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TAJIKISTAN: Loudspeakers banned from unregistered mosques

By Igor Rotar, Forum 18

Unregistered mosques in the capital Dushanbe may no longer broadcast the call to prayer through loudspeakers, local Muslims told Forum 18 News Service, but officials denied that any decree had been issued. Shamsuddin Nuriddinov of the religious affairs department of the city administration admitted to Forum 18 that the authorities had "requested" the leaders of unregistered mosques not to use loudspeakers for the call to prayer. Nuriddinov believes unregistered Muslim places of worship cannot be regarded as mosques and are operating illegally.

Muslims have been banned from using loudspeakers to read out the call to prayer at all unregistered mosques in the capital Dushanbe under a decree issued by the city executive committee, local Muslims told Forum 18 News Service on condition of anonymity. However, officials denied to Forum 18 that any decree had been issued, merely a "request".

The spokesman for the Tajik muftiate, Said Negmatov, told Forum 18 on 28 August that he had "not heard anything" about a decree from the city authorities and could therefore make no comment.

The imam-hatyb of Dushanbe's central mosque Khabibhon Azimjanov proved better informed. "I have indeed heard about such a decree," he told Forum 18. "In fact it was not even a decree, just a verbal request." He said the order did not affect his and other large mosques, and that the central mosque was still using loudspeakers to broadcast the call to prayer as before.

"It is possible that some old people who find it hard to reach the larger mosques would like the call to prayer to be made using loudspeakers in their mahalla [city district], but times change," Azimjanov added. "Around ten years ago calls to prayer were broadcast on the radio, but that is now impossible!"

The head of the religious affairs department of the city administration, Shamsuddin Nuriddinov, admitted to Forum 18 on 28 August that the authorities had "requested" the leaders of unregistered mosques not to use loudspeakers for the call to prayer.

However, he believes that only registered Muslim places of worship may be regarded as mosques. "According to Tajikistan's law on religion, registration is obligatory and therefore unregistered religious associations are operating outside the law," Nuriddinov insisted to Forum 18. In fact there is nothing in the law on religion about a requirement to register.

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