

UKRAINE-CRIMEA/RUSSIA: Up to 10 years' jail for Muslims, Jehovah's Witness?

In "extremism" criminal cases opened by Russia's FSB in occupied Crimea, four Muslims face imminent trial, while Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov is under investigation. They face up to 10 years' jail. The Muslims "simply gathered in the local mosque to discuss religious questions", a lawyer stated. "We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible," Filatov told Forum 18.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (28.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2r7pJL0> – Nearly 14 months after the Russian FSB security service opened the first criminal case in occupied Crimea against four alleged members of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, their trial on "extremism"-related charges is imminent at Crimea's Supreme Court in the regional capital Simferopol, a court official told Forum 18. The alleged leader faces up to 10 years' imprisonment if convicted, while the other three each face up to 6 years' imprisonment. All four are from the Crimean Tatar minority.

"The men simply gathered in the local mosque to discuss religious questions," a legal specialist familiar with the case told Forum 18. "This is of course a question of freedom of conscience." Officials refused to put Forum 18 through to the prosecutor who prepared the indictment (see below).

The four Muslims were first arrested in October 2017 after the FSB opened criminal cases against them. Three have been held at home for most of the time since then. But one, 49-year-old Renat Suleimanov – who the authorities regard as the leader of the group – has been in pre-trial detention for more than a year, since his October 2017 arrest (see below).

The four Muslims are facing charges under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2. This punishes “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”.

On 14 November, the Russian FSB security service opened the first criminal case in occupied Crimea against a Jehovah’s Witness, Sergei Filatov, on the same “extremism”-related charges. The following day, about 10 groups of FSB security service and OMON riot police officers from Simferopol raided his and seven other homes in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. During one raid, officers put a 78-year-old man – deported to Siberia by the Soviet Union for his faith when he was 9 – up against a wall and handcuffed him (see below).

On 16 November, FSB Investigator Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin ordered Filatov to sign a pledge not to leave Dzhankoi without his specific permission. Lieutenant Chumakin is investigating the 46-year-old Filatov under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, who faces up to 10 years’ imprisonment if convicted. Lieutenant Chumakin refused to talk to Forum 18

(see below).

“I no longer meet my friends because it might cause them problems,” Filatov told Forum 18. “We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We’re not law-breakers and we’re not against the government” (see below).

“Extremist” organisations banned

Russia’s Supreme Court banned Tabligh Jamaat as “extremist” in 2009. The Russian ban was imposed in Crimea after Russia annexed the peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014.

Russia’s Supreme Court banned Jehovah’s Witnesses as “extremist” in 2017. Prosecutors in Russia are investigating more than 90 individuals on “extremism”-related criminal charges. Of them, 25 were in pre-trial detention as of 19 November, Jehovah’s Witnesses noted.

Following Russia’s occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to Jehovah’s Witness communities in Crimea, only to ban them following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Annexation, restrictions imposed

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. The peninsula is now divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

After the annexation Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection “Fortress of a Muslim” – which have been banned as “extremist” in Russia. Religious communities and individuals continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith.

Muslim Supreme Court trial imminent

Crimea's Supreme Court is about to begin the trial of four Muslim men accused of membership of the banned Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, a court official told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 28 November. The four facing trial on charges connected with “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” are:

1) Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.

2) Talyat Abdurakhmanov (born 1953), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

3) Seiran Rizaevich Mustafaev (born 2 January 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

4) Arsen Shakirovich Kubedinov (born 6 August 1974), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 punishes “Organisation of” and Part 2 punishes “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”.

Suleimanov faces a maximum 10-year jail term if convicted of organising such activity. The other three face a maximum 6-year jail term each if convicted of participating in such activity.

Raids, four Muslims arrested

Russia’s FSB security service launched criminal cases against the four Crimean Tatar Muslims on 29 September 2017. Masked men raided their homes early on 2 October 2017, local human rights defenders and media reported.

The lawyer Edem Semedlyayev first noted the search and arrest of one of the men, Suleimanov, in his home village of

Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea's capital Simferopol. FSB officers and OMON riot police arrived at 6 am as he was returning from early prayers at the mosque. After showing a search warrant about 20 officers raided the house, looking through all the rooms.

"All the men were in masks and all the official cars had their number plates removed," the lawyer Samedlyaev wrote on his Facebook page. "So it was unknown who had taken him or where."

Officers seized a computer, as well as five copies of three Muslim books from Suleimanov's home. The books were by two members of the Kandahlawi family, key figures in the Tabligh Jamaat movement. Two of the three titles have been banned as "extremist" by Russian courts.

Suleimanov is married with three young daughters. "Of course he's in shock, when they grabbed him at 6 o'clock in the morning," his lawyer Samedlyaev told Radio Free Europe on the day of the arrest. He said Suleimanov denied having organised or being involved in any extremist organisation and was therefore happy to answer investigators' questions.

The same morning officers raided the homes of and detained three other Muslims. At 6 am, men in balaclavas raided the home of Abdurakhmanov in the village of Melnichnoe in central Crimea, Abdureshit Dzhapparov of the Crimean Contact Group for Human Rights told Radio Free Europe's Krym Reali. Abdurakhmanov has difficulties with his hearing.

Also on 2 October 2017, officers raided the home of Kubedinov in Simferopol and detained him. Kubedinov is married with four children, the oldest of whom is now 11. Officers raided the home of Mustafaev in the village of Pionerskoe, south east of Simferopol, and detained him.

At hearings on 3 October 2017 at Simferopol's Kiev District Court, Judge Viktor Mozhelyansky acceded to the prosecutor's requests that Suleimanov, Abdurakhmanov and Kubedinov be held in pre-trial detention until 29 November 2017, according to court records. The Judge rejected pleas by lawyers for the three men to have them held under house arrest. The Judge ordered that Mustafaev be held under house arrest.

The requests to hold the four men had been presented to court by FSB Investigator R. Gorbachev, according to court records. He had opened criminal cases against all four men under Article 282.2, Part 1. Later the accusation was changed for Abdurakhmanov, Kubedinov and Mustafaev to Article 282.2, Part 2.

In November 2017, Abdurakhmanov was freed from Simferopol's Investigation Prison. He was instead required to sign a pledge not to leave his town without permission from the investigator.

On 22 February 2018, Kubedinov was freed from investigation prison in Simferopol. He was instead required to sign a pledge not to leave his town without permission from the investigator, his lawyer Jemil Temeshev announced.

This left only Suleimanov in Simferopol's Investigation Prison. His lawyers repeatedly tried to challenge his continued pre-trial detention, appealing to Crimea's Supreme Court against Kiev District Court extensions to the detention. However, each time the appeals were rejected, according to court decisions seen by Forum 18.

During the one-year investigation, FSB Investigator Gorbachev was replaced by another investigator, those close to the case told Forum 18. The case was then handed to Crimea's Prosecutor's Office, where it was assigned to Deputy Prosecutor Sergei Bulgakov.

Officials at Crimea's Prosecutor's Office refused to put Forum 18 through to Prosecutor Bulgakov on 26 November.

Indictment rejected – then accepted

On 14 September 2018 – 50 weeks or almost one year after the FSB launched the criminal case against the four Muslims – Prosecutor Bulgakov handed the case to Crimea's Supreme Court for trial. However at the preliminary hearing on 27 September, presided over by Judge Andrei Paly, the indictment was found to have been “completed with violations of the provisions of the Code” and ordered sent back to the Prosecutor for further work, according to court records.

Prosecutor Bulgakov challenged Judge Paly's decision. On 21 November, Judge Aleksey Kozyrev of Crimea's Supreme Court upheld the challenge, according to court records. This cleared

the way for the trial to go ahead.

The case is now being assigned to a Judge and a date for the preliminary hearing is now being set, a court official told Forum 18 on 28 November.

First Jehovah's Witness criminal charges

The first individual to face "extremism"-related criminal charges linked to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea is 46-year-old Sergei Viktorovich Filatov. He headed the Sivash Jehovah's Witness community in the town of Dzhankoi, one of two Jehovah's Witness communities in the town registered by the Russian authorities in April 2015. Both communities were liquidated through the courts in May 2017 following the Russian Supreme Court ban, according to Russian Federal Tax Service records.

Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin of the FSB security service in Simferopol opened the criminal case against Filatov on 14 November under Russian 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"). Filatov faces a maximum 10-year jail term if convicted.

The man who answered FSB Lieutenant Chumakin's phone on 27 November repeatedly insisted it was a wrong number and put the

phone down.

Eight coordinated raids

On the evening of 15 November, about 10 groups of FSB officers, OMON riot police and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017.

"I was out when they arrived at my home, but they had handcuffed my 21-year-old son," Filatov told Forum 18 from Dzhankoi on 26 November. "I saw about 25 men out on the street, in three cars, and in my home. I counted them at one point. No violence was used in my case and officers behaved more or less correctly."

However, Filatov expressed concern about the treatment of another whose home was raided, 78-year-old Aleksandr Ursu. The raiders pushed him up against a wall, during which he fell to his knees. Officers then handcuffed him.

In 1949 Ursu was among hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses deported to Siberia from his native Moldova with his family as a 9-year-old boy to punish them for their faith. "The whole time you felt hunger," he recalls of the deportation. The Soviet authorities "rehabilitated" him in 1991, finding that he had been unjustly punished four decades earlier.

The FSB appear so far to have initiated a criminal case only against Filatov. On 16 November, Lieutenant Chumakin ordered Filatov to sign a pledge not to leave Dzhankoi without his specific authorisation, Filatov told Forum 18.

Filatov said since the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses across Crimea, their Kingdom Halls lie empty. "We're not allowed to use them," he told Forum 18. "I read the Bible together with my family."

The criminal case against him has had an intimidating effect. "I no longer meet my friends," Filatov added, "because it might cause them problems. We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government."

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BULGARIA: Christians continue protests

By Ken Camp

Baptist Standard (27.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Q1wtZ0> – For the third consecutive Sunday, Bulgarian Christians gathered in their nation's capital to pray and protest proposed restrictions on religious freedom.

Christians representing varied traditions assembled in Tzar Osvobedital Square in Sofia on Nov. 25 to register concern about potential changes in Bulgaria's Religious Denominations Act that would significantly restrict the rights of minority religions.

"This was a national protest, so people from Sofia, Plovdiv, Pazardjik, Varna, Burgas, Lom and other cities traveled to the capital to raise prayers and voices against the intentions of the Bulgarian politicians," Teodor Oprenov, pastor of Evangelical Baptist Church in Sofia and leader in the Baptist Union of Bulgaria, wrote in a Nov. 25 email.

Carrying signs and Bulgarian flags, the Christians called for members of the Bulgarian Parliament to "abolish" the amendments they had approved on first reading in early October. Oprenov characterized the earlier legislation as a

“major drift from the freedom of religion and faith principles in the Constitution of Bulgaria and European laws.”

As originally presented, the amendments would grant Eastern Orthodox and Muslim believers the exclusive right to train clergy and operate religious schools; restrict religious activity only to designated buildings; give legal religious status only to groups with more than 300 adherents; place limitations on preaching and teaching; restrict missionary activity; and limit foreign donations to religious groups.

The Nov. 16 deadline for receiving public comment on the amendments passed with the nation’s parliament taking no immediate action.

In the days immediately preceding the deadline, a working group of politicians and representatives of major religious bodies met to discuss the legislation, and those meetings reportedly produced “some softening” on certain provisions, Oprenov said.

However, many Christians—particularly those representing groups other than the historically dominant Orthodox Church—remained concerned about the legislation.

Earlier this month, Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Elijah Brown and European Baptist Federation General Secretary Anthony Peck sent a letter to Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov asking the proposed legislation be withdrawn. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

subsequently expressed its concerns about the proposed law in a tweet that included a link to the BWA letter.

Christer Daelander, religious freedom representative of the European Baptist Federation and member of the BWA Religious Liberty Commission, also wrote to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, saying the proposed changes in Bulgarian law would violate the United Nations Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, as well as similar European Conventions.

Kishan Manocha, senior adviser on freedom of religion or belief at the OSCE, replied in a Nov. 14 email, saying her organization's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights "submitted a letter to the Bulgarian authorities signaling its readiness to prepare a legal opinion on said draft law."

About 2,000 Christians rallied in Sofia outside the Bulgarian Parliament and marched peacefully to the National Palace of Culture on Nov. 11, and smaller groups gathered to pray and protest around the country. In spite of inclement weather, about 1,000 people participated in a second public demonstration Nov. 18, Oprenov reported in a Nov. 20 email.

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TURKEY: Appeals court rules Alevi minority's cem houses are places of worship

Ahval News (28.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2TW5uNj> – Turkey's Court of Appeals ruled that cem houses, places where the Alevi religious minority carry out services, are places of worship and the state should therefore cover their electricity expenses as it does for the mosques, left-wing news site Sendika.org reported .

According to Turkish law, the electricity bills for places of worship of the Muslim population are paid from the budget allocated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), Turkey's top religious body.

But the Diyanet does not pay the electricity bills for the cem houses of the Alevis, who make up some 15-20 percent of Turkey's population as the Turkish state treats Alevi Islam as a heterodox Muslim sect .

Turkey was taken to the European Court of Human Rights in 2010 by Cem Foundation, an Alevi organisation, for not paying the electricity bills of cem houses in Istanbul.

The court ruled in 2014 that Turkey was discriminating against Alevis by failing to grant their places of worship the same status and advantages as those of other faiths.

The Turkish Court of Appeals later decided to overturn a previous court verdict from 2012 that was in favour of the Istanbul's Electric Distribution Company (Bedaş), which sued cem houses in Istanbul for not paying their electricity bills. Bedaş appealed, but the court one again ruled in favour of the Alevi cem houses.

Lawyer Ulaş Çam, who has been representing the Cem Foundation from the very start, told Sendika.org that the verdict was expected to be finalised in a short while and after that cem houses would not be obliged to pay their electricity bills.

"This is an important step, we have been following this case for a long time. Our demand from now on is a legal regulation," Çam said.

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WORLD: Why home is the least safe place to be a woman

By Emma Charlton

World Economic Forum (27.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2FJ6pxD>– Where's the most dangerous place to be a woman?

At home, according to new research from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which shows almost 6 in 10 women intentionally killed are murdered by an intimate partner or a family member. That equates to 137 killed every day, by people they know. And the number is increasing.

Women in Africa and the Americas are most at risk of being killed by intimate partners or family members, the report shows. In Africa, the rate is 3.1 victims per 100,000, while in the Americas it was 1.6. The lowest rate is found in Europe. Most worryingly, the study highlighted how little tangible progress has been made in recent years.

“Gender-related killings of women and girls remain a grave problem across regions, in countries rich and poor,” Yury Fedotov, executive director at the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime writes in the report. “While the vast majority of homicide victims are men, killed by strangers, women are far more likely to die at the hands of someone they know.”

The findings are underpinned by figures from the World Economic Forum’s wide-reaching [Global Gender Gap Report](#), which looks at the status of women in society and seeks to quantify the differences between men and women in four key areas: health, economics, politics and education.

In the Forum’s report, the Health and Survival sub-index reflects violence against women. One part looks at the sex ratio at birth, to capture the phenomenon of “missing women” prevalent in many countries where families prefer sons. Another part looks at differences in male and female life expectancy, to capture years lost to factors including violence, disease and malnutrition.

Many countries score well, when assessed using this index and 34 out of 144 have reached parity, suggesting little difference exists. Azerbaijan, Armenia and China are the lowest ranked countries, the data shows, with some of the lowest female-to-male sex ratios at birth in the world.

Violence against women – particularly intimate-partner violence and sexual violence – is a major public health problem, according to the World Health Organisation. It

estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

So why are so many women being killed? As well as domestic violence, the UNODC report cites honour-related killings, dowry-related killings and deaths resulting from armed conflict as some of the reasons. It notes that violence against women is often under-reported to the police and that a large share of it remains hidden.

The UNODC findings, which are part of a larger report on homicide due for release in 2019, have implications for policymakers around the world. The agency says women need access to specific resources that enable them to leave a violent relationship. Women also need specialized support services, including shelter, protection orders, counselling and legal aid, which are effective in helping women to leave abusive relationships.

“Across the world, in rich and poor countries, in developed and developing regions, a total of 50,000 women per year are killed by their current and former partners, fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters and other family members because of their role and status as women,” the report concludes. “Women need access to a comprehensive range of services provided by the police and justice system, health and social services, which need to be coordinated to be effective.”

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SOUTH AFRICA: The link between violence against women and children matters. Here's why

By Shanaaz Mathews

AllAfrica.com (22.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2Q00Hun>– Nearly half of women across South Africa are subjected to violence by an intimate partner. This in turn negatively affects about one in four children. A child who is exposed to violence in the home also risks being abused and will, quite reasonably, fear for their own safety.

The country's government and civil society recently responded

to the scourge of violence against women by hosting a summit to galvanise political support and develop solutions to end this sort of violence. Also recently, the [#TotalShutDown movement](#) embarked on protests across the country demanding an end to violence against women.

This focus is a critical step towards addressing South Africa's immense problem of gender based violence. But it's important for campaigners to recognise that the problems of violence against women and violence against children are deeply intertwined.

There's an increasing global recognition that violence against women and children often occur together in homes, and are driven by the same factors. For instance, young boys who witness their mothers being abused in the home or who are abused themselves are more likely to harm women and children later in life.

In South Africa, as in many other places, social and cultural norms promote a gendered hierarchy: men are in a superior position over women and children. These social norms provide considerable space for men's violence towards women and children to be tolerated. They are manifested in expressions of masculinity, enforcement of gender norms and the way that children are disciplined.

Intergenerational violence

Evidence shows that men's use of violence and controlling

behaviour towards an intimate partner often extends to physically punishing their children as a means of discipline. Importantly, research is now revealing that women who experience violence at the hands of a partner are more likely to use physical punishment to discipline their children. This further drives the cycle of intergenerational violence.

The impact of experiencing or witnessing violence as a child has wide-ranging and long lasting effects. When a child experiences violence at home, they learn to tolerate violence. They are also at an increased risk of suffering from poor mental health, engaging in drug and alcohol abuse and risky sexual behaviours, and contracting HIV. They are also more at risk of behavioural problems such as aggression, delinquency and poor social functioning.

It's also important to understand that children who have experienced violence are more likely to lack empathy towards others. That means they're more likely to perpetrate violence. It is this aspect of exposure to violence that drives its intergenerational transmission. This has a direct impact on their relationships with intimate partners, as well as their ability to be emotionally responsive parents.

Growing up in violent households affects a child's sense of security, self-worth and how they relate to other children. In qualitative research I conducted among violent men, they spoke about having previously witnessed violence against their mother by a father or stepfather.

Many of the men described feeling scared for their own safety.

They also felt powerless to protect their mother. It's important for society to respond to both problems in a coordinated way to reduce their burden simultaneously.

Seeking solutions

South Africa's response to both violence against women and children has, until now, been happening in silos. It's important that people start to join the dots. It makes sense to integrate approaches to both problems.

The evidence showing what works on joint programmes to address violence against women and violence against children is only starting to emerge in low and middle-income settings. Successful programmes are targeting multiple stakeholders, challenging social norms about gender relations and the use of violence. At the same time, such programmes are also supporting greater communication and shared decision making among family members.

South Africa has signed on to be a pathfinder country, as part of the United Nations' Global Partnership to end violence against children. In line with this commitment, the government is developing a programme of action to end violence against women and children.

If children are to reach their full potential and the cycle of intergenerational violence is to be broken, South Africa must consider collaborative solutions. Any programme of action must be aimed at preventing violence before it happens and

providing an effective response and support to those affected by violence.

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