant (who did not give her name) took Forum 18's question why Akhmedov was given such a huge fine for giving out a leaflet on the street and why he was held in custody for 15 days. She asked Forum 18 to wait on the line, but a few minutes later she said that the "Judge cannot answer the question at the moment since he is hearing a case." She asked Forum 18 to call back half an hour later. Called back the same day, Judge Pirnazarov's number went unanswered. Other Court officials on 21 April (no names were given) also refused to comment on the case, referring Forum 18 to Judge Pirnazarov.

"Akhmedov is not intending to pay the fine since he does not consider that he violated the Law," Baptists told Forum 18. "He only exercised his fundamental human right." They added that he has already filed a complaint against the "illegal actions of the authorities and the fine".

### ***Raids, fines***

Police have continued raiding homes of various Protestants hunting for and seizing religious books and materials, with courts fining them for the confiscated religious materials. On 10 February a Tashkent court fined Ilmira Ishanova and her two sons, Vagiz and Rustam Ziganshin, for "illegally" storing Christian literature and materials in their flat. They were each fined 10 times the minimum monthly wage or 1,184,000 Soms. Tashkent City Criminal court in an appeal case on 20 March upheld the fines on the three.

On 2 March another Tashkent court fined four members of one family, Ibrohimjon and Yulduz Yusupov, a married couple, as well as their daughters Inobad and Inoyat Yusupova. They were fined up to five times the minimum monthly wage or 592,000 Soms for "illegally" storing Christian religious literature and materials in their home.

On 23 March a court in Navoi Region fined Dmitri and Svetlana Butov, a married couple who are members of the local officially registered Baptist Church, for "illegally storing" Christian literature in their private home. They were each fined one month's minimum wage or 118,400 Soms.

### **Police harassment of another Protestant**

On the afternoon of 17 April, police in Namangan summoned Murodjon Rakhimov by phone to the local Mahalla Committee (local residential administration) for "urgent issues", local Protestants who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 20 April. Rakhimov is a member of a local unregistered Protestant Church.

Major Umidjon Jalilov and Lieutenant Madamin Siddikov from the Namangan Criminal Police were waiting for Rakhimov at the Mahalla Committee. "They demanded that Rakhimov write a statement explaining why he attends his Church, exactly what Christian books he is reading in the Church, and whether anyone forced him to become a Christian."

When Rakhimov refused to write a statement, police officers "twisted his left arm, and threatened that they will take him to the Police Station unless he cooperated," Protestants complained to Forum 18. Officers also threatened to open a criminal case against him and keep him in custody. Despite the threats and physical violence, Rakhimov refused to write a statement or sign the police reports. The use of physical violence and torture, or threats of this, by the authorities is widespread in Uzbekistan. Most victims are, for extremely good reasons, unwilling to publicly discuss their experiences (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862)).

"Seeing that the threats didn't work, Major Jalilov prepared summonses for Rakhimov and his wife Gulchohra Abdurakhmanova to appear before the police, and handed over the summonses to them," Protestants told Forum 18. They said that they think that the police are preparing a case against Rakhimov under Administrative Code Article 240.

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

Major Jalilov adamantly denied to Forum 18 on 21 April that he or Lieutenant Siddikov abused Rakhimov. asked why police are targeting Rakhimov for attending a church or becoming Christian, he responded: "We're not concerned with whether he should be Muslim or Christian, but that he obeys the Law." Asked why police summoned Rakhimov and what specific charges are being prepared, Jalilov did not say. He refused to talk to Forum 18 further.

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### **"She fears police brutality during interrogation and administrative arrest"**

Forum 18 (14.04.2015) - In recent months Uzbekistan's police are known to have renewed their targeting of two women for exercising their freedom of religion or belief – Gulchohra Norbayeva, a Muslim in Tashkent Region, and Guljahon Kuzebayeva, a Protestant in the southern Kashkadarya Region, Forum 18 News Service has learned. Two more Muslim women were sacked from their jobs in Karshi for insisting on wearing the hijab (Islamic headscarf).

Norbayeva – who lost her job as a teacher in 2012 for refusing to give up wearing the hijab – faced police summonses, a house search for religious literature, accusations she was teaching the Koran "illegally", and pressure to sign statements incriminating Muslim men she did not know.

Asked whether the police or other authorities are still harassing her or whether she knows if a case has been opened against her, Norbayeva told Forum 18 on 7 April: "At the moment they have left me alone. I don't know if the police opened a case." An Anti-Terrorism Police officer who took part in a February 2015 raid on Norbayeva's home insisted to Forum 18 that the search was to hunt for religious literature and that the case is now closed. Severe censorship of such literature, including house searches, is imposed by the state (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Kuzebayeva – who went into hiding in July 2014 following a raid on her home - faces possible prosecution for allegedly talking to family members about her Christian faith. "She fears police brutality during interrogation and also possible administrative arrest," fellow Protestants told Forum 18.

The use of physical violence and torture, or threats of this, by the authorities is widespread in Uzbekistan. Most victims are, for extremely good reasons, unwilling to publicly discuss their experiences and women are often particularly targeted by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey <[http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862)>).

Protestants told Forum 18 that they think that police opened a case against Kuzebayeva under Administrative Code Article 240, Part 1 ("Violation of the Religion Law") and Article 241 ("Teaching religious beliefs without specialised religious education and without permission from the central organ of a [registered] religious organisation, as well as teaching religious beliefs privately"). But the police "could not bring her before a court as she is hiding for fear of administrative arrest."

Punishments under these Articles are fines or administrative arrest of up to 15 days (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Police are known to detain people who actively exercise their freedom of religion or belief after having opened an administrative case against them. Police then bring such people quickly before the courts without proper investigation or due legal process, resulting in punishments for exercising human rights. If the police's victims are given a term of administrative arrest, they are immediately taken to prison (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

### ***"Special register of Muslims to be watched"***

Norbayeva told Forum 18 that during one recent interrogation, police officers told her that "it does not matter now if I wear the hijab or abandon it. They said that I will still be in their special register of Muslims to be watched."

People who actively exercise their freedom of religion or belief – both Muslims and those with other beliefs – are known to be on lists for special scrutiny, held by the National Security Service (NSS) secret police, ordinary police and Mahalla (local district) Committee officials. Wearing the hijab or going to the mosque or other place of worship frequently is enough to be listed (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Norbayeva approached the Human Rights Alliance, an independent human rights organisation in Tashkent. "We studied her case, and it is a gross violation of her religious and other human rights," Yelena Urayeva of the Alliance told Forum 18 from Tashkent on 14 April. She said her organisation is calling on the international community to "support

and protect" Norbayeva, as well as on Uzbekistan's authorities to "restore her to her work" as a teacher.

A source from Kashkadarya, who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 13 April that they know of at least two Muslim women from Karshi who were dismissed from their jobs recently for wearing the hijab. The women were also subjected to police interrogation and harassment for their religious beliefs. The source did not wish to identify the two for fear of state reprisals.

Officials of the government's Religious Affairs Committee in Tashkent, including Press Secretary Shovkat Hamdamov, refused to comment on the cases to Forum 18 on 13 April.

### ***Pressure to abandon the hijab***

Trouble began for Norbayeva, a Muslim resident of Parkent in Tashkent Region, in 2008, when she heard rumours that her husband had died in Afghanistan. "He left me and our seven-month-old baby in 2000 and went abroad, I don't know where," she told Forum 18. During this period, police questioned her several times over the whereabouts of her husband. "Officers also warned me not to wear the hijab." In 2008 Norbayeva filed for divorce, and was granted it.

In 2012 the Administration of Secondary School No. 8, where she worked as an English teacher, warned Norbayeva not to wear the hijab. "School officials told me in front of all the staff that either I must stop wearing the hijab - as the government does not want teachers to wear hijabs - or I must leave my job," she told Forum 18. "Otherwise I'd be in trouble. I chose leaving my job instead of stopping wearing the hijab." She signed a letter voluntarily resigning her job at the school.

Norbayeva has been without a full-time job since 2012, surviving by giving English lessons privately. "And I still wear my hijab," she added.

Sadriddin Abullayev, Director of School No. 8, adamantly denied that he or other school officials pressured Norbayeva to resign her job. "She left the job for health reasons," he claimed to Forum 18 on 7 April. However, he affirmed that teachers "cannot wear the hijab to school since an Education Ministry Decree on the official dress code for teachers does not allow the hijab or any other religious apparel." Asked why teachers cannot wear clothes that accord with their religious beliefs, he did not answer. He did not wish to talk to Forum 18 further.

### ***Harassment continues***

For some time after 2012, police left Norbayeva alone. "But they began harassing me again in August 2014," she told Forum 18. "They would summon me and pressure me to sign statements against two Muslim men and their alleged illegal actions. I didn't even know them." She told Forum 18 that she knew the men's wives by sight. "We got acquainted through common friends in the bazaar. We greet each other occasionally on the street, but our relationship has not gone beyond these greetings."

At 6 am on 23 February 2015, about 14 police officers raided Norbayeva's Parkent home. The raid was organised by Yukori-Chirchik District's Yangibazar City Police in cooperation with the Police from Parkent. Officers showed her a search warrant from the Yukori-Chirchik District Prosecutor's Office. However, some of the officers hurried Norbayeva away to the Yangibazar Police Station, while others searched the flat in the presence of her brother and some neighbours.

### ***Why the search?***

Yangibazar Anti-Terrorism Police Officer Mirvohid Mirboboyev told Forum 18 the search was conducted "because we were tipped off by the Religious Affairs Committee that Norbayeva has religious books in her flat". He added that "books were seized from her flat and sent for expert analysis to the Committee in Tashkent".

However, Norbayeva denied this. "I counted my books when I returned home, and all the books were in place." She pointed out that the Prosecutor's warrant said that the search in her flat was in connection with a Muslim man (whose name she did not remember) who was in custody, and who allegedly testified that he knew her. The police had pressured the man's wife to sign a pre-written statement which claimed that "Norbayeva lived like a vagabond, and she taught Koran lessons illegally."

Asked on 9 April why Norbayeva's home was searched and why she was questioned by the Police, Yukori-Chirchik District Prosecutor Otabek Abdullayev refused to discuss the case. "You need to talk to higher authorities, if they allow us then we'll talk to you," he told Forum 18. Asked who exactly it should speak to, the Prosecutor put the phone down.

Officer Mirboboyev adamantly denied that Norbayeva is being targeted by the police. Asked why officers pressured her to sign statements against the Muslim men, he told Forum 18: "We only conducted a search in her home." Asked why then on 23 February she was taken to Yangibazar Police Station for interrogation, he did not answer. "The case is over, there is no need to worry," he insisted.

Asked why he thinks the case is over, Officer Mirboboyev responded: "The Religious Affairs Committee sent us an expert analysis that the books found in her home are the Koran and Hadith [collections of sayings attributed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad], which are legally allowed in Uzbekistan."

Local police officer Aziz Bekmirzayev, who led the officers to Norbayeva's flat and who participated in her detention and the search, refused to discuss the case. "I cannot discuss this case with you over the phone," he told Forum 18 on 8 April. Asked why, he said: "It's a secret." He also refused to tell Forum 18 whether a case was opened against Norbayeva or any other details of the Police investigation.

### ***Twelve-hour interrogation, 11 days of heart treatment***

After being taken to Yangibazar Police early on 23 February, Norbayeva was questioned there for almost 12 hours with only a short break, she complained to Forum 18. Officers were able to compel another Muslim woman to sign a statement that "I allegedly gave her private Koran lessons, which I never did. It is this woman's husband who in February was given a 15-day administrative arrest in Yangibazar, and against whom I was asked to sign a statement," Norbayeva said. She said that later the man "was freed."

At about 7 pm, she and the Muslim woman who testified against her were taken to Yukori-Chirchik Prosecutor's Office for the police to "complete some formalities for about 15 minutes" and where they were not questioned. They were then returned to the police station. "After that we sat on chairs in the police station hallway until 11 pm without being fed or given water, and then we were released."

The woman "admitted to me she had to sign the statement against me, because police then released her husband as promised," Norbayeva told Forum 18. "She was very sorry, and apologised to me that she had to do this to save her husband."

The police officers, one of whose name is Olim (last name not known), "verbally abused me during the interrogation and threatened to put me in a psychiatric ward if I did not

sign false statements, one of which was against me." Despite the police pressure, Norbayeva refused to sign the statements.

Officer Olim seized Norbayeva's mobile phone and her passport on 23 February. They were not returned until late March, Norbayeva said.

Norbayeva told Forum 18 that "after that interrogation I suffered heart pain and palpitations for many days." On 9 March she was accepted as an outpatient by Tashkent City hospital No. 7 with a diagnosis of tachycardia, she said. She attended the hospital daily for treatment until 20 March.

### ***Police target Protestant in Kashkadarya***

Meanwhile, trouble began for Kuzebayeva on 11 July 2014, when police searched her flat in Karshi in her absence, "hoping that they could find Christian books there to punish her," Protestants told Forum 18. However, officers "found nothing illegal."

Soon after, police brought Kuzebayeva's brother and his wife and their 19 year-old son to a police station. "There they were made to sign statements that Kuzebayeva illegally shared her Christian beliefs with them." After this police began hunting for her to punish her under the Administrative Code for teaching religion without state permission.

The officers who searched Kuzebayeva's home and searched for her in the beginning were Olim Gulomov, Bakhtiyor Babayev, and Zhavlon Sharipov of Karshi Police, Protestants told Forum 18. Later Karshi Criminal Police officers Iskandar Zhahongirov, Ilhom Zhabbarov and Chief of Criminal Police Alisher Mahmudov searched for Kuzebayeva and "made her relatives sign statements."

### ***Attempted arrest***

The latest attempt to bring Kuzebayeva before the police was made by Aziz Haydarov, Chief of Karshi's Passport Regime Department. On 12 February 2015 he signed a summons for Kuzebayeva to appear before the Department with her passport, as well as a letter from the local Mahalla Committee about her character. The letter reached her address in Karshi on 23 February, Protestants told Forum 18. However, Kuzebayeva did "not appear before the police, and is still hiding."

Officer Zhabborov came to her home at 11 pm on 24 February to "arrest her but could not find her."

Asked on 13 April why the Criminal Police is searching for Kuzebayeva and why her relatives were summoned and compelled to sign statements against her, Police Inspector Timur Hakverdiyev from Karshi Criminal Police responded: "I need to look into the case." Asked whether a criminal or an administrative case has been opened against Kuzebayeva, Inspector Hakverdiyev did not answer. After consulting his supervisors, he told Forum 18: "I cannot say anything." He referred Forum 18 to Aziz Haydarov, Chief of the Passport Regime Department, and refused to talk further.

Haydarov of the Passport Department also was reluctant to comment on why police are searching for Kuzebayeva. "She needs to come to us herself, and we will explain to her," he told Forum 18 on 13 April. Asked why Kuzebayeva cannot peacefully practice her religion or why she cannot share her beliefs with her relatives, Haydarov did not answer. He repeated his previous answer.

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## **"Pardoned only after repenting and asking the President for forgiveness"**

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

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

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

### ***Jailed***

Rashid Sharipov was jailed in 2010 for seven years along with other Muslims who read Nursi's works (see F18News 8 July 2010 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1465](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1465)). Akmal Abdullayev was like Sharipov tried in Bukhara [Bukhoro] but slightly later in 2010 among a group of nine or ten Muslims who read Nursi's works (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)). Ahmad Rakhmonov, Ahmadjon Primkulov and Kudratullo (last name unclear) are thought to have been sentenced around the same time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Relatives inside and outside Uzbekistan have been very concerned about the sisters' health, particularly over Mehriniso Hamdamova diagnosed with a possible cancerous growth called a myoma in 2014 which needs to be removed (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)). In October 2014 relatives

told Forum 18: "Their health seems to be a little better now. Mehrinisso has not been operated on yet, but she was given some medicines. She said she is feeling a little better at the moment" (see F18News 24 March 2014 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1941](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1941)).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An expert from Uzbekistan, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum on 26 February that he thinks around 100 Muslim readers of Nursi's works were jailed between about 2007 and 2010. Some of these prisoners of conscience are known to be still in jail, including:

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

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

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

### ***No comment***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent numerous homes of Jehovah's Witnesses were raided between September 2014 and January 2015. At least 10 people were fined for "illegally" storing religious books in their homes as well as meeting for worship without state permission (see below). Police and secret police officers frequently raid religious meetings in private homes. Religious literature is frequently seized in such raids, as well as by customs officials on the border and at airports. Penalties – often heavy – frequently follow (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1862](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1862)).

Customs seize two Islamic books and three mobile phones

Trouble began for the two Russian lorry drivers, 39-year old Magomedsayid Khasayev and his 21-year old nephew Alisultan Abakarov, when they crossed into Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan on 28 November 2014, Khasayev told Forum 18 on 10 February 2015. The

two were detained at Uzbekistan's Daud-Ata customs checkpoint in Kungrad [Qunghirot] District of Karakalpakstan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, the customs officials in Urgench demanded that the lorry remain in the town until the criminal case concluded. "We decided that we would rent a place in Urgench so we could watch the lorry, and my nephew Alisultan would travel between Urgench and Nukus for his case." Khasayev said that Abakarov made numerous trips by taxi between Urgench and Nukus – a journey of 165 kms (100 miles) - in the two months when the case was under investigation and in the court.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A court later fined Karkayeva one month's minimum wage. "The case was heard without Tanzilya Karkayeva being in the room - she was out in the corridor of the court building and she only heard the decision from the local police officer," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "Karkayeva hasn't even received the written text of the decision. The local believers told us that she decided for personal reasons not to complain," They said they do not know the exact date of the hearing or other details of the Court case.

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

Article 240 punishes "violation of the Religion Law", including by holding unregistered

religious meetings or sharing one's faith with others. Punishments are arrest for up to 15 days or a fine of between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage.

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

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

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

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

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

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