



# Pastor Dmitry Shestakov

## Country : Uzbekistan

*'I am called by God to be a pastor to the people in Uzbekistan, I am on a pilgrimage without a home, a church or status – but with God.'*

Pastor Dmitry Shestakov

On January 21 2007 Pastor Dmitry Shestakov was arrested in Andijon. In a raid on Shestakov's registered Full Gospel Church, National Security Service (NSS) secret police asked the pastor to step outside with them for five minutes and then immediately escorted the 37 year old pastor to the local police station where he remains in solitary confinement.

On January 30 Pastor Shestakov was officially charged with operating an illegal religious organisation, inciting religious hatred and distributing materials promoting religious extremism. If convicted on these criminal charges, he faces maximum sentences from five to ten years in prison for each separate offence. Prosecutors have long been seeking to imprison Pastor Shestakov. Harassment began in May 2006, apparently in reaction to the conversion from Islam to Christianity of a number of ethnic Uzbek families. Police raided his home in June, confiscating recordings of his sermons. Authorities also searched his Andijon church, confiscating cds and video materials and pressuring members of the congregation to testify against their pastor. Although the pastor was ordered to list all of his church members, he refused to do so. Pastor Shestakov fled Andijon with his wife and three children to avoid arrest. He returned in November and reopened the church. Now he has been arrested under an order issued in June.

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**EMAIL ALERT**  
**for prayer & action**  
**MARCH 2007**



Pastor Abramov, a pastor of the church in Andijon where Shestakov has been serving says that the church is praying for Pastor Shestakov. *'Dmitry's only crime is believing in God,'* he says. *'We are praying that our brother will be set free.'*

Dmitry's wife Marina testifies to her husband's transformed life since his conversion 15 years ago. *'All our Christian life, God has been guiding us,'* she says. *'We believe God has a plan for us.'* But she admits to having been very afraid for the first two or three days after her husband's arrest, as she tried to calm her children's fears – and her own.

### PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ Pray for Pastor Shestakov's health, release and that the truth will come out at his trial
- ▶ Pray for church leaders in Uzbekistan who are coming under increasing pressure. Pray they will continue to persevere, encourage and disciple the Uzbek believers
- ▶ Pray for Pastor Shestakov, for his wife Marina and their three daughters that God will give them wisdom, faith, peace and joy

*'But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him'*  
Acts 12:5

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THE VOICE OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

## **Hebrews 13:3 'Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering'**

The past year has seen increased government control of all religious activity in Uzbekistan. New restrictions have been proposed to punish religious leaders if any members of their communities share their faith with others and censorship of religious literature has been intensified, while massively increased fines for unregistered religious activity were introduced towards the end of 2005.

Foreign non-governmental organisations with any kind of religious affiliation or suspected of having a religious affiliation have been closed down and foreign citizens involved in religious activity have been deported. At the same time the government has stepped up its propaganda offensive trying to deny that it violates religious freedom. Pastor Shestakov could face up to twenty years jail, if he is found guilty and receives maximum consecutive sentences for the charges of stirring up inter-religious hatred, leading an 'illegal' religious organisation and distributing religious extremist recordings. Prosecutors in Andijon have now completed their case against Pastor Shestakov. Much of the prosecution's case is a defence of Uzbek government policy that attacks religious and political organisations linking 'Charismatic Pentecostals' together with radical Islamic groups.

## **Take action!**

Please write a polite letter requesting that Dmitry Shestakov is released

**Please do not mention Release International, or advance your political opinion or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.**

A sample letter is given below.

[Date]

His Excellency Islam Abduganievich Karimov  
Prezidentu Respubliki Uzbekistan  
700163 g. Taskent  
ul. Uzbekistankaya, 43  
Rezidentsia prezidenta  
Uzbekistan

Your Excellency,

I respectfully draw your attention to the case of Dmitry Shestakov, a pastor from Andijon who is facing criminal charges as a result of pursuing his vocation.

I respectfully ask on behalf of Christians in the U.K. and worldwide, for your government to release Pastor Dmitry Shestakov, so that he might continue his peaceful duties as a respectful citizen of your country. In addition that he may have the right to freely choose and practise his faith in accordance with Article 18 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

I respectfully ask the Uzbek authorities to demonstrate their commitment to the principle of freedom of religion and review the basis of the charges laid against him.

Sincerely,

[Your name and signature]