

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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Uzbekistan tolerates disturbing violations by police against citizens and minors

SAMARKAND, Uzbekistan—In a show of force reminiscent of Stalinist raids of the Soviet past, police officers and local officials of Samarkand raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses and took 18 congregation members to the police station.

One of the victims is a 17-year-old girl who was stripped and fondled by an intoxicated police officer. Ozod Saidov, also 17 years old, had his hair pulled and was hit repeatedly on the head. Muhayyo Abdulhakova, a 14-year-old-girl, was interrogated alone and was threatened with being beaten. Akmaral Rahmonberdiyeva was arrested while she was visiting her friend Yana Karimova. The police searched Karimova's apartment and took them both in for questioning.

All the victims faced extreme pressure to incriminate fellow members and disclose private information. All were severely abused verbally and were threatened with physical assault. It was obvious that the police were intimidating all involved and were pressuring them to deny their faith.

Some of the officers participating in these raids were drunk, as were "eye-witnesses" called on to serve as search witnesses. In many cases, no warrants were provided to justify the raids, nor was legal protocol adhered to. Various personal belongings disappeared from the homes of the individuals searched, including identification papers and employment documents. An infirm 86-year-old woman lay helpless as the police searched her son's home and confiscated their belongings. When the police could not find any Bible literature in Yuriy Khasanov's apartment, they planted 11 magazines and a brochure in the Uzbek language, and then they arrested him on the pretense that these items belonged to him.

Most of these incidents occurred on February 19. The police and officials who participated have not been held accountable for this string of unconscionable human rights violations, behavior that indicates a steady deterioration of human rights in Uzbekistan.

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