

# **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 Białyostok 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.

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