

# US quits 'biased' UN human rights council

BBC (20.06.2018) – <https://bbc.in/2tiif8o> – The US has pulled out of the United Nations Human Rights Council, calling it a “cesspool of political bias”.

The “hypocritical and self-serving” body “makes a mockery of human rights”, said US envoy to the UN Nikki Haley.

Formed in 2006, the Geneva-based council has been criticised for allowing countries with questionable human rights records to be members.

But activists said the US move could hurt efforts to monitor and address human rights abuses around the world.

Ms Haley announced her country’s intention to quit the council at a joint news conference with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who called the council “a poor defender of human rights”.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in a statement released through his spokesman, responded by saying he would have “much preferred” the US to remain in the council.

The UN human rights commissioner, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein,

called the US withdrawal “disappointing, if not really surprising, news”. Israel, meanwhile, has praised the decision.

The move comes amid intense criticism over the Trump administration’s policy of separating child migrants from their parents at the US-Mexico border.

On Monday [Mr Hussein has called the policy “unconscionable”](#).

### ***More dismay among allies***

This is just the latest rejection of multilateralism by the Trump administration, and will likely unsettle those who look to the United States to protect and promote human rights around the world.

The United States has always had a conflicting relationship with the UN Human Rights Council. The Bush Administration decided to boycott the council when it was created in 2006 for many of the same reasons cited by the Trump administration.

The then UN ambassador was John Bolton – who is currently President Trump’s national security adviser and a strong critic of the UN.

It wasn't until years later, in 2009, that the United States re-joined under the Obama administration.

Many allies have tried to convince the United States to remain in the council. Even many who agree with Washington's long standing criticisms of the body believe the United States should actively work to reform it from within, rather than disengaging.

### ***What is the UN Human Rights Council?***

The UN set up the council in 2006 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which faced widespread criticism for letting countries with poor human rights records become members.

A group of 47 elected countries from different global regions serve for three-year terms on the council.

The UNHRC meets three times a year, and reviews the human rights records of all UN members in a special process the council says gives countries the chance to say what they have done to improve human rights, known as [the Universal Periodic Review](#).

The council also sends out independent experts and has set up commissions of inquiry to report on human rights violations in countries including Syria, North Korea, Burundi, Myanmar and South Sudan.

### ***Why has the US decided to quit?***

The decision to leave the body follows years of US criticism.

The country initially refused to join the council in 2006, arguing that, like the old commission, the UNHRC had admitted nations with questionable human rights records.

It only joined in 2009 under President Barack Obama, and [won re-election to the council in 2012](#).

But human rights groups voiced fresh complaints about the body in 2013, after [China, Russia, Saudia Arabia, Algeria and Vietnam were elected members](#).

This followed [Israel's unprecedented boycott of one of the council's reviews](#), alleging unfair criticism from the body.

Last year, [Nikki Haley told the council it was "hard to accept" that resolutions had been passed against Israel yet none had been considered for Venezuela](#), where dozens of protesters had been killed during political turmoil.

Israel is the only country that is subject to a permanent standing agenda item, meaning its treatment of the Palestinians is regularly scrutinised.

On Tuesday, despite her harsh words for the UNHRC, Ms Haley said she wanted “to make it crystal clear that this step is not a retreat from our human rights commitments”.

### ***What’s been the reaction?***

Some countries and diplomats were quick express disappointment about the US withdrawal.

The UNHRC’s current president, Slovenian ambassador Vojislav Suc, said the body was the only one “responding to human rights issues and situations worldwide”.

After the US decision to quit, he said, “it is essential that we uphold a strong and vibrant council”.

[UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said the decision was “regrettable”](#), arguing that while reforms are needed, the UNHRC is “crucial to holding states to account”.

A number of charities and aid groups criticised the move, with the American Civil Liberties Union saying the Trump administration was leading a “concerted, aggressive effort to violate basic human rights”.

The New York-based group Human Rights Watch condemned the US

decision to leave the council and called President Trump's human rights policy "one-dimensional".

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to support the measure, posting a number of tweets praising the country's "courageous decision".

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## **LEBANON: The Chief's Daughter**



*SB OverSeas is a humanitarian organisation working in Lebanon to provide access to education. They are strictly against the practice of child marriage which affects many of the girls in our schools and work to keep them in education. Read more about our work here: [www.sboverseas.org](http://www.sboverseas.org)*

*Written by Kevin Charbel, Project Manager in Saida, Lebanon*

SB Overseas (06.20.2018) – I still see her sometimes, walking through the maze of corridors in the shelter she lives in. Our eyes will meet for the briefest of moments as she smiles nervously before dropping her gaze, and passing me by silently. In that instant I feel the urge to reach out to her, to ask her how she's been and what she's up to, but I always hold back, because I know that any interaction between us carries a risk to her safety.

Sarah was married under duress three months ago, at the age of 14. For some time, she openly defied her father, the community's chief, resisting his attempts to marry her to another teenager. She wanted to stay in school, to keep learning and to be with her friends. Eventually though, her father grew tired of her refusals, resorting instead to beating her into submission. It didn't take long after that for Sarah to be engaged. When I found out what had happened I

made sure she knew we could protect her and that we would defend her right to choose, but by then, in her mind, the only thing worse than getting married to a stranger was to stay living with her father.

The once vibrant, cheeky student who would knock on my office door just to say hello disappeared from one day to another. Her marriage precludes her from continuing her education as she is now expected to prioritise domestic duties. This 14 year old girl is under pressure to learn to be a "good wife", meaning she must quickly master the skills to keep a clean home and satisfy her husband's appetite, as well as learn not to flinch when he makes sexual advances. Sarah's own desires and thoughts no longer matter; her position in society limited by the four walls of her modest home, where she is expected to remain while her husband is at work.

Child brides are often told that the more compliant and submissive they are, the easier the transition will be. They are the ones who must adapt, not their husband. They are the ones who must sacrifice, who must accept hardships and who must, all of a sudden, become women. Sarah's imagination and fiery stubbornness were once assets in the classroom, where they could be put to good use. Now these traits are a risk to her; she must lose this part of herself if she is to fit into the mould her father has set for her. She has no real choice in the matter, as if she were to end up discarded by her husband, she would not have the option to start again, she would be tainted.

Her friends, who are still in school, tell me that Sarah's father threatens her with more violence should she seek to continue contact with any of our staff members. If she is



isolated there is much less risk of her rejecting her conditions and, as time goes on, the combination of aloneness and intimidation will numb Sarah into accepting a reality she would otherwise never have chosen for herself.

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## **RUSSIA: 19 Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars as of 15 June**

HRWF (08.06.2018) – The number of Jehovah's Witnesses deprived of their freedom is increasing week after week.

Three more Jehovah's Witnesses have been arrested for "planning the activity of an extremist organization" (!): **43-year-old Konstantin Bazhenov, 35-year-old Aleksei Budenchuk,**

## **and 33-year-old Feliks Makhammadiev**

See below the region they are from, followed by the name of the detainee and birthdate, the date of the arrest, the article of the criminal code and the dates of their pre-trial detention.

### ***Charges***

**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.

**Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2:** 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.

### ***List of 16 other JW who have been jailed since May 2017***

#### **Oryol Region Oryol**

Dennis CHRISTENSEN (18-Dec-72)

25-May-17

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 26-May-18 / 1-Aug-18

## **Republic of Tatarstan Naberezhniye Chelny**

Ilkham Shamilevich Karimov (9-Feb-81)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 29-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Vladimir Nikolayevich Myakushin (6-Nov-87)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1), (1.1) and (2)

Pre-trial detention: 29-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Konstantin Matrashov (1983)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1), (1.1) and (2)

Pre-trial detention: 29-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

Aydar Maratovich Yulmetyev (Aug-93)

27-Mar-18

Article 282.2(1), (1.1) and (2)

Pre-trial detention: 31-May-18/ 25-Jul-18

## **Republic of Bashkortostan Ufa**

Anatoliy Sergeyevich Vilitovich (15-Sep-86)

10-Apr-18

Article 282.2(2)

Pre-trial detention: 12-Apr-18/ 2-Jul-18

### **Murmansk Region Polyarny**

Roman Nikolayevich Markin (18-Mar-74)

18-Apr-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 23-Apr-18/ 11-Jun-18

Viktor Fedorovich Trofimov (26-Mar-57)

18-Apr-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 23-Apr-18/ 12-Jun-18

### **Vladivostok Region Vladivostok**

Valentin Pavlovich Osadchuk (15-Mar-78)

19-Apr-18

Article 282.2(2)

Pre-trial detention: 23-Apr-18/ 20-Jun-18

### **Orenburg Region Orenburg**

Aleksandr Gennadyevich Suvorov (20-Apr-80)

16-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 19-May-18/ 14-Jul-18

Vladimir Yuryevich Kochnev (15-Oct-79)

16-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 19-May-18/ 14-Jul-18

### **Magadan Region Magadan**

Konstantin Nikolayevich Petrov (9-Aug-86)

30-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18/ 29-Jul-18

Ivan Grigoryevich Puyda (C.O.) (5-Nov-78)

30-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18 30/-Jul-18

Yevgeniy Anatolyevich Zyablov (9-Mar-77)

30-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18/ 29-Jul-18

Sergey Liviyevich Yerkin (23-Jun-53)

30-May-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention: 01-Jun-18/ 29-Jul-18

### **Tomsk Region Tomsk**

Sergey Gennadyevich Klimov (C.O.) (26-Mar-70)

3-Jun-18

Article 282.2(1)

Pre-trial detention 05-Jun-18 04-Aug-18

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## **RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witnesses hit with two-month pretrial detention**

*Saratov: Searches, frame-ups and arrests of three believers*

JW in Russia (15.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2LX0e7t> and <https://bit.ly/2M1fbp1> – On 12 June 2018 in Saratov and the oblast, personnel of law enforcement agencies conducted massive searches in homes of citizens who are suspected of professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. Three men were arrested and taken to a SIZO: 43-year-old Konstantin Bazhenov, 35-year-old Aleksei Budenchuk, and 33-year-old Feliks Makhammadiev.

At least 7 searches are known in the city of Saratov and village of Shirokoe (Saratov oblast). Acting extremely rudely, personnel of law enforcement agencies hacked at apartment doors. Thus, after arriving for a search in the home of Konstantin and Irina Bazhenov, the special forces by mistake broke down the door to their neighbors' and only later, having realized, broke down the door to the couple's apartment. During searches, all technology, books, photographs, notebooks, personal savings passbooks, and foreign passports were seized from the citizens.

During at least two searches, planting of forbidden items occurred. For example, during a search in the village of Shitokoe, in the home of Aleksei and Tatiana Budenchuk, in the sleeve of a child's jacket, hanging on a hanger, the intruders inserted and then demonstratively "discovered" two books, one of which had been entered into the Federal List of Extremist Materials. Aleksei Budenchuk was arrested.

More than ten persons were taken for interrogation to the F.S.B. and several were interrogated until almost midnight. On the whole, during questioning, believers followed the instruction from the Bible: "I will restrain my lips while the evil one is before me. I was mute and voiceless and was silent even about the good" (Bible, Psalm 38.2,3 Synodal translation).

On 14 June 2018 it was learned that Konstantin Bazhenov, Feliks Makhammadiev, and Aleksei Budenchuk were charged on the basis of article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code of the RF ("planning the activity of an extremist organization").

Svetlana Gogoleva, a judge of the Frunze district court of the city of Saratov, chose as a measure to assure appearance a two-month confinement in custody (until 12 August 2018) for these law-abiding, respected citizens.

Such a serious violation of the rights of believers is a direct consequence of a horrible judicial mistake, the decision of the Russian Supreme Court for the baseless liquidation and ban of all 396 organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. Law enforcement personnel, driven by unknown motives, consider the joint religious confession of law-abiding citizens to be participation in the activity of an extremist organization. (tr. by PDS, posted 16 June 2018)

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**UK: Suicides raise alarm**



# about UK's treatment of child refugees

*Three Eritrean teenagers killed themselves after travelling to Britain without their parents*

The Guardian (17.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2t5DQ4E> – At least three teenage refugees who arrived in Britain from the migrant camp in Calais have killed themselves in the past six months, raising questions about how the Home Office and local authorities handle profoundly vulnerable asylum-seeking children and young people in the UK.

Three young men from Eritrea, two of them aged 18 and one aged 19, have taken their own lives in London since last November. All of them fled conflict in Eritrea, travelling without their parents across Africa and Europe as young teenagers, and all spent time in the Calais migrant camp. A fourth young asylum seeker from Eritrea whose name and age has not been made public is also known to have killed himself last year.

Filmon Yemane had recently turned 18 when he killed himself in November. Alexander Tekle, also 18, took his own life a fortnight later in December, a year after he had arrived in the UK, hidden in the back of a refrigerated lorry. A third teenager, N (whom the Guardian is not naming, at the request of his family), killed himself last month, aged 19, in the same hostel in north London where Yemane had stayed.

An inquest was held into Yemane's death in April. It

highlighted that he was in a state of crisis in the 24 hours before he took his own life, and found that although employees at the sheltered accommodation where he lived had reported a deterioration in his condition to NHS mental health staff, their concerns were not “escalated appropriately within the crisis team”. A pre-inquest hearing was held into Tekle’s death last month; there is no date yet for the full hearing, and no scheduled inquest yet into the third young man’s death.

In the absence of other inquest findings, it is impossible to assess what prompted the three teenagers, who were acquainted with each other, to end their lives. All of them had been through extremely traumatic experiences, having fled conflict and encountered multiple dangers on the way to the UK, not least in the often violent environment of Calais, and risked their lives when they attempted to enter Britain by smuggling themselves on to lorries and trains. However, people who knew them have said that they subsequently found the protracted process of applying for refugee status in the UK extremely stressful.

Hamid, another Eritrean asylum-seeking teenager, who knew all three teenagers, said Alexander Tekle and N, the young man who killed himself last month, were both extremely concerned about the length of time it was taking for the Home Office to decide on whether they would be granted refugee status here. Hamid asked for his real name not to be printed, afraid that speaking out might somehow complicate his own asylum claim, which still remains unresolved, three years after his arrival in the UK at the age of 15.

He said: “Alex and I were close friends. He was such a nice guy but he was giving up on life. He was stressing about Home

Office things – we all were. I tried to tell him not to worry too much, but he was thinking about it all the time. He was saying: once you have your papers, you can start your life, you can start college. He wanted to start work; he wanted to send money to his mother. Without papers you can't work."

He was unsure about whether Yemane had ongoing concerns about his Home Office status, but he knew that the third young person, N, was very anxious about whether he was going to be accepted as a refugee. "He was worried about Home Office and being sent back to his country and stressing about that," he said.

The Home Office is understood not to be currently sending people back to Eritrea, because it is considered too dangerous; however child asylum seekers who turn 18 and are not granted refugee status remain in limbo, unable to work, or study, and liable to be sent to immigration detention centres if they do not leave the country voluntarily.

Benjamin Hunter met Tekle while doing volunteer work with refugees in Calais when Tekle had just turned 16. He stayed in touch with him when he travelled to England. "Alex experienced deeply traumatic events on his journey to the UK, in particular in Libya and in Calais, where he lived alone in a tent for as long as a year, subject to abuse and neglect," Hunter said.

Tekle was wrongly age-assessed on arrival in the UK; it was not easy to get his birth certificate sent from Eritrea, although the documents were eventually sent. For a while he

was treated as an adult, and sent to live in a unit for adults where he experienced real difficulties, Hunter said. Since arriving in the UK Tekle had at times been homeless, and occasionally drank heavily as a way of alleviating the stress, Hunter said.

“Instead of receiving the support and help that he desperately needed, upon his arrival in the UK, he told he was not eligible for support as a child or care-leaver. He was placed outside of care, in a hostel for adult asylum seekers where he was violently assaulted,” he said. “Alex was stressed about the wellbeing of his family, about the uncertainty of his future and in particular was stressed by his asylum claim and the thought that he might be deported. The last thing he said to me, the day before he died, was, ‘Why have I not received my papers, like my friends have?’”

His father, Tecle Sium Tesfamichel, a refugee now living in Sudan, said: “Alexander is not coming back. But I want to know this doesn’t happen to children and young people again. These children, who have to leave home through no fault of their own, are traumatised on their journey through the desert and the sea. It is the job of the authorities to look after and guide these children, who come to the UK alone. They shouldn’t come to die.”

The family’s lawyers, Bhatt Murphy, would like the coroner to examine the actions of the local authorities responsible for him, the adequacy of his accommodation, of the age assessments, and of access to mental health services.

An Eritrean woman who works with young asylum seekers (who asked not to be named) said she observed many different pressures making life hard for newly arrived teenagers. "The journey, then the welcome and reception they get here is not what they expected," she said. "They feel like they are unwanted."

"Everything is so different from how they have lived at home. The loneliness, the language barrier; they are placed in accommodation with no one to talk to."

The mental health problems experienced by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have been well documented by refugee organisations and children's charities.

Sam Royston, policy director at the Children's Society, which has been carrying out new research into the mental health of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK, said: "These vulnerable young people may have experienced the trauma of war, persecution, bereavement and exploitation, all of which can have a huge impact upon their mental health. Too often, they do not get the help they need ... Practitioners we spoke to knew of young people who had sadly self-harmed and attempted suicide."

A study by the children's commissioner last year warned that Home Office delays in processing asylum claims were causing difficulties. "Testimony from migrant children demonstrates how the experience of uncertainty and waiting leads to a state of paralysis and depression, seriously undermining their wellbeing," the report states.

Elaine Chase, an academic who has interviewed more than 60 unaccompanied young migrants in the UK for the research project, *Becoming Adult*, said about a third of the people she spoke to had experienced mental health difficulties ranging from difficulties sleeping, anxiety, severe depression to suicidal feelings, often related to uncertainty about their Home Office status. "One 18-year-old attempted suicide and ended up in a mental health unit, and was then billed for his healthcare and told he had to leave the country," she said.

Her colleague on the research project Jennifer Allsopp said the migrants interviewed tended to be more troubled about the uncertainty they faced about their futures than by the trauma they had experienced in the past. "For them, good mental health is associated with being able to work towards future aspirations; having a sense of stability, moving onwards with their lives. It is very hard to do that, if not impossible, without security of legal status," she said.

Rosalind Compton, an immigration solicitor with the charity Coram Children's Legal Centre, who runs advice sessions for asylum-seeking children, said many were under extreme stress. She said she knew an 18-year-old who had attempted suicide in December after being refused asylum. "There needs to be significantly improved mental health support available for all asylum-seeking young people," she said. "Mental health support is delayed or made ineffective by Home Office delays."

Liz Clegg met Alexander Tekle during the two years she spent working in Calais, supporting child migrants in the camp. She now runs a centre in Birmingham to support those who have

arrived in the UK. "He was lovely. I remember him getting in the car and singing along to the radio. He came across like a genuine, funny, sociable boy," she said. She said many young people were destroyed by spending a long time in Calais trying to get to Britain. Those who spent only a few days in the camp tended to be in a better state when they arrived here.

"It had a profound effect on them and then there's a delusional notion that it will all be OK when you get to the UK. That can be the final nail. You've held on and held on, you've kept going and you've got here, and then you realise that the dream is not the dream," she said.

Britain gives temporary leave to remain to all minors who arrive here, but those who are found ineligible for refugee status are asked to begin making plans to return to their home country when they turn 17 and a half. Many of them struggle to gather the correct evidence to show that they should be eligible for refugee status; it can be difficult to access legal advice. "You have to have evidence that you need refugee protection," Clegg said.

"It's a nightmare process, and they don't understand it. None of these children read the Geneva convention or had the slightest idea of the asylum process. For many of them, they so believed that they could get to the UK and everything would be all right, and then they get rejected. It's hugely stressful. The whole hostile immigration environment is turned towards them. If you are told you can be here only until you are 17 and a half, it's inhumane – it's a form of abuse."

A Home Office spokesperson said: “We recognise that some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have fled persecution in their countries of origin and experienced potentially dangerous journeys before reaching the UK. We are committed to reaching asylum decisions as quickly as we can, while ensuring these often complex cases are given proper consideration. Unaccompanied children are looked after by local authority children’s services, who are required to assess their individual needs, including access to mental health support.”

Hamid, who has seen three teenagers in his circle take their own lives in the space of six months, said he still struggled to understand why they decided to give up on life. “Alex was so generous, he would give me his last money; he gave me his clothes. If he had only £1 he would buy two drinks – one for him and one for you. He would share everything with you.”

He remains extremely concerned about his own immigration status and has recently received a Home Office letter informing him that he is a “person without leave”, liable for detention and possible removal from the country. The letter states: “You are not allowed to WORK. You are not allowed to STUDY.”

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## **RUSSIA: Officials continue to hound African Pentecostals studying in Russia**

*How the Yarovaya Package made a vicious violator of the administrative code out of a Zimbabwean protestant*

Russia Religion News (15.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2HNrT8m> – A court in Nizhny Novgorod fined a student from Zimbabwe, Kudzai Niamarebvu, 30,000 rubles for an interview in which she is called a “hero of faith.” For Kudzai, this is the second fine because of “missionary activity” in a year.

The 25-year-old Kudzai Niamarebvu came to Russia from Zimbabwe in 2012, to study on the medical faculty of the Volga Research Medical University in Nizhny Novgorod. At that time, the largest protest actions in many years were going on, because of the elections to the State Duma and the return of Vladimir Putin to the post of president. At the same time, authorities began to make harsher anti-extremism legislation and to regulate the internet yet more. Over time, imprisonment for reposting ceased surprising anybody, but all these processes

did not concern Kudzai; the girl was studying in the university and attending the “Embassy of Jesus” protestant church. It is difficult to say unequivocally whether she engaged in any social and political activity: while having studied in Russia for six years, she had not mastered the Russian language and she communicated in the main with other foreigners.

In social networks (Russian friends advised her to set up an account on “VKontakte”), she published posts about love for God. In the autumn of 2016, Kudzai acted in a video where she invited friends to come to the Embassy of Jesus for a party planned in November, which was called a Welcome Party. As attorney Alexander Malinin told Meduza, in the video Kudzai said that there would be African songs and dances at the party.

Several months before the publication of the video, President Vladimir Putin signed the “Yarovaya Package,” one of the most criticized legislative initiatives in the sphere of antiterrorism legislation and regulation of the information technology sphere. Among other things, the law changed article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law (violation of legislation on freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession and on religious associations), adding to it three new kinds of law violations, and it introduced requirements for missionary activity. Mediazona has already written in detail how the change in the law affected not just religious leaders.

Publication of the video was translated for the Embassy of Jesus immediately into two administrative cases on the basis of the substance of article 5.26 that had recently appeared:

on the basis of part 3, the religious organization was fined 30,000 rubles for publishing a video without identification information with the full name of the church, and on the basis of part 4, it was fined 50,000 rubles for Kudzai's missionary activity without pertinent permission. At the same time, the materials of the cases indicated that Kudzai had conducted missionary activity on 26 April 2017. The press secretary of the Embassy of Jesus, Yulia Ermoshina, told Mediazona that it is unclear why the security personnel thought that Kudzai engaged in missionary activity on this particular day.

There were no charges against the girl herself, although in the winter of 2018 she learned to her surprise that a report had been composed against her on the basis of part 2 of article 18.8 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law (violation by a foreigner of the rules of visiting Russia expressed in the incompatibility of the declared goals of entry with activity actually conducted). The Ministry of Internal Affairs argued the case in this way: Kudzai entered Russia supposedly for study, but in reality she engaged in missionary activity.

The native of Zimbabwe insisted that she did not engage in any kind of missionary activity but simply invited friends to a party. The Sormov district court of Nizhny Novgorod oblast did not listen to her arguments, ordering a fine of Kudzai of 5,000 rubles and deportation of the sixth-year student from Russia six months before receiving her diploma. "[Attorney Vladimir] Malinin said that he tried to become her lawyer, but when the judge asked Niamarebvu in Russian whether she needed a lawyer, she did not understand what he was talking about and she answered in the negative," Meduza wrote. However, Kudzai lucked out: the appellate instance permitted her to leave the country by the end of June so that the African would be able

to return to her homeland with higher education.

“Students stopped attending church; the video, photos, quotes about Christianity, Christmas and Easter greetings were removed. Before that, the Africans were not even able to think that singing in church or posting Christian topics on a personal page could be a crime,” Galina Liamina, a Russian language teacher for foreigners, wrote in VKontakte. “Now the Africans are being taken to court one after the other. Evidence being used include screens from social networks and links with YouTube from 2016 and 2017, collected previously, since after Kudzai’s case the Africans have removed the ‘kompromat,’ and even their own pages.”

For example, this is what happened with Nosisa Shiba, a native of Swaziland. The Sormov district court fined her on the basis of the same article for violating the rules of staying in Russia 7,000 rubles and ordered her deportation no later than 30 June. Shiba also is a sixth-year student and she was permitted to complete her studies. The reason for opening her case was the African’s participation in an Easter concert. Her performance can be seen on the video at the end of the seventh minute, when believers are singing ‘Jesus, arisen for me.’”

Kudzai also was not helped by the removal of the video from the social network. Security agents had documented her pages well in advance. Another administrative case was opened against the girl on the basis of part 5 of article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law (conduct of missionary activity by a foreigner in violation of the requirements of legislation on freedom of conscience and freedom of religious confession and on religious associations). Later, as attorney Malinin described for

Mediazona, this case was closed because of the lapse of the statute of limitations. Judging by his profile on VKontakte, the lawyer, like Kudzai, belongs to the Christian Pentecostals: his avatar is a collage of a photograph depicting Jesus embracing a girl, a cross, a heart, and an inscription, "Jesus Christ, my God and my Lord."

In the Pentecostals' church they are indignant about such treatment of their fellow believer. In April, the press secretary of the Embassy of Jesus, Yulia Ermoshina, recorded an interview with Kudzai which later was published on YouTube. For twenty minutes, Kudzai, with the help of a translator, describes for Yulia her misadventures. She [i.e., Yulia] peers intently, nods, and again with the help of the translator poses clarifying questions, and in the end she says: "Kudzai, thank you very much; you are a real hero of faith, and we believe along with you that, actually, the court will make a positive decision on your matter and you will finish your studies in Russia fine and you will go home with good impressions from this country and with a good heart. We also believe that this law will not affect foreigners negatively and hinder their visiting those churches that they have been accustomed to attending from childhood."

"What a pity for Russia. Even Africans are in shock. Lord, have mercy!" one YouTube user comments regarding this interview. It became the basis for opening a third case against Kudzai Niamarebvuvu, again on part 5 of article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law. Judging from the materials of the case, the F.S.B. is interested specifically in the last sentence of the press secretary of the church in which she calls Kudzai a "real hero of faith." The security service ordered a complex expert analysis, asking the specialists to answer the question: "What does the term 'hero

of faith' mean in the doctrine of Christians of Evangelical Faith and who can be acknowledged as a 'hero of faith,' and what kind of obligations does this recognition impose on the 'hero of faith' and on adherents of the doctrine respecting him?"

The commission of three persons, including the chief editor of the magazine "Kholm Poetov" and kandidat of psychological sciences Andrei Tremasov, replied: "The film has a 'covert missionary character,' and 'heroes of faith' are 'people who, from the point of view of Christians of Evangelical Faith, God has chosen for preaching;' they are 'instruments in the hands of God' in the work of preaching, that is, evangelism." "By the very fact of their existence, 'heroes of faith,' in the opinion of Pentecostals, are able to win over people. Thus, the designation of Kudzai Niamarebvu as a 'hero of faith' and the video of her itself are a covert form of proclamation of the faith of Pentecostals. Foreign students, who viewed this video, were unambiguously urged to follow Kudzai Niamarebvu as a 'hero of faith' and thus to violate Russian legislation," the experts concluded. In conclusion it was noted that any religious group of Pentecostals can recognize a person as a "hero of faith" and this recognition imposes on him the obligation "to engage actively in missionary activity," but this does not affect other people in any way.

On 9 June, the court ordered for Kudzai a fine of 30,000 rubles. The Embassy of Jesus says that the girl does not have such money so that the church will pay the fine for her. The native of Zimbabwe herself decided not to talk with journalists until after she leaves Russia. (tr. by PDS, posted 13 June 2018)

Original article in Russian : [Mediazona, 13 June 2018](#)

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## **ARGENTINA: Lawmakers in marathon abortion debate**

*Lawmakers in Argentina spent Wednesday afternoon and the entire night debating whether to allow women to have abortions in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy.*

BBC (14.06.2018) – <https://bbc.in/2MrAvou>– A vote on a draft bill is due to be held in the lower house later on Thursday.

Deputies have been split almost evenly in the highly divisive debate and the result could go either way.

If approved, the bill will still have to go to the Senate.

President Mauricio Macri is strongly opposed to the bill but has said that he would not veto it if it was passed by Congress.

Abortion is currently illegal in Argentina, except in cases of rape or when the life or health of the woman is at risk. Women seeking abortions also have to apply to a judge for permission, which critics say can unnecessarily delay the procedure.

### ***Divided, but not along party lines***

Lawmakers for and against the bill had five minutes each to outline their position and try to sway deputies from the other side.

President Macri had told members of his party to vote according to their conscience.

The debate was rare in Argentine politics in that it was not divided along party lines, but that there were opponents and supporters both on the left and the right.

Before the session started at 11:30 local time on Wednesday (14:30 GMT), more than a dozen lawmakers had said that they



were still undecided.

It is these that the lawmakers speaking are trying to convince. More than 200 took to the podium in the first 19 hours of the debate.

Axel Kicillof of the Justicialist Party urged his colleagues to “give women the right to decide over their bodies”.

But Mario Horacio Arce of the Radical Civic Union argued that the bill would be unconstitutional.

“The national constitution does not distinguish between different phases of pregnancy, it protects life from the moment of conception,” he said.

Silvia Martínez, also of the Radical Civic Union, disagreed: “This is a great opportunity. I ask you to reflect, let’s not tell women making these demands ‘no’.”

The divisions inside the chamber were mirrored on the streets outside, where opponents and supporters gathered for all-night vigils.

Police had earlier erected barricades to keep the two sides apart but that did not prevent the occasional shouting match.

## ***Growing momentum***

The vote comes a year after lawmakers in neighbouring Chile approved lifting that country's total ban on abortions.

The momentum in favour of a change in the law in Argentina has grown over the past months and was further boosted by the overwhelming vote for overturning the abortion ban in Ireland.

There have been huge marches backing the bill led by #NiUnaMenos (#NotOneLess), a movement first created to fight violence against women but which has since expanded across much of Latin America to stand up for women's rights.

Tens of thousands of people have shown their support by wearing green handkerchiefs but there has also been stiff opposition led by the Catholic Church.

Non-governmental organisations say an estimated 500,000 abortions a year are carried out clandestinely, often in conditions which pose a health risk for women and girls.

In most of Latin America there are tight restrictions on abortions and in some countries such as the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Honduras there is a total ban.

If Argentina were to pass the bill it would be the most

populous nation in the region to lift restrictions on abortions.

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## **South Africa: The women of Waqf are claiming their right to pray in the mosque**

*What began as a means for women to form a spiritual community and pray their salaah in congregation during the holy month of Ramadan has exposed a deeply rooted patriarchy and toxic masculinity in the Johannesburg Muslim community.*

By Shaazia Ebrahim

The Daily Vox (06.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2JBBmW8>– A group of local women were, on Friday and again on Monday, rebuked for praying at Masjid Siratul-Jannah also known as the Gold Mosque in Ormonde, Johannesburg.

Many Johannesburg mosques don't have provision for women at all while others have small allocated areas that are often locked.

On Monday, a video showing a man trying to stop women from getting close to listening to the Quran being recited at the Gold Mosque went viral.

[See video](#)

Women were barred from praying in a section of the mosque that evening. A woman in the congregation, Sumaya Hendricks, posted a video of the incident on Facebook, which was recorded by Tazkiyyah Amra. Hendricks said a group of praying women were insulted and called "morons". In the video, a man is heard saying that women cannot be in view of men during prayers.

This was not the first time the women had been barred from prayer at the mosque.

The women claiming the space to pray have become known as the Women of Waqf (WOW). Shameelah Khan and her friend Noorjaan Allie decided at the beginning of Ramadan to pray at different Johannesburg mosques. "My friend and I decided we wanted to

spend one night, every night, at a different mosque so we could get to know the different mosques in Johannesburg,” Khan said in an interview with The Daily Vox. Both had previously lived in Cape Town and frequented the mosque regularly with friends. She speaks of the sense of community she felt there where the congregation would pray for those who were ill or writing exams.

The first mosque they attended was the Gold Mosque because they were aware that it had women’s facilities. Khan, who grew up in the mosque where she attended Madressah (Islamic school) as a child, had never prayed there as an adult.

When they arrived at the mosque, they saw an older woman leaving frustrated because the women’s facilities did not have a speaker for her to follow the taraweeh prayer in congregation. In the women’s facility there was a sign saying that women are not allowed to use the speaker unless it is to hear adhan (call to prayer) because women need to pray alone.

Khan and Allie struggled to get a speaker that night but eventually managed to attain a small radio speaker to follow the taraweeh prayer. They prayed there for a week and a half and a few other women started joining them as well. The speaker had altered the dynamic and allowed women to pray taraweeh instead just wait for hours for their husbands.

The two decided to host a small iftaar on Friday, 31 May and distributed a poster asking women from the area to join and meet them. They tried to contact the mosque management but were brushed off.

Everything went awry when the mosque management caught wind of the iftaar. They were met with extremity and harsh demands where mosque authorities called this gathering bidah or an innovation in religious matters and said the women had not obtained permission to host an event.

Both Allie and Khan who furthered their Islamic Studies at the Medinah Institute in Cape Town knew this was not the way to respond. Besides, the men break their fasts there every evening.

The iftaar, with close to 30 women in attendance, went on smoothly until a man threatened the women to leave when they proceeded into the demarcated section for women, which has a separate entrance. "Under no circumstances", he said, "are women allowed to pray here unless they are travelling". He said he was to lock the back room which had signs put up that we had to leave after maghrib (sunset prayers).

After performing maghrib, Khan and another woman asked the caretaker of the mosque to open a classroom for the ladies to finish eating and perform the evening prayers.

"We were sitting in utter darkness and we would not eat really, because we could not see. We said we would really like to be in a room with a [loudspeaker] so that we can read taraweeh and he said 'absolutely not'," Khan said to Voice of the Cape.

The women then sat in “a peaceful protest” in the courtyard of the mosque. Before the evening prayers were about to commence, a group of men approached them and demanded that the women not pray in congregation and leave the area. A man pushed a woman as she protected her daughter who was attempting to record the incident, Khan said.

“He charged at her and pushed the mother and one of the women and I tried to get him off of her and tried to calm the mom down, because at this point she was shaking,” she said.

Another man eventually intervened and arranged for a room for the women to pray in where they completed the remainder of the evening prayers.

Khan said with both incidents she was so shocked at the way the men behaved at the mosque. “I’m still shocked because the men felt it was okay to lay their hands on us,” Khan said. The worst part, she said, was that no one did anything.

“Men would stand back and know this is an act that is wrong and didn’t take responsibility for it,” she said.

When the Spur video went viral, and with the #MeToo campaign, men stood up to condemn their fellow men, she said. “In our Muslim community, we realise they are not vocal about gender-based violence even in the mosque space for women who want to pray,” Khan said. She said this is deeply rooted in toxic masculinity and patriarchy.

Khan said mosque officials confirmed that the prayer room would be remain available to women after the incident on Friday, but on Sunday night the room was locked midway into evening prayers.

Khan and Allie were promised that they would be able to engage with mosque officials about the incident, but to date no communication has been received.

To pray at the mosque is sunnah, Khan said and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not ban women from mosque.

“We live in a critical time where women are not empowered because we are kept behind closed doors,” Khan said. “The mosque is not just a place to pray, it’s a place to grow spiritually. It has nothing to do with men really, they’re just there. We really want to grow with each other,” she added.

At the end of the day women just want respect and love from our communities, Khan said. All Khan and Allie want is for women to be treated equally and for men to respect women equally. “Women need respect for their voices, their bodies, what they have to say and their minds,” she said.

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## **NEW REPORT: Women's Rights & Religion**

# Women's Rights & Religion

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A report on women's rights and  
Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

June 2018  
Human Rights Without Frontiers



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## ***Excerpt:***

In hopes to discover and highlight the powerful potential that religion and religious leaders have to help guarantee women's rights around the world, this report examines current tensions that exist between women's rights and some interpretations of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish doctrines.

This report addresses early, forced and child marriages, female genital mutilation, violence against women, 'honour' killing, public dress codes, and reproductive rights. Through these various facets of women's rights, the report explores the ways in which religious texts, practices, cultural influences, and patriarchal systems influence or motivate violations of these rights.

The Abrahamic religions as organized systems have always been led by men and have perpetuated a patriarchal culture that can be questioned in the light of the current human rights culture. Women have the right to gender equality, and some women reject the dominance of men and patriarchal social systems over their persons, claiming autonomy over choices on issues exclusive to their sex.

Women's rights and freedoms are guaranteed under international law and should be protected over social, cultural, or even legal norms when they result in gender discrimination and prejudices.

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## **ROMANIA: A window of opportunity for corrupt justice system in #Romania?**

By Lea Perekrests, *HRWF*

EU Reporter (12.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2t53bLA> – *At the end of May, the Constitutional Court of Romania ruled that*

***President Iohannis must dismiss the country's chief anti-corruption prosecutor, Laura Kovesi, after allegations of her involvement in multiple violations of the rule of law. As the Constitutional Court's rulings are binding, a glimmer of hope has emerged, offering a golden opportunity to improve Romania's currently [abysmal corruption record](#), writes Lea Perekrests of Human Rights Without Frontiers.***

The call for Kovesi's dismissal reached a crescendo in February 2018, when the Justice Minister presented a 36-page report detailing illegal activities for which Kovesi is responsible. Justice Minister, Tudorel Toader concluded his presentation by summarizing that Kovesi is guilty of "excess of authority, discretionary behavior, defying the Parliament, challenging the Constitutional Court's decisions and authority...[which are] acts and facts that are intolerable in a rule of law".

***Laura Kovesi: Unjust tactics for unworthy praise***



***Laura Kovesi, chief anti-corruption prosecutor (photo credit: EU Reporter)***

Since Laura Kovesi's appointment as chief anti-corruption prosecutor, the National Anti-corruption Directorate (DNA) has been able to flaunt impressive statistics to the European Commission; it has achieved a conviction rate of over 90%, and more asset freezes, arrests, and convictions than any other counterpart agency in the EU. While the European Commission has praised these numbers at their face value, they have failed to look deeper and recognize the numerous unlawful activities that prop these numbers up.

In order to achieve 'praiseworthy' success rates the DNA has abused institutional structures and employed questionable tactics, which have ultimately robbed Romanian citizens of their right to a fair trial.

Institutional links between the DNA, Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), judicial branches, and judges themselves, have all been revealed over the past few years, bringing serious concern to the organization of institutional structures and their ability to provide fair trials.

For example, in 2015, an SRI leader had publically stated that the SRI remains involved in judicial proceedings until the final resolution of each case and stated that magistrates across the country need to be monitored. In the same year, the SRI was also involved in training over 1,000 judges across the country.

Foreign judges' organisations, including the Paris-based Magistrates Association MEDEL (Magistrats europeens pour la Democratie et les Libertes) have reacted to these statements

with great concern for the apparent lack of respect for basic human rights.

Worryingly, it has also been reported that the DNA and SRI have used questionable tactics, including unconstitutional phone tapping, the intimidation of judges, falsifying evidence, targeting suspects' family members, and producing propaganda against suspects.

Bringing to light the severity and depth of these tactics, it was revealed in February 2018 that two top DNA prosecutors had been recorded faking evidence, planting evidence in people's homes and cars, changing witness declarations, faking official documents, and blackmailing witnesses, all under the instruction of Laura Kovesi.

Currently, the SRI Secretary-General, Dumitru Dumbrava, is also facing calls to resign after media reports revealed that he was contacting and influencing judicial officials presiding over DNA cases via Facebook.

### ***Impacts for Romania: A window of opportunity?***

The cases brought forth by the DNA under Laura Kovesi have shown a pattern of unlawful activity, including: failing to assume innocence, unfair judicial processes, forced confessions, threat of indictments, and extended pre-trial detention periods.

The lengthy pre-trial detention periods are also of high concern given the deteriorating prison conditions and high rates of torture cases being presented to the ECtHR.

In 2017, Romania had the highest number of cases brought before the ECtHR than any other country in the EU. Twenty of the 69 cases involved the prohibition of torture or inhumane treatment, and twenty-six involved either a lack of effective investigation, the right to a fair trial, or the length of proceedings.

An overall deeply disturbing, neo-Ceausescu picture emerges when looking further behind the DNA's success rates. At a moment when Romania is seeking to further integrate into the European Union, the necessity to investigate and reform is paramount. It would be negligent of the European Commission to turn a blind eye to the disturbing nature of Romania's anti-corruption fight as it seeks to join the Euro and Schengen.

The Constitutional Court of Romania's recent decision to require Kovesi's removal opens a window of opportunity for the country to reform the corrupt institutions that are meant to safeguard the rights of Romanian citizens. It can allow the country to hit the reset button and enable a truly effective system for tackling corruption.

It is now in the hands of the Romanian government to reverse its current Kovesi-era path of unfair trials and unsafe convictions and to build institutions and leaders that can both guarantee Romanian's their human rights and ensure corruption is tackled firmly but fairly.

[1] <https://www.romania-insider.com/romanias-justice-minister-presents-report-anticorruption-department/>

[2] <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/corruption-romanias-anti-corruption-fight/>

[3] <https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2018/03/26/praise-for-romanian-crackdown-on-corruption-groundless/>

[4] [http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/21\\_03\\_Human-Rights-in-Romania\\_Systematic-violations-and-the-anti-corruption-efforts.pdf](http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/21_03_Human-Rights-in-Romania_Systematic-violations-and-the-anti-corruption-efforts.pdf)

[5] <https://eutoday.net/news/politics/2017/romanias-secret-services-under-parliamentary-scrutiny>

[6] <http://bit.ly/2nkZ0dX>

[7] <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/corruption-romanias-anti-corruption-fight-laid-bare-world-see/> ; <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Romania-paper.pdf>

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[9] <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Romania-paper.pdf>

[10] [https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Stats\\_violation\\_2017\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Stats_violation_2017_ENG.pdf)

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