



Southern Union Mission headquarters

Photo courtesy of Southern Union Mission.

# Southern Union Mission

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Dmitry O. Yunak graduated in Finance and Economics from a Soviet secular educational institution and completed a six-year course of Theology at an underground SDA Theological Institute (Moldova, USSR). In the Soviet times, he served as a pastor, administrator, and bible/history professor in the underground Theological Institute. In 1990, he was appointed as Treasurer and Publishing Ministries Director for the USSR Division. After the Euro-Asia Division was organized in 1991, Dmitry O. Yunak served as ESD auditor and under treasurer. He was the author of a dozen of SDA history books and scores of other publications. He owns a major SDA history archive.

Daniel D. Pavelko

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The Southern Union Mission is a part of the Euro-Asia Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Organized in 1990 and reorganized in 1994, 2010, and 2012, it has its headquarters in Almaty; Kazakhstan.

Territory: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan; comprising the Kyrgyzstan, Northern Kazakhstan, and Southern Kazakhstan Missions; and the Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan Fields.

Statistics (June 30, 2021): Churches, 67; membership, 3,916; population, 116,251,000.<sup>1</sup>

## Significant Dates

1990 – Organization of the Southern Union Conference (SUC).

1994 – Reorganization of the Southern Union Conference. Leadership separated the churches in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan from the Southern Union Conference and added them to the Trans-Caucasus Union Mission.

2010 – Southern Union Conference reorganized into the Southern Union Mission.

## The History of Adventism in the Southern Union Mission

The first Adventists appeared in Central Asia in the late nineteenth century, initially in German settlements, and then the local population began to accept the Adventist message. Seventh-day Adventist congregations and companies organized in the Russian Empire as part of denominational structures (union conferences and missions) having their centers outside of Central Asia and Kazakhstan.

The session of the Russian Union board, held on January 28, 1907, approved a proposal to include Adventist congregations that existed in the territory of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in the East Russian (Siberian) Missionary Field headed by Pastor G. K. Löbsack.

G. K. Löbsack conducted his ministry in this vast territory, spending months in numerous trips. On January 1, 1911, the Siberian Union Mission headed by Gerhard P. Perk was organized. Adventists in Central Asia (three congregations with 91 members) were transferred to the Turkestan Missionary Field. In 1921 the Turkestan Missionary Field was renamed the Central Asia Field.

## The Development of Church Organization

In 1926 church leaders reorganized the Central Asia Field into the Central Asia Conference, headed by K. F. Remfert. But soon the repressions of the 1930s almost completely destroyed the church's administrative structure in the region. Congregations held worship services in secrecy, believers gathered only in small groups, the number of ministers was insufficient, and new baptisms were sporadic. It was only in 1953 that the situation somewhat improved. From the 1950s to the 1970s the Adventist Church carried out its activities in Central Asia countries and Kazakhstan both officially and unofficially. New church employees were taken on, new ministers ordained, and new churches and companies planted.

In 1954, Kazimir A. Korolenko, who lived in Tashkent, had responsibility for the mission in Central Asia at large. However, in 1958 the authorities arrested and sentenced him to eight years of imprisonment. Mikhail Petrovich

Kulakov, after finishing his sentence in Kazakhstan (1948-1953), superseded K. A. Korolenko, and from 1959 to 1975 served as a senior preacher for Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Later, David Petrovich Kulakov held the position for two years.

In 1977-1978 the following conferences were formed in Central Asia: Kazakhstan Conference (president–Rostislav N. Volkoslavskiy); Kyrgyz Conference (president–Roman T. Wagner); and the Asia-Transcaucasia Conference (president–David P. Kulakov).

During 1970-1980 the church's organizational structure re-emerged in the Soviet Union. After organizing local conferences in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, a new union conference was formed in 1990. The Inter-Republic Council of the Adventist Church of the USSR decided to unite the Central Asia and Trans-Caucasus local conferences into the Southern Union Conference (SUC) with headquarters in Almaty. The SUC included the following republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. In 1994, however, the SUC was reorganized, with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan being detached and included in the newly established Trans-Caucasus Mission.

After the collapse of the USSR, the sovereign states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan emerged in Central Asia.

The most sizeable growth in church membership in Central Asia took place in the early 1990s. People were searching for God and showed interest in studying the Bible. Large-scale evangelism took place and hundreds of people annually joined the church in the territory of the Southern Union Conference. By 1999 it had 7,259 members in SUC.

But major migration movements marked the same period. Many lay members and pastors moved to Russia and Germany for permanent residence. The emigration continues through today and negatively affects the growth and development of the Adventist Church in the countries of Central Asia.

In 2010, church administration reorganized the Southern Union Conference into the Southern Union Mission (SUM). Then in 2011, it added a new country, Afghanistan, to the territory of the Southern Union Mission. As of the end of 2017, the Southern Union Mission comprised 71 churches and 49 companies with 4,092 members.

## Presidents

1990-1994–Ilya I. Velgosha, president of the Southern Union Conference.

1994-2002–Aleksander F. Schwarz, president of the Southern Union Conference.

2002-2010–Rubin R. Ott, president of the Southern Union Conference.

2010-2015—Rubin R. Ott, president of the Southern Union Mission

2015–present--Daniil D. Pavelko, president of the Southern Union Mission.

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## SOURCES

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## NOTES

1. "Southern Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Accessed 2021. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=10054>.

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