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

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14.11.2023 – The case of Jehovah's Witnesses from Karpinsk once again returns to the Sverdlovsk Regional Court

Sova – After the Supreme Court did not approve the acquittal of three Jehovah's Witnesses, the Sverdlovsk Regional Court

simply returned the case to the prosecutor. The cassation court again sent the case to the regional court.

On November 8, 2023, the Seventh Cassation Court of General Jurisdiction in Chelyabinsk overturned the ruling of the Sverdlovsk Regional Court to return to the prosecutor the criminal case of Jehovah's Witnesses Alexander Pryanikov, Venus and Daria Dulova, accused under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization), and sent the case for a new appeal hearing to the same court with a different composition.

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13.11.2023 – In Moscow, due to the “threat of public scandal,” the presentation of a book by a priest who did not support the SVO was canceled

Sova – On November 13, 2023, the cultural center “Pokrovskiye Vorota” announced the cancellation of the presentation of the book by Archpriest Andrei Kordochkin, “The Russian Orthodox Church in Spain from the mid-18th to the beginning of the 21st century,” scheduled for November 14. The reason was “threats of public scandal” from Orthodox activists.

Shortly before the expected presentation, calls appeared on the Telegram channels of some Orthodox activists to prevent the event. In particular, the Orthodox publicist Alexander Voznesensky considers it unacceptable that “in the capital of Russia some bastard in a cassock, broadcasting that “Russia is a country of fascists”, that “the president is a man with the psychology of a terrorist”, that the Special Military Operation is evil, makes public presentations his books and also made money from those very Russians and from that very Russia about which he so simply wipes his feet to please his

cronies like Khodorkovsky .

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13.11.2023 – Attempted arson of a temple in New Moscow

Sova Center – On November 9, unknown persons tried to set fire to the temple in honor of the Georgian Icon of the Mother of God in the village of Marushkino in New Moscow.

A temple worker, walking around the area, found traces of burning on a wooden building and two bottles with a flammable mixture nearby. Apparently, someone scared off the arsonists, since there were people in the temple during the day.

The police are investigating what happened.

09.11.2023 – Residents of South Butovo oppose the construction of a mosque

JW – On November 7, 2023, it became known that residents of the Moscow district of Yuzhnoye Butovo are opposed to the construction of a mosque on Akhmat Kadyrov Street. They are asking the mayor's office to hold a vote on this issue.

Residents living near the site of the proposed construction fear that the appearance of the mosque will lead to a transport collapse. They also fear the inconvenience associated with the use of sound amplification equipment during services.

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07.11.2023 – Valeriy Vyaznikov, a retired miner from Primorye Territory, received a suspended sentence for believing in Jehovah God

JW- On November 7, 2023, Nina Kalashnik, judge of the Pozharskiy District Court of the Primorye Territory, found Valeriy Vyaznikov guilty of participating in extremist activities – this is how the confession of faith in Jehovah was interpreted. A peaceful 59-year-old believer from the village of Chegdomyn was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months of suspended imprisonment.

“My conscience is clear before God, people and the court. It is for the fact that I try to convey life-saving truths from God’s Word that I am now being judged,” the believer said in his final statement. Despite the lack of any victims and facts of extremist actions in the case, the prosecutor asked to impose a suspended sentence of 3 years with restriction of freedom for 1 year. The verdict can be appealed.

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07.11.2023 – Russia Hands Jehovah’s Witness Follower 7-Year Jail Term for ‘Extremism’

Moscow Times – A court in Russia’s Chelyabinsk region has sentenced a Jehovah’s Witness follower to seven years in prison on charges of “extremism,” the religious organization’s Russian branch said Tuesday.

Yevgeny Bushev had been under house arrest since September 2022 on allegations of “organizing actions to continue the illegal activities of a banned religious organization,” the religious group said on its website.

Russia's Supreme Court in 2017 declared the Jehovah's Witness movement to be "extremist," banning its estimated 400 branches across the country.

Chelyabinsk's Kalininsky District Court found Bushev guilty and handed him a seven-year prison sentence.

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07.11.2023 – Searches of Falun Gong followers were conducted in several regions

Sova – On November 1, 2023, police officers and the Center for Combating Extremism in several regions conducted searches in the homes of Falun Gong practitioners.

In particular, searches took place in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Irkutsk and the Irkutsk region.

According to Falun Gong, the searches in Irkutsk were preceded by an authorized picket in support of Falun Gong followers persecuted in China, during which two men present at the action invited another participant, N., to take the posters they had brought and take a photo with them in their hands.

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03.11.2023 – Appeal in Tatarstan upholds the verdict of three Jehovah's Witnesses

JW- On November 1, 2023, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan upheld the sentence of the first instance—2 years suspended for Tatyana Obizhestvit, 2.5 years suspended for Leysan Bochkareva and 3 years and 1 month in prison for Andrey Bochkarev, who has already served this term in full while in jail.

The prosecutor considered the decision of the court of first instance too lenient and in March 2023 filed an appeal in which he asked the court to “strengthen” the punishment for the believers, as well as to exclude mitigating circumstances from the verdict.

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03.11.2023 – The appeal in Yaroslavl reduced the suspended sentence of Petr Filiznov and Andrey Vyushin by 4 years

JW- On October 30, 2023, the judicial board of the Yaroslavl Regional Court commuted the sentences of Petr Filiznov and Andrey Vyushin, sentencing them to 2.5 years instead of 6.5 years suspended. For the Kuznetsovs, the suspended sentence of 2.5 years remained the same.

The basis for mitigating the sentences for Filiznov and Vyushin was that the court reclassified the charge from Part 1 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation to Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of

the Russian Federation.

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03.11.2023 – A criminal case has been opened against the perpetrator of a pogrom in a monastery in the Tula region

Sova – On November 3, 2023, it became known that a criminal case had been initiated under Part 2 of Art. 148 of the Criminal Code (intentional public desecration of religious or liturgical literature, objects of religious veneration, or their damage or destruction) and Part 2 of Art. 213 of the Criminal Code (hooliganism committed with the use of weapons or objects used as weapons) against a 40-year-old resident of Novomoskovsk, who staged a pogrom in the Assumption Monastery.

House arrest was chosen as a preventive measure.

Let us remember that at the end of October he smashed icon cases and overturned a lectern in the monastery church and insulted believers.

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02.11.2023 – Armed raid on Krasnodar Region church

Forum 18 – In early October, 10 unidentified armed men raided a non-Moscow Patriarchate Russian Orthodox Church in the southern Krasnodar Region whose clergy have repeatedly spoken

out against Russia's war in Ukraine. A priest was physically tortured, detained, and charged with "disobeying a police officer" and "discrediting the Russian Armed Forces". "At least five searches took place simultaneously", Fr Iona told Forum 18. The Krasnodar Region branches of the Investigative Committee, Federal Security Service (FSB), Interior Ministry, and National Guard failed to respond to Forum 18's questions about the raid.

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01.11.2023 – Another Muslim house of worship sealed in Moscow

Sova – On October 31, 2023, another Muslim prayer house was sealed in Moscow, this time in the Yuzhnoye Butovo microdistrict.

We are talking about the prayer house of the Local Muslim Religious Organization "Mercy", located in the SNT "Gavrikovo-1".

According to the chairman of this organization, Imam Marat Alimov, "employees of the Investigative Committee conducted an inspection in the prayer hall of the spiritual center, seizing copies of the Koran and other religious literature for examination. After this, the building was sealed." Let us remind you that a Muslim prayer house in the Moscow Mitino district

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