

Kazakhstan Destroys Bibles, Uzbekistan Attacks Convert
By BosNewsLife News Center
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ASTANA/TASHKENT/BUDAPEST - A court in Kazakhstan has ordered the destruction of 121 pieces of Christian literature, including Bibles, while in neighboring Uzbekistan an elderly convert from Islam is in "great distress" after police raided his home, Christians said Thursday, March 21.

Vyacheslav Cherkasov, a street evangelist from the Kazakhstan's city of Shchuchinsk, was reportedly detained by police on October 20 last year for offering Christian literature to passers-by in the street.

Officers confiscated his suitcase containing Bibles, children's Bibles and other books and leaflets about the Christian faith, said Forum 18, an advocacy group investigating the case.

On March 5 the court said the confiscated material should be destroyed, in what is believed to be the first such ruling since Kazakhstan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Cherkasov was also ordered to pay 86,550 Tenge (US\$574) well above the average one month's wage in Kazakhstan on charges of "violating the rules" regarding "importing, publishing and distribution of religious literature" which came into force in 2011 as part of a harsh new Religion Law.

AUTOCRATIC PRESIDENT

The legislation was introduced under the autocratic President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has been in power virtually unchallenged since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Cherkasov, who was previously harassed by police, has lodged an appeal, trial observers said.

The state Agency of Religious Affairs (ARA) has reportedly defended the ruling saying they are not "bothered by having to destroy religious literature".

Local Council of Churches Baptists said in published remarks: "We were shocked - this is sacrilege and illegality".

The latest incident is part of a wider crackdown by authorities on devoted Christians in Central Asia, rights activists say, with reports that in neighboring Uzbekistan an elderly man was attacked by security forces.

OFFICERS SHOUTING

"The officers shouted at the woman and her youngest son, a recent convert, and confiscated literature and CDs," said Barnabas Fund, an advocacy group supporting Christians in heavily Islamic nations.

"They searched for her oldest son, who is a church leader, but he was not at home," the group said, without providing more details amid apparent security concerns.

The incident, which happened late in the evening March 14, "appears to be part of a wider police crackdown on Christian converts," the group explained. "Barnabas Fund is aware of raids at the homes of at least another three converts from Islam."

The crackdown has been linked to President Islam Karimov perceived ruthless repression of what he views as religious extremists.

He has ruled the former Soviet nation for over two decades. Karimov. He won another in elections in December 2007, which opponents dismissed as rigged.

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