

RUSSIA: One more Jehovah's Witness sentenced to 6 years in prison

As of 9 December, 43 JWs were in detention and 22 under house arrest.

HRWF (16.12.2019) – A Jehovah's Witness was sentenced to six years in prison by a Russian court after being found guilty of extremist activity.

Vladimir Alushkin, 55, was sentenced for so-called extremist activity by the Leninsky District Court of Penza, about 350 miles (563 km) southeast of Moscow.

Alushkin was immediately handcuffed and taken into detention. Five other Jehovah's Witnesses, including Vladimir's wife, Tatyana, were party to the same case. The five were convicted and given conditional sentences (no prison time) of two years.

"Russian authorities have remained obstinate in the face of repeated criticism from prominent international bodies and human rights advocates. The current state of religious freedom in Russia is reminiscent of Soviet times," Jehovah's Witness spokesman Jarrod Lopes in New York told in a press release.

"Vladimir's six-year prison sentence is one of the harshest imposed on one of Jehovah's Witnesses since the 2017 ban."

Last month in the Siberian city of Tomsk, another member of the group, Sergei Klimov, was also sentenced to six years in prison.

UN Working on Arbitrary Detention

UN WGAD (Working Group on Arbitrary Detention) issued a 12-page opinion in August 2019 that denounced Russia for arresting and detaining Vladimir Alushkin (<https://bit.ly/34magrA>). Russia has ignored the WGAD's opinion/directives (see points 52, 54, and 67-71 of the opinion) and the prior WGAD decision issued in April 2019 concerning Dmitriy Mikhaylov (<https://bit.ly/2LVr3vg>). In its verdict, the Russian court stated that although the defense based its arguments on the WGAD's opinion, the court deemed the WGAD's opinion groundless in view of the 2017 Supreme Court ban.

Additional Background

Vladimir Alushkin was arrested on July 15, 2018, after about a dozen masked police officers with assault rifles forced their way into his home. The officers searched the apartment for almost four hours, seizing cell phones, electronic devices, Bibles, and other literature. Officers searched three other homes of Jehovah's Witnesses that day and took some 40 people in for interrogation.

Local authorities kept Vladimir Alushkin in a temporary holding facility for two days before the Pervomayskiy District Court of Penza ordered his transfer to a pretrial detention center for two months. The district court subsequently extended Vladimir Alushkin's pretrial detention term twice. After spending nearly six months in the detention center, he was transferred to house arrest, where he remained to date.

Vladimir Kulyasov, Andrey Magliv, and Denis Timoshin were charged in the same criminal case but were placed under house arrest, where they have remained to date. Criminal charges were also filed against Vladimir's wife, Tatyana, and Galiya Olkhova. They were later (Feb 2019) required to sign a recognizance agreement.

As of Monday, 9 December, there were 297 JWs dealing with criminal charges for their faith in some 50 regions of Russia. There are 43 JWs in detention and 22 under house arrest.