

Prisoners of faith

release
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

OCTOBER 2010

Tohar Haydarov Uzbekistan



Uzbekistan continues its policy of harassment, interrogation and short-term imprisonment of evangelical Christians. In several cases over the last 12 months those detained have subsequently been released but fined heavily. In July, ten Christians were jailed for between three and five days, and three were fined 80 times the minimum monthly wage following a brutal raid in Tashkent's Mirzo-Ulugbek District. Twenty-three people, including small children, were detained and two Bibles, four songbooks and one textbook of violin lessons were confiscated. Officials then began pushing the believers forcefully into cars. Some of the believers were kicked and hit while they were dragged out of the house they were meeting in. Elsewhere a court has ordered that officially permitted Christian books and leaflets found in a raid should be confiscated and destroyed, violating Uzbek legal procedure.

Several Church leaders have spoken to Release of their concern for their members who now face prison sentences and fines simply for meeting together in unregistered house churches. A number of pastors including some from the Baptist Council of Churches believe that registration will lead to unhelpful and unnecessary interference from the state. Unregistered religious activity in Uzbekistan is banned, as is evangelizing, publishing unapproved religious literature, and attending religious meetings in private homes.

On January 18, Tohar Haydarov was arrested in Syrdarya region on charges of producing or storing

drugs, charges local Christians insist are fabricated. At the police station, Tohar was reportedly pressured and threatened to renounce his faith. When he refused, police allegedly planted drugs on him. Officials later reported finding additional drugs at his apartment in a search that was not monitored by any witnesses until after a bag of narcotics was found. Forensic tests on the drugs 'found' on Tohar and in his apartment were conducted the same evening, raising suspicion on how precise forensic results were available so quickly. At a court date three days after his arrest, Tohar told believers that police had beaten him and forced him to sign papers. His face was swollen and he could barely walk. At last report, police were attempting to have Tohar charged under a different article of the Criminal Code which calls for a 10 to 20-year prison sentence.

On March 9 a criminal court in Uzbekistan sentenced 27-year-old Tohar to 10 years in prison. Local Christians are outraged and maintain that the authorities fabricated the evidence and he is simply being punished because of his Christian faith. Tohar was found guilty of the 'preparation of a crime or attempted crime' and of the 'illegal sale of narcotic or psychotropic substances in large quantities.' Other Baptists were not permitted to testify on Tohar's behalf and the lawyer they hired for him was not allowed into the courtroom. He has appealed the ruling and the case has been referred to the Regional Court. At last report, a date had not yet been set for his appeal.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

'I am in chains for Christ' Philippians 1:13

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PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That God will strengthen and comfort Tohar while imprisoned
- ▶ That the ruling against him will be overturned and he will be released
- ▶ That Christians in Uzbekistan will continue to be faithful in spite of opposition

PLEASE WRITE

By way of encouragement you may write a short letter or send a card to some of our Uzbek brothers. When writing please do not mention Release International, or advance your political opinion or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

You can write to Tohar Haydarov at the following address:

Tohar Haydarov
UYa 64/49
Otryad 13
Pos. Shaikh-Ali
G. Karshi, KashKadarya Region
180020 Uzbekistan.

You can also write to Dmitry Shestakov at the following address:

Dmitry Shestakov
8th Detachment, 82nd Brigade
Navoi Camp No.29
210105 Navoi-5
UYa 64/29
Uzbekistan

In March 2007 Pastor Dmitry Shestakov was sentenced to four years of exile within Uzbekistan. Dmitry has been serving out his sentence in Navoi prison, a hard labour camp over 350 miles from his home and family. Dmitry suffers from high blood pressure and in recent months has had some problems with his health. He is due to be released in January 2011.

Release International produces the Prisoners of Faith alert every month as part of its ministry to support persecuted Christians. To receive your own copy free of charge by email, please register your details at www.releaseinternational.org/signup.

If you would like to make a financial donation to support Christian Prisoners of Faith and their families, you may give securely online at www.releaseinternational.org/donate, or by calling 01689 823491. Registered Charity 280577.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

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