



**NGO: EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE (ECLJ)**

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW  
53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN  
FOR THE 53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

*www.ECLJ.org*  
*4, quai Koch*  
*67000 Strasbourg, France*  
*Phone: +33 (0)3.88.24.94.40*

## Status of Human Rights in Tajikistan for the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review

### Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Tajikistan (Tajikistan) for the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

### Background

2. Tajikistan is a country located in Central Asia and has a population of approximately 10.5 million people.<sup>1</sup> The population is predominantly Muslim, with approximately 96.7% of the population identifying as Muslim, 1.6% as Christian, and 1.7% as other.<sup>2</sup> In its 2026 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Tajikistan as the 27th worst country for Christians.<sup>3</sup> This ranking stems from the fact that the government imposes strict restrictions on religious gatherings and activities.<sup>4</sup>

3. Tajikistan's last review was held on November 4, 2021.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the review, Tajikistan received 234 recommendations, 180 of which it accepted.<sup>6</sup> It was recommended by Poland, and supported by Tajikistan, that the government “[g]uarantee freedom of religion or belief and eliminate all forms of discrimination against people belonging to religious minorities.”<sup>7</sup> It was also recommended by the Netherlands, but only noted by Tajikistan, that the government [r]epeal all laws that negatively impact freedom of religion or belief, such as laws that penalize unauthorized religious activities, limit religious education as well as the right of minors and women to participate in religious activities.”<sup>8</sup> In our last report on Tajikistan, we expressed concern about Tajikistan's restrictions on religious freedom.

### Legal Framework

4. Article 26 of the Constitution of Tajikistan guarantees the right to freedom of religion. Article 26 states that “[e]veryone has the right to independently determine his (her) relationship

---

<sup>1</sup> *Tajikistan*, BRITANNICA (Oct. 9, 2025), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tajikistan>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Tajikistan*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/tajikistan/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Universal Periodic Review – Tajikistan*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/tj-index> (last visited March 25, 2026).

<sup>6</sup> *Infographic-Tajikistan*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/hrbodies/upr/documents/session39/tj/2022-07-14/tajikistan.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> UPR of Tajikistan (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle – 39<sup>th</sup> Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, OHCHR, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/hrbodies/upr/documents/session39/tj/2022-07-14/UPR39\\_Tajikistan\\_Thematic\\_List\\_of\\_Recommendations.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/hrbodies/upr/documents/session39/tj/2022-07-14/UPR39_Tajikistan_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx) (last visited March 25, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

toward religion, to profess any religion individually or together with others, or to profess none, and to participate in the performance of religious cults, rituals, and ceremonies.”<sup>9</sup>

5. However, the government heavily regulates the activities of religious groups through the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Conscience and Religious Associations.”<sup>10</sup> Article 4, paragraph 9, of this law states that “[o]nly religious associations registered in accordance with the procedures determined by this Law are allowed to do mass preaching.”<sup>11</sup> Further, paragraph 15 reads that “[i]t is prohibited to involve minors into the activities of religious associations. It is also prohibited to preach among underage persons without written consent of the parents or guardians.”<sup>12</sup>

6. Additionally, under Article 22, the “[p]roduction, export, import, sale and distribution of religious literature, as well, and other religious articles and materials is allowed only after obtaining the conclusion of the state theological expertise.”<sup>13</sup>

7. Tajikistan has an obligation under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to uphold the rights enshrined within. Under Article 18 of the UDHR:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.<sup>14</sup>

8. Tajikistan is also a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>15</sup> Article 18 of the ICCPR enshrines the right to religious freedom with similar language to that found in Article 18 of the UDHR.<sup>16</sup>

9. Additionally, Tajikistan is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>17</sup> Under Article 30 of the CRC:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her

---

<sup>9</sup> CONS'T OF TAJIKISTAN 1994 art. 26 (Taj.).

<sup>10</sup> Law of the Republic of Tajikistan “On Conscience and Religious Associations (amended 28 June 2011).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* CHAPTER. 1, art. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* art. 22.

<sup>14</sup> G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 18 (Dec. 10. 1948).

<sup>15</sup> *Ratification Status for Tajikistan*, OHCHR,

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=171&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=171&Lang=EN) (last visited March 25, 2026).

<sup>16</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted Jan. 4, 1999*, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

<sup>17</sup> *Ratification Status for Tajikistan*, *supra* note 15.

group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.<sup>18</sup>

## Religious Persecution

10. Since President Emomali Rahmon came into power in 1994, the government has increasingly repressed the freedom of religion and belief.<sup>19</sup> Government officials perceive Christianity as a western threat that seeks to destabilize political power in Tajikistan.<sup>20</sup> Since its last UPR, Tajikistan has taken no steps to guarantee and protect religious freedom for Christians.

11. Under the law in Tajikistan, it is illegal for churches to operate without registration. Members of unregistered churches risk being arrested, fined, or having their property seized.<sup>21</sup> One Christian shared that “[w]e meet for worship without registration, but are afraid that the authorities can punish us at any time.”<sup>22</sup>

12. Since Tajikistan’s last review, there have been numerous reports of Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches being raided, threatened, fined, and their members arrested.<sup>23</sup> For example, in January 2024, authorities raided a Protestant church in Khujand in the northern Sughd Region and questioned the church members.<sup>24</sup> The church was operating without government permission and met in a private home.<sup>25</sup>

13. Another way the government persecutes Christians is through restricting religious texts, like the Bible.<sup>26</sup> Even though the Constitution claims to guarantee freedom of religion, in practice, the government heavily restricts all religious activity.<sup>27</sup> For example, one Christian was arrested and sentenced to eight years in prison when he was found in possession of more than twenty Bibles.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 30, *adopted* Oct. 26, 1993, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

<sup>19</sup> *Scholarly Analysis: Christian Response to Persecution in Tajikistan*, UNIV. OF NOTRE DAME (Aug. 2022), <https://ucs.nd.edu/learn/tajikistan/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Christians in Former-Soviet Central Asian Nations Increasingly Face Persecution*, INT’L CHRISTIAN CONCERN (June 12, 2025), <https://persecution.org/2025/06/12/christians-in-former-soviet-central-asian-nations-increasingly-face-persecution/>

<sup>22</sup> Mushfig Bayram, *TAJIKISTAN: We Will No Longer Register any New Churches*, F. 18 (July 1, 2022), [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2754](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2754).

<sup>23</sup> *Tajikistan: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT’ / WORLD WATCH RSCH, 8 (Dec. 2024), [https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Tajikistan-Full\\_Country\\_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf](https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Tajikistan-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Mushfig Bayram, *TAJIKISTAN: Criminal Cases Against Human Rights Defenders, Relatives Threatened*, F. 18, [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2894&utm](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2894&utm).

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> Antonio Graceffo, *Persecution of Christians in Tajikistan*, PROVIDENCE MAG (Jan. 22, 2025), <https://providencemag.com/2025/01/persecution-of-christians-in-tajikistan/>.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

14. Additionally, in August 2022, authorities sent questionnaires to non-Muslim religious communities.<sup>29</sup> The questionnaires enquired details about all employees and their families and asked for details on the financial support that these religious communities received.<sup>30</sup> Christians expressed concern that these questionnaires would be used by the State Committee for National Security (NSC) to identify and spy on the members of these religious communities.<sup>31</sup>

15. It is important to note that many Christian groups in Tajikistan want to follow the law and register with the government and they are not purposefully being defiant. In 2022, more than fifteen Christian churches expressed their desire to register.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the government has made it nearly impossible for churches to register.<sup>33</sup> That same year, a senior state religious affairs official told Protestant Christian leaders that the government “will no longer register any new churches.”<sup>34</sup>

16. Tajikistan’s laws also prohibit children from participating in religious activities. In 2022, church leaders were reminded that children under the age of eighteen are not permitted to participate in church activities or attend religious camps.<sup>35</sup> In one case, a church camp was shut down by the government even though the Baptist church that operated it was registered with the government.<sup>36</sup>

17. Tajikistan’s laws restricting religious freedom are in contravention of numerous human rights documents such as the UDHR, the ICCPR, and the CRC. Again, the UDHR states that everyone has the right to “manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”<sup>37</sup> This right is likewise enshrined in the ICCPR. By requiring churches to register with the government and then denying all new registrations, Tajikistan is infringing on the right of individuals to gather and practice their faith. Additionally, Tajikistan’s law prohibiting minors from participating in religious activities infringes on the rights of minors to practice their faith, as enshrined in the CRC and the parents’ rights to rear their children in the faith of their choice. Again, the CRC enshrines the right of children to “profess and practise his or her own religion.”<sup>38</sup>

18. In addition to the restrictions placed on Christians by the government, Christians also face persecution from the Muslim majority. Christian converts face the brunt of this persecution.<sup>39</sup> This

---

<sup>29</sup> *Mushfig Bayram, TAJIKISTAN, Religious Freedom Survey, December 2023*, F. 18 (Dec. 18, 2023), [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2880](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2880).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Bayram, supra* note 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Christians in Former-Soviet Central Asian Nations Increasingly Face Persecution, supra* note 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Tajikistan: “We Will No Longer Register Any New Churches”*, ARCHONS OF THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE (July 8, 2022), <https://archons.org/persecution/tajikistan-we-will-no-longer-register-any-new-churches>.

<sup>35</sup> *Tajikistan: “We Will No Longer Register Any New Churches”*, *supra* note 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Christians in Former-Soviet Central Asian Nations Increasingly Face Persecution, supra* note 21.

<sup>37</sup> UDHR, art. 18, *supra* note 14.

<sup>38</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 30, *supra* note 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Tajikistan: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT’ / WORLD WATCH RSCH, 7 (Dec. 2024), [https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Tajikistan-Full\\_Country\\_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf](https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Tajikistan-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf).

is because converting to Christianity is viewed as betraying the family and the culture.<sup>40</sup> Converts are often targeted, harassed, and ordered to recant their Christian faith.<sup>41</sup>

19. Throughout 2024, it was reported that at least twenty Christian converts were abused and beaten by their family or by people in their community.<sup>42</sup> For example, one Christian convert was beaten by her family members when they learned that she had converted to Christianity.<sup>43</sup> Her family members also tried to forcibly marry her to a Muslim man.<sup>44</sup> Thankfully, she was able to flee the country and seek safety.<sup>45</sup>

## Recommendations

20. In our last UPR for Tajikistan, we urged the government to reform its laws to allow all its citizens, including children, to practice their faith. Unfortunately, Tajikistan has taken no steps to guarantee the fundamental right to religious freedom. Additionally, not only has Tajikistan failed to guarantee this fundamental right, but it has also taken steps to further restrict it by outright refusing to register new churches. Once again, we urge Tajikistan to reform its laws to allow for all Christians to freely and peacefully practice their faith.

21. We also urge Tajikistan to take action to protect Christians from the societal abuse they face from their families and members of the community.

---

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* 13.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Tajikistan – Media Advocacy Dossier ODI 2025, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/tajikistan/>.

<sup>43</sup> *TAJIKISTAN, Christian Women Beaten, Barely Escapes Forced Marriage*, VOICE OF THE MARTYRS (Sep. 25, 2024), <https://www.persecutionsa.org/post/tajikistan-christian-woman-beaten-barely-escapes-forced-marriage>.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*