

RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witnesses: 612 home raids since the 2017 ban

– HRWF (07.08.2019) – The state repression of Jehovah's Witnesses is accelerating month after month in Russia according to recent statistics provided by the headquarters of their movement in the US to Human Rights Without Frontiers, such as those about home raids: 612.

2018

281 (23.4/month)

2019 (Jan-July)

331 (47.2/month)

Over 100% increase from 2018

June/July 2019

139 (69.5/month)

Nearly 200% increase from 2018

As of July 31, 2019

241 JWs facing criminal charges

39 in detention (pretrial or prison)

27 under house arrest

As of Aug 5

244JWs facing criminal charges

39 in detention (pretrial or prison)

27 under house arrest

Over 100 under a variety of other restrictions

RUSSIA: Prosecutions against religious organizations and believers in June and July

SOVA Center (01.08.2019) – <https://bit.ly/33cL3Rb>– In July, we learned about several administrative prosecution cases related to religious literature that we consider inappropriately prohibited. Back in early June, the Orenburg District Court of the Orenburg Region ruled against Rustam Yerzhakovsky, a citizen of Kazakhstan, who intended to export to Turkey one copy of *The Fortress of a Muslim* – a book that has been recognized as extremist in Russia. Yerzhakovsky was fined one thousand rubles with confiscation of a banned book under Article 16.3 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (non-observance of interdictions and (or) restrictions on exportation of goods from the customs territory of the Eurasian Economic Union). *The Fortress of a Muslim* is a popular collection of prayers for every day, which, in our opinion, contains no signs of incitement to religious hatred, therefore the courts did not have grounds to recognize it as extremist.

In late July, Khava Shakhtamirova, a resident of Novy Urengoy, was fined two thousand rubles under Article 20.29 of the Code

of Administrative Offenses for the fact that she offered passersby to study the brochure "Women in Islam versus Women in Judeo-Christian Tradition." We regard the ban on this book as inappropriate since its text is respectful of Judaism and Christianity.

In mid-July, the Supreme Court of Russia reduced by three months the lengthy terms of imprisonment faced by each of the four Crimea residents convicted in the Bakhchysarai **Hizb ut-Tahrir** case: Enver Mamutov, Rustem Abiltarov, Zevri Abseitov, and Remzi Memetov. They were convicted under Article 205.5 Part 1 or Part 2 (organizing the activities of a terrorist organization or participation in it) and under Article 278 utilizing Article 35 Part 2 and Article 30 Part 1 of the Criminal Code (preparation for forcible seizure of power by an organized group by prior conspiracy). We believe that accusing members of Hizb ut-Tahrir of involvement in terrorist activities solely on the basis of their party activities (holding meetings, reading literature, etc.) is inappropriate. Qualifying any positive comments on Hizb ut-Tahrir activities as appeals for terrorism or justification of terrorism is also inappropriate.

Prosecutions against **Jehovah's Witnesses** continued in July. Early in the month, Alexander Solovyov, a follower of this doctrine in Perm, was found guilty of participation in the activity of an extremist organization (Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code) and sentenced to a fine of 300 thousand rubles.

In the Nizhny Novgorod Region, cases under Article 282.2 Parts 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activity of an extremist organization and participation in it) were opened in July against nine Jehovah's Witnesses, two of whom – Alexei Oreshkov and Alexander Vavilov – were also incarcerated. Sergey Yavushkin and Alexander Bondarchuk were put under house arrest in Kemerovo under Article 282.2 Part 2 of the Criminal Code

Two Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in Kaluga; one of them, Roman Makhnyov, stated that he had been subjected to inhuman treatment by the local FSB officers.

Searches in Jehovah's Witnesses' residences were conducted in a number of regions, including in the Trans-Baikal Region, which has never reported any information about criminal proceedings opened against Jehovah's Witnesses.

The decision to recognize the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia and 395 local organizations as extremist was made by the Supreme Court of Russia in April 2017. We believe that this decision, which entailed mass criminal proceedings against the believers under Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code, was legally unfounded, and regard it as a manifestation of religious discrimination.

Falun Gong and Faizrakhmanist community (Muslim new religious movement)

Sova Center (01.07.2019) – <https://bit.ly/20K9vGn>– We found out in June that the Nevsky District Court of St. Petersburg deemed the book *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party* (Moscow, 2015) prohibited for distribution in Russia. The decision was made in late May upon request from the City Prosecutor's Office. This book has been distributed by the followers of the Falun Gong spiritual practice (its authorship belongs to the Epoch Times media project). The court relied on the expert opinion, which stated that the anthology contained psychological signs of incitement of hostility “against the Communist Party” and statements “aimed at inciting social enmity against followers of the Chinese Communist Party and communism in general.” In our opinion, the ban against *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party* lacks legal justification, despite the sharp criticism of the CCP's activity contained in the book. No particular political party (especially a foreign one) and no particular ideology is entitled to protection from criticism. The authors of the book stay within the framework

of historical and political discussion, do not allow any manifestations of ethnic xenophobia, do not advocate violence, and, on the contrary, emphasize the importance of a “non-violent transition to a society liberated from the CCP.” We believe that the decision of the Yekaterinburg court, which had previously declined the [prosecutorial request](#) to ban the book for inciting hatred toward the Chinese supporters of the CCP, was appropriate, while the decision of the St. Petersburg court constitutes excessive interference with freedom of expression.

The Sovetsky District Court of Kazan in mid-June sentenced five residents of the republic, having found them guilty of continuing the activities of the banned **Faizrakhmanist community**. Depending on their respective roles, they were found guilty of committing crimes under Parts 1 and 2 of Criminal Code Article 282.2 (organizing activity of an extremist organization or participating in it), Part 1.1 of Article 282.2 (involvement of others in activities of an extremist organization), or Part 1 of Article 282.3 (financing activity of an extremist organization). As the spiritual leader of the community, 52-year-old Gumar Ganiev was sentenced to seven years in prison to be served in a minimum-security penal colony; 58-year-old Talgat Gizatullin and 41-year-old Rustam Galiev were sentenced to five years, 58-year-old Glimyan Khazetdinov to six years, and 61-year-old Mudaris Ibragimov – to five and a half years in a penal colony. The Faizrakhmanist community founded by former deputy Mufti of Tatarstan Faizrakhman Sattarov, was recognized as an extremist organization in 2013 after the relevant agencies found out that its members were leading an isolated way of life and did not seek help from medical institutions or send their children to schools. Such organizational features are not subject to anti-extremist legal regulation. As far as we know, the community led an insulated but not aggressive way of life; therefore the decision to recognize it as extremist was, in our opinion, inappropriate. Accordingly, we consider the

sentences to the Sattarov's followers inappropriate as well.

RUSSIA: 150 Jehovah's Witnesses under investigation

– JW Headquarters (19.03.2019) – Almost two years after the ban of their movement in Russia, 150 Jehovah's Witnesses are currently under investigation. Already in 2019 Russian law enforcement has conducted raids on JWs in 10 cities in 6 regions (in 2018 Russian agents conducted 280 searches in about 40 regions throughout the Federation).

Latest figures regarding JWs facing criminal charges throughout Russia:

Pretrial Detention: 24

House arrest: 26

Ban on activities: 5

Recognizance: 55

Wanted: 4

Another EU citizen detained in Russia: Andrzej Oniszczyk from Poland

Andrzej Oniszczyk, 50, has been kept in solitary confinement for over five months, and is not permitted to lie down from 06:00 to 21:00. He is only allowed to take a shower with hot water once a week for 15 minutes. The administration of the detention center in Kirov refuses to allow Andrzej to have a

Bible.

For the five months Andrzej has been detained, his wife, Anna, has not been allowed to visit him and has only communicated with him by letter. She has submitted several requests to visit Andrzej in prison; however the investigator in Kirov has repeatedly denied her requests. Typically prisoners in Russia can have visits from close family members, so it is unclear why such extreme action has been taken to keep Anna from seeing her husband.

You may recall that Andrzej was arrested on Oct 9, 2018, when local police and masked special-forces raided 19 homes and one former place of worship for Jews in Kirov, Russia. Andrzej is being accused of "extremist" activity for simply singing biblical songs, improving the skills of missionary work, and studying religious literature.

At the outset, Andrzej Oniszczyk was forced to sign a document under duress wherein he agreed to refuse visits by the Poland Embassy, so the embassy was initially unable to contact/assist. However, after several requests by the embassy, they have finally been allowed to visit/assist Andrzej. The address where Andrzej is being held: FKU SIZO-1, UFSIN of Russia, Kirov Region, ul. Mopra, d. 1, Kirov, 610004. Andrzej's pretrial detention has been extended twice (now through April 2, 2019).

A total of seven men in Kirov are facing criminal charges for practicing their faith. Four men (44-yr-old Maksim Khalturin, 66-yr-old Vladimir Korobeynikov, 26-yr-old Andrey Suvorkov, and 41-yr-old Yevgeniy Suvorkov) had been arrested in October 2018 and held in pretrial along with Andrzej. Yevgeniy continues in pretrial detention, however the three others have been released to house arrest. Two other men (63-yr-old Vladimir Vasilyev and 25-yr-old Vladislav Grigorenko) from Kirov have been under investigation since January 21, 2019 but are not yet under any restrictions.

BIO: Andrzej was born October 3, 1968 in the city of Białystok in northeastern Poland. After graduating from school, he became a lathe operator. Andrzej enjoys reading Russian literature, especially Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn, and Pasternak. In 1997, he moved to Russia and worked for himself in the city of Kirov. There he met Anna, and they married in 2002.

Anna, Andrzej Oniszczyk's wife, has agreed to talk to journalists (Polish or Russian only). Her phone number +7(961) 748 2088 (via Telegram or Signal).

Sergey Skrynnikov under threat of three years in prison

On the heels of the Zheleznodorozhniy District Court of Oryol sentencing Dennis Christensen to six years in prison, another one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Sergey Skrynnikov, also from Oryol is being criminally tried at the same court for his peaceful worship as one of Jehovah's Witnesses and a verdict is expected on April 1, 2019.

On 18 March, prosecutor Nadezhda Naumova recommended that the Court sentence 56-yr-old Sergey to three years in prison followed by one year of additional restrictions for so-called extremist activity. Closing statements by the defense will be next Thursday March 28, with the court's verdict will be at 10am on Monday April 1.

For more information, please contact Yaroslav Sivulskiy in Russia: (ysivulsk@jw.org; call or WhatsApp [+7 985 359 34 10](tel:+79853593410); [+371 2 0044105](tel:+37120044105)).

RUSSIA: Dennis Christensen behind bars for 6 years: Outcry of the international community

– Human Rights Without Frontiers calls upon the European Parliament to adopt a resolution denouncing the egregious violations of religious freedom in Russia and to ask for the release of Dennis Christensen

– HRWF (11.02.2019) – HRWF joins the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union in demanding Mr Christensen to be released immediately and unconditionally and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Additionally, HRWF urges the European Parliament to adopt a resolution denouncing the egregious violations of religious freedom in Russia.

Council of Europe: Russia monitors express concern at sentencing of Jehovah's Witness for 'extremism'

CoE (07.02.2019) -The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of Russia, Telmo Correia (Portugal, EPP/CD) and Angela Smith (United Kingdom, SOC), have expressed serious concern at the conviction and sentencing to six years imprisonment, by the Zheleznodorozhniy District Court, of Dennis Christensen for "organising the activity of an extremist organisation" on the grounds that he is a practising Jehovah's Witness.

"Mr Christensen's conviction and imprisonment for nothing more

than peacefully practising his faith is an unacceptable violation of the right to freedom of religion,” said the co-rapporteurs. They emphasised that the European Court of Human Rights has already, on previous occasions, ruled in favour of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ right to worship without interference from the Russian authorities.

In addition, the co-rapporteurs reiterated concerns expressed by PACE about the abuse and arbitrary application of the so-called “extremism law” by the Russian authorities. They expressed their hope that Mr Christensen’s conviction would be overturned without delay by the appeals court and called on the Russian authorities to release him pending an appeal.

Source:

<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=7366&lang=2&cat=3>

EU: Statement by the Spokesperson of Federica Mogherini on the sentencing of Dennis Christensen

EEAS (06.02.2019) -Today, a Russian court in the city of Oryol sentenced Mr Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen, to 6 years of imprisonment.

Mr Christensen was arrested in 2017 when Federal Security Service agents raided a peaceful religious meeting of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Oryol. He has been convicted on grounds of ‘organising extremist activity’, which amounts to exercising his right to freedom of religion as a Jehovah’s Witness. A number of other criminal cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses are also currently pending. No one should be imprisoned for peaceful acts of worship in the expression of their religious beliefs.

The European Union expects Mr Christensen to be released immediately and unconditionally. Jehovah’s Witnesses, as with 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.

Source:

https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/57728/statement-spokesperson-sentencing-dennis-christensen-russia_en

USA: USCIRF condemns Russian conviction of Danish prisoner of conscience Dennis Christensen

USCIRF (07.02.2019) – [Kristina Arriaga](#), Vice Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ([USCIRF](#)), today condemned the decision by a Russian court to convict and sentence [Dennis Christensen](#), a Jehovah's Witness, to six years imprisonment on charges of "organizing the activity of an extremist organization."

"Dennis Christensen's conviction represents the continued deterioration of religious freedom in Putin's Russia," said Arriaga, who advocates on behalf of Mr. Christensen as part of USCIRF's [Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project](#). *"Evidently, it's not enough for the state to brand peaceful groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses 'extremist'; it must also imprison their members. Russia must enter the 21st century and respect religious freedom as a fundamental human right."*

In June 2016, following a trend of repression of religious minority communities throughout Russia, a regional court in Oryol, where Mr. Christensen resides, branded the local Jehovah's Witnesses branch an "extremist" group. On May 25, 2017, state security forces disrupted a Jehovah's Witness prayer service, detaining some 70-80 people for several hours and arresting Mr. Christensen, alongside 15 Russian citizens. Mr. Christensen had appeared in court more than 50 times before being convicted on February 6. He has already spent

more than 622 days in Detention Facility No. 1 in the Oryol Region.

In 2018, USCIRF again [recommended](#) that Russia be designated a “country of particular concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act. In November 2018, the U.S. State Department [placed Russia on a Special Watch list](#) for “engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom.”

Source:

<https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases-statements/uscirf-condemns-russian-conviction-danish-prisoner-conscience>

HRWF Database of FORB Prisoners contains documented cases of

- 29 JW who were in prison last year (some were afterwards put under house arrest but most of them are still detained)
- 7 cases of Said Nursi Followers (Muslim) and 4 cases of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims
- 5 Scientologists

In all, more than 40 peaceful believers were in prison in Russia in 2018. Russia is Nr 3 after China and Iran in Tier 1.