

# Baptist fined in Uzbekistan

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OSLO (ABP) - The leader of a Baptist church in Uzbekistan was fined 80 times the minimum monthly wage Nov. 21 for holding what authorities considered an illegal religious meeting outside of a registered house of worship.

Forum 18, a Norwegian news service that tracks religious-freedom abuses, [quoted](#) anonymous Baptists in Uzbekistan who said charges against Sergei Kozin were fabricated and the case was prosecuted after the legal time limit.

The arrest stemmed from the raid of a group of Baptists who were reading together while on a holiday from work. The verdict stated that Kozin only had a right to hold religious meetings at the legal address of the church.

Baptists, a small ethnic minority in Muslim-majority Uzbekistan, have had a series of run-ins with the law. In 2009 a judge removed three leaders of the Baptist Union of Uzbekistan convicted of illegal religious instruction at a summer youth camp they had previously held several years without incident.

In September a delegation from the Baptist World Alliance and the European Baptist Federation conducted a joint human-rights [visit](#) to Uzbekistan to promote religious freedom and strengthen the relationship with the Baptist union.

In addition to the case against Kozin, Forum 18 reported that police raided the home of an unregistered Baptist church member Nov. 19 in the eastern town of Fergana, allegedly without a search warrant.

The officially registered Baptist Church in Angren, Tashkent Region, was

raided twice on Oct. 16. Two schoolgirls questioned in that case stopped coming to church after police threatened them that "they will be in police records and thrown out of school," Baptists elsewhere told Forum 18.

*-Bob Allen is managing editor of Associated Baptist Press.*