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Russia: Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest April 01-15

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly digest April 01-15

14.04.2023 – In Anapa, a pastor was sentenced to a year in prison for collaborating with the New Generation

Sova center – On April 13, 2023, it became known that the

pastor of the religious group of Christians of the Evangelical faith "Christ the Savior" **Nikolai Bogoslovsky** was convicted. The Anapa City Court found him guilty under Part 1 of Art. 284.1 Participation in the activities of a foreign or international non-governmental organization, in respect of which a decision was made to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation, committed by a person subjected to administrative punishment for a similar act) and sentenced him to a year of imprisonment with a term of settlement colonies.

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14.04.2023 – A new case was opened in Tambov on participation in the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses

Sova Center – A 67-year-old Tambov resident became a suspect under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

On April 14, 2023, the investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee for the Tambov Region announced that it had opened a criminal case under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (participation in the activities of an extremist organization) in relation to a 67-year-old Jehovah's Witness. His name is not called.

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12.04.2023 – Russia, Pastor Moskvitin's Church headed for liquidation

Bitter Winter – Bitter Winter reported in March that the Kirovsky District Court of Omsk, Russia, sentenced **Pastor Stanislav Moskvitin** on March 12 to one and a half years to be spent in a penal colony. Moskvitin had been arrested on July

18, 2021. He is the pastor of the Apostolic Center Church “New Creation,” which is part of the Russian Council of Christian Evangelical Churches.

As Bitter Winter had reported when the trial started in September 22, New Creation was founded in 2014 and registered in 2016. It is part of a network of Russian-speaking conservative Evangelical churches established in Russia, the Baltic States, and the United States. They supported in the past Putin and Patriarch Kirill’s criticism of Western LGBT activism. However, they were denounced as “cults” by the Russian Orthodox Church because they proselytize and convert Orthodox believers to their Protestant faith.

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11.04.2023 – Raid on Jehovah’s Witnesses in St. Petersburg. The Security Forces searched for everything with the words “God”, “Jesus”, “Faith”

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/04/110844.html>

On the evening of April 4, 2023, nine Jehovah’s Witnesses in St. Petersburg were subjected to searches, six of them, men and women aged 40 to 68, were interrogated by the Investigative Committee throughout the night.

Around 20:00, groups of OMON fighters broke into the apartments of believers at several addresses in the south of the city. At that time, the hosts received guests. In one of the apartments, armed security forces in balaclavas, shouting “everyone on the floor”, broke down the door.

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10.04.2023 – Rustam Seidkuliev served his sentence for his faith and was released from the penal Colony in Saratov

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/04/101437.html>

On April 7, 2023, **Rustam Seidkuliev** was released from a penal colony in the Saratov Region. As he walked out, he was met by his wife and dozens of friends who came to support the believer.

In January 2020, a criminal case was initiated against Rustam Seidkuliev under the article on participation in the activities of an extremist organization. On May 20, 2021, the Leninskiy District Court found him guilty and sentenced him to two and a half years in a general regime penal colony. Later, the Saratov Regional Court reduced this term by two months.

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10.04.2023 – In St. Petersburg, riot police did not allow Catholics to perform a ceremony near the temple

Sova center – In St. Petersburg, at the request of the security forces, the Catholic community on the eve of Easter was forced to conduct a ceremony of lighting a fire inside the temple, and not at the entrance to it, as they had done before.

On April 8, 2023, OMON fighters came to the Basilica of St. Catherine in St. Petersburg, where the Catholic community was going to hold a ritual of lighting a fire on the eve of the Easter service. The security forces demanded permission from the rector to hold an event at the entrance to the temple.

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10.04.2023 – Russia uses the UOC-MP and religion as weapons to incite social tension in Ukraine – ISW report

Risu – Russia falsely accuses Ukraine of infringing religious freedoms against the UOC-MP, while it itself has launched real religious purges in the occupied territories of Ukraine as part of a broader campaign of genocide against Ukrainians.

According to NV, this was stated in a new report by the Institute for the Study of War.

The report analyzes in detail the religious repression that Russia has been carrying out throughout the occupied territory of Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022.

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08.04.2023 – Only ‘compatriots’ in war How plans for a new mosque in Moscow exposed the limits of Russia’s religious pluralism

Meduza.io – In early February, residents of Moscow’s Kosino-Ukhtomsky District started protesting in opposition to the rumored construction of a new mosque in their area. Over the weeks that followed, the demonstrations grew into a bizarre and ugly spectacle on which everyone from MMA fighters to Chechnya Governor Ramzan Kadyrov to Russian Orthodox Church head Patriarch Kirill felt compelled to weigh in. On April 5, Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin announced that the protesters would get their wish, and that a new site had been chosen for the mosque. The solution was sold as a win-win, but public figures from Dagestan and Chechnya say the incident triggered xenophobia that will leave Russia’s Muslims worse off in the long run.

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07.04.2023 – Russians launch disinformation campaign aimed at inciting Muslims against Ukraine

Risu – The goal of this disinformation campaign is to incite inter-religious enmity and demonize Ukraine and Ukrainians in the eyes of Muslims. In addition, according to analysts, another goal of the disinformation campaign is to increase the level of mobilization among devout Muslims.

Experts from the Center for Countering Disinformation at the National Security and Defense Council have identified a disinformation campaign.

Telegram channels broadcasting pro-Kremlin rhetoric are spreading reports about “Nazi Ukrainians who hate other people’s religions,”, particularly Islam.

The authors of these messages are attempting to convince readers that “Ukraine is a godless and satanic state” by spreading fake news about incidents such as the burning of the Quran.

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06.04.2023 – Lunkin R. Campaign against a religious minority: a dangerous game on the feelings of believers

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/docs/285.html>

In 2019, several articles in the information and analytical journal Religion and Law were devoted to Jehovah’s Witnesses. Doctor of Political Science, Head of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the Institute of Europe of the

Russian Academy of Sciences, Editor-in-Chief of the Modern Europe magazine Roman Lunkin, in his article analyzed in detail how the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia unfolded over the past 25 years.

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05.04.2023 – First jail term for religious-based opposition to war

Forum 18 – On 30 March, a Moscow court jailed 63-year-old Orthodox **Christian Mikhail Simonov** for 7 years for disseminating “false information” about the Russian armed forces on the basis of “political hatred”. He had made two short social media posts condemning Russia's war against Ukraine, including: “We, Russia, have become godless. Forgive us, Lord!” The Investigative Committee and Prosecutor's Office did not respond on why they sought a long jail term for Simonov, who suffers from health problems. A Krasnodar Region court fined 86-year-old independent Orthodox Archbishop Viktor Pivovarov two months' average pension for a sermon.

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03.04.2023 – Court of Appeal in Kemerovo upheld the 6-year suspended sentence for Sergey Sushilnikov, a veteran of labor

Link to full text in Russian:
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/04/031040.html>

On March 29, 2023, the Kemerovo Regional Court upheld the main part of the sentence for 65-year-old **Sergey Sushilnikov** – 6-year suspended sentence. At the same time, a number of additional restrictions were removed from the verdict, in particular, a ban on publishing on the Internet and attending public events.

“The court did not determine any consequences of my actions aimed at the peaceful practice of my faith in accordance with the Bible commandments, and did not mention them in the verdict,” Sushilnikov emphasized at the appeal hearing. “The verdict does not include quotations of extremist statements, nor the dates, times and places of when they were made. On the contrary, it indicates that ... there are no such statements”.

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03.04.2023 – Kremlin’s Dismissal Of Kalmyk Religious leader last straw for Russia’s Buddhists

Eurasiareview – The Kremlin’s decision to oust the leader of the Kalmyk Buddhists both because of his anti-war comments and in order to curry favor with China has outraged many in the three Buddhist nations of the Russian Federation, the Kalmyks, the Buryats and the Tuvins.

And it is driving the most radical in all three to send men to fight Russian force in Ukraine and to organize in the diaspora and at home to defend their religion and seek independence for their nations, according to Daavr Dorzhin of the Congress of the Oyrat-Kalmyk People and the League of Free Nations

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