

RUSSIA: Jehovah's Witness in pretrial custody in Krasnoyarsk territory

Believer imprisoned for two months for conversations on religious topics in Sharypov

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia (26.04.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2vxWkvr>– On 24 April 2019, Inga Gavritskaia, a judge of the Sharypov city court of Krasnoyarsk territory, ordered the imprisonment for a term of two months of the 28-year-old driver of a power station, Anton Ostapenko. He was arrested during widespread searches in believers' homes that were conducted throughout the city on 19 April. In the opinion of the investigation, the believer is an "arranger of the activity of an extremist organization." (part 1, article 282.2 CCRF).

The case was opened on 19 April 2019 by the senior investigator of the special department for Sharypov district of the Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia (SKR) for Krasnoyarsk territory, Yu. Fedyniak. The charge is based on evaluation of conversations about the Bible that were recorded on a hidden video camera in the home of one of the believers.

In considering the petition of the investigator for imprisoning Ostapenko, the judge ignored the arguments of the lawyer that during the search in his apartment, no weapons or traces of a crime were found. It made no impact on the court's

decision even that the defendant is described positively by everybody who knows him, he never has been criminally liable, and he cares for his disabled mother.

The searches on 19 April 2019 in Sharypov were carried out in a total of ten homes of believers. They followed a similar pattern: groups of personnel of the FSB and the Investigative Committee blockaded peaceful, unarmed people in their homes, took from them all electronic equipment and Bibles (including in the synodal translation), forbade them from conversing with one another, and interrogated them. Several were arrested and taken to the investigation department. Believers reported that they experienced great stress and some became ill.

Law enforcement personnel in Sharypov, copying their colleagues from other cities of Russia, came to the incorrect conclusion that ordinary religious activity of citizens (reading the Bible, prayers) are a "continuation of the activity of an extremist organization." International organizations, the Council on Human Rights, and even the president of Russia have frequently called attention to this pernicious practice and its sad consequences.

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