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## **RUSSIA: Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest May 01-15**

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**15.05.2023 – The eviction of Vissarion's followers began in the Krasnoyarsk Territory**

SOVA – On May 11, 2023, it became known about the beginning of the eviction of the followers of the Church of the Last Testament from their homes in the Kuraginsky district of the Krasnoyarsk Territory. The bailiffs demanded that two families

living on the Svetly Ruchey farm should demolish their houses and outbuildings on their own, otherwise, after May 15, this will be done forcibly.

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### **15.05.2023 – Buddha's birthday declared a national holiday in Kalmykia**

On May 11, 2023, the head of Kalmykia, Batu Khasikov, signed a decree declaring Shakyamuni Buddha's birthday a national holiday. Previously, this holiday was declared a non-working day in the republic for several years.

In 2023, Shakyamuni Buddha's birthday falls on June 4th. As it is Sunday, the holiday is moved to Monday, June 5th.

### **12.05.2023 – Criminal case opened in Chuvashia against Jehovah's Witness**

SOVA – On May 11, 2023, it became known that in Chuvashia the investigating authorities opened a criminal case under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) in relation to a local resident. His name is not called.

According to the investigation, since July 2019, he "carried out preaching activities, expressed in conducting conversations and teaching the religious teachings of the indicated extremist organization, convincing the followers of the religious teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses and their superiority over representatives of other religions, involving new participants in the activities of the said organization" .

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## **12.05.2023 – Abakan resident sentenced in case of insulting the feelings of believers**

A resident of Khakassia was sentenced to compulsory labor under Art. 148 of the Criminal Code for publishing pictures about Christianity on a social network.

On May 11, 2023, the main investigative department of the Russian Investigative Committee for the Krasnoyarsk Territory and the Republic of Khakassia reported that a court in Abakan had sentenced a 22-year-old local resident accused under Part 1 of Art. 148 of the Criminal Code (insulting the religious feelings of believers). He was sentenced to 160 hours of compulsory work.

Probably, we are talking about Yevgeny Baturin, whose case was originally received by the judicial district of Justice of the Peace No. 4 of Abakan, but on March 3, 2023, it was transferred under the jurisdiction of another judge (we were unable to establish which court).

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## **12.05.2023 – Priest who changed prayer for victory is defrocked**

On May 11, 2023, it became known about the decision to sack from the rank of cleric of the Moscow church of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called in Lublin, Priest John Koval, who was previously suspended from service for replacing the word “victory” with the word “peace” in the “Prayer for Holy Russia” prescribed by the patriarch.

Archpriest Vladislav Tsy-pin, Deputy Chairman of the Church Court, explained that the basis for the deprivation of Fr. John the rank became the 25th canon of the Holy Apostles,

which prohibits perjury – in this case it consisted in violating the oath that the priest gives at ordination, pledging to fulfill the orders of the hierarchy: " His fundamental refusal to obey the hierarchy – this can be used to designate the main basis for the decision on his case" .

The decision of the church court has not yet been approved by the patriarch.

### **11.05.2023 – The Appeal Court in Blagoveshchensk upheld the sentencing of five Jehovah's Witnesses to a penal colony for more than 6 years for their beliefs**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/111527.html>

On May 11, 2023, the panel of judges of the Amur Regional Court did not grant the appeal of **Sergey Afanasiyev, Sergey Kardakov, Sergey Yermilov, Anton Olshevskiy and Adam Svarichevskiy** against the decision of the court of first instance, which equated peaceful religious activity with extremism. The verdict has entered into force.

Earlier, Daria Varkalevich, judge of the Blagoveshchensk City Court of the Amur Region, sentenced Sergey Afanasiyev to 6.5 years, Sergey Kardakov to 6 years and 4 months, Sergey Yermilov, Anton Olshevskiy and Adam Svarichevskiy to 6 years and 3 months in prison.

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### **10.05.2023 – The US Commission on International Religious Freedom presented a list of those who suffered for freedom of religion**

SOVA – On May 5, 2023, the United States Commission on

International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released the List of Victims Affected for Freedom of Religion or Belief. The list includes 409 people from Russia. There are more than 2,000 people on the list.

Among the Russians included in this list are Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims (including followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, and other organizations banned in Russia) who have suffered for their beliefs: those held in custody, placed under house arrest, or under in prison. In addition, the list includes representatives of Protestant communities that disappeared after the outbreak of hostilities on the territory of Ukraine.

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**10.05.2023 – Seven-year suspended sentence for reading the Bible with friends. Court Sentences Ivan Shulyuk, one of Jehovah's Witnesses from Nazarovo.**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/100922.html>

On May 10, 2023, Lev Afanasyev, judge of the Nazarovsky City Court of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, gave **Ivan Shulyuk** a 7-year suspended sentence with 4-year probation. The court deemed discussing the Bible, praying and singing religious songs among friends as organizing the activity of an extremist organization.

The prosecution of Ivan Shulyuk for his faith began on June 18, 2020, when law enforcement officers raided the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in Nazarovo. He said: "I was subjected to a degrading procedure of search, arrest and confinement in a detention center. I was repeatedly transported in a tiny metal chamber within the prison van in the heat, kept and moved about in handcuffs, although I do not pose any threat to

society.

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### **05.05.2023 – Case of Jehovah's Witnesses filed in court in Samara**

SOVA – On April 20, 2023, the Samara District Court of Samara received the case of Jehovah's Witnesses **Denis Kuzyanin, Sergei Polosenko, Nikolai Vasilyev, and Aram Danielyan**. They are accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization).

According to investigators, the defendants resumed and continued the activities of the Volzhskaya cell, which was part of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, from December 2020 to December 2021.

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### **05.05.2023 – The police checked the flag with the face of Christ for insulting religious feelings**

Sova – On May 1, 2023, public utilities demanded that the flag with the face of Christ installed for the May holidays be removed from the balcony of one of the houses on Kutuzovsky Prospekt in Moscow. The tenants of the apartment refused to do so, so the public utilities called the police. The police seized the flag and sent it for examination to find out if it offended the feelings of believers.

In response to the request of the flag owners to return the confiscated flag, the police advised to obtain permission from the mayor's office to install banners on their own balcony.

After discussing the incident in social networks and the

media, the flag was returned, apparently having come to the conclusion that the Savior Not Made by Hands does not offend the feelings of believers.

### **04.05.2023 – Liquidating the SOVA Center: The Official End of Religious Freedom in Russia**

Bitter winter – The Moscow City Court decision of April 27 “liquidating” the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, a leading Russian NGO monitoring violations of freedom of religion or belief, is one of the saddest news coming from Russia in recent times. We are all indebted to SOVA, not only for information not available anywhere else, but also for in-depth analyses explaining why the Putin regime behaves as it does in its assault against religious liberty. SOVA has announced that it will appeal, but it seems unlikely that a politically motivated decision may be overturned.

**Continue reading...**

### **02.05.2023 – Residents of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug demand to check the journalist for insulting the feelings of believers**

Sova – On May 1, 2023, it became known that several residents of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug applied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Nizhnevartovsk and Surgut with a request to check journalist Konstantin Shcherbina for insulting religious feelings.

The reason for the appeal was a photograph published by him on VKontakte, in which Shcherbina is sitting on a bench next to a wooden crucifix. Shortly after the publication, a similar wooden sculpture was found in a trash can in one of the districts of Nizhnevartovsk. The police began searching for

the person who had thrown away the crucifix.

The journalist himself said that the sculpture belonged to his deceased neighbor, whose belongings could not be disposed of for a year and a half. According to Shcherbina, the priest who examined the sculpture said that it depicts not Christ, but, possibly, a crucified robber, is not a religious shrine and can be chopped up for firewood.

### **01.05.2023 – The Court denied Aleksandr Nikolayev early release from the penal colony**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://www.jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/011414.html>

On April 27, 2023, the Apsheronsky District Court of the Krasnodar Territory denied **Aleksandr Nikolayev** early release from the penal colony. His release is planned for the end of September 2023.

In December 2021, the Abinsky District Court sentenced Aleksandr Nikolayev, a father of many children, to 2.5 years in prison for participating in an online meeting for worship in which he read a passage from the Bible aloud. The believer spent 13 months in pre-trial detention and since February 2023 he has been in a penal colony.

In the Khadyzhensk penal colony, Nikolayev was provoked when one of the officers tried to rip off the badge from his uniform, the absence of which is usually viewed as breaking the rules.

Aleksandr does not lose heart and is grateful for letters of support from different countries: Russia, Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

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