

11 August 2003

UZBEKISTAN: Pentecostal Pastor to seek asylum due to "intolerable conditions"

By Igor Rotar, Forum 18

A Pentecostal pastor intends to seek political asylum outside Uzbekistan, he has told Forum News Service, due to "intolerable conditions". Officials have told him they will not register his church because they were "not interested in the spread of Christianity". Pastor Bakhtier Tuichiev has been repeatedly warned that he would be subject to administrative and even criminal punishment if he continues his work.

Pentecostal pastor Bakhtier Tuichiev, from Andijan in eastern Uzbekistan, has decided to ask a democratic country for political asylum, he told Forum News Service, as Protestants are enduring intolerable conditions in Andijan. In July 2003 the authorities in Andijan irrevocably refused to register his church. Tuichiev stated that in private conversation officials told him that they would not register the church because they were not interested in the spread of Christianity in Andijan. Tuichiev also claims that the work of the church is impossible without registration, since he as pastor had been repeatedly warned that he would be subject to administrative and even criminal punishment.

In February 2002 Tuichiev first received authorisation for his church to operate, then had the authorisation taken back. In March that year a meeting of residents, possibly under pressure from the authorities, decided that "inexpedient for a Christian church to operate". In September Tuichiev's Church was visited by a group of people claiming to be BBC and CNN journalists, but who appear to have been National Security Service (ex-KGB) officers, as both the BBC and CNN had no knowledge of these "journalists" (See F18News 14 March 2003).

"I am familiar with Tuichiev's problem," Kamal Kamilov, head of the Department for Non-Muslim Religions at the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Uzbek government, told Forum 18 on 8 August. Kamilov claims that Tuichiev's main problem is that he calls his church the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church, but the registered office of this denomination in Tashkent refuses to recognise Tuichiev's church. His church co-operates instead with the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church of South Korea. Also, according to Kamilov, Tuichiev had not submitted all the documents necessary for registration.

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