

New raids on Jehovah's Witnesses in Azerbaijan

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By: Nick Mackenzie.

Police in Azerbaijan have now raided two Jehovah's Witness communities this month, Forum 18 News Service is reporting today.



The second raid was on "a small peaceful religious meeting" in a home in the capital Baku. Fifteen police officers took part in this raid and detained all of the congregation, beating up three detainees.

After the first raid, nine Jehovah's Witnesses caught up in it wrote to the General Prosecutor, pointing out that the raid was a violation of their rights to freedom of thought, speech and conscience guaranteed under the Azerbaijani Constitution and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

They asked for "urgent and effective measures" to halt such violations, for the actions of officials to be legally verified, and for criminal prosecutions of officials who have violated the law.

The number of raids seem to have increased in the past year, primarily targeting Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Adventists and other Protestants.

Communities of other faiths have also been raided and warned by officials in 2008; these communities have asked Forum 18 not to identify them for fear of further repression.