

Tajikistan Law Could Nix Kids Ministries

✖ Tajikistan's Parliament is considering another restrictive law that will impact faith communities.

Government officials are looking at the draft of a Parental Responsibility Law. According to reports from Forum 18 and church planters sponsored by Slavic Gospel Association, if passed as written, this could threaten all outreach to children.

SGA's Joel Griffith explains that "the drafts that are circulating around would ban children from participating in religious activities apart from funerals."

Forum 18 notes that the draft appears to have been initiated by President Emomali Rahmon, and it seems to break the Constitution and international human rights standards. Griffith says the bill appeared suddenly and left little time to respond. "Whatever the latest text of this is, it hasn't been made public yet, although it's been discussed in some committees. They're thinking maybe it might even be adopted by July."

The draft law, according to press reports, is "aiming at increasing responsibility of parents, government agencies and organizations, and other relevant agencies in upbringing and training of the growing generation."

However, it could be an attempt to stop extremism from growing. Griffith says this is similar to a tactic used by the Parliament in the passage of the restrictive religion law in 2009. "On the surface, frequently, they will say that this is intended to deal with extremist situations; but in practice, really, it's just basically keeping their thumb on religious groups of all sorts."

If it passes, Griffith says, “it would certainly interfere with a whole lot of things—children’s ministry, camps, orphan ministry, Sunday Schools. Certainly, on the evangelical church perspective of it, this is really a matter for concern if this actually does become law.”

Evangelical circles are praying that the bill doesn’t go far. The gospel will go forward, but such a law would complicate future growth. “Children are the next generation of the church. It’s so important to reach them with the gospel when they’re young. If this actually bans children from attending religious activities apart from a funeral, the impact on the churches would be significant,” Griffith explains.

He goes on to say that condemnation of the draft law is widespread, so pressure may come to bear on the bill moving forward since the crackdown doesn’t appear to be targeted at one religious group. “Pray that this would be stopped at the Parliamentary level and that it wouldn’t even get to the point where it’s passed through Parliament and becomes law.”

Whether or not their concerns will be addressed is still unknown. Griffith concludes, “We need to pray that the churches would be able to continue to proclaim the Gospel as they have and be able to educate their children in Scripture.”