



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Religious Freedom in Tajikistan:
Policy Options for a Country of Particular Concern

Fred Davie, USCIRF Vice Chair:

Thank you, Chair Cooper, and I would like to join in welcoming everyone to today's hearing. In addition to the concerns raised by Chair Cooper, over the past year the government of Tajikistan has implemented new methods of persecution specifically aimed at the country's Ismaili Shi'a Muslim population largely located in the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region, or GBAO. As the government has targeted peaceful protesters and conducted large scale military operations in the region, it has also enacted new forms of religious repression, including closing religious schools and community centers, and shuttering religious bookstores that sold Ismaili literature. It has fined individuals for holding private prayer meetings in their homes and has required families to remove from their homes pictures of their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan.

USCIRF carefully documents the arbitrary imprisonment of individuals for the expression of their faith through our Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

Victims List. We are actively monitoring the cases of nine people currently imprisoned in Tajikistan for their belief. One example is Ismaili Muslim cleric Muzaffar Davlatmirov, who last year was detained and sentenced to five years in prison after officiating funeral services for protesters killed by the government.

Another recent example is 71-year-old Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov, who was sentenced to prison for "inciting religious hatred" after he shared his faith in public. He was just released this past April after serving out his full sentence of four years.

If you know of any individuals who have been targeted due to their faith-based activity or advocacy in Tajikistan and should be included on USCIRF's FoRB Victims List, I invite you to visit the USCIRF website and submit information for us to review.

I will now turn it back over to Chair Cooper.