



## Tajikistan

Christian worship and witness are tightly controlled by the government of Tajikistan. In effect it requires that any religious activity be officially approved in order to be legal, and it suppresses and punishes churches and other organisations that do anything independently of state control.



Barnabas Fund supplied books for this library at a Bible School in Tajikistan

The 2009 Religion Law required all religious groups to re-register with the government. The process is difficult, and organisations that fail to register or are denied registration are harassed and banned. Private religious education (other than by parents) was criminalised by the law, while government permission was required to provide religious instruction; there are no licensed Christian schools in the whole country, and unregistered schools are closed down. Sharing one's faith was also forbidden, and strict controls were imposed on the publication and importing of religious literature; unapproved materials are liable to confiscation.

In 2011, new penalties of large fines and prison terms were introduced for religion-related offences, and a new law on parental responsibility banned children from public religious activity except in official religious institutions. In effect this stops young people under 18 from participating in Christian worship. Then in 2012 extra provisions to the country's Administrative Code penalised those who break the law on preaching and teaching religious doctrines and on establishing links with religious organisations abroad. They also punish religious communities that engage in activities not specifically mentioned in their statutes.

Minority communities that are believed to be influenced from abroad, such as Protestant Christians, are particularly liable to repression under these draconian regulations. Christians make up only about 1% of the population of Tajikistan, which is currently the poorest of the former-USSR states. A large majority of the country's population profess to be Muslims, although their beliefs often contain elements of folk religion and Zoroastrianism. Families and communities of Tajik Christians who have converted from Islam may put pressure on them to reconvert.

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