

Baptist Briefs: Churches pressured in Belarus, Kazakhstan

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Baptists arrested at worship in Belarus. Authorities in Belarus raided a Baptist church service and charged three leaders with holding an unauthorized mass public event, according to an international news service that specializes in religious liberty violations around the world. [Forum 18](#), based in Oslo, Norway, reported 10 police officers and two official witnesses broke into a private home in the southeastern town of Gomel



where local Baptists meet regularly for worship. Police arrested Pastor Aleksandr Zolotorev; a second preacher, Oleg Danilevsky; and Andrei Tupalsky, a deacon who owns the home where the group was meeting. Belarus, a landlocked country in Eastern Europe bordered by Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, protects religious liberty in its constitution, but other laws and policies restrict religious practice. A 2002

religion law bans all religious activity by unregistered groups. The house church in Gomel is part of the Council of Churches Baptists, a group that refuses to register with the government as a matter of principle. Unregistered religious activity generally is punished under a section of the country's administrative code intended to curb political extremism. Banned activities include organizing or attending a mass event for public or political interests or protest. Violators are eligible for fines or arrest.

Kazakh Baptists refuse to pay fines. Two Baptists in Kazakhstan recently served 48 hours in jail after refusing to pay fines handed down in

2013 for worshipping and sharing their faith without the government's permission. Shoe-repairer Vyacheslav Cherkasov and plumber Zhasulan Alzhanov were sentenced Jan. 9 in Kazakhstan's northern Akmola region, according to the [Forum 18 news service](#). They



were released Jan. 11. The two were among more than 60 Baptists fined in Kazakhstan in 2013 who refuse to pay fines in an act of civil disobedience. They are part of the Council of Churches Baptists, which argues compulsory state registration of religious exercise violates religious freedom protections in Kazakhstan's constitution and international human-rights obligations.