

Letter

Religion issues in Central Asia

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DESCRIPTION

Despite the liberties declared by each Central Asian state following their independence declarations in 1991, religious freedom has been restricted as a result of multiple legislative amendments. Despite substantial disparities between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the one hand, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the other, all authorities are becoming more and more rigorous on religion issues.

These reforms began in 1990's in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan's perestroika-era liberal legislation has been strengthened after 1995; it looks very similar to Uzbekistan issue, happened in 1998. Christian communities in both states have had a difficult time being registered with the judiciary. Religious education is subjected to severe restrictions; with his rigorously regulated practice, it is more disseminated at home, as it was during the Soviet era. Moreover, there is no religious literature. In Turkmenistan, some Orthodox churches have stores that sell mostly icons and ceremonial artefacts, while Bibles and other religious materials are difficult to come by. Foreign religious literature is usually seized by the police upon the arrival into the nation. Members of Christian communities have difficulties in leaving the nation to attend the meetings of their own movement. All contacts with other countries are further hampered by the systematic surveillance of all forms of speech and communication, such as the Internet. People of Turkmen or Uzbek origin who convert to Protestantism face, having immediate pressure from their surroundings and political officials in these two republics, in particular in the Uzbek regions of Karakalpakstan and Khorezm.

Various modes of administrative pressure

Registration procedures for Christian communities have once again become one of the principal methods of official pressure, as they were during Soviet era. When organisations

failed to meet the conditions, registration was denied, in most of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan regions. The legal framework was rapidly exceeded, particularly in other republics where the law did not proved as effective in putting an end to potentially dangerous movements; some communities were not registered while meetings held in all conditions. Particular attention has been paid to foreign movements accused of proselytism, such as Presbyterian churches, charismatic organizations, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Some organisations have even been denied registration due to the presence of a foreign head.

Religion in post-Soviet Central Asia: new context, new role?

The aim of Central Asian authorities to control the risks that a "revival" of faith may bring has resulted in stronger legislation and pressure against religion. Given the severe political upheavals and social and economic obstacles caused by the Soviet Union's demise, it's debatable whether the region is seeing a religious resurgence that entails a break from the Soviet rule or a change toward new religious standards that are prevalent in secular nations. It's also worth considering whether religion in Central Asia derives from contemporary Soviet-era sources or from a more distant past.

CONCLUSION

Religious "revival" is fraught with difficulties and political implications. The Central Asian governments use it to proudly express their commitment to democracy and rediscovered religious freedom. They emphasise the number of houses of worship that are currently open, which is significantly larger during the Soviet era, but they refuse to remark on the coercive actions employed against religious denominations. The official language continues to attack the former regime's declared atheism while "forgetting" the decades of involuntary religious sacrifices. The idea for a loss of centre is appealing to the authorities, who frame it as a threat to society's stability. To avoid a "vacuum" being filled by extremism, Central

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Asian authorities have either eliminated Soviet centrality and imposed their own, or at the very least attempts to preserve one held by Soviet authorities, despite proclaiming their novelty and condemning the previous regime's authoritarianism. This

idea can be found in all spheres of life—political, economic, and social—and is best exemplified in the context of education, where contemporary presidents' works have occasionally taken the place of Marxism-Leninism studies.