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

Religious persecution and issues – Bimonthly Digest September 01-15

15.09.2023 – The Court of the City of Kazan sent Sergey Gromov to a penal colony for six years for conducting religious meetings

JW- On September 14, 2023, the examination of the case of Jehovah's Witness, **Sergey Gromov**, was completed in the Moskovskiy District Court of the city of Kazan. Judge Alsu

Gumirova found him guilty of extremism and sentenced him to six years and one month of imprisonment for peacefully practicing his faith.

Gromov's guilt, according to the investigation, is that he "conducted religious meetings" at home. Although, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation ruled that worship services in themselves are not a crime, the investigator, followed by the judge, equated holding such meetings with organizing the activities of an extremist organization. The prosecutor asked to sentence Sergey to eight years in prison. The believer considers himself innocent and can appeal the verdict.

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15.09.2023 – The Court of Cassation in Vladivostok upheld the conviction of believers from Yelizovo

JW- On September 12, 2023, the Ninth Court of Cassation of General Jurisdiction in Vladivostok upheld the sentence of Konstantin Bazhenov and his wife Snezhana, as well as Vera Zolotova, to 2 years suspended sentence for their convictions.

Court proceedings against believers from Yelizovo have been going on for 4 years. In September 2020, the judge of the Yelizovsky District Court, Yuliya Piskun, handed down a guilty verdict to all three, which was approved by the appeal, but in November 2021, the Court of Cassation overturned this decision and returned the case to the appeal stage. In January 2022, a second appeal acquitted the believers. However, the prosecutor's office, through the Supreme Court, succeeded in overturning this decision. As a result, the case was sent for a new appeal, the believers were found guilty of extremism and received suspended sentences. The believers filed the cassation appeal.

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13.09.2023 – A court in Primorye refused to transfer shaman Gabyshev to a milder type of treatment

Sova Center – On July 28, 2023, the Primorsky Regional Court satisfied the appeal submission of the Ussuri city prosecutor to cancel the decision of the Ussuri city court to transfer shaman **Alexander Gabyshev** to a milder type of treatment and sent the case to the same court for a new trial.

On September 12, the Ussuriysky District Court, having considered the case again, refused to satisfy the defense's request to transfer Gabyshev to a general psychiatric hospital.

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13.09.2023- Attacks on women wearing hijabs and niqabs in Moscow and the Moscow Region

Sova – In late August and early September 2023, at least three girls wearing Muslim headscarves were attacked in Moscow and the Moscow region.

On September 1, 2023, a passenger on the Moscow metro reprimanded a girl wearing a niqab, Elizaveta Baranovskaya (according to another account of the event, there were two girls in niqabs). The passenger was angered by the girl's covered face, which he considered a «terrorist threat.» «While our Russian boys are being killed at the SMO (special military operation), these here are just chilling. I want her to take this thing off and wear normal clothes,» he said. Some of the passengers supported the right to wear religious clothing, others supported the angry man.

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12.09.2023 – A false “Buddhist diplomacy”: State-controlled Chinese and Russian Buddhists support each other

Bitter Winter – Buddhist bureaucrats loyal to their governments attended an “international Buddhist forum” in Ulan-Ude, Buryatia. Putin himself sent a message.

Russian and Chinese State-controlled Buddhist organizations both have a problem of credibility. As “Bitter Winter” reported last year, the then Supreme Lama of Kalmyk Buddhists, Telo Tulku Rinpoche (Erdne Ombadykow), became in October 2022 the first Russian high-profile religious leader to condemn the war of aggression against Ukraine. He even said that in his opinion “the Ukrainian side is right.” Obviously, he had to escape to Mongolia, where he catered to tens of thousands of Russian Buddhists who fled there to avoid conscription. In January 2023, Telo Tulku Rinpoche was declared a “foreign agent” in Russia and compelled to resign.

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11.09.2023 – In Saratov, a Muslim tried to perform namaz in a temple

Sova Center – On September 9, 2023, it became known that in Saratov a Muslim came to the Orthodox Church of St. ap. Peter and Paul on Molodezhnaya Street to perform namaz.

The priest began to explain why this should not be done, and reminded that there are mosques and other suitable places in Saratov. The man insisted. To get him out of the temple, it was necessary to call a rapid response team.

According to witnesses, the visitor “obviously did not shine even with superficial knowledge of the Koran, which even the priest himself possessed . ”

Activists of the “Russian Community” considered the Muslim’s act a provocation and incitement of hatred and said that they would make sure that he received punishment.

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08.09.2023 – The Appeal in Kemerovo upheld the sentence of Lyubov Serebryakova, 72.

JW – On September 5, 2023, the Kemerovo Regional Court upheld the verdict of **Lubov Serebryakova**, 72, who was sentenced to four years of suspended sentence with a probation period of three years and restriction of liberty for ten months for talking about God. The verdict may be appealed in the court of cassation.

In her appeal, Lubov Serebryakova pointed out the mistakes that, in her opinion, were made by the court of first instance. For example, the verdict does not describe the specific extremist actions that she had participated in that prosecution claims to have taking place.

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07.09.2023 – In Novochoerkassk, the case of three Jehovah’s Witnesses was brought to court

Sova – All three, including the elderly woman, spent more than a year in pre-trial detention.

On September 6, 2023, the investigative department of the Investigative Committee for the Rostov region announced that the case of three Jehovah’s Witnesses from Novochoerkassk had been transferred to court. 56-year-old **Garegin Khachaturyan** and 36-year-old **Gevorg Yeritsyan** are accused under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of

an extremist organization), and 67-year-old **Lyubov Galitsyna** – under Part 2 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activities of an extremist organization). The case came to court on August 20.

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06.09.2023 – A verdict has been issued in the case of three Jehovah's Witnesses from Nizhnekamsk

Sova – In September 5, 2023, the Nizhnekamsk City Court of the Republic of Tatarstan found guilty under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organization of the activities of an extremist organization) of Jehovah's Witnesses Denis Filatov, Stanislav Klyuchnikov and Dmitry Yarchak and sentenced them to six years in prison.

The corresponding criminal case was initiated in November 2020 in Nizhnekamsk. On November 18, 12 Jehovah's Witnesses were searched there; believers were interrogated about their involvement in the activities of the Kazan community. In August 2021, **Filatov, Klyuchnikov and Yarchak** became suspects in this case, a written undertaking not to leave the place was taken from them, and in early October of the same year they received the status of accused.

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06.09.2023 – A worship cross was cut down in the Omsk region

Sova – On the night of August 31, 2023, unknown persons cut down a worship cross installed several years ago at the entrance to the village of Azovo, Omsk Region.

“The height of the metal base is more than two meters. This means that the hooligan prepared thoroughly: in order to reach

the cross, he probably brought a ladder with him. Local residents regard such an act of vandalism as a provocation, an insult to the feelings of believers and banal disrespect for a working person ,” local Channel 12 reported.

The cross was installed at the expense of local residents.

The police began searching for the vandals.

06.09.2023 – In Tatarstan, three of Jehovah’s Witnesses were sentenced to long suspended sentences.

JW – On September 5, 2023, the Judge of the Nizhnekamsk City Court of the Republic of Tatarstan sentenced to six years of suspended imprisonment: **Sergey Kamenov, Denis Filatov, Stanislav Klyuchnikov and Dmitriy Yarchak**, who has had a disability since childhood. The court considered prayers and the singing of religious songs to be extremism.

The verdict has not yet entered into force and can be appealed. Believers insist on their complete innocence.

In November 2020, the Investigative Directorate of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation for the Republic of Tatarstan initiated a criminal case and conducted a series of searches in the city of Nizhnekamsk. An investigation was launched against the three men, which lasted fourteen months. In January 2022, the case went to court, where it was considered for another nineteen months. All this time, the believers were under recognizance agreement.

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01.09.2023 – The Astrakhan Regional Court approved a seven-year prison sentence for three Jehovah’s Witnesses

Sova – The Astrakhan Regional Court confirmed the verdict of Sergei Korolev, Sergei Kosyanenko and Rinat Kiramov, found guilty under Art. 282.2 and 282.3 of the Criminal Code.

On August 31, 2023, the Astrakhan Regional Court confirmed the verdict passed on April 17, 2023 by the Akhtubinsky District Court to Jehovah's Witnesses **Rinat Kiramov, Sergei Korolev and Sergei Kosyanenko**. accused. Each of them was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment to be served in a general regime colony with a three-year ban on activities related to the management of public organizations and participation in them and restriction of freedom for a year under Part 1 of Art. 282.2 of the Criminal Code (organizing the activities of an extremist organization) and Part 1 of Art. 282.3 of the Criminal Code (financing extremist activities).

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