

## **TAJKISTAN**

### REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

Head of state: Imomali Rakhmon  
Head of government: Okil Okilov  
Death penalty: abolitionist in practice  
Population: 6.8 million  
Life expectancy: 66.3 years  
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 81/72 per 1,000  
Adult literacy: 99.5 per cent

The authorities failed to address the continuing serious problem of domestic and sexual violence. Members of religious minorities came under increasing pressure from the authorities. Hundreds of people were faced with forced evictions and displacement.

### ***Background***

The UN World Food Programme announced in August that it would deliver US\$10 million worth of food to avert famine in the country. The decision was taken in the wake of one of the harshest winters in Central Asia in several decades. Tajikistan suffered severe energy shortages which crippled vital infrastructure and left most people with no heating or electricity and limited access to food. A subsequent drought and a locust infestation added to the hardships of one of the world's poorest countries.

### ***Violence against women***

Domestic and sexual violence against women remained a serious problem. In cases of domestic assault the police could only initiate an investigation if they received a written request by the victim. Many women did not submit written complaints because they feared reprisals from their partner or their partner's family. A draft law "On social and legal protection from domestic violence", in preparation for several years, had still not been presented to parliament. Poverty and unemployment affected women disproportionately and made them more vulnerable to human rights abuses. Unregistered marriages, polygamy and forced marriages were increasing. Suicides of women were reported to be on the rise.

### ***Forced evictions***

Authorities continued with forced evictions and displacement of people living in areas designated for urban regeneration. Affected residents claimed that they were offered no or inadequate financial compensation, nor suitable alternatives for resettlement. In the capital Dushanbe, the country's only synagogue was demolished in June. A Protestant Church was destroyed a month later.

- April saw a rare small-scale peaceful demonstration by residents of a district in Dushanbe targeted for demolition. Police officers used force to disperse the demonstrators and detained 20 women protestors. They were released after giving assurances never again to participate in demonstrations.

### ***Freedom of religion***

A proposed restrictive new law on religion continued to be under discussion. Pending the new law's adoption no new applications for legal status by religious organizations were accepted. Two Protestant groups, Eho Church and the Abundant Life Christian Centre, suspended for three months in October 2007, were unable to resume their activities. Another Protestant group lost its worship building in Dushanbe in August. This decision was appealed in October. Its senior pastor, a US citizen, was threatened by the authorities with removal of his visa.

- In September a court in Dushanbe upheld the government's October 2007 decision to revoke the legal status of the Jehovah's Witnesses and to ban indefinitely all activities by the religious minority across the country. An appeal to the Supreme Court was pending at the end of the year.

### ***Amnesty International visits/report***

- Amnesty International representatives visited Tajikistan in October and November.
- Central Asia: Summary of human rights concerns, March 2007-March 2008 (EUR 04/001/2008)