



“Even Stone Can Be Shaped Through Soft Engagement”

Kazakhstan Religious Freedom Assessment Trip Report
September 13-22, 2025

Disclaimer

This report does not reflect the official views of the governments of Kazakhstan, the United States, or any affiliated institutions. These findings are based on our own observations, interviews, and discussions conducted during the delegation’s visit to Kazakhstan. It is not an academic study but a field-based trip report that summarizes impressions and offers practical recommendations to strengthen ongoing reforms and encourage further progress.

Introduction¹

At the invitation of the Government of Kazakhstan, a delegation was formed to assess the current state of religious freedom and social cohesion in the country. The delegation was led by Mr. Wade Kusack, Founder and President of Love Your Neighbor Community (LYNC). The members of the delegation: Dr. Chris Seiple, LYN Community Senior Fellow; Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director for the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers; Mr. Greg Mitchell, Founder and CEO for IRF Secretariat. Dr. Elsanousi traveled in his personal capacity and not as USCIRF Commissioner.

The delegation jointly visited Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent from 13–22 September 2025, meeting with senior officials from the Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA), religious leaders, and local multifaith clubs. Additional visits to Aktobe, Atyrau, and Aktau were conducted separately by Wade Kusack, and all references to findings in these cities in this report are based solely on his observations and interviews conducted during his visit to the latter cities.

The government covered all in-country costs, underscoring its openness to transparent evaluation. The members of the delegation met whomever they wanted publicly or privately.

The assessment focused on four contexts and their interaction:

1. Historical
2. Security



3. Geopolitical
4. Legal (the law & how it is implemented)

Conceptual Backdrop

This assessment was conducted within the “builders approach”²—an engagement model emphasizing cooperation and partnership over confrontation. Rather than criticizing from a distance, this approach builds relationships from within, providing suggestions to governments and societies as they navigate religious freedom reform.

The builders’ approach ensures that engagement occurs in mutual respect, contextual understanding, and shared responsibility—prioritizing sustainable progress toward religious freedom or belief and cultivation of positive linkages between religious freedom, long-term stability, and social cohesion.

The delegation’s goal was to better understand the factors shaping the religious landscape and current challenges to advancing religious freedom, and to propose practical steps for steady, long-term progress.

Historical Context

Kazakhstan’s approach to religion has been shaped by a century of control, repression, and, in very few instances, gradual renewal.

During the Russian Imperial era, religion was not only a matter of faith but also a tool of assimilation. For many ethnic Kazakhs and other Central Asian peoples, the Christianization policies of the empire symbolized a form of cultural domination. As one unregistered church leader in Shymkent reflected during our visit, *“Negativity toward religion dates back to the Russian Empire—oppression was carried out by Christians. For many, Jesus became seen as a Russian god with different Easter egg colors that suppressed our own identity.”*

This historical memory—of religion being used as an instrument of political and cultural control—still lingers in the collective consciousness. It has contributed to both the state’s cautious approach to religious activity and society’s sensitivity to external religious influence.

Under the Soviet regime (1920s–1991), the repression intensified. The state sought to eradicate all religions as part of its campaign for atheistic modernization. Mosques, churches, and seminaries



were closed; clergy were imprisoned or executed; and expressions of faith were systematically suppressed. By the 1970s, religion had been largely driven underground—surviving mostly as folk customs and cultural traditions, rather than as thoughtfully developed theologies.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, it revealed a profound spiritual vacuum. Decades of state-enforced atheism had disrupted the natural transmission of religious knowledge and development of religious educational institutions, leaving many citizens with sincere spiritual curiosity but limited grounding in theology. Into this open space came a wide spectrum of religious influences—some constructive and community-building, others less transparent or more aggressive.

Although the 1990s were marked by a period of broad religious freedom, by the mid-2000s, the government had grown increasingly alarmed by the spread of extremist influences. It is important to note that government officials themselves were also vulnerable during this period. Their lack of understanding of the wide variety of religious influences, including those of non-traditional faith communities, was also a contributing factor. So, they were alarmed by extremist influences and non-traditional communities they did not understand.

By the late 2000s, a series of terrorist incidents and extremist infiltrations prompted the government to do what they had learned from the Soviet time to do—adopt a more securitized approach, culminating in the 2011 Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations, which tightened registration and monitoring procedures³ and reduced the number of recognized religious communities—cutting roughly in half those previously registered, including many peaceful non-traditional groups such as Scientology and small Protestant communities. These measures, though restrictive, reflected the state’s attempt to prevent chaos in an environment still learning to balance freedom with responsibility. (LYNC first visited Kazakhstan at this time (2013), and it was not possible to have the conversations that this assessment reports.)

While these measures helped contain extremist activity in the short run, they also constrained the growth of smaller peaceful faith communities. In practice, the same restrictive tools used against extremists were sometimes applied to individuals and groups who posed no threat. This created feelings of *antagonism, frustration, and distrust* toward the government among peaceful believers—especially those who were unable to practice their faith openly or demonstrate their positive contributions to society. Although only a small percentage of those affected became radicalized, the broader impact was an increase in alienation and resentment, which can itself undermine long-term security and social cohesion.

After 2015, however, a shift began. Local authorities were given more responsibility for managing religious affairs through regional Departments of Religious Affairs. This made implementation of



the law more context-sensitive and responsive to community realities. Local officials, religious leaders, and NGOs began to build direct relationships, creating the conditions for dialogue and gradual liberalization.

An even greater shift happened when President Tokayev assumed his current position in 2019, articulating the vision of a “listening state.” According to numerous conversations conducted during this assessment, this concept signaled a new phase in government–religious relations. Before 2019, many religious groups were viewed primarily through a security lens, often regarded as potential threats. Under the new administration, however, the religious climate changed markedly. Authorities began to meet regularly with religious representatives, solicit their opinions, and include them in joint programs and public initiatives.

Mr. Alexey Kildyshov, Deputy Chair for the Biblical Center New Life, Almaty, described this transformation succinctly: *“Before, the government responded with penalties; now we receive warnings. The most important change is the atmosphere itself—today, we feel no threat. The government wants to hear from us and invites us to contribute.”*

An evangelical pastor from Aktau shared his personal story: he had been detained and fined seven times for conducting “unregistered religious activity” prior to 2019. “Now,” he said, *“I sit with everyone else to discuss religious affairs and social issues in our city.”*

Security Context

Religious freedom is not only a human right—it is a cornerstone of national security and social stability. When religious leaders are free to practice their faith and engage openly in dialogue within the public sphere, they become valuable partners in preventing conflict, countering radicalization, and strengthening community resilience.

1. Countering Radicalization and Extremism

Kazakhstan faces persistent threats from transnational extremist groups (including ISIS-K) that seek to exploit economic hardship and digital platforms to radicalize youth across Central Asia.⁴ Government officials described a multi-tiered system of prevention that combines intelligence monitoring, civil-society engagement, and theological outreach.

In Aktobe (in Western Kazakhstan), for example, 120 local specialists monitor online content for radical material. The Kazakh NGOs and imams work together to intervene early—through counseling, mentoring, or education—before law enforcement becomes involved. This proactive



approach aims to distinguish between non-criminal radicalization and actual extremist acts, helping to prevent unnecessary persecution while preserving security.

However, this work remains a gray area in practice. There is not always a clear legal or operational boundary between expressions of non-violent thought and activities deemed extremist. In some instances, preventive measures could be taken over punitive actions. Continued education (especially in Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy) and dialogue between government, law enforcement, and civil society are therefore essential to ensure that prevention efforts remain widespread.⁵

2. Rehabilitation and Reintegration – Operation Zhusan

Kazakhstan’s landmark initiative, Operation Zhusan, remains one of the most humanitarian and successful repatriation programs in the world. Since 2019, hundreds of women and children have been brought home from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. The government treats them first of all as victims of manipulation, and then considers whether they were involved in criminal activities.

During the visit to Atyrau, Wade Kusack met with the wives of former ISIS fighters, now attending/working in rehabilitation centers. Their testimonies revealed the devastating psychological and social consequences of extremism, but also the transformative impact of Kazakhstan’s compassionate reintegration model. Each woman receives counseling, vocational training, and theological guidance to rebuild her life within society. Some of the women met during this assessment had received prison sentences for their roles in recruiting other women to join ISIS, or for bringing their children into conflict zones where those children tragically perished in Syria or Iraq.⁶

Geopolitical Context

1. Navigating Major Power Competition

The ongoing Russia–Ukraine war has tested Kazakhstan’s diplomatic independence and its long-standing “multi-vector” foreign policy. While maintaining necessary trade and security ties with Moscow, Kazakhstan has deliberately avoided endorsing Russian aggression, instead positioning itself as a proponent of constructive diplomacy, sovereignty, and international law.

At the same time, China’s expanding economic and political footprint has created both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Chinese investments in infrastructure and energy have bolstered



national development, yet they also raise concerns about dependency, strategic leverage, and influence over domestic narratives.

Both Russia and China continue to seek influence within Kazakhstan’s internal affairs for their own purposes, including in the sphere of religion. Russia’s ongoing “anti-cult” campaigns, led by figures such as Alexander Dvorkin, have historically targeted minority faiths under the guise of protecting “traditional values.” These narratives have at times influenced public and policy discourse in neighboring states, including Kazakhstan, by stigmatizing smaller religious groups and complicating interfaith relations.

Similarly, China’s internal security paradigm—particularly its fear of separatism and terrorism in Xinjiang—has shaped its regional approach to religion, promoting tight state control and surveillance of religious expression. Such perspectives risk influencing broader Central Asian policy debates about security, extremism, and religious regulation. As one participant from the Almaty multi-faith club emphasized, *“All of these things have to be discussed together, and it is critically important to include civil society in such discussions.”*

In this complex geopolitical environment, Kazakhstan’s government continues to balance competing pressures by reinforcing its sovereignty, making positive amendments in its existing religious freedom policies, and engaging diverse international partners. Its goal is to remain a bridge between East and West, advancing President Tokayev’s vision of Kazakhstan as a “middle power that builds peace through dialogue,” while safeguarding its internal stability and the autonomy of its religious and civic institutions.

2. Role of Religion in Diplomacy

Kazakhstan’s global identity is increasingly tied to its multi-faith diplomacy. The Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held triennially in Astana, positions Kazakhstan as a global convenor for dialogue among civilizations. The 2025 Congress featured speeches from religious leaders across Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, as well as international organizations such as the OSCE and UN.

Kazakhstan became a unique place where, behind the same roundtable, one could see the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, the top leadership of the Anglican Church, a Jerusalem Rabbi, and Iranian Ayatollahs.

President Tokayev’s addresses reaffirmed Kazakhstan’s commitment to “unity in diversity, tolerance, and trust” as the foundations of both domestic policy and foreign relations. He warned



against the rise of religious nationalism and called on faith leaders to act as moral compasses in a turbulent world.⁷

While the Congress continues to showcase Kazakhstan’s global leadership in interreligious dialogue, it would gain even greater legitimacy and inclusiveness by expanding participation to include non-traditional faiths, which are currently excluded. It is worth noting that Greg Mitchell, a member of this delegation, who chairs the IRF Roundtable in Washington, D.C., has been involved in the cooperative and constructive engagement since May 2013, and has made several trips to Kazakhstan—including five different cities—to build relationships and trust, was not invited to the Congress.

3. Multi-Faith Clubs

Religious freedom is not only a human right—it is a cornerstone of national security and social stability. When religious leaders are free to practice their faith and engage openly in dialogue within the public sphere, they become valuable partners in preventing conflict, countering radicalization, and strengthening community resilience.

In Kazakhstan, this principle is increasingly evident through the establishment of multi-faith clubs, which exemplify the practical link between religious freedom and security. These clubs create safe spaces where representatives of various registered religious communities can meet regularly to discuss not only interreligious relations but also the broader social challenges affecting their cities and regions. The multi-faith clubs are currently restricted the participation of non-registered religious communities.

In Almaty, for instance, the local multi-faith club has evolved beyond mere discussion of theological or administrative issues. It has become a forum for addressing pressing societal concerns—including online radicalization, domestic violence, youth disengagement, and environmental responsibility—while seeking actionable, community-based solutions. Through collaborative projects, such as city clean-up campaigns, participation in public marathons, and visits to each other’s places of worship, these religious leaders model unity and shared responsibility in the public eye.

Importantly, multi-faith clubs could play a role in creating a structured pathway for inclusion—a process through which peaceful, non-registered religious communities may begin to engage with the state and other faith groups. These clubs could invite such communities to participate initially as observers, allowing them to gradually build relationships, demonstrate transparency, and contribute



to joint civic initiatives. Over time, this step-by-step approach would help foster mutual understanding, respect, and trust, laying the groundwork for inclusion and equal citizenship.”.

This model would benefit both sides: government authorities would gain a clearer picture of Kazakhstan’s diverse religious landscape and identify reliable, community-minded partners, while religious communities would gain opportunities to show their peaceful intent, civic responsibility, and commitment to the nation’s shared values. In this way, the multi-faith clubs could become a practical mechanism for bridging regulation with relationship—transforming inclusion from a policy aspiration into a lived experience.

Legal Context

Improvements

- **Legal moderation and proportionality:**⁸ January 2025 amendments to Article 490 of the Administrative Code halved fines for religion-related offenses, removed automatic deportations, and introduced official warnings as alternative sanctions.
- **Judicial independence:** Kazakhstan’s courts ruled:
 - In favor of a Jehovah’s Witness conscientious objector⁹ and
 - Protected schoolgirls’ right to education even when wearing hijabs, indicating a more balanced interpretation of the law¹⁰.
- **Dialogue mechanisms:** Multi-Faith Clubs are now being initiated in multiple cities, across the whole country, providing regular forums for religious leaders and government officials to collaborate on social and security issues.
- **Rehabilitation and reintegration:** Operation *Zhusan* evolved into a model humanitarian program that focuses on rehabilitation, theological counseling, and social reintegration of women and children repatriated from Syria and Iraq.
- **Shift in tone and policy culture:** Officials increasingly rely on education and dialogue rather than penalties, with some religious leaders reporting a climate of safety and cooperation unseen before 2019.

Through direct observation and dialogue, the delegation concluded that many restrictive practices identified by previous reports reflect residual patterns of Soviet-era governing structure—bureaucratic caution, excessive control, and low trust between state and society.

These legacies are gradually fading, replaced by more transparent and cooperative approaches. The shift from penalties to warnings, the creation of multi-faith clubs, and the willingness of authorities to engage in open discussions all indicate progress toward a systemic transformation.



Remaining Challenges and Needed Reforms

Our delegation's findings suggest a number of priorities for continued improvement:

1. **Legal harmonization:** We recommend that Kazakhstan continue modernizing its legal framework to reflect trust-based governance rather than control, and progress toward harmonization with international legal standards. This includes:
 - a) Simplifying the registration process by reducing the minimum membership requirement.
 - b) Easing procedures for foreign missionary approval and the circulation of religious literature.
 - c) Address the hijab issue through sustained dialogue that respects both the secular framework and the right to manifest belief.
 - d) To clearly distinguish between prosecutable extremist activity—which threatens public safety—and non-violent expressions of belief or radical thought that can be addressed through education, dialogue, and other forms of constructive engagement.
2. **Freedom within Islam:** Broaden space for independent moderate Islamic scholarship beyond the single school of thought, which is adopted by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan.
3. **Accountability and Due Process:** Establish oversight mechanisms to investigate alleged abuses by law enforcement in religion-related cases.
4. **Institutionalizing Dialogue and Cooperative Mechanisms:**
 - a) The Multi-Faith Clubs model¹¹, already successful in Almaty, should be expanded nationwide as community-based trust-building platforms. These Clubs could serve as a platform for positive engagement of not-yet-registered religious communities. These clubs could invite such communities to participate initially as observers, allowing them to gradually build relationships, demonstrate transparency, and contribute to joint civic initiatives. Over time, this step-by-step approach would help foster mutual understanding, respect, and trust, laying the groundwork for eventual membership and formal registration.
 - b) Establishing a Kazakhstan Religious Freedom and Social Cohesion Secretariat (building on the IRF Secretariat model) would ensure continuity and engagement with the IRF Secretariat global network.
 - c) Embedding Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) into Kazakhstan's national education and governance systems—particularly within civil service training, law enforcement academies, and university-level programs—would provide officials,



educators, and community leaders with the competencies needed to navigate religious diversity constructively. Institutionalizing CCRL would strengthen preventive approaches to extremism, enhance public trust, and reinforce cooperative engagement as a national norm.

5. Promoting Cultural Heritage and Religious Tourism

Developing multi-faith pilgrimage and cultural routes highlighting Kazakhstan’s Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and Nestorian heritage would strengthen international understanding, generate economic benefits, and reinforce the country’s image as a bridge of civilizations.

Conclusion

Across their collective experience over the years, the delegation has observed the evolution from control toward cooperation and the growing inclusion of religious communities in policy dialogue. Kazakhstan’s path forward lies in consolidating this culture of “soft engagement” into durable institutions of trust. Achieving this will require not only continued government openness but also sustained attention from international and domestic partners to ensure that progress in spirit is matched by freedom in practice.

Kazakhstan stands at a pivotal moment in its modern history. Its steady progress toward ensuring religious freedom, constructive diplomacy, and pluralistic governance demonstrates that national stability and religious diversity can coexist.

The government’s decision to invite international partners for open assessment and its cooperation with civil society organizations like LYNC have become good practices in Central Asia. If Kazakhstan continues on this path—simplifying restrictive laws, eliminating unnecessary regulations, deepening dialogue, and embedding Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy into its national education and governance systems—it can serve as a regional and global model for peaceful coexistence and human dignity in a pluralistic world.



¹ History of Engagement Between the International Religious Freedom Roundtable (IRFRT), LYN Community and the Republic of Kazakhstan

The 2011 law introduced stricter registration requirements, resulting in the de-registration of nearly half of all existing religious organizations, including most non-traditional groups. While the intent of the law was to bring structure and oversight to religious activity, it had the unintended effect of marginalizing smaller faith communities that had previously operated peacefully within Kazakhstan’s legal framework.

2012–2013: The Beginning of Dialogue

In response to these developments, participants of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in Washington, D.C., initiated outreach to the Kazakh government. In **2012**, the Roundtable drafted and circulated a multi-faith letter, which was signed by approximately 32 representatives of diverse religious communities and NGOs. The letter expressed concern about the impact of the 2011 law and called for constructive engagement between Kazakhstan and the international religious freedom community.

In early 2013, as Kazakhstan’s new ambassador to the United States began diplomatic meetings in Washington, IRF Roundtable members invited him to meet with the signatories of the letter. The ambassador agreed and arranged a follow-up session at the Kazakh Embassy when officials from the Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) were visiting Washington. This first formal meeting in May 2013 opened a direct channel for discussion, mutual understanding, and potential collaboration.

2013–2019: Building Trust Through Engagement

At the invitation of the Kazakh government, a multi-faith IRF Roundtable delegation traveled to Kazakhstan in December 2013. The delegation was granted full access to engage with any stakeholders they wished—including government officials, registered and unregistered religious leaders, and civil society representatives. This marked the beginning of a trust-based relationship centered on dialogue rather than confrontation.

Between 2014 and 2019, a series of follow-up meetings took place at the Kazakh Embassy in Washington, D.C. and in-country. These exchanges deepened understanding on both sides and gradually built confidence in the feasibility of joint initiatives to advance religious freedom through cooperative means.

2019: Establishment of Multi-Faith Roundtables in Kazakhstan

By 2019, these discussions culminated in the Government of Kazakhstan agreeing to host a series of multi-faith roundtables in partnership with LYN Community, the IRFRT, and local stakeholders. Meetings were held in Shymkent, Aktobe, Ust-Kamenogorsk, and Astana, with participation from both traditional and non-traditional religious communities, including those still seeking official registration.

One particularly moving moment occurred at the conclusion of the Shymkent Roundtable, when representatives from two non-registered religious communities privately expressed their gratitude to the delegation. They shared that simply being invited to sit at the same table with the majority faiths and government officials—for the first time ever—was profoundly meaningful. Neither had spoken during the meeting, but both were visibly emotional, with tears in their eyes. They conveyed that inclusion itself was transformative, symbolizing recognition as equal and loyal citizens of Kazakhstan, eager to contribute to the nation’s social harmony.

This early cooperation between the IRF Roundtable and the Government of Kazakhstan laid the foundation for the trust-based model that continues today. The experience demonstrated that multi-faith dialogue and cooperative engagement—even on sensitive issues—can gradually reshape relationships between the state and religious communities.

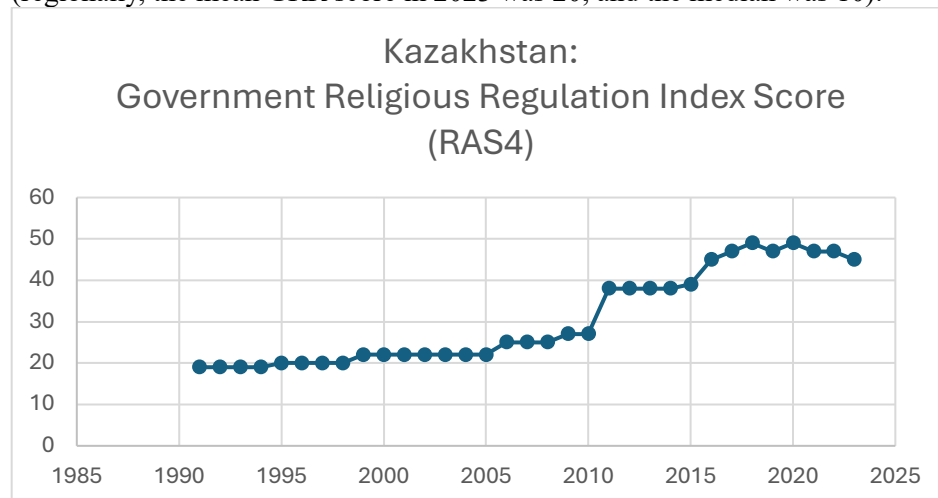
[March 2022—CCRL conference in Shymkent](#)

[April 2024—pastors & imams to US](#)

[December 2024—CCRL for CRA](#)

² <https://religionnews.com/2023/01/25/advocates-and-builders-advancing-religious-freedom-together/>

³ For comparative empirical context, note that the Religion and State Project dataset has recently completed round 4 vis-à-vis the 29 countries of the former-communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. RAS4 produces a Government Religious Regulation (GRR) index score for each country on an annual basis from 1990 (or earliest year of the country’s post-1990 existence) through 2023. The annual index scores for Kazakhstan confirm a significant upward spike in government regulation following the 2011 Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations. GRR scores continued an upward trend through 2020. A slight decline is observable from then to 2023, which is an encouraging sign. Note as well that Kazakhstan’s 2023 index score of 45 was significantly less restrictive than several of its neighbors, such as Azerbaijan (78), Tajikistan (72), Turkmenistan (66), and Uzbekistan (66). Still, it is also important to acknowledge that Kazakhstan’s 2023 GRR score remained far higher than the 2023 average across former-communist states (regionally, the mean GRR score in 2023 was 20, and the median was 10).



For more on RAS4 findings related to former-communist Eurasia, see: Dennis P. Petri, Jonathan Fox, and Ariel Zellman, “[Global Religious Freedom Index: Post-Communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#),” International Institute for Religious Freedom, 2025; and Jonathan Fox, Marko Vekovic, and Ariel Zellman, “Government Religion Policy and Religious Freedom in Post-Communist Eastern Europe and Central Asia 1990 to 2023,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, forthcoming 2025.

⁴ ISIS-Khorasan is an offshoot of the ISIS group <https://atlasinstitute.org/the-resurgence-of-the-islamic-state-in-the-khorasan-province/>

⁵ Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy (CCRL) is a leadership tool that equips different groups to work together on common projects. Please see links below for more on how LYNC has partnered with the government to implement CCRL programs:

<https://lyncommunity.org/report/cross-cultural-religious-literacy-ccrl-training-for-government-officials/>

<https://lyncommunity.org/report/journey-from-central-asia-to-the-grand-canyon-bridges-cultures/>

⁶ Their testimony and documentary in Russian and Kazakhs can be access here:

<https://www.youtube.com/@Theportrety>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_KBFTX4p8Q.

⁷ <https://lyncommunity.org/blog/kazakhstan-role-as-a-middle-power/>

⁸ Amendments to the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Administrative Offenses (January 2025):

Русский текст

Внесение изменений в Кодекс Республики Казахстан об административных правонарушениях от 5 июля 2014 года – январь 2025.

Законом Республики Казахстан от 10 января 2025 года «О внесении изменений и дополнений в Кодекс Республики Казахстан об административных правонарушениях» (далее – КоАП) были внесены поправки в статью 490 КоАП (нарушение законодательства Республики Казахстан о религиозной деятельности и религиозных объединениях). Поправками были смягчены санкции за различные правонарушения, как указано ниже.

1. Смягчение санкций за нарушение общих требований к религиозной деятельности (часть 1 статьи 490 КоАП). Штрафы были сокращены вдвое: с 50 до 25 месячных расчетных показателей (МРП) для физических лиц и с 200 до 100 МРП для юридических лиц; из субъектов

English Translation

Amendments to the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Administrative Offenses (Adopted January 2025).

By the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 10 January 2025, “On Amendments and Additions to the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Administrative Offenses” (hereinafter – the Code), amendments were introduced to Article 490 of the Code, which governs violations of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activity and religious associations. The amendments substantially mitigate sanctions for a range of administrative offenses, as outlined below.

1. Reduction of penalties for violations of general religious activity requirements (Part 1 of Article 490). Administrative fines have been reduced by half: from 50 to 25 monthly calculation indices (MCI) for natural persons and from 200 to 100 MCI for legal entities.

ответственности исключены должностные лица.

Нарушения включают: проведение религиозных обрядов, церемоний и собраний с нарушением установленных требований; осуществление благотворительной деятельности с нарушением установленного порядка; ввоз, изготовление, выпуск, издание и (или) распространение религиозной литературы и предметов религиозного назначения без надлежащего разрешения; строительство или перепрофилирование зданий под культовые сооружения без согласования.

Кроме того, введена самая мягкая мера административного взыскания – предупреждение (часть 1 статьи 490 КоАП).

2. Смягчение санкций за воспрепятствование законной религиозной деятельности (часть 2 статьи 490 КоАП). Штрафы сокращены в два раза: с 50 до 25 МРП для физических лиц, со 100 до 50 МРП для должностных лиц и с 200 до 100 МРП для юридических лиц.

Эта норма применяется к действиям, направленным на воспрепятствование законной религиозной деятельности; нарушение гражданских прав по мотивам отношения к религии; оскорбление религиозных чувств; или осквернение религиозных предметов, зданий и мест, если такие действия не содержат признаков уголовного преступления.

3. Смягчение санкций за осуществление миссионерской деятельности без регистрации (часть 3 статьи 490 КоАП). Штрафы сокращены с 100 до 50 МРП для

Moreover, officials are no longer classified as subjects of liability under this provision.

The offenses concerned include: conducting religious rites, ceremonies, or gatherings in violation of legal requirements; engaging in charitable activities contrary to the established procedure; importing, producing, publishing, or distributing religious literature and religious items without proper authorization; and constructing or repurposing buildings for use as places of worship without the required approval.

In addition, the mildest administrative measure—an official warning—has been introduced as an alternative sanction under Part 1 of Article 490.

2. Reduction of penalties for obstruction of lawful religious activity (Part 2 of Article 490). Fines have likewise been reduced by 50 percent: from 50 to 25 MCI for individuals, 100 to 50 MCI for officials, and 200 to 100 MCI for legal entities.

This provision applies to acts such as obstructing lawful religious activity; violating citizens' rights on grounds of religion; insulting religious feelings; or desecrating objects, buildings, or places revered by followers of any religion, provided that such actions do not constitute criminal offenses.

3. Reduction of penalties for unregistered missionary activity (Part 3 of Article 490). Fines have been decreased from 100 to 50

граждан Казахстана, иностранных граждан и лиц без гражданства.

Нарушения включают: осуществление миссионерской деятельности без регистрации (перерегистрации); использование религиозных материалов без положительного заключения религиозно-экспертной экспертизы; распространение вероучения незарегистрированных религиозных объединений.

Введена альтернативная санкция – предупреждение (часть 3 статьи 490 КоАП). Ранее в отношении иностранных граждан и лиц без гражданства одновременно со штрафом применялось административное выдворение, и эти меры были безальтернативными.

4. Введение альтернативных санкций за нарушения, связанные с руководством религиозными объединениями (часть 7 статьи 490 КоАП). В качестве альтернативной санкции введено предупреждение за руководство религиозным объединением лицом, назначенным иностранным религиозным центром без согласования с уполномоченным органом, а также за непринятие мер по недопущению участия несовершеннолетних при возражении родителей или законных представителей.

MCI for citizens of Kazakhstan, foreign nationals, and stateless persons.

These offenses include engaging in missionary activity without registration or re-registration; using religious materials without a positive theological expert opinion; and propagating the teachings of unregistered religious associations.

As an alternative sanction, an official warning has also been introduced under this part. Previously, foreign nationals and stateless persons were subject to mandatory administrative expulsion in addition to fines, and these sanctions were cumulative and non-alternative.

4. Introduction of alternative sanctions for leadership violations (Part 7 of Article 490). An official warning has been introduced as the least severe administrative measure in cases where: a person appointed by a foreign religious center leads a religious association without the consent of the authorized body, or the leader fails to prevent minors' participation in religious activities when one parent or legal representative objects.

⁹ <https://www.jw.org/finder?wtlocale=E&docid=702024154&srcid=share>

¹⁰ Several court cases were heard in various regions of Kazakhstan in which parents challenged the acts or decisions of school administrations that denied access to classes for students who came to school wearing hijabs.

The courts ruled that, although the Order of the Minister of Education and Science dated June 14, 2016, "On Approval of the Requirements for the Mandatory School Uniform for Secondary Education Organizations" prohibits the inclusion of clothing elements associated with religious affiliation of different confessions in school uniforms, the legislation does not provide for a ban on attending school in cases where such requirements are

violated. The laws also do not grant educational institutions the right to restrict (or prohibit) access to the educational process for violating the school uniform requirements.

The position of the local courts was upheld by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It should be noted that the courts examined these cases primarily through the lens of violations of the right to education. Issues of freedom of religion were almost not addressed, though they were evidently present in the background of the proceedings.

The courts also did not declare unconstitutional the relevant provisions of the aforementioned Order of the Minister of Education and Science. Nevertheless, these rulings are highly significant, as previously all similar lawsuits had virtually no chance of success. For the sake of objectivity, it should also be noted that there were some cases in which the parents' claims were not satisfied.

Public recourses:

<https://www.ulysmmedia.kz/news/42543-shkolnitsa-v-platke-nedopusk-k-zaniatiyam-snova-priznali-nezakonnym-v-kazakhstane/>

<https://rus.azattyk.org/a/33140392.html>

¹¹ **Almaty Model**—a fresh approach to multi-faith engagement that replaces rigid, formal meetings with dynamic, solution-driven discussions. This initiative has allowed religious leaders and government officials to collaborate on major social issues like domestic violence, radicalization and religious intolerance.