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RUSSIA: Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01.10-15.10.2022)

**RUSSIA: Freedom of Religion or Belief News:
Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (01-15.10.2022)**

14.10.2022 – The court placed a man and a woman in a pre-trial detention center after a wave of searches at believers in Primorye

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/101633.html#update>

On October 6, 2022, in the village of Yaroslavsky (Primorsky Territory), searches were carried out at 12 addresses of those whom the investigation considers to be Jehovah's Witnesses. Two believers, 70-year-old **Boris Andreev** and 49-year-old **Natalya Sharapova**, were detained. The next day, the court sent them to a pre-trial detention center.

According to preliminary information, Andreeva is suspected of organizing the activities of a banned organization (part 1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), and Sharapova of involvement in this activity (part 1.1 of article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation). It is known that they will spend at least 22 days in a pre-trial detention center.

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13.10.2022 – Two priests on trial for opposing Russia's war in Ukraine

Forum 18 – Two Russian Orthodox priests are on criminal trial for opposing Russia's war in Ukraine from a religious perspective and could face imprisonment or massive fines. Fr Nikandr Pinchuk's first full trial hearing in Sverdlovsk Region is due on 17 October. Fr Ioann Kurmoyarov's trial in St Petersburg is due to resume on 14 November. He has been in pre-trial detention since early June. Investigative Committee officials in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg refused to explain why they brought prosecutions for opposing the war on religious grounds.

Two Russian Orthodox priests are on trial on different criminal charges for their opposition to Russia's war in Ukraine. If convicted, they could be imprisoned or have to pay massive fines. They are the first members of the clergy known

to be facing criminal prosecution for protesting against the war from a religious perspective, although others have been charged with lesser administrative offences.

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13.10.2022 – Moscow hosts the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, where Kirill again brings up the issue of “canonical territories”

Before the meeting, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church delivered an opening speech to the Synod members.

“Today, we have a fairly broad agenda consisting of 20 issues, each of these requiring due attention,” Patriarch Kirill said.

“The Holy Synod meets at a time that cannot be called calm,” the head of the Russian Orthodox Church continued. “Therefore, the task of the Church, which has always been, is and will always be a peacemaking force, is that through our prayers, our labors, and our positive influence on society, we can relieve existing tension as much as possible and, if possible, influence the easing of conflicts that can lead to unpredictable consequences.”

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11.10.2022 – An appeal in Birobidzhan overturned the verdict for the faith of the Postnikov spouses and returned their case for a new trial

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/111543.html>

On October 11, 2022, a panel of judges of the Birobidzhan

Regional Court of the EAO overturned the conviction of **Oleg and Agnessa Postnikov** and sent the criminal case for a new trial to the court of first instance. Believers will once again have to defend their right to freedom of religion in court.

The couple faced reprisals for their faith in May 2018, when a search was conducted in their house as part of the Judgment Day special operation. The prosecution against the Postnikovs was based on the testimony of police officer Yulia Zvereva and another woman who feigned an interest in Bible study. A hidden video camera was installed in her house to record conversations with believers.

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10.10.2022 – The Court of Appeal in Krasnodar left Lyudmila Shchekoldina sentenced to more than 4 years in prison behind bars

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/100921.html>

On October 6, 2022, the Krasnodar Regional Court, chaired by Igor Krainik, denied 45-year-old **Lyudmila Shchekoldina** her appeal against the sentence, which has now entered into force.

In May 2022, Lyudmila Shchekoldina was sentenced to 4 years and 1 month in a penal colony for participating in the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses. The believer appealed the verdict. In her appeal, she emphasized that the court of first instance did not explain why a peaceful way of expressing faith in God was regarded as a crime, while freedom of religion is enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The believer still insists on her innocence and can file a complaint with the cassation instance.

In February 2022, at a meeting of judges, Chairman of the Supreme Court Vyacheslav Lebedev clarified that peaceful religious rites and ceremonies cannot be considered extremist crimes. However, at least 349 Jehovah's Witnesses have passed through Russian prisons since 2017.

10.10.2022 – In Kodinsk, Krasnoyarsk Territory, 59-year-old Ildar Urazbakhtin was given a 3-year suspended sentence for talking about the Bible

Link to full text in Russian: <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/101627.html>

On October 10, 2022, the judge of the Kezhemsky District Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, Grigory Garbuz, sentenced **Ildar Urazbakhtin** to 3 years probation, equating the study of the Bible with extremist activity. The verdict has not entered into force and can be appealed. The believer insists on his complete innocence.

In July 2021, the Urazbakhtins were searched. They had three minor granddaughters visiting them, the youngest of whom at that time was five years old. A day earlier, for discussing Bible teachings with friends, a criminal case was initiated against Ildar on suspicion of "committing a grave crime" under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

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06.10.2022 – An appeal in Kirov upheld the verdict against 6 Jehovah's Witnesses

Link to full text in Russian : <https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2022/10/060947.html>

On October 4, 2022, the Kirov Regional Court, chaired by Alexander Kulguskin, denied the appeal of six local believers. The verdict of the first instance – from 2.5 to 6.5 years of probation – came into force.

Andrzej Onischuk, Yevgeny and Andrey Suvorkov, Maxim Khalturin, Vladimir Korobeinikov and Vladimir Vasiliev still maintain their innocence because they practiced their religion legally. Believers have the right to appeal the verdict in cassation.

Speaking with the last word in the Court of Appeal, Andrzej Onischuk noted that he had been a Jehovah's Witness for more than 30 years and lived according to biblical principles. He said: "As a believer, I never even thought about extremism... My inner convictions do not allow me to oppose the state system." Vladimir Vasiliev also noted: "I profess religious views that are not prohibited by law. I have never had anything to do with extremism."

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04.10.2022 – Four-year jail term if Russia gets back exiled Muslim?

Forum 18 – If Russia succeeds in getting back exiled **Imam Ilkhom Merazhov**, he could be tried and punished with a maximum four-year jail term. He left Russia in 2015, but in June 2022 the Novosibirsk FSB reopened the criminal case to punish him for meeting with others to study the works of theologian Said Nursi. On 8 September, a Novosibirsk court issued a detention

order in absentia. The FSB has sought to have an Interpol Red Notice issued, though it remains unclear whether Interpol has approved any request.

The FSB security service has reopened a criminal case against a Muslim who met with others to study the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi – despite the fact that he has been living outside Russia since 2015. The FSB in Novosibirsk suspended its investigation of Imam Ilkhom Merazhov in January 2018, after it became clear that he had moved abroad, but Novosibirsk Regional Prosecutor's Office overturned this decision in June 2022 and returned the case to investigators.

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03.10.2022 – The Russian Church says its relations with Vatican actually frozen

Interfax-religion – Moscow, October 3, Interfax – The relations of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church are really frozen now, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, said.

“Lately, unfortunately, I have to say that our relations are practically frozen,” he said on air of the *Church and the World* program on *Russia-24* TV.

According to the metropolitan, some comments of Pope Francis and his assistants “do not contribute at all” to the preparation of the Pontiff's meeting with Patriarch Kirill and further cooperation between the two Churches.

To illustrate his words, the representative of Russian Church recalled that the last conversation between the patriarch and the pope, held in March via remote communication, was of a

benevolent nature. However, after a while the Russian Church was surprised to read the interview of pontiff, where he “caricatured this meeting, allowed expressions (...) absolutely impermissible in this context and informed that the meeting would not take place and that, in general, he would not go anywhere.”

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