

Russia: 23 Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars (+ 1) and 3 put under house arrest

JW Headquarters (18.07.2018) – On Sunday 15 July 2018, around 4 p.m., a police raid took place in Penza (about 650 km SE of Moscow). The police officers arrived at homes where four small groups of Witnesses had gathered. They had waited for someone to leave the apartments before bursting in and conducting searches. In one of the groups, a female investigator searched 6 women, ordering them to remove all of their clothes. As is often the case, the police seized all electronic devices and storage media, printed photographs, personal notes and notebooks. They detained about 20 adults in total, taking them to the police station. At 2 or 3 a.m. they finally let all the women go, along with most of the men. However Vladimir Alushkin, Vladimir Kulyasov, Andrey Magliv, and Denis Timoshin were detained. On 17 July, a judge sentenced Mr. Alushkin to pre-trial detention (two months), while the other three men have been placed under house arrest (two months).

Additionally, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum issued a press release (<https://bit.ly/2uK9y7G>) to express their 'deep concern' over the escalating persecution of JWs in Russia. The press release included a reminder that JWs were persecuted (many even killed) during the Nazi regime. The German government targeted JWs largely due to the fact they would not swear allegiance to the state (any state) or serve in the military. Thus, learning from such a dark period in history, the Museum's director urged "leaders from across society to forcefully denounce the anti-Jehovah's Witnesses campaign currently underway" in Russia:

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum remains deeply concerned over the continuing harassment and persecution of

Jehovah's Witnesses by Russian authorities. Since the Russian Supreme Court labeled Jehovah's Witnesses an "extremist organization" in April 2016, Witness property has been seized by the state, numerous Witnesses have been arrested, and hundreds have fled the country.

"The state-sponsored persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses continues to escalate in the Russian Federation," said Tad Stahnke, the Museum's director of international educational outreach. "The Museum urges leaders from across society to forcefully denounce the anti-Jehovah's Witness campaign currently underway."

During the Nazi regime, the German government targeted Jehovah's Witnesses because their religious beliefs prevented them from adhering to the requirements of the Nazi state. Witnesses do not swear allegiance to any state or serve in the military. These religious convictions as well as their international connections—the headquarters are in the United States and some Witnesses travel abroad for their missionary work—made them a perceived threat to Nazism. Of the 25,000–30,000 active Jehovah's Witnesses in Nazi Germany, about half were convicted and sentenced during the Nazi period. Of those convicted or sentenced, between 2,000 and 2,500 were sent to concentration camps, as were a total of about 700 to 800 non-German Witnesses. An estimated 1,000 German Witnesses and 400 non-German Witnesses died in the camps.

A living memorial to the Holocaust, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum inspires citizens and leaders worldwide to confront hate, prevent genocide, and promote human dignity. Its far-reaching educational programs and global impact are made possible by generous donors. For more information, visit ushmm.org.

RUSSIA: 22 Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars/ First female JW locked up

JW Headquarters / Russia Religion News (10.07.2018) – <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180706a.html> – On 6 July 2018, 46-year-old Sergei Poliakov and his wife, Anastasia, who are suspected of professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, were sent to an Omsk SIZO (pretrial detention). They were arrested during searches conducted on 4 July 2018 in the homes of local residents.

The Poliakov couple were incommunicado for two days and the door to their apartment was found to be broken down. Simultaneous searches were conducted in at least four residences of Omsk. Beginning at 7:00 a.m., searches continued until 15:00 and were conducted in houses, parcels of land, business structures, and in citizens' parked cars. All sorts of electronic devices and data storage were seized. During a search, witnesses actively helped law enforcement personnel, prompted, and even tried to question believers. The operation was conducted by Denis Loginovsky, an investigator of the Azov Investigation Department of the Russian Investigative Committee for Omsk oblast.

It is still not known which articles the criminal case will be based on. However law enforcement agencies in various regions of Russia mistakenly take the shared religious confession of citizens as participation in an extremist organization. The attention of prominent public figures of Russia and also of the Council for Human Rights under the Russian president has already been called to this problem. (tr. by PDS, posted 9

July 2018)

RUSSIA: 16 Jehovah's Witnesses behind bars as of 8 June

HRWF (08.06.2018) – The number of Jehovah's Witnesses deprived of their freedom has been dramatically and rapidly increasing in Russia since the ban of their religion in April 2017.

It can unfortunately be expected that the situation will worsen day after day and that young Jehovah's Witnesses will also be targeted for their conscientious objection to military service, as members of a banned extremist religious organization (!).

Here is an updated list of 16 prisoners as of 8 June 2018. Their pre-trial detention is systematically prolonged until their trial starts.

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 Prisoners

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

RUSSIA: Open Letter from 10 of the wives of 16 imprisoned Jehovah's Witnesses to President Putin's adviser Mikhail Fedotov

HRWF (08.06.2018) – On 7 June, ten of the wives of the 16 imprisoned JWs in Russia sent an open letter (Russian version: <https://jw-russia.org/news/18060718-345.html>) plea to Mikhail

Fedotov—advisor to President Putin and chairman of the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights.

Human Rights Without Frontiers has a pdf of the full list of names of JW's with open criminal cases against them, as a result of the home arrests that began in April. In addition to the prisoners, dozens of believers in 11 regions are under house arrest and/or are not permitted to leave the region.

Text of the Open Letter in English

To the Russian Federation Presidential Council For the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights

Honorable Mr. Fedotov! Honorable members of the Human Rights Council!

This open letter to you is a cry of desperation. People who are very dear to us, our husbands, those who feed us, the fathers of our children, peaceable, honest people, who are always ready to help others, are being thrown behind bars for being suspected of reading Bible commandments and praying together with us and our children to the God whose name, as recorded in the Bible, is Jehovah.

As of this day in Russia already 17 individuals are being held in pre-trial detention. One of our fellow believers has been in custody for over a year. Dozens more believers, in 11 regions of Russia, are under house arrest or are forbidden to leave their cities of residence. With each passing day, their number is increasing. Taking into account that in Russia there are 175,000 professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses, we wonder how many more dozens, hundreds or thousands of victims of conscience will it take before the unjust criminal persecution of people for their faith in God is brought to an end.

Under the guise of fighting extremism, many of us, and even our children, have been threatened with weapons by agents of

the special forces and ordered to lie face down. Our homes have been raided and searched, our telephones and computers have been seized, so we can't work or live a normal life. Our family photographs, our passports and other personal documents, and Bibles have been confiscated. They are trying to force us to live in fear and shake every time there's a knock at the door or the sound of a siren on the street, as we await arrest merely for our faith. Some believers have already been dismissed from their places of work after many years of faultless work just because the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is banned in Russia. We cannot find the answers to the questions of why we are being subjected to such harassment in our country, and which religion will be the next to fall victim after us?

The law-enforcement agencies that are persecuting our husbands for their faith in God explain that it is because of the April 20, 2017, decision of the Russian Federation Supreme Court to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia.

However, both the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice, during the hearing at the Supreme Court, and the Russian Federation Government, after the decision was handed down, officially stated that the court's decision would not result in any violations of the rights of citizens to freedom of worship.

The aforementioned decision of the Supreme Court did not ban the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. It only involved legal entities. So why are the law-enforcement agents acting in contravention of the will of the government of our country? Who in our country benefits from the mass repression of religious believers? Why are our relatives being accused of a serious crime with the prospect of imprisonment from 6 to 10 years for fictitious extremist activity (Article 282.2 of the RF Criminal Code)? Why are the law-enforcement agents mistakenly interpreting peaceful expression of faith on God for participation in an extremist organization?

Honorable members of the Council, please help us to receive answers to these questions.

In the face of such monstrous circumstances, we are afraid for our children's future. The ground has been laid for children to be torn away from parents, whose faith in God has been declared "wrong." News that information on children whose parents are Jehovah's Witnesses is being gathered in educational and medical facilities is very worrying. It is not surprising that virtually every week whole families of our fellow believers are abandoning everything and fleeing abroad to seek political asylum for the protection of their children.

In return for freedom and a quiet life, we are being invited to disown our faith. This is not just a figure of speech—investigators have directly invited us to sign documents in order to avoid punishment for "extremism." If not, in their words, no attorney will be able to save us. But we cannot stop believing in God. It is a right that every individual has from birth. The Russian Federation is a multi-confessional state, and we, as citizens of Russia, have the right to expect that our rights will be respected by the state. We are not asking for any special privileges. We are asking for just one thing—please, defend our rights.

Honorable members of the Council! A campaign of terror has been unleashed against an entire religion, one of the largest Christian religions in Russia. Fundamental human rights are being trampled on: the right to freedom of worship and personal inviolability, the right to personal dignity, the right to privacy, the right to the inviolability of the home, to freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of worship, the right to private property.

If the Russian government does not quickly put an end to this growing campaign of terror, the administration will be faced with a nation-wide human rights catastrophe. We are certain that you have the power to take action now! We ask that you

please pass this information on to the President of the Russian Federation, and use all possible legal means to restore the rights of religious believers.

With respect, the wives of men who are being held in custody:

Alyona Vilitkevich (Republic of Bashkortostan)

Anna Zyablova (Magadan Region)

Yulia Klimova (Tomsk Region)

Galina Kochneva (Orenburg Region)

Irina Christensen (Oryol Region)

Svetlana Markina (Murmansk Region)

Tatyana Petrova (Magadan Region)

Anastasia Puyda (Khabarovsk Territory)

Natalia Suvorova (Orenburg Region)

Trofimova Ulyana (Murmansk Region)

RUSSIA: A second Jehovah's Witness behind bars

HRWF (29.04.2018) – On 10 April 2018, police came to the home of 32-year-old Anatoliy Vilitkevich and took him into custody, accusing him of organizing the activity of an extremist organization. Vilitkevich was merely considering Bible-based publications with a small group of others who also were subjected to searches.

Two days later, the Leninskiy District Court of Ufa (Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia), ruled to keep Anatoliy in pre-trial detention for 1 month and 22 days, that is, until June 2, 2018. Anatoliy faces up to 10 years imprisonment.

Anatoliy is the first Russian Jehovah's Witness to be held in

detention since the Supreme Court's banning decision of 20 April 2017.

It is unclear why Jehovah's Witnesses in Ufa are suddenly being targeted, but authorities claim to have "volumes" of information against the local Witnesses.

The legal team for Anatoliy filed an appeal regarding his detention on 16 April but it was denied three days later.

Dennis Christensen in prison since May 2017

On May 25, 2017, heavily armed police officers and agents of the Federal Security Service (FSB) disrupted a peaceful weekly religious service of Jehovah's Witnesses in Oryol, Russia. Since authorities there had liquidated the Oryol Local Religious Organization (LRO) in June 2016 on extremism charges, they alleged that the congregation's religious services were continuing the activity of an extremist organization.

The prosecutor initiated criminal charges against Dennis Christensen, one of the elders in the Oryol Congregation, for his role in the congregation's religious services. The Sovietskiy District Court ordered that Mr. Christensen be held in pretrial detention. His trial is currently ongoing.

250 violations of the rights of JW in 1 year

Since the Russian Supreme Court ruled to ban the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses a year ago (20 April 2017), there have been at least 250 violations of the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, including attacks, vandalism, and other kinds of discrimination. Seventeen of their properties have been confiscated, and lawsuits have been launched to seize another 52 properties.

These most recent raids represent a serious escalation of state-sponsored human rights abuse, reminiscent of Soviet era

repression and Nazi persecution experienced by minority groups in the early days of these former regimes. Without international awareness, it can be expected that this situation will increase in both severity and frequency in the days ahead.

Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses' property in Far East confiscated

Arbitration in Priamurie deprives Jehovah's Witnesses of property in Tynda

RIA Novosty (21.02.2018) – <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180221a.html> – An arbitration court of Amur oblast made a decision to deprive the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses* (whose activity is banned in Russia because of extremism) of property, the website of the court reports.

By a decision of the Russian Supreme Court of 20 April 2017, the activity of the organization "Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia"* and local religious organizations that are members of its structure was terminated. The Russian Ministry of Justice entered the Jehovah's Witnesses* into the list of organizations that have been liquidated for extremism. The Russian Supreme Court decided to convert to the ownership of the Russian federation the property of the liquidated organization that remains after the satisfaction of the claims of creditors.

According to information of the file of the arbitration court,

the banned religious organization in Tynda owns land and a structure of 431.4 square meters in area.

“Because the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses* (of the city of Tynda) owns a parcel of land in the city of Tynda, the Russian Ministry of Justice for Amur oblast requested ordering with respect to the organization proceedings for distribution of identified property. By decision of the arbitration court of the Amur oblast, the petition of the directorate of the Russian Ministry of Justice for Amur oblast was granted,” the website of the court reports.

The proceedings for distribution of the property are ordered by 6 August 2018. Sergei Kryazhev (Moscow) was appointed arbitration manager.

*An extremist organization prohibited in Russia.
(tr. by PDS, posted 21 February 2018)

Believers of all faiths and atheists in prison: 24 countries of particular concern

HRWF Int’l (10.01.2018) – *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l* has released its 2017 database of believers and non-believers who have been imprisoned for exercising their freedom of religion or belief.

Twenty-four countries in all were identified by *Human Rights*

Without Frontiers Int'l for depriving believers and unbelievers of their freedom in 2017: **Algeria, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritania, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Yemen.**

“In 2017, we documented over 2200 individual cases of illegal imprisonment of believers and non-believers and we carried out campaigns to get their release, some with success,” according to Fautré, director of *Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l*.

Among all denominations, Christians of all faiths were in jail in the highest number of countries: Protestants in 13 countries, Catholics and Orthodox in 2 countries.

However, members of a dozen other religious or belief communities are known to have been in jail in 2017: Jehovah's Witnesses in 6 countries; Sunnis in 4 countries; Shias, Said Nursi and Tabligh Jamaat followers in 3 countries; Ahmadis, Baha'is, Buddhists and Sufis in 2 countries; Atheists in Egypt, Falun Gong practitioners in China, and Scientologists in Russia.

“Prison terms are usually imposed on peaceful and law-abiding members of religious or belief groups on the basis of laws restricting their freedom to change religion, share one's beliefs, and practice their right to freedom of association, worship and assembly. Additionally, they may be imprisoned simply because of their religious identity”, Fautré said.

According to the database, **China, Iran and South Korea** recorded the largest number of freedom of religion or belief prisoners.

In **China**, Falun Gong practitioners, whose movement was banned in 1999, are massively put in prison, a number of Catholic priests and bishops have also been missing, since their arrests many years ago for being faithful to the Pope instead

of swearing allegiance to the Communist Party.

Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestants belonging to the mushrooming network of house churches, and Uyghur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists, both of which are systematically suspected of separatism, are also particular targets of the regime.

In **Iran**, the Baha'is, whose movement is considered a heresy of Islam, make up the highest number of prisoners. They are followed by home-grown Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians who extensively carry out missionary activities among their fellow citizens despite the risk of imprisonment and execution. Baluchi and Kurdish Sunnis as well as Sufis are also particularly targeted.

In **South Korea**, over 300 young objectors to military service were still serving 18-month prison terms at the end of 2017. Since the Korean War, more than 19,200 Jehovah's Witnesses have reportedly been sentenced to a combined total of over 37,200 years in prison for refusing to perform military service. Eritrea, Singapore and Tajikistan are other countries which still imprison conscientious objectors.

"Our best wish for 2018 is that the EU converts its words into action and fully uses the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief to help release many FoRB prisoners of conscience," Fautré hopes.

The lists of prisoners per country can be consulted at: <http://hrwf.eu/forb-intro/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

() Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l has been monitoring freedom of religion or belief as a non-religious organization since 1989. In 2017 it covered in its daily newsletter more than 70 countries where there were incidents related to freedom of religion or belief, intolerance and discrimination. See its news database at <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>*

For further information, contact

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Website: <http://www.hrwf.eu>

RUSSIA: ORTHODOX SECT-FIGHTER A. DVORKIN RILES HINDUS

Lawsuit by Kumar Prakash against Irenaeus of Lyon Russian association of Centers for Study of Religions and Sects discussed in State Duma

SOVA Center (15.12.2017) – <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/> – On 12 December 2017, a roundtable was held in the State Duma, the occasion for which was an appeal by the head of the Center for Facilitating the Preservation and Development of Hindu Culture, Kumar Prakash, who is worried about the growth of religious intolerance in Russia.

Participants in the event included Vadim Samodurov (the emcee), Prasun Prakash (the son of Kumar Prakash), Pavel Kostylev, attorney Kali Akhilgov, Semmi Kotvani (the president of the Association of Indian Business in Russia), and deputy Valery Rashkin (C.P.R.F.), who in March 2017 called for investigating the activity of the “sectologist” **Alexander Dvorkin** because of his statements about Hinduism.

Prasun Parkash described for the audience how “A. Dvorkin’s forum has for two years now conducted propaganda work against their society and several news media draw upon this branch of the forum for information for their articles.” In late 2016 Kumar Prakash filed a lawsuit in court against the St.

Irenaeus of Lyon Russian Association of Centers for Study of Religions and Sects, headed by A. Dvorkin, but he did not win the case.

“The forum that Mr. Dvorkin leads,” V. Rashkin said in his turn, “harms the establishment of intercultural and friendly relations with India. I think that it has already reached severity. If people begin to come out onto the streets in rallies, this would get hot. It is now time to take measures from the government’s point of view and to attract the attention of law enforcement agencies.”

We recall that in early February 2017 there was a demonstration of protest in Delhi, whose participants accused A. Dvorkin of “defaming Hinduism and offending their religious feelings.” (tr. by PDS, posted 16 December 2017)

Article in Russian:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/religion-general/2017/12/d38497/>

RUSSIA/EUROPEAN COURT: Controversial dissolution of the Russian Orthodox Free Church

The Russian Orthodox Free Church argues the authorities take sides with the official Orthodox Church (Application no. 32895/13).

HRWF (23.10.2017) – In the case Bryansk-Tula Diocese of the

Russian Orthodox Free Church against Russia lodged on 19 April 2013, the European Court addressed a number of questions to the parties in May of this year. The case concerns the decision of the Russian Supreme Court to dissolve the church for allegedly failing to bring its founding documents into conformity with The Religious Act of 1997. The applicant complained under Article 9 and 11 of the Convention, taken on their own and in conjunction with Article 14, about its dissolution which was prompted, in its submission, by the Russian authorities' determination to eradicate any competition with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Excerpt of the Communication of the European Court on 15 May 2017

"On 28 August 1995 the applicant church was officially registered as a religious association having legal-entity status under the RSFSR Religions Act of 25 October 1990.

On 1 October 1997 a new Religions Act entered into force. It required all religious associations that had previously been granted legal-entity status to bring their articles of association into conformity with the Act and obtain re-registration from the competent Justice Department (section 27(4)). The time-limit for doing so expired on 31 December 2000.

In 2004, the Ministry of Justice brought an action for the dissolution of the applicant church, claiming that it had failed, firstly, to submit information demonstrating continuity of its operation and, secondly, to secure re-registration under the new Religions Act.

On 17 May 2004 the Trubchevskiy District Court in the Bryansk Region rejected the claim. It held that the Ministry of Justice did not produce any evidence showing that the applicant church had committed any repetitive or gross

breaches of the legislation or had wound up its operations. In the court's view, its articles of association did not contain any provisions incompatible with the effective revision of the Religions Act. It further referred to the Constitutional Court's ruling of 7 February 2002 to the effect that the dissolution was not an automatic sanction for failure to secure re-registration in the absence of evidence that the religious organisation had ceased its operations or had engaged in unlawful activities.

The Ministry of Justice did not appeal against the judgment. Nevertheless, the applicant church inquired the Ministry about the conditions and procedure for obtaining re-registration. By letter of 20 September 2004, the Ministry replied that re-registration was no longer possible since the time-limit had expired on 31 December 2000.

On 30 June 2010 the Ministry of Justice informed the applicant church that it had studied its file and uncovered a number of irregularities, such as a failure to bring its founding documents into conformity with the Religions Act, a failure to specify "the aims, purposes and main forms of operations" of the religious organisation, the procedure for electing the Diocesan Assembly and Council and the rights and obligations of parishioners, as well as to change its name from "Russian Orthodox Free Church" to "Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church" to reflect the change in the name of the affiliated church that occurred in 1998. The Ministry listed further failings, including non-inclusion in the State Register of Legal Entities, non-submission of an authority form for the bishop Mr Nonchin, failure to submit annual reports on the continuation of operations and the closing down of local parishes of the Bryansk and Tula region.

The applicant organisation unsuccessfully sought to challenge the Ministry's demands before a court.

On 24 June 2011 the bishop submitted a proof of his

appointment to the Ministry of Justice and asked it to provide a copy of the founding documents from their archives because the originals had been misplaced.

By letter of 8 August 2011, the Ministry replied that the appointment letter had not been properly certified and that the provision of copies of the founding documents was outside the Ministry's mandate.

The Ministry brought a new action for the dissolution of the applicant church on the ground that it had committed gross and repetitive breaches of the laws it had outlined in its warning letter of 30 June 2010.

The applicant organisation submitted in its defence that all the irregularities could be remedied by way of registering amendments to the founding documents. However, it could not apply for registration of amendments because the procedure required the presentation of the founding documents or their certified copies which it did not have.

On 4 July 2012 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation allowed the Ministry's action for the dissolution. It held that the applicant church had failed to bring its founding documents into conformity with the law and that there was "no credible evidence that the Ministry of Justice had prevented it from obtaining re-registration". The Supreme Court restated the grounds contained in the Ministry's letter of 30 June 2010 and declared them to amount to "gross and repetitive" violations of the law which warranted its dissolution.

On 23 October 2012 the Appeals Panel of the Supreme Court upheld that judgment."

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HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>

RUSSIA/EUROPEAN COURT: “Beware: Sects” campaign in the dock at the European Court

Hare Krishna accused the public authorities of dissemination of false information about their movement (Application no. 37477/11)

HRWF (23.10.2017) – Earlier this year, the European Court addressed a number of questions to the parties in the case “Centralised Religious Organisation Centre of Krishna Consciousness Societies in Russia and Mikhail Aleksandrovich FROLOV against Russia” (Application no. 37477/11) lodged on 29 May 2011.

The Krishna Centre complained under Article 9 of the Convention regarding a public campaign targeting and labelling them as a “totalitarian sect” and tarnishing their religious beliefs, presenting followers of the Krishna movement as

inferior or disabled people and inciting religious hatred and enmity.

The Krishna Centre accused public authorities of disseminating false information about their movement in the form of a "Beware of Sects" project. The project provided guidelines to local secondary schools concerning the Krishna movement as well as Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Scientology and others.

Excerpt of the Communication of the European Court on 23 January 2017

On 23 September 2008 the first applicant (the Krishna Centre) lodged a complaint with the St Petersburg Office of the Federal Agency of Mass Communications ("the Agency"), alleging that there was an adverse public campaign and that it fell within the purview of anti-extremist legislation, because it incited enmity and hatred on the grounds of religious belief. The Agency submitted the impugned material to a private company providing expert advice, and sought a report from it as to whether that material could be perceived as inciting racial, national or religious hatred or enmity. The company's report concluded that the material could not be perceived in that manner. On 28 January 2009 an official of the Agency dismissed the complaint, with reference to the above report. On 29 April 2009 a complaint against that dismissal, lodged by the first applicant with a higher authority within the same Agency, was dismissed. The first applicant sought judicial review of the decisions of 28 January and 29 April 2009 under the Code of Civil Procedure. By a judgment of 10 November 2009 the Taganskiy District Court of Moscow dismissed the judicial review challenge. On 30 November 2009 the Moscow City Court upheld the judgment.

As an example to indicate the existence of an adverse public campaign, the first applicant refers to the "Beware: Sects!" project which was carried out in 2008 in the Ulyanovsk Region. Information about the project was published on the website of

the regional administration, specifying that the main goal of the project was to prevent the negative activities of destructive religious groups.

As part of the project's activities, at the regional government's request, staff members of Ulyanovsk State University compiled "Be vigilant: Sects!" guidelines which concerned the Krishna movement, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Scientology, and others. As regards krishnaite, the document read:

"On the streets of our towns you can see colourful groups of people wearing white and yellow clothing and chanting hymns ... You should know that those are members of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, a totalitarian religious organisation ...

Their goals are frequently commercial, to procure money by any means. They beg for money, sell their literature; in some countries, they have been caught stealing or selling drugs. All income is submitted to the leaders of the sect ... Even a brief overview of their teachings brings us to the conclusion that such religious teaching is extremely destructive to our society. It is not connected to our people, genetically, historically or geographically. It is a specific spiritual culture of the East. Psychological manipulation and zombification constitute a serious threat to our future."

These guidelines were distributed to the teaching staff of local secondary schools.

The first applicant lodged a non-criminal complaint with the Prosecutor General's Office under the Prosecutors' Service Act. The complaint was then forwarded to the regional prosecutor's office for examination. On 29 December 2008 the regional prosecutor's office replied that: the public authorities had acted within their remit in relation to the "Beware: Sects!" project and guidelines; the primary objective

of the project was to discuss acute issues relating to interfaith dialogue, and build the best possible framework for the relationship between the State and religious organisations; it remained open to the first applicant to institute civil proceedings, if they considered that the impugned guidelines impinged upon their rights or freedoms.

The first applicant's renewed complaints to a higher authority were dismissed on 26 March and 6 June 2009 by, among others, the Prosecutor General's Office.

The first applicant sought judicial review of those administrative decisions under the Code of Civil Procedure.

By a judgment of 27 October 2010 the Tverskoy District Court of Moscow dismissed the first applicant's complaint, finding that the relevant decisions had been issued by a competent authority acting within its remit, and had disclosed the absence of sufficient grounds for action on the part of the prosecution service. On 16 March 2011 the Moscow City Court upheld the judgment.

Second applicant

The second applicant, Aleksandrovich Frolov, complained that he was prohibited from holding a public meeting to disseminate information about their values. The municipality ruled that the meeting ran counter to section 7 of the Public Events Act and the District Court dismissed the case.

Both applicants complain of Article 9 violations of the Convention. The Court questions whether the applicants exhausted domestic remedies, if they have standing, and if the interference with the public meeting was lawful under Russian law at the time.

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