

INDONESIA: Islamic hardliners detain transwomen

The Observers (30.05.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2J5qviM> – In West Java, Indonesia, a group of Islamic hardliners patrolling the town of Cianjur harassed and physically restrained four transgender women last Friday. All the while, police officers accompanying the group on their patrol simply looked on. A video of this scene has since circulated online.

Last week, men were patrolling an area of Cianjur called Cilaku, on the lookout for alcohol and for food stalls open during the day during the holy month of Ramadan, [according to the local police chief](#). Some of the men in the patrol belonged to the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), a self-appointed morality brigade known for its violent tactics, including attacks on bars and on people [selling food during Ramadan](#).

At one point, as the video shows, they started harassing two transwomen. They then forced their way into a building, shouting all the while, and brought out two more transwomen. All four were lined up against a wall outside, and surrounded by the large group of men, who continued to shout at them. One of the men preached loudly and forced them to repeat a promise that they would stop dressing in a feminine way.

[Coconuts Jakarta](#), an online news site, translated one of the men's orders to the transwomen: "Go ahead and sing, but wear macho outfits so that nobody will be attracted."

At the end of the video, a man splashes water from a bottle onto the transwomen's faces, and orders them to wash away their make-up.

At several points in the video, a uniformed police officer can be seen standing in the group of men, watching the scene.

The Cianjur police chief confirmed to [local media](#) that police officers were present during this incident, but said they hadn't done anything wrong; he claimed their presence had ensured the situation remained "safe and conducive".

While there are no laws against being transgender in Indonesia, transgender people are regularly targets of violence, harassment and discrimination. In May, a video circulated showing police officers publicly shaming transwomen in Aceh province.

Naila Rizqi Zakiah is a public defender with LBH Masyarakat, a Jakarta-based NGO that works with marginalised communities, including the LGBT community.

We are in contact with friends in the area where this video was filmed, who have assured us that the transwomen have moved to a safe place. We are now trying to get into contact with the victims to talk to them about helping them press charges. In any case, we intend to file a complaint.

This sort of incident is unfortunately quite common, and is

happening in many areas all over Indonesia. What you see in this video is an example of the repressive attitude of both government and society toward LGBT people in Indonesia.

We carried out research on cases of harassment and discrimination of LGBT people throughout 2017. We counted that last year there were 973 such cases that were reported in the media. We found that 26 percent of victims were targeted because they were gay or lesbian, while nearly 74 percent were targeted because they were transgender.

We also noted who the perpetrators were: in 55 percent of cases, they were from law enforcement or government agencies, while in 45 percent of cases they were from civil society.

“Even progressive parties aren’t speaking out against abuses faced by the LGBT community”

It’s a very alarming situation. The Islamic Defenders Front has become a sort of moral police, targeting the LGBT community as well as all sorts of ethnic and religious minorities. Unfortunately, the police tend to agree and support these groups who want to punish what they call the “immoral community”. [Editor’s Note: a [recent survey](#) showed that 87 percent of Indonesians considered the LGBT community “a threat to private or public life”.]

Several events have taken place in the last few years that have worsened the climate for LGBT people in Indonesia. In 2016, LGBT groups were [barred](#) from universities. In 2017, a

conservative group called the Family Love Alliance brought a petition to the Constitutional Court to try to criminalise homosexuality. The court [rejected it](#), but now our country's parliament is considering a ban.

There are so many politicians and civil society leaders who talk about wanting to criminalise homosexuality. I think cases like the one we saw in the video will keep happening if they keep stoking anti-LGBT sentiment. And at the moment, with regional elections coming up in June, even progressive parties aren't speaking out against abuses faced by the LGBT community.

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A lost childhood – Syrian

refugees in Lebanon



Painting by an SB OverSeas beneficiary in Lebanon

By Jade-Leigh Tenwick, Communications and Development Officer at SB OverSeas

This story is part of our child marriage series which aims to highlight this increasingly prevalent practice amongst the refugee community in Lebanon.

SB Overseas (31.05.2018) – This article tells the story of Ream, an eighteen year old who attends one of our SB OverSeas centre. SB OverSeas has three centres in Lebanon where we run education and empowerment programs.

Ream left Syria at the age of twelve shortly after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. A conflict which led her not only to lose her home, but also her childhood and education.

Ream, along with her family, followed the same path as many other Syrians escaping the conflict to Lebanon. She was enthusiastic to start her life in Lebanon and continue her education. She dreamed of being a human rights lawyer, giving a voice to those who had none.

This dream did not last long. Registration requirements and safety concerns of her family thwarted her educational opportunities.

Left at home. Without routine. The monotony and the hopelessness of the situation began to erode at the once happy and ambitious child. Her mental health deteriorated. Her mother charged her with more responsibility in the household in a bid to lift her out of her depression. This was her existence for two years.

At the age of fourteen, Ream was told about her impending marriage to a family friend. This was her chance to start a new life. Excited for the wedding day, she dreamed about wearing her white dress. After an idyllic day, she was filled of hope for a new life with her husband. A husband nearly double her age.

This story follows the same narrative as the other stories we have heard. Cracks began to appear and her feelings of hope

shrunk. They were unable to register the marriage as Ream was too young. This legal status had consequences for her the child she was bearing. Without legal status, the child would be born statelessness – a life without clear rights or legal status.

Their problems also extended to the husband's family. Living in a small space caused tensions to heighten. She tried to ease this by shouldering more household responsibilities. This included not only household chores, but walking to retrieve water. Overwhelmed by the responsibilities and pregnancy, she would often find herself in tears.

With problems escalating, she felt more and more overwhelmed and asked for a divorce so she could return to her family. Her husband refused. He threatened her stating he would not register the marriage, renounce their child and marry another woman. The ramifications of these actions were sufficient to convince her to stay.

Things did not get better. Her husband began to beat her, sometimes daily, and she worried about the physical affect of the trauma on her unborn child. She fled her family to seek their support. Yet, they were not as supportive as she had hoped. With over 70% of Syrian refugees living below the poverty line in Lebanon, food is scare and hunger is rife. They told her to forget about her old family and to return to her new one.

Ream had to choose either to be vulnerable and alone on the streets or to return to her husband. She chose the latter.

With her baby born, she had not only herself to worry about, but another human. With another mouth to feed, she was often hungry, barely able to provide for her child.

Her health deteriorated and her husband decided took her back to the family visiting her sporadically. After three months, her family decided it was time for her to fend for herself. Left out on the street, she begged her husband to look after her and her son. He rented a small room for her. This came at a cost. He appeared to only visit her when he wanted to have a target for his anger and frustration.

Her family realising the extent of the situation, took her back in. After three years of limbo, Ream is now trying to rebuild her life and find the girl who once dreamed of being a human rights lawyer. She comes to SB OverSeas centre four times a week and attends our courses. At our centre, she also speaks of her story with the other girls to raise awareness of her and many other girls' experiences with child marriage.

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BELGIUM / ECJ: Flanders ban on ritual slaughter is legal, says court

By Alan Hope

The Brussels Times (30.05.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2kAl6Wj> – **A ban introduced in Flanders to limit ritual slaughter – killing animals without stunning them first – has been declared lawful by the European Court of Justice.**

The measure is aimed at limiting the number of animals slaughtered according to Muslim rite, by making it illegal to carry out slaughters in temporary abattoirs, which were previously opened up at the end of Ramadan to cope with the demand. Regulated slaughterhouses are still able to carry out the procedure, but have been shown in the past to be unable to keep up with demand.

Under normal circumstances, when an animal is slaughtered it is first stunned, by a captive bolt in the case of cows and calves, and by electrodes in the case of pigs. Under the rules of halal, the animal must be conscious at the moment of slaughter, when it also has to be exsanguinated. Jewish kosher rituals have roughly similar rules and are carried out by certified butchers (shochet), but there is not the pressure caused by an annual festival, so registered abattoirs are well

able to keep up with demand.

Muslim representatives had taken the Flemish ban to the European Court, arguing that it represented a block on freedom of religion – a position previously upheld by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, on a proposal to ban ritual slaughter altogether. The EU court rejected that argument.

Earlier this week, the Walloon parliament approved a ban on ritual slaughter, which becomes law on 1 June but will only come into operation on 1 September next year.

Meanwhile the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice, Eid Al-Adha, takes place this year at the end of the fast of Ramadan, on 21 August.

See the full court decision at <https://bit.ly/2JdWvEJ>.

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RUSSIA: Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses

OPEN CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

STATEMENT OF FACTS AS OF MAY 24, 2018

Belgorod, Belgorod Region:

- **Sergey Aleksandrovich Voykov**, DOB 28 August 1975, charged under Article 282.2 (2) of the Criminal Code
- **Anatoliy Aleksandrovich Shalyapin**, DOB 21 01 1994, charged under Article 282.2 (2) of the Criminal Code

Kemerovo, Kemerovo Region:

- Open criminal case under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, 12 searches in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses conducted, nobody has been charged

Mayskiy, Republic of Kabardino Balkaria:

- **Yuriy Viktorovich Zalipayev**, DOB 8 October 1962, charged under Article 280(1) and 282(1) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement

Orenburg, Orenburg Region:

- **Aleksandr Gennadyevich Suvorov**, DOB 20 April 1980, charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention
- **Vladimir Yuryevich Kochnev**, DOB 15 October 1979, charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention
- **Vladislav Sergeyeovich Kolbanov**, DOB 27 November 1992, charged under Article 282.3(1) of the Criminal Code, currently under house arrest
- **Olga Timofeyevna Sandu**, DOB 31 March 1984, charged under Article 282.2(2), recognizance agreement
- **Pavel Aleksandrovich Lekontsev**, DOB 5 July 1981, charged under Article 282.2(2), recognizance agreement
- **Aleksey Nikolayevich Matveev**, DOB 23 April 1983, charged under Article 282.2(2), recognizance agreement
- **Sergey Viktorovich Logunov**, DOB 28 November 1962, charged under Article 282.2(2), recognizance agreement
- **Nikolay Nikolayevich Zhugin**, DOB 14 February 1976, charged under Article 282.2(2), recognizance agreement
- **Fail Samigullovich Shangareyev**, DOB 16 December 1960, charges unknown, recognizance agreement

Oryol, Oryol Region:

- **Dennis Christensen Ole**, DOB 18 December 1972, charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention
- **Sergey Vladimirovich Skrynnikov**, DOB 30 October 1962, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code

Perm, Perm Region:

- **Aleksandr Vasilyevich Solovyev** (DOB 13 February 1970), charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, currently under house arrest

Polyarny, Murmansk Region:

- **Roman Nikolayevich Markin**, DOB 18 March 1974, charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention
- **Viktor Fedorovich Trofimov**, DOB 26 March 1957, charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention

Prokhladny, Republic of Kabardino Balkaria:

- **Arkadya Akopovich Akopyan**, DOB 28 May 1948, charged under Article 282 (1) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement

Shuya, Ivanovo Region:

- **Dmitriy Vasilyevich Mikhailov**, DOB 25 October 1977, suspected under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, no charges yet

Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan:

- **Anatoly Sergeevich Vilitkevich**, DOB 15 September 1986, charged under Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention

Vladivostok, Vladivostok Region:

- **Valentin Pavlovich Osadchuk**, DOB 15 March 1978, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, currently in pre-trial detention
- **Nailya Sunatovna Kogay**, DOB 5 October 1951, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement
- **Yelena Viktorovna Zayshchuk**, DOB 25 August 1934, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement
- **Raisa Mikhailovna Usanova**, DOB 1947, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement
- **Nina Ivanovna Purge**, DOB 1940, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement
- **Lyubov Aleksandrovna Galaktionova**, DOB 1942, charged under Article 282.2(2) of the Criminal Code, recognizance agreement

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ALGERIA: Two more Protestant churches closed down by government

World Watch Monitor (29.05.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2IYNDUb> – The authorities in Algeria have closed down two more Protestant churches, amidst growing pressure on the country's Christian minority.

Over the past weekend, police sealed off two churches in the north-eastern province of Kabylie, where much of the growth in the Church is happening.

One church is in Ait-Mellikeche, a district of Tazmalt, in the Bejaia region (200km east of Algiers, the capital). It was established in 2005, and more than 200 attended its weekly service. It affiliated to the main umbrella organization for Protestant churches, Eglises Protestantes d'Algerie (EPA), in 2007.

The notice to close the church was unexpected, as one of its leaders – who wants to remain anonymous – told World Watch Monitor:

“The officers came in on Friday morning. They simply sealed off the main entrance without a prior notice, as was the case before with other EPA-affiliated churches.”

Moreover there is no notification explaining the reasons behind the closure.

Yesterday (28 May), some leaders of the church went to police in Bejaia in an attempt to understand the authorities’ motives and to try to get them to lift the closure measure.

But “We were sent back empty-handed” one told WWM.

“The police told us to send a request to the Prefet of Bejaia, the only one who can do something since he was the one who ordered the closure”.

The other church to be closed this past weekend is in Maatkas town, 20 km from the main city of Tizi-Ouzou, 100km east of Algiers. Again, the order came from the Prefect, this time of Tizi-Ouzou.

The church of Maatkas is a nascent community, which gathers sixty members for its weekly service. It’s not yet affiliated to the EPA.

One of its leaders, again on condition of anonymity, told World Watch Monitor that the closure was not justified.

He said he got a call from a police officer saying: "I'm calling to inform you that we have received an order to close your church".

On Saturday morning, a group of police officers sealed off the main entrance of the building. They also ordered the church leaders not to open until further notice.

The Algerian government has been criticised for discrimination against the country's Christian minority. Churches and individual Christians have faced increased restrictions in recent months, raising concerns that these pressures signal a "coordinated campaign of intensified action against churches by the governing authorities", according to Christian advocacy group Middle East Concern.

In addition to church closures, individual Christians have faced legal harassments in recent months, as [WWM has reported](#).

On 18 May, [EPA called on the Algerian government to lift its measure for closing down churches](#), and to give equal treatment to the Christian minority, as stated by the constitution:

"As full citizens, we call on the highest authorities in the country to ensure that all the fundamental rights of the citizen are protected, regardless of their religious

affiliation.”

EPA had been officially recognised by the government since 1974. But in 2012, new laws meant that it had to re-register. Despite meeting all the legal requirements and applying for re-registration in 2013, the EPA is yet to receive an official government response, meaning, technically, it lacks official legal status.

Last month, three pastors from Algeria visited the USA, UK and France to ask that their leaders lobby the Algerian government to stop its current crackdown.

Mustafa Krim, Ali Khidri and Youssef Ourahmane, representing EPA, wanted to ensure that Christians are provided for under Algerian law, that the laws are respected and implemented and that Algeria fulfils its commitment to freedom of religion or belief as stated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

They are lobbying for the de-regulation of places of worship, official recognition for the EPA, an end to anti-proselytism laws, and freedom to import Christian materials.

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TAJIKISTAN: Daniil Islamov released after serving unjust imprisonment in Tajikistan

JW.org (24.04.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2sj1hXT> – On April 13, 2018, Daniil Islamov, a conscientious objector and one of Jehovah's Witnesses, was released from Yavan Prison after unjustly serving a six-month prison sentence under the charge of evading military service. Mr. Islamov was imprisoned for nearly a year, since he had been in pretrial detention for six months before sentencing.

In April 2017, he received a military call-up and reported to the enlistment office. He informed the officers that he could not perform military service in good conscience. The commissariat arrested Mr. Islamov and detained him in military barracks until his trial. While in detention, he was repeatedly pressured to take the military oath and to put on a military uniform, which he refused to do.

According to Tajikistan law, a person may substitute alternative service for military service, but the government

has not enacted legislation to provide for this. Since Mr. Islamov had been unlawfully detained for refusing military service, he submitted a complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD). On October 5, 2017, the WGAD released its opinion and confirmed that conscientious objection to military service is an internationally protected right. The opinion concluded that Tajikistan is guilty of arbitrarily detaining Mr. Islamov and should release him immediately.

However, Tajikistan disregarded the WGAD decision. On October 13, 2017, Tajikistan's military court sentenced Mr. Islamov to six months in prison. The Military Collegium of the Supreme Court rejected Mr. Islamov's appeal, and he served his full sentence.

Philip Brumley, General Counsel for Jehovah's Witnesses, stated: "We hope that the Tajikistan government will reconsider its treatment of conscientious objectors like Mr. Islamov. Since the WGAD and other international tribunals have repeatedly ruled that conscientious objection to military service is an internationally protected right, we anticipate that Tajikistan will adhere to its commitment to respect the fundamental rights of conscientious objectors."

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PAKISTAN: Officials take part in a new assault on the Ahmadiyya Muslim community

FOREF (26.05.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2IVkTrf> – The Forum for Religious Freedom – Europe (FOREF) condemns in the strongest terms the 23 May 2018 attack on the Baitul Mubarak Mosque in Sialkot, Pakistan, which resulted in the near destruction of the facility. The mosque has historical and spiritual importance for the Ahmadiyya Community.

According to information received by FOREF and media reports, the violence began with the destruction the house of Hakim Hassamuddin by the members of the Municipal Committee of Sialkot, who were escorted by local police. A mob of around 600 persons, reportedly from the local Sunni Muslim community, joined in for the attack on the nearby mosque, chanting anti-Ahmadiyya slogans. The attack took place over a period of about seven hours. Officials claim repairs on the building were illegal.

The Ahmaddiyya Community characterized the incident as “vandalism of buildings by the governmental administration for

the mere satisfaction of extremist forces without any judicial order.”

“The government of Pakistan must conduct an impartial investigation and bring the perpetrators of these crimes, including local officials, to justice, and ensure that reparations are made for the damages done to these holy places,” according to Dr. Aaron Rhodes, President of FOREF.

“Our organization and other independent human rights institutions are ready to work with Pakistani authorities to put in place laws and policies that are consistent with Pakistan’s international legal human rights obligations to protect all religious minorities,” he added.

For more information:

Dr. Aaron Rhodes – President: aaronarhodes@gmail.com

Peter Zoehrer – Director General: foref.office@gmail.com

Links to news media accounts of the incident are below.

- <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistani-mob-destroys-ahmadi-mosque/4407754.html>
- <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/5/24/historic-ahmadi-mosque-demolished-by-mob-in-pakistan>
- <https://www.rabwah.net/pakistani-mob-destroys-historic-mosque/>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/mob-demolishes-ahmadiyya-mosque-in-pakistan/article23978822.ece>
- <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-ahmadis/pakistani-mob-destroys-100-year-old-minority-ahmadi-mosque->

[idUSKCN1IP20H](#)

- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/mob-demolishes-mosque-belonging-to-minority-sect-in-pakistan/articleshow/64305273.cms>
- <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/320990-ahmedi-worship-place-partially-demolished-in-sialkot>
- <https://www.dawn.com/news/1409714/local-authorities-demolish-ahmadis-historical-building-mob-vandalises-place-of-worship>
- <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/5/24/historic-ahmadi-mosque-demolished-by-mob-in-pakistan>
- <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistani-mob-destroys-ahmadi-mosque/4407754.html>
- https://tribune.com.pk/story/1717928/1-mob-razes-historic-ahmadi-property-sialkot/?amp=1&__twitter_impression=true
- https://dailytimes.com.pk/244101/mob-led-by-pti-leader-rains-down-misery-on-ahmadi-community-desecrates-worship-site-in-sialkot/amp/?__twitter_impression=true
- <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/05/24/mob-attacks-ahmedi-sacred-site-worship-place-in-sialkot/>

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RUSSIA: Three more Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars

Forum18

(25.05.2018)

– http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2381 – *Officers launched 28 raids on Jehovah's Witness homes in May, often forcing entry, threatening occupants with weapons and seizing literature and other items. Under criminal investigation are 7 Jehovah's Witnesses in pre-trial detention, 1 under house arrest and at least 11 under travel restrictions. Two others are already on trial. (Excerpts hereafter)*

Perm

Aleksandr Solovyov and his wife Anna had just returned from a trip abroad when law enforcement agents detained them at Perm-2 railway station on the evening of 22 May. Friends who had come to meet them said that officers put Solovyov in handcuffs and took him and his wife away in separate cars, the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses reported on 24 May.

Anna Solovyova has since been released, but Aleksandr is being held in a temporary detention centre while a judge decides on further restrictive measures. It is as yet unclear whether he will be placed in pre-trial detention or which court will rule on the matter. Under which part of Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("Organisation of" or "participation in" "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in

force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity”) he is being investigated is also unknown.

Investigators searched the Solovyovs' home overnight on 22/23 May and seized the deeds to the flat, electronic devices, computer drives, their wifi router, photographs, and their collection of Bibles.

Before the nationwide ban on Jehovah's Witness activity and the consequent liquidation of local communities, Aleksandr Solovyov chaired the Perm Jehovah's Witness congregation, according to federal tax records. Anna Solovyova does not appear on the list of founding members.

As of 24 May, Solovyov was being held at the Temporary Detention Centre, ulitsa Uralskaya, 90, Perm, 614017.

Orenburg Region: Mass raids

Investigative Committee operatives, FSB security service agents, and armed riot police carried out 18 house searches in Orenburg, Buzuluk, Perevolotsky, and Sol-Iletsk, also on 17 May.

They took 15 people away for questioning, three of whom were then sent to a temporary detention centre, according to statements by the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses on 17 May and 21 May.

Of these three, Judge Igor Ismaylov of Industrial District Court ruled on 19 May that one – Vladislav Kolbanov – should be placed under house arrest, while the other two –**Aleksandr Suvorov and Vladimir Kochnyov** – should be kept in pre-trial detention until 14 July.

Orenburg Region Investigative Committee reported that a further six people are under travel restrictions.

Forum 18 understands Suvorov and Kochnyov's prison address to be:

Orenburg Region

460000 Orenburg

ulitsa Naberezhnaya, 7

Investigation Prison No. 1

The Investigative Committee said in a press statement on 22 May that nine people in Orenburg Region have been formally charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"), Article 282.2, Part 2 ("Participation in" such an organisation), and Criminal Code Article 282.3, Part 1 ("Financing of extremist activity").

The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses thinks that Kochnyov and Suvorov (both from Orenburg) have been charged

under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. Kolbanov (also from Orenburg), Boris Andreyev (from Perevolotsky), and Anatoly Vichkitov (from Sol-Iletsk) are also among those charged, although it remains unclear with which alleged offences.

Before the liquidation of the Administrative Centre, Orenburg and Buzuluk had registered Jehovah's Witness communities, while Perevolotsky and Sol-Iletsk did not. According to federal tax records, Suvorov previously chaired the Central Orenburg Jehovah's Witness community, and Kochnyov was among its founding members.

The raids on 17 May took place "as a result of carefully planned and organised operational and investigative actions", according to the Investigative Committee statement, and had the aim of "seizing documents and items relevant to the criminal case, as well as identifying other persons involved in unlawful activities".

In raiding the historically pacifist Jehovah's Witnesses, police "anti-extremism" officers, the Economic Security and Anti-Corruption Administration, and the Orenburg Region FSB security service were also involved. The raids on pacifists also included what was described as "armed support" from National Guard special forces troops.

Investigators allege that the suspects, knowing of the 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witness activity, "organised the activity of a structural subdivision of Jehovah's Witnesses by calling and holding meetings, organising the recruitment of new members, and communicating the contents of religious literature to

meeting participants”.

The investigation is continuing, with “necessary investigative and operational-search measures underway in order to collect and consolidate a base of evidence”, according to the statement.

Telephones at Orenburg Region Investigative Committee went unanswered when Forum 18 called on 24 May to ask why officials thought armed force was necessary against pacifists.

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**RUSSIA / EU / OSCE: EU
Statement on the situation of**

Jehovah's witnesses in Russia

OSCE Permanent Council N° 1185, Vienna

HRWF salutes the continuous efforts of the European Union and the OSCE to defend the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia but regrets that many faith-based organizations defending religious freedom and human rights NGOs keep silent about the ban (170,000 JW deprived of the right to religious freedom), the confiscation of all their property (395 congregations), the numerous criminal cases opened against them (20, as of 25 May) and the imprisonment of 7 of their members.

EU

(10.05.2018)

– <https://www.osce.org/permanent-council/381820?download=true> – The European Union is deeply concerned by the recent reports of increased government harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, which includes police raids of private homes, arbitrary detentions and intimidation.

As we have stated previously in many other occasions, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, like all other individuals, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of religion or belief as well as freedom of assembly without discrimination, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation and Russia's international commitments.

On April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses and all 395 of the Witnesses' local legal entities on grounds of "extremism". The Russian government claimed that although it was liquidating the legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses,

individual Witnesses would be free to practice their faith. However, the government's claim is inconsistent with its actions. Over the past year, authorities have launched nine criminal investigations and five Jehovah's Witnesses are currently in detention. All could face possible prison sentences of up to ten years merely for meeting together for peaceful worship. In addition to the criminal cases, around 90-100 properties belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses have been confiscated by the Russian state based on court decision, and an additional 100 properties are currently in court proceedings. The Russian authorities have also threatened to deprive Jehovah's Witnesses of parental rights.

The EU reiterates its call on Russia and all other OSCE participating States to respect its international commitments on freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. OSCE participating States have repeatedly affirmed the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a pillar of the concept of comprehensive security.

The EU will continue to follow closely the developments concerning the Jehovah's Witnesses across the OSCE region and are worried about information received concerning several participating States limiting Jehovah's Witnesses' right to practice their faith.

The freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is a fundamental right of every human being, without discrimination. This right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and our shared OSCE commitments. Freedom of religion or belief includes the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, individually or in community with

others, in public or private, through worship, observance, practice and teaching. The EU continues to promote freedom of religion or belief, a right that must be respected and promoted everywhere on the basis of the principles of equality, nondiscrimination and universality.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.*

** The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

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MALAYSIA: Inquiry into Pastor Koh, missing for 15 months, hears of police collusion

World Watch Monitor (24.05.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2L1Y4D1> – The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) has [resumed its inquiry](#) into the mystery [disappearance of church leader Raymond Koh](#), who was [kidnapped](#) in broad daylight by masked men on 13 February, 2017, and others.

The [inquiry](#) was halted in January when part-time Uber driver Lam Chang Nam was suddenly charged with Koh's kidnap. Malaysian law specifies that SUHAKAM's power to hold an inquiry ceases when court proceedings begin against a suspect. He had previously been arrested, and cleared of the kidnap charge.

However, SUHAKAM said their panel had “concluded unanimously that the subject matter in court (i.e. Lam's charge) is not the same subject matter as the public inquiry”. It said it had taken into consideration arguments and submissions from the police and Koh's family lawyers. The inquiry is into the disappearance of four people: Koh, another Christian couple, Joshua and Ruth Hilmy, and Muslim activist Amri Che Mat.

The civil society coalition Citizens Against Enforced Disappearances (CAGED) accused law enforcement agencies of

trying to shut down the inquiry because it embarrassed the police.

As SUHAKAM announced it would resume its inquiry, a police whistleblower came forward alleging that the abduction of Koh, as well as of social activist Amri Che Mat, missing since 2016, involved Malaysia's Special Branch, and was done with the full knowledge and approval of the then-Inspector General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar.

The whistleblower, Sergeant Shamzaini Mohamed Daud, had first approached Amri Che Mat's wife on 12 May with information.

Koh's lawyer Gurdial Singh told media "[Daud] has said that he wants to come clean and does not want to pay for the sins of others.

"He told Amri's wife that this was indeed a black operation by the Special Branch in which some very senior police officers were involved".

'Perjury'

Singh has said he plans to call the [officer as a witness in the resumed SUHAKAM inquiry](#), adding that if the allegations are true, it would mean some of those who have already given their testimony have committed perjury.

Che Mat's wife Norhayati Mohd Ariffin has said "This police

officer told us that he knew who had taken my husband Amri.”

She also named a top police officer in charge of Special Branch’s Social Extremism Division (E2) as the person who headed the operation.

“When I asked the police officer why Amri was taken, he alleged it was because of ‘Shia’ and ‘forex’,” she said in a statement.

The development has given new hope to Koh’s family. His wife, Susanna Liew, said she hoped “[Raymond] will be released soon”.

SUHAKAM’s announcement came shortly after the 9 May election of Mahathir Mohamad as Malaysia’s seventh prime minister. He led Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) to unexpected election victory over the right-wing Barisan Nasional coalition, which had governed Malaysia since the country’s independence in 1957.

A spokesperson for the international charity Open Doors, which supports Christians under pressure around the world, said “initial signs indicate [Mahathir’s] government may be more amenable to Christians, and that it aims to uproot some of the corruption issues that plagued the previous government”.

“I hope now, with the new government, that [Koh’s] investigation documents will not be put under the Official

Secrets Act anymore,” Liew added.

Koh's abduction

Koh was [kidnapped on 13 February last year](#) by at least 15 masked men driving black 4×4 vehicles. They ambushed his car in a military-precision operation that was caught on CCTV.

Koh was bundled out of his car and carried away. His vehicle was also taken and has not been found.

[Video footage](#) of the abduction in broad daylight was shared widely and shocked the nation.

Other missing Malaysians

Koh's disappearance in an urban environment in, until recently, moderate-Muslim Malaysia is one of a number of “missing” cases SUHAKAM is investigating.

The national human rights commission is also investigating the disappearances of social activist Amri Che Mat, Pastor Joshua Hilmy and his wife Ruth Sitepu.

Amri, the founder of non-profit organisation Perlis Hope, went missing on 24 November 2016. His vehicle was found abandoned.

There has been media speculation that he was promoting the

Shia ideology, a branch of Islam that the majority-Sunni Malaysian Muslims reject. Amri's wife has denied the alleged link to Shi'ism.

Joshua Hilmy, a Malay who converted to Christianity, and his wife Ruth, a Christian from Kalimantan in Borneo, were reported missing on 6 March 2017.

Non-Muslim minority groups remain concerned they could have been abducted by Muslim vigilantes, given the rise of an intolerant strain of Islam in Malaysia that seeks to impose Sharia (Islamic law), mandating amputations.

Their cases, as well as Koh's, are being closely watched because police have been unable to provide answers after months of investigations.

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