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UZBEKISTAN: Police beat Jehovah's Witnesses

By Igor Rotar, Forum 18

Jehovah's Witnesses are considering whether to demand a criminal case against the police officers who beat four of their members in Kagan, one of whom lost consciousness. The four – who were arrested on 1 May for preaching on the street – are being threatened with legal cases. "For the time being we are holding back the reports of the beatings," lawyer Rustam Satdanov told Forum 18 News Service. "But if the case goes to trial despite this, we will call for a criminal case to be brought against the police officers for beating believers." A police officer has denied that any of the Jehovah's Witnesses were beaten. "They had not committed a serious enough offence to deserve a beating!" the deputy head of Kagan's investigation isolation unit told Forum 18.

Jehovah's Witnesses are still considering whether to demand a criminal case be brought against the police officers who beat four of their members in Kagan on the outskirts of Bukhara in western Uzbekistan. The four – who were arrested at the beginning of May for preaching their faith on the street – are now being threatened with criminal or administrative cases. "For the time being we are holding back the reports of the beatings," their lawyer Rustam Satdanov told Forum 18 News Service in the capital Tashkent on 29 May. "But if the case goes to trial despite this, we will call for a criminal case to be brought against the police officers for beating believers." A police officer has denied to Forum 18 that any of the Jehovah's Witnesses were beaten.

Police officers in Kagan arrested the Jehovah's Witnesses on 1 May, Satdanov told Forum 18. The four – local residents Shahzoda Pulatova and Negmat Hojayev, as well as Igor Pak and Stanislav Ten who were visiting from Tashkent - were taken to the town's police department, where police officers started to beat them. Satdanov claims the two Jehovah's Witnesses from Kagan received a particularly severe beating. Hojayev lost consciousness while he was being beaten.

Satdanov told Forum 18 that after several hours the four were released, but police warned them that their case would be handed over to court. They said a criminal case would be brought first of all against Pulatova, because it was the second time this year that she had been arrested by the police.

Straight after the beating Hojayev and Pulatova went to the hospital in Kagan, where doctors gave them a report on the injuries they had sustained. In the report given to Pulatova, it states that "she is suffering from raised internal cranial pressure as a result of blows".

Nevertheless, the deputy head of the investigation isolation unit in Kagan, Shavkat Abdullayev, who was involved in questioning the four, strongly denied that any of them were beaten. "No one beat the Jehovah's Witnesses," he told Forum 18 on 29 May. "They had not committed a serious enough offence to deserve a beating!"

Abdullayev declared that "the court would decide whether to bring a criminal case or an administrative case against the believers". He added that they were waiting for Pak and Ten to come to Kagan "because without them we cannot hold a court hearing".

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