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RUSSIA: Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest June 01-15

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15.06.2023 – Jehovah's Witness approved sentence in Kemerovo Region

SOVA – On June 14, 2023, the Kemerovo Regional Court upheld the verdict against Jehovah's Witness Sergei Ananin, convicted under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization).

On March 31, 2023, the Belovsky City Court of the Kemerovo Region sentenced him to six years in prison to be served in a penal colony. The believer was taken into custody in the courtroom. During the debate of the parties on March 21, the public prosecutor asked that Ananin be sentenced to eight years in prison.

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15.06.2023 – The Court of Appeal in Primorye Territory upheld the verdict against three believers from Lesozavodsk

JW – On June 14, 2023, the Primorskiy Territorial Court, chaired by Judge Svetlana Ustimenko, upheld the verdict against Yevgeniy Grinenko, Sergey Kobelev and Svetlana Yefremova for their faith – a 6-year suspended sentence for the men and 3 years of probation for the elderly woman.

In February 2022, the Lesozavodskiy District Court found three local residents guilty of extremism for talking about the Bible and attending peaceful religious meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. The convicted persons have appealed the verdict. According to the defense, the believers did not commit any real crime, the court only proved that they belong to the denomination of Jehovah's Witnesses, which is not prohibited by any law.

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15.06.2023 – Legal concept of “extremist material” expanded in Russia

Bitter Winter – Courts will be allowed to consider “extremist” even documents or information not explicitly listed as such—and anything connected with “Fascism.”

From now on in Russia, if texts you distribute are officially listed as “extremist” you go to jail. But if your texts are not in the list of “extremist materials” you can go to jail as well.

This is the consequence of amendments to the law on extremism approved by the State Duma (the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia) last month and by the Federation Council (the upper house) on June 7.

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13.06.2023 – In the Kuban, two Pentecostals were fined for participating in the activities of an undesirable organization

SOVA – In June 2023, it became known that on May 26, the Krasnoarmeisky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory found Kirill and Ekaterina Ulitin, the son and daughter of pastor Nikolai Ulitin, guilty under Art. 20.33 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (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) and fined each of them five thousand rubles.

Both of them in December 2021 took part in a pastoral conference in Ramenskoye, organized by representatives of the New Generation.

Recall that the father of Ekaterina and Kirill, pastor Nikolai Ulitin, is charged under a criminal article on organizing the activities of an organization whose activities are recognized as undesirable.

13.06.2023 – Russia, Transformation Center Church falsely accused of supporting “Ukrainian terrorists”

Bitter Winter – The U.S.-based organization led by Andrey Shapovalov inspires several Russian churches. It has been declared “undesirable.”

On June 8, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Russia declared “undesirable” the Transformation Center Church International, a large nondenominational Slavic Evangelical community based in Seattle, Washington.

Shapovalov is an associate of Pastor Aleksey Ledyaev, the founder of the Latvian New Generation Church, whose Russian communities in Chelyabinsk, Moscow, Kemerovo, Novosibirsk, Krasnodar, and Sochi were raided by special forces on August 15, 2022, and whose pastors continue to be arrested and sentenced.

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09.06.2023 – The Court of Appeal in Tuva upheld the verdict against Anatoliy Senin, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses – a 6-year suspended sentence

JW – On June 8, 2023, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tuva upheld the basic punishment for Anatoliy Senin, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a 6-year suspended sentence, but removed restrictions on his attending mass events from the verdict.

On January 12, 2023, the Kyzylsky City Court found the believer guilty of organizing the activity of an extremist organization. Senin’s “guilt” comes down to the fact that he “broadcasted video recordings of a religious content, encouraged the audience to pray, sing religious songs and study the Bible”.

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06.06.2023 – Muslim Kotelnikov accused of “illegal” missionary work and violation of fire safety

SOVA – On June 5, 2023, cases were initiated against the local religious organization of Muslims in Kotelniki near Moscow under part of the law. 3 and 4 art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (carrying out by a religious organization of activities without indicating its official full name, including the release or distribution of literature, printed, audio and video materials without marking with the specified name or with incomplete or deliberately false marking as part of missionary activities; carrying out missionary activities in violation of requirements of the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations) and Part 1 of Art. 20.4 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (violation of fire safety requirements).

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05.06.2023 – Residents of Sochi opposed the construction of the synagogue

SOVA – On May 4, 2023, it became known that residents of the Sochi microdistrict Bytkha began collecting signatures against the construction of a Jewish cultural center, which includes a synagogue. Opponents of the construction believe that this place should be a public garden.

According to the chairman of the Bytkha territorial public self-government, Olga Sadovskaya, the participants of the gathering spoke out against the construction of the synagogue on this site, at which it was decided to change the purpose of the site to “a square, a recreation area, create a square with a children’s and sports ground . ”

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02.06.2023 – A court in St. Petersburg sentenced three foreign citizens to expulsion for “illegal missionary work”

Sova – According to the court, they organized an underground school where they taught Islam to children and adults and tried to involve them in the Turkish organization Suleymancilar.

On May 24, 2023, it became known about the deportation of three foreign citizens from Russia, whom the Oktyabrsky District Court of St. Petersburg found guilty of “illegal missionary work.”

The court found Turkish citizen Shaban Dincer, Azerbaijani citizen Fazli Agayev and Tajik citizen Sharofiddin Rakhmanov guilty under Part 5 of Art. 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses (carrying out missionary activities in violation of the requirements of legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations, committed by a foreign citizen) and sentenced them to 30,000 rubles each and administrative expulsion from the country.

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02.06.2023 – In Komsomolsk-on-Amur six more searches were conducted at homes of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Searches involved several families.

JW – On the evening of 25 May, 2023, searches were conducted at six addresses of residents of Komsomolsk-on-Amur who are Jehovah’s Witnesses. Presumably, a criminal case was opened for their faith.

The searches started around 8 p.m. and lasted almost until midnight. The believers were communicating with each other via video conferencing at the time.

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02.06.2023 – The Orthodox were outraged by the exhibition of contemporary art in St. Petersburg

SOVA – On June 1, 2023, it became known that in St. Petersburg, a group of Orthodox believers opposed an exhibition of contemporary art at the Pig's Snout Gallery. They consider the exhibits presented there offensive to believers.

The statement against holding the exhibition is addressed to the Prosecutor General's Office, the Investigative Committee, the Synodal Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as the head of the Safe Internet League Ekaterina Mizulina, the chairman of the Central Headquarters of the "Cultural Front of Russia" Nikolai Burlyayev, the chairman of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko, a member of the committee Federation Council for Defense and Security Margarita Pavlova. As of June 1, the statement has been signed by more than 30 people.

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02.06.2023 – The Court of Appeal reduced the terms of imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses from Birobidzhan

SOVA – Valery Krieger, Sergei Shulyarenko, Alam Aliyev and Dmitry Zagulin were found guilty of involvement in the activities of a banned community.

On June 1, 2023, the Court of the Jewish Autonomous Region (JAO) considered appeals against the conviction of four Jehovah's Witnesses, which was pronounced on December 19, 2022 by the Birobidzhan District Court. The court of appeal upheld the guilty verdict, but reduced the terms of imprisonment for

two believers.

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