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## TAJIKISTAN: Baptist fined for "talking to passers-by about God"

By Igor Rotar, Forum 18

*A Baptist has been fined five times the minimum wage (57 Norwegian Kroner, 8 Euros or 8 US Dollars) for "talking to passers-by about God", and threatened with property confiscation if he does not pay the fine, Forum 18 News Service has learnt. The fine has been imposed even though Tajikistan's 1994 law "On Religion and Religious Organisations" does not prohibit either religious gatherings in private homes or street evangelisation.*

Andrei Reimer, a Baptist, has been fined five times the minimum wage (some 57 Norwegian Kroner, 8 Euros or 8 US Dollars) for conducting religious meetings in the courtyard of the communal block of flats where he lives and "talking to passers-by about God", Forum 18 News Service has learnt. Reimer, who lives in a suburb of Khudzhand, the principal town in the northern Tajik region of Sogdi, was fined on 18 July by the local Chkalovsk district court because he refused to provide a written assurance that he would not repeat his preaching, and was threatened with property confiscation should he refuse to pay it.

Reimer is a member of the Council of Churches (or unregistered Baptists), which split from the All-Union Council of Baptists in 1961, when further state-sponsored controls were introduced by the then Baptist leadership. It has refused state registration ever since. According to one of its pastors in Moscow, it has 3,705 congregations throughout the former Soviet Union.

Contacted by Forum 18 on 24 July, the senior justice administrator at Chkalovsk district court, Abdumalik Akramov, confirmed the fine but refused to give any further comment on the case.

This fine has been imposed even though Tajikistan's 1994 law "On Religion and Religious Organisations" does not prohibit either religious gatherings in private homes or street evangelisation.

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