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## KYRGYZSTAN: Jehovah's Witness book ban in court, criminal case, secret police ban request

By Felix Corley, Forum 18 (<https://www.forum18.org>)

*Jehovah's Witness teaching "is contradictory and oriented towards people who don't know the fundamentals of religion and the Bible" and based on "the personal views of the founders of the organisation who misinterpret the Bible", NSC secret police chief Kamchybek Tashiyev claimed to the General Prosecutor in July. He called for their literature to be banned and a ban on the entire organisation to be considered (while the NSC continues a criminal case). Without informing Jehovah's Witnesses, the General Prosecutor's Office lodged a suit to Bishkek's Pervomaisky District Court for 13 books and 6 videos to be declared "extremist". The case is due to resume in court on Thursday morning (2 December).*

A suit from the General Prosecutor's Office to ban 13 Jehovah's Witness publications and 6 videos as "extremist" is due to resume in a Bishkek court on Thursday morning (2 December). "Interested parties" in the case are the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police – which is pushing for Jehovah's Witnesses to be banned in Kyrgyzstan – as well as the Interior Ministry and the State Commission for Religious Affairs. The General Prosecutor's Office gave Jehovah's Witnesses only a few days' notice of the hearing, with access to the full documents only at the first hearing.

The 16-page General Prosecutor's Office suit – seen by Forum 18 – quotes word for word a claim by the Head of the NSC secret police Kamchybek Tashiyev that Jehovah's Witness teaching "is contradictory and oriented towards people who don't know the fundamentals of religion and the Bible" and that it is based on "the personal views of the founders of the organisation who misinterpret the Bible" (see below).

The suit comes as the NSC secret police continues to investigate a criminal case opened in December 2019 against so far unspecified representatives of the Jehovah's Witness national centre in Bishkek on charges of inciting hatred. The secret police raided the centre in March 2021, seizing documents and electronic devices (see below).

In July, the Head of the NSC secret police Tashiyev wrote to the General Prosecutor calling for not only Jehovah's Witness literature to be banned, but the community as a whole. He claimed, without giving evidence, that Jehovah's Witnesses "at various times and in various countries have been accused of rape, child kidnapping, murder, incitement to murder and suicide, desertion, fraud, theft, racism, extortion, bodily harm, prostitution, etc. The activity of Jehovah's Witnesses is banned in Russia, China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Iraq and in a number of other countries" (see below).

"We believe that the General Prosecutor's Office initiated the civil case to declare some publications 'extremist' primarily to strengthen the criminal investigation and pave the way for an eventual claim to liquidate the national centre and ban the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyrgyzstan," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

They fear that "if the court finds the centre guilty of 'extremist activity', the authorities may begin targeting any one of the 5,200 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country for 'participating in' or 'organising' the activity of an extremist organisation".

Such a ban would be against Kyrgyzstan's legally-binding international human rights obligations. The country acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1994, and ICCPR Article 19 ("Freedoms of opinion and expression") states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his [sic] choice". As General Comment 34 on this Article (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ed34b562.html>) puts it: "All forms of opinion are protected, including opinions of a (..) moral or religious nature. It is incompatible with paragraph 1 to criminalize the holding of an opinion. The harassment, intimidation or stigmatization of a person, including arrest, detention, trial or imprisonment for reasons of the opinions they may hold, constitutes a violation of article 19" (see below).

Jehovah's Witnesses struggles to gain state registration have been accompanied by false allegations against Jehovah's Witnesses, the use of torture against Jehovah's Witnesses, and NSC secret police and ordinary police officers repeatedly trying to stop defence lawyers participating in the appeal hearing, and invading a judges' deliberation room (see below).

Gulnaz Isayeva, Deputy Director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA), distanced her agency from the General Prosecutor's Office and NSC secret police allegations. "We would have to study their arguments to see if there is a basis for this," she told Forum 18. "If they [Jehovah's Witnesses] were extremist, we wouldn't have registered them."

No one at the General Prosecutor's Office or the NSC secret police would discuss the banning suit or the criminal case with Forum 18.

The authorities refuse to allow the Ahmadi Muslim community to function. The Falun Gong spiritual movement was banned as "extremist", was later able to register as a public organisation but two months later the Justice Ministry cancelled the registration. The authorities have also banned as "extremist" the film "I am Gay and Muslim" (see below).

Meanwhile, the new Criminal Code and the Violations Code both come into force on 1 December. The new Violations Code introduces fines for offering religious materials from door to door or in state or municipal institutions, and continues fines for exercising freedom of religion or belief without state registration (see below).

Isayeva of the State Commission for Religious Affairs defended the continuing punishments for exercising freedom of religion or belief without state permission. "It's in the law," she told Forum 18 (see below).

New Religion Law to come?

The State Commission for Religious Affairs is preparing a new Religion Law. The United Nations Development Programme's Bishkek office sponsored public discussions of the draft in Bishkek on 23 November and in the seven regions of the country. As of 30 November, no text of any draft law in either Kyrgyz or Russian yet appears on the Justice Ministry's website of draft laws open for public discussion.

Previous attempts to draft a new Religion Law have stalled. In 2017 a State Commission draft brought to Parliament proposed among other restrictions that: all religious literature be subject to state censorship, sharing beliefs be banned, and 500 adult citizens in one location would be required to apply for state registration (and so permission to exist) of a religious community ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2283](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2283)).

Book and video-banning suit now in court

On 17 November, Deputy General Prosecutor Kumarbek Toktakunov sent a suit to Bishkek's Pervomaisky District Court asking for it to ban 13 Jehovah's Witness books (3 in Kyrgyz and 10 in Russian) and 6 videos as "extremist".

The Court assigned the case to Judge Venera Aydaraliyeva. The first, brief hearing was held on 29 November, a court official told Forum 18 on 29 November. Jehovah's Witness representatives asked for an adjournment to allow them to study the documentation which was only made available to them at the brief hearing. The case is due to resume at 11:00 am on 2 December, the court official added.

As well as the Prosecutor's Office representative, who the court official identified as Azatbek Temirbayev, representatives of "interested parties" – the NSC secret police, the Interior Ministry and the State Commission for Religious Affairs – were also present in court. The official said it was unknown how many hearings the case will need and when it might conclude.

Gulnaz Isayeva, Deputy Director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, told Forum 18 that its lawyers were participating in the case after receiving notice from the court.

Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18 that they only learnt of the General Prosecutor's Office suit on 23 November. This allowed them little time to prepare for the hearings. Only at 4 pm on 26 November did officials tell them that the first hearing would be on 29 November.

No one at the General Prosecutor's Office in Bishkek would discuss the banning suit with Forum 18 on 29 November. Nor was Forum 18 able to reach its representative who is taking part in the hearings.

General Prosecutor's Office claims

The 16-page General Prosecutor's Office suit – seen by Forum 18 – notes that it draws on claims from the NSC secret police. The suit – quoting word for word a claim by the Head of the NSC secret police Kamchybek Tashiyev – claims that Jehovah's Witness teaching "is contradictory and oriented towards people who don't know the fundamentals of religion and the Bible" and that it is based on "the personal views of the founders of the organisation who misinterpret the Bible".

The General Prosecutor's Office suit points to the criminal case opened against so far unspecified representatives of the Jehovah's

Witness national centre in December 2019 (see below) and the March 2021 NSC secret police raid on the centre. It also cites four "expert analyses" conducted by the Justice Ministry's Judicial Expert Analysis Centre, two on 30 December 2019 (one of 3 pages, the other of 5 pages), one on 8 April 2020 (of 17 pages) and the fourth on 6 May 2021 (of 33 pages).

Such "expert analyses" have long been used against the exercise of freedom of religion and belief, and have been strongly criticised by lawyers, human rights defenders, and members of religious communities ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013)).

The "analyses" claim that the books contain "negative attitudes" to other faiths, express the superiority and uniqueness of the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses, and "call in hidden form not to obey laws and the norms of a secular state". It says they "incite religious enmity (discord).

The General Prosecutor's Office suit, citing the "experts", also included a list copied from a Russian blog of 63 things Jehovah's Witnesses are supposedly unable to do. These include laughing at obscene jokes, getting fat, attending rock concerts and throwing rice at weddings. The suit attributes the list – without any explanation – to "Doctor Bergman".

Russian websites – including those of Aleksandr Dvorkin and that of the Russian Orthodox Church in Belarus – identify the widely-copied list as a translation from the 1992 book "Jehovah's Witnesses and the Problems of Mental Illness" by an American writer Jerry Bergman, a prolific writer against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Binding international human rights law obligations

Kyrgyzstan acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1994, and ICCPR Article 19 ("Freedom of opinion and expression") states: "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his [sic] choice". As General Comment 34 on this Article (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ed34b562.html>) puts it: "All forms of opinion are protected, including opinions of a (..) moral or religious nature. It is incompatible with paragraph 1 to criminalize the holding of an opinion. The harassment, intimidation or stigmatization of a person, including arrest, detention, trial or imprisonment for reasons of the opinions they may hold, constitutes a violation of article 19."

Similarly, the OSCE / Council of Europe Venice Commission Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities (<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/9/139046.pdf>) note that under international human rights law: "State permission may not be made a condition for the exercise of the freedom of religion or belief. The freedom of religion or belief, whether manifested alone or in community with others, in public or in private, cannot be made subject to prior registration or other similar procedures, since it belongs to human beings and communities as rights holders and does not depend on official authorization."

The Guidelines also note: "The state must respect the autonomy of religious or belief communities .. In the regime that governs access to legal personality, states should observe their obligations by ensuring that national law leaves it to the religious or belief community itself to decide on its leadership, its internal rules, the substantive content of its beliefs .. In particular, the state should refrain from a substantive as opposed to a formal review of the statute and character of a religious organization."

General Prosecutor's Office suit

The General Prosecutor's Office suit asked Bishkek's Pervomaisky District Court to ban the Jehovah's Witness materials and to assign enforcement of the ban to the NSC secret police, the ordinary police, the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA), and the Digital Development Ministry's Communications, Regulation, and Oversight Service.

The General Prosecutor's Office suit "repeats very similar accusations to those employed in Russia: a combination of theological assertions, total falsehoods, misrepresentations and trivia presented as matters of substance," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. They added that before the 29 November hearing they were not allowed to see the "expert analyses" or to know who the "experts" who had prepared them were.

An official of the Justice Ministry's Judicial Expert Analysis Centre, who did not give her name, said that it cannot give Forum 18 copies of the "expert analyses" it prepared on the Jehovah's Witness materials. "Analyses can only be shared with those who commissioned them," she told Forum 18 from Bishkek on 29 November. Forum 18 asked for the "analyses" in writing the same day, but received no response by the end of the working day in Bishkek of 30 November.

A human rights defender notes that many prosecutions for "extremist" literature depend on "expert analyses". "The main issue is that for any arrests or bans to be legitimate, there has to be a court-based decision that finds this literature 'extremist' – which is what the General Prosecutor's Office is apparently trying to do [in the Jehovah's Witness case]," the human rights defender told Forum 18 from Bishkek on 30 November. "They have to base their decision on a linguistic and semantic analysis, which is where the problem

lies, as the quality of these analyses is severely lacking." Even when such "expert analyses" have been placed before a court, courts have often allowed their use to suppress the exercise of human rights ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013)).

Jehovah's Witnesses have met Zhayilbek Dadiyev, the Head of the Citizens' Appeals Sector of the Presidential Administration, to express their concern about the banning suit and the continuing criminal case.

Asked about the banning suit, Dadiyev said that he is well informed about it. "But we don't have the right to interfere in court cases or participate in court hearings," he told Forum 18 on 30 November.

#### Criminal case, raid

On 4 December 2019, the NSC secret police opened a criminal case against so far unspecified members of the Jehovah's Witness national centre in Bishkek under Article 313, Part 2, Point 2 of the Criminal Code then in force. This punishes "Incitement of racial, ethnic, national, religious or inter-regional enmity (discord) conducted by a group of people in a prior conspiracy" with jail terms.

Article 313 of the old Criminal Code is similar to Article 330 of the new Criminal Code which comes into force on 1 December 2021. Any trial would take place under the provisions in force at the time the "crime" was committed.

No individual defendants are reportedly named as part of the criminal case. Jehovah's Witnesses fear that any guilty verdict would have wider consequences. "A guilty verdict would likely lead to closing the centre, dissolving its activities, likely confiscating its assets, and subsequent prosecutions and imprisonment of anyone who was deemed to be continuing those activities," they told Forum 18.

Zhayilbek Dadiyev of the Presidential Administration confirmed to Forum 18 that the criminal case had been opened by the NSC secret police after an appeal from an individual.

As part of the criminal case, the NSC secret police raided the Jehovah's Witness national centre in Bishkek and the adjoining residence on 25 March 2021. Officers seized documents and electronic equipment from both. "After protests they returned the confiscated materials within one day," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18.

The General Prosecutor's Office banning suit (see above) notes that the four "expert analyses" of Jehovah's Witness publications and videos were commissioned as part of the criminal case.

"We cannot review the documentation in the criminal case file because the investigation is ongoing," Jehovah's Witnesses told Forum 18. "However, we find a clue in the search warrant which served as the basis for the National Security Committee raids in March 2021, which stated that 'pre-trial proceedings' are being conducted 'on the basis of information about the presence of signs of extremism and incitement of religious hatred in the activities of representatives of the religious organisation, the Religious Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyrgyzstan'."

"We believe that the General Prosecutor's Office initiated the civil case to declare some publications 'extremist' primarily to strengthen the criminal investigation and pave the way for an eventual claim to liquidate the national headquarters and ban the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyrgyzstan," Jehovah's Witnesses added.

On 7 July 2021, Jehovah's Witnesses contacted the Ombudsperson's Office in Bishkek to express concern about the continuing criminal investigation. The Ombudsperson's Office then contacted the General Prosecutor's Office. On 1 October, the Deputy Ombudsperson responded to the Jehovah's Witness national centre saying that the criminal case is still open.

The spokesperson for the Ombudsperson's Office told Forum 18 on 30 November that all questions should be sent in writing. That day Forum 18 in writing what steps the Ombudsperson's Office had taken or would take to protect the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses to exercise freedom of religion or belief. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Bishkek of 30 November.

#### Secret police banning request

On 29 July 2021, Kamchybek Tashiyev, the head of the NSC secret police, sent a letter to the General Prosecutor Kurmankul Zulushev (seen by Forum 18) making various allegations against Jehovah's Witnesses.

Tashiyev claimed, without giving evidence, that Jehovah's Witnesses "at various times and in various countries have been accused of rape, child kidnapping, murder, incitement to murder and suicide, desertion, fraud, theft, racism, extortion, bodily harm, prostitution, etc. The activity of Jehovah's Witnesses is banned in Russia, China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Iraq and in a number of other countries."

Noting the "expert analyses" of Jehovah's Witness materials undertaken as part of the criminal case, Tashiyev insisted that these publications incite "religious hatred (discord) and propaganda of exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of citizens on the basis of their

religious views", a "hostile attitude" towards people of other faiths, and calls for individuals to refuse to perform civic duties prescribed by law.

Tashiyev also claimed that "according to doctors, negative psychological changes may be caused by being a member of this organisation". He cited a complaint by a mother that her 41-year-old daughter, allegedly a former Jehovah's Witness, is "in constant need of medical care" after suffering "psychological harm" and "negative changes to her psychological state". He then quotes two television programmes where alleged former Jehovah's Witnesses spoke out.

Tashiyev also mentioned a demonstration outside the Jehovah's Witness national centre in Bishkek on 14 February 2021 which included "victims", as well as "citizens' collective appeals to state agencies about the need to take measures against the uncontrolled [Jehovah's Witness] activity".

Tashiyev asked the General Prosecutor "in order to forestall negative consequences from the illegal activity" of Jehovah's Witnesses as well as "to prevent damage to national security" not only to ban items of their literature but to consider a ban on the entire organisation. He attached 142 pages of "non-secret" material.

The NSC secret police refused to put Forum 18 through to Tashiyev. "There's no way you can talk to him," the duty officer told Forum 18 on 30 November. He referred Forum 18 to the spokesperson. However, the spokesperson – who did not give his name – refused to answer any questions by phone about Tashiyev's letter to the General Prosecutor seeking the banning of Jehovah's Witness literature and asking for a ban on the organisation to be considered, or about why the NSC is conducting a criminal case. He asked for questions in writing.

On 30 November, Forum 18 resent the questions it had already sent in writing on 26 November. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Bishkek of 30 November.

#### Jehovah's Witnesses' registration struggles

Officials have prevented many Jehovah's Witness communities – especially in the south – from gaining state registration. Of the 41 communities the State Commission for Religious Affairs has allowed to register, only one is in Jalal-Abad Region, only one is in Naryn Region and none are in the city of Osh, Osh Region or Batken Region.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Community in Osh was given registration in late 2018, not as an independent community but as a branch of their national centre in the capital Bishkek ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2491](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2491)). This came after 10 years of the community attempting to gain registration as an independent community. In the course of their attempts, two Jehovah's Witnesses, Nadezhda Sergienko and her daughter Oksana Koryakina, were placed under house arrest for many months after their March 2013 arrest for alleged swindling but in reality apparently because of the Osh community's attempts to gain registration ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1819](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1819)). Judge Sheraly Kamchibekov acquitted the two women of all charges, telling Forum 18 in November 2014 that "it was a fabricated case" ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2015](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2015)). After a long legal battle the case was closed in 2016, but hearings in the prosecutions attempt to reopen the case continued into 2017 ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2248](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2248)).

In the course of the protracted legal battle NSC secret police and ordinary police officers repeatedly tried to stop the two women's lawyers participating in the appeal hearing, and then invaded the judges' deliberation room ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2116](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2116)) when they realised that the women might be set free. Under international law some of the police should not have been at liberty, as they were involved in torturing Jehovah's Witnesses who met for worship in Osh ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2112](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2112)). Officials refused to tell Forum 18 if the rule of law would be defended and official perpetrators punished.

However, Jehovah's Witness communities in Batken Region still do not have registration, despite a March 2019 ruling from the United Nations Human Rights Committee (CCPR/C/125/D/2312/2013 (<https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/125/D/2312/2013>)). In July 2019 the head of the State Commission for Religious Affairs section responsible for religious organisation registration claimed to Forum 18 that the communities would be registered "if their documents are in order" ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2491](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2491)).

#### Ahmadi Muslim community not allowed to exist

In July 2011 the State Commission for Religious Affairs refused to re-register the Ahmadi Muslim community after the NSC secret police told it that Ahmadi Muslims are a "dangerous movement and against traditional Islam". The General Prosecutor's Office then sought in 2012 to have the community included on a list of banned organisations as "extremist" ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013)). Despite multiple serious violations of due legal process, on 10 July 2014 the Supreme Court rejected an appeal against two lower courts' support of the State Commission for Religious Affairs' refusal to give state registration to the Ahmadi Muslim community.

Ahmadi Muslims have not met together for worship since July 2011 ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2491](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2491)). All other Muslim communities are state-controlled via the Muslim Board. "We consulted with our world leaders and local leaders, and decided that we should not be publicly active for the time being and not meet for worship as a community," an Ahmadi Muslim, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 in June 2019. They added that: "If we see goodwill towards us from the authorities, of course we would love to register again and meet for public worship. At the moment we only pray individually in our private homes."

Asked on 30 November 2021 if the State Commission for Religious Affairs would register an Ahmadi Muslim community if it applied, SCRA Deputy Director Isayeva told Forum 18 that she could not discuss a situation that had not yet happened.

#### Earlier film censorship

The film "I am Gay and Muslim" was scheduled to be shown in September 2012 at the Bishkek Bir Duino (One World) human rights film festival. The film, by Dutch filmmaker Chris Belloni, follows the life of several gay Moroccan men who reflect on their orientation and Islam. After a protest from the then-acting Chief Mufti to the NSC secret police, the NSC asked the State Commission for Religious Affairs to conduct an "expert analysis" ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013)) of the film.

The same day the State Commission for Religious Affairs concluded that the film was "extremist" ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1781](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1781)) under the 2005 "Anti-Extremism" Law, and later that day the NSC confiscated the film before it could be shown, and gave film festival organiser Toleskan Ismailova a warning that if she showed the film she faced possible prosecution ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013)) under Criminal Code Article 299 ("Incitement of national, racial, or religious hatred").

General Prosecutor Aida Salyanova also telephoned Ismailova the same day to warn her not to show the film, and the next day the film was banned, and the State Communications Agency was ordered to block internet access to the film ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1781](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1781)). Attempts to challenge the ban on the film and the warning issued to Ismailova failed ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013)).

The film remains on the list of banned "extremist" materials on the Justice Ministry website.

Falun Gong banned as "extremist" in 2005, registered in 2018, then swiftly de-registered

A Falun Gong association was registered in July 2004, but - under Chinese pressure - was liquidated as "extremist" in February 2005. On 26 January 2018 the Chui-Bishkek Justice Department in the capital Bishkek registered a Falun Gong association ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2491](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2491)). However, on 20 March 2018 the Justice Department issued a decree cancelling the registration, according to the Justice Ministry register of legal entities.

#### New Violations Code, Criminal Code come into force

Both a new Violations Code and the new Criminal Code come into force on 1 December. They replace the earlier Codes adopted in 2017 and which came into force on 1 January 2019.

Parliament, the Zhogorku Kenesh, adopted the new Codes and President Sadyr Japarov signed them into law on 28 October 2021. He had sent back earlier versions of the Codes.

Article 141 of the new Violations Code punishes "Obstruction of the exercise of the right to freedom of conscience and belief" with fines of 100 Financial Indicators (FIs) on individuals, 280 FIs on organisations, and 150 FIs on officials.

One Financial Indicator is 100 Soms (11 Norwegian Kroner, 1 Euro or 1.2 US Dollars). A fine of 100 FIs, 10,000 Soms, is equivalent to about three weeks' average wages for those in formal work.

Article 142 of the new Violations Code punishes violations of the Religion Law, including by conducting unapproved religious education and interference of religious organisations in state affairs.

Part 3 of Article 142 punishes "Distribution of literature, print, audio and video materials of religious nature in public places, as well as by going round homes, state or municipal institutions" with fines of 55 FIs on individuals and 170 FIs on organisations.

Part 4 of Article 142 punishes "Carrying out religious activity without registration at the executive state body for religious affairs" with fines of 75 FIs on individuals and 230 FIs on organisations.

Article 477 of the Violations Code assigns cases under Article 142 to the State Commission for Religious Affairs.

SCRA Deputy Director Isayeva defended the continuing punishments for exercising freedom of religion or belief without state permission. "It's in the law," she told Forum 18. (END)

More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Kyrgyzstan (<https://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?country=30>)

For background information, see Forum 18's Kyrgyzstan religious freedom survey ([https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2013](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2013))

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments ([https://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article\\_id=1351](https://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1351))

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