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RUSSIA: Freedom of religion or belief : Special Bimonthly FORB Digest (16–30.12.2021)

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30.12.2021 – First prison term after the Plenum Ruling: one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Aleksandr Nikolayev, sentenced to 2.5 years in prison

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/241338.html>

On December 23, 2021, Nikolay Surmach, a judge of the Abinsk District Court of the Krasnodar Territory, found 48-year-old Aleksandr Nikolayev guilty of participating in the activities of an extremist organization and sentenced him to 2 years and 6 months in a general regime colony.

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29.12.2021 – The government plans to monitor the activities of religious associations and NGOs

The plan for the implementation of the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the next four years, approved by the government, includes a number of measures, including monitoring, devoted to discrimination of citizens on ethnic and religious grounds. Monitoring of the activities of religious associations and NGOs is entrusted to the Ministry of Justice and law enforcement agencies.

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29.12.2021 – Tatarstan official fired for speaking out about Russians and Orthodox

“The district deputies voted for the early termination of Galimyanova’s powers,” RIA Novosti reports on December 29 with reference to the press service of the Aktanysh district of the Republic of Tatarstan. The deputy head of the district administration, Raikhan Galimyanova, announced a few days ago that the Aktanysh district is Tatar, so the authorities do not want churches to appear in the district and the number of Russians to grow. Restrictions, she said, are necessary “to preserve the Tatar nationality.”

Later, the press service of the President of Tatarstan said that on December 29, at an extraordinary meeting of the

council of the Aktanysh municipal district, the issue of the early termination of powers of the deputy head of the Aktanysh municipal district, Raikhan Felusovna Galimyanova, was introduced.

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28.12.2021 – First sentence in Khanty-Mansi autonomous area: Father of two, Andrey Sazonov, convicted for discussing the Bible

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/241544.html>

On December 24, 2021, the judge of the Uray City Court of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug – Yugra, Ilnur Gilmanov, found 41-year-old Andrey Sazonov guilty of organizing and financing the activities of an extremist organization and sentenced him to a fine of 500 thousand Russian rubles (about 6800 US dollars).

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23.12.2021 – The Court of Appeal in Birobidzhan upholds the sentence of Tatyana Sholner: 2.5 years of suspended sentence for faith in Jehovah God

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/171046.html>

On December 16, 2021, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region considered Tatyana Sholner's appeal against the verdict of the Birobidzhan District Court. The panel of judges chaired by Svetlana Ketova approved the verdict.

According to the defendant, the prosecution focused on proving

the existence of some kind of organization among believers and their belonging to the denomination of Jehovah's Witnesses instead of specifying specific facts of criminal activity.

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22.12.2021 – Orthodox “foreign minister” announces negotiations for patriarch’s meeting with pope

Link to full text in Russian :
<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/13268741>

Patriarch of Moscow and all-Rus Kirill would like to meet with Roman Pope Francis. This was reported to a TASS correspondent on Wednesday by the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow patriarchate, Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Ilarion,.

“Pope Francis has frequently spoken about his desire to meet with Patriarch Kirill, including during my last meeting and the meeting before that with him,” the Vladyka said. “On his part, Patriarch Kirill also would like to meet with Pope Francis, because more than five years have already passed since their previous meeting, which was the first, and many new issues have arisen.”

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21.12.2021 – The brutal attack by the law enforcers did not break the believers in Irkutsk

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/211523.html>

In the early morning hours of October 4, 2021, dozens of law enforcement officers raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses

in the Siberian city of Irkutsk. Some of the raids were accompanied by beatings and abuse.

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21.12.2021 – Another Appeal in Birobidzhan dismissed. Verdict to Anna Lokhvitskaya entered into force

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/171429.html>

On December 16, 2021, the Jewish Autonomous Region Court upheld the sentence to 28-year-old Anna Lokhvitskaya: 2.5 years of suspended sentence. By its decision, the panel of judges chaired by Yelena Pyshkina equated communication of fellow believers with each other with “participation in extremist activities.”

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20.12.2021 – In the Kuban, a citizen of Ukraine was denied a residence permit due to religious beliefs

On December 20, 2021, it became known that in the Krasnodar Territory a citizen of Ukraine was denied a residence permit due to his religious beliefs. According to the FSB, he belongs to the New Generation Church.

The 34-year-old citizen of Ukraine came to Russia in 2019, at the same time he received a temporary residence permit. Now he has applied for a residence permit, but the regional FSB department reported that the man belongs to the New Generation church, the activities of four foreign organizations of which in Russia were deemed undesirable . According to the FSB, he is “actively spreading the ideas” of his church.

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“Foreign agents”, “undesirable organisations”, and freedom of religion or belief

Russia has used increasingly strict legislation on “foreign agents” (a term which has connotations of spying) and “undesirable organisations” to curtail, complicate, or prohibit the activities of organisations which promote human rights and monitor their violation, including that of freedom of religion and belief. This “indirectly affects the people human rights defenders stand up for”, says Aleksandr Verkhovsky of the SOVA Centre for Information and Analysis (branded a “foreign agent”). The Justice Ministry and prosecutors are seeking through the courts to close down the Memorial Human Rights Centre (also branded a “foreign agent”), partly for its monitoring of criminal prosecutions of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

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17.12.2021 – Jehovah’s Witnesses under the yoke of repression. Results of 2021

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2021/12/161640.html>

During 2021, several anti-records were recorded – in the number of sentences, in their cruelty, as well as in the number of believers in colonies and pre-trial detention centers. However, the end of the year was marked by the ruling of the Plenum of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation in defense of believers and the first acquittal.

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