



Uzbekistan: False Prosecutions

Authorities in Uzbekistan continue to pressure churches and religious groups, often fabricating evidence to punish or limit Christians' ability to practice their faith. Christians recently have been subjected to excessive fines, false accusations and literature confiscations. In the most recent case, on July 15, 2011, Konstantin Malchikovsky, pastor of the Hamza District Baptist Church in Tashkent, was indicted for tax fraud.

The indictment involved allegations that Malchikovsky failed to pay taxes on church offerings and book sales between 2003 and 2010. According to Forum 18 News, a government investigator threatened church members with jail time if they refused to fabricate evidence against the pastor. The government apparently wants the church to use a cash register to receive offerings so they can issue a receipt for each one.

Malchikovsky faces a maximum of two years in jail if convicted. Local Christians told Forum 18 that city tax authorities did not present to the court all of the documents claimed as evidence. And the judge ignored documents that proved the inaccuracy of the indictment.

Last spring, authorities raided the Hamza District Baptist Church, confiscating money, printing equipment and tens of thousands of Christian books. Four church members, including Malchikovsky, were fined between 50 and 100 times the minimum monthly wage.

In a separate raid in June, authorities confiscated about 250 Christian books and recordings, a computer and a passport from Christian Anvar Rajapov's home. Rajapov was fined 80 times the minimum monthly wage. Ignoring police threats, Rajapov twice unsuccessfully appealed the ruling to Tashkent Criminal Court. On July 10, when Rajapov asked the court for the return of his hard drive, the court ordered that it be destroyed.

In another case, the Uzbek Supreme Court recently upheld the 10-year sentence of Tohar Haydarov, who was arrested in March 2010 and charged with the "illegal sale of narcotic or psychotropic substances in large quantities." Church members consistently told Forum 18 News that the allegations were fabricated to punish him.

Although prison authorities have shown Haydarov letters that have been mailed to him, he has not been allowed to read them. The reason, prison authorities say, is that there are "too many citations from the Bible in them." Local Christians told Forum 18 News that Haydarov has admonished other Christians to "appreciate dearly your worship services and listen attentively to the sermons. I so much wish to attend worship services, but, alas, I don't have the opportunity."

Sources: *Forum 18 News, ASSIST News Service*