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## KYRGYZSTAN: Official begins destruction of six rural mosques

By Igor Rotar, Forum 18

*After unilaterally closing six of the nine mosques in his district close to Jalal-abad in southern Kyrgyzstan, Asan Erinbayev, head of Karadarya rural district, has now begun to destroy them, regional Muslim leader Dilmurat haji Orozov complained. He said the six mosques closed down last May were registered with the government's committee for religious affairs. "Yet Erinbayev is still flagrantly flouting the laws," Orozov told Forum 18 News Service. "I simply don't know what to do. All I can do is go to Karadarya and fight it out with him." Erinbayev justified the destruction of the mosques, telling Forum 18 they had been built illegally on state-owned land, claims the Muslims deny.*

Six mosques closed down earlier this year in a district of Jalal-abad region of southern Kyrgyzstan are now being destroyed on the orders of the head of the local administration, the leader of the regional Muslim spiritual administration Dilmurat haji Orozov complained to Forum 18 News Service on 14 October in Jalal-abad. The six mosques – out of a total of nine – are located within the territory controlled by Asan Erinbayev, head of Karadarya rural district, 30 kilometres (20 miles) west of Jalal-abad. Erinbayev justified the destruction of the mosques, claiming to Forum 18 on 14 October in the village of Karadarya that they had been built illegally on state-owned land.

However, Orozov continues to challenge Erinbayev's claim. He insisted that at the start of the 1990s, when land from collective farms was redistributed, the sites were handed over so that mosques could be built. "Before Erinbayev, all the heads of the district believed the mosques were functioning legally," Orozov told Forum 18. He said all the mosques were registered at the government's committee for religious affairs. "Yet Erinbayev is still flagrantly flouting the laws. I simply don't know what to do. All I can do is go to Karadarya and fight it out with him."

Erinbayev closed the mosques in May, making no attempt to hide his decision. He claimed that in addition to their being built on state-owned land, the imams in different mosques were preaching contradictory views and some were performing marriage ceremonies before the bride and groom had registered at the registry office. "Now that the mosques have been closed, I can monitor the activities of the imams on my territory," he admitted openly to Forum 18 back in May (see F18News 22 May 2003).

The Karadarya district stretches for around 25 kilometres (15 miles) and local Muslims, who asked not to be identified, told Forum 18 that it is now very difficult for elderly believers to reach the remaining functioning mosques. They maintained that Erinbayev believed he could operate with complete impunity because his brother, Baimat Erinbayev, is a deputy of the regional assembly. They also alleged that Baimat Erinbayev is "one of the most influential mafia members in the region".

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