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CENTRAL ASIA: Hizb-ut-Tahrir wants worldwide Sharia law

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Hizb-ut-Tahir, which is widespread in Central Asia, has told Forum 18 that it aims to introduce a worldwide Caliphate and ban all faiths apart from Islam, Judaism and Christianity, all religious practice being regulated by Sharia law. Buddhism, Hinduism, the Hare Krishna faith and what the party sees as sects within Islam would all be banned. Hizb-ut-Tahir members also explained to Forum 18 that the party would give all non-Muslim states a choice between either joining the Caliphate under Sharia law, or paying a tax to the Caliphate. Failure to pay the tax would be punished by military attacks. The USA, the United Kingdom and Israel were described to Forum 18 as the work of the devil and "European democracy" as "a farce". Within the Caliphate, Christians and Jews would be allowed to drink alcohol, if that was required for religious rituals, and to regulate within their own communities marriage, divorce and the assignment of possessions.

Members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, one of the most widespread illegal Islamic movements in Central Asia, have told Forum 18 News Service that if it comes to power, Islamic Sharia law would be imposed on all and faiths not mentioned in the Koran would be banned. A self-styled international Islamic political party that claims to reject violence, thousands of whose members have been imprisoned in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan, it mostly devotes its energies to circulating leaflets and other literature and says it avoids violence. But Hizb-ut-Tahrir members in both the Uzbek and the Kyrgyz sections of the Fergana valley, speaking to Forum 18 on condition of anonymity, described how the party plans to treat non-Muslims if it achieved its chief goal of establishing a caliphate.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, whose headquarters is illegally based in Jordan, is banned or treated as illegal in all the Central Asian republics. It aims to achieve the unification of Muslims worldwide under a single caliphate and believes that western democracy is unacceptable to Muslims. Its publications contain violently anti-Semitic views and it denies key human rights such as religious freedom. Countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Israel are considered to be the work of the devil. Blatant anti-Semitism is a characteristic of the party's ideology. For example, Hizb-ut-Tahrir leaflets distributed illegally in Uzbekistan invariably call the Uzbek president Islam Karimov a "Jewish kafir". One Uzbek member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir expressed his regret to Forum 18 that Hitler had not succeeded in eliminating all Jews.

In March 2002, Hizb-ut-Tahrir published a statement describing Jews as "a defective people" and calling upon Muslims to remove them from Palestine. It was still on the organisation's Russian-language website in April 2006. Entitled "Kill them wherever you find them, and cast them out from wherever they cast you out" - a quotation from the Koran - the March 2002 document begins by describing Jews as "renowned for their treachery and broken promises (...) they kill prophets and innocent people." While stopping short of calling for specific terrorist acts, it describes how "in Palestine today the mujahidin display examples of piety - young men compete in acts of self-sacrifice (...) and mothers encourage their sons to become shahids [a term for suicide bombers] and bow to Allah in gratitude if they hear news that their children have fallen as shahids." It concludes by calling upon Muslims to mobilise armies for battle "in order to cast the Jews into misfortune for their deeds and wipe their vile persons from the land of Isra and Mi'raj" (a reference to a journey said to have been undertaken by the Prophet Muhammed from Mecca to Jerusalem and then heaven in one night).

Hizb-ut-Tahrir is banned as anti-Semitic in Germany, and the organisation's Danish spokesman, Fadi Abdelatif, was in October 2002 given a sixty-day suspended jail sentence for distributing racist propaganda, after he circulated the March 2002 anti-Semitic statement on the streets of the Danish capital Copenhagen.

Hizb-ut-Tahir members in the Fergana Valley have told Forum 18 that ideally an Islamic state should be formed, as the prophet Mohammed decreed, at the initiative of citizens. However given today's conditions, it was said that such a step "would become a farce, like the so-called European democracy", and so the decision to form an Islamic state should be taken by the most "influential people" (i.e. powerful politicians and businessmen). Ideally it was said, all the countries of the world would join the caliphate although Hizb-ut-Tahir plans to allow non-Muslim countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, not to join the caliphate provided that they pay a tax to it. They would then fall under the protection of the caliphate and it would defend their interests. If non-Muslim countries refused to pay the tax, the caliphate would launch military attacks against them.

In the caliphate itself Christian and Jewish communities would be permitted because, according to the Koran, adherents of these religions are "people of the Book". Other religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism and the Hare Krishna faith, would be considered pagan sects and would be banned. In particular, the caliphate's leadership would oppose what it regards as sects within Islam itself (including Ahmadiyya, Bahai'ism and Ismailism). In Hizb-ut-Tahrir's view, the only true Muslims are those who adhere to the four Madhabs (i.e. the four separate schools of legal interpretation within Shariah law). Those who depart from the Madhabs would be considered as apostates and liable to punishment according to Islamic law.

All citizens in the caliphate would have to abide by Sharia law when outside their homes. For example, all women would have to wear long dresses and scarves when in public places. However, Hizb-ut-Tahir members told Forum 18 that in Christian and Jewish quarters women could wear clothes permitted by the laws of their own religion. Christians and Jews would also be allowed to drink alcohol within their own communities, if that was required for religious rituals. Although all citizens of the caliphate would be subject to Sharia law, Christians and Jews could administer justice according to their own laws in what were described as internal matters (i.e. marriage, divorce and the assignment of possessions).

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