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## **RUSSIA: 15 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January**

### **15 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms since 1 January**

HRWF (25.05.2022) – The release of the Danish Jehovah's Witness Denis Christensen yesterday after five years spent in prison is the tree that hides the forest. Indeed, the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses goes on unabated in Russia. Two of them were sentenced to heavy prison terms on the eve of the release of Christensen: Andrey Vlasov, a handicapped person, to 7 years (!) and Lyudmila Dhchekoldina to 4 years and

1 month.

## **Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in Russia in 2022 (Update)**

23 May 2022: Andrey Vlasov, 53 years old (7 years)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 45 years old (4 years and 1 month in a penal colony)

26 April 2022: Andrey Ledyaikin, 34 years old (2 years and 2 months)

19 April 2022: Konstantin Samsonov, 45 years old (7 years 1/2 years)

18 March 2022: Valeriy Rogozin, 60 years old (6 years and 5 months in a penal colony)

Denis Peresunko, 54 years old (6 years and 6 months)

Sergey Melnik, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

Igor Egozaryan, 57 years old (6 years in a penal colony)

07 February 2022: Yuriy Saveliyev, 68 years old (6 years + 1 year of restricted freedom)

02 February 2022: Anatoliy Gorbunov, 64 years old (6 years)

25 January 2022: Anna Safronova, 57 years old (6 years)

20 January 2022: Yevgeny Korotun, 52 years old (7 years + 2 years of restricted freedom)

20 January 2022: Andrei Kolesnichenko, 52 years old (4 years +

1 year of restricted freedom)

19 January 2022: Alexei Ershov, 68 years old (3 years)

17 January 2022: Maksim Beltikov, 42 years old (2 years)

### ***Andrey Vlasov, a disabled Jehovah's Witness sentenced to 7 years in prison***

On May 23, 2022, the judge of the Central District Court of Prokopyevsk Pavel Kotykhov found 53-year-old **Andrey Vlasov** guilty of organizing the activities of an extremist community and sentenced him to **seven years in prison**. He was taken into custody in the courtroom.

Addressing the court with the last word, Vlasov said: "My physical condition is limited . . . Due to stiffness in movement, without outside help, I cannot take care of my legs: put on socks, take care of my feet and toes. All this is done by my dear [wife] Natasha. I am in constant need of medical treatment and supervision."

In July 2020, Ivan Sablin, an investigator with the Federal Security Service of Russia for the Kemerovo Region–Kuzbass, opened a criminal case against Andrey Vlasov. Ten days later, the FSB searched his house and workplace. The investigation went on for almost a year. In June 2021, the Vlasov case was submitted to the Central District Court of the city of Prokopyevsk. Although there is not a single victim in the case, the prosecutor asked the court to sentence the believer to 8.5 years in prison.

Vlasov spent two days in isolation, a year and 10 months he was under house arrest. Andrey said: "I am limited in movement, my life revolves on 30 square meters of an apartment." Despite the fact that the believer never violated the detention regime, the court repeatedly extended his

preventive measure. All this had a negative impact on his health, however, the court continued to restrict Vlasov from visiting medical institutions.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

In the Kemerovo Region, 14 Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted for their faith. Three of them received suspended sentences. Sergey Britvin and Vadim Levchuk have already served their terms in a penal colony.

Russian law enforcers mistakenly interpret the usual exercise of the constitutional rights of believers as extremist activity. Although the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the activities of legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses, this court did not in itself prohibit the practice of this religion.

***In the Krasnodar Territory, the Court sent a woman to a penal colony for four years***

On May 23, 2022, Olga Marchenko, a judge of the Pavlovsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, sentenced 45-year-old **Lyudmila Shchekoldina to four years and one month** in a penal colony. The woman was taken into custody in the courtroom. The court equated her ordinary religious practices with participation in the activities of an extremist organization and involving others in it.

The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. Shchekoldina insists on her complete innocence.

Although Lyudmila Shchekoldina's health has recently deteriorated and she needs a surgery, the prosecutor asked the court to find the believer guilty under Articles 282.2 (1.1), 282.2 (2) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and

sentence her to 4.5 years in prison.

The criminal case against Lyudmila Shchekoldina was initiated on April 23, 2020. A week later, a series of searches took place in the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Krasnodar Territory, and Lyudmila also became a victim. The accusation against the believer was based on a report by intelligence agent Ilchenko that the woman tried to involve him in the activities of an extremist organization. This is how he described their conversations about the Bible.

The case of Shchekoldina was investigated by the investigative department of the Federal Security Service of Russia for the Krasnodar Territory for a year. On May 13, 2021, the case went to court. It was examined by Judge Olga Marchenko of the Pavlovsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, the same judge who sentenced one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Vladimir Skachidub, to 4 years in prison.

Russian human rights activists and the world community consider the criminal prosecution for the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses incompetent and strongly condemn it.

### ***Andrey Ledyakin sentenced to 2 years and 2 months in prison***

On 26 April 2022, the Seversky City Court of the Tomsk Region sentenced **Andrey Ledyakin to 2 years and 2 months in prison.**

In July 2020, FSB and Investigative Committee officers, accompanied by two OMON fighters, arrived at Andrey Ledyakin's place of work, in the administration of Seversk, to pick up a believer for a search of his home. After the Seversk Investigation Department opened a criminal case against Ledyaykin in March 2021, he was forced to resign.

Three days later, the court chose a preventive measure for him in the form of a written undertaking not to leave the place and proper behavior.

In June 2021, the Ledyaykin case was submitted to the Seversky City Court of the Tomsk Region. It was considered by Judge Yekaterina Soldatenko. The accusation was based on the testimony of FSB agent Kira Klisheva, who testified against 5 more Jehovah's Witnesses in Seversk. The prosecutor requested 4.5 years in a general regime colony for the believer.

### ***Jehovah's Witness Konstantin Samsonov sentenced to 7.5 years in prison***

On April 19, 2022, Maksim Mazikin, judge of the Neftekumsk District Court of the Stavropol Territory, sentenced **Konstantin Samsonov to 7.5 years in prison**, he was arrested in the courthouse. Aleksandr Akopov and Shamil Sultanov each received a fine of 500,000 rubles, which has already been paid off on account of the time served in the pre-trial detention center. A written undertaking not to leave was taken from them.

Even before the initiation of a criminal case, Neftekumsk believers faced an armed raid during a friendly meeting, surveillance and repeated searches. In December 2018, Samsonov, Akopov and Sultanov ended up in a pre-trial detention center. A. V. Astakhov, senior investigator of the FSB department of the Stavropol Territory, accused them of extremism (part 1 of article 282.2 and part 1 of article 282.3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

After a year of imprisonment, the court replaced their arrest

with a ban on certain actions. For more than two years, due to the restrictions imposed, they have been forced to wear special sensors that record their movements. Akopov could not receive the medical care he needed, and Samsonov could not work in his specialty (his family lives off the savings made before his arrest).

The ECtHR, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention are just some of the organizations condemning the repression of Jehovah's Witnesses.

### ***An appeal in Volgograd upholds the sentence of four Jehovah's Witnesses***

On March 18, 2022, the Volgograd Regional Court upheld the conviction of **Valeriy Rogozin, Igor Egozaryan, Denis Peresunko and Sergey Melnik**.

In September 2021, the court of first instance sentenced **Rogozin to 6 years and 5 months** in a penal colony, **Peresunko to 6 years and 3 months**, and **Melnik and Egozaryan to 6 years** in a penal colony. The verdict has entered into force, but believers can appeal it in cassation.

When the criminal prosecution began, the wife of Denis Peresunko died of COVID-19, and the believer himself was placed in a pre-trial detention center for 5 months. He was on disability and the resulting stress exacerbated his condition. A long stay in the pre-trial detention center also seriously undermined the health of Valeriy Rogozin. Egozaryan and Melnik are raising their underage sons.

In 2019, law enforcement officers arrested four believers and accused them of organizing extremist activities, and later two of them – Peresunko and Rogozin – also of financing it. At the same time, recordings of religious meetings of Volgograd

Jehovah's Witnesses, at which they discuss Bibles, sing songs and pray to God, were used as material evidence of their "guilt."

Source of the detailed individual cases:  
<https://jw-russia.org/prisoners.html>

**Further reading about FORB in Russia on HRWF website**

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