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RUSSIA: Religious persecution and issues – Jan 01.15

RUSSIA: Religious persecution and issues – Jan 01.15 – Bimonthly news digest

13.01.2023 – The Court of Appeal canceled the recovery of 931 million rubles from the Catholic Archdiocese

Sova Center – On January 11, 2023, the Ninth Arbitration Court of Appeal overturned the decision of the Moscow Arbitration Court to recover 931 million rubles from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow in favor of the

Affordable Housing company.

The decision of the Court of Appeal came into force from the date of its adoption.

Recall that the company represented the interests of a religious organization in the process of returning buildings in Milyutinsky Lane and demanded remuneration for its services in accordance with the contract, but the archdiocese refused to pay it. In October 2022, the Moscow Arbitration Court ordered the archdiocese to pay the required amount, but the appeal instance overturned this decision and ordered Affordable Housing LLC to pay the Catholics legal costs in the amount of three thousand rubles.

12.01.2023 – The Supreme Court of Russia partially satisfied the appeal of four Jehovah's Witnesses from Omsk. One of them has already served a full prison term for his faith.

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/120938.html>

On January 11, 2023, the Supreme Court of Russia considered the cassation complaint of Jehovah's Witnesses against the guilty verdict in the extremism case handed down on November 30, 2020 in Omsk and satisfied it in terms of revising the sentence served by **Sergey Polyakov**.

The Pervomaisky District Court of the city of Omsk more than 2 years ago sentenced Polyakov to 3 years in a penal colony, and 3 women were given a suspended sentence: **Anastasia Polyakova** 2.5 years, **Gaukhar Bektemirova**—2 years and 3 months, **Dinara Dyusekeyeva**—2 years. In May 2021, the appeal approved the verdict, and a year later this decision was upheld by the Eighth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Kemerovo. In November 2022, Sergey Polyakov was released after serving his full term in a colony.

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12.01.2023 – The Court in Kyzyl sentenced Anatoliy Senin to six years suspended sentence for his faith.

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/120935.html>

Six years suspended sentence—with such a sentence on January 12, 2023, the consideration of the case of Anatoliy Senin in the Kyzyl city court ended. Judge Vyacheslav Kyzyl-ool considered the discussion of the Bible among fellow believers to be an organization of extremist activity.

The starting point for the criminal prosecution of the believer was the searches in Kyzyl in January 2021. Then **Anatoliy Senin** was detained, and then sent under house arrest for 56 days. The believer was accused of organizing the activities of an extremist organization. Investigator of the RF IC Olchi Ohemchik considered the broadcasting of video recordings of religious content, the inducement to pray, sing religious songs and study the Bible as extremist actions.

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12.01.2023 – Cassation sent the case of 71-year-old Lyudmila Salikova, for a new appeal

Link to full text in Russian –
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/120936.html>

On January 11, 2022, the Seventh Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Chelyabinsk overturned the appeal ruling against **Lyudmila Salikova**. An appeal against a verdict for the faith of a veteran of the nuclear industry and a veteran of labor will be considered by a different

composition of the Court of Appeal.

“If the courts had correctly applied the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, they would have acquitted me,” Lyudmila told the cassation court. “Communicating, reading and studying the Bible with my fellow believers, singing songs, praying, as well as telling others about my Bible-based beliefs, the investigation charged me with a crime.”

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12.01.2023 – The deep Constitution of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church

Byu Law – Mikhail Antonov is a professor of law associated with the Law Faculty of the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg.

At the formal level, the Russian Constitution provides a standard set of antidiscrimination guarantees that are similar to many constitutions of Western countries. It proclaims Russia to be a democratic Rechtsstaat (Article 1) and enumerates a solid list of inalienable rights and freedoms in Chapter 2. In particular, Article 13 guarantees ideological diversity and prohibits any state ideology; Article 14 establishes that Russia is a secular state in which there shall be no state or obligatory religion and that religious associations are separated from the State and equal before the law.

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12.01.2023 – Crimean imam sentenced to 17 years in prison

Sova center – On January 12, 2023, the Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don found Crimean Imam Raif

Fevziev guilty in the case of involvement in the radical Islamic party Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is recognized as a terrorist organization in Russia. He was sentenced to 17 years in prison, the first three years the imam will spend in prison, the rest of the term in a strict regime colony. As an additional punishment, restriction of freedom for one and a half years was appointed.

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11.01.2023 – Religious repression in Putin's Russia

Providence – While religion was formally abolished under the USSR, under Putin it has been repressed. Consequently, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom identified Russia as one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom.

In December 2021, just two months before the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's supreme Court dissolved the non-governmental agency (NGO) Memorial, which is the oldest and most respected human rights organization in Russia and an outspoken supporter of religious freedom. Among other activities, the group was compiling a list of those imprisoned for alleged offenses related to religion. The dissolution of Memorial was seen as a warning to other activists, that they too could be prosecuted for speaking out against Putin's government.

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11.01.2023 – The Moscow Arbitration Court ordered the Catholic Archdiocese to pay a debt to a firm that helped return buildings

Sova center – On October 5, 2022, it became known that the Moscow Arbitration Court ordered the Roman Catholic

Archdiocese of the Mother of God in Moscow to pay about 930 million rubles to the Affordable Housing company. In accordance with the agreement concluded in 2016, the company assumed the financial costs in a lawsuit to return the buildings in Milyutinsky Lane to the Catholics.

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11.01.2023 – The Kemerovo Court of Cassation upheld the conviction of Aleksandr Bondarchuk and Sergey Yavushkin—Four years suspended

Link to full text in Russian –
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/01/111049.html>

On January 10, 2023, the Eighth Cassation Court of General Jurisdiction in Kemerovo upheld the conviction of Aleksandr Bondarchuk and Sergey Yavushkin – 4 years of suspended sentence. The hearing was held in person and was attended by 12 of the defendants' relatives and friends.

The court of first instance passed its sentence in June 2021, and in February 2022, the appeal left it unchanged. **Aleksandr Bondarchuk** and **Sergey Yavushkin** still do not agree with the charges against them, as they reported in their appeals: "Neither the verdict nor the appellate ruling provides clear criteria by which we can clearly see what specific actions we took were a continuation of illegal activities of a liquidated legal entity."

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10.01.2023 – Prosecutor General's Office: Banned translation of "Sahih al-Bukhari" contains distortions "in favor of Salafi ideas"

Sova Center – On January 9, 2023, the Coordinating Center for Muslims of the North Caucasus (KCMSC) published the response of the Prosecutor General’s Office to a request regarding the recognition of the collection of hadiths “Sahih al-Bukhari” as extremist material.

Recall that one of the editions of this authoritative collection in a summary of the 15th-century imam al-Zubaidi (M.: Umma, 2007) was banned by a court in Tatarstan in December 2021. The decision stood in the court of appeal, after which the publication was included in the Federal List of Extremist Materials. The ban provoked a critical reaction from many Muslim figures.

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03.01.2023 – Moscow’s former chief rabbi: ‘The best option for Russian Jews is to leave’

JTA – Pinchas Goldshmidt, the former chief rabbi of Moscow who fled the country earlier this year, said other Russian Jews should leave before it’s too late in an interview with the Guardian.

“When we look back over Russian history, whenever the political system was in danger you saw the government trying to redirect the anger and discontent of the masses towards the Jewish community,” Goldschmidt told the Guardian. “We saw this in tsarist times and at the end of the Stalinist regime.”

He argued that Russia’s floundering invasion of Ukraine is starting to foster a similar environment.

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