

Daniil Islamov, Jehovah's Witness, remains imprisoned in Tajikistan

The 18-year-old was conscripted into the military, but refused to wear a military uniform or take an oath of service.

by [Kimberly Winston](#) in the [December 6, 2017](#) issue



Daniil Islamov. Photo courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses.

A United Nations committee has condemned what it sees as the unlawful detention of Daniil Islamov, an 18-year-old Jehovah's Witness in Tajikistan.

According to the UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Islamov has been imprisoned for being a conscientious objector to the country's mandatory military service. The faith bars members from reciting patriotic pledges, singing nationalistic songs, or joining the military. They believe their allegiance is to God alone.

In October a military court sentenced Islamov to six months' imprisonment, according to [the Jehovah's Witnesses website](#).

The right of Jehovah's Witnesses to adhere to their faith's rejection of military service is recognized in the United States and other Western countries. But Tajikistan has no law concerning conscientious objectors.

Islamov, who turned 18 in January, was forcibly conscripted into Tajikistan's military in April and promptly arrested for refusing to wear a military uniform and take the oath of service. Islamov sought permission for alternative civilian service but was denied, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention passed a resolution calling for Islamov's immediate release as well as an offer of reparations.

David A. Semonian, a spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses at its world headquarters in New York, said it's encouraging that the Working Group declared Islamov's pretrial detention arbitrary.

But "we are very concerned that the Working Group's opinion had no effect on the court's subsequent decision to convict and imprison him for conscientiously refusing to serve in the military," Semonian said.

Jehovah's Witnesses have recently suffered crackdowns in Russia and other former Soviet republics, including Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. In April, Russia declared Jehovah's Witnesses to be "extremists" and formally banned them.

In May, the Witnesses, who number about 8 million worldwide, released a report documenting 50 cases of persecution, including harassment, beatings, the closing of churches, and arson attacks.

Increasingly, the crackdowns are focused on the young, including children.

Among them was the case of an eight-year-old Russian girl forced by her school principal to sing patriotic songs in front of her classmates. —Religion News Service

A version of this article appears in the December 6 print edition under the title "People: Daniil Islamov."