



APRIL 7, 2014

[UZBEKISTAN](#)

Is Improvement in Sight for Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan?

Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan are cautiously optimistic that the Uzbekistan authorities will allow them to practice their faith without interference. Igor Yurchenko, a local representative of Jehovah's Witnesses involved in meetings with Uzbekistan officials in 2013, stated: "We have noticed a marked improvement in our discussions with Uzbekistan authorities, and they appear committed to making positive changes. We hope that these meetings will soon yield positive results."

In what may be a good faith gesture, Uzbekistan authorities released Abdubannob Akhmedov from prison on March 2, 2013, after he had served over four and a half years of a six-and-a-half-year sentence. He was one of three Witnesses imprisoned for peaceful religious activity. The other two Witnesses were released earlier, in 2012. There are no Witnesses currently imprisoned in Uzbekistan.

In the months following Mr. Akhmedov's release, Uzbekistan authorities committed themselves to making positive changes in respecting human rights. On July 5, 2013, the Uzbekistan government informed the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of its willingness to implement recommendations made to recognize the right to freedom of religion and belief for all individuals and groups without discrimination.

Efforts to Register New Congregations

At present, there is one legally registered congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan, and it is located in the town of Chirchik, in the Tashkent region. However, many of Jehovah's Witnesses live in other parts of the country. Because they have not been able to register new congregations since 1996, Witnesses meet for peaceful worship without legal protection and risk punishment. Mr. Yurchenko further stated: "We hope that the current constructive dialogue with the authorities will pave the way for further improvements that might result in legally registering congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Uzbekistan."

Jehovah's Witnesses welcome the prospect of peaceful worship in Uzbekistan and are hopeful that Uzbekistan authorities will register new congregations soon.



Abdubannob Akhmedov

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