

# City Campaigns in the "Back Yard" of the Taliban!

**Normal hustle and bustle of life came to an abrupt stop in the Fergana Valley on May 13, 2005. The Taliban had attacked the central government of the Fergana Valley. The valley is located on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. At the time, the Internal Affairs Minister of Uzbekistan had been finalizing a new, restrictive law on religion, which threatened the very existence of all evangelical churches in the area. Christians all over Uzbekistan were praying for a miracle. The new law was shelved as a result of the attack.**

On that day 20 trucks loaded with Taliban and extremist Islamic soldiers as well as heavy artillery vehicles crossed the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border. They headed straight for the strategic city of Andizhan, in the middle of the densely populated Fergana Valley.

Their mission was to overtake the government, take control the valley of 10 million people and establish an ultra-Islamic state. Their plan did not succeed—without warning, Uzbek military forces opened fire on unarmed protesters, who

were being used as human shields by the Taliban and extremist Islamic soldiers.

## Hundreds Died

Hundreds of Uzbek mothers and their children died from being used as human shields between the Uzbek military and the rebel forces.

If the Islamic soldiers had succeeded, it would only have been a question of how long it would take for a Taliban-like regime to spread throughout Central Asia. Christian missions work would have certainly ceased if they had succeeded.

The restrictive law of religion was tabled in 2005, but the churches of Central Asia were given a full three-year grace period to continue their work. God had his own plan.

Without really understanding the gravity of the situation in Uzbekistan,

IRR/TV representatives travelled to Kazakhstan, only days after the bloodshed, to negotiate a mega-city evangelistic campaign to be held in Almaty.

## Campaign in Almaty 2006

The response from the historic seven-week long city campaign held in the Islamic city of Almaty, Kazakhstan was incredible.

During the campaign, 2.5 million people saw evangelistic TV programs on TV-TAN. 11 million people watched the programs aired on Channel 31 across all of Kazakhstan.

137,000 evangelistic leaflets were delivered to homes and 200,000 ad inserts went out in various magazines.

Over 5,000 calls came into the campaign call-center.

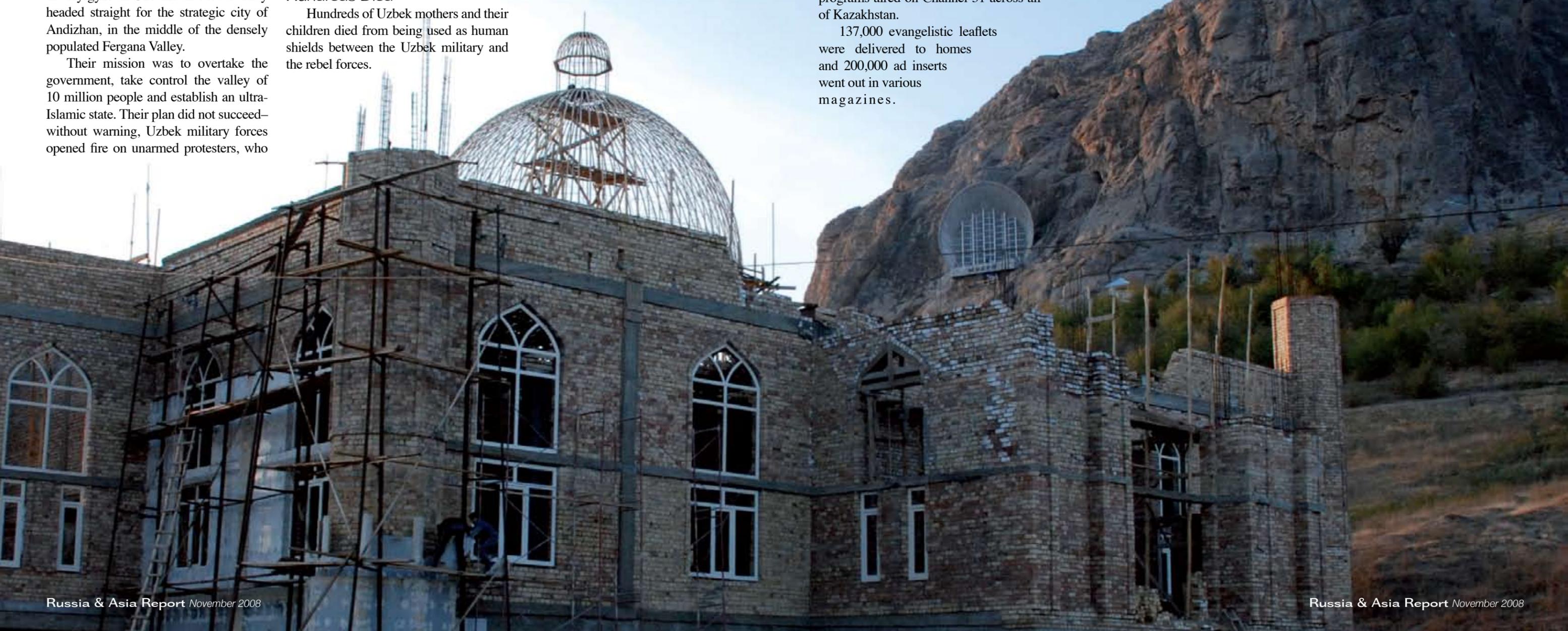
## Campaign in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan 2007

Fifty pastors told us that Bishkek has never seen such monumental evangelistic outreach before during a 30-day period.

Approximately one million people heard the Gospel message over and over again in their

home and through various media outlets in Bishkek.

Over 6,000 families contacted our



call-center by phone in this mainly Islamic city.

#### Campaign in Osh 2008

This October and November, our focus has been on the southern Kyrgyzstan cities of Osh, Dzhahalal-Abad and Kyzyl-Kiya.

These cities are on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The people here are spiritually starved. The only remedy available has been Islam.

The largest of the three cities is Osh, with 500,000 residents. It is estimated to be 2,500–3,000 years old, established during King David's reigning years. It is very pro-Islamic. We were faced with special challenges when we held an evangelistic media campaign there. But amazingly, the news and advertising media were available to us.

Half way through the campaign, the pastors of Osh report that over 1,500 calls have been logged already. Of these over 1,000 have ordered a special evangelistic DVD and requested follow-up visits. The pastors say that they have never been able to reach so many people using traditional outreach methods.

The number of people responding to the Gospel increases daily. The counseling center has now surpassed 250 calls per day.

#### Dzhalal-Abad

The second of the three evangelism campaign cities is Dzhalal-Abad, a city of 150,000 people.

In the past few years, the churches in

Dzhalal-Abad had become mired in their outreach programs and evangelism had essentially come to a halt.

But today, by working together on a media based outreach, along with IRR/TV, the churches in Dzhalal-Abad have over 700 new names and addresses of people who contacted the call-center during the 30-day evangelism campaign. Bunissa, a counselor on the phones at the call-center told us that people are asking for help. They use alcohol heavily and are looking for an escape from that road to nowhere.

"We have never seen this kind of evangelistic outreach before," said Bunissa. "We were able to place a giant billboard ad with the campaign message in the city center, very close to the central marketplace, so everyone is able to see it when they come to shop. Everyday, thousands of Muslims see the ad with our call-center number on it. We constantly receive orders for the advertised, free DVD."

#### Kyzyl-Kiya

Kyzyl-Kiya has less than 50,000 people, yet it is important to the campaigns.

The only TV channel that was available for the campaign is located here. Its signal can be picked up in Osh, Dzhalal-Abad, all the border villages and towns, and most of the Uzbekistan side of the Fergana Valley.

Preaching the Gospel in the valley

is not permitted, but the evangelistic TV broadcasts reach across the border throughout the valley while the campaign is on!

I asked our campaign coordinator to show me where the TV station is located, and he took me outside and pointed to a location far up a mountain. I could see the two towers without binoculars.

"Up there!" he said with a smile. "We installed a stronger transmitter just the other day. We had to borrow a couple of donkeys from the mountain shepherds in order to reach the station. You cannot get there by car."

"How far does the signal reach?" I asked in wonder.

"About 200 kilometers (125 miles), all the way to Namangan!"

"Amazing," I thought to myself. "God has opened a door, this TV station, to facilitate the spread of the Gospel to millions of Uzbeks; while other smaller TV stations are not interested in taking our programming. One is enough; we didn't need the other stations."

#### Central Asia is closing

On November 6, the parliament of Kyrgyzstan unanimously passed a devastating law designed to severely restrict the work of the church. According to the new law, all religious organizations,

with less than 200 members, will be outlawed. Those with a minimum 200 members will now have to register every member and have their identities confirmed by local authorities, which will still have the power to decide if an organization meets other arbitrary criteria to qualify for a religion permit. This means most Kyrgyz churches will have to cease operations and meet in secret under threat of criminal prosecution.

All missions and evangelism will be banned. Sunday schools and other religious educational institutions will also be closed if the government does not issue them a permit.

The future of the Church in Central Asia hangs in the balance. The old ways of the Soviet Union are returning to Central Asia; but the hearts of governing officials can be changed through prayer. Please pray for Central Asia.

*Hannu Haukka*



*A giant billboard ad containing an evangelistic message in the Kyrgyz language is located right next to the central market in Dzhalal-Abad, a city of 150,000 people. Many Uzbeks live here.*



# Evangelistic TV Programs to Millions in the Fergana Valley

The only TV channel to offer airtime during the city campaign, is located near the top of a mountain that measures 2,000 meters (over 6,200 ft) in height. Donkeys were used in order

to erect the TV transmitting tower at that altitude. The broadcasts cover most of Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley. An estimated 6 to 8 million people reside within the footprint of the Channel's

TV reception. The valley is one of the world's most densely populated regions on earth.

These campaigns will reach over a million people in these three cities

in Kyrgyzstan: Osh, Dzhahal-Abad and Kyzyl-Kiya. The call-center has already logged over 3000 calls, mainly from Kyrgyz Muslims and Uzbek Muslims living in Kyrgyzstan.



*Mt. Solomon flanks the city of Osh. From here you can see the Fergana Valley, where an estimated 12 million people live. The campaign targeted the Uzbek population of the valley.*