FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE, Oslo, Norway
https://www.forum18.org/
The right to believe, to worship and witness
The right to change one's belief or religion
The right to join together and express one's belief

5 December 2018

UZBEKISTAN: "Illegal Christian Wahhabi activity"

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18 (https://www.forum18.org)

Police raided Protestants enjoying a meal, searching the home without a warrant, confiscating a New Testament. Officials tried to pressure one guest to accuse the host and the pastor of holding "unauthorised religious meetings", threatening to take her two children and ordering her mother-in-law to beat her.

On 23 November, 12 police officers raided a home in Urgench [Urganch] in Uzbekistan's north-western Khorezm Region where Sharofat Allamova and her family were hosting several fellow-Protestants for a meal. After searching the home without a warrant and confiscating a New Testament, they questioned those present. Pastor Ahmadjon Nazarov suffered heart pains and had to be hospitalised after officers pressured him to sign a statement.

The following day, Captain Mukhammad Rakhimov, head of Urgench Police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department, summoned one of those present to the Mahalla Committee. There officials tried to pressure her to accuse the host and the pastor of holding "unauthorised religious meetings" (see below).

When she refused they threatened to deprive her of her two children and lodge a criminal case against her. When she still refused they summoned her mother-in-law and ordered her to beat her daughter-in-law until she signed a statement about what one officer called "illegal Christian Wahhabi activity" (see below).

Captain Rakhimov refused to answer any of Forum 18's questions. Asked why officers ordered and allowed the mother-in-law to assault her daughter-in-law, another officer who was present claimed to Forum 18: "There was no beating. Who said that?"

The mother-in-law then kicked her and her son out of the family home (see below).

Police took another local resident to the local Mahalla Committee after she visited the pastor's flat. Captain Rakhimov and other officers "mocked her, threatened her, and made her recite Islamic prayers", Protestants complained to Forum 18 (see below).

Protestants fear that police and prosecutors may be preparing further criminal or administrative charges against Pastor Nazarov and Allamova, the host of the meal raided by police (see below).

Police and State Security Service (SSS) secret police officers often raid communities as they hold meetings for worship, especially if such meetings take place in homes. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314)

In the first known case, officers of the National Guard – part of the military – joined a raid on a Baptist community in Tashkent as it was meeting for Sunday worship on 25 November. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2433)

Raid on home

On 23 November police raided the flat of Sharofat Allamova, a Protestant Christian in Urgench in Khorezm Region. The 12 police, only one of whom was in uniform, included local police officer Arslon Atayev and Captain Mukhammad Rakhimov, head of Urgench Police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department.

Allamova was having an evening meal with her two daughters and four friends, including the Pastor of her Church Ahmadjon Nazarov and another local Protestant Lolakhon Umarova, local Protestants who wish to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 28 November.

Police filmed everyone present, and took their personal details and addresses. Without the legally required search warrant officers searched the flat. They confiscated an Uzbek-language New Testament from Allamova, "which the police had confiscated twice before and had returned to Allamova".

Police cause Pastor Nazarov's hospitalisation

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2018

Police tried to force Pastor Nazarov to sign a police statement about their actions, but he refused. As a result of the police pressure he began to experience heart pains. An ambulance had to be called, and the ambulance crew gave him injections to stabilise hypertension. On 28 November Pastor Nazarov was admitted to Urgench Hospital, where he remains under treatment.

Officials have repeatedly targeted Christians in Urgench exercising their freedom of religion and belief. For example, in August 2017 police followed Pastor Nazarov and others from Urgench to Kungrad [Qunghirot] in the neighbouring Karakalpakstan [Qoraqalpoghiston] Region. Police then raided a meeting, searched the house, and confiscated various electronic devices and Christian religious materials including a Bible. A friend of the host who also present during the police raid was tortured, and multiple unfair trials of those present and fines followed. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2383)

Umarova threatened

On 24 November, the day after the raid, Captain Rakhimov ordered officials of Umarova's mahalla (residential area) committee to call her to the administration building at 3 pm, Protestants told Forum 18. When she arrived Captain Rakhimov had gathered Samobek Ibragimov, local Police Officer, Khakimjon (last name not given), the Chair of the Mahalla Committee, the local posbon and the local head of the state-controlled Women's Council.

Mahalla committees are key instruments in the regime's attempts to control all of society. Posbons are formally-appointed police informers whose role is to inform mahalla committees and police of any activity the state dislikes. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314)

Captain Rakhimov demanded that Umarova write a statement accusing Pastor Nazarov and Allamova of "organising unauthorised religious meetings in the area and inviting people to these meetings". Umarova refused to do this.

Captain Rakhimov repeatedly refused between 30 November and 4 December to answer Forum 18's questions about his conduct, each time putting the phone down as soon as Forum 18 introduced itself. Local police officer Ibragimov also refused to tell Forum 18 on 4 December why police tried to pressure Umarova to write a statement against Pastor Nazarov.

Captain Rakhimov then in the meeting began threatening Umarova that the police will take away her parental rights over her children, and also open a criminal case against her. When Umarova still refused to write the statement, Captain Rakhimov summoned her mother-in-law Saodatkhon Mavaripova to the Mahalla Committee.

Women in particular exercising their freedom of religion and belief are often targeted by male officials, including with the use of sexual violence (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314). Male officials have particularly targeted women who attend Pastor Nazarov's Church. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2383)

Umarova's family threatened

Captain Rakhimov then threatened Mavaripova. He said that unless Umarova signs the statement about what he called "illegal Christian Wahhabi activity" and because she participates in these "illegal meetings", Mavaripova will: be jailed; her family will be attacked in local newspapers and on television; and Captain Rakhimov will organise a social boycott of Mavaripova and her family.

Mother-in-law ordered to physically assault Umarova

Mavaripova was then ordered to physically assault Umarova, which she did repeatedly and demanded that Umarova write the statement the police want.

Umarova then wrote a statement that a police officer, in this case Captain Rakhimov, should not provoke and encourage hooliganism. She added that it is his duty to stop physical violence committed against her, and that she would be making a formal complaint about Rakhimov's illegal actions.

Local police officer Ibragimov refused to tell Forum 18 why he did not stop Mavaripova from physically assaulting Umarova, claiming: "There was no beating. Who said that?" When Forum 18 again described the attack Ibragimov witnessed and did not stop, he replied: "Please talk to Captain Rakhimov."

"Hooliganism", Uzbekistan's obligations

"Hooliganism" is an offence under Administrative Code Article 183, which has a maximum penalty of 15 days' jail. However, the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2018 - Page 2/5

kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity".

Under Article 6 of the Convention Uzbekistan is obliged to arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture or having acquiesced in torture. This applies to anyone acting in an official capacity, not only police officers. Under Article 4 Uzbekistan is obliged to try them under Criminal law which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature". (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314)

"Criminals walk free and the police instead target us"

Local Protestants commented to Forum 18 that "much criminal activity goes on in Khorezm, and problems of narcotic drugs and prostitution are huge. But criminals walk free and the police instead target us."

Local Protestants also told Forum 18 that they have many times made written complaints to Urgench City Prosecutor, the national Prosecutor General and the Interior Ministry about "Captain Rakhimov's criminal actions". Yet no investigation or trial has taken place.

Captain Rakhimov and many other officials frequently systemically violate Uzbekistan's binding international legal obligations with impunity, and illegally also witness other officials doing this without stopping the violations. Recent examples include: raiding and threatening Urgench Baptists with criminal prosecution for meeting for worship at Easter (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2380); the failure to bring to justice any of the officials who tortured a Jehovah's Witness and made death threats against him. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2374)

Alim Nabiyev, Head of the General Prosecutor's Office's International Relations Section, refused to say why officials who violate Uzbekistan's international legal obligations are not brought to justice. "You cannot cast doubt on our whole law-enforcement system based on the words of some individuals," he claimed to Forum 18 on 3 December. "If they are unhappy about something let them write to us."

When Forum 18 pointed out that the General Prosecutor's Office has already received written complaints, Nabiyev responded: "We have so many complaints and correspondence." He refused to talk more to Forum 18.

Interior Ministry officials, who refused to give their names, repeatedly refused to answer when Forum 18 asked on 3 December why officials who violate Uzbekistan's international legal obligations are not brought to justice. For example, officials who answered the phone of Lieutenant Colonel Doniyor Kadyrov, Head of the Ministry's Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department, said either he was busy or "somewhere and we don't know when he will be back".

Captain Rakhimov refused to talk to Forum 18. Each time Forum 18 called him between 30 November and 5 December he put the phone down as soon as Forum 18 introduced itself.

Umarova escapes

As the interrogation and threats continued, Umarova ran out of the Mahalla Committee building. She evaded Captain Rakhimov and mahalla officials' attempts to catch her.

Captain Rakhimov went to the house where Umarova lives with Mavaripova, but could not find Umarova. However, he did find Umarova's nine-year old son. He threatened the boy unless he told police where his mother was. But the boy did not know.

Mavaripova then evicted Umarova and her grandson from the house, and they are now staying elsewhere.

Major Khamro Masimov, Head of Khorezm Regional Police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department, summoned Umarova on 5 December and asked her to write a statement about what happened to her. The same day, Major Masimov refused to talk to Forum 18, putting the phone down each time Forum 18 introduced itself.

Threats against other local residents

In other city districts, the police with the local mahalla committees ordered other people to write statements against Pastor Nazarov, Protestants told Forum 18.

A local resident called Adyl gave police 12 Christian books, including an Uzbek-language Bible and Injil (New Testament), and wrote in his statement that Pastor Nazarov gave these books to him.

Captain Rakhimov stopped another local resident, Rano Abdullayeva, after she visited Pastor Nazarov's flat on 25 November. Officers then took her to the local Mahalla Committee, where Captain Rakhimov and other officers "mocked her, threatened her, and

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2018 - Page 3/5

made her recite Islamic prayers".

"I don't know, I was sitting in a different room"?

Ikram Rakhimov, Chair of Abdullayeva's local Mahalla Committee, claimed to Forum 18 on 4 December that "it was police Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department officers who invited Abdullayeva". Asked why she was mocked, threatened, and made to recite Islamic prayers, Rakhimov claimed: "I don't know, I was sitting in a different room, and I don't what went on in the room." He then refused to talk further to Forum 18.

Local police officer Kudrat Akhmedov participated in Abdullayeva's questioning, but was also keen to deny any responsibility. Asked why officials mocked and threatened Abdullayeva, and made her recite Islamic prayers, he claimed: "It has nothing to do with me. I did not question her."

Akhmedov then justified officials' actions by claiming that "Abdullayeva's name is on the Preventative Register of extremists of Urgench Police, which is why Captain Rakhimov summoned and questioned her".

The Preventative Register facilitates wide-ranging arbitrary official punishments of anyone on the List, and allows many state bodies to put anyone on the List (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314).

Local police officer Akhmedov refused to answer when asked why Abdullayeva is on the Preventative Register and whether Christians are considered by the authorities to be "extremists". He then claimed that "I have nothing against Christians".

New charges?

Police may be preparing Criminal Code charges against Pastor Nazarov and Administrative Code charges against Allamova, Protestants think. Police have not yet told Nazarov and Allamova what they will do.

On 25 July police raided Pastor Nazarov's home, and confiscated handmade Christian post cards, Nazarov's notebook with sermons, a certificate and letter of thanks given to him by the local old people's home for visiting their residents for 18 years, a similar certificate given to Nazarov for visiting Khiva home for people with learning difficulties, and other notebooks.

Pastor Nazarov was then on 12 September tried under Administrative Code Article 184-2 ("Illegal production, storage, or import into Uzbekistan, with the intent to distribute or actual distribution, of religious materials by physical persons"). Judge Umurbek Khasanov of Khorezm Regional Administrative Court fined him 184,300 Soms, one month's minimum monthly wage. He also ordered the destruction of the religious materials confiscated from Nazarov.

Khorezm Regional Administrative Court officials (no names were given) refused to talk to Forum 18 on 5 December about Pastor Nazarov's 12 September fine or put Forum 18 through to Judge Khasanov.

As this is a second similar charge within one year, a prosecution can take place under Criminal Code Article 244-3 ("Illegal production, storage, import or distribution of religious literature"). If there has been a previous Administrative Code conviction, punishment is a fine of between 100 and 200 times the minimum monthly wage, or up to three years' corrective labour (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314). (END)

Full reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Uzbekistan (http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&religion=all&country=33)

For more background, see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2314)

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1351)

Follow us on Twitter @Forum_18 (http://twitter.com/forum_18)

Follow us on Facebook @Forum18NewsService (http://www.facebook.com/Forum18NewsService)

All Forum 18 text may be referred to, quoted from, or republished in full, if Forum 18 is credited as the source.

All photographs that are not Forum 18's copyright are attributed to the copyright owner. If you reuse any photographs from Forum 18's website, you must seek permission for any reuse from the copyright owner or abide by the copyright terms the copyright owner has chosen.

© Forum 18 News Service. All rights reserved. ISSN 1504-2855.

If you need to contact F18News, please email us at:
f18news @ editor.forum18.org

Forum 18
Postboks 6603
Rodeløkka
N-0502 Oslo
NORWAY

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2018 - Page 5/5