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# **RUSSIA: Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest May 15-31**

## **Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest May 15-31**

**31.05.2023 – Two pastors charged with collaborating with an unwanted organization**

SOVA – On May 31, 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation announced the approval of the indictment in the case of pastors Nikolai Ulitin and Svyatoslav Yugov. They were charged under Part 3 of Art. 284.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (organization of the activities of

an international non-governmental organization, in respect of which a decision has been made to recognize its activities as undesirable on the territory of the Russian Federation in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation) .

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### **30.05.2023 – “Would Jesus Christ have gone to kill in Ukraine?”**

Forum 18 – Eduard Charov criticised Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on social media, asking “Would Jesus Christ have gone to kill in Ukraine?”. The FSB alerted the Prosecutor’s Office. A Sverdlovsk Region court fined him for “discrediting” the Armed Forces and “inciting hatred” towards state authorities. A Moscow court fined Mariya Kunchenko for an Orthodox Easter Sunday protest, while a Kareliya court fined Yekaterina Kukharskaya for putting up stickers bearing the Sixth Commandment (“Thou shalt not kill”). Police, prosecutors’ offices, and courts did not respond to Forum 18’s questions.

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### **29.05.2023 – A case of insulting the feelings of believers was initiated against a resident of Volgograd for a video about the burning of the Koran**

SOVA – Against a resident of Volgograd, who recorded a video about the burning of the Koran in front of a mosque, a criminal case was initiated for insulting religious feelings. The case was transferred to Chechnya for investigation.

On May 21, 2023, it became known that a criminal case had been opened under Part 2 of Art. 148 of the Criminal Code (public actions expressing clear disrespect for society and committed in order to insult the religious feelings of believers,

committed in places specially designed for worship, other religious rites and ceremonies) in relation to a resident of Volgograd.

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**29.05.2023 – In the Altai Territory, another Jehovah's Witness has been convicted for his faith. Court in Barnaul Gave Pavel Kazadaev a 3-Year suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/261315.html>

On May 26, 2023, Dmitriy Malikov, judge of the Industrial District Court of Barnaul, gave Pavel Kazadaev, 26, a 3-year suspended sentence with restriction of liberty for 6 months and a probation period of 2 years for participating in the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Investigative Committee initiated a criminal case against the believer in May 2021. Two weeks later, the security forces conducted mass searches at the homes of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Altai Territory, calling the special operation "Armageddon".

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**25.05.2023 – The Primorye Territory Court slightly reduced the harsh terms of imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses convicted of extremism**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/250915.html>

On May 3, 2023, the Primorye Territorial Court reduced the terms of punishment for residents of Spassk-Dalnii convicted

for their faith by 2 months. Three believers will go to a penal colony: Dmitriy Malevaniy for 6 years 10 months, Aleksey Trofimov for 6 years 4 months and Olga Panyuta for 4 years 4 months. The suspended sentence for Olga Opaleva will be 4 years and 10 months.

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### **23.05.2023 – New criminal case for faith in Crimea. Home of Jehovah's Witnesses raided in Feodosia**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/231100.html>

On May 22, 2023, early in the morning a search was carried out at the home of a married couple in Feodosia. One of Jehovah's Witnesses, Maksim Zinchenko, 31, was detained and taken to Sevastopol.

The search, which took place from 06:30 to 10:00 am, was led by investigator Nikolay Pogorelov. The task force consisted of more than 10 people, five of whom were armed. The law enforcement officers ordered the hosts and the married couple who were visiting them to lie down on the floor. The investigator suggested that Zinchenko's wife cooperate with the investigation, intimidating her with a long prison term for her husband and a ban on visiting him. Electronic devices were confiscated from the believers. The detention of Maksim Zinchenko was preceded by a long period of surveillance.

Despite condemnation from the global community, the Russian authorities continue to prosecute Jehovah's Witnesses. In Crimea, 13 criminal cases for faith were initiated, 12 believers were sentenced to imprisonment in penal colonies.

**19.05.2023 – After searches at the homes of Jehovah's**

## **Witnesses in Tolyatti two criminal cases were initiated for their faith**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/191138.html>

On May 16, 2023, in Tolyatti, officers of the Investigative Committee and the FSB broke into the homes of at least three families of believers. Two new criminal cases are known to have been initiated. Aleksandr Dolganov, 34, was placed under house arrest, and Sona Olopova, 36, signed a recognizance agreement.

Searches of the homes of the Dolganovs and of another believer started at about 6:30 in the morning and lasted more than two hours. At about the same time, a search took place at the home of Anatoliy and Sona Olopovs. Armed law enforcement officers confiscated electronic devices and personal records from the believers, and foreign passports were also taken from Dolganov and Olopova.

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**18.05.2023 – A Court in Primorye refused to acquit three of Jehovah’s Witnesses from the City of Ussuriysk. The verdict entered into force—A six-year suspended sentence**

Link to full text in Russian:  
<https://jw-russia.org/news/2023/05/181711.html>

On May 18, 2023, the Primorsky Regional Court refused to grant the appeal of Sergey Korolchuk, Anton Chermnykh and Dmitry

Tishchenko against a guilty verdict that imposed a six-year suspended sentence. The decision has entered into force, but the believers have the right to appeal it in the cassation court.

The court considered the following to be evidence of extremist activity: the defendants continued to “follow the teachings” of Jehovah’s Witnesses by participating in worship services, “listening to sermons,” and “performing religious songs.” As noted in the appeal, these actions are not prohibited by the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation as socially dangerous acts but are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation as fundamental human rights and freedoms.

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### **18.05.2023 – Muslim prayer house closed in Kotelniki**

SOVA – On May 18, 2023, it became known that a prayer house located in a high-rise building was closed in Kotelniki near Moscow. Representatives of the police and the Investigative Committee sealed the premises, having previously checked the documents of those present. A criminal case was initiated against the owners of the premises under Part 1 of Art. 293 of the Criminal Code (negligence).

The local religious organization operating in the annex to the apartment building is officially registered. In 2021, they tried to bring her to administrative responsibility for the absence of a plate with the name of the organization, but the case was dismissed due to the absence of an offense.

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## **17.05.2023 – What about that meeting between Pope Francis and an exiled Russian Orthodox leader?**

Getreligion – So, my gentle readers, please allow me to flash back to a recent news story that I intended to discuss, but travel got in the way. This was a story that may or may not have been important, but we really don't know because it centered on a private meeting between Pope Francis and a very symbolic Russian Orthodox leader.

Why to I say that Metropolitan Hilarion of Budapest is a highly"symbolic" Orthodox leader, especially at this point in the hellish conflict between Russia and Ukraine?

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## **16.05.2023 – Muslim community in Rostov region fined for "illegal" missionary work**

Sova – In mid-May 2023, it became known that on April 27, the Justice of the Peace Court No. 7 of the Azov Judicial District of the Rostov Region fined the Muslim community for "illegal" missionary work in the amount of 30,000 rubles.

The local religious organization "Mahalla No. 2806" was found guilty under Part 3 of 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 within the framework of missionary activities without marking with the specified name or with incomplete or deliberately false marking).

In the course of the prosecutor's inspection of compliance with the legislation on freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious associations, carried out jointly with the FSB, it was established that the imam of this organization

used the literature of the Turkish religious organization “Suleimanji”.

## **16.05.2023 – In the Murmansk region, the court sentenced two Jehovah’s Witnesses**

SOVA – The court fined Yunona Ilyasova and Aleksey Eliseev from Snezhnogorsk, finding them guilty under Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code.

On May 15, 2023, the Polyarny District Court of the Murmansk Region passed a sentence on Jehovah’s Witnesses Alexei Eliseev and Yunona Ilyasova, accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization). The court found the residents of Snezhnogorsk guilty and fined them 450 and 400 thousand rubles, respectively.

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