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RUSSIA : 26 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison since 1 January 2022

26 Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison since 1 January 2022

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

The European Times (08.09.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3RqpCVb> -The persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses is going on unabated. In the last eight months, 26 of them have been sentenced for merely practicing their religion in private and put behind bars. Here is the list of the last six Jehovah's Witnesses

sentenced on 25 August 2022 and serving heavy prison terms:

Vladimir Atryakhin, 35 years (6 years)

Georgiy Nikulin, 59 years (4 years and 2 months)

Yelena Nikulina, 54 years (4 years and 2 months)

Aleksandr Shevchuk, 33 years (2 years)

Aleksandr Korolev, 42 years (2 years)

Denis Antonov, 46 years (2 years)

They were all prosecuted under Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 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”):

Article 282.2, Part 2 – two to six years’ imprisonment, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to five years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year after release; or a 300,000 to 600,000 Rouble fine; or one to four years’ assigned labour, plus a possible ban on holding certain positions and/or carrying out certain activities for up to three years and compulsory restrictions on freedom for up to one year.

Others who were arrested in 2022 are detained and waiting for their trial.

In 2019, several Jehovah's Witnesses of Saransk, a city located far in Siberia, were prosecuted for gathering to discuss about the Bible. As the movement of Jehovah's Witnesses has been banned as an extremist organization since 2017, all their collective activities are considered illegal.

Vladimir Atryakhin

Vladimir Atryakhin was born in 1987 in the village of Rozhdestveno (Mordovia). Since his childhood, he has loved sports and has enjoyed playing football, volleyball, hockey...

He is a professional programmer and works as a system administrator for two companies. He also edits a scientific journal at Mordovian State University. He is respected by the neighbors—he heads the house committee in the residential building where he lives.

In 2009, Vladimir got married with Mariya. The couple have two small children who were 7 months and 2 years old at the time of their father's arrest. More here.

Georgiy Nikulin

Georgiy Nikulin was born in 1963 in the city of Rovenki (Ukraine). After school, he graduated from college with a degree in driver-car mechanic. Subsequently, he mastered several more specialties: graphic designer, satellite communications radio technician, equipment maintenance mechanic, printing, woodcarving. He worked in all these areas.

He often had to move in connection with work – he lived in Zhytomyr (Ukraine), Tolyatti (Samara region) and in Yakutia. Over time, together with his wife Elena, he moved to Saransk, where the family was able to settle in their own house for the first time.

Sudden criminal prosecution and a long stay in a pre-trial detention center undermined his health. More here.

Elena Nikulina

Elena Nikulina was born in 1968 in the village of Monastyrsk (Mordovia). As a child, Elena was fond of cross-country skiing and sewing.

After school, she studied as a dressmaker and cutter. In search of work, she moved to Saransk and Togliatti. She worked as a seamstress at various enterprises, was engaged in cleaning the premises. In 2016, Elena married Georgiy.

The criminal prosecution affected both spouses: Georgiy spent 147 days behind bars, both lost their jobs and lost their livelihoods. Elena experienced a nervous shock, she became afraid to stay at home alone. [More here.](#)

Aleksandr Shevchuk

Aleksandr Shevchuk was born in 1989 in Pyatigorsk (Stavropol Territory). He grew up in a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. Many of his relatives survived the religious persecution of the Soviet years. His great-grandparents were exiled in 1951 to Siberia where his parents were born.

At school, he was a motivated student. He learnt garden and park construction. When he was called up for military service, he opted for an alternative civilian service which he carried out in Khimki near Moscow.

Later he moved to Saransk, where he worked in the furniture industry. He loves sports, especially basketball and table tennis. [More here.](#)

Aleksandr Korolev

Aleksandr Korolev was born in 1978 in the Zemetchinsky district of the Penza region.

He became a tractor driver and worked on a collective farm as a shepherd and livestock breeder. Recently he has worked as a

carpenter-fitter of wooden products.

For some time, he lived in the village of Akim-Sergeevka (Mordovia) and then moved to Saransk where he met his future wife Natalya. At that time, she was raising her son alone. They got married in 2006.

The criminal prosecution has brought anxiety, worry and uncertainty into the life of the family. The parents of Aleksandr and Nataliya worry about their spouses and try to support them. More here.

Denis Antonov

Denis Antonov was born in 1976 in Syktyvkar (Komi Republic). His family moved frequently, as his father worked as an agronomist and helped on collective farms in the north of Siberia.

He entered a technical school in Vorkuta, in the north of Siberia, where he received a degree in mining electromechanics. For about five years he worked at the mine as an underground electrician, then as a janitor, a building maintenance worker, and most recently as a house foreman.

In 2015, Denis married Olga, whom he had known since 1996. She worked as a cook in a coal factory and in a kindergarten. The couple moved from Vorkuta to Saransk to take care of Olga's elderly mother, who was left alone after her husband's death. During a search, the authorities took away their work books and other documents related to their religion. More here.

List of 20 other Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to prison terms in 2022:

06 June 2022: Vladimir Ermolaev, 34 years (6 $\frac{1}{2}$ years)

Alexander Putintsev, 48 years (6 $\frac{1}{2}$ years)

Igor Mamalimov, 46 years (6 years in a colony)

31 May 2002: Rustam Seidkuliev, 45 years old (2 years and 4 months)

23 May 2022: Lyudmila Shchekoldina, 46 years (4 years and 1 month)

Andrey Vlasov, 53 years old (7 years)

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

26 April 2022: Andrey Ledyakin, 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)

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)

Photo: JW Russia.org – Defendants with families and friends shortly before sentencing (Saransk, August 2022)

Further reading about FORB in Russia on HRWF website

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