



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Working session 10: Freedom of thought, conscience,  
religion or belief.

## Religious Freedom in some OSCE countries

Moderator, distinguished guests, thank you for giving me the floor.

Open Doors International is advocating for full freedom of religion or belief for all, however, we are concentrating our efforts on those countries where Christians are persecuted or discriminated against.

Open Doors is participating in several inter-faith platforms such as the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID).

**Kazakhstan** revived its plans for new religion laws in order “to bring order to our house” as president Nazarbayev put it in a speech on September 1, 2011. The laws came into force October 26, 2011 and were even enforced before. Unfortunately, the country did not seek assistance from OSCE or took into account the review of the quite similar draft of 2008. Even Ambassador Lenarcic’s remark on September 29, 2011, showing his great concern, were widely ignored.

Kazakhstan’s claim that the law is in no way intended to limit the right to freedom of belief has to be opposed. Several religious communities and leaders in Kazakhstan have been punished for non-registered religious activities and there was a considerable increase in raids and confiscations of religious books.

In addition, Uzbek religious refugee Makset Djabbarbergenov who sought refuge in Kazakhstan in 2007, was detained September 5, 2012. He is still wanted by Nukus authorities, among other accusations, for producing, storing and distributing religious



literature. A court ordered the detention period to last 40 days, which means it will end on October 15. An extradition would mean that he faces a court trial in Uzbekistan on two charges dealing with an alleged contempt of religion laws, facing a harsh punishment. The UNHCR Almaty office acknowledged him and his family as early as 26 February 2008 refugee status. The certificate issued notes "As a refugee, he is a person of concern to the UNHCR, and should, in particular, be protected from forcible return to a country, where he would face threats to his life or freedom." I urge the authorities to respect his status as refugee as clarified by UNHCR and not to extradite him to Uzbekistan.

In **Turkmenistan**, Ilmurad Nurliev was released in February after four years imprisonment for faith-related reasons. We are grateful for the amnesty granted by President Berdimuhamedov. But as still laws apply which ban unregistered religious activity, including people meeting together for worship in private homes and censor religious literature, we want to take the opportunity to ask the Turkmen government to consider a review of these laws according to international Human Rights standards.

Mr. Moderator, in **Uzbekistan** Tohar Haydarov, was sentenced to 10 years in March 2010, allegedly for drug possession; a charge believers from his church say is completely fabricated. Open Doors calls for his immediate release

Registration requirements still make illegal in fact all non-traditional faith groups. In recent months there were increased reports on raids and confiscations, among them bibles in Russian language and a 17<sup>th</sup> century Christian book called "The Pilgrim's Progress" which shows how arbitrary these laws are applied. We therefore urge the Uzbek government to review its legislation.

Finally, allow me to say two sentences on **Tajikistan**. Laws from 2011 in fact ban religious education for children and add complementary articles to the Penal Code. In July 2012, further changes to the Administration Code were made stating that religious education abroad will only be allowed if the person concerned completed a domestic state-licensed religious education. This rule discriminates against all smaller, especially non-traditional religious communities as they do not have a domestic education center.

Distinguished delegates, with these examples, I can just call upon you all to work towards full freedom of religion or belief in the OSCE region respectfully yet decisively and with the necessary sense of urgency.

Thank you for your attention,

Dr. Daniel Ottenberg