

# **RUSSIA: Six more Jehovah's Witnesses sentenced to years in prison**

– HRWF (19.09.2019) – Six Jehovah's Witnesses from Saratov have been convicted and sentenced to prison for their peaceful Christian worship.

Judge Dmitry Larin of the Leninsky District Court of Saratov sentenced Konstantin Bazhenov and Alexei Budenchuk to 3 years and 6 months in prison; Felix Makhammadiev to 3 years; Roman Gridasov, Gennady German, and Alexei Miretsky to 2 years. Additionally, all of the men have been banned from holding leadership positions in public organizations for a period of 5 years and restriction of freedom for 1 year. All have been charged under Part 1 of Art. 282 of Russian Criminal Code (organization of activities of an extremist organization). The defendants were taken into custody in the courtroom and will be sent to jail. The defense intends to appeal the verdict.

The whole logic of the accusation was based on the speculative thesis that faith in God is "a continuation of the activities of an extremist organization." As a consequence of this approach, instead of searching and proving the guilt of the defendants, the aim of the investigation was to prove their religious affiliation, despite the fact that no religion is prohibited in Russia. Having proved the religion of the defendants, which they did not hide, the court automatically interpreted this fact as the activity of a prohibited legal entity.

Criminal cases were initiated against all six men as a result of home raids conducted in Saratov on June 12, 2018. Three of the men, Konstantin Bazhenov, Alexey Budenchuk, and Felix Makhammadiev spent almost a year in pretrial detention. All five of the men have families and have been productive members of their community. Alexei Budenchuk has two children who are still in school.

In their final words, the six men quoted from the Bible, thanked the court and law enforcement agencies, and said that they did not harbor animosity toward the persecutors.

Including today's verdict, Russia has now convicted and sentenced to prison seven men.

Link to images and short biographies for all of the men. You're welcome to use the images, but we ask that you please include the following credit line: "Courtesy of Jehovah's Witnesses."

As of Sept 19

**251** JWs were facing criminal charges

**41** were in detention (pretrial or prison)

**23** were under house arrest

**Over 100** were under restrictions

Source: JW headquarters in the US

### ***Moscow's religious persecution in Crimea***

Today, at the OSCE/ ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, the Crimean Human Rights Group stressed that 36 Muslims had been deprived of their freedom on alleged charges of terrorism and extremism although they had never used or advocated violence.

The Crimean Human Rights Group also stressed that three mass searches had been organized in November 2018 among Jehovah's Witnesses and four of them had been accused of extremism.

This summer, a group of Hare Krishna devotees (Hindus) met in the forest in Sevastopol to sing religious songs. This was reported to the Russian police anti-extremism unit. In August, two of them were fined 5,000 rubles for 'unlawful missionary activities'. The 'evidence' was a video posted by Hare Krishna devotees on social media. However, it is clear on the video that there no other people than themselves and were unable to preach to anyone