

Tajikistan: Authorities ban children and young people from entering mosques

On 15 June, the parliament of Tajikistan adopted a law prohibiting children and adolescents aged under 18 from entering mosques (except for religious holidays recognised by the state) under penalty of punishment for their parents. Along with the disastrous economic situation (food prices are rising) and growing social discontent at the authoritarian, corrupt regime of President Emomalii Rahmon, this law could contribute to a further rise in internal tensions in the country.

Banning children and young people from mosques is another move by the authorities in recent months to strike at followers of Islam, next to repeated cases of mosques being closed, the prevention of clergy from performing religious duties, and the informal prohibition of visits to religious schools abroad. This latest act is of great symbolic importance, because – unlike the previous decisions – it *de facto* concerns the public at large (Muslims constitute over 90% of the population). The introduction of the ban not only reduces the government's already very low social credibility, but also weakens the position of the lawfully acting moderate Islamic opposition in the face of radical tendencies.

The internal situation in Tajikistan is tense. In summer and autumn of 2010 a series of armed attacks on government forces (including in the Rasht valley) took place, and since then there have been repeated cases of expressions at the local level of public discontent against different backgrounds (including the repression and corruption of local authorities). The decision to ban children and young people from mosques will further increase tensions. The extensive weakness of the Tajik state and Dushanbe's incomplete control over its own territory may seriously threaten to destabilise the internal situation. <MMat>