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**High court fixes strict requirements on evangelism**

*Constitutional Court clarifies rules on labeling religious literature introduced by “Yarovaya Law”*

by Attorney Sergei Chugunov
Religiia i Pravo (22.12.2017) - http://bit.ly/2D57p91 - Late last year a sensational event occurred when a court in the city of Vladivostok ordered the destruction of religious literature belonging to the Salvation Army, including 36 Bibles. Let me recount how events developed.

The prosecutor's office of the Lenin district of Vladivostok conducted on 23 November 2016 an inspection of the activity of the Christian religious organization of the Salvation Army in Vladivostok. In the course of this inspection, religious literature that was discovered by the inspectors at the address of the religious organization was copied and photographed, specifically religious literature that was in the library on shelves in the pastor's office (the office of the head of the organization) including 36 copies of the Bible in the Synodal translation and also collections of religious songs in the worship hall (premises for conducting worship services). The aforesaid printed materials had not been produced by the Christian religious organization of the Salvation Army in Vladivostok and therefore they did not have identification labels with its denominational name. On the basis of the results of the inspection, the prosecutor's office opened a case of administrative violations of law against the Christian religious organization of the Salvation Army in Vladivostok based on part 3 of article 5.26 of the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Violations of Law and filed it for consideration in court. The organization was accused that it "in its missionary activity uses and distributes literature and printed materials without identifying labels of the religious organization."

By order of a magistrate judge of judicial precinct No. 4 of the Lenin judicial district of Vladivostok, A.V. Badeev, of 20 December 2016, in the case of administrative violation of law No. 5-855/16, the Christian religious organization of the Salvation Army of Vladivostok was found guilty of committing the violation of law provided by part 3 article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law and was assigned an administrative penalty in the form of a fine of 30,000 rubles. The court also ordered the confiscation and destruction of the literature and printed materials enumerated in the court's order.

The decision concerning destruction of the Bibles evoked such a great public resonance that the decision was appealed not only by the Salvation Army itself or the initiator of this case, the prosecutor's office. As a result, with a speed that is incredibly great for our legal system, in just ten days a reconsideration of the decision was conducted. By a decision of Judge I.N. Novozhilovaia of the Lenin district court of Vladivostok, of 30 December 2016, the order of the magistrate judge was changed: from the operative part of the order, the part about destruction of the confiscated items of the administrative violation of law was removed. However, the remainder of the magistrate judge's order stayed unchanged.

The decisions in the case were appealed all the way to the Russian Supreme Court. But the higher courts did not find any grounds for changing them. Then attorneys of the Slavic Legal Center V.V. Riakhovsky and S.V. Chugunov filed an appeal in the interests of the Salvation Army in the Constitutional Court of the Russian federation on the incompatibility of the provisions of part 3 of article 17 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" and part 3 of article 5.26 of the Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Violations of Law with article 28 and part 3 of article 55 of the constitution of the Russian federation. The reason for the appeal was that the indicated rules of the laws contain legal imprecision regarding the question of just which materials are subject to identification labeling: all materials that potentially may be distributed by a religious organization within the context of conducting missionary activity, or materials that are immediately being distributed in the context of missionary activity conducted at that moment for which the religious organization is being accused of committing violations of law.

Several months later the appeal was reviewed by the Russian Constitutional Court and a decision was rendered regarding it. Since in this case a determination to refuse to accept
for review a religious appeal had been made, it could seem that no positive result would been achieved. However this was not true. This is a common practice in the operation of the Russian Constitutional Court, when a determination is issued to refuse to consider an appeal, that is, the court formally recognizes that the rules being challenged are in accordance with the constitution of the RF. But in this same determination the court gives an interpretation of the rules being challenged, that is, how these rules should be applied. This is what happened this time.

In its determination of 7 December 2017, No. 2793-O the Russian Constitutional Court explained the following:

"In the system of existing legislation, the concept 'identification labeling,' used in article 17 of the federal law 'On freedom of conscience and religious associations,' means the affixing in any form (printed, hand-written, or another form) of the full official name of said organization on any materials, both produced by it and also produced by other organizations, but used by it in conducting its missionary activity. In those cases where literature or printed, audio, and video materials are distributed by the religious organization in the context of missionary activity, but created (issued) by another religious organization, in accordance with the sense of this article in the system of current legislation the existence of two identifying labels is required: of the religious organization that immediately published the literature and created the printed edition or audio and video materials and the one that obtained said materials for use in its missionary activity."

The most important part of the court's determination:

"The consequence of this is that what is subject to identification labeling is literature and printed, audio, and video materials that are produced by a religious organization and also that was not issued by the religious organization but is being distributed within the context of conducting missionary activity in its name outside of places that are specifically designated for conducting religious activity, in accordance with point 2 of article 24.1 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations."

"As distribution of religious literature and materials of religious significance within the context of missionary activity should be understood not only the distribution of said materials to specific persons but also providing free [i.e., unimpeded—tr.] access to this literature and materials for an indeterminate circle of persons."

Further in its determination the court points out that in considering such cases, in each specific case the question should be investigated whether there is free access for an indeterminate circle of persons to the premises in which the literature and other printed materials of religious contents is located and whether in such premises missionary activity is being conducted without restrictions and additional requirements.

Thus all religious organizations that were held administratively accountable for violation of law provided by part 3 of article 5.26 of the Code of the Russian Federation of Administrative Violations of Law, in the event that they distributed literature or it was located in places identified in part 2 of article 24.1 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations", have the right to a reconsideration of their cases.

I will recall that part 2 of article 24.1 of the federal law "On freedom of conscience and religious associations" indicates the following:

2. Missionary activity of a religious association is conducted unhindered:

in liturgical premises, buildings, and facilities, and also on plots of land on which such buildings and facilities are located;
in buildings and facilities belonging to religious organizations by ownership rights or provided to them on other property rights for conducting their charter activity and also on parcels of land on which such buildings and facilities are located;

in premises belonging to religious organizations by ownership rights or provided to them on other property rights for conducting their charter activity and also on parcels of land on which the building are located having corresponding premises, by agreement with owners of such buildings;

in premises, buildings, facilities, and on parcels of land pertaining to the right of ownership or provided on other property rights to organizations created by religious organizations;

on parcels of land belonging to religious organizations by right of ownership or provided to them on another property right;

in places of pilgrimage;

in cemeteries and crematoria;

in premises of educational organizations that have historically been used for conducting religious rituals.

Almost a year and a half has passed since the amendments regulating missionary activity took effect, although it may be said that this decision is the first positive event in overcoming those violations of the rights of citizens that were caused by their adoption. One of the reasons for this, I think, is the reluctance of persons who have been held accountable to file appeals in court and to defend their rights to the end. We urge them to defend their rights and attorneys of the Slavic Legal Center are always ready to give you legal aid.

At the present time one case has been communicated by the European Court of Human Rights and is awaiting consideration. Also in the near future another appeal will be submitted to the Russian Constitutional Court regarding the constitutionality of the "evangelism amendments." (tr. by PDS, posted 22 December 2017)

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**New World Translation remains banned in Russia**

JW Headquarters (21.12.2017) - Today, the Leningrad Regional Court denied the Witnesses’ appeal of the Vyborg City Court’s August ruling to ban the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT), declaring it an extremist publication. Representatives from several foreign embassies (e.g., Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States) attended in support of the defense.

The court-appointed experts were called in to defend their assessment of the NWT and they were resolute in claiming that the NWT is not Bible. When questioned, one of the court-appointed experts, Ms. Kryukova, defended her original claim by stating that the NWT cannot be considered a Bible unless it is marked "by the blessing of the patriarch" or matches word-for-word with such a translation. The “experts” also objected to the use of God’s personal name Jehovah and that the text of the NWT does not support certain church dogma. The judge rejected any motion by the defense for a new unbiased expert study of the NWT.
After losing the appeal today, the Witnesses have no other remedy available within the Russian legal system and will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

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**A Proxy for the Kremlin: The Russian Orthodox Church**

Alexandru Lazescu

*World Affairs Journal (21.12.2017) - In late October the head of the Russian Orthodox Church traveled to Romania for the first time since 1962. Although Patriarch Kirill technically came to attend a theological event in Bucharest, the political implications of his appearance are impossible to miss. The visit was part of the Kremlin’s long-term strategy to deploy the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a soft power tool to exploit divisions, win friends and expand Russia’s influence in a region which shares the same Christian Orthodox faith. This is especially relevant in Romania where public perception of Russia is deeply negative.

The Russian Orthodox Church is particularly eager to influence public opinion by solidifying existing relations and making new friends for the Kremlin in Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Romania, where the Christian Orthodox faith is popular. Upon his arrival in Bucharest, Kirill wasted no time launching his charm offensive by reminding Romanians that "Romanians and Russians worship the same saints and share the same values"—a message that is closely aligned with the Kremlin’s ideological offensive to create frictions between the Orthodox and socially conservative Balkan countries and the West. It’s worth noting that according to Soviet archives, Kirill spent his earlier years as a KGB agent (code name “Mikhaylov”) as did his predecessor, Patriarch Alexei II. In more recent years, since becoming patriarch in 2009, Kirill speaks of the Putin era as “a miracle of God.”

Kirill’s momentous trip to Romania was only the most recent effort by the Kremlin-ROC axis to soothe longstanding resentments, and it appears the Kremlin’s soft power strategy is working. On Sunday Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church
traveled to Moscow to participate in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the restoration of the Patriarchate of the Russian Church.

The *soft power* concept, a term coined by Joseph Nye in the late 1980s, describes how countries in the modern era often seek to achieve foreign policy goals through persuasion rather than exerting more traditional methods of military or economic coercion. For the Kremlin, the Russian Orthodox Church is just such a tool: a normative powerhouse wielded to change attitudes and ultimately reshape the post-communist European geopolitical framework to Russia’s advantage.

Under Vladimir Putin’s leadership, Russia has deployed a variety of soft power methods to undermine European unity and the transatlantic alliance in order to establish a multipolar world order befitting the Kremlin’s aspirations to secure its permanent rule at home and expand its influence abroad. To achieve these goals, the Kremlin is attempting to create and exploit fault lines that would separate Eastern Europe, formerly part of its sphere of influence, from the "decadent West". This particular narrative is a dominant theme in the Kremlin’s soft power toolbox and is characterized by virulently anti-Western and anti-American messages. The Kremlin adopted the “decadent West” line about a decade ago and it has since been propagated by multiple Russian public figures and sources, including key political, diplomatic, academic, and Church leaders, and amplified in the mass media, government-friendly NGOs, and indeed, in school textbooks. The theme is consistent with the view of a considerable contingent of the Russian elite who believe that Russian society is deeply ingrained in the Christian Orthodox faith, and that it is fundamentally incompatible with the West’s liberal social model.

Putin openly assumes the role of defender of traditional Christian values and Russian identity. He frequently references and quotes Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954), a famed Russian political and religious philosopher whose bones President Putin personally saw repatriated from Switzerland in October 2005 to the Donskoy Monastery in Moscow. Ilin used the term “mirovaya zakulisa” to describe what he called the Western conspiracy against Russia. “The West exported this anti-Christian virus to Russia...Having lost our bond with God and the Christian Tradition, mankind has been morally blinded, gripped by materialism, irrationalism and nihilism...” In his 1950 essay, “What Dismemberment of Russia Entails for the World,” he wrote what has become the basis for most of Moscow’s contemporary anti-Western propaganda line, arguing that Russia has a unique spiritual mission among the Euro-Asiatic nations. Indeed, at the height of the Ukrainian crisis during the Christmas period, Ilin’s “Our Mission” ("Nashi Zadachi") was among the three books distributed by President Putin as recommended reading to regional governors from the Russian Federation and leading members of the United Russia Party. The Russian Orthodox Church reciprocated the tribute with full support for the Kremlin’s political line on Ukraine and Crimea. Photographs circulated online of Russian priests blessing humanitarian convoys and even military vehicles en route to Eastern Ukraine.

In 2015 Hilarion Alfeyev, the Metropolitan of Volokolamsk and second ranking member in the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, traveled to Romania to launch the Romanian-language edition of two of his books and to deliver a lecture at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Romania's oldest. Hilarion is also Chair of External ROC Relations, and is thus directly responsible for advancing the Kremlin's agenda abroad, using the Church as a vehicle.

Unlike Patriarch Kirill, who is largely seen as a Kremlin apparatchik, Hilarion is a force in his own right. Only 51 years old, he is a distinguished theologian reportedly with more than 600 publications to his name. He has earned PhDs from Oxford University and Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. He is also a respected composer. This reputation of a contemporary “Renaissance Man” increases Hilarion’s popular standing, rendering him a potent, sophisticated promoter of Russian interests on the global stage.
For example, a year ago, while in London for the consecration of a cathedral alongside Patriarch Kirill, he reportedly met Baroness Anelay, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss, among other things, Syria and the Middle East. His international appeal to both clerical as well as conservative intellectual circles is a powerful asset in Vladimir Putin's efforts to promote Russia as a beacon of traditional Christian values, drive a wedge within Europe and the West, expand its influence, and reshape the political and security architecture in post-communist Europe.

Russia’s self-appointed role as the defender of traditional Christian values is music to the ears of Romanian Orthodox priests and some conservative circles in Eastern Europe who are deeply troubled by the West’s promotion of what they consider to be a “decadent” social agenda that has overturned the definition of the traditional family and Christian moral principles. Indeed, the Romanian Orthodox Church gathered more than 3 million signatures in support of a referendum that would define marriage as exclusively "between a man and a woman" in the state constitution, a clear indication that conservative social values have broad public support in the region.

Moscow is well-positioned and eager to exploit this chasm and expand its influence—as it does other divisions in liberal-democratic societies—by anointing the Kremlin and the Orthodox Church as the joint defenders of the Christian faith. Aleksandr Dugin, the influential philosopher and pro-Kremlin ideologue, has also exploited the language and message of the ROC during a series of visits to monasteries in Moldova in Eastern Romania. These visits would not be possible without the tacit approval of the Head of the Moldavian Metropolitan Church, and one can thus be sure that Dugin’s views regarding the role and mission of the ROC are favorably received by the monks and priests, many of whom have significant influence in rural areas. As an example, Chevron’s efforts to extract shale gas in eastern Romania were defeated by massive local resistance that was inspired and coordinated by several priests. Predictably, these protests were widely covered by the Russian state network RT that was delivering a message that conveniently conformed to Moscow’s strategic goal of discouraging energy projects that would reduce energy dependence on Russia.

Over the last decade, the Russian Orthodox Church has become a privileged partner of the Kremlin, supporting Mr. Putin’s nationalist line as well as the traditionalist, conservative values the Kremlin promotes within Russia and abroad. In April 2015, at the height of the Greek financial crisis, during their meeting in Moscow, both Vladimir Putin and Alexis Tsipras, the Greek Prime Minister, were keen to emphasize the “shared religious, cultural and historical ties” of the two Orthodox Christian nations. While such remarks may seem surprising from Mr. Tsipras—the leader of a far-left party that includes, among others, Maoists and Che Guevara devotees—they are routine for Mr. Putin, whose close ties to the Russian Orthodox Church are well-established.

For the Kremlin, the Russian Orthodox Church is a highly valuable soft power tool that complements other instruments of influence such as state media (including RT and Sputnik), cyber and digital information warfare, business and finance ties, and elite cooptation. The promotion of a progressive social agenda by Brussels that is deemed offensive to many in Eastern Europe has made the Russian Orthodox Church—in concert with the Kremlin—an expedient vehicle for strengthening ties between Moscow and these countries, especially those embracing the same Christian Orthodox faith by exploiting social, cultural, and religious divisions. Indeed, as tensions grow within the EU, Mr. Putin will have plenty of opportunities to amplify them in line with his objective to dismantle European and transatlantic ties.
Property sell-offs, alternative service denials follow Jehovah's Witness ban

By Victoria Arnold, Forum 18

Following the Supreme Court ban on all Jehovah's Witness activity – in force since July - Regional Justice Ministry branches are preparing to sell off their confiscated property. Military call-up offices have denied several army conscripts the option of alternative civilian service. Jehovah's Witnesses experience increased law enforcement harassment, plus vandalism and violence.

Forum 18 (19.12.2017) - http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2344 - Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continue to feel the impact of their liquidation and the nationwide ban on their exercise of freedom of religion or belief. Regional Justice Ministry branches are preparing to sell off confiscated Jehovah's Witness property. Military call-up offices have denied several army conscripts the option of alternative civilian service. Jehovah's Witnesses also experience increased law enforcement harassment and incidents of vandalism and violence across the country.

Individual Jehovah's Witnesses remain at risk of criminal prosecution if they engage in any expression of their faith which law enforcement officers may interpret as "continuing the activities of a banned extremist organisation".

Jehovah's Witness appeals to both Russia's Human Rights Ombudsperson's Office and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg are pending (see below).

A 14 November Supreme Court resolution advises courts to deprive people of their parental rights in cases of their "involvement [of the children] in the activity of a public or religious association or other organisation which has been liquidated by a court order which has come into force, or whose activity has been banned". Courts could use this against Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as against Muslims who meet to study the writings of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi (see below).

Meanwhile, Jehovah's Witnesses are also trying to stop the prohibition as "extremist" of their Russian-language New World Bible. Vyborg City Court upheld prosecutors' request to rule the text "extremist" on 17 August 2017 (see F18News 29 September 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2319). The next hearing in the appeal process is due at Leningrad Regional Court on 20 December. The suit is not connected to the Supreme Court's liquidation ruling, as Leningrad-Finland Transport Prosecutor's Office lodged its suit more than a year earlier.

Banned since 17 July

The Supreme Court's ruling that the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre be declared an "extremist" organisation and its activities prohibited throughout Russia came into force on 17 July, when an appeal panel upheld the original 20 April decision. Some Jehovah's Witness activities had already been halted by a 15 March suspension order issued by the Justice Ministry when it lodged its liquidation suit (see F18News 18 July 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297).

Individual believers and communities had already begun to suffer the effects of the liquidation ruling, even before it came into force, with a steep rise in vandalism, the prosecution of community elders for leading worship, and incidents of discrimination against children at school and adults in the workplace (see F18News 18 July 2017
The Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre and all 395 local communities have now been added to the Justice Ministry's list of banned "extremist" organisations, alongside violent far-right and Islamist groups, Forum 18 notes. They are also included on the Federal Financial Monitoring Service (Rosfinmonitoring) list of "terrorists and extremists" whose assets banks are obliged to freeze (though in the case of Jehovah's Witness organisations, the state has already seized their assets).

Jehovah's Witnesses are in a unique position in Russia as the only centralised religious organisation with a nationwide presence which has been ruled "extremist" and liquidated, thus losing its legal personality and forfeiting its property.

Other religious associations which have been banned as "extremist" have either lacked registration (and therefore property of their own), such as "Nurdzhular" (followers of Said Nursi), or have been local communities, such as the Muslim congregation of Borovsky in Tyumen Region (see Forum 18's Russia "extremism" religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215).

Appeal to European Court of Human Rights

On 1 December 2017, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled the Jehovah's Witnesses' appeal against their liquidation admissible and decided that it should be considered as a priority case.

The appeal challenges the liquidation ruling under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion), in conjunction with Article 11 (the right to freedom of assembly and association) and Article 14 (the prohibition of discrimination). It also protests specifically against the confiscation of Jehovah's Witness property, under Article 1 of the additional 1952 Protocol to the Convention (protection of property).

On 1 December, the Court asked the Russian government to respond by 23 March 2018 to the question of whether the liquidation violates Jehovah's Witnesses' rights under these Articles.

"Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses and Kalin vs. Russia" (Application No. 10188/17) was originally lodged on 3 February 2017 in response to the General Prosecutor's Office warning of "the inadmissibility of extremist activity", issued on 2 March 2016. Jehovah's Witnesses had already challenged this warning unsuccessfully in the Russian courts, lastly at Moscow City Court on 16 January 2017.

The appeal to the ECtHR now also encompasses the Supreme Court's 20 April decision to declare the Administrative Centre an "extremist" organisation and ban all Jehovah's Witness activities.

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers questions to Russia

On 7 December, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of ECtHR judgments, decided to change the monitoring of two earlier rulings against Russia to an "enhanced procedure".

The June 2010 ruling in Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others vs. Russia (Application No. 302/02) obliged Russia to re-register the Moscow Jehovah's Witness community, which was eventually completed in 2015. The June 2014 ruling in Krupko and Others (Application No. 26587/07) v. Russia obliged the Russian authorities to pay
damages to Jehovah's Witnesses who were detained when police raided a worship service taking place in a hired hall.

The Committee of Ministers "expressed their serious concern" about the impact of the nationwide Supreme Court ban on Jehovah's Witness activities, the 7 December decisions note. It has asked the Russian government for information on how the Jehovah's Witnesses who lodged these two cases may "continue to enjoy the individual right to freedom of religion".

**Appeal to Human Rights Ombudsperson**

Jehovah's Witnesses also sent an appeal to Human Rights Ombudsperson Tatyana Moskalkova on 9 October. They asked her to use her right to appeal against court decisions which have come into force. They also drew attention to the "massive, growing violation of human rights that followed the court's ruling", the jw-russia.org news website reported.

"Believers hope that, after reading the case materials, Tatyana Moskalkova will consider it necessary to apply to the presidium of the Supreme Court of Russia with a demand to overturn the unreasonable and unlawful court decision," the website noted.

Jehovah's Witnesses appear to have received no reply. Forum 18 wrote to the Ombudsperson's office before the start of the Moscow working day of 18 December, asking what answer it had to the Jehovah's Witness appeal, and how it was responding to the violation of their human rights. Forum 18 received no reply by the end of the working day in Moscow on 19 December.

**Confiscation of property**

- **Administrative Centre case**

On 7 December, after a four-hour hearing, Judge Natalya Bogdanova of St Petersburg's Sestroretsk District Court ruled that a 17-year-old property contract was invalid, thus allowing the seizure by the state of the Jehovah's Witnesses' principal site in Russia. The court's decision may be appealed within 30 days.

"This decision casts a shadow over the inviolability of property rights in the Russian Federation, where no organisation, even an international one, can have peace of mind over its transactions, even if they are officially registered by authorised bodies," the jw-russia.org news website commented on 7 December.

The complex in question consists of 14 buildings (constructed by the Jehovah's Witnesses) on ten hectares of land in the village of Solnechnoye, and has a value of more than 881 million Roubles (126 million Norwegian Kroner, 13 million Euros or 15 million US Dollars), according to a court press release of 7 December. The Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses acquired the land in 2000 and transferred its ownership to the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, which in turn allowed the Administrative Centre free use of the site.

Because the site was owned by a foreign organisation, it did not automatically become the property of the state upon the liquidation of the Administrative Centre, a Russian legal entity. The Kurortny District Prosecutor's Office argued, however, that the contract governing the transfer of the property to the Watch Tower Society's ownership was invalid, as it was the Administrative Centre which continued to use and maintain the land and buildings.
Watch Tower Society lawyer Viktor Shipilov argued in court that federal tax records show that the Society has been paying taxes on the property since 2000 (had the Administrative Centre owned the site, it would not have had to do so, as registered Russian religious organisations are not liable for tax on land or property used for religious purposes). He also noted that Kurortny District Prosecutor's Office checked the legitimacy of the acquisition of the property and its ownership by the Watch Tower Society in 2007 and found no violations.

The Administrative Centre complex also accommodated almost 400 people, both Russian and foreign nationals, some of whom had made their homes there for more than twenty years. "The move from their homes and the disruption in their voluntary religious service .. have been traumatic," according to a 5 December Jehovah’s Witness statement on their international website, jw.org.

Forum 18 telephoned the Justice Ministry's Department for the Affairs of Religious Organisations on 19 December to ask what would happen to the Administrative Centre's property in St Petersbourg and whether the people who lived there would receive any compensation. A spokeswoman insisted that all questions must be put to the Ministry's press service.

The Department for the Affairs of Religious Organisations was responsible for submitting the liquidation suit to the Supreme Court in March 2017, and its staff member Svetlana Borisova represented the Justice Ministry during the hearings.

- **Locally-owned property**

Meanwhile, buildings and land owned by local Jehovah's Witness organisations are now in the process of being sold off. Once creditors have been satisfied, any remaining assets will pass to the state and may then be sold. If a local community had insufficient monetary funds to pay off its debts, its property will be auctioned to raise more (if worth more than 100,000 Roubles).

According to legal documents seen by Forum 18, this process is initiated by regional branches of the Justice Ministry, overseen by regional arbitration courts, and carried out by an executor from the Interregional Self-Regulatory Organisation of Professional Arbitration Managers.

Justice Ministry branches appear to be seeking to appoint the same executor, Sergei Aleksandrovich Kryazhev, to manage the disposal of Jehovah's Witness property across the country. He is to be paid 30,000 Roubles per month from the liquidated community's assets (disposal periods vary between cases).

Regional Justice Ministry branches appear to have begun lodging suits initiating the disposal of Jehovah's Witness property in late September (only two months after the Supreme Court's ruling came into force), but, according to the Civil Code, they have five years to do so after a legal entity is recorded as liquidated in federal tax records. The process of disposal of Jehovah's Witness assets may therefore continue for some time.

The Republic of Karachai-Cherkessiya's Justice Ministry branch lodged its suit to initiate the disposal of the Cherkessk Jehovah's Witness community's property on 21 September at the Arbitration Court of Karachai-Cherkessiya. It was upheld on 6 December. The congregation's property consists of a non-residential building of 298.5 sq.m. and a plot of land of 857 sq.m. Judge Ali Botashev ruled that disposal should take place within six months and agreed to the appointment of Sergei Kryazhev as executor with remuneration of 30,000 Roubles per month from the assets of the liquidated community.
The Judge stipulated that the executor should publish notice of the disposal process in the journal "State Registration Herald" (Vestnik gosudarstvennoy registratsiy) no more than ten working days after the court ruling is issued, and should immediately inform any creditors of the disposal process. Notice of the disposal should also be published in the media within two months of the ruling, and creditors should be given two months (from publication in the press) in which to put forward their claims. The judge has scheduled another hearing on 18 May 2018 to examine the executor's report on the results of the disposal process.

Similar proceedings are underway or have recently been completed in other regions, e.g. Krasnoyarsk (lodged 24 October; first hearing 20 November, next hearing due 9 January 2018), Saratov (re. Volzhsk community, lodged 13 November, first hearing due 16 January), Vladimir (lodged 24 October, first hearing due 23 January 2018), St. Petersburg/Leningrad Region (re. Administrative Centre, lodged 27 October, first hearing due 26 December; re. Kirishi community, lodged 30 October, first hearing due 26 December), Amur (re. Tynda community, lodged 8 December, first hearing due 15 January 2018), Irkutsk (re. Northern, Usolye-Sibirskoye community, lodged 22 September, halted 19 October at Justice Ministry’s request because of lack of resources; re. Vikhorevka community, lodged 22 September, upheld in full 1 November), Republic of Karachai-Cherkessiya (re. Kurdzhinovo community, lodged 21 September, preliminary hearing due 27 December), Sakha Republic/Yakutiya (re. Chulman community, lodged 9 November, upheld in part 11 December), Rostov (re. Salsk community, lodged 17 November, preliminary hearing due 25 December).

It is theoretically possible under the Civil Code for the founders or former directors of a liquidated organisation to be named as third parties to such arbitration suits, and in cases of organisations liquidated through choice or because of non-viability, remaining assets would be divided between them. In the case of Jehovah's Witness congregations, however, the "extremism" ruling and ban means that they no longer have any right to proceeds from their property, and even appear to be unable to attend court hearings on its disposal.

Forum 18 found one instance, in Krasnoyarsk, of the twenty founding members of a community being named by the court as third parties to the suit. The judge removed them as third parties at the first hearing, however, at the request of the regional Justice Ministry, based on the fact that Jehovah’s Witness property was now forfeit to the state (two had also died).

**Denial of alternative civilian service**

At least six young Jehovah’s Witness men are potentially being denied their right to perform alternative civilian service. Of the six individuals in five different regions across Russia known to Forum 18, three have so far received official refusals and have been called up to the army, while military authorities have yet to make a final decision regarding the other three.

Individuals whose beliefs do not allow them to engage in military activity may apply to local military call-up offices for permission to perform "alternative civilian service" (see Forum 18’s Russia religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246]).

The military call-up office for the Central and Komintern Districts of Voronezh now obliges conscripts to fill out a form about their "attitude to religion" and "attitude to religious trends of an extremist nature", the portal-credo.ru news website reported on 30 November. Conscripts must state whether they "belong to”, "are acquainted with", or "defend the activities of" such movements.
Although the form gives "Wahhabism" as an example of such extremist religious beliefs, it is likely that Jehovah's Witnesses would also be considered as such in the wake of the Supreme Court ban – as a result, young Jehovah's Witness men would be obliged to disclose their religious affiliation.

The insistence that conscripts give their views on religion violates both their Constitutional rights and international human rights norms. Article 29, Part 3, of Russia's Constitution declares: "No one can be forced to declare their opinions and beliefs or to deny them."

General Comment 22 of the United Nations Human Rights Committee on Article 18.3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights notes that "no one can be compelled to reveal his [sic] thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief".

The duty officer at Voronezh Region military call-up office put the phone down on 19 December as soon as Forum 18 asked about conscripts being given a form about their attitude to religion. The telephones at the military call-up office for the Central and Komintern Districts went unanswered each time Forum 18 called the same day.

Deprivation of parental rights

On 14 November, the Plenum of the Supreme Court issued a resolution on the application of legislation to disputes affecting the rights of children. This included advice to courts to deprive people of their parental rights if they "involved [the children] in the activity of a public or religious association or other organisation which has been liquidated by a court order which has come into force, or whose activity has been banned".

The resolution mentions no specific organisation, but the measure could apply to Jehovah's Witnesses and to Muslims who read the works of Said Nursi (frequently prosecuted for involvement with the banned "extremist" organisation Nurdzhular, the existence of which Muslims in Russia deny).

The resolution also does not explain what is meant by "involvement" (vovlecheniye), which could be subject to a wide range of interpretation by officials.

Forum 18 is not aware of any instances of this measure being used against Jehovah's Witnesses or Muslims who read Nursi's works, as of 19 December.

Arrests, detentions, raids

On 14 December, around 40 law enforcement officers, including from the fire brigade, entered the Hall of Congresses, a large worship building in northern St Petersburg, the jw-russia.org news website reported the same day. Officers then sealed the building. The congregation, abiding by the Supreme Court's ruling, has not used the building since April.

Throughout November alone, police detained Jehovah's Witnesses, required them to disclose their religion, often took them to police stations, obliged them to submit to photographing and fingerprinting, and confiscated their personal belongings, the Moscow-based SOVA Centre reported on 12 December. Such incidents have occurred in Dmitrov (Moscow Region), Severnaya Ferma (Vologda Region), Chapayevsk (Samara Region), and Diveyevo (Novgorod Region), and in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District.

Police, sometimes accompanied by FSB security service officers, have also raided homes, Jehovah's Witnesses reported. In the village of Uyskoye in Chelyabinsk Region, police
took down the details of anyone who entered a flat in which Jehovah's Witnesses lived. In Kuchva in Sverdlovsk Region, police searched a house without permission, insulted the owner and a visiting friend, and "expressed their scorn for their faith". A Jehovah's Witness couple from Belgorod claims that police illegally entered their flat and installed audio and video surveillance equipment. In Naberezhnye Chelny (Republic of Tatarstan), police and FSB security service officers went to a holiday complex which had been rented by 100 Jehovah's Witnesses, inspected their documents, and took their details. Police in Novosibirsk also visited a Jehovah's Witness at work and allegedly planted religious literature in his office.

So far, no prosecutions are known to have arisen from these incidents.

**Vandalism and violence**

On 23 November in Moscow, a man allegedly pushed a 54-year-old Jehovah's Witness down the stairs of his block of flats. Her tablet computer broke in the fall.

On 16 September, in Chusnysky village in Irkutsk Region, "unknown persons" broke into the building formerly used for Jehovah's Witness worship, the jw-russia.org news website reported on 20 September. The intruders smashed the building's internal doors, set off fire extinguishers, destroyed sound equipment, and broke the burglar alarm. Jehovah's Witnesses reported the incident to the police, and "have no doubt" that it was provoked by the Supreme Court decision.

**Prosecutions**

After the Justice Ministry issued its 15 March suspension order, several Jehovah's Witness leaders were prosecuted under Administrative Code Article 20.28, Part 1 ("Organisation of or participation in the activities of a public or religious association, in relation to which a decision on the suspension of its activities is in force"). Most of these prosecutions led to fines. The prosecutions were launched despite the fact that the order did not apply to worship (see F18News 18 July 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297).

After the Supreme Court's liquidation ruling came into force on 17 July, these prosecutions ceased, as Jehovah's Witness activities are now banned, not merely suspended. Individuals are therefore now at risk of criminal prosecution under Criminal Code Article 282.2 ("Organisation of" or "participation in" "the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity").

Danish Jehovah's Witness Dennis Ole Christensen remains in pre-trial custody on charges of "organising the activities of a banned extremist organisation" (Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1) (see F18News 8 December 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2339). He will appeal against his detention for the third time at Oryol Regional Court on 22 December. Christensen is accused of "continuing the activities" of the Oryol Jehovah's Witness community, which was ordered liquidated in June 2016.

The next hearing in the trial of Jehovah's Witness elder Arkady Akopovich Akopyan is due on 10 January 2018 at Prokhladny District Court in Kabardino-Balkariya. Akopyan's case is also not directly connected to the Supreme Court's liquidation ruling; he was charged under Article 282, Part 1 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group") for
allegedly giving sermons in which he "degraded the dignity of adherents of other religions" (see F18News 23 June 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2290).

Orthodox sect-fighter 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:

Russian law enforcement descends on Jehovah's Witnesses' property

House of worship that served thousands of St Petersburg believers confiscated and sealed

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (14.12.2017) - On 14 December 2017, approximately 40 personnel of various agencies, including the emergency situation ministry, seized and later sealed the enormous house of worship near Metro station "Pionerskaia" in St. Petersburg. Details are being clarified.
This building, with a sign "Jehovah's Witnesses Hall of Congresses," was ceremonially opened in September 1999 on Kolomyazhskii Prospect. In one of the specialist journals, a brief architectural design survey of this structure was published, as well as an interview with its architect, Osmo Ilmari Khelennios.

One archive video, of 11 April 2017, shows how believers assembled for the final worship service in this building. (tr. by PDS, posted 14 December 2017)

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**Court sets deadline for trial of Danish Jehovah's Witness**

*Orel court restricts Dane Christensen’s familiarization with case*

Orel News (12.12.2017) - The Soviet district court of Orel granted the petition of an investigator of the Directorate of the Federal Security Service [FSB] for restricting the time for familiarization with the materials of the case of the Dane Dennis Christensen, who is accused of continuing the activity of an extremist organization.

"Having considered the aforesaid order of the investigator and materials that were submitted, the court has come to the conclusion that the defendant and his lawyers have unreasonably dragged out the procedure of familiarization with the materials of the criminal case, and therefore it has made the decision to grant the petition of the investigator. The defendant, D.E. Christensen, and his lawyers were given a deadline for familiarization with materials of the criminal case of 25 December 2017, inclusive," the court’s press service reported.

Danish citizen Dennis Christensen was arrested 26 May and confined by the district court for two months. The day before the arrest, FSB and police personnel conducted searches in a building where local adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses, an organization that is banned in Russia, gathered. The siloviki reported that extremist literature was seized during the searches. In addition, testimony of witnesses was obtained regarding the participation of the Dane in criminal activity of an extremist nature, the FSB reported. A criminal case for planning the activity of a forbidden organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal Code) was initiated against Christensen.

In July of this year, rights advocates of the "Memorial" organization recognized Christensen as a political prisoner.

In September, the court once again extended Christensen's detention. (tr. by PDS, posted 13 December 2017)

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**Falsified "evidence" helped convictions?**

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (11.12.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2nSkHmR](http://bit.ly/2nSkHmR) - Law enforcement agencies may have falsified testimonies used in the criminal prosecution of Muslims for meeting to study the works of the late Muslim theologian Said Nursi, Forum 18 notes. Turkish company Sözler, which published Nursi's works in Russian before they were banned as "extremist" material, has accused law enforcement agencies of falsifying witness testimony used in two criminal cases. It has appealed to the General Prosecutor's Office to investigate.
Sözler representative Sergei Mikhailov asserts that these witness statements supported prosecution cases which led to the jailing of two Muslims:

Prisoner of conscience Bagir Kazikhanov was sentenced in February 2015 to three and half years' imprisonment for organising alleged Nurdzhular activities in Ulyanovsk. Prisoner of conscience Yevgeny Kim was sentenced in June 2017 to three years and nine months' imprisonment for organising alleged Nurdzhular activities in Blagoveshchensk.

Typically, such Muslims meet in homes to study their faith, with one or more expounding on Nursi's works. They also pray, eat, and drink tea together. They do not seek any state permission for such meetings.

The state interprets such meetings as organised activity by an organisation called "Nurdzhular" (derived from the Turkish for "Nursi followers"). "Nurdzhular" was ruled "extremist" and prohibited by the Supreme Court in 2008, despite the fact that Muslims in Russia deny such an association even exists. Many Russian translations of Nursi's books have been banned, despite their not calling for violence or the violation of human rights.

Testimony used in the prosecutions of both Kazikhanov and Kim appears to have come from a 2007 article by "M.N. Davydov", whose identity remains unknown. This was used in Kazikhanov's case by an unknown witness to whom the prosecution gave the pseudonym "Ibrogim Salikh Ibrogimov", and whose testimony was then used in Kim's case in the testimony of a Dzait Alikhanovich Sultygov (see below).

Muslims continue to be jailed for organising meetings to study Nursi's works. In November, three Muslims received prison terms for organising such meetings. They are being held in custody while their appeal is pending. A judge in Novosibirsk, meanwhile, has ruled that the cases against two men also accused of participation in the banned "extremist" alleged organisation "Nurdzhular" should be closed, and the men obliged to pay judicial fines. A third defendant in Novosibirsk, charged with the more serious offence of "organisation" of "extremist" activity, is still awaiting trial (see F18News 8 December 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2339).

**Falsification of evidence: from Ulyanovsk to Blagoveshchensk**

Law enforcement agencies may have falsified testimonies used in the criminal prosecution of Muslims for meeting to study Nursi's works, Forum 18 notes – prosecutions which resulted in the conviction and imprisonment of the defendants.

Bagir Kurbanovich Kazikhanov (born 9 September 1983) was found guilty in February 2015 of organising alleged Nurdzhular activities in Ulyanovsk. He was sentenced to three and a half years' imprisonment (see http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2046). Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) received a custodial sentence of three years and nine months in June 2017, also for allegedly organising Nurdzhular meetings in the Far Eastern city of Blagoveshchensk.

Prisoner of conscience Kazikhanov was released from prison in October 2017 after serving two years and four months. His sentence was reduced by the time he had spent in pre-trial detention.

Prisoner of conscience Kim is incarcerated at Correctional Colony No. 3 in Khabarovsk. He had been beaten in pre-trial detention (see http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2332). Amur Regional Court dismissed his cassational appeal without consideration, a fellow Muslim told Forum 18 on 29
November. He is now preparing an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg.

Despite these cases taking place over 6,500 kms (4,000 miles) and two years apart, two witness statements used by the prosecution bear significant similarities – both to each other and to an online article about Nurdzhular, published in November 2007. The 2007 article's statements about "Nurdzhular" appear to have been reproduced in the witness statements and largely attributed to the defendants.

**Falsified 2017 "witness" testimony?**

Sergei Mikhailov, a representative of the Sözler publishing company, which distributed Nursi's books in Russian translation before they were prohibited as "extremist", wrote to the General Prosecutor's Office on 4 October 2017 asking it to investigate the apparent falsification of evidence.

The General Prosecutor's Office told Mikhailov that it had passed the matter to the Ulyanovsk Region Prosecutor's Office. In early December, he received a response from the Prosecutor's Office dated 22 November, claiming that it had found no violations, he told Forum 18 on 11 December. Mikhailov is preparing an appeal against this.

The General Prosecutor's Office also sent a copy of the complaint, with supporting evidence, to Amur Region Prosecutor's Office. Mikhailov is yet to receive a response from them, he told Forum 18.

**"Witness" statements?**

Forum 18 has seen a notarised copy of the 2007 article by "M.N. Davydov", as well as the witness statements in question and the conclusions of expert linguistic analysis of all three documents. This was commissioned by Sözler and carried out by Ella Borgoyakova of the Scientific Research Institute of Judicial Analysis in Moscow.

The original 2007 article, "Activity of the Turkish religious sect 'Nurdzhular'" by "M.N. Davydov" was published on the website of the Moscow-based Institute of the Near East, where it is still available. It claims to describe the development, structure, and aims of "Nurdzhular".

"Davydov"'s full name and identity are unknown and Forum 18 has been unable to find any other publications by him. In 2010, Yefim Zhigun, Director of the Institute of the Near East, denied in an interview with the FSB security service that the institute had an employee of that name, Vitaly Ponomarev noted in a March 2015 article on the Memorial website.

"Davydov" claims that "Nurdzhular" disseminates its ideas via networks of educational institutions established by the Gulen movement (followers of Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish preacher now living in exile in the US), including (at the time of writing) in Russia. In addition, the movement allegedly sets up small groups for the study of the Koran, at which the leader offers "pro-Gulenist" interpretations which "often contradict the dogmas of Islam".

"Davydov" asserts that "Nurdzhular" in Russia is "purposeful and clearly structured", with different companies or foundations responsible for different regions, their activities overseen by "governing functionaries" who inspect their work, preach, and carry out religious instruction according to Gulen's ideas.

The goal of "Nurdzhular", according to "Davydov", is "to create a pro-Turkish mindset among a layer of Russian society that will eventually form the 'Turkish lobby'", and its
teachings are characterised as "strongly anti-Russian". "Nurdzhular"’s alleged development in Russia has caused "serious fears" of "the destruction of the unity of Russian Muslims, and the disengagement of Muslim communities on a national basis". "Davydov" concludes by listing the books by Nursi which had been banned in Russia as "extremist" by the time he was writing. The article does not cite any sources in support of its claims.

Those associated with the government have long circulated conspiracy theories, without credible evidence, about the alleged organisation "Nurdzhular". One such typical claim was that "Nurdzhular" is part of a conspiracy by the intelligence agencies of Turkey and the US "to weaken and then completely destroy Russia".

First suspect witness statement

The first suspect witness statement was given on 12 September 2014, by an "Ibrogim Salikh Ibrogimov", to the Ulyanovsk Region police department. In it, he describes his alleged acquaintance with the suspect, Bagir Kazikhanov, as well as the history, structure, activities, and goals of "Nurdzhular". The usual identifying information on such a statement – date and place of birth, citizenship, address, passport details – is absent.

According to Sergei Mikhailov, "Ibrogim Salikh Ibrogimov" was a hidden witness in the case against Kazikhanov – someone whose identity is concealed and who gives evidence under a pseudonym. "Nothing at all is known about who he is," Mikhailov told Forum 18 on 29 November. "In court, during the interrogation of the hidden witness, Kazikhanov drew the attention of the court to the fact that [Ibrogimov's] testimony had been copied from the article by M.N. Davydov. But the judge laughed at Kazikhanov and did not attach any importance to this."

The verdict in Kazikhanov's case reproduces "Ibrogim Salikh Ibrogimov"’s testimony and the judge explicitly took it as evidence of Kazikhanov's organisation of "Nurdzhular" activities in Ulyanovsk.

The pseudonym chosen by law enforcement for the hidden witness – "Ibrogim Salikh Ibrogimov" – is very similar to that of Ibragim Salyakh (or Salekh)-ogly Ibragimov, founder of the Nuru-Badi Educational Fund which also published Nursi's works in Russia. An anti-extremism police officer questioned during Kazikhanov's trial named Ibragimov as "the leader of 'Nurdzhular' in the Russian Federation".

It is unclear why this pseudonym was chosen. Mikhailov of Sözler described it to Forum 18 as "simply a provocation, as I understand it".

Ibragim Ibragimov left Russia soon after Nursi's works began to be prohibited in 2007. In December 2007, he appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg over the "extremism" bans. His case, Ibragimov and Cultural Educational Fund 'Nuru-Badi' vs. Russia (Application No. 1413/08), is still pending before the Court, the ECtHR press service told Forum 18 on 5 December.

Two other cases relating to bans on Nursi's books are also pending at the ECtHR. "Yedinoe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musulman Krasnoyarskogo Kraia vs. Russia" (Application No. 28621/11) was submitted in December 2011. "Valiullin and The Association of Mosques of Russia vs. Russia" was lodged in February 2008. As of 11 December 2017, none of these cases has been heard (see Forum 18's "extremism" Russia religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215).

Second suspect witness statement

The second witness statement was given on 10 May 2016 in Blagoveshchensk by Dzait
Alikhanovich Sultygov, to the Amur Region FSB. Sultygov also describes his acquaintance with the suspect, in this case Yevgeny Kim, and goes on to outline the history, structure, activities, and goals of Nurdzhular. Sultygov was a real acquaintance of Kim's who used to visit his home, Mikhailov told Forum 18 on 29 November (his testimony is followed by a transcript of conversations between himself and Kim). Mikhailov suspects Sultygov to have been "sent by the FSB from the beginning".

Sultygov was not cross-examined in court and his testimony is not cited in the written verdict in Kim's case – the reasons for this remain unknown. His statement was, however, included in the case materials and was therefore seen by the judge, Forum 18 notes.

"[Sultygov's] questioning in court was postponed for a very long time, despite the fact that only his testimony contained information about 'Nurdzhular','" Mikhailov remarked to Forum 18. "They said that he had travelled to the far north to work for a month, but a month later he did not appear. Perhaps he did not want to support false testimony at the trial and the prosecutor had to abandon him as a witness."

Mikhailov also speculates about another possible reason why the court did not call Sultygov: "It is also possible that law enforcement found out that I was preparing an appeal to the General Prosecutor's Office about this matter and was conducting a study of Sultygov's statement and Davydov's article, and therefore they refused to allow Sultygov to testify in court."

**Witness statements derived from 2007 article**

Sözler asked linguistic analyst Ella Borgoyakova to determine, firstly, whether there were textual and semantic similarities between the materials, and secondly, whether "Davydov"'s article could be the original source of the witness statements and which of the reports contained borrowings. Borgoyakova's analysis concludes that the witness statements are identical to the article and that the article is the original source material, which was reproduced in hidden witness "Ibrogim Salikh Ibragimov"'s testimony. This testimony was then reproduced and expanded upon in Sultygov's testimony.

Borgoyakova cites a number of similarities (also checked by Forum 18). For example, Davydov writes: "After the death of S. Nursi, his closest students in the cities of Turkey organised courses for the study of the collection of his works 'Risale-i Nur', which were copied by hand". Both "Ibrogim Salikh Ibragimov"'s and Sultygov's statements contain the sentence: "After the death of Said Nursi, his students continued to develop the religious association 'Nurdzhular'. In different cities of Turkey, they organised courses for the study of the collection of his works 'Risale-i Nur', which were copied by hand". The phrase "by hand" is rendered slightly differently in the article (ot ruki) and the witness statements (vruchnuyu).

Similarly, "Davydov"'s article contains the paragraph: "The development of a network of 'Nurdzhular' cells in conditions of semi-underground work and pressure from the state led to the formation of a kind of secret service. The sect collects information in political, economic, inter-confessional and other spheres in the regions and states where Turkic-speaking peoples live, uses methods of conspiracy, carries out the introduction and further promotion of its adherents in organs of power in both Turkey and the CIS, including Russia".

"Ibrogim Salikh Ibragimov" stated in his testimony: "The development of a network of 'Nurdzhular' cells in conditions of semi-underground work, as well as pressure from the state at the initial stage, in effect formed a sect-secret service. Participants of 'Nurdzhular' actively collect information in the political, economic, inter-confessional and other spheres of society in the region and the state. According to Kazikhanov,
'Nurdzhular' is interested in the south of Russia, the Volga region, i.e. those territories where Turkic-speaking peoples predominantly live. 'Nurdzhular', using methods of conspiracy, carries out the introduction and further promotion of its adherents in organs of power and administrations".

Exactly the same paragraph appears in Sultygov's statement as in "Ibrogim Salikh Ibrogimov''s, the only difference being the substitution of the name Kim for Kazikhanov.

Forum 18 asked the Ulyanovsk police and the Amur Region FSB on 5 and 6 December why the statements bore such a resemblance to each other and Davydov's 2007 article. It had received no reply by the end of the working day in each place on 11 December.

Past record

Earlier decisions in other cases by different district courts have shown commonalities, suggesting that they were not driven by local circumstances. A May 2007 Koptevo ruling cites the "expert" conclusion that Nursi's work attempts "to influence the psyche of the reader subconsciously, using mechanisms of religious belief, i.e. the formation of conscious values and convictions with an irrational basis". A September 2010 Krasnoyarsk ruling cites exactly the same phrase, supposedly from its independent, local "expert" analysis (see http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1504). Yet the text of that analysis does not contain this phrase (see http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1811).

Cases brought by prosecutors have also shown numerous inconsistencies. For example, part of the prosecution's 2013 case against Imams Ilhom Merazhov and Komil Odilov strengthens their counterclaims that they reject violence. An "expert analysis" commissioned by the prosecution also contained numerous flaws (see http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1808).

Jehovah’s Witnesses appeal banning of Bible translation

JW World Headquarters (05.12.2017) - On Wednesday, December 6, at 10 a.m., the Leningrad Regional Court will consider the appeal by Jehovah’s Witnesses challenging the August 17 decision of the Vyborg City Court, which ruled that the Russian-language New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT) is an "extremist" publication.

Ironically, in the fall of 2015, President Putin signed an amendment to Article 3 of the Federal Law on Extremism, which states: “The Bible, the Quran, the Tanakh, and the Kangyur, their contents, and quotations from them cannot be recognized as extremist materials.” However, the court appointed an “expert study” that claimed the NWT is not a Bible, thus giving them license to ban it as an “extremist” publication.

David Semonian, international spokesman for Jehovah’s Witnesses, states: “We, of course, were not happy with the August 17 decision, but we were not alone. International experts have sharply criticized the integrity of the expert study and the ruling that resulted.”

For example, Alexander Verkhovsky, director of the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis and a member of President Vladimir Putin's Human Rights Council, states: "Ms.Kryukova [the court-appointed expert] is notorious for extremely low quality expert conclusions. She always works on the side of accusations—not to mention she lacks any training in study of religions—so her opinion is not valuable.”
Dr. Daniel Mark, chairman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, states: “The conclusion by the court—by any court—that the NWT translation is not a Bible is nonsense. All people of good will should be concerned with this development in Russia.”

Additionally, the SOVA Center’s “Misuse of Anti-Extremism in July-August 2017” newsletter stated: “We consider the Vyborg City Court decision unlawful and regard it as a dangerous precedent. The approach chosen by experts and the court’s way of circumventing the law that prohibits recognition of the scriptures of the major religions as extremist opens the door to prohibiting other translations and paraphrases of the holy books in the future.”

Mr. Semonian concludes: “The NWT is an internationally respected Bible translation; we remain hopeful that the Leningrad Regional Court will recognize that fact on Wednesday and reverse the August 17 ruling.”

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**Russia court authorises seizure of outlawed sect children**

By Jonathan Luxmoore

The Tablet (23.11.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2jikeF0](http://bit.ly/2jikeF0) - Russia's Supreme Court has confirmed that children can be removed from their parents if they involve them in banned social or religious groups, in a move said by local media to be aimed against the outlawed Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Kommiersant daily said the ruling, confirmed in October, would "greatly extend" existing rules on the deprivation of parental rights, which was previously possible only in cases of "direct threats to life or health". It added that membership of suspended religious sects had thus been placed on a par with "prevention of basic education, and incitement to gambling, begging, vagrancy, theft, prostitution, alcohol and drug abuse", and would clearly affect the Witnesses, who are still awaiting a European Court of Human Rights appeal hearing against their prohibition as an "extremist organisation".

Police began seizing places of worship belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses after their 395 branches were outlawed by the Supreme Court last April. The move was condemned by human rights groups and the US, British and German governments, as well as by Russia's small Catholic Church, whose spokesman, Mgr Igor Kovalevsky, said there were "strong misgivings" Catholics could now also face "new acts of discrimination and limits to freedom of belief".

However, it was welcomed by Russia's predominant Orthodox church, whose foreign relations director, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, described the Witnesses, who have around 175,000 Russian members, as a "totalitarian, harmful sect" propagating "false teachings", which did not "believe in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, or recognise the doctrine of the Trinity".

Russia's Italian-born Catholic archbishop, Paolo Pezzi, told Germany's Catholic.de agency last week he had faced "no disadvantages or problems in everyday life" as head of the Church's Moscow-based Mother of God archdiocese, and said he believed Catholic-Orthodox ties were "continuing to develop positively" in the country.
Oryol District Court extends the pretrial detention of Dennis Christensen for another three months


Mr. Christensen, who has Danish citizenship and is married to a local resident, was arrested on May 25, 2017, at a Bible study meeting, which he was attending with his wife Irina. FSB officers investigating the case inaccurately claimed that Christensen "was continuing" the activity of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Oryol, which had been liquidated by a court decision. However, he has never been a member of this organization, which the court could have easily confirmed by simply looking at the documents received from the local department of the Ministry of Justice. During the six months since Christensen has been detained, FSB investigators have interviewed dozens of residents of the Oryol Region and other areas in an attempt to find evidence that Christensen was engaging in unlawful activities.

After a three-hour hearing, Judge Andrey Tretyakov refused to change the measure of restraint to a softer one, such as house arrest. The court also ignored official guarantees from the Royal Embassy of Denmark, which under humanitarian considerations gave assurances that they would not provide Christensen with a new passport to replace the one seized by the investigators or assist him in traveling outside the Russian Federation.

The fact that the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the city of Oryol was liquidated and its activities prohibited does not annul the right of “everyone” (not only Russian citizens) to freedom of religion, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. According to the fundamental law of the country, everyone is guaranteed freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, including the right to profess individually or together with others any religion, to freely choose, possess and disseminate religious and other views and act according to them.

The main occupation of Dennis Christensen in Oryol was installing wooden structures. He was in Oryol for personal reasons, and not at the invitation of any organization. Dennis Christensen is completely innocent.

Misuse of anti-extremism in October 2017

Prosecuting Religious Organizations and Believers

SOVA Center for Information and Analysis (10.11.2017) - http://bit.ly/2mMxvuj - On October 13, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Declaration on Freedom of Religion in Russia. The declaration was signed by 28 deputies from 14 European countries. The authors of the declaration noted that, “whilst the Russian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to freedom of religion or belief, this fundamental right is at risk as the Russian authorities continue to foster an atmosphere of intolerance, discrimination and persecution against religious minorities throughout the entire Federation.” The total ban imposed on Jehovah's Witnesses in 2017 served as the principal example of this trend. According to the declaration, Evangelical Christians, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Scientologists and representatives of other religious groups are being persecuted in Russia; some of them remain under arrest awaiting their trial on the basis of the 2002 law on combating extremist activity, while, in fact, they are charged for “simply engaging in peaceful religious beliefs and activities.” The Declaration calls on the Russian
government to “put an end to these violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief of members of religious minorities.”

In late October, it was reported that a court in Nizhny Novgorod recognized a citizen of Uzbekistan, a team leader in a cleaning company, guilty under Article 282.2 Part 2 of participation in the activities of Tablighi Jamaat and sentenced her to 1 year of imprisonment to be served in a settlement colony.

The criminal case under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code for involvement in the activities of Tablighi Jamaat was initiated in Crimea in early October. Several homes on the peninsula were searched, and four people were arrested.

It became known in October, that, in late September, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan changed the verdict, issued by the Naberezhnye Chelny City Court under Part 2 of Article 282.2 in April with respect to nine Tablighi Jamaat supporters. The reference to an aggravating circumstance in the form of committing a crime by a group of persons was excluded from the verdict, and, therefore, the prison terms were reduced for all the offenders.

We would like to remind that the Tablighi Jamaat religious association was banned in Russia in 2009; we regard this ban as inappropriate. The movement is engaged in preaching its version of Islam and has not been implicated in any calls for violence.

In October, we learned about at least two cases of prosecution under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offences for distribution of inappropriately banned (in our opinion) religious literature. A resident of Magas faces a fine for storing in a market pavilion two copies of the Fortress of a Muslim – a collection of daily prayers, which shows no signs of extremism. A resident of Kunashak, the Chelyabinsk Region, was fined for distributing to his co-religionists an inappropriately forbidden brochure Woman in Islam and in the Judeo-Christian World, which extolls the advantages of the women’s position in societies that live according to the Islamic tradition.

**Prosecution for Anti-Religious Statements**

It was reported in mid-October that a criminal case had been opened in Krasnodar under Article 282 Part 1 of the Criminal Code against Maxim Drozdov. The charges were based on the fact of publication by Drozdov of his own satirical poem “Heretic” on his VKontakte page. Despite the fact that the material in question is an obvious satire on the Orthodox radicals, the investigation declared that the poem was aimed at humiliating the dignity of the social group “atheists.” In our opinion, the poem does not give the slightest grounds for criminal prosecution; hopefully, this absurd case will not reach the court.

In late October, the Central District Court of Sochi partially granted the appellate complaint of Viktor Nochevnov, convicted under Article 148 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (insulting the feelings of believers). The verdict of the Magistrates Court was revoked and the case was sent for a new consideration. In August, the Magistrates Court sentenced Nochevnov to a fine of 50,000 rubles. The prosecution was based on the fact that Nochevnov, under the pseudonym “Vityok Vlasov,” had shared a series of caricature images of Christ via the social network VKontakte. We spoke out against the verdict to Nochevnov.

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**Supreme Court threatens parental rights of, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses**

*Supreme Court recommends depriving parents who involve children in sects of their rights*
The Russian Supreme Court confirmed a recommendation to abridge the parental rights of people who involve children in sects, extremist organizations, or terrorist organizations, RIA Novosti was told in the court's press service.

The plenum of the Supreme Court confirmed an order about resolving disputes connected with the protection of the rights and legal interests of a child. It notes that when parental rights are abused, courts may abridge those rights.

"It should be understood that it is an abuse of parental rights to use these rights to the detriment of the interests of children, for example, creating hindrances to education; involving them in gambling; or encouraging vagrancy, theft, prostitution, use of alcoholic beverages, drugs, or psychotropic substances, or potentially dangerous psychoactive or intoxicating substances," the plenum notes.

The order also indicates that it is abuse of rights to involve a child "in the activity of a public or religious association or other organization with regard to which a court decision has taken effect regarding the liquidation or ban of its activity" in accordance with the laws "On combating extremist activity" and "On combating terrorism." (tr. by PDS, posted 14 November 2017).

**Muslim prisoner of conscience tortured**

By Victoria Arnold

Forum18 (07.11.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2AwoFUu](http://bit.ly/2AwoFUu) - Russian prisoner of conscience Yevgeny Lvovich Kim, who was jailed on 19 June for three years, nine months for meeting to study Muslim theologian Said Nursi's works, was in pre-trial detention tortured. No arrest or trials appear to have taken place against those responsible (see below).

There is a pattern within Russia's prisons of localised violations of prisoners' freedom of religion and belief within overall harsh prison conditions nationwide. This pattern – which can include denying access and allowing access to religious literature - affects among others Muslims in Dagestan and Krasanoyarsk, and a Jehovah's Witness in Oryol (see below).

Since 2007 both Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims who study the works of late Turkish theologian Said Nursi have been particularly targeted by the authorities. A verdict appears to be imminent in in Dagestan in the case of three Muslims accused of organising meetings of Muslims to read the works of Nursi, with prosecutors seeking up to five years' imprisonment (see below).

The pre-trial detention of another Muslim in Dagestan being held for studying theologian Nursi's works has been extended again until late December (see below).

Prosecutors in Novosibirsk have formally charged three Muslims who read Nursi's works and have been under investigation for nearly two years. One Muslim commented that they are "so tired of this stupidity of the law enforcement system" (see below).

In April the Jehovah's Witnesses were banned nationwide. In Oryol a Danish Jehovah's Witness remains in pre-trial detention. While in Kabardino-Balkariya the trial of a Jehovah's Witness former community leader continues, while another former community leader remains under investigation (see below).

**Muslim prisoner of conscience tortured**
Russian prisoner of conscience Yevgeny Lvovich Kim (born 5 October 1974) was in the far eastern city of Blagoveshchensk jailed on 19 June for three years, nine months for meeting to study Muslim theologian Said Nursi's works, and allegedly organising other Muslims to do this. He was the first person to receive a (non-suspended) custodial sentence for allegedly continuing the activities of the banned "extremist" organisation "Nurdzhular" for more than two years. Judge Aleksei Salnikov in the Far Eastern city also ordered that, after Kim's prison sentence, he will have a further one year of restrictions on freedom. During that year he will not be allowed to move house or travel outside his place of residence without permission, and may have to report regularly to probation authorities (see F18News 23 June 2017 http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2290).

Prisoner of conscience Kim has begun serving his sentence at Correctional Colony No. 3 in Khabarovsk, about 700 kilometres (about 440 miles) from his home in Blagoveshchensk. He lodged a cassation appeal at Amur Regional Court after his initial appeal was unsuccessful on 24 August. No hearing date for the cassation appeal has yet been set.

Since 2007 both Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims who study the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi have been particularly targeted by the authorities. The Muslims are accused among other things of membership of a banned organisation "Nurdzhular" (a russification of the Turkish for "Nursi followers"), although they themselves deny such an organisation has ever existed (see Forum 18's "extremism" Russia religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215 ).

While in pre-trail detention from December 2015 in Blagoveshchensk's Investigation Prison No. 1, Kim was tortured, had his ribs broken, and suffered attempted rape. "Thank God, they did not succeed", a fellow Muslim who wished to remain anonymous told Forum 18 on 31 October 2017.

Immediately after Kim's December 2015 detention, "they put him in the so-called 'press hut', a special room where the necessary testimonies are beaten out [of inmates] by other detainees who are colluding with the prison administration", the Muslim stated. "They beat Kim very badly, so badly that they themselves were frightened – apparently the perpetrators overdid it. Naturally, he was not taken to hospital, because there everything would have been recorded. After this, he was not beaten so badly again, and was generally only threatened."

**International torture obligations**

The United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Russia (as the Soviet Union) ratified in 1987, defines torture as: "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity".

Under Article 6 of the Convention, Russia is obliged to arrest any person suspected on good grounds of having committed torture. Under Article 4, Russia is obliged to try them under criminal law which makes "these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature". No such arrests or prosecutions of prisoner of conscience Kim's torturers, or those who facilitated this, are known to have happened.

**General prison conditions**
Prisoner of conscience Kim is being held in the Khabarovsk Correctional Colony's internal prison for refusing to sign an agreement to carry out particular work. This is because "much of this document contradicts his beliefs and would not allow him to perform prayers freely, which is most important to him", his fellow Muslim told Forum 18.

But conditions in Correctional Colony No. 3 are "relatively OK – better than the investigation prison in Blagoveshchensk". However, religious literature is supposedly permitted but none is available, "not even the Koran". The Muslim has been in contact with the local imam who knows the situation, "but for some reason nothing has so far been done".

Prison food consists mainly of bread and water "and whatever you have sent to you". But "in neither the prison nor the investigation prison is there anybody who will prepare food separately according to Islamic norms".

**Prison conditions better in Dagestan...**

However in Dagestan in the North Caucasus, another Muslim who wished to remain anonymous told Forum 18 on 30 October that "it is significantly better. There is halal food and the opportunity to read the Koran freely and perform prayers. Moreover, almost 100% of prisoners perform the namaz [Muslim daily prayers]".

A prisoner of conscience in Dagestan being held for studying theologian Nursi's works is Ilgar Vagif-ogly Aliyev, arrested in April. His lawyer Magomedrasul Zapirov told Forum 18 in May that Aliyev had experienced no restrictions on praying and had access to the Koran in some editions, as well as other religious literature censored by the authorities (see F18News 12 May 2017 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2279]). His lawyer Zapirov told Forum 18 on 31 October that his detention has been extended again, for two months, until late December.

**..but worse in Krasnoyarsk and Oryol**

But in Krasnoyarsk, Muslim reader of Nursi’s works Andrei Nikolayevich Dedkov (born 16 June 1979), who was also held in pre-trial detention before being released under travel restrictions, was "not allowed to perform morning or evening prayers, on the grounds that this is a violation of internal regulations" (see F18News 29 June 2016 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2193]).

Dedkov and Andrei Gennadyevich Rekst (born 14 March 1994) have been on trial since May at Krasnoyarsk’s Soviet District Court and Sverdlovsk District Court respectively (see F18News 12 May 2017 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2279]). They are both next due to appear on 13 November. Both Muslims – who have not been found guilty of any crime - are on the Rosfinmonitoring blacklist of "terrorists and extremists", which obliges banks to freeze their assets and put them under financial transaction restrictions (see Forum 18’s "extremism" Russia religious freedom survey [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215]).

In Oryol, Danish prisoner of conscience Dennis Ole Christensen (born 18 December 1972) has not been allowed to see or speak to his wife Irina Christensen since his arrival in jail, has had his Bible confiscated, and has become ill in the cold and damp conditions of his cell as he has not been given warm clothing. Jehovah's Witness Christensen has been in detention since May 2016 for attending a Bible study group raided by police and the FSB security service, and is being investigated under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on
liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity") (see F18News 22 June 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2290).

On 28 September Oryol Regional Court upheld an earlier lower court refusal to put him under house arrest instead, in spite of the Danish Embassy's official guarantee that it would not give him a new passport (his previous one has been confiscated) or otherwise help him to leave Russia. His case has now gone to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (ECtHR) (Application No. 39417/17), which on 4 September sent questions to the parties involved (see http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-177365). Prisoner of conscience Christensen is being kept in custody until at least 23 November.

**International human rights standards**

There is a pattern within prisons of localised non-observance of prisoners' freedom of religion and belief within overall harsh prison conditions (see Forum 18's general Russia religious freedom survey (see http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2246). International human rights standards, such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (known as the Mandela Rules – A/C.3/70/L.3), require governments to respect the freedom of religion or belief and other human rights of prisoners – including those in pre-trial detention (see http://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GA-RESOLUTION/E_ebook.pdf).

**Verdict due in one Dagestan Muslim trial?**

Ziyavdin Badirsoltanovich Dapayev (born 12 May 1982) and brothers Sukhrab Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev (born 13 November 1981) and Artur Abdulgamidovich Kaltuyev (born 15 June 1986) are – like prisoners of conscience Kim and Aliyev (see above) - accused of organising meetings of Muslims to read the works of Nursi.

Dapayev has been detained in Makhachkala's Investigation Prison No. 1 in Dagestan since March 2016. The arrests came after 14 Muslims were arrested in a series of raids across Dagestan and the FSB security service confiscated large amounts of allegedly "extremist" material. Most of the Muslims were later released (see F18News 11 April 2016 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2166). The Kaltuyev brothers remain under travel restrictions.

All three Muslims - who have not been found guilty of any crime - are on the Rosfinmonitoring blacklist of "terrorists and extremists", which obliges banks to freeze their assets and put them under financial transaction restrictions (see Forum 18's "extremism" Russia religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215).

Judge Magomed Nasrutdinov has presided over 22 hearings in seven months at Lenin District Court in Makhachkala, the latest on 3 November. Their trial may end on 7 November, lawyer Murtazli Barkayev told Forum 18 on 3 November. Prosecutors are seeking five years' imprisonment for Dapayev and four years for the Kaltuyevs.

All three - like prisoners of conscience Kim, Aliyev and Christensen - have been charged under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"). For alleged "crimes" like those allegedly committed by the three Muslims before July 2016 they could be jailed for up to six years or given other penalties. For "crimes" committed after 20 July 2016 harsher punishments came into force (see Forum 18's "extremism" Russia religious freedom

Prisoner of conscience Kim was also charged with breaking Criminal Code Article 282, Part 1 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group") (see F18News 23 June 2017 http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2290).

**Charges now brought in Novosibirsk Muslim case**

Prosecutors in Novosibirsk have formally charged three Muslims who read Nursi’s works and have been under investigation for nearly two years. They and their lawyers are now familiarising themselves with the case materials, lawyer Yuliya Zhemchugova told Forum 18, which she believes may take until approximately early December. There is a possibility that two of the men may avoid possible prison sentences upon payment of a fine.


Odilov is now accused under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 of the alleged "organisation of" an alleged "Nurdzhular cell", and Karaguzinov, Nasirov and Atadzhanov are accused under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2 of alleged "participation in" an alleged "Nurdzhular cell". Odilov was held in pre-trial detention for nine months before being released and placed under travel restrictions in September 2016. Karaguzinov and Nasirov are also under travel restrictions. The whereabouts of Atadzhanov remain unknown but he has been placed on the federal wanted list (see F18News 1 February 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2251).

Odilov, Atadzhanov, Karaguzinov, Nasirov are all on the Rosfinmonitoring blacklist of "terrorists and extremists".

"So tired of this stupidity of the law enforcement system"  

Imam Ilhom Merazhov, who has been following the case, told Forum 18 on 30 October that investigators had offered to close the case against Karaguzinov and Nasirov if they paid a fine under Criminal Code Article 76.2. This stipulates that people who have committed a minor or moderate-severity offence for the first time may be "released from criminal liability" by a court if they have paid a fine which compensates for the damages caused.

Merazhov added that he did not know why this had been proposed. "Because guilt has not been proven? Because Karaguzinov is a pensioner and did not commit any crime, and Nasirov is a first-year student? .. There's no guilt there. And, in general, there's no evidence relating to Karaguzinov and Nasirov .. We are just so tired of this stupidity of the law enforcement system".

The FSB security service has also now opened an investigation of Merazhov under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity").

In May 2013 both Merazhov and Odilov were under this Article given one-year suspended
prison sentences for allegedly organising "Nurdzhular" activity. Sergei Ageyev of Novosibirsk's October District Prosecutor's Office admitted in his 14 May 2013 closing arguments that "the deed of which they are incriminated does not envisage any kind of extremist activity", and no evidence was presented that "Nurdzhular" exists (see F18News 18 June 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1848). But an appeal against the conviction failed (see F18News 6 September 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1872).

Odilov and Merazhov then appealed in January 2014 to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg (Application No. 6731/14 and Application No. 6738/14) (see F18News 10 April 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1946). On 31 August 2017 the ECtHR sent questions to all the parties involved, including the government (see http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-177189).

Kabardino-Balkariya - Prokhladny trial of Jehovah's Witness continues

The trial of 69-year-old Arkady Akopovich Akopyan, head of the Prokhladny Jehovah's Witness community in Kabardino-Balkariya, is continuing before Judge Oleg Golovashko at Prokhladny District Court. The most recent hearing took place on 31 October.

Akopyan has also been charged under Criminal Code Article 282, Part 1 ("Actions directed at the incitement of hatred [nenavist] or enmity [vrazhda], as well as the humiliation of an individual or group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or social group"). He is accused of giving sermons in which he "degraded the dignity of adherents of other religions", as well as of distributing banned "extremist" literature among members of his congregation (see F18News 22 June 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2290).

The case is one of a number of cases brought since the Jehovah's Witnesses were banned nationwide and their appeal against the ban failed (see F18News 18 July 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297).

Kabardino-Balkariya - Maysky investigation of Jehovah's Witness continues

Yury Viktorovich Zalipayev, 54-year-old chair of the now-liquidated local Jehovah's Witness community in Maysky, is apparently still under investigation, for allegedly inciting hatred against Christian clergy by distributing an allegedly "extremist" publication (see F18News 25 August 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2310).

The case has not yet been lodged at Maysky District Court. When Forum 18 rang the Prosecutor's Office, they refused to answer any questions about the case. (END)

“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 krishnaites, 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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**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.

Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Newsletter | Russia
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.
Occupied S. Ossetia bans Jehovah’s Witnesses as ‘extremist’

By Thea Morrison

Georgia Today (17.10.2017) - http://bit.ly/2hOns27 - Georgia’s Russian-occupied region of South Ossetia has banned religious group Jehovah’s Witnesses as an extremist organization, also officially declaring their activities as illegal.

The information was spread on October 17 by Sputnik-Ossetia.

The so called Supreme Court of de facto South Ossetia satisfied the lawsuit of the so called Prosecutor General’s Office about the ban on the activity of the religious association Jehovah’s Witnesses and its recognition as extremist on the territory of the “republic”, de facto Justice Minister Zalina Lalieva told Sputnik.

On October 17 the court verdict went into force, which means that the religious organization has been banned in the occupied region.

Zalina Lalieva did not specify exactly how many members of Jehovah's Witnesses are there in the region, however she added that they are more than a thousand.

"In the republic there is only one religious organization registered in the Ministry of Justice - the Alan Diocese,” she added, without specifying what punishment awaits the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ members if they still continue their activities.

It should be noted that in August 2017 Russian Federation also banned Jehovah's Witnesses administrative center in Russia and its 395 local branches.

The move was based on an April supreme court decision that declared Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist organization and ordered its property to be turned over to the state.

United Nations human rights experts said the court case against Jehovah's Witnesses "signals a dark future for all religious freedom in Russia.”

Religious freedom in Russia: 28 members of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly sign a common declaration

Written declaration No. 647 | Doc. 14430 | 13 October 2017

CoE (13.10.2017) - http://bit.ly/2hKWRTs - Whilst the Russian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to freedom of religion or belief, this fundamental right is at risk as the Russian authorities continue to foster an atmosphere of intolerance, discrimination and persecution against religious minorities throughout the entire Federation. Recently,
Jehovah’s Witnesses, a Christian denomination that rejects violence, have been banned as “extremist” by a decision of the Supreme Court.

Evangelicals, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Scientologists and others have been targeted, with some of their members sentenced to pre-trial imprisonment based on the 2002 Extremist law, while in reality being held for simply engaging in peaceful religious beliefs and activities.

The 2002 Extremism Law laid the foundation for an alarming trend in repressions against civil society and the “non-traditional” minority religions. The law was initially passed to combat terrorism after 9/11 but it provides no clear definition for the term “extremism,” thus rendering virtually any group or individual vulnerable to political and legal harassment.

With all due respect, we urge the Russian government to intervene and put an end to these violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief of members of religious minorities in Russia.

Signatories: Ms Edite ESTRELA, Portugal, SOC ; Mr Viorel Riceard BADEA, Romania, EPP/CD ; Mr Jokin BILDARRATZ, Spain, ALDE ; Mr Liam BYRNE, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN, Romania, SOC ; Mr Paolo CORSINI, Italy, SOC ; Ms Vanessa D’AMBROSIO, San Marino, SOC ; Mr Geraint DAVIES, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr José Ramón GARCÍA HERNÁNDEZ, Spain, EPP/CD ; Mr Valeriu GHILETCHA, Republic of Moldova, EPP/CD ; Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ, Spain, SOC ; Mr Andres HERKEL, Estonia, EPP/CD ; Mr Giorgi KANDELAKI, Georgia, EPP/CD ; Mr Luis LEITE RAMOS, Portugal, EPP/CD ; Mr Georgii LOGVYNSKYI, Ukraine, EPP/CD ; Sir Alan MEALE, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Iain MURRAY, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Victor NAUDI ZAMORA, Andorra, SOC ; Mr Joseph O'REILLY, Ireland, EPP/CD ; Ms Irina PRUIDZE, Georgia, NR ; Ms Soraya RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS, Spain, SOC ; Ms Leyla ŞAHİN USTA, Turkey, EC ; Mr Virendra SHARMA, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Adão SILVA, Portugal, EPP/CD ; Mr Ionut-Marian STROE, Romania, EPP/CD ; Ms Adriana Diana TUSA, Romania, SOC ; Mr Burhanettin UYSAL, Turkey, EC ; Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS, Lithuania, EPP/CD

HRWF Comment

Noteworthy is the fact that no deputy from Austria, Belgium, France and Germany – four EU countries which created questionable state institutions meant to monitor the activities of so-called sects – signed the declaration.

See HRWF book Freedom of Religion or Belief, Antisect Movements and State Neutrality: FECRIS, a case study in English here, in Russian here, and in French here.

FECRIS vice president stands behind the Orthodox Church against non-Orthodox minorities

HRWF (05.10.2017) - http://www.about-dvorkin.ru - On 27-29 September 2017, a closed anti-cult conference financed by the Russian state took place in Selekhald, a Russian city near the Polar Circle. Some sociologists of religions known to defend religious freedom for all were denied access to it. Anticultists from Italy, Canada, and Germany participated in the event. Among them were Alexander Dvorkin, vice-president of the European Federation of Centres of Research and information on Cults and Sects (FECRIS) who is ‘well-known’ for his hate speech against non-Orthodox minorities, and Luigi Corvaglia, a member of the FECRIS board.

See the review of the conference in English here.
See the book *Freedom of Religion or Belief. Antisect Movements and State Neutrality: FECRIS, a case study* in English here, in Russian here, and in French here.

Starting from the left: Gerald Armstrong, Alexander Dvorkin, Archbisp Nikolay (Chashin), Thomas Gandow, Luigi Corvaglia. Salekhard, 29 September 2017 | Photo: yamalrpc.ru

**Conclusion of HRWF presentation about FECRIS at an OSCE/ODIHR side-event in September in Warsaw**

All non-Orthodox religious denominations and their members have been attacked by Alexander Dvorkin and the *Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Centre for Religious Studies*, which is the FECRIS member association in Russia.

FECRIS in France has never disavowed him when he was using hate speech against Jehovah’s Witnesses, Protestants (Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists and others), Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners, the Salvation Army, Hare Krishna devotees, Mormons, the Church of Scientology and some Orthodox Churches not affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate, etc.

FECRIS in France has never disavowed him, even when he was taking sides with China at an antisect conference in Beijing on 12-13 May 2008 specifically targeting Falun Gong although the repression against this group had been repeatedly denounced by the UN Commission of Human Rights, the European Parliament, the US State Department, the IS Commission on International Religious Freedom, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others.

**Text of the full presentation:** [http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports](http://hrwf.eu/forb/our-reports)
Russian pastor flees religious persecution to seek asylum in Germany

Religious minorities in Russia often face persecution. A Russian pastor's family had to flee Sochi. Now they hope they can live in Germany.

DW (21.09.2017) - http://bit.ly/2xATnOs - "Why Germany? The Protestant Church here is strong," explains Alexey Kolyasnikov when asked why he applied for political asylum in Germany. The pastor hopes that German authorities will grant him asylum. "It is very dangerous to return to Russia. There, I will be declared a terrorist and put behind bars," says Kolyasnikov.

Since the end of July 2017, the pastor, his wife and three daughters have been living in a refugee shelter in the western German city of Leverkusen. In the school gymnasium that has been furnished to temporarily accommodate refugees, the Kolyasnikovs share what little space they have with refugees from Chechnya.

"Unauthorized gathering" in a café

Kolyasnikov is convinced that he is being persecuted for his religious activities in Russia. In 2014, the pastor held a gathering with his Pentecostal congregation. As they do not have their own church building, the congregation members met in a café in Sochi as usual. On that evening, police officers and members of the Russia's main intelligence agency, the Federal Security Service (FSB) suddenly appeared during the bible reading. They accused Kolyasnikov of holding an unauthorized gathering, which is a civil violation.

"Six weeks previously, a young woman attended our gathering for the first time. From then on, she took part in everything – she was very interested in the topics we discussed. However, on the evening the FSB appeared, she did not come alone, but with a friend, as she called him," recalls Kolyasnikov.

Later, it turned out that the supposed friend actually worked for the intelligence agency FSB. That young woman and her friend later testified against the pastor in court. Alexander Popkov, Kolyasnikov's lawyer, said that in the past, the woman had also appeared in trials against other religious communities in Sochi.

The judges imposed a fine on Kolyasnikov for "organizing an unauthorized gathering." After filing an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for the violation of his right to religious freedom in the Russian Federation, the pressure started to mount. And then, all at once, a Ukrainian trail was added to the story.

Euromaidan supporter

DW is in possession of a copy of a letter sent to the public prosecutor's office of the southern Russian Krasnodar region. In it, then-FSB Major-General Alexander Rodionov not only documented civil violations but also the pastor's direct links to the events in Ukraine in the winter of 2013 and spring of 2014.

The letter states that "upon taking power, 'Euromaideners' - whose religious conviction is based on the ideology of pro-West Protestant religious movements and is supported by the EU as well as NATO - a growing threat of 'anti-Russian' hotspots has developed, though which social and ideological tension is emanated." After that, Russia's center for anti-extremism took on the case.

Kolyasnikov asserts that he, as a pastor, condemned all forms of violence and bloodshed in Kyiv. Moreover, he says that his religious beliefs did not allow him to support the revolution in Ukraine. "I was clearly against the Maidan. At that time, we prayed for the
good of the country and the president," he claims. When he read the FSB report, he was shocked that security forces thought he had taken part in the Euromaidan protests.

"It is also ridiculous because I never went to Ukraine at the time. I was in Kyiv for the first time in 2016, and of course, many of my prejudices were dispelled. Nobody there attacked me because I spoke Russian. I felt very free there," says the pastor. He is convinced that legal cases are opened arbitrarily against anyone and are always easily justified by links to the events in Ukraine.

**The FSB's revenge?**

To this day, the pastor still does not fully understand the real reason for the mistreatment. He recalls an incident in 2012: "An FSB major demanded I speak to him. He told me he was investigating religious groups in Sochi. He stressed the fact that there was an increased terrorist threat in Russia. Then, he asked me to give him a list of my congregation members including their personal details."

Kolyasnikov's lawyer Alexander Popkov believes that many factors are at play in this case. Firstly, the situation in Russian has worsened because of the events in Ukraine. Furthermore, Russian security agencies want to keep religious communities in their country under control. "And Kolyasnikov has refused to be controlled," claims Popkov.

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**Jehovah’s Witness Bible, Jewish, Christian, Muslim books banned**

*Banned as "extremist": Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Bible, other Jehovah's Witness and Muslim books, an article on the Jewish concept of the Holy Land, a Jewish historical novel claimed to incite hatred of Catholics, a book on "Christian women persecuted for their faith" and an atheist slideshow.*

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (29.09.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2gabCtQ](http://bit.ly/2gabCtQ) - A court in Leningrad Region has outlawed the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Bible as "extremist". The court imposed the ban despite the Extremism Law's prohibition on such bans in relation to the main sacred works of four religions, after the judge agreed with court-appointed "experts" that the book was not in fact a bible. The ruling means that Jehovah's Witnesses, already subject to a complete prohibition of their activities across Russia, are now also liable to prosecution for possession of this commonly held text. Jehovah's Witnesses have appealed against the decision.

Other Jehovah's Witness literature has also been declared "extremist" in 2016 and 2017, both before and after the Supreme Court ban on their Administrative Centre and all their communities, which came into force in July 2017 (see F18News 18 July 2017 [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2297)).

The same ruling which banned the New World Bible also outlawed three other books seized by Russian customs officials, which do not appear to call for any violation of the human rights of others. Online versions of both Jehovah's Witness and other religious material continue to be blocked.

While Jehovah's Witness and Islamic literature predominates among religion-related items on the Justice Ministry's Federal List of Extremist Materials, other belief systems' materials can also be added – most recently, several Jewish texts, an online atheist
slideshow, and two Christian books. While these items sometimes explicitly criticise other faiths, none encourages violence towards their adherents (see below).

Several items of literature of the Chinese spiritual movement Falun Gong have also been banned, including, in 2011, its core spiritual text "Zhuan Falun" (Turning the Law Wheel) (see F18News 14 December 2012 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1782).

In 2012, an attempt in Tomsk to ban "The Bhagavad Gita As It Is", a key text for Hare Krishna devotees, was unsuccessful after a public outcry both locally and in India (see F18News 21 March 2012 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1682).

**Banning religious literature**

Often, publishers and living authors do not know of an attempt to ban their publications until after the court case. Sometimes, however, they manage to mount a defence. On 31 August 2017, the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights began considering two cases brought against Russia by two publishers of Muslim books which have been ruled "extremist", Aslambek Ezhayev and Sözler. Both parties – the Russian government and the publishers – must now respond to a series of questions about the initial lower court proceedings and how the bans affect European Convention rights to freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly.

The Federal List, which details items which have been declared "extremist" by courts and banned from distribution in Russia, now has more than 4,200 entries. A large quantity of these are far-right nationalist or Islamist materials which are violent and/or racist, but the broad interpretation of "extremism" set out in the 2002 Extremism Law means that items which do not incite violence or the violation of any human right may also come to be prohibited.

Frequently, this takes place on the grounds of "promoting the superiority and exclusivity" of one faith (or its adherents) over another, although conviction of the inherent truth of one’s own beliefs to the exclusion of others is, however, common to many religions, and does not in itself constitute evidence of hatred or violent intent (see Forum 18’s Russia "extremism" religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215).

The Plenum of Russia’s Supreme Court issued a definition of "extremism" in June 2011 – "statements that justify the need for genocide, repression, deportations, violence against members of a nation, race or religion" – in which it acknowledged that "criticism of religious beliefs or religious customs should not be viewed as extremism".

In its report on the Russian Federation of 25 August 2017 (CERD/C/RUS/CO/23-24), the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination acknowledged these problems with the Extremism Law. It recommended (not for the first time), that Russia "amend the definition of extremism .. to ensure that it is clearly and precisely worded, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention". The Committee also requested that Russia "do away with the Federal List of Extremist Materials".

Any Russian court can declare a work (eg. a book, leaflet, song, slogan, video, website or webpage) "extremist". The Justice Ministry must then add the work to the Federal List. The List often does not include full bibliographical details, and is irregularly updated. Checking whether a particular item is on the List can therefore be difficult or even impossible. The removal of an item from the Federal List is rare and can be short-lived. In recent years, new titles have been added at an increasing rate (see F18News 27 July 2015 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2084).
Once a publication has been banned as "extremist", anyone owning the work is subject to punishment under Administrative Code Article 20.29 (see Forum 18's Russia "extremism" religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2215).

As of 23 November 2015, an amendment to the Extremism Law prevents some, but not all, sacred texts - "the Bible, the Koran, the Tanakh and the Kanjur, their contents, and quotations from them" – from being ruled "extremist" (see F18News 30 November 2015 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2126).

**Jehovah's Witness Bible banned in Vyborg**

On 17 August 2017, after nearly nineteen hours of hearings over two days, Judge Dmitry Grishin of Vyborg City Court ruled that the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Bible and three brochures – "The Bible and its principal theme", "Has science replaced the Bible?", and "Ways to improve your health" – were extremist materials and should be banned from distribution in Russia.

Consideration of the Leningrad-Finland Transport Prosecutor's suit had taken more than a year and a half since it was submitted in December 2015. Judge Roman Petrov suspended the case in April 2016 and ordered further "expert analysis" of the texts. Proceedings resumed under Judge Grishin in June 2017.

The extra analysis ordered by the court was carried out by Natalya Kryukova, Aleksandr Tarasov and Viktor Kotelnikov of the Centre for Socio-Cultural Analysis, despite the fact that they had produced the reports suggesting the presence of "extremism" on which the prosecutors' suit was originally based. They have repeatedly refused to comment to Forum 18 on their work for this case.

The Centre for Socio-Cultural Analysis was registered in Moscow in 2014. It appears to comprise four specialists in, respectively, art history, mathematics (Kryukova), languages (Tarasov), and political science and religious studies (Kotelnikov). According to their website, they offer, among other services: "the identification in text and images .. of the promotion of extremist activity and direct, indirect and hidden calls to extremism; the determination of extremism in the activities of organisations; and the identification of signs of forced involvement in an organisation whose activities bears signs of extremism".

The Centre states it works with law enforcement and judicial bodies, as well as unspecified other organisations and individuals. In 2015, it produced analysis of two Jehovah's Witness texts which were then banned as "extremist" in Kurgan, although a higher court later overturned this ruling. Kryukova also produced analysis for the criminal case against two Jehovah's Witness elders in Sergiyev Posad, who were accused of inciting religious hatred in their sermons – they were twice acquitted (see 25 August 2017 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2310).

In court in Vyborg, Jehovah's Witness lawyers Aleksandr Dyubin, Maksim Novakov and Anton Bogdanov claimed that the court-ordered "expert analysis" contained "many mistakes and inaccuracies", and that the experts were not properly qualified. They stressed that Kryukova, Tarasov and Kotelnikov had already produced analysis of the texts at the request of customs officials, and so could not do so again.

Anatoly Baranov, a philologist from the Institute of the Russian Language at the Russian Academy of Sciences, also submitted to the court a comparative analysis of more than 600 randomly sampled fragments from five different Bible translations, including the New World, which concluded that they were identical in meaning.

According to reports of the proceedings on the jw-russia.org news website (which is administered from outside Russia), during the hearing on 16 August, lawyer Dyubin questioned Mikhail Odintsov, chair of the Russian Society of Researchers of Religion, on...
the contents of the New World version. Asked whether the latter was a bible, Odintsov affirmed that it was.

The judge disregarded these statements, and the Jehovah's Witnesses' assertion that none of the titles showed any signs of extremism.

The Jehovah's Witness lawyers submitted an appeal against the "extremism" ruling to Leningrad Regional Court on 21 September. No hearing date has yet been set. The judge ordered the books themselves to be confiscated, but not destroyed.

**The verdict: not a bible**

According to the written Vyborg verdict, seen by Forum 18, all four texts contain "justification of the need to implement actions aimed at violent change to the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation; justification of the need to violate the integrity of the Russian Federation .. calls for religious discord .. statements justifying the need for genocide and mass repressions against adherents of other religions .. allegations of the natural superiority of Jehovah's Witnesses and the inferiority of adherents of other religions .. [and] justification of the opposition and incompatibility of the interests of Jehovah's Witnesses with the interests of other religious groups".

The court also concluded that the texts use "manipulative psychological and linguistic methods" in order to inculcate "negative attitudes towards a person on the grounds of attitude toward religion" and encourage Jehovah's Witnesses "to distance themselves from the institutions of civil society, as well as from the institutions of the family and marriage" and "refuse to perform duties in the ranks of the Armed Forces".

Judge Grishin notes the Extremism Law's 2015 prohibition on banning the Bible, the Koran, the Tanakh, and the Kanjur (and quotations from them), but cites the findings of the Centre for Socio-Cultural Analysis as evidence for why the Russian-language New World version should not be considered a bible.

The experts concluded that the New World Bible is not a Bible because "it does not have such a title [but uses the title "Holy Scripture"], it is based on a translation into English from Ancient Hebrew and Ancient Greek texts, [and] significant changes have been made to the text, which are recognised by the authors of the New World translation themselves .. The most revealing example is the use of a tetragrammaton in the form of Jehovah [to refer to God]. In addition, the key texts of the New Testament, affirming the unity and equality of God the Father and God the Son, are changed so that they can be interpreted in the opposite sense".

While Judge Grishin accepted the Jehovah's Witnesses' argument and the experts' own testimony that the New World version contains text "partially coinciding in its content with the text of universally accepted translations of the Bible", he concluded that this "in itself is not grounds to consider all editions of the Bible as such – in connection with which the norms of Article 3.1 of the Extremism Law cannot be applied".

Customs officials at the Svetogorsk border crossing from Finland had impounded millions of copies of the four books on three occasions in May, June and July 2015. On each occasion, customs authorities took Jehovah's Witnesses to court under Article 16.3, Part 1, of the Administrative Code ("Non-observance of Customs Union rules on goods banned or limited 'on the basis of national interests and objectives'").

Customs officials based their case on examination of the texts by the Centre for Socio-Cultural Analysis (their report on the New World Bible concluded that it induced "hostility towards people based on religious affiliation" and contained "justification of the necessity of carrying out aggressive, violent, cruel actions towards a person in connection with religious affiliation").
The Jehovah's Witnesses' Russian and Finnish branches have unsuccessfully tried to challenge the confiscation of their literature through the arbitration courts (see F18News 5 May 2016 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2174).

In a 16 July 2015 statement, Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre representative Yaroslav Sivulsky called the block on importing Bibles "the apotheosis of a mindless, unprofessional, and frenzied struggle with imaginary 'extremism'".

Other Jehovah's Witness texts

Several other Jehovah's Witness resources have also been banned. Proletarian District Court, Rostov-on-Don, ruled "extremist" on 24 March 2017 "Questions of Youth: Practical Advice, Volume 2" (2008 New York edition) by request of the Southern Transport Prosecutor's Office. It was added to the Federal List on 15 June 2017.

Customs officials had found a copy in a sailor's cabin on a ship in Rostov's port. A linguistics expert from the Rostov Centre for Judicial Expertise concluded that the book "negatively evaluates" people who are not Jehovah's Witnesses, encourages Jehovah's Witnesses to end relationships with them, and promotes the "superiority" of Jehovah's Witnesses, but also concluded that the text contains no calls for violence and in fact advocates tolerance towards non-Jehovah's Witnesses.


Serov District Court in Sverdlovsk Region found "Listen to God" and the January 2015 issue of the journal "Awake!" to be "extremist" on 19 February 2016. The first of these texts consists of quotations from the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Bible, the second, of advice on dealing with anger, discussion of God's culpability in human suffering, information on Costa Rica, and an interview with an ill child. Both also contained links to the main Jehovah's Witness website, jw.org, which is itself banned and blocked in Russia.

Jewish texts

Judge Yury Kurin of Sochi's Central District Court ruled on 22 March 2017 that a nineteenth-century Jewish-themed historical novel and an academic article on the concept of the Holy Land should be banned as "extremist".

According to the court verdict, seen by Forum 18, the FSB security service seized both items during a search of an unspecified building in Sochi. Their ownership is unclear, and no representatives of the publishers or the article's author appeared to be party to the case or present at the hearing.

The novel, published under the Russian title "Forcibly Baptised [Nasilno kreshchenniye]" is by Marcus Lehmann (1838-1890), a German rabbi, writer, and civil servant. It tells the story of a Jewish convert to Catholicism who becomes treasurer at the court of the Polish king, and details the experiences of Jews in fourteenth-century Poland-Lithuania, particularly the persecution and discrimination they encountered. According to the verdict, expert analysis by an FSB criminology laboratory concluded that the novel was intended to incite hatred towards Christians, especially Catholics, and to promote the "superiority and exclusivity" of Judaism over Christianity.

As well as the hard copy novel (published in Russian by Izografus, 2001, Moscow), Judge Kurin ordered two websites which host the text to be banned and blocked. The book's entry on the Federal List, added on 17 July 2017, does not specify print or electronic versions. The book appears to have been withdrawn from the Russian National Library, in whose online catalogue it is marked as "Removed from public access. Federal List [of Extremist Materials] No. 4176".
Rabbi Boruch Gorin of the Federation of Jewish Communities criticised the ban, calling it "an absolute mockery of the entire Extremism Law" in a statement on his Facebook page on 17 July. "To say this book is 'extremist,' a book which had dozens of editions, even in Germany in the 19th century, a book about the religious discrimination against Jews in Medieval Europe — that means to ridicule the idea of the 'fight against extremism'."

The banned article "The holiness of the land of Israel", by Zoya Kopelman, was published in the journal "Fathers and Children" (Issue 35, 2001, Moscow), which is produced by the Moscow-based Institute for Jewish Studies in the CIS. Kopelman is a translator and teacher of literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, specialising in the links between Jewish and Russian culture.

The article examines the concept of the "Holy Land", the nature and meaning of "sanctity" when connected with particular geographical space and whether this can change over time, whether such sanctity is original and inherent or dependent on the presence of pious Jews keeping the commandments there, and the importance of Israel in the prayers and practices of Jews even when they do not live there.

The FSB's "expert analysis" reported that the article was intended to incite hatred towards non-Jewish ethnicities and promote the "superiority and exclusivity" of Jews over other peoples; it also allegedly incites religious hatred and "infringes on the rights, freedoms, and legal interests of the person and citizen in relation to their ethnicity, religious affiliation, and attitude to religion".

In his verdict, Judge Kurin concludes that dissemination of Kopelman's article would therefore encourage people "to commit a criminal offence, facilitate the commission [of the crime], aid in its preparation, and foment social, racial, national or religious strife among the population".

Kopelman asks "How are human life and the holiness of the Land of Israel connected?", and in answer quotes Israeli Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, who outlines in his 1993 book of essays "Pirkei Moadot" how God gave different lands to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to Lot and Esau and their descendants: "And the border dividing these lands is nothing but a boundary between the holy and the ordinary, between light and darkness, between the people of Israel and other nations. And the unceasing struggle between the population on different sides of this border is the struggle of the holy and the unholy .. a reflection of the duality inherent in this world - the coexistence of good and evil, pure and impure".

Rabbi Breuer also points out, however, that God told the Jews not to conquer these other lands, that they had a right to them only if their inhabitants gave them up. Kopelman's article makes no call for violence or discrimination against non-Jews.

As with Lehmann's novel, Judge Kurin also ordered the page of the Institute's website containing the article to be banned and blocked, although the Federal List entry (also added on 17 July 2017) does not distinguish between print and electronic versions.

The SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis commented on 17 July that the experts, prosecutors, and court in this case were clearly ignorant of the nature of Judaism as an ethnocentric religion, "for which ideas of the mission of the Jewish people and the holiness of the land of Israel are very important and inalienable".

**Jewish Kabbalah texts**

Another Jewish text, Mikhael Laytman's "Kabbalah: Secret Jewish Teachings. Part 10 – Fruits of Wisdom" was banned by Kirov District Court in Yekaterinburg on 1 October 2015. The work did not appear on the Federal List until 23 April 2017, however, after an unsuccessful appeal by the author at Sverdlovsk Regional Court on 23 December 2016.
Prosecutors seized the book from the library of Yekaterinburg's Or-Avner Jewish Gymnasium. Expert analysis found it to contain "information aimed at inciting ethnic hatred and enmity, propaganda of the exclusivity and superiority of Jews over other people (non-Jews) .. the idea of the inferiority of other peoples, except for Jews".

Laytman, a Soviet-born Israeli citizen, is the head of the Bney-Barukh International Kabbalah Academy. He has caused controversy among Orthodox Jews by teaching the Kabbalah to non-Jews. Although the book contains the suggestion that Jews are in opposition to other peoples, it appears to have no violent or aggressive content.

**Islamic literature banned again**

Islamic literature also continues to be ruled "extremist". On 3 March 2017, Svetly City Court in Kaliningrad Region banned "Muslim dogma (Akida)", by Turkish academic Ahmed Saim Kilavuz. The Justice Ministry added it to the Federal List on 7 June 2017, noting explicitly that the many Koranic quotations it contains are not banned, in accordance with the 2015 amendment to the Extremism Law.

Kilavuz's work describes the foundations of the Islamic faith, and does not appear to contain any aggressive or violent statements. It was also among 68 Islamic texts banned in a single 20-minute hearing at Orenburg's Lenin District Court in March 2012 – in 2015, an appeal hearing at Orenburg Regional Court decided that fifty of these, including Kilavuz's book, were not "extremist", and they were later removed from the Federal List (see F18News 27 July 2015 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2084).

Despite this, these items continue to be subject to bans under the Extremism Law. Another title which has repeatedly fallen foul of the Extremism Law, both before and after it was reprieved in Orenburg, is "Fortress of a Muslim", by Said al-Qahtani. This is a volume of prayers and greetings for everyday occasions, which contains no call for violence or violation of human rights, but which has been blocked across multiple websites as well as in hard copy. It appears seven times on the Federal List (although the exact editions are not always clear), banned in four separate rulings by three different courts between July 2014 and August 2016.

Soviet District Court in Ulan-Ude issued the latest ban of "Fortress of a Muslim" on 22 August 2016, in relation to the 2011 3rd edition from the Ezhayev publishing house. It was added to Federal List on 8 November 2016.

The lifting of a previous ban or an earlier refusal to rule a text "extremist" offers no subsequent protection. On 1 February 2017, Kirov District Court in Ufa banned "Selected Hadith", a Russian translation of several hundred sayings attributed to the Muslim Prophet Mohammed. The collection was compiled by Muhammad Yusuf Kandahlawi (1917-1965), a major figure in the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, which is outlawed as "extremist" in Russia.

Pervouralsk City Court, however, refused to ban the book in December 2015 on the grounds that it contained quotations from the Koran. An appeal judge at Sverdlovsk Regional Court upheld this interpretation of the 2015 amendment to the Extremism Law in March 2016 (see F18News 5 May 2016 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2174).

In an indication of the inconsistency with which the amendment is applied, five items appear on the Federal List with the note that the ban does not cover the Koranic or Bible quotations they contain – but the entry for "Selected Hadith", added on 7 June 2017, includes no such caveat.

**Christian texts**
It appears that almost any negative portrayal of another religion or its adherents can lead to a text being declared "extremist", regardless of whether this is accompanied by the incitement of violence or discrimination.

Bryansk Region Military Prosecutor's Office requested that "Hearts of Fire: Eight Women in the Underground Church and Their Stories of Costly Faith" and "Islam: a look beneath the mask" be outlawed as extremist. Judge Viktor Rukhmakov of Sevsk District Court upheld the two separate suits on 12 April 2016, and the Justice Ministry added both titles to the Federal List on 20 April 2017.

According to the written verdicts, seen by Forum 18, the FSB border service had seized the two books "as part of a planned operation" from two men travelling to Russia from Ukraine, after being tipped off by customs officials who had seen "signs of incitement to extremist activity on religious grounds" in the texts. Igor Balashov and Venyamin Yakubovsky, from whom the books were confiscated, do not appear to have been prosecuted on any administrative charge. It is unclear how many copies of the book the FSB seized.

The books were subjected to psychological and linguistic analysis by the Justice Ministry's Bryansk Laboratory of Judicial Expertise. According to both verdicts, "experts" found them to contain "a combination of linguistic and psychological signs of the incitement of religious enmity and hatred". The verdicts give no further details of the "expert analysis" and quote no parts of the texts which were deemed "extremist". No representative of the authors, publishers, or owners of the books appear to have been present in court.

Neither book appears to encourage violence against non-Christians or support discrimination against them, but prosecutors couched the case in terms of state and societal security.

The verdict claims: "At present, threats to the national security of the Russian Federation are predominantly internal. Therefore, the most important area for ensuring Russia's national security is the fight against organised crime, ensuring state and public security and protecting public order. A significant threat to Russia's national security is the most dangerous form of organised crime – extremism .. combating extremism as ideology, intolerance, incitement of hatred or enmity, humiliation of human dignity on grounds of race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, or membership of any social group is the most important way of ensuring national security".

"Hearts of fire" was produced by Steve and Ginny Cleary of the US-based Christian mission support organisation Voice of the Martyrs, with a foreword by American missionary Gracia Burnham. The Russian edition was published in the US in 2015, shortly before the FSB seized the books on 4 September 2015. As attested on the verso of the title page, the edition was intended for free distribution.

Based on interviews carried out by the authors, the book describes the experiences of eight "Christian women persecuted for their faith" by atheist governments or other religious groups (mostly locals, plus one Australian missionary) in different countries (Indonesia, Bhutan, the Soviet Union, Communist Romania, Pakistan/Iran, China, India, and Vietnam).

Despite depicting often extremely violent actions, committed by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and atheists, the book portrays none of its protagonists as desiring revenge or encouraging hatred of non-Christians.

"Islam beneath the mask", by Dariy Hussein, was published in Kiev in 2012. Its author appears to be an Iranian who converted from Islam to Christianity and is keen to encourage other Muslims to do the same. His book's explicitly stated goal is "to show the real essence of Islam, which, as a rule, nobody publishes .. God put it in my heart to write this book to tell people what true Islam is. I hope that an intelligent person who is
capable of sound reasoning will understand and make the right choice of religion – a choice on which depends not only life on this earth, but also life after death”.

To this end, Hussein offers a highly negative view of the Koran, the Muslim Prophet Mohammed, and sharia law. He suggests that terrorist atrocities arise directly from Islamic teachings and compares Islam unfavourably with Christianity. For example, he contrasts the Koran with the Bible by claiming that they portray “two different Gods”, one calling for “murder, violence, and excess pleasure”, the other for love of neighbour.

Hussein is critical of the portrayal of women in the Koran and their position under Islamic law. He notes the right of Muslim men to have four wives and the “right” of girls to marry from the age of nine (while for men it is 15). He then adds: “What can you expect from followers of a religion whose leader was himself a fornicator and all his life fornicated and had a harem? Dear girls and women who want to marry a Muslim, I want to warn you”.

Alongside more dispassionate accounts of the history of Islam, Mohammed's early life, and the differences between Sunni and Shia, Hussein also criticises the commercialisation of the haj pilgrimage, compares the veneration of the Kaaba in Mecca to pagan idol worship, and claims that inside the Kaaba are "Satan and evil spirits, but not God".

At no point, however, does the book openly call for violence towards Muslims or their forced conversion – Hussein encourages Christians to conduct evangelistic work among Muslims only with friendship, love, prayer and respect for their culture.

Atheist slide show

As well as religious writings, atheist material can also fall foul of the Extremism Law. On 28 February 2017, Yoshkar-Ola City Court ruled that a ten-minute video of still images on atheist and anti-religious themes was "extremist". It was added to the Federal List on 19 May 2017.

The video consists of a series of cartoons and photographs, with no sound. They include, among others: a picture of Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, captioned "First after God"; pictures of the Bible captioned "I read it. Now I’m an atheist" and "Down with the brain!"; photos of priests and nuns apparently drinking alcohol; an image of Muslims at prayer outdoors entitled "Soon in your city"; cartoons satirising creationist beliefs; and a picture of a man's head captioned "Going to church? Leave your brain at home!"

The video contains no obvious calls for violence or incitement of hatred for believers. A possible exception is a photograph of a burning church bearing a quotation attributed to Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durutti – "The only church which illuminates is a burning church" – which could be taken as a call to burn churches. The quotation is also linked in the image to Norwegian far-right and neo-pagan musician Varg Vikernes, who was convicted in 1994 of church arson, as well as an unrelated murder.

No verdict is available, so it is unclear whether it was this one slide which led to the ban or whether all the images were considered equally at fault. As the entire video is now banned, however, it is possible that the use of any one image from the series, even outside the context of the video, may lead to prosecution for distribution of "extremist" material.

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**Danish Jehovah’s Witness loses in court again**

_Provincial court leaves Christensen in custody until late November_

By Denis Volin
Orel News (28.09.2017) - http://bit.ly/2xXxnvC - The Orel provincial court once again rejected the appeal of lawyers against the detention of Danish citizen Dennis Christensen, who is charged with conducting the activity of an extremist organization in Orel (282.2 Criminal Code of RF).

The adherent of Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are banned in Russia, has already been in a SIZO [pretrial detention cell] for four months, and in this time he has been recognized as a political prisoner and the embassy of Denmark has sent to the court a letter of guarantee in his defense. Nevertheless the court did not find grounds for releasing the Dane from custody. The court session was observed by an Orel News correspondent.

The session in the provincial court on 28 September gathered as usual several dozen supporters of Dennis Christensen. He himself arrived "on air" by means of a conference call link. Before the start of the trial, the Dane’s wife, Irina Christensen, and also Jehovah’s Witness devotees closed in on the monitor located on the wall of the courtroom. They tried to give the defendant encouragement, who even without this had a positive attitude. As always, Christensen—dressed in a suit, over which this time there was a warm jacket—answered the questions of his supporters in Danish and his wife translated. At some point the Dane began singing some melodic song and tapping on the table, which evoked smiles and laughter from those gathered around. However he was quickly rebuked.

We recall that this session was now the second one based on the appeal of the lawyers against the decision of the Soviet district court of 20 July, by which the term of his detention was extended to four months. The first one was held last week. At it the Dane's defense attorney managed to state the arguments of his appeals and to present the letter of guarantee from the embassy of Denmark in Russia, in which the diplomats assured the authorities that in the event of the selection of a less severe measure of prevention for him, Christensen would not leave the country and would not impede the course of the investigation. We recall that, on the basis of the investigation, Christensen is accused by the F.S.B. that on the base of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are forbidden in Orel, he revived the activity of this organization as he continued to assemble people for conducting worship services. The security forces had declared that during searches in the meeting hall extremist literature was seized. The Dane was arrested on 26 May, immediately after the searches.

Christensen's attorneys spoke out during the arguments at the session on 28 September. In their statement they appealed to the European Convention on Human Rights and normative acts of the European Court of Human Rights.

"This is not a question of holding a man in custody; it is a question of the restriction of the rights of a man to liberty. Only the right to life is more precious than this right," attorney Anton Bogdanov said in the debate. "It is impermissible for investigative agencies to simplify the procedure of restricting this right merely because a man has a passport of a citizen of another state."

Bogdanov called the court’s attention to the fact that the "world community" and "citizens of our country" will draw conclusions about rights and freedoms in Russia based on the example of this case. He asked the court to replace the measure of prevention for Christensen with house arrest or placing him on bail of four million rubles.

The Dane himself also joined in the arguments.

"I am an honest and peaceful person who tries to live according to the golden rule: do unto others as you wish that they will do unto you. Therefore I respect the opinion of others, even if they do not agree with me. I consider that each person has the right to his own opinion. Proceeding from this I do not want to, and will not, influence witnesses," Dennis Christensen began the presentation of his position and his words were, as always, translated from Danish by the translator. "I always have respected representatives of authority and I will respect them in the future, and therefore I do not intend to hinder
the investigation. I have never done anything criminal. This contradicts everything that I believe and love, and on which I have built my life. In the gospel of Matthew it is said: Love the Lord as you love yourself and love your neighbor as yourself. I have always acted in this way: I have loved God and neighbor."

"What a remarkable person," the voice of a pensioner, who was sitting next to me, rang out in the room. She nodded her head in sympathy, leaning on a metal cane. Meanwhile Christensen continued:

"I have lived for many years in this splendid city with my wife, Irina. Every spring and every fall I have participated in volunteer work days [subotniki]. Here in Orel is my life and my work. I am an independent businessman (carpenter—ed. note). Since 2009 I have done much to build a good business and to develop relations with clients. They know me as a peace-loving and honest person on whom one can depend. In addition, I have many friends in Orel who are very dear to me. The F.S.B. has tarnished my honor and good name by means of false and contradictory accusations. But these are false accusations and I intend to prove that."

Christensen assured the court that he does not intend to flee from Russia, since he wants to live in Orel and raise his family with his Russian wife. "I will do everything possible in this judicial arena so that in this case truth will triumph," the Dane declared. He also described how in the SIZO his health has deteriorated sharply. There is a suspicion of a hernia. The Dane has a bad back and legs, but there are no qualified doctors in the detention cell.

"It is very cold and damp in the cell. All day I walk about the room in a winter overcoat and hat and at night I wear all available clothing. I became sick and developed a cold.

But when I appeal to the medics that they would give me medicine for a sore throat, I find out that they do not have medicines and cannot help me," Dennis Christensen explained. He also added that he showers in the SIZO twice a week and in the remainder time he washes out of a bottle with cold water.

"Profoundly esteemed mister judge, I ask you to rescind the decision about my being held in custody and to select for me another form of restriction of liberty. Let me be with my wife," Christenson asked.

The next to speak was the prosecutor, or as the translator called Elena Polukhina, the "statsadvokat." However the statement was not as emotional as the preceding one. Polukhina noted that she considers the decision of the Soviet district court to be legal and logical and she asks for it to be left in force. The prosecutor said that there are no grounds for changing the measure of prevention to a less harsh one. As regards the conditions of detention in the SIZO, Polukhina noted that "you have the right to send an appeal to the prosecutor's office," which will take action in its turn. As needed, it seems.

After the judge went off into a conference room, Christensen's supporters again gathered at the monitor in order to talk with him.

"How many times are you fed, Dennis?"

The Dane indicated that he was fed three times a day.

"Sechka" [buckwheat gruel] was the only word that Christensen uttered in Russian, which greatly confused the greater part of those present. Others began to explain to them that this is a fermented dish of prison fare, a distinct kind of kasha.

At this point the judge returned to the courtroom. He quickly announced that the decision of the district court remained in force and thus the Dane will remain in the SIZO at least
After Jehovah’s Witnesses ban, Russia takes on Scientology with controversial arrests

By Damien Sharkov

Newsweek (25.09.2017) - http://bit.ly/2xwxq1S - An assemblage of Russia’s top human rights activists is pleading with President Vladimir Putin to reverse decisions that threaten the Church of Scientology’s existence in Russia.

Lyudmila Alexeyeva—the woman hailed as Russia’s “grand dame of human rights”—led the charge in an open letter published by Russian daily newspaper Kommersant on Monday, asking Putin to intervene in the recent arrest of five Scientologists in St. Petersburg.

“The events that occurred in St. Petersburg can seriously harm the reputation of our country, which seems particularly dangerous on the eve of the upcoming campaign for the presidential elections in 2018,” the letter read.

Russia’s security services raided Scientology headquarters in the country’s so-called northern capital this summer, launching a probe into illegal entrepreneurship, extremism and incitement of hatred in June.

“’The activities for which senior figures [in the church] ended up in jail are conducted in all Scientologist communities, practicing in different countries in Europe, North and South America, Asia, Australia and Africa,’” the letter added. Russia’s Justice Ministry has turned its attention toward the group’s earnings just weeks after outlawing Jehovah’s Witnesses, a Christian evangelical movement.

Earlier this year, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) labeled Russia a “country of particular concern” when it comes to religious freedom.

The letter highlighted that Putin’s role may not be “to defend Scientology” but called on him to “defend the foundations of our constitutional order.”

Speaking to Kommersant, Alexeyeva, whom Putin personally visited on her 90th birthday this year, reminisced about the state of civil liberties in Soviet times, when her activism began and atheism was the official state doctrine.

“I am not a very religious person, but I understand that for believers, their faith is just as important as my conviction,” she said. “In Soviet times, I defended the right for people to believe, but it seems I have to commit myself to this now as well.”


Foreign Jehovah’s Witness kept in custody in Orel

Orel appeal hearing in case of Danish Jehovah’s Witness continued to 28 September.
Russia Religion News (21.09.2017) - http://bit.ly/2fjE8hb - On 20 September 2017, after a four-hour session of the Orel provincial court, an appeal hearing in the case of the Dane Dennis Christensen, a Jehovah's Witness who is being held in the SIZO of the city of Orel, was adjourned. The reason for this is that the court of the first instance did not deliver to the appeal a part of the evidence of the defense that had been examined during the consideration of the question of the extension of the detention.

The court of the first instance chose the harshest measure of restraint, suggesting without reason that Dennis Christensen could run away from the investigation and the court by leaving Russia. The lawyers pointed to the excessiveness of such a harsh measure of restraint. Investigators have confiscated the believer's passport and therefore he cannot physically exit from Russia. A letter from the Danish consulate was attached to the case which says: "On the basis of humanitarian considerations, the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Moscow, in supporting the petition . . . for substituting for the means of restraint in the form of detention in custody another means of restraint, gives assurances that the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Moscow will not provide a new passport to D.O. Christensen and will not assist D.O. Christensen in leaving the territory of the Russian federation."

The believer is suspected of continuing the activity of the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, which was liquidated by a court. In seeking his complete acquittal, at this stage the lawyers are asking the appellate court to select for Dennis Christensen a measure of restraint in the form of bail or house arrest. The appellate hearing will resume in the Orel provincial court on 28 September 2017 at 14:00. (tr. by PDS, posted 21 September 2017)

Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brussels) and FOREF-Europe (Vienna) urge Russia to lift the ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses at the OSCE/ODIHR HDIM in Warsaw

HRWF (14.09.2017)

Chairman,

Our organization, along with the Forum for Religious Freedom – Europe, takes this opportunity to raise once again what is arguably the most flagrant assault on religious freedom to occur in the Euro-Atlantic region since the end of the Soviet Union and its satellite communist regimes in Eastern Europe – namely, the Russian Federation’s illegal ban on the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

As we meet here today, Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are charged with membership in an “extremist” organization, are being prosecuted for no other crime than their religious faith.

The ban was confirmed by the Russian Supreme Court on the 20th of April 2017. The law makes it a crime for about 170,000 Russian citizens to practice their faith. The denomination has faced increasing persecution in Russia for decades. Indeed, we have warned about the growing persecution of members of this group in Russia for 13 years.

Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen, was arrested for attending a religious meeting of Jehovah’s Witness and was sentenced to a 2-month pretrial detention that has been extended until 23 November. Russia is thus incarcerating a prisoner of conscience in this case.
Still, this unprecedented restriction on the fundamental human right to freedom of religion, a right the Russian Federation is committed to protect as a signatory to the Helsinki documents, and under legal treaty obligations, has been met with only limited and muted criticism. More often than not, the ban has been met by silence indicating indifference. International reaction has not been consistent with the gravity of this massive violation of human rights.

The weak reaction to the ban on the Jehovah’s Witnesses reflects enduring prejudice against minority religions, and what are categorized as “sects.” Indeed, it reflects the same ignorance and condescension that motivated Russian authorities, at the behest of the Russian Orthodox Church, to outlaw the group.

Our organizations applaud numerous activists, experts, international officials, and governments, and the few human rights organizations, which have voiced their objections.

But not enough have done so. The issue has not been afforded the importance it deserves, but has largely remained underreported. We can only conclude that weak international criticism and action to counter this assault on freedom of religion will be taken as a “green light” for further legal discrimination against religious communities not only in Russia, but in other states where authoritarian regimes seek to impose cultural and spiritual harmony upon their citizens.

We are thus calling on the participating States of the OSCE to raise their voices against the ban on the Jehovah’s Witnesses by the Russian Federation. Without exaggeration, the future of religious freedom in the region depends on it.

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Recommendations

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int’l (HRWF) and Forum for Religious Freedom/ Europe (FOREF) urge the authorities of the Russian Federation

- To lift the ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses and to restore the full religious freedom of the 175,000 members of their movement
- To release Dennis Christensen, a Danish Jehovah’s Witness detained since April 2017 for attending a religious meeting in Oryol.
Jehovah's Witnesses appeal Russian decision on declaring them extremist organization

In April, Russia’s Supreme Court declared Jehovah’s Witnesses to be an extremist organization.

TASS (12.09.2017) - http://bit.ly/2wVRMB - The Jehovah’s Witnesses religious group has appealed with the Russian Supreme Court's presidium a decision on declaring it an extremist organization and banning its activity in Russia. "In its complaint, the plaintiff asks to cancel the April 20 decision," a court spokesperson said.

In April, Russia’s Supreme Court declared Jehovah’s Witnesses to be an extremist organization and outlawed its activity throughout Russia, thereby upholding the Justice Ministry’s requests. The court declared the immediate shutdown of all 395 local chapters of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia and transferred the organization’s assets into state custody.

Representatives of the organization filed an appeal claiming the facts specified in the lawsuit were not substantiated during hearings in the courtroom. They also said Jehovah’s Witnesses would take the case to the European Court for Human Rights if the appeals college left the ruling unabated.

Jehovah’s Witnesses is an international religious organization that supports offbeat views on the essence of the Christian faith and provides special interpretations of many commonly accepted notions.

Ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other peaceful religious movements denounced at the OSCE/ODIHR HDIM in Warsaw

Statement of Human Rights without Frontiers


The Committee expresses concern over the law about ‘foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable organizations’. "The Committee is further concerned about the continuous classification of some non-governmental organizations as foreign agents, impacting their operational activities and in some instances leading to their closure.” The main accusation put forward to ban a number of peaceful civic and religious groups is their allegedly carrying out ‘extremist activity’ and their use of ‘extremist material’. "The Committee is concerned that the definition of extremist activity as contained in the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity remains vague and broad which is further exacerbated by the new Criminal Code provisions with similar contents, and that no clear and precise criteria on how materials may be classified as extremist are provided in the law.”

The Committee reiterates its recommendation (CERD/C/RUS/CO/20-22, para. 13) that the State party amends the definition of extremism in the Law on Combating Extremism and in articles 280 and 282 of the Criminal Code to ensure that it is clearly and precisely worded, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention. The State party is also requested to do away with the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The Committee also recommends
that the Federal Laws on Non-Commercial Organizations and on ‘Undesirable Organizations’ be reviewed.

**Ban of religious groups of foreign origin**

**Ban of peaceful Muslim groups**

Religious movements of foreign origin have become victims of the Russian concept of spiritual security that was put in place by President Putin in 2000 to purify the Russian Orthodox lands.

The combination of this concept with the anti-extremism laws has been damaging to many minority religious groups as they are perceived as a threat to the Russian identity, national Orthodox values, social and religious cohesion and even national security.

Since the beginning of this century, Russia has attempted to ban a number of religious groups of foreign origin, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses community of Moscow, the Jesuits, the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army or the Church of Scientology of Moscow and St Petersburg. However, these cases were brought to the European Court of Human Rights, and each time Russia lost.

While these groups have experienced the safety net of the European Court of Human Rights, some Muslim groups have not. Two peaceful Muslim groups of foreign origin – Tabligh Jamaat members and Said Nursi followers – have been particularly targeted by the Russian government.

These movements have been banned and their members have been massively arrested over the past few years.

**Ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses**

On July 17, 2017, in blatant disregard for Russia’s international commitments to protect religious freedom, the Supreme Court of Russia confirmed its earlier ruling that criminalized the activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia. The decision effectively bans the worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the country.

The three-judge panel of the Appellate Chamber of the Supreme Court rejected the Witnesses’ appeal and upheld the Court’s April 20 decision by Judge Yuriy Ivanenko. He had ruled in favor of the claim filed by the Ministry of Justice “to liquidate the religious organization ‘Administrative Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia’ and the local religious organizations that are part of its structure [and] to turn over to the Russian Federation all property of the liquidated religious organization.”

The decision deprives over 175,000 of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia of their freedom of association, worship and assembly. The appellate chamber’s decision provides a legal veneer of legitimacy for the abuses already inflicted on Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia and exposes them to criminal prosecution and further abuse. They have become outcasts in their own country.”

By the experience of other peaceful of two peaceful Muslim groups – Tablighi Jamaat and Said Nursi followers – which have been banned for years, we know that Jehovah’s Witnesses are now at risk of being arrested and imprisoned for any of their activities. If they meet in private homes or premises for worshipping or for sharing their beliefs with others, if they possess and use publications of their religious movement abusively listed as extremist by a court, they will be under threat of being arrested, detained and sentenced to prison terms.

**Arrest and detention of Danish citizen Dennis Christensen**
On the evening of May 25, 2017, Dennis Christensen – a baptized Jehovah’s Witnesses since 1989 - was arrested along with 15 Russian citizens at a peaceful worship service held in a privately owned building in Oryol.

Most of the attendees were detained for some hours. Only Mr Christensen was not released. He was kept in pretrial detention for two months, an imprisonment period that was extended by four more months. He was just attending a religious service but he has been charged with organizing an illegal religious activity under article 282.2 of the Russian Criminal code and he faces up to 10 years of imprisonment.

**Recommendations**

*Human Rights without Frontiers recommends Russia*

- implements the last recommendations of the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination of the United Nations about the laws on ‘foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable organizations’, and about the definitions of ‘extremist activity’ and ‘extremist material’ in the Law Combating Extremism;

- repeals the ban of peaceful religious groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Tabligh Jamaat and Said Nursi movements;

- releases Dennis Christensen, a Danish Jehovah’s Witness who has been put under pretrial detention for at least six months for attending a religious meeting in Oryol;

- releases Tabligh Jamaat and Said Nursi followers who have been sentenced to prison terms for exercising their right to freedom of assembly.

*Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends Denmark, the EU and the OSCE*

Use all the institutional mechanisms at their disposal in order to get

- the repeal of the ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses, Tabligh Jamaat and Said Nursi followers

- the release of Dennis Christensen, who is a citizen of the European Union, as well as Russian Muslims belonging to the Said Nursi and Tabligh Jamaat movements.

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**Evictions, trials as Russian Church claims property**

*With the resurgence of a Kremlin-endorsed monastery, islanders on Valaam have endured trials, evictions and arson.*

By Mansur Mirovalev

Al Jazeera (07.09.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2w0molK](http://bit.ly/2w0molK) - Varvara Sergeeva’s great-grandfather was among the tens of thousands of clerics, monks, nuns and believers executed by Communist iconoclasts in 1937. Pavel Orleansky had served as a deacon in the revered Orthodox Christian monastery on Valaam, the lake island just south of Finland.

Sergeeva learned about his fate from declassified KGB archives in 1988, when during the Perestroika reforms the USSR celebrated a millennium of Christianity in Russia.
Soon after graduating from high school, Sergeeva decided to get baptised and leave her native St Petersburg for Valaam to help revive the monastery.

"I felt absolute happiness. What was happening was unreal," says the stately, fair-haired 44-year-old at a cafe in St Petersburg. "It's a wonderful place, very pure, very vivid."

But in the past decade, Sergeeva and her son have faced a forced eviction from their Valaam apartment, an arson, confiscation of property, a string of lost trials and debilitating health problems, all as a result of the resurgence of the monastery and the Orthodox faith in Russia, and the Kremlin-backed restitution of religious property.

**Embracing Orthodoxy after Communism**

After the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Communists uprooted Russia's Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist communities. They destroyed thousands of religious buildings and turned many more - along with their land - into museums, schools, theatres, police stations, prisons, collective farms and parks.

But the Russian Orthodox Church, the czarist empire's dominant creed, did not own most of the properties. For almost three centuries, the Church has functioned as a government institution whose clerics served in churches and chapels built and maintained by nobles, merchants, other government bodies, the military, and civilian communities.

In the post-Soviet 1990s, many Russians embraced Orthodoxy believing the Patriarchate of Moscow would help Russia exorcise the Communist doctrine.

"The Church was very open and most people had unconscious hopes that the Church would help build a democratic, free Russia," says Roman Lunkin of the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Europe.

The Kremlin started a nationwide effort to restitute religious properties, often prime real estate in city centres or recreational spots. But the Patriarchate has been selective. Instead of restoring thousands of decrepit churches, it has focused on well-known sites which could turn a profit and whose maintenance the Kremlin pays for, Lunkin says.

"They choose symbolic, significant sites and ask the government to keep financing them," he says.

**The influential Patriarchate**

The Patriarchate, however, is far from destitute.

President Boris Yeltsin let it run tax-exempt businesses that sold alcohol, tobacco and oil, and now those businesses include publishing houses, farms, construction companies, shopping malls and hotels.

The Patriarchate never releases its financial records, and its annual profits roughly amount to $1-1.2bn, says Nikolay Mitrokhin, Russia's leading expert on the church economy. It also gets sizable donations from the state, major businesses and worshippers.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow was spotted wearing a $30,000 wristwatch in 2012. The septuagenarian travels by personal jet, a custom-made, bulletproof limousine and a luxury yacht, which has a private dock on Valaam.

By 2010, when a federal law made restitution easier, the Kremlin saw Orthodoxy as providing an important ideological function.

"The Communist ideology ceased to exist and a real ideological vacuum emerged. And it could not be filled by anything other than religion," President Vladimir Putin said in June.
But the way the Patriarchate propagates its viewpoint is increasingly repressive.

Its clerics consecrate nuclear missiles, calling them "Russia's guardian angels". It blesses the Kremlin's aggressive anti-Western nationalism by extolling Russia as an heir to the Byzantine empire which opposed the Catholic West for centuries. Patriarch Kirill's conception of the "Russian world", or Moscow's duty to "defend" millions of ethnic Russians in ex-Soviet republics, back the Kremlin's renewed assertiveness.

"These ideas justified the invasion in Ukraine - ideologically," Mitrokhin says, referring to a massive campaign in Kremlin-controlled media that claimed Ukrainian authorities were conducting a "genocide" of ethnic Russians.

The Patriarchate condemns same-sex marriages, abortions, sex education and HIV-prevention programmes, and seeks to introduce compulsory religion classes in schools. It welcomes official pressure on other religious groups - including splinter Orthodox movements and Protestants - such as a court ban of Jehovah's Witnesses in July for their "extremist" teachings. Patriarchate-affiliated groups assault critics, attack gay clubs and enlist neo-Nazis and aggressive football fans.

**Arson and evictions**

When Sergeeva settled on the forested island half the size of Manhattan in the late 1980s, the disbanded monastery's buildings belonged to a museum. She found an apartment in the Winter Hotel, a residence of museum employees who restored medieval icons and frescoes. She and hundreds of secular island residents unanimously approved the return of monks to Valaam in 1989.

Sergeeva made a living by sewing clothes for monks and souvenir bags for tourists. She contributed money towards the renovation of the chapel her great-grandfather had served in and raised her son Dmitri as an observant Christian.

But after the monastery restituted its buildings in the early 1990s, it started forcing out all secular islanders who did not work for it, offering them apartments in mainland towns addled by unemployment. Sergeeva refuses to accept an apartment in a former slaughterhouse with new cladding but no heating. Medical experts found that toxic fungi and mould covered its concrete walls.

After years of desperate resistance to the eviction and several lost trials, she developed a chronic heart condition and her son was diagnosed with bone cancer. Dmitri, who is in remission after lengthy chemotherapy, awaits surgery, she says.

"Bishop Pankraty [Valaam's head], is forcing us to commit suicide, given our health status," says Sergeeva, who now lives with her son and parents in St Petersburg.

In 2016, a fire damaged the Winter Hotel and some 60 residents left, especially after the monastery cut off electricity and water supply, former residents said. The fire spared Sergeeva's apartment, but in July, bailiffs broke in while she and her son were in hospital - and confiscated their belongings.

Valaam's last secular mayor and ex-firefighter Sergei Grigoriev says that the fire was an "arson organised by the monastery". One of the hotel's former residents, Dmitry Sinitsa, is awaiting trial on arson charges, but maintains his innocence and suspects monastery workers set the building alight.

"They solved the monastery's problems [with the resettlement] at once," Sinitsa says.

Back in 2005, Grigoriev shook hands with Putin on Valaam - and complained to him about the evictions. He was soon forced to resign and was evicted from his apartment.
"That handshake cost me dearly," says the gaunt 60-year-old who now lives in the mainland town of Sortavala. "I am a deported bum now."

**Religious stronghold**

The monastery's press service declined to provide comment and referred Al Jazeera to Bishop Pancraty's interview with the RIA Novosti news agency in July where he said: "Someone is always unhappy with a resettlement."

The Patriarchate's press service was not available for comment despite numerous requests.

Fewer than 100 monks live on Valaam now; some in secluded houses with saunas and garages with SUVs. Since 1991, the island's secular population went down from 550 to about 50.

"The objective is to only have the monastery on the island," Patriarchate spokesman Alexander Volkov told the Novaya Gazeta daily in mid-July. "Understandably, certain complications emerge, and it is hard to assume that everything will go on painlessly."

Valaam's only public school and hospital were closed last year, and Patriarch Kirill - who called the secular islanders' problems "microscopic" - ordered the razing of food and souvenir shops catering to pilgrims and tourists. Now, all that is available to the more than 100,000 people who visit the island each year are the basic, monastery-run rooms and shops.

**More confiscated properties**

Elsewhere in Russia, restitution continues.

The Patriarchate seeks to seize a former barrack that was privatised by the family of a 90-year-old WWII veteran in the southern city of Stavropol; the land it stands on once belonged to a monastery.

The entire fortified medieval centre of the central city of Ryazan will become church property in 2018. Ruins of a 17th-century church and a nearby necropolis there were razed in July to give way to a new church; graveyard bones and debris were hauled to a junkyard.

After being transferred to the Patriarchate, 16 churches of a splinter Orthodox group in the city of Suzdal stand vacant, their newly painted frescoes crumbling.

In 2010, authorities in Kaliningrad, Russia's westernmost province that was part of Germany until 1945, transferred five castles dating back to the Crusades and almost 30 Catholic and Protestant buildings.

Orthodox clerics "accidentally" destroyed the frescoes in the 1364 Arnau church that were restored by a German charity for 450,000 euros.

"They are doing it under the banners of the 'Orthodoxification' of Kaliningrad," Mitrokhin says.

One of the five-storey buildings of the Russian Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography in northern Moscow stands on the foundation of a destroyed convent. A court ordered the entire institute to relocate despite the imminent destruction of sophisticated aquariums housing endangered salmon species.

"The institute's building will be destroyed," Kseniya Chernega, the Patriarchate's chief lawyer, told an appeals court in January. "A church will be rebuilt in its place."
Ban of Muslim movement Tabligh Jamaat

Applications nos. 2841/10 and 79469/13 : Fatikh Gayazovich BASYROV against Russia - Farit Ravkhatovich BIKEYEV and Others against Russia lodged on 21 December 2009 and 5 November 2013 respectively.

European Court (31.08.2017) - http://bit.ly/2xI1qZJ - The applications concern the ban on a religious Islamic association Tabligh Jamaat and prosecution of its members. On 7 May 2009 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, sitting in camera, declared Tabligh Jamaat an extremist organisation and banned it. The judgment was never published. On 30 July 2009 the Cassation Chamber of the Supreme Court refused Mr Basyrov’s application for a leave to appeal, finding that he was not a party to the proceedings and that his rights were not affected by the judgment. On 9 September 2009 a prosecutor’s office issued a written warning to Mr Basyrov. The warning stated that Mr Basyrov was a member of Tabligh Jamaat which had been declared an extremist organisation. The prosecutor therefore warned Mr Basyrov that his membership of Tabligh Jamaat made him liable under Article 282.2 § 2 of the Criminal Code.

On 9 April 2013 the Justice of the Peace of the Sol-Istetskiy District of the Orenburg Region convicted Mr Bikeyev, Mr Bimukhanov, Mr Dubertalayev and Mr Krushenov of leadership (Mr Bikeyev) and membership (Mr Bimukhanov, Mr Dubertalayev and Mr Krushenov) of an extremist organisation, an offence under Article 282.2 §§ 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code and sentenced them to fines ranging from 50,000 to 250,000 Russian roubles. She found that they had participated in the activities of Tabligh Jamaat from May 2009 to June 2011, that is after it had been declared an extremist organisation. On 31 May 2013 the Sol-Istetskiy District Court of the Orenburg Region upheld the conviction on appeal.

Questions to the Parties

1. The Government are requested to submit a copy of the judgment of 7 May 2009 by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation and copies of expert reports on which it relies, if any. Was that judgment officially published? If it was published, the Government are requested to produce a copy of the official publication of the full text or, at least, the operative part of the judgment.

2. The parties are requested to submit copies of the judgments made in the judicial review proceedings instituted by Mr Basyrov against the warning of 9 September 2009.

3. As regards the Supreme Court’s decision to declare Tabligh Jamaat an extremist organisation and ban it, was there a violation of Mr Basyrov’s rights to freedom of religion, expression and association under Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the Convention? In particular, what legitimate aim did that measure pursue, was it proportionate to that legitimate aim and necessary in a democratic society?

4. Given that members of Tabligh Jamaat were not notified of the date of the hearing of 7 May 2009, that the judgment delivered on that date had been never published and that Mr Basyrov was refused leave to appeal against the judgment, has there been a violation of Article 13 of the Convention in conjunction with Articles 10 and 11 of the Convention in respect of Mr Basyrov (see the Constitutional Court’s judgment no. 10-P of 21 April 2010, point 3.1)?

5. Did the warning issued against Mr Basyrov interfere with his rights under Articles 9, 10 or 11 the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law? In particular, if the judgment of 7 May 2009 was not officially published, can the applicable law be
considered sufficiently accessible and foreseeable? Was the interference “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Articles 9 § 2, 10 § 2 and 11 § 2 of the Convention?

6. If the judgment of 7 May 2009 was not officially published in the period from May 2009 to June 2011, can the law on the basis of which Mr Bikeyev, Mr Bimukhanov, Mr Dubertalayev and Mr Krushenov were convicted be considered sufficiently accessible and foreseeable, as required by Article 7 of the Convention (see Kasymakhunov and Saybatalov v. Russia, nos. 26261/05 and 26377/06, §§ 89-95, 14 March 2013)?

7. As regards Mr Bikeyev’s, Mr Bimukhanov’s, Mr Dubertalayev’s and Mr Krushenov’s conviction, was there an interference with their right to freedom of religion, expression or association under Articles 9 § 1, 10 § 1 or 11 § 1 of the Convention? If so, was that interference justified in terms of Articles 9 § 2, 10 § 2 and 11 § 2?

Appendix

Application no 2841/10

Fatikh Gayazovich BASYROV is a Russian national who was born in 1954, lives in Kazan.

Application no 79469/13

1. Farit Ravkhatovich BIKEYEV is a Russian national who was born in 1961, lives in the Orenburg Region and is represented by Mr N. Dolubayev.

2. Akhmetkali Mendgaliyevich BIMUKHANOV is a Russian national who was born in 1958, lives in the Orenburg Region and is represented by Mr N. Dolubayev.

3. Temrbulat Urangaliyevich DURBELTAYEV is a Russian national who was born in 1965, lives in the Orenburg Region and is represented by Mr N. Dolubayev.

4. Kanat Muratovich KRUSHENOV is a Russian national who was born in 1977, lives in the Orenburg Region and is represented by Mr N. Dolubayev.

HRWF Comment

Tabligh Jamaat is a revivalist missionary movement within Islam, founded in India in the early twentieth century. The term means ‘those who preach’ and is sometimes called the ‘Society for Spreading Faith.’ The Tabligh Jamaat movement seeks to revitalise Muslims in their faith and encourage them to follow Islamic religious practices more vigorously.

Human Rights Without Frontiers and Sova-Center (Moscow) view the ban of the religious association Tabligh Jamaat inappropriate, since the organisation was engaged in promotion of Islam and was never implicated in incitements to violence. Human Rights Without Frontiers and Sova-Center (Moscow) consider the repression of the Tabligh Jamaat members to be unjustified.

See our description of the Tabligh Jamaat’s teachings at


Ban of Said Nursi’s writings and prosecution of his readers

Rashid Dzhabrail-Ogly ABDULOV against Russia (Application no 32040/12) and 8 other applications
The applications concern prosecution of members of religious movement Nurculuk ("Нуржулар") based on the writings of Said Nursi, a Muslim Turkish scholar who lived in the first half of the 20th century.

In May 2007 Risale-I Nur Collection, a body of commentary on the Quran written by Said Nursi, was declared extremist materials and banned by the Koptevskiy District Court of Moscow.

On 10 April 2008 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, sitting in camera, declared Nurculuk an extremist organisation and banned it. Mr Merazhov’s, Mr Odilov’s and Mr Salimzyanov’s applications for a leave to appeal were rejected on the ground that they were not a party to the proceedings and their rights were not affected by the ban.

On various dates between 2011 and 2015 the applicants were convicted of leadership or membership of an extremist organisation, an offence under Article 282.2 §§ 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code and sentenced to fines, correctional labour or imprisonment ranging between one year conditional on one year’s probation and one year and six months really served. The courts found that they had participated in the activities of Nurculuk after it had been declared an extremist organisation, in particular by reading in groups extremist books by Said Nursi, books by Muhammed Fethullah Gülen and other Islamic books some of which had been also declared extremist.

Mr Abdulov was also convicted, for the same activities, of incitement of hatred or discord as well as abasement of human dignity, an offence under Article 282 § 1 of the Criminal Code.

In August 2013, while the criminal proceedings against Mr Salimzyanov were still pending, his name was included in the list of persons suspected of extremist or terrorist activities. That information was widely published by the media and on Internet. The applicant’s bank account was blocked and he was unable to open a new bank account. He was also unable to find employment. His judicial review complaint was rejected.

In December 2014 Mr Merazhov was dismissed from his post as a professor of mathematics at a university on the ground that he had been convicted of leadership of an extremist organisation, a criminal offence against the constitutional foundations and security of the Russian Federation.

Questions to the Parties

1. Was the judgment of 10 April 2008 by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation officially published? If it was published, the Government are requested to produce a copy of the official publication of the full text or, at least, the operative part of the judgment.

2. As regards the Supreme Court’s decision to declare Nurculuk ("Нуржулар") an extremist organisation and ban it, was there a violation of Mr Salimzyanov's rights to freedom of religion, expression and association under Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the Convention? In particular, what legitimate aim did that measure pursue, was it proportionate to that legitimate aim and necessary in a democratic society?

3. Given that members of Nurculuk were not notified of the date of the hearing of 10 April 2008 and that Mr Salimzyanov was refused leave to appeal against the judgment, has there been a violation of Article 13 of the Convention in conjunction with Articles 10 and 11 of the Convention in respect of Mr Salimzyanov (see the Constitutional Court’s judgment no. 10-P of 21 April 2010, point 3.1)?

4. Has Mr Kazikhanov complied with the six-month time-limit laid down in Article 35 § 1 of the Convention?
5. As regards each applicant’s conviction, was there an interference with his or her right to freedom of religion, expression or association under Articles 9 § 1, 10 § 1 or 11 § 1 of the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law? In particular, if the judgment of 10 April 2008 was not officially published, can the applicable law be considered sufficiently accessible and foreseeable? Was the interference “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Articles 9 § 2, 10 § 2 and 11 § 2 of the Convention?

6. As regards the confiscation and destruction of religious books belonging to Mr Merazhov and Mr Odilov and the retention and destruction of files with religious contents on their computers, was there an interference with their right to freedom of religion or expression under Articles 9 § 1 or 10 § 1 of the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law and “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Articles 9 § 2 and 10 § 2 of the Convention?

7. As regards the inclusion of Mr Salimzyanov’s name in the list of persons suspected of extremist or terrorist activities:

- Was there an interference with his right to freedom of religion, expression or association under Articles 9 § 1, 10 § 1 or 11 § 1 of the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law? Was it “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Articles 9 § 2, 10 § 2 and 11 § 2 of the Convention?

- Given the repercussions of this measure on Mr Salimzyanov’s everyday life, was there an interference with his right to respect for private life under Article 8 § 1 of the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law? Was it “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Article 8 § 2 of the Convention?

- Did Mr Salimzyanov have an effective domestic remedy in respect of his complaints under Articles 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the Convention, as required by Article 13 of the Convention?

8. As regards Mr Merazhov’s dismissal from his post as a university professor:

- Was there an interference with his right to freedom of religion, expression or association under Articles 9 § 1, 10 § 1 or 11 § 1 of the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law, in particular in the light of the Constitutional Court’s ruling no. 19-П of 18 July 2013? Was the interference “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Articles 9 § 2, 10 § 2 and 11 § 2 of the Convention?

- Was there an interference with his right to respect for private life under Article 8 § 1 of the Convention? Was the interference prescribed by law? Was it “necessary in a democratic society” within the meaning of Article 8 § 2 of the Convention?

**HRWF Comment**

Said Nursi followers are prosecuted for religious activities that do not pose any public danger. They deny that there is any movement named Nurculuk or Nurcular. Nursi himself never advocated or incited violence, called for the overthrow of the regime or favoured the establishment of a caliphate. Nursi’s teachings were moderate in character and appeal to Muslims wishing to reconcile Islamic teaching and modernity. Followers meet to discuss his works in private homes and do not pose any threat.

UN Committee criticizes Russia for rights violations

Portal-Credo (30.08.2017) - The Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination of the United Nations adopted on 25 August a recommendation on a report from the Russian federation. According to the document, which the Sova Center for News and Analysis quotes, the committee is recommending to Russia to adopt finally complex antidiscrimination legislation and to bring current rules mentioning discrimination, including article 136 of the Criminal Code of the RF, into conformity with its own international obligations.

The committee notes that the definition of "extremist activity" and procedures for banning materials in the RF are, as before, extremely indefinite. The committee recommends to the RF to abandon the maintenance of the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

The committee also expressed concern over law about "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations."

The committee asks for making more precise the definition of "extremist activity" and articles 280 and 282 of the Criminal Code and also for making more precise laws about "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" so that they will not interfere with legal activity of non-commercial organizations.

Welcoming the decrease in the number of hate crimes, the committee notes that they remain a problem, as is also the inflaming of hatred, including that by politicians.

The committee also recommended to Russia to concentrate efforts on combating specifically hate crimes, including those on the part of neo-nazis and cossacks, and to train police in skills of antidiscrimination and in how to avoid racial profiling in their work.

Earlier, on 3-4 August, within the context of the 93rd session of the committee, Memorial, KrymSOS, and the Sova center, along with the International Federation for Human Rights, presented an alternative report. (tr. by PDS, posted 30 August 2017)


International community of human rights defenders v. Russian state-appointed 'experts’

HRWF (20.08.2017) - On 17 August 2017, the Vyborg City Court in Russia ruled to ban the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT), a Bible published by Jehovah's Witnesses, on the basis of the opinion of three so-called state-appointed experts in religious matters: A. Ye. Tarasov, V. S. Kotelnikov, N. N. Kryukova, three so-called religious experts of the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies. International experts disagree with their alleged expertise.

Alexander Verkhovsky, member of Russia's Presidential Council on Human Rights and the Director of the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis in Moscow
Ms. Kryukova, the director of the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies, is notorious for extremely low-quality expert conclusions. She does not have any training in the study of religions and she always works on the side of accusations, so her opinion is not valuable. Anyway, it's a strange idea to prove that a certain translation 'is not the Bible.' There are many translations, scientists and believers may discuss which ones are better or worse, but it is only an act of faith to see the translation as the Bible or not. Now that the Russian court has declared the NWT “extremist,” other religions and their sacred texts may be in danger. Why not? We already witnessed an attempt to ban one translation of the Qur'an.” averh@sova-center.ru

Roman Lunkin, head of the Center for Problems of Religion and Society at the Russian Academy of Science’s Institute of Europe in Moscow

“The attempt to ban the JW’s translation of the Bible is an embarrassment to the Russian procuracy and court system. The court-ordered “expert study,” in my opinion, is based on forgery for several reasons—the experts listed in the study are not specialists in religious studies. Maybe that explains the illogic of the statements that the NWT is not a Bible and does not contain quotes from the Bible, etc. So the experts prepared a fake study for the court—that could be a crime that needs punishment. Now that Russia has banned the Witnesses’ NWT, other faiths should be concerned that their new translations of their sacral texts could also be banned.” romanlunkin@gmail.com

Emily Baran, assistant professor of Russian history at Middle Tennessee State University

“Democratic governments should not be in the business of determining theology. Yet this is what the Russian court system has chosen to do by wading into matters of scriptural translation. Different Christian communities use different translations of the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses included. Russia seems to want to have it both ways: on the one hand, claiming to protect the Bible from its own anti-extremist law, and on the other, declaring some Bibles to be not Bibles at all so that it can still apply this law selectively to faiths it opposes. Jehovah's Witnesses are not at fault in this matter, but they have been a primary victim of this flawed and fundamentally undemocratic legislation.” Emily.b.baran@gmail.com

Daniel Mark, chairman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

“The conclusion by the court--by any court--that the NWT translation is not a Bible is nonsense. This is because it is simply not up to courts to decide what does or doesn't count any as one particular group's Holy Scripture. If the Witnesses consider this book their scripture, then it is. The internationally recognized and guaranteed right to freedom of religion or belief for all people surely includes the right of the Witnesses to be free from the dictates of any government entity as to what is or isn't their Bible. All people of good will should be concerned with this development in Russia. And we should be mindful of the fact that the principle at stake here puts all disapproved group under threat of similar actions. Unfortunately, this is yet further evidence that the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which I chair, was correct to recommend that the State Department designate Russia as a 'country of particular concern' for the first time.” Dmark55@gmail.com
Willy Fautré, director and co-founder of Belgium-based Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

"It is not up to a state to determine what is and what is not the sacred book of a religion, which translation of the Bible has the same status as the Bible in the original language. After the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses, banning their holy scriptures – New World Translation - because they "are not a Bible" according to Russian state-appointed experts is another egregious violation of freedom of religion or belief in Russia. Any translation of any other historical sacred book – the Koran of the Muslims, the Tanakh of the Jews and the Kangyur of the Buddhists - can now be declared illegal in Russia, and any sacred book of any other religion is now vulnerable to state censorship in Russia.” w.fautre@hrwf.net

Mathew N. Schmalz, associate professor of religious studies at The College of the Holy Cross; founding editor of the Journal of Global Catholicism

"The claim that the NWT is not ‘a Bible’ is absurd on its face. There are numerous translations of the Bible—if the Russian court wishes to outlaw the NWT translation, then, if they wish to be consistent, they should outlaw all other translations of the Bible as well. The Jehovah’s Witnesses I have known have always been caring and supportive neighbors and good citizens who contribute to the community. Two Jehovah's Witnesses have played especially important roles in my life, supporting me in times of need. Labeling Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist group is not only inaccurate, it is an insult. All religious denominations need to come together to express their outrage at the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses by the Russian government. Allowing the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses to continue will only embolden the Russian government to curtail the legitimate religious liberties of many other denominations.” mschmalz@holycross.edu

Russian court bans the Bible of Jehovah’s Witnesses

World Headquarters of Jehovah’s Witnesses (17.08.2017) - On August 17, 2017, the Vyborg City Court in Russia ruled to ban the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT), a Bible published by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Russia's Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity, signed by President Putin himself in November 2015, explicitly prohibits declaring sacred texts, such as the Bible, to be extremist. In an unconscionable move to circumvent the law, the court relied on a so-called expert study alleging that the NWT is not a Bible, opening the way for it to be banned.

Commenting on the ruling shortly after it was issued, David A. Semonian, international spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses at their world headquarters in New York, states: "It's impossible to comprehend how a court can justify the decision to ban the Bible. It's absurd that a court would outlaw the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, a Bible respected by scholars around the world, which has not only been distributed in hundreds of millions of copies but also has been translated into over 150 languages. Just how far will Russia's resistance to religious freedom go? We certainly hope that respect for sacred texts will prevail when we pursue this case on appeal.”

Scores of religious experts following the situation in Russia have not been shy in speaking out in opposition to the case, such as Daniel Mark, chairman of the United...
States Commission on Religious Freedom, who states: "The conclusion by the court-by any court-that the NWT translation is not a Bible is nonsense." Likewise, Dr. Mathew N. Schmalz, associate professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross, declares: "the claim that the NWT is not 'a Bible' is absurd."

Many point to the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies in Moscow, the group responsible for the "expert study," as the source of the absurdity. Scholars have roundly denounced the group. For instance, Roman Lunkin, the Head of the Center for Problems of Religion and Society at the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of Europe in Moscow, has labeled these experts as "fake," revealing that "not one of [them] has a degree in religious studies." Countering the claims of the "expert study," Professor Gerhard Besier, director of the Sigmund Neumann Institute for the Research on Freedom and Democracy (Germany), succinctly defends the NWT, stating: "The New World Translation has received high-praise worldwide from Bible scholars representing diverse religious communities."

With the decision to ban the NWT, the Russian Federation has assumed a hostile posture that should concern more than just the Witnesses. According to Willy Fautré, director and co-founder of Belgium-based Human Rights Without Frontiers: "Any translation of any other historical sacred book - the Koran of the Muslims, the Tanakh of the Jews, and the Kangyur of the Buddhists - can now be declared illegal in Russia, and any sacred book of any other religion is now vulnerable to state censorship in Russia."

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**Russian « religious experts » hired by a court against Jehovah’s Witnesses have no academic credentials**

**By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers**

HRWF (14.08.2017) - On 22 June 2017, A. Ye. Tarasov, V. S. Kotelnikov, N. N. Kryukova, three so-called religious experts of the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies in Moscow appointed by a Russian court, signed an expertise concluding that the Witnesses’ New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures is not a Bible (See http://bit.ly/2u1kBag). On the eve of a new hearing by the Vyborg City Court, it means that their holy scriptures will not be protected against potential accusations of containing extremist material and against a probable ban.

According to international experts in religious studies (See below), the Russian Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies is not known to have academic expertise in religious issues. Moreover, Ms. Kryukova who is one of the signatories of the report, is... a mathematician, according to Roman Lunkin, head of the Center for Religion and Society Studies at the Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, and president of the Union of Experts on Religion and Law.

This is a clear attempt to circumvent the Law on Counteracting Extremist Activity, which prohibits declaring sacred texts, such as the Bible (for Christians), the Koran (for Muslims, the Tanakh (for Jews) or the Kangyur (for Buddhists), to be extremist. Additionally, the "expert study" bases its conclusion on theological grounds. For example, its authors object to the New World Translation’s rendering of the Tetragrammaton * as “Jehovah” and falsely claim that the text was altered to fit the Witnesses’ doctrine.
Jehovah’s Witnesses and their literature have been subject to court-appointed analysis by the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies in Moscow. One study was completed in August 2015 and was used as the basis for an ongoing case against the Witnesses’ New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures in Russian. Another study was afterwards ordered.

On 28 July 2017, the Vyborg City Court resumed hearing the case to declare “extremist” the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures. The case had been adjourned since April 2016 after the judge ruled in favor of the Leningrad-Finlyandskiy Transport Prosecutor’s claim to appoint an “expert study” to declare the New World Translation to be “extremist.”

Opinions of some international experts in religious studies about Russian “religious experts” in courts

Professor Robert C. Blitt, professor of law, University of Tennessee; former international law specialist, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), United States:

“Russia has long relied on so-called expert studies for the purpose of categorizing and prosecuting certain religious groups. For example, in February 2009, the Russian Ministry of Justice established an Expert Religious Studies Council. This body had power to investigate religious organizations and reach conclusions regarding, among other things, whether the organization espoused extremist views. At the time, it was chaired by Aleksandr Dvorkin, an individual who lacked appropriate academic credentials as a religion specialist and was already known as ‘Russia’s most prominent “anti-cult” activist.’ Often, individuals appointed to such councils, or even those tapped as prosecution experts in judicial proceedings, lack necessary and even basic qualifications. These ‘expert’ bodies function simply to validate the government’s prosecution, although there has been some recent indication of certain expert bodies occasionally finding against the government’s interest. Findings from these and similar bodies should be considered with care.”

Dr. Roman Lunkin, head of the Center for Religion and Society Studies at the Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow; president of the Union of Experts on Religion and Law, Russia:

“In defiance of all good sense, Russia’s law-enforcement system generates completely ridiculous expert studies (and, it appears, they encourage loyal supporters to open expert centers). Regarding the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies commissioned to analyze the Witnesses’ Bible, not one of the experts has a degree in religious studies and they are not even familiar with the writings of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their analysis included quotes that were taken from information provided by the Irenaeus of Lyon Centre, a radical Orthodox anti-cult organization known for opposing Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as many other religions and denominations.”

Dr. George D. Chryssides, former head of religious studies, University of Wolverhampton; honorary research fellow in contemporary religion at York St. John University and University of Birmingham, United Kingdom:
“I do not know the names of the so-called experts who have been called upon by the State to express opinions on the Witnesses’ organization, but other genuine scholars of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia have ridiculed these ‘experts.’ I have personally never heard of the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies, and the fact that Internet search engines can find no information on it speaks for itself. I am a regular attendee and presenter at academic conferences where new religions, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, are discussed. It is customary for attendees to indicate their institution or designation, and these so-called experts are never represented. One’s credentials as an expert are determined by academic qualifications in the relevant field, publication in peer-reviewed journals, and a willingness to subject one’s ideas to discussion in the appropriate arenas, such as academic conferences. Since the so-called experts whose opinion has been sought in Russia identify innocuous books such as My Book of Bible Stories and The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived as examples of subversive literature, this must call their expertise, as well as their motivation, into question.”

HRWF Footnote

Alexander Dvorkin is also the head of the Irenaeus of Lyon Centre, a radical Orthodox anti-cult organization, and vice-president of FECRIS, the French international anticult organization massively funded until now by the French state.

For more opinions about Russian” religious experts”, see:


Religious cleansing going on at full speed

HRWF (11.08.2017) - In the name of the “concept of spiritual security” and on the basis of its “anti-missionary legislation”, Russia is violating one of the most fundamental rights to religious freedom that was however fully recognized by the European Court of Human Rights in the case Kokkinakis v. Greece in 1993: The right to share one’s beliefs with others.

All sorts of religious communities and their members are now persecuted and prosecuted on a scale that has had no equivalent since the Cold War as it is highlighted by a remarkably documented report of Victoria Arnold published on 9 August by Forum 18.

180 individuals and communities brought to court in one year

Forum 18 (09.08.2017) – http://www.forum18.org - More than 180 individuals and communities have been brought to court in the year since "anti-missionary" punishments came into force on 20 July 2016. Forum 18’s list of known cases documents the wide range of people and communities across Russia subjected to such punishments.
More than 180 cases to punish individuals and communities for violating Russia’s "anti-missionary" restrictions are known to have reached court in the year since they came into force on 20 July 2016.

Prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 3, 4, and 5 have steadily increased throughout this 12 month period.

**Article 5.26, Part 3** punishes "Implementation of activities by a religious organisation without indicating its official full name, including the issuing or distribution, within the framework of missionary activity, of literature and printed, audio, and video material without a label bearing this name, or with an incomplete or deliberately false label".

**Article 5.26, Part 4** punishes "Russians conducting missionary activity". **Part 5** punishes "Foreigners conducting missionary activity".

Forum 18 found 181 cases against 129 individuals and 52 religious communities which reached court between 20 July 2016 (when the amendments entered legal force) and 20 July 2017. Of these, 133 resulted in initial convictions, with 130 fines being imposed. Of the foreigners prosecuted, 5 were ordered deported (though one of these had the deportation order overturned on appeal). More than half the regions in Russia have seen at least one prosecution. Russian citizens comprise the majority of defendants.

Russia has also imposed this legislation in Crimea, which it occupied in March 2014. Forum 18 found 27 administrative cases in the year of the "anti-missionary" punishments there, resulting in fines in 16 of the cases so far. (...)

**All communities are concerned or under threat**

As the cases hereafter clearly show, all religious denominations and their members are concerned, except the Russian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate: Jehovah’s Witnesses, Protestants (Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists and others), Muslims, Buddhists, Salvation Army, Jews, Hare Krishna devotees, some Orthodox Churches not affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate, Mormons, etc.

Most of these communities have been attacked for years by Orthodox antisect organizations in Russia and in particular by Alexander Dvorkin, vice-president of the FECHR (European Federation of Centers of Research and Information on Cults and Sects), which is massively funded by the French government.

The religious repression also targets foreigners from various countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, India, Nigeria, South Korea, Ukraine and United States.

The cases listed below come from the report of Victoria Arnold. She has documented each of them with the data that she has managed to collect. Her full report is available at [http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306](http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2306).


**Human Rights Without Frontiers** also organized a conference on religious freedom in Russia at the European Parliament on 6 June to alert the EU and its member states about
the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses and to raise to the alarm bell concerning the situation of religious non-Orthodox minorities in Russia.

**Cases under Article 5.26, Part 3**

Administrative Centre of the New Apostolic Church in Russia  
Sharypovo Jehovah's Witness community  
Igor Osipenko, Jehovah's Witness  
Jehovah's Witness community, Khabarovsk  
Jehovah's Witness community of Zelenogorsk  
Word of Life Pentecostal Church, Samara  
Salvation Army  
Vitaly Shmidt, pastor  
Salvation in Jesus Evangelical Church  
Faith, Hope, Love Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church  
Siberian Christian Mission of Mercy  
Aksyonovo Muslim community  
Good News Evangelical Church  
Glorification Evangelical Church, Sharypovo  
Aleksandr Mikhailov, pastor  
Tauba Muslim community  
Ramazan Muslim community  
Dzhuma Muslim community  
Oleg Gorobets, pastor of Rebirth Baptist Union Church, Samara  
A.V. Tselykh (unknown Christian denomination)  
Al-Radzhab Muslim community, Belozerye village  
Al-Furkan Muslim community, Belozerye village  
Andrei Okhapkin, chair of Kineshma Jehovah's Witness community  
House of Life Evangelical Church, Vladivostok  
Presbyterian Spiritual Seminary  
Light of Truth Pentecostal Church, Bryansk  
House of Prayer Evangelical Church  
Antioch Baptist Union Church, Chita  
Central Nizhny Novgorod Jehovah's Witness community  
Jesus Christ Pentecostal Church, Nizhny Tagil  
Pentecostal Church of the Last Time  
Salsk Jehovah's Witness community  
Source of Life Pentecostal Church  
Ildar Urazbakhtin, chair of Boguchany Jehovah's Witness community  
Ivanovo Jehovah's Witness community  
Ernest Mikhailov, chair of Jewish community Among Your Own  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)  
Glory of God Pentecostal church, Syktyvkar  
New Testament Evangelical Church  
Embassy of Christ Union of Evangelical Churches in Nizhny Novgorod Region  
Salvation in Jesus Evangelical Church  
Embassy of Christ Biblical Centre, Nizhny Novgorod  
V.M. Maltsev (Association of Local Churches of Evangelical Christians)  
Liberation in Jesus Evangelical Church  
Light of Christ Pentecostal Church, Nizhny Novgorod  
Transfiguration Evangelical Church  
Voice of Hope Evangelical Church  
Dmitry Taranenko, chair of Chelyabinsk Jehovah's Witness community  
Among Your Own [Sredi Svoikh] Jewish community  
Makhalla-Mosque No. 2230, Korkino
Baptist Union Church of Vanino

Cases under Article 5.26, Part 5 ("Foreigners conducting missionary activity")

Donald Ossewaarde, American independent Baptist preacher legally resident in Russia (He filed a complaint with the European Court)
Ebenezer Tuah, Ghanaian Christ Embassy Protestant leader
Kalsang Dkhondul, "stateless person"
Irina Tishchenko, Ukrainian New Generation Pentecostal pastor
William Curtis Norton, Jr., American charged with preaching at a Seventh-day Adventist meeting
Ts. Kus, Foreign citizen, Jehovah's Witness
Victor-Immanuel Mani, Indian Protestant Christian (with right of residence in Russia)
Vladimir Sukhanov, Ukrainian citizen – religious affiliation unknown
A.V. Rudenko, foreign citizen, priest of an unregistered (unidentified) religious association

Consmance Maziku, citizen of Democratic Republic of Congo, student and member of the Kirov Evangelical Bible Church
Issa Salifu, Ghanaian
V.Ye. Maslova, Ukrainian Jehovah's Witness
Clever Ogenerobo Light, a Nigerian student at Kursk State Medical University; affiliated with Protestant Dunamis International Gospel Centre
Eun Chul Sin, South Korean pastor of Protestant Good News church
Zh.Yu. Ong, South Korean Protestant pastor

Cases under Article 5.26, Part 4 ("Russians conducting missionary activity")

Aleksei Teleus, Baptist Union pastor
Vadim Sibiryev, Hare Krishna devotee
Alekssandr Yakimov, New Generation Pentecostal leader
Archbishop Sergei Zhuravlyov, Ukrainian Reformed Orthodox Church
Geshe Gualtso Dakpa, Buddhist monk (Indian-born, but a Russian citizen), director of "Centre for the Teachings of Nagarzhuna" in Kyzył
Ivan Denisov, Protestant leader (House of the Potter Church)
S.P Kozin, Jehovah's Witness
Mayma Seventh-day Adventist Church
Andrei Matyuzhov, New Generation Pentecostal pastor
Ivan Kumbrasyev, Protestant pastor
I.V. Parmon, Jehovah's Witness
S.A. Furman, Jehovah's Witness
Ivan Denisov, Protestant leader (House of the Potter Church)
Olga Matyuzhova, New Generation Pentecostal pastor
L.G. Pyshnaya, Jehovah's Witness
Andrei Puchkov, Hare Krishna devotee
Vasili Zaitsev, Protestant
Yuri Dachev, Word of Life Pentecostal Church pastor
V.S. Sidorov, Baptist
Exodus Evangelical Church
Andrei Sysolyatin, Hare Krishna devotee
Andrei Puchkov, Hare Krishna devotee
Aleksei Mokiyev, Protestant
Konstantin Petrenko, Council of Churches Baptist pastor
Dmitry Ugai, Hare Krishna devotee and yoga teacher
Ilya Matveyev, Hare Krishna devotee
Name: R.G. Gasanaliyev, Protestant
Pyotr Yemelevsky, Hare Krishna devotee
T.I. Sukhanova, Jehovah's Witness
Mikhail Ishenin, Jehovah's Witness
Vitaly Ryazanov, Baptist pastor
T.V. Lipshina, Jehovah's Witness

Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church, organisation also convicted under Part 3 (see above)

Vilyuchinsk Jehovah's Witness community
Sergei Selezniov, Jehovah's Witness
Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky Jehovah's Witness community
O.M. Rakhimkulov, Baptist
Sergei Merkulov, pastor of Council of Churches Baptist church
Mikhail Pugachyov, pastor of Council of Churches Baptist church
Sergei Suprunenko, director of unregistered Council of Churches Baptist religious group

V.I. Sergeyeveva, Protestant
Aleksandr Khramugin, Baptist
Andrei Novikov, Baptist
Aleksandr Bychkov, Baptist
V.I. Polkovnikova, Protestant
V.N. Lukina, Jehovah's Witness
V.I. Nasonova, Jehovah's Witness
Islam Gadzhiev, Muslim

Vladimir Klimenko, leader of religious group Christians of Evangelical Faith
R.R. Mannanova, Protestant
F.R. Muratov, Protestant
R.A. Akhmetyanova, Protestant
A.G. Vakhitova, Protestant
Ivan Manakov, Baptist shopkeeper
Marat Zhambulov, member of the Evangelical Christian Youth Movement of Buryatia
Aleksei Pomazov, Hare Krishna devotee
Anatoly Mukhin, Baptist pastor
Unknown (man), Protestant
Aleksandr Kutyavin, Baptist Union pastor
Anton Ryzhkov ("Svetozar Ryzhkov"), leader of religious group "Pokon Roda", part of a "non-traditional religious movement"
P.V. Kotlyarenko, Jehovah's Witness
T.A. Mandrichenko, Jehovah's Witness

Sergei Kriulin, Russian Orthodox priest (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad which did not rejoin the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007)
O.A. Porokhova, Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church
Ye.V. Kalinin, Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church
V.I. Novoselov, Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church
V.L. Poluboryatsev, Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church
P.V. Kornilov, Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church
S.I. Golovachev, Nizhny Tagil Evangelical Christian Church
Mikhail Bezgans, Baptist
V.V. Volkov, Baptist
L.I. Konovalova, religious affiliation unknown

Jesus Christ Evangelical Church, Nizhny Tagil
Svetlana Tarasova, Baptist
Z.A. Dzhafarov, Jehovah's Witness
Olga Supranovich, Hare Krishna
Kifoyatullo Mirzoyev, an unofficial imam
Inna Khaziakhmetova, Hare Krishna

A.V. Mazepov, religious Christian affiliation unknown
G.M. Goncharov, Jehovah's Witness
Ivan Denisov, Protestant
Aleksandr Kulikov, Hare Krishna leader
Court extends detention for members of St. Petersburg Church of Scientology

TASS Russian News Agency (03.08.2017) - https://wwrn.org/articles/47229/ - St. Petersburg’s Neva District Court has extended arrest terms for defendants under the St. Petersburg Church of Scientology case until October 20, the city court’s press service reported on Thursday.

"The court has ruled to extend measures of restraint in the form of detention for Ivan Matsitsky, Anastasiya Terenteva and Sakhib Aliev until October 20. The court has also extended house arrest for Konstantsiya Yesaulkova for the same term," the report says.

The members of the St. Petersburg Church of Scientology are accused of illegally organizing scientology courses and programs on a paid basis without any proper licensing or authorization documents, the proceeds from which are estimated at over 276 million rubles (around $4.6 mln). They were arrested on June 6. That same day, officials from the FSB’s St. Petersburg and Leningrad Region Directorate searched the organization’s office based on violations of legislation from the Russian Criminal Code "Illegal business operations," "Incitement of hatred and enmity" and "Establishment of extremist organization." Books and materials found in the office and recognized as extremist under the Russian law were confiscated and hauled away. According to the investigators, the St. Petersburg Church of Scientology is an extremist society.
Dianetics and Scientology is a religious and philosophical movement developed in the United States in the early 1950s by American science-fiction writer Lafayette Ron Hubbard. In Russia, some scientology files were included in the federal government’s list of extremism-related materials. Their storage and dissemination throughout the country’s territory is prohibited.

**HRWF Comment**

Members of the Church of Scientology in pretrial detention are now experiencing the same fate as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Dennis Christensen, a Danish Jehovah’s Witness, arrested in May for attending a religious meeting, was first sentenced to two-month pretrial detention. This imprisonment period was recently prolonged by four months.

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**International response to Russia’s Supreme Court decision against Jehovah’s Witnesses**

JW.ORG (02.08.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2vSftjY](http://bit.ly/2vSftjY) - International government agencies and officials have responded to Russia’s Supreme Court decision that criminalizes the worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia. These statements have criticized Russia’s unjust and harsh judicial action against a minority religious group known for peaceful religious activity.

On July 17, 2017, a three-judge panel of the Appellate Chamber of Russia’s Supreme Court upheld the Court’s April 20 decision “to liquidate the religious organization ‘Administrative Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia’ and the local religious organizations that are part of its structure [and] to turn over to the Russian Federation all property of the liquidated religious organization.” With this decision, the Court effectively banned the worship of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout Russia.

**Statements After the July 17, 2017, Appellate Chamber Decision**

The following are excerpts of statements made after the July 17, 2017, decision by the Appellate Chamber of Russia’s Supreme Court to uphold the April 20 ruling:

“"We are deeply concerned by the decision of Russia’s Supreme Court to reject the appeal of the Jehovah’s Witnesses against their labelling as ‘extremists.’ This ruling confirms the criminalisation of the peaceful worship of 175,000 Russian citizens and contravenes the right to religious freedom that is enshrined in the Russian Constitution.”—Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for Human Rights, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Great Britain. [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-human-rights-statement-on-russian-supreme-court-ruling](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-human-rights-statement-on-russian-supreme-court-ruling)

"The Russian Supreme Court’s decision this week against the Jehovah’s Witnesses is the latest in a disturbing trend of persecution of religious minorities in Russia. We urge the Russian authorities to lift the ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activities in Russia, to reverse the closing of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Administrative Center, and to release any members of religious minorities that continue to be unjustly detained for so-called ‘extremist’ activities.”—Heather Nauert, Department Spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State. [https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/07/272679.htm](https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/07/272679.htm)

"Jehovah’s Witnesses, like all other religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the


“I am very concerned by the fact that the court ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia has been upheld. Despite our appeals on a number of levels, this move makes the peaceful enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion and thought a criminal offence.” — **Gernot Erler, Coordinator for Intersocietal Cooperation With Russia, Central Asia, and the Eastern Partnership Countries, Foreign Ministry of Germany.** [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_5DAC942B7DE50BCC4AFCD864C2E383/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2017/170719-Ko_RUS-Zeugen_Jehovas.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_5DAC942B7DE50BCC4AFCD864C2E383/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2017/170719-Ko_RUS-Zeugen_Jehovas.html)

“Russia’s recent outrageous decision to ban the Jehovah’s Witnesses from existing as a recognized faith community in Russia is a complete violation of the protections for freedom of religion and belief in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. . . . People of goodwill from all faith communities as well as all those who cherish freedom of conscience rights must stand in solidarity with the Jehovah’s Witnesses of Russia.” — **Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, president, Lantos Foundation.** [https://www.lantosfoundation.org/news/2017/7/17/lantos-foundation-condemns-russias-outrageous-decision-to-ban-jehovahs-witnesses](https://www.lantosfoundation.org/news/2017/7/17/lantos-foundation-condemns-russias-outrageous-decision-to-ban-jehovahs-witnesses)

**Statements After the April 20, 2017, Decision of the Supreme Court**

Prior to the Appellate Chamber’s decision, numerous government agencies and officials condemned the Russian Supreme Court’s April 20 ruling:

“I asked President Vladimir Putin to use his influence to guarantee minority rights here as well as with Jehovah’s witnesses.” — **Chancellor Angela Merkel, during a news conference with President Putin.** [http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-germany-putin-syria-idUKKBN17Y1JZ](http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-germany-putin-syria-idUKKBN17Y1JZ)

“The recent decision of the Supreme Court to declare the Jehovah’s Witnesses Administrative Center in the Russian Federation an extremist organisation, and to close it down, together with the 395 Local Religious Organisations used by Witnesses, raises serious concerns regarding freedom of religion in Russia and is another example of the legislation against extremism being abused to curtail freedom of expression and assembly.” — **Theodora Bakoyannis and Liliane Maury Pasquier, co-rapporteurs of the PACE Monitoring Committee for the Russian Federation.** [http://assembly coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6599](http://assembly coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=6599)

“Russia’s failure to respect religious freedom is yet another inexcusable violation of Moscow’s OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] commitments. People who practice their faith peacefully should never be in danger of being harassed, fined, or jailed. The court order to seize organization property owned by Jehovah’s Witnesses adds insult to injury. I am hopeful that this case will be appealed to the
"Yesterday’s decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation to ban the activities of the Administrative Centre of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia on grounds of ‘extremism’ could make it possible to launch criminal prosecutions against Jehovah’s Witnesses for mere acts of worship. Jehovah’s Witnesses, like all other religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation as well as by Russia’s international commitments and international human rights standards.”—Spokesperson for the European Union External Action Services.

"I’m deeply concerned by this unwarranted criminalization of the peaceful activities of members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses communities in Russia, eliminating this community as a viable entity in the country. This Supreme Court decision poses a threat to the values and principles that democratic, free, open, pluralistic and tolerant societies rest upon.”—Michael Georg Link, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. http://www.osce.org/odihr/313561

"This ban persecuting peaceful persons for mere acts of worship clearly violates the fundamental right to religious freedom and with it international human rights standards as also guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation. It therefore needs to be revised as soon as possible.”—Professor Ingeborg Gabriel, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination. http://www.osce.org/odihr/313561

"I am alarmed by the decision of Russia’s Supreme Court to recognise the Jehovah’s Witnesses as ‘extremists’. This ruling effectively criminalizes the peaceful worship of 175,000 Russian citizens and contravenes the right to religious freedom which is enshrined in the Russian Constitution. The UK calls on the Russian government to uphold its international commitment to this basic freedom.”—Baroness Joyce Anelay, former Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-for-human-rights-criticises-russian-supreme-court-ruling-for-labelling-jehovahs-witnesses-as-extremist

**International Condemnation of Russia’s Supreme Court Decision**

On July 20, 2017, the Permanent Council of the OSCE adopted a statement from the European Union (EU). The statement calls on Russia to allow Jehovah’s Witnesses to “be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation as well as by Russia’s international commitments and international human rights standards.” The statement was unanimously adopted in Vienna by all 28 member states of the EU, and other non-EU member countries such as Australia, Canada, and Norway have aligned themselves with it. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/pc_1155_eu_jehovahs_witnesses_in_russia.pdf

Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide are deeply disappointed that with its arbitrary decision, Russia’s Supreme Court has effectively banned their worship throughout the country. In their responses, international government agencies and officials expose Russia for unjustly declaring Jehovah’s Witnesses “extremists” and for ignoring its own constitutional and international commitments to protect religious freedom. The European
The Court of Human Rights has yet to hear this matter and will hopefully reverse the nationwide ban.

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**A complaint in Strasbourg against Russia about the right to share one’s beliefs**

*Application no. 27227/17 Donald Jay OSSEWAARDE against Russia*

HRWF (02.08.2017) - On 30 March 2017, Donald Jay Ossewaarde lodged a complaint against Russia and on 6 July, the European Court communicated questions to the parties.

**Statement of facts**

The applicant, Mr Donald Jay Ossewaarde, is a citizen of the United States of America (USA) who was born in 1960 and who has been living in Oryol, Russia, since 2005 on the basis of renewable residence permits. He is represented before the Court by Ms T. Glushkova, Ms T. Chernikova, Mr D. Shvedov, and Mr K. Koroteyev, lawyers practising in Moscow.

**The circumstances of the case**

The facts of the case, as submitted by the applicant, may be summarized as follows. The applicant is a Baptist Christian. Since moving to Oryol in Russia, he and his wife have regularly gathered people at their home for prayer and Bible reading. The applicant personally invited people to those meetings or put invitations in people's mailboxes.

On Sunday, 14 August 2016, as the applicant was holding a Bible-reading meeting in his home, the police officers walked in through the door that was not locked. The police waited for the end of the service to ask questions and take statements from the applicant and the participants. At about 1 p.m. they took the applicant to the police station to take his fingerprints.

At the station the applicant was shown a statement by a "concerned resident" who had complained to the police about "foreign religious cultists" pasting Gospel tracts to a bulletin board at her apartment block. In the subsequent proceedings, it transpired that the "concerned resident" Ms B. was a deputy chairman of the Oryol Regional Government in charge of security matters. The police charged the applicant with the offence under Article 5.26(5) of the Code of Administrative Offences for placing invitations to religious services on bulletin boards, which was interpreted as spreading of information about his religion among non-members of his religious group, and for conducting "missionary activities" without notification of establishment of a religious group.

After two-and-a-half hour's detention at the police station the applicant was taken before the Zheleznodorozhnny District Court in Oryol. He pleaded his innocence, maintaining that he was not a member of any religious association in Russia and could not exercise "missionary activities" within the meaning of the Religions Act. At approximately 7 p.m. the District Court convicted the applicant for conducting "missionary activities" without having notified the authorities of establishing a religious group, and fined him 40,000 Russian roubles.

On 30 September 2016 the Oryol Regional Court rejected the applicant's appeal.
On 28 February 2017 the Constitutional Court dismissed the applicant's constitutional complaint. It held in particular that it was not competent to determine the question of fact whether the applicant "had been a member of any religious association and carried out missionary activities on its behalf by involving other persons into the activities of the religious association or whether he simply disseminated his religious beliefs in public".

Complaints

The applicant complains under Articles 9 and 11 of the Convention that he was punished for manifesting his religion in community with others. He also invokes Article 14 in conjunction with the above provisions to complain about a difference in treatment between Russian and foreign nationals under Article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offences.

The applicant also complains under Article 5 § 1 of the Convention that his detention at the police station was not necessary because nothing prevented the police for drawing up the offence record on the spot.


The vice-president of FECRIS, the antisect organization funded by the French government, supports the ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses

Alexander Dvorkin, vice-president of the European antisect organisation FECRIS, supports the ban of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia, as he recently declared to the Russian propaganda TV channel Sputnik (https://sputniknews.com/russia/201705211053836265-human-rights-ban-effect). He clearly endorses the destruction of non-Orthodox minorities. Here is the excerpt of his declarations to the Russian media:

However, Alexander Dvorkin, president of the Association of Centres for the Study of Religions and Sects, told RIA Novosti that these claims are part of a "very aggressive attack against Russia the likes of which we haven't seen in quite a while."

"They're trying to portray it as some kind of campaign against faith. But this is not a campaign against faith because the government cannot regulate people's beliefs, and none of the Jehovah's Witnesses adherents are prohibited from practicing their religion," Dvorkin pointed out. According to him, the government merely banned a select organization and cut off a substantial flow of money to it - nothing more, nothing less.

"If you so desire, feel free to hold gatherings at your apartments and discuss your religion - no one is going to prevent you from doing so. However, I’m certain that in a few years the number of the organization’s adherents will decrease dramatically - by half or to a third of its original size. Because when the financial basis is cut off, along with the ability to freely recruit other people and rent large halls, people tend to quickly lose interest and begin to scatter. In that regard, this decision was very astute," Dvorkin said.

He also pointed out that the Ministry of Justice’s decision to shut down Jehovah's Witnesses HQ was aimed at protecting the rights of the group’s adherents.
"Jehovah's Witnesses maintains strict control over every aspect of its members’ lives, including even the most intimate moments of their family lives as spouses have to report on one another. All members have to keep an eye on each other, to spy on one another," he said.

Dvorkin ruefully added that he tried several times to contact human rights groups and to make them aware of the plight of people who fell victim of religious sects, but his pleas were ignored.

"Essentially, the struggle for human rights is being supplanted with the struggle for the rights of organizations which violate human rights. This is not human rights activity but rather its exact opposite," Dvorkin surmised.

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**Misuse of the anti-extremist legislation against religious groups**

HRWF (01.08.2017) - SOVA Center in Moscow has just published an analysis of court decisions taken in June on the basis of the extremism legislation. Only non-Orthodox minorities and their publications are targeted by the repression.

The cases identified by SOVA Center clearly show that the courts are fully implementing the concept of "spiritual security" introduced in the Russian legislation in 2000 and which leads to the progressive destruction of religious diversity, freedom of thought and expression in religious matters.

On July 13 SOVA Center paid the 300 thousand rubles fine for having failed to voluntarily register itself as a "foreign agent", - which it denies to be - before that was done by the Ministry of Justice.

SOVA Center asked its readers for help and the amount of 59418 rubles 72 kopecks arrived in their accounts. They are deeply grateful to everyone for their help, but unfortunately, the sum we got was not enough.

Now they have to appeal the inappropriate decisions against SOVA Center up to the European Court of Human Rights.

If you would like to help, please use one of the following bank accounts. Please indicate the purpose of your transfer as a Targeted donation for paying the fine.

**Account details in USD:**
ROO Tsentr SOVA
UniCredit Bank
SWIFT: IMBKRUMM
Account 40703840700010865184
Correspondent bank: JPMorgan Chase Bank, New York,
SWIFT Code: CHASUS33

**Account details in Euro:**
ROO Tsentr SOVA
UniCredit Bank
SWIFT: IMBKRUMM
Account 40703978300010865184
Correspondent bank: UniCredit Bank AG,
SWIFT Code: HYVEDEMM
Criminal Prosecution of Said Nursi Followers and Scientologists

In the middle of the month, the Blagoveshchensk City Court of the Amur Region sentenced Yevgeny Kim to three years and nine months of imprisonment with subsequent restriction of freedom for a period of one year, having found him guilty of committing crimes under Part 1 of Criminal Code Article 282.2 (organizing the activities of an extremist organization) and Part 1 of Article 282 (incitement to hatred). According to investigators, Kim, who shared the ideology of Nurcular international religious association (banned in Russia), held religious meetings in Blagoveshchensk in September - December 2015, during which he quoted from the texts of the banned books by Said Nursi. In addition, it follows from the case materials that, during the meetings, he made negative statements against the "infidels", a number of ethnic groups (Russians, Jews, Armenians, English), as well as against a professional group "officers of the FSB," and advocated the exclusive status of the Turkic peoples and of the version of Islam preached by the followers of Nursi. We do not view Kim’s verdict as appropriate in its part pertaining to charges under Article 282.2. We believe that bans against Said Nursi’s books as well as the ban of Nurcular association are unwarranted. The latter has never even existed in Russia; there are only individual believers who face persecution for studying Nursi’s books. We cannot claim that the charges under Article 282 of the Criminal Code were inappropriate. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the composition of Article 282 covers public actions aimed at inciting hatred, while Kim’s xenophobic remarks were addressed only to a very limited number of participants in the religious meetings.

In early June, FSB officers conducted yet another series of searches on the premises of the Scientology Church of St. Petersburg and homes of some believers as part of the investigation under Article 171 (illegal enterprise), Article 282 (incitement to hatred) and Article 282.1 (organizing an extremist community) of the Criminal Code. According to the investigation, the Scientology Church was engaged in shadow business practices, selling educational programs to its followers and not paying the corresponding taxes. In accordance with the ruling of the Nevsky District Court of St. Petersburg, Anastasia Terentyeva, Ivan Matsitsky, Galina Shurinova, and Sahib Aliev were arrested; Konstantsiya Esaulkova was put under house arrest. During the court hearings on pre-trial restrictions, the FSB investigator stated, in particular, that the Scientologists had created an extremist community with the purpose of humiliating the dignity of some of its members, who comprised a social group “the sources of trouble.” Obviously, he was referring to the "potential sources of trouble" category used by Scientologists; believers assigned to this category are prohibited from participating in auditing, that is, in communicating with a Scientology consultant. An FSB representative also stated that the defendants had disseminated extremist literature and advocated the exclusivity of their religion. We view prosecution against Scientologists for extremism as inappropriate. Adherents of any religion view their creed as exceptional, and the prosecution for such assertions is absurd. Psychological pressure (if any) exerted by the Scientologists' against a segment of the Scientology followers, who became a target of criticism by their fellow believers, belongs to the sphere of internal relations within a religious community and has nothing to do with public humiliation of dignity on the basis of belonging to a social group.

Administrative Prosecution against Falun Gong Practitioners

In June, we learned about three cases of prosecution under Article 20.29 of the Code of Administrative Offences for dissemination (or storage with intent to distribute) of materials that, in our opinion, were inappropriately recognized as extremist. In Abakan, the follower of the Falun Gong spiritual practice was fined for distributing Zhuan Falun, the banned treatise by Falun Gong ideologist Li Hongzhi. Sergei Tuguzhekov faced responsibility after the law enforcement authorities seized a copy of the treatise from him
and a computer printout of the same from another practitioner in March. Another case under Article 20.29 was opened in Togliatti against Sergei Ionov, an assistant to a municipal duma deputy from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation for posting on VKontakte the banned video Let's Remind Crooks and Thieves about Their Manifesto-2002 by Alexei Navalny's supporters. Ionov is sure that prosecution against him is connected to his role as the organizer of the June 12 anti-corruption rally. Gennady Makarov, an activist from Yelets in the Lipetsk Region, received five days of administrative arrest for his posts on the social networks VKontakte and LiveJournal, which discussed the fact that the image of Vladimir Putin in makeup had been recognized as extremist. The posts were accompanied by a corresponding image, but the caption, which served as the basis for the ban, had been removed. Makarov believes that the prosecution is related to his civic activities - in particular, to his conflict with the chief of the city police - and intends to appeal the court decision.

As we found out in June, a resident of Alexandrov in the Vladimir Region had been fined under Article 20.28 Part 1 of the Administrative Code (organization of activity of a religious association, in whose respect a decision has been taken to suspend its activity) for holding regular meetings of the Jehovah's Witnesses religious association in a residential building. You may remember that the activities of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and nearly four hundred local communities were suspended in mid-March for the duration of the Supreme Court consideration of the claim by the Ministry of Justice's seeking to ban the organization; the claim was satisfied in April.

In late June, after a court hearing in the case of illegal missionary work under Article 5.26 (such prosecutions are covered in our Religion in Secular Society section), Vitaly Arsenyuk, the sixty-seven-year-old leader of the local Jehovah's Witnesses community, died from a major heart attack in Dzhankoy (Republic of Crimea). We consider it necessary to pay attention to this tragic incident, which shows the consequences of the persecution campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses, launched by the authorities, which has no legitimate grounds.

**Banning Religious Materials as Extremist**

A number of books that we view as prohibited inappropriately were added to the Federal List of Extremist Materials in June. These include Selected Hadith by Muhammad Yusuf Kandhlawi and Piety and the Fear of God [Blagochestiie i Bogoboyazennost] by Muhammad Zakariya Kandhlawi, which contain no signs of extremism and have been prohibited only because their authors were ideologists of Tablighi Jamaat movement, banned in Russia (in our opinion, this ban lacked reasonable justifications). Notably, the texts presented in the Selected Hadith collection are the ancient legends about the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad that are sacred for Muslims; Muhammad Yusuf Kandhlawi only selected and sorted them by subject. The decisions to ban these publications were issued by the Kirovsky District Court of Ufa on February 1, 2017.

In addition, in accordance with the decision of the Svetly City Court of the Kaliningrad Region issued in March 2017, the Federal List of Extremist Materials came to include the books Muslim Faith (Aqidah) by Ahmed Said Kliauz, Islam. Briefly on What's Most Important by Fahd ibn Ahmad al-Mubarak and From Shiism to Islam by Ali Mohammed al-Qudaibi. We found no incendiary statements in any of the above materials.

The Federal List of Extremist Material also came to include the Jehovah's Witnesses publication Youth Issues: Practical Advice, Volume 2 (N. Y., 2008). The decision to ban the book was issued in March 2017 by the Proletarsky District Court of Rostov-on-Don. Another edition of this book was recognized as extremist in 2009. We believe that bans against Jehovah's Witnesses materials on the basis of advocating the superiority of their religion over others is inappropriate.
EU statement on the upheld ban of activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia

OSCE Permanent Council No 1155 (20.07.2017) - http://www.osce.org/permanent-council/333051?download=true - The Russian Supreme Court on 17 July upheld its previous decision to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, terminate their activity and confiscate their property, alleging "extremist activity". The decision confirms the ban on the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country.

This ban has already resulted in cases of criminal prosecutions against Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as police raids on their prayer halls. It has contributed to an atmosphere of hatred and stigmatization, which has led to arson attacks and other forms of harassment.

Jehovah's Witnesses, like all other members of religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, as well as by Russia's international commitments to international human rights standards through its membership of the OSCE and the Council of Europe. OSCE Participating States have on several occasions, including at the Kyiv Ministerial Council in 2013, emphasized the link between security and full respect for the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

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

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

Previous activities of the EEAS

"In the specific case of Russia, the High Representative (HR) is closely following the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Head of the EU Delegation to Russia met on 4 April with representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow and the Deputy Head had a meeting with them on 13 July. EEAS officials have also met them in Brussels. EU and Member States' diplomats attended several of the sessions of the Supreme Court hearing including the hearing of the appeal on 17 July. Jehovah's Witnesses have been highly appreciative of this support.

The HR spokesperson issued a statement[1] on 21 April 2017 and 18 July[2] respectively, after the Russian Supreme Court declared the Jehovah's Witnesses administrative centre as "extremist", and decided to liquidate it and confiscate all its property, and again once the Court decided to uphold its earlier decision following an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

On 24 April the HR raised this issue, as well as other human rights concerns, when she met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Moscow.

The 28 EU Member States agreed to issue statements condemning the harassment and persecution against Jehovah’s Witnesses at the OSCE's Permanent Council meetings of...
Human Rights Without Frontiers FoRB Newsletter | Russia

30 March[3], 27 April[4] and 20 July[5] as well as in the Council of Europe's Council of Ministers on 5 April[6].

The EU will continue urging the Russian authorities to ensure that Jehovah's Witnesses, like all other religious groups, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation as well as by Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards."

Claude Véron-Réville
Deputy Head of Russia division - European External Action Service

[5] Not yet published on the OSCE's website

ECHRI confronts Russian anti-evangelism law

ECHRI will express its position on religious amendments in Russian Code of Administrative Violations of Law

by Anastasia Kurilova, Viktor Khamraev, Pavel Korobov

ECHRI will express its position on religious amendments in Russian Code of Administrative Violations of Law

Kommersant (27.07.2017) - The European Court for Human Rights (ECHRI) will give an evaluation to incidents of the restriction of evangelism in Russia which were brought about by the "Yarovaya Law" in the summer of last year. The ECHR accepted for review an appeal from an American citizen, the Baptist Donald Jay Ossewaarde, who on the basis of a declaration by a "concerned resident" was fined in Orel. A similar appeal to the ECHR was submitted by a volunteer cleric and citizen of India, Viktor Emanuel Mani, who was arrested in Naberezhnye Chelny and later deported and separated from his family. Experts say that the amendments to the law primarily hit foreigners.

The ECHR communicated (accepted for review) the appeal of the American citizen Donald Jay Ossewaarde, who lives with his wife in Orel. As Baptist Christians they assembled believers in their home for reading the Bible. On 14 August 2016, during such a meeting, police officers arrived at Mr. Ossewaarde's home. They explained to the Baptist that a "concerned resident"-the vice-chairman of the provincial government for security matters-had written a statement indicating that "foreign adherents of a religious cult" has pasted excerpts of Scripture to a bulletin board of the building. The American was accused of "missionary activity with violation of the requirements of legislation on freedom of conscience" (point 5 of article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law). For foreigners, the fine on this article is from 30 thousand to 50 thousand rubles "with or without administrative deportation beyond the borders of the RF." The court sentenced the Baptist to a fine of 40 thousand rubles.
The ECHR sent questions to Russian authorities asking "was the transfer to the police station and detention there compatible with requirements of legislation of the RF and article 5 of the Convention ("Right to freedom and personal inviolability"). The ECHR also asked "whether there occurred a violation of article 9 and article 11 of the Convention ('Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion' and 'Freedom of assembly and association') in connection with prosecution of the declarer for organization of meetings for reading the Bible." In addition, Strasbourg called attention to the fact that the Code of Administrative Violations of Law has different penalties for Russian and foreign missionaries (the fine is higher for the latter). The Russian side is supposed to respond no later than 30 October, the Ministry of Justice told Kommersant. The staff of the Russian commissioner at the ECHR, Mikhail Galperin, began to work out the "legal position of the Russian side, taking into account the opinion of the competent bodies of state authority and conclusions of national judicial instances."

Kommersant has learned that a similar appeal also was submitted by a citizen of India, Viktor Emmanuel Mani. "He is a cleric on a volunteer basis in the 'Love of God' Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith in Naberezhnye Chelny which is a member of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists" an attorney of the international rights advocacy group "Agora," Damir Gainutdinov, told Kommersant. Mr. Mani lived in Russia from 2001. Late last year a new visitor began attending his services. On 4 December 4 he made a donation, approached an employee of the church, and bought literature. Then the visitor send a declaration to the prosecutor's office indicating that the clergyman suggested that he call friends to the church and gave him two brochures and a book; that is, he engaged in missionary activity. "At the trial the defendant explained that he personally did not converse with the visitor and did not give him books," Mr. Gainutdinov says. The Naberezhnye Chelny city court issued a decision for a fine of 30,000 rubles and deportation. The latter was an "extreme penalty," the attorney says, pointing out that Mr. Mani is married to a Russian citizen and they have a daughter who is about a year old. Thereby there was a violation of article 8 of the Convention, the right to private life.

We recall that the article of the Code of Administrative Violations of Law regarding restriction of missionary activity appeared in June 2016, when the State Duma adopted anti-terrorism amendments by Deputy Irina Yarovaya. The amendments, as Kommersant reported, were publicly criticized by religious organizations, including also representatives of traditional confessions. An expert group of the Council on Human Rights under the Russian president also pointed out that the new rules "create unjustified and extreme restrictions for exercising freedom of consciences by believers of all religions and religious movements," and "arbitrarily hold administratively accountable persons who clearly have not committed socially dangerous actions."

The director of the Center for Study of Problems of Religion and Society of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Roman Lunkin, commenting on the appeals to the ECHR says that each instance of the application of the "Yarovaya Law" is a debasement of a specific confession since "some are able to preach and others are not." "Foreigners are fined, in the first place, considering that they have the fewest rights to confession of their religion in Russia. At the same time, police and investigators prefer not to distinguish worship services and evangelism, although such a distinction exists in the law," Mr. Lunkin told Kommersant.

"The main absurdity of the law is the actual inclusion of the concept of 'missionary activity' within terrorist or extremist activity," the chancellor of the Russian Associated Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals), Konstantin Bendas, told Kommersant. "Foreigners are forced to participate in worship services and talk about religion in fear of deportation and large fines," Mr. Bendas says. "Russian missionaries labor in Myanmar, Laos, India, and another 100 countries. They have their own
Case against the Bible of Jehovah’s Witnesses resumes Friday

JW Headquarters New York (26.07.2017) - On Friday, July 28, 2017, the Vyborg City Court, 138 kilometers (85 mi.) northwest of St. Petersburg, will resume hearings in the case against the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (NWT), a Bible published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Russian authorities are seeking to ban this Bible, as "extremist," despite an amendment to Article 3 of the Federal Law on Extremism signed by President Putin in the fall of 2015. The amendment states: "The Bible, the Quran, the Tanakh, and the Kangyur, and their contents, and quotations from them cannot be recognized as extremist materials." The prosecution's case is largely based on attempting to prove the NWT is not a Bible.

The case has been suspended since April 26, 2016, pending a court-appointed analysis of the NWT by the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies. This week the court received the completed analysis (some 100 pages in length) and has scheduled the hearing to resume on Friday. A copy of the document shows that the 'expert' analysis concluded that the NWT is "not a Bible." The apparent basis for such a conclusion is that the publication refers to itself as the "Holy Scriptures." (See http://bit.ly/2u1kBag for a preliminary English translation of the analysis, along with the original in Russian).

This is not the first time the Center for Sociocultural Expert Studies has analyzed the NWT. Their conclusions about the NWT served as the basis for the prosecutor's original claim. This in itself is a violation of a precedent set by Russia's Supreme Court disqualifying an expert from being used twice in the same case to address the same question.

According to Roman Lunkin, leading research fellow of the Center for Religion and Society Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Europe, none of the experts at the center has a degree in religious studies and they are unfamiliar with the writings of Jehovah's Witnesses in general. Mr. Lunkin states: "In defiance of all good sense, Russia's law-enforcement system generates completely ridiculous expert studies (and, it appears, they encourage loyal supporters to open expert centers)." Other noted scholars have likewise expressed surprise (see http://bit.ly/2h4GN1W) at the extent to which Russia is willing to go to ban any publications produced or distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Pre-trial detention of Danish citizen Dennis Christensen extended until late November

HRWF (26.07.2017) – The district court of Orel has decided to extend by four months the pre-trial detention of Dennis Christensen, a Danish Jehovah’s Witness arrested on 25 May while he was attending a religious meeting of his congregation. Noteworthy is the fact that very few media in Europe have covered this issue. European parliaments and major human rights organizations have failed to raise their voices for this prisoner of conscience, who is an EU citizen.
Washington has urged the Russian authorities to lift the ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activities in Russia ruled by the Supreme Court on 20 April and confirmed on 17 July, to reverse the closing of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Administrative Center, and to release any members of religious minorities that continue to be unjustly detained for so-called ‘extremist’ activities.

Almost 80% of Russians approve of Jehovah’s Witnesses ban according to a recent poll by Levada Center. One in five (20%) heard nothing about the organization, according to the findings of a poll of 1,600 respondents in 137 Russian cities and towns on June 23-26. Thirteen per cent are aware of the Russian ban on JW; 34% heard something but no details; and 50% are unaware of the ban. Meanwhile, a majority (79%) approve of the court ban on JW; 12% disapprove; and one in ten (9%) could not answer. (Source: http://interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13919)

Let us not forget the famous statement of anti-nazi theologian and pastor Martin Niemöller:

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Trade Unionist
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.

Similarly, we could say nowadays about prisoners in Russia:

They came for Tablighi Jamaat Muslims, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Tablighi Jamaat Muslim
Then they came for Said Nursi followers, and I did not speak out
Then they came for Jehovah’s Witnesses, and I did not speak out
Because I am not a Jehovah’s Witness
Then they came for Scientologists, and I did not speak out
Because I am not a Scientologist
Then, they came for me, and there was no-one left to speak for me.

Sign our petition online for the release of Dennis Christensen, a Danish JW imprisoned since May in Russia: http://bit.ly/2smGyAl


**Danish Jehovah’s Witness still in jail**

JW in Russia (22.07.2017) - https://www.jw-russia.org/news/17072223-197.html - On 20 July 2017, by decision of the Soviet district court of the city of Orel, Danish citizen Dennis Christensen was left in an investigation cell for another 4 months, until 23 November. The court decided to extend his measure of restraint as a criminal who
committed a "serious violation of law," despite the complete lack of evidence of a crime and of victims.

The court rejected all petitions of the defense, except for one—a public hearing. The judge did not consent to release the believer under house arrest with a bail of one million rubles, insisting that the peaceful believer should be isolated from society, although the investigation is still unable to explain what his crime consists of.

The investigation continues to mislead the court, maintaining that Christensen is the leader of the forbidden local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Orel. In reality, he never even was a part of this organization.

Numerous foreign observers were present in the courtroom, including the vice-consul of Denmark and representatives of news media of Denmark and Germany.

The believer's attorneys are preparing an appeal. (tr. by PDS, posted 24 July 2017)

Oryol Court extends imprisonment of Dennis Christensen

JW.ORG (24.07.2017) - https://www.jw.org/en/news/legal/by-region/russia/court-extends-imprisonment-20170724 - On July 20, 2017, the Sovietskiy District Court of Oryol extended the pretrial detention of Dennis Christensen to November 23, 2017. Mr. Christensen, a Danish citizen and one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, was arrested on May 25 when Federal Security Service agents, along with masked and armed police officers, raided a peaceful religious meeting that he was attending in Oryol.

His attorneys presented a motion for his release on bail and had made arrangements to cover the cost. Yet, the court refused to grant the motion in spite of the fact that he has no criminal record or history of violent behavior.

Mr. Christensen’s extended detention comes on the heels of the July 17 Appellate Chamber decision of Russia’s Supreme Court, which affirmed its earlier ruling to liquidate all of the Witnesses’ legal entities and to ban their activity throughout the country. After more than a decade-long campaign to persecute the Witnesses and cast them as “extremists,” Russian authorities have now succeeded in fabricating a legal veneer to criminalize their religious activities.

Commenting on the overall situation facing the Witnesses in Russia, Kate M. Byrnes, Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. of the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, stated: “We are alarmed by the July 17 Supreme Court verdict to uphold the ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ activities and the dissolution of the Jehovah’s Witnesses Administrative Center and its 395 local religious organizations for supposed ‘extremist activity.’ It is abhorrent that the over 175,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia may now face criminal prosecution for simply practicing their religion. The increasing application of legislation concerning ‘extremism’ to target wrongfully members of peaceful religious minority groups in Russia is troubling.”

The book of a prominent 19th century rabbi labeled as extremist

Rabbi Boruch Gorin, a senior aide to Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar and a key figure within Russia’s Chabad-affiliated Federation of Jewish Communities, called “absurd” Monday’s ruling by a district court in the city to classify as extremist the book “Forcibly Baptized” by Rabbi Marcus Lehmann.

The novel, which deals with a Jew’s determination to retain his faith despite external pressures to renounce it, was added to the federal list of extremist materials of the Ministry of Justice of Russia.

In his scathing rebuke Gorin, a book publisher by profession, said the decision was “a mockery of justice” that belonged in the 19th century. He also suggested it was part of a judicial policy in Sochi to limit the growth of Jewish spiritual life, and went on to compare the move to tendencies to distort the history of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Gorin’s rebuke was the latest and sharpest in a series of comments reflecting discomfort with authorities and the judiciary by a man who serves as the senior spokesman for Lazar. The chief rabbi’s Federation of Jewish Communities has worked closely with the Kremlin on projects related to Jewish life in Russia, which has blossomed under President Vladimir Putin, whose government has allocated land for the construction of many synagogues.

In May, a Moscow-area court ordered a foreign rabbi serving in the city, Joseph Kherson, to leave Russia, citing his illegal work there without a visa. Earlier this year, Rabbi Ari Edelkopf, the emissary to Sochi of Chabad and the Federation of Jewish Communities, was ordered to leave by a local court on unspecified security charges. Gorin strongly objected to the ruling, which a higher court nonetheless affirmed.

"Until now, it seemed like a whim of the Sochi court, now it is the decision of the Justice Ministry. And it is an absolute mockery of the entire law on extremism," Gorin said in a statement.

"To say this book is ‘extremist,’ a book which had dozens of editions, even in Germany in the 19th century, a book about the religious discrimination of Jews in Medieval Europe — that means to ridicule the idea of the fight against extremism."

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**Ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses: Some statements of support**

HRWF (21.07.2017) - Since the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses was confirmed by the Supreme Court on 17 July, the US State Department and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom as well as a number of scholars have condemned this unprecedented denial of religious freedom to about 175 000 people in Russia. Unfortunately, the EU institutions, parliaments of EU member states, well-known human rights NGOs and organizations defending religious freedom have totally kept silent about this serious issue...

Let us not forget the famous statement of anti-nazi theologian and pastor Martin Niemöller:

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Trade Unionist
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.

Similarly, we could say nowadays about prisoners in Russia:

They came for Tablighi Jamaat Muslims, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Tablighi Jamaat Muslim

Then they came for Said Nursi followers, and I did not speak out
Then they came for Jehovah's Witnesses, and I did not speak out
Because I am not a Jehovah's Witness

Then they came for Scientologists, and I did not speak out
Because I am not a Scientologist

Then, they came for me, and there was no-one left to speak for me.

Sign our petition online for the release of Dennis Christensen, a Danish JW imprisoned since May in Russia: http://bit.ly/2smGyAl

US State Department: Respecting Religious Freedom in Russia

Heather Nauert
Department Spokesperson
Washington, DC
July 19, 2017

The Russian Supreme Court's decision this week against the Jehovah's Witnesses is the latest in a disturbing trend of persecution of religious minorities in Russia. We urge the Russian authorities to lift the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses' activities in Russia, to reverse the closing of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, and to release any members of religious minorities that continue to be unjustly detained for so-called "extremist" activities.

We further urge Russia to respect the right of all to exercise the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. All religious minorities should be able to enjoy freedom of religion and assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Russian Federation's constitution.

For video and imagery of the hearing, please use this link:http://bit.ly/2uH4Qck

Daniel Mark, assistant professor of political science, Villanova University; and chairman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), United States

"The Russian Supreme Court's rejection of the Witnesses' appeal is, sadly, not a surprise. Russia remains actively hostile to many independent religious groups and unconcerned with international human rights norms and practices. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which I chair, has recommended to the President and Secretary of State that they designate Russia a 'Country of Particular Concern' because of its systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. This latest development confirms that our 2017 Annual Report recommendation is, unfortunately, well deserved. Russia continues to intensify its religious repression at home while also extending its repressive policies to neighboring states."
Sir Andrew Wood, former British ambassador to Russia (1995-2000), United Kingdom

"The Russian decision to label Jehovah's Witnesses as extremists, just confirmed after an appeal to the country's Supreme Court was rejected, underscores the arbitrary nature of the country's legal system. The Witnesses threaten no one. They have practiced their faith in Tsarist, Soviet and now Federal Russia without injury to anyone. That there are those who disagree with their doctrines is no reason to suppress them, let alone in practice to present them to the Russian public as deserving scorn or even violent rejection. Russia claims to be guided by spiritual values and Christian principles. Not in this case."

Derek H. Davis, former director of the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, United States

"Russia's recent Supreme Court decision banning the Jehovah's Witnesses across Russia is another step backward for an increasingly isolationist and repressive Russia. The Witnesses are one of the most caring, loving, peaceful Christian groups in the world today, yet Russia bans them as 'extremists' because they dare to publish literature that compassionately mentions other groups whom they believe fall short of God's standards. Other nontraditional religious groups in Russia should brace for the possibility of similar treatment as Russia continues to ignore internationally recognized rights of free speech and religious freedom, becoming in the process an increasingly repressive state."

Roman Lunkin, senior researcher, Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia

"So, as the appeal of JW's was rejected by the Supreme Court the situation for the believers became really tragic. Now the activity of every community or group is banned and believers waiting for the confiscation of religious property-that could be the most massive seizure of church buildings since Soviet repressions in the 1920-30s. That ban of JWs is the source of mass fears among the most lawful and numerous communities. The ban of JWs also means that all religion in Russia is terrified and frightened. And that is not a good missionary field for any religious movement Christian or non-Christian, that is a way for new Russian secularization - the continuation of the Soviet secularization in the new circumstances."

Mathew N. Schmalz, associate professor of religious studies, the College of the Holy Cross, United States

"The Jehovah's Witnesses I have known have always been caring and supportive neighbors and good citizens who contribute to the community. Two Jehovah's Witnesses have played especially important roles in my life, supporting me in times of need. Labeling Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist group is not only inaccurate, it is an insult. Religious freedom in Russia is under threat--as it is worldwide. The aim of the Russian government seems to be to target vulnerable minority religious groups, but larger religious groups should be deeply concerned. It is important that all religious groups--regardless of their doctrinal differences--support the efforts of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia to affirm the basic values of freedom of worship and assembly."

George D. Chryssides, former head of religious studies, University of Wolverhampton; honorary research fellow in contemporary religion, York St. John University and University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
"I am sorry, although not surprised, to hear that the Supreme Court has rejected the appeal by Jehovah's Witnesses. Governments do not seem to learn from history. Jehovah's Witnesses have always had the courage of their convictions, and persisted in worshipping and spreading their message, regarding Jehovah's law as having precedence over any laws devised by humans. Jehovah's Witnesses have never been deterred by sanctions, and will continue in their endeavours to propagate their teachings, whatever civil governments and their law courts decide. They are only a minute proportion of Russia's population, and it is difficult to see why the authorities should go to such lengths to stop their activities."

Emily B. Baran, assistant professor of Russian and Eastern European history, Middle Tennessee State University, United States

"Certainly this outcome is hardly surprising. At this point, the Russian state will have to decide how much resources to invest into prosecuting a small community of religious believers that pose no security threat. No matter what it decides, it cannot eliminate Jehovah's Witnesses from Russia. All it can do is push them back to the margins of society, a position they occupied for decades under Soviet rule. Even if Witnesses will continue to exist, however, their designation as "extremists" is likely to have negative repercussions as they go about the daily practice of their faith. Already, we have seen arrests and harassment of Witnesses simply for meeting as a congregation and sharing their faith with others. Such instances will almost certainly increase in the immediate future. In the long run, the European Court of Human Rights will have a chance to hear the case, and its case law on Witnesses is a fairly settled matter. I cannot see the ECHR ruling in favor of Russia. It will be up to Russia to decide whether to ignore the court or accept its decision."

Jehovah's Witnesses are not alone

Ban of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia has become symbol of senseless discrimination against believers

by Roman Lunkin

Religiia I Pravo (19.07.2017) - The Russian government has, for the first time since soviet times, completely banned a specific religious movement and recognized that hundreds of thousands of believers—Russian citizens—are outside the law. The ban came on an extremely symbolic date. On 17 July (the date of remembrance of the murder of the tsarist family) a chamber of the Supreme Court of the RF left without satisfaction an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses and thereby the decision regarding their liquidation in Russia took effect in its entirety. After 20 April (Hitler's date of birth), Jehovah's Witnesses were required to suspend their activity. Now the property of the organization will be confiscated throughout the country and believers will be driven from their houses of worship.

The case of the Jehovah's Witnesses has for long years been the occasion for accusations against Russia of violation of freedom of conscience and of simple common sense. Believers have prepared an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights and it is quite clear that the decision will not be in Russia's favor. On 18 July the European External Action Service condemned the decision of the Russian Supreme Court, noting the basic right, which religious groups should have. This is freedom of assembly, which believers have been deprived of.
The way the authorities have dispensed with this new religious movement, which many Christian confessions view with dread, will not pass without a trace for all of them. First, representatives of the government took advantage of theological differences among various religions and confessions, knowing that nobody especially would support Jehovah's Witnesses, and official representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church will condemn them with joy. Second, the Jehovah's Witnesses became a clear example of the fact that persecution of those who believe differently in Russia is based on an unvarnished lie. Such Orthodox activists as Roman Silantiev or Alexander Dvorkin base discrimination (leading to disruption of relations between religion and the state and inter-religious strife) on myths about "national security" and how spies exist everywhere and poor citizens supposedly do not know who is preaching to them.

The reporting is noteworthy on the program "Vesti-Moskva" on the "Russia" channel of 18 July 2017 about the ban of the Jehovah's Witnesses, where they were accused of proclaiming the truth of their religion and collecting donations, although these are also done by the Orthodox Church. In addition, Jehovah's Witnesses were also accused of forbidding blood transfusion, although this fact was not at all considered in the course of any judicial proceedings. And there are few who are interested in the fact that expert analyses considering brochures of Jehovah's Witnesses to be extremist were no less absurd and grotesque, from the point of view of science. The Supreme Court did not pay any attention to this.

The decision that was adopted about the ban of Jehovah's Witnesses, in the opinion of a member of the Council on Human Rights under the Russian president and attorney of the Slavic Legal Center, Vladimir Riakhovsky, may be called political. Hopes that common sense would prevail were not justified. Vladimir Riakhovsky says that it turns out that nobody considered the consequences of the decision that was adopted. After 17 July it is inevitable, not only that property will be confiscated, which is an unprecedented since soviet times nationalization of church property, but also that there will be criminal cases against members of religious congregations. Believers may wind up in confinement or receive suspended sentences (several families of Jehovah's Witnesses in Taganrog have already been sentenced to suspended terms).

The potential possibility of prison for believers in the country has frightened many other representatives of non-Orthodox Christian confessions, inasmuch as it is they who are most active in the missionary sphere and are most numerous. New religious movements are marginalized and can more easily change the form of their existence in society. Baptists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Adventists immediately became the number one targets for radical "sect fighters." In the first place, following the logic of soviet atheists, all the might of the press and law enforcement system should be turned on Pentecostal Charismatics, since they have the most emotional services and clear theological conceptions of healing.

In connection with the action of the "Yarovaya Law" with respect to evangelical congregations (fines for illegal missionary activity), many churches have proven to be frightened and weakened, and their relations with society and local authorities have turned out to be under threat. Any of the provisions of the Yarovaya Law for control of evangelism and fines for distributing religious literature may affect not only protestants and Catholics but also Orthodox. Within the framework of the Russian Orthodox Church there are many quite diverse conservative and liberal groups, which also want to preach freely. Moreover, they will have full rights to do this in the future. For now the authorities are not applying the law with respect to Orthodox, but that is quite possible.

Ironically, a part of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine wound up in a similar situation, repeating the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. The Verkhovna Rada is considering draft law No. 4511 "On the special status of religious organizations whose
administrative centers are located in a state recognized by the Verkhovna Rada as an aggressor state." An explanatory note to this bill says: "There exists in Ukraine a direct threat of external influence and destructive propaganda, with the use of the religious factor on the part of an aggressor state. In circumstances of external military aggression, this creates the potential danger of the emergence of new foci of conflicting and inter-confessional tensions and inter-religious conflict, and as a consequence this means the emergence of real threats to the national interests, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security of Ukraine." Sect fighters in Russia say approximately the same about Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the event of the adoption of this bill in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UPTs), as part of the Moscow patriarchate, will have to show that the UPTs exists independently from the administrative center, that is, from the RPTs. And that the canonical subordination of the UPTs to the Moscow patriarchate is an internal determination of a religious organization in which the state should not interfere. This is the spiritual tie of the Russian church and the UPTs. Ukrainian deputies, like many Russians also, think that they themselves may carve up the religious field as they wish. In the event it is recognized as an organization with its center in an "aggressor state," the UPTs will have to coordinate its personnel policy with the authorities and will fall under the control of bureaucrats, and those who will not submit apparently will be threatened with criminal cases for lack of "patriotism."

In the course of judicial proceedings in the Russian Supreme Court, the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses did not manage to prove that the center has only a spiritual link with local congregations and the liquidation of the center should not lead to liquidation of all actually independent organizations. And the Jehovah's Witnesses became "non-patriots," who may be put into jail.

Regardless of the situation around Jehovah's Witnesses, the state in Russia, in the person of the police and prosecutors, received after the adoption of the Yarovaya Law the greatest power of government and control over religion without any reasonable explanation, and this is a deep pit for all preachers, each of whom is obliged to consider someone a "heretic," "schismatic," or "sectarian." Such is religious life. (tr. by PDS, posted 19 July 2017)

**Jehovah’s Witnesses banned after the Supreme Court rejects appeal**

USCIRF condemns the ban of Jehovah’s Witnesses

USCIRF (17.07.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2u5CKJ](http://bit.ly/2u5CKJ) - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) denounces the Russian Supreme Court ruling on Monday rejecting an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses against an April decision declaring them as extremist. USCIRF Chairman Daniel Mark commented that "The Supreme Court's decision sadly reflects the government's continued equating of peaceful religious freedom practice to extremism. The Witnesses are not an extremist group, and should be able to practice their faith openly and freely and without government repression."

This ruling clears the way for the Russian government to seize the Jehovah's Witnesses' assets and property throughout the country. In recent years, the Witnesses have been subject to government-sanctioned harassment, have had their legal existence banned, and now will lose their physical presence as their meeting halls, known as Kingdom Halls,
become the property of a government that violates the rights of religious groups as a matter of law.

In an April 20th statement, USCIRF condemned the Russian Supreme Court's decision to ban the Jehovah's Witnesses (http://bit.ly/2pZIrS8).

USCIRF recommended in 2017 for the first time ever that Russia be designated a "country of particular concern" (or CPC) for systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. Chairman Mark added "This latest move by the Russian government confirms that our 2017 Annual Report recommendation is well-deserved. The Russian government is intensifying its crackdown on religious freedom at home while also extending its repressive policies to neighboring states."

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**Jehovah’s Witnesses banned after they lose appeal**

BBC (17.07.2017) - http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40635267 - The ban came into effect after the court rejected an appeal by the religious group against a ruling in April which declared it to be extremist.

The justice ministry had argued that the group distributed pamphlets which incited hatred against other groups.

The group described the ruling as the end of religious freedom in Russia.

The denomination says it has 175,000 members in Russia - a country where it was persecuted during the Stalin era.

An estimated eight million people worldwide are part of the Christian-based movement, best known for going door-to-door looking for new converts.

The ruling means that the group's headquarters near St Petersburg and 395 local chapters will close.

It will be required to hand over all its properties, known as Kingdom Halls, to the Russian government.

The group's Russia spokesman, Yaroslav Sivulsky, said that "religious freedom in Russia is over".

"There were no real facts of any extremism on part of Jehovah's Witnesses. It's all about bad literature and intolerance. Now anyone who studies the Bible can be jailed," he said, quoted by Newsweek magazine.

One pamphlet distributed by the group quoted the novelist Leo Tolstoy as describing the doctrine of the Russian Orthodox Church as superstition and sorcery.

Officials have accused the religion of destroying families, propagating hatred and endangering lives. The Church had also joined calls for a ban.

The Jehovah's Witnesses group was founded in the United States in the 19th century.

They take most of the Bible literally and refuse blood transfusions. They are not seen by traditional Christian Churches as a mainstream denomination. Original Supreme Court ruling came in April this year.
During Joseph Stalin's reign of terror in the Soviet Union it was outlawed and thousands of members were deported to Siberia. Other Christian groups were also persecuted.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, there was a revival of Christianity in Russia and the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses was lifted in 1991. But attitudes hardened again and in 2004 it was accused of recruiting children and preventing believers from accepting medical assistance.

Human rights group Sova has argued that an "official repressive campaign" has been conducted against the movement for years and many of their members have been physically attacked.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are expected to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, but Russia may well ignore any verdict in their favour.

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**Mormonism’s Russia dilemma: How to grow a fledgling faith with missionaries who can’t do missionary work**

By PEGGY FLETCHER STACK


Halfway through her Mormon mission, Sariah Warnick had to stop being what she was: a missionary.

No more knocking on doors in a quixotic quest for converts. No more handing out pamphlets on the street about her religion's birth here on Earth or its views of life after death. No more doctrinal discussions about prayer, prophets or priesthood in the homes of would-be members.

In fact, in a move as symbolic as it was mandatory, "Sister Warnick" could not wear her iconic black name tag identifying her as a missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Although she remained every bit the missionary on the inside, on the outside this perky proselytizer from Provo was now officially a "volunteer" serving in the Utah-based faith's Russia Samara Mission.

Why the change? A year ago this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a stringent anti-terrorism law that severely limited outreach by any religions, save for the Russian Orthodox Church.

Moscow's strong arm not only tied the hands of youthful Mormons serving across Russia but those of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists and Buddhists, Muslims and Mennonites, Seventh-day Adventists and Scientologists.

Built on a fear of foreigners, the Yarovaya Law, as it is known, forbids "preaching, praying, disseminating religious materials, and even answering questions about religion outside of officially designated sites," according to a 2017 report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

The clampdown "effectively criminalized all private religious speech not sanctioned by the state," the report says. "The Jehovah's Witnesses stand on the verge of a nationwide ban, and innocent Muslims were tried on fabricated charges of terrorism and extremism.
... [S]ecurity forces carried out arrests, kidnappings, and disappearances of persons suspected of any links to 'nontraditional' Islam with impunity.

But no one is paying more attention to the law's fallout than top Mormon brass more than 5,500 miles away in Salt Lake City.

Earlier this month, the Utah-based faith reduced its missions in the country from seven to six, merging Vladivostok into the Novosibirsk mission. The scaled-back system divvies the 300 missionaries into the half-dozen remaining groups — far below the average mission size of 150 to 200 — to cover Russia's vast landscape and support the 25,000 members there (amid an overall population of 144 million).

Members and volunteers (formerly known as missionaries) carefully heed the government's decree. A few volunteers have been accused of illegal proselytizing, though no official action was taken against them.

"While we don't always agree with the restrictions or regulations placed on our volunteers and missionaries," says LDS Church spokesman Doug Andersen, "we always abide by those rules and teach our volunteers and missionaries to do so as well."

Indeed, one of Mormonism's Articles of Faith declares that Latter-day Saints believe in "being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."

Andersen reiterates that sentiment, saying that the church "encourages its members to be loyal citizens in the country where they reside and to be engaged in service to their country."

That hardly keeps top LDS leaders from worrying about their Russian flock and American-born volunteers or from wondering: "Could our church face the same fate as the Jehovah's Witnesses?"

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A superpower falls, a door opens • Though early LDS missionaries made short forays into Russia in the 19th and early-20th centuries (one convert fled the country after the 1917 revolution), Mormonism didn't really get rolling there until the early 1990s. That's when Russia officially recognized the church, timed to coincide with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performing in Moscow's famed Bolshoi Theater.

By the end of 1991, the atheistic Soviet Union had collapsed, and citizens long deprived of openly practicing their faith began asserting their religious identity — mostly in the long-suppressed Russian Orthodox Church, now closely associated with Russian nationalism.

At the same time, many evangelicals and other missionaries saw the opening and sprinted across the globe to the land of their former enemies, seeing Russia as fertile ground for converts and creating competition for souls between Orthodoxy and the newcomers.

Mormonism, though much smaller and lesser known than other faiths, was among the sprinters.

"To the extent that Russians even know the LDS Church," says Elizabeth Clark, a law professor at LDS Church-owned Brigham Young University, "they tend to group it with Protestant beliefs or know only the references to Mormons in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's works."

And native believers, she adds, view all Protestant religions as "new and nontraditional, even though some have been in the country since the early 1700s."

The Rev. Thomas Reese, chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, says most Russians regard all outside sects as "strange" at best and "destructive" at worst, threatening to disrupt social harmony and serving as "agents of Western imperialism."
Roman Lunkin, a sociologist specializing in religious freedom, first met Mormon missionaries in the 1990s on the streets of Moscow. Later, he brought interns from BYU to work in the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, interviewed LDS officials for articles and attended an open house at the Mormon temple in Kiev, Ukraine.

"I was impressed by the politeness and smiles of missionaries, how they are devoted to their mission," Lunkin, who is not Mormon, writes in an email. "Certainly, I felt some religious feelings in the temple because of its beauty and solemnness, and I understood that members of the church want to live in a pure space like in heaven."

Lunkin, senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, observed that his country's converts were attracted to Mormonism's "attempts to create the absolute family happiness."

They are drawn, he says, to "the image of the American dream in Mormonism and [its] connection with heroic paths of American history — the journey from Illinois to Utah."

As Russians joined the U.S.-based faith, however, they often faced ostracism from loved ones and suspicion from other churches.

Missionaries routinely were hauled in for questioning by police, constantly threatened with yanking away their visas or deportation for minor offenses.

A Russian news channel broadcast photos of Mormon undergarments, worn as a reminder of religious covenants, says Andrew Dutson, a Kearns resident who served in the Yekaterinburg Mission from January 2014 to December 2015. The station also showcased controversial snippets about church founder Joseph Smith and Mormon history.

The public had heard all the most scandalous material, Dutson says. "So members were judged pretty harshly by their family and friends for joining."

 Outsiders often see the church as a "U.S. agent," says Yaroslav Rizhkov, a district president who oversees a number of Mormon congregations in Novosibirsk. "Some members became inactive in 2012 because they did not like what Mitt Romney would say about Russia, and they felt weird being members of the same church with him."

Romney, a Mormon and the 2012 Republican presidential nominee, once labeled Russia America's "No. 1 geopolitical foe."

Because of such public perceptions, Rizhkov says, it has become nearly impossible to get permission from government officials to build a new LDS meetinghouse.

But the inner peace found in a newfound faith sometimes makes up for the outside strains.

Mormonism "brought so much happiness into my life," says Galya Risner, who joined in Moscow at age 16. "Once I realized who I am — not only a lone teen without friends, whose family doesn't understand my religious interest — I am a beloved daughter of Heavenly Father, and since that moment, I was lonely no more."

Now in her 30s, she resents Russia's treatment of Ukraine and says it hinders her ability to visit the LDS temple there.

Even so, Risner and Rizhkov say the year-old anti-proselytizing law has forged a greater bond between members and missionaries.

"The work goes forward," Risner says. "We have several investigators each Sunday, and our ward keeps growing."

Alexey Vargin attends a tiny LDS branch of 25 in Yaroslavl, about three hours from Moscow.
"We try to teach our members to be independent in following Christ and doing their callings," he says. "Most of those who are active in life also are active in the [lay, member-led] church and do their callings."

He does note, though, that there are "a lot of members who depend on leaders and missionaries and cannot do anything by their own initiative."

Vargin, who served a senior Mormon mission with his wife, misses helping the missionaries "when they had the freedom to teach and talk with people everywhere."

Now, he has to "find work for them just to help them be busy."

Vargin recalls ruefully a moment when his former mission president from Salt Lake City promised the Latter-day Saints in Russia that the church would grow dramatically.

"I believe in it," he says hopefully, "but sometimes it is hard to see the future when the present is not nice."

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Going alone • Independent LDS demographer Matt Martinich, who tracks Mormon statistics worldwide, does not predict major growth in Russia in the coming years.

"The closure of the Russia Vladivostok Mission appeared to be very sudden and spontaneous," the Colorado-based researcher says. "Otherwise, I anticipate more missions in Russia being consolidated due to missionary visa problems, low receptivity and the small number of congregations that these missions service."

Russia has some 103 wards and branches, but Martinich points out that many Mormon missions in much smaller areas have "as many congregations as the entire country of Russia."

In the law's wake, LDS growth in Russia has been mostly flat, says Andersen, the church spokesman, noting that some areas have seen baptisms decline.

What if LDS Church headquarters pulls foreign-born missionaries from the country altogether or stops sending them there in the first place? Would the faith wither without that support?

"There are very few volunteers [missionaries] serving as branch presidents in Russia," Andersen says. For instance, Dutson, the former missionary from Kearns, oversaw such a congregation for a time in Siberia.

"A small number of congregations ... are somewhat dependent upon volunteers," Andersen says, "but the vast majority of the congregations would function without problems if there were no volunteers in the country."

He hopes, of course, such a rupture doesn't happen.

"What would be lost is an opportunity for the volunteers and local members to work together to serve others, worship together and strengthen bonds of friendship and respect," he says. "We believe that our volunteers bless the people of Russia and bless Russia itself."

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Parallels and paradoxes • The Jehovah's Witness movement was launched in the United States about a half-century after Mormonism, which formed in 1830. It also sends out pairs of proselytizers to knock on doors and distribute doctrinal tracts.

Unlike the LDS Church — whose missionaries serve for a limited time, typically two years for young men and 18 months for young women — all Witnesses are expected to spend some hours every month looking for converts.

Though similar, the two faith groups are treated differently by the Kremlin — partly because the Witnesses oppose military service.
"The Jehovah's Witnesses have been in the crosshairs of the Russian security services since World War II," says Clark, the BYU scholar. "The KGB was quite paranoid about the comparatively rapid influx of Jehovah's Witnesses after the post-World War II Soviet annexation of territory, even though their absolute numbers were still quite small. At that time, thousands of them were rounded up and deported to Siberia on cattle cars."

In the past couple of years, Witnesses "have continued to be the prime target of state repression, with numerous arrests of members, the banning of their literature as 'extremist' and liquidation of local Kingdom Halls," she says, "all this a few years prior to the national ban that the Supreme Court upheld earlier this year."

The vehicle for this continued persecution has been the "anti-extremism laws," Clark says, "which is highly ironic — given that Jehovah's Witnesses are pacifists."

Marjorie Castle, a political scientist at the University of Utah, speculates that Mormonism may be able to dodge the Jehovah's Witnesses' plight partly because of its structure.

"The LDS Church is far more centralized and hierarchical than any of these other religious groups operating in Russia," she says, "and this may allow it to adapt to challenging conditions with a coherent policy and not be undone by the enthusiasm of individuals."

Whether Mormons or other faith groups will be singled out for additional strictures, Castle says, "rises and falls with Putin."

When the Russian leader "is weaker, when he faces greater domestic challenges or international setbacks, or when the Russian population is facing economic hardships," she says, "we would expect to see crackdowns intensify."

He could focus even more hostility toward U.S.-based faiths, using them as a "scapegoat," Castle says, and who could be "more clearly American than Mormons?"

For his part, Lunkin does not anticipate any further government slaps at the LDS Church.

"The next U.S. ambassador in Russia could be a member," he says, given that President Donald Trump is eyeing former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. as his pick for the post. "But there always will be some feature stories on TV about the spies in the church and some cases against foreign missionaries just to show the place of the LDS Church in Russian religious hierarchy."

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A new missionary model • Last year's law forced Warnick and her fellow Mormon volunteers to adopt a do-it-yourself approach.

"We had to be creative," says Warnick, who returned in February to her Utah County home, "in thinking of ways to fill our time."

These young Mormon ambassadors got permission to attend plays, museums, concerts and ballets — generally off-limits to full-time missionaries — often with a church member in tow.

They also worked closely with homegrown Latter-day Saints who are allowed to share their faith, sponsoring game nights at Mormon meetinghouses. They baked goodies for fellow believers and less-active members, being careful to drop them off at the correct address, Warnick recalls. "Just knocking on a door of a nonmember by accident could get us in trouble."

She and her companion volunteers spent the rest of their time doing humanitarian work, cleaning nursing homes and retirement centers. Once, they helped remodel a center for the blind.

Then a funny thing happened. Simply trying to be friends with people was more "effective," Warnick says, than formal proselytizing.
Because preaching was outlawed — except at the chapel itself — these youthful volunteers would just talk to people, many of whom wanted to know what the Americans were doing there and why they spoke the language so fluently.

They couldn't talk directly about their religion, so they would respond, "We are here for our church."

If their listeners posed specific follow-up questions — about, say, the name of the church and its beliefs — the volunteers were allowed to provide short answers.

Many Russians thought "we were cool Americans," Warnick recalls fondly. "They were more willing to talk to us, so we got to know them on a more normal basis. It was a lot more natural."

Pitching LDS doctrine and the Book of Mormon, with its account of Christ coming to the Americas, to strangers on the street or on a doorstep was, frankly, awkward.

Imagine, if the roles were reversed, meeting a pair of conservatively dressed 20-somethings from Russia on a U.S. street or doorstep who had a "weird accent" and trying to give you a book about a Jesus sighting in their country, she says. "We'd think they should go back to Russia and we'd stay away."

Immersing herself in Russia's arts, history and culture was an unexpected bonus for Warnick, but she believed she was called by God to spread the Mormon gospel, not to spend 18 months on a study-abroad excursion.

This friendship-and-service missionary model — minus the name tag — seems like a way to satisfy that desire.

Unless Russia bans that method, too.

Editor's note • Paul Huntsman, the owner and publisher of The Salt Lake Tribune, is a brother of Jon Huntsman Jr.

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**Russian Jehovah’s Witnesses revive Soviet-Era house churches but with laptops and kindles**

By Paul Goble


The Russian Supreme Court in April declared that the Jehovah's Witnesses were an "extremist" organization, prohibited its missionary activities, and declared that the Witnesses’ 396 Kingdom Halls were to be handed over to the state. The Witnesses have appealed that decision and a final hearing on their case will be take place on Monday.

Because of the appeal, the government has not yet implemented all the aspects of the original decision, and Russian Jehovah's Witnesses are hopeful for a positive result, either there or later at the European Court of Human Rights. But the Russian government action has already had a serious impact on the community.

Taking their cue from the Russian government, Russians have attacked Witnesses more often—with the number of such attacks up by 750 percent between the month before and the month after the court decision — and expressed more hostility toward the Witnesses — almost 80 percent of Russians said they did not approve of the group according to one recent poll.
Not all Russians have fallen victim to this official campaign. According to a report in *Novaya gazeta* today, for example, one policeman asked Witnesses who continue to engage in missionary activity to do so somewhere other than on his beat but then relented and allowed them to go ahead.

More seriously, Jehovah’s Witnesses deprived of access to their Kingdom Halls have created house churches that resemble in some ways the underground religious groups that existed in Soviet times. But they are doing so with many modern touches: many rely on laptops and even read the Bible on kindles.

Some Russian Witnesses are thinking about emigrating given the crackdown against them in Russia today, but most say that they “do not want to leave the country because of the ban. We love Russia. We love the Russian language. [And] we love these people,” the Witnesses say.

In the words of one Russian Witness, “Witnesses don’t take up arms, they do not participate in wars and meetings. We will struggle but by purely legal methods. I don’t understand why they are banning us. But it seems to me,” he said, “that those who are doing the banning don’t know the answer either.”

What is obvious, however, is that Vladimir Putin has chosen to attack religious groups that he believes Russians won’t defend and that the West will not stand up for, going after the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Pentecostals, and thus create precedents for moving against denominations as well.

While some in Russia and in the West have spoken out in defense of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, not enough have, perhaps because they do not yet fully understand how serious the challenge Putin is posing by his campaign against the Jehovah’s Witnesses, first to members of that denomination, then to followers of other religions and finally to all people of good will.

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**Changing administrative punishments for public events**

*Prosecutions under Administrative Code Article 20.2 for exercising freedom of religion and belief in public fell in 2016 as officials turned to "anti-missionary" Article 5.26 (Parts 3, 4, and 5), which came into force in July 2016. Article 5.26 offers far higher financial penalties.*

By Victoria Arnold

Forum 18 (05.07.2017) - [http://bit.ly/2tP6vMw](http://bit.ly/2tP6vMw) - Individuals continue to be prosecuted for exercising their freedom of religion and belief in public, but the legal mechanism for doing so appears to be changing, Forum 18 has found. Officials are turning less to Article 20.2 of the Administrative Code and more to Article 5.26 (Parts 3, 4, and 5), which came into force in July 2016. These Parts of Article 5.26 offer far higher financial penalties.

Administrative Code Article 20.2, which punishes "violations of the established order of conducting public events", has frequently been used against individuals and communities whose beliefs require them to share the tenets of their faith in public. Under Part 1 and Part 5, individuals may be fined 10,000 to 20,000 Roubles or sentenced to compulsory labour of up to 40 hours; under Part 2, individuals may receive a fine of 20,000 to
30,000 Roubles, compulsory labour of up to 50 hours, or up to 10 days in jail. Fines for organisations under Part 1 are 50,000 to 100,000 Roubles; under Part 2, 70,000 to 200,000 Roubles.

The number of prosecutions under Article 20.2 which reached court in 2016, however, shows a marked decrease on the previous year, particularly after the introduction of the new "anti-missionary" law in July 2016.

The "anti-missionary" law and its associated punishments under Administrative Code Article 5.26 (Parts 3, 4, and 5) now appear to be becoming law enforcement's primary means of controlling and penalising the expression of freedom of religion outside (and sometimes even within) the confines of places of worship. The maximum fines for both individuals and organisations under Article 5.26, Part 4 and for foreign individuals under Part 5 are much higher than under Article 20.2, Parts 1, 2 and 5.

Article 20.2 prosecutions in 2016 continued to result in heavy punishments, including fines of nearly two-thirds the average monthly wage and twice the average monthly pension, and, in one case, an eight-day jail sentence for sitting on a pavement singing religious mantras (see below). Particularly when appeals (from both sides) and re-trials are taken into account, cases can be costly in terms of time, effort, and money, even if defendants are ultimately exonerated.

**Article 20.2**

Administrative Code Article 20.2 is linked to the Demonstrations Law and punishes the "violation of the established procedure for organising or conducting a gathering, meeting, demonstration, procession or picket". Its eight parts cover a variety of offences, but only Parts 1, 2, and 5 are known by Forum 18 to have been used against people who exercise freedom of religion or belief.

As well as individuals promoting their religious beliefs, members of public associations and political parties (such as Communists marking Lenin's birthday), political demonstrators (such as those involved in anti-corruption protests on 26 March and 12 June 2017), and individuals protesting against social problems (such as rising utility costs or the introduction of new road tolls for lorry drivers) may also face charges under Article 20.2.

Eight Part 2 cases and four Part 5 cases in 2016 were based on a law enforcement interpretation of much outdoor religious activity as "picketing" (deemed unlawful if carried out by more than one person without notifying the authorities). Jehovah's Witnesses, upon whom the burden of such cases principally falls, do not consider their actions to be picketing, but "religious service" and therefore do not think to inform the authorities.

Despite legal changes in 2012 and 2014 which give judges concrete grounds for dismissing cases in which police misapply the law, the situation remains confusing. In December 2012, responding to an appeal by two Jehovah's Witnesses, the Constitutional Court ruled that notification of an event need only be submitted if the authorities are required to provide health and safety measures. The Religion Law was amended in 2014 to clarify in which places religious events may be freely held.

Nevertheless, police and prosecutors persist in bringing charges against individuals for publicly exercising freedom of religion and belief, often on a very small scale. In 2016, Forum 18 found ten prosecutions (five based on the same investigation – see below) which should not have been initiated in light of these legal changes. All but one of these defendants were acquitted by judges who cited the 2012 Constitutional Court ruling and/or the 2014 amendments in support of their decisions.
28 prosecutions in 2016

From an analysis of available court records, Forum 18 found 28 prosecutions to punish exercising freedom of religion or belief under Article 20.2 Parts 1, 2 and 5 in 2016 (all of individuals). Seven of these were under Part 1, 11 under Part 2, and 10 under Part 5.

In 2015, Forum 18 found 122 such prosecutions (including three of communities).

Overall, it appears that prosecutions in general under Article 20.2 (both religious and non-religious) have remained fairly stable, with a total of 387 in 2016 and 468 in 2015 under Parts 1, 2, and 5 (for all eight parts of Article 20.2, these figures were 843 cases in 2016 and 748 in 2015). Only in religion-related cases can a noticeable decline be observed.

There also appears to have been a decline towards the end of the year, with 10 cases reaching court between January and April and 13 between May and August, but only 5 between September and December.

These 2016 prosecutions led to 18 convictions (15 fines, one 8-day jail term, and three 20-hour community service sentences) and 11 acquittals (before appeals). Ten of the 18 convictions were challenged in higher courts. Only two of these appeals were successful. An appeal judge reduced fines in a further two cases. Police and prosecutors also appealed against five acquittals, but none of these was overturned.

In 2016, Forum 18 found eleven cases involving members of the Society for Krishna Consciousness (derived from six separate investigations), ten of Jehovah's Witnesses (also from six investigations), one of an Evangelical Protestant, one of a Falun Gong adherent, one of a Baptist, and four of Christians of unspecified denomination.

These figures show a substantial decrease in prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses, of which Forum 18 found 83 in 2015, and Baptists (9 cases in 2015). Hare Krishna and Evangelical Protestant prosecutions remain consistent (nine and three respectively in 2015).

Gender and geography

Of the 26 individuals known to have been prosecuted (two of them twice), eight were women and 18 were men.

Prosecutions took place in 13 of the Russian Federation's 83 federal subjects (not counting Crimea and Sevastopol). Rostov and Tver Regions each saw four cases come to court, with three each in Kaliningrad and Magadan Regions and two each in Murmansk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Zabaikalsk and Primorye Regions and the Republic of Bashkortostan. The Tula and Orenburg Regions each saw one prosecution, as did Samara (though this was later transferred to Tver).

In addition to the prosecutions found by Forum 18, similar cases have been brought in Russian-annexed Crimea.

Reasons for change

The decrease in prosecutions for exercising freedom of religion or belief under Article 20.2 can be largely accounted for by the massive decline in prosecutions under this Article of Jehovah's Witnesses, who now face far more serious penalties (as well as halting of worship meetings, threats and vandalism) following the April 2017 ban on their activities.
In general, law enforcement attention towards Jehovah's Witnesses intensified throughout 2016 and into 2017. Prosecutions have increased under Administrative Code Article 20.29, which punishes "production or mass distribution of extremist materials included in the published Federal List of Extremist Materials, as well as their production or storage for mass distribution"; several communities have been liquidated; and the Supreme Court ruled on 20 April 2017 that the Jehovah's Witness Administrative Centre is an "extremist organisation" and all Jehovah's Witness activity in Russia should be halted.

However, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia now rarely engage in their traditional practice of standing in the street or parks, alone or in pairs, with trolleys of religious literature, a then spokesperson Ivan Belenko told Forum 18 in December 2016. Such activity frequently attracted charges of "unlawful picketing" under Article 20.2.

This, Belenko explained, is for two reasons: firstly, there is little literature left to offer, as so much has been banned as "extremist" and all imports have been impounded since March 2015; secondly, an amendment to the Demonstrations Law in March 2016 introduced a requirement to notify the authorities of a one-person "picket" if it made use of "prefabricated collapsible structures" such as stands and trolleys. Notification has not usually been necessary for one-person pickets.

Prosecutors and police initiated Article 20.29 prosecutions of Jehovah's Witnesses in 2016 primarily after law enforcement raids on Kingdom Halls and believers' homes, Forum 18 notes, or after they found links to the banned jw.org website on individuals' social media pages. Only a handful of Article 20.29 prosecutions now arise from the apprehension of Jehovah's Witnesses offering literature in public places.

Courts also declared five Jehovah's Witness communities "extremist organisations" in 2016 (in Stariy Oskol, Belgorod, and Elista in February, Oryol in June, and Birobidzhan in October). If former members of these communities had engaged in any public expression of their faith, they may have been liable to criminal prosecution under Criminal Code Article 282.2 (organising or participating in the activities of a liquidated extremist organisation).

Jehovah's Witnesses now face heightened danger of prosecution (both administrative and criminal) since the Supreme Court ordered their Administrative Centre to be liquidated as "extremist" on 20 April 2017.

Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the Moscow-based SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, attributes the decline in Article 20.2 prosecutions of religious believers "partly" to the introduction of the so-called "missionary law". This amendment to the Religion Law, which came into force on 20 July 2016, imposes restrictions on where and by whom beliefs may be shared, and prohibits imprecisely defined "missionary activity" by anyone without written permission from an officially recognised religious organisation or group, and by religious organisations not displaying their full legal names.

"Often, the police simply choose the law [under which to prosecute] at random", Verkhovsky commented to Forum 18 on 4 July, "and the emergence of options leads to a redistribution."

Lawyer Sergei Chugunov of the Slavic Centre for Law and Justice also confirmed to Forum 18 that the majority of such religion-related cases now attract charges under Article 5.26 instead of Article 20.2.

*Same "offence", different penalty*
Administrative Code Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 – which came into force in July 2016 - punish violations of the "anti-missionary" law by Russian citizens and foreigners respectively (Part 3 fines religious organisations for the specific offence of not displaying their full official names during "missionary activity").

Many of the prosecutions so far under Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 have been for activities which also fall under the scope of Article 20.2, such as the distribution of religious literature, open-air services and processions, and events held in rented premises.

In total, Forum 18 found 25 cases brought to court under Article 5.26, Parts 4 and 5 between 20 July and 31 December 2016 (five involving Jehovah's Witnesses, five Pentecostals, 5 other Evangelical Protestants, two Hare Krishna devotees, two Seventh-day Adventists, two Baptists, two Buddhists, and one village elder in relation to a Pentecostal case). At least 14 of these featured activities could have been prosecuted under Article 20.2.

Of the 28 prosecutions under Article 20.2, Parts 1, 2, and 5 found by Forum 18 in 2016, 20 took place in the seven months to the end of July 2016 (when the "anti-missionary" amendment began to take effect), but only eight in the five months thereafter, with none at all found in October and November (the two in December involved the same person and were based on events he held in June).

Only one case so far is known to have involved charges under both Article 5.26 and Article 20.2. Andrei Puchkov, a Hare Krishna devotee in Tver, organised a procession in the city in October 2016, notifying the local authorities as required by law. Prosecutors accused him of both conducting "missionary activity" without written authorisation from a religious organisation or group (Article 5.26, Part 4), and "violating the established order of a public event" by carrying out "missionary activity" instead of the festival of Indian culture described in the notification (Article 20.2, Part 1). Puchkov was found guilty of the first alleged offence on 10 January 2017 and of the second on 22 February 2017.

**Example cases under Article 20.2**

Hare Krishna devotee Nikolai Kryukov received an eight-day jail sentence (under Article 20.2, Part 2) at Magadan City Court on 28 July 2016 for sitting outside a city centre shop and singing the mantra "Hare Krishna", without having notified the city mayor's office.

According to the written verdict, seen by Forum 18, a passer-by had called the police to report a group of people "performing religious rites and agitation in the streets of Magadan". The witness claimed the men were trying to sell books, and that when he refused to take one on the grounds that he was of a different faith, Kryukov had told him all other religions were a lie.

Kryukov himself argued in court that he and his friends had made no impositions on anybody, had not handed out any literature, and had aimed only to bring "joy and happiness". Judge Yelena Sidorovich, however, noted that this was a repeat "offence" and decided on detention as a deterrent.

Kryukov's companions, Oleg Kim and Vladimir Gerasimenko, were charged under Article 20.2, Part 5. Judge Ilona Cherkasova acquitted the two men on 23 August 2016, however. She concluded that they had not violated any of the restrictions on participants in a public event (the offence covered by Part 5), and noted that the police had based the charges on the lack of notification (Part 2), for which Kim and Gerasimenko could not be held responsible as participants.

Kryukov and another Hare Krishna adherent, Dmitry Moskvichyov, had already been detained for six days for a similar alleged offence in Magadan in August 2015. They had
no opportunity to organise proper legal support and were refused a vegetarian diet for three days. Gerasimenko, Kim, and a fifth man, Yevgeny Fedoreyev, who were also involved in the incident, were later charged in their home regions and fined.

Judgments continue to be inconsistent in 2016 prosecutions, with different outcomes in very similar cases heard in different courts or before different judges. Jehovah's Witnesses E. Shevchenko and Ye. Zherebilova, for example, were charged under Article 20.2, Part 2, with "unlawful picketing" for displaying religious literature on information stands in a park in the Rostov Region town of Shakhta. Police and prosecutor's office staff carrying out an "anti-extremism inspection" allegedly observed that the two women were standing only 25 metres apart (the minimum distance permitted between one-person pickets, which require no notification, is 50 metres). Judge Lidiya Cherepanova of Shakhta City Court found them guilty on 4 April 2016 and fined them each 20,000 Roubles.

Jehovah's Witnesses Oleg Shekhanin and T. Shekhanina, however, were also charged under Article 20.2, Part 2, with "unlawful picketing" for standing together with religious literature displayed on a trolley on the river embankment in Kaliningrad – but were acquitted. Judge Irina Kuzovleva of the city's Leningrad District Court decided on 22 January 2016 that the defendants "did not take an active part in the event by expressing opinions or making particular demands, and did not create a threat to public order or public security".

Cases can also be long and complex, often with divergent outcomes for different defendants in the same case. Five Hare Krishna devotees were charged under Article 20.2, Part 5, for singing songs using amplification equipment at a bus stop in Tver and offering religious literature to passers-by. In the case materials, cited in court verdicts seen by Forum 18, police described this as a "public voluntary action".

One man, Pavel Shiriyayev, appeared in court in his home town of Samara on 7 April 2016 and received a fine of 10,000 Roubles. On appeal at Samara Regional Court on 21 June, his case was sent back for re-examination; at re-trial on 30 June at the original Krasnoglinsk District Court, it was transferred to Tver, where the alleged offence took place. Shiriyayev was eventually acquitted by Judge Olga Baranova of Tver's Central District Court on 2 November, on the grounds that the "event" had not threatened public order or safety and therefore had not required notification under the 2012 Constitutional Court ruling (for which, in any case, Shiriyayev, as a participant, could not be held responsible).

Shiriyayev's fellow defendants faced a range of experiences in the court system. O. Gordeyeva was also fined 10,000 Roubles at Tver's Kalinin District Court on 8 April. Her initial appeal was unsuccessful, but a subsequent supervisory appeal resulted in her case, too, being sent back for re-examination and transferred to the city's Central District Court for jurisdictional reasons. She was acquitted by Judge Lyudmila Fokina, who also cited the 2012 Constitutional Court ruling and pointed out that "public voluntary action" was not a recognised category of public event.

Judge Aleksei Mikhailov found A. Chechelev guilty at Tver's Central District Court on 12 May and fined him 10,000 Roubles. Chechelev did not appeal.

Judge Fokina also acquitted I. Ivanov on 30 June, citing the 2012 Constitutional Court ruling and the constitutional and international right to share one's beliefs.

The fifth Hare Krishna devotee involved in the incident, Anastasiya Puchkova, did not come to trial. Judge Fokina returned her case to police twice (on 3 February and 2 June 2016) for technical reasons (including the fact that "public voluntary action" was not a
category of public event recognised under the Demonstrations Law). It was not lodged a third time.

Although only one of the five ended up with a punishment, the others all had to undergo protracted and complicated court proceedings which did not conclude for many months after their alleged offence, which took place on 19 December 2015.