

RUSSIA: BBC features case of Danish Jehovah's Witness

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia: how Dennis Christensen became an Orel extremist

By Viktor Nekhezin

Russia Religion News (23.01.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2FJzbgV> – [...] At seven o'clock in the evening of 25 May 2017, during a Saturday worship service at building 50 on Zheleznodorozhny St. in Orel, a squad of OMON troops led by agents of the F.S.B. burst into the Kingdom Hall (as Jehovah's Witnesses call their houses of worship). A search was conducted in the building, which lasted until 5:00 in the morning of the next day.

Of 100 persons who were at the worship service, only Dennis Christensen was arrested. He was informed that a criminal case of extremism had been opened against him. Since that time, the Dane has been in pretrial detention.

He himself calls the accusation against him absurd. "To call me or other peaceful Jehovah's Witnesses extremists is the greatest stupidity that I have ever heard!" the Dane says in amazement.

An "excerpt from the order regarding the defendant of 15

November 2017” says that “Christensen, Dennis Ole, committed an intentional crime against the foundation of the constitutional structure and the security of the state.” In the opinion of the investigator, Christensen, while being “the effective leader of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel, undertook aggressive actions of an organizational nature directed to the continuation of the illegal activity of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel.”

The list of charges against Dennis Ole Christensen includes:

- he agreed and coordinated his actions as leader of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel with the forbidden “Administrative Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia;”
- he received from the “Administrative Center” religious literature with extremist contents and also forms for registering refusal of medical intervention (blood transfusion);
- he engaged three Russian citizens in the administration of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel (a criminal case against them was made into a separate trial and all three left Russia, along with their families, in 2017);
- he disposed of property of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel, by controlling the receipt and disbursement of funds;
- he organized the collection of funds from members of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel and directed their transfer to the account of the forbidden “Administrative Center;”
- “he continued the use of the building at the address of 50 Zheleznodorozhny St., Orel” as the premises for

worship services and directed the payment of utilities for this building;

- “he adopted measures of conspiracy for hiding the activity of the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel;
- he organized the storage of financial documents and religious literature “in electronic form and remote access;”
- “using his authority as a spiritual leader,” he independently made decisions about receiving new members into the local religious organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses of Orel;
- “he was the initiator and he exercised primacy in determining the course of worship services,” in which persons who are not adherents of the religious teaching of Jehovah’s Witnesses and also state agencies and bodies of local administration are evaluated negatively.

At the same time, Dennis Christensen was not even an official member of the Orel local religious organization. “He was never in this local religious organization at all and he could not be by law. Can you imagine? Because he is a foreigner. And the charter of the local religious organization stipulates that only citizens of Russia may be members of the local religious organization. Of course, this is nonsense, but what is to be done,” explains Irina [Christensen’s wife].

Her words are confirmed by Christensen’s lawyer, Anton Bogdanov: the defense examined the documents of the local religious organization and did not find a single mention of Dennis Christensen. “Even the prosecution does not challenge this,” Bogdanov emphasizes. “They say that he was the ‘effective director.’ Although the facts say otherwise.”

According to the logic of the prosecution, the attorney says, it turns out that after the liquidation by the court of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel, the adherents of this religion in principle did not have the right to conduct worship services: "Their position comes down to this, that once the court liquidated the legal entity, then people cannot assemble together, read the Bible, pray, or sing religious songs."

But this contradicts the decision of the Supreme Court, the attorney avers. "There is the appellate determination of the Russian Supreme Court on this case regarding the liquidation of the local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses of Orel—that after this liquidation, people professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to profess their religion afterward and to conduct their rituals," Anton Bogdanov recalls.

Complete Surprise

The local religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Orel was liquidated in July 2016; in October of the same year this court decision took legal effect, but both before and after this the Orel Jehovahists continued to gather twice a week in their Kingdom Hall on Zheleznodorozhny. Irina Christensen said that she and her husband did not have any premonitions or fears. Dennis' arrest at the end of May 2017 was a complete surprise for them.

The prosecutors presented their evidence in court for almost

six months, but, as Anton Bogdanov notes, the foundation of the accusation was audio and video recordings made with the help of a hidden camera of two services in February 2017. The recordings were made by an agent who was inserted into the congregation, who spoke in court as a secret witness under the pseudonym "Aleksei Ermolov."

"This is a person we know. He is a teacher of the Orel State University, and he filmed everything that was happening," the attorney explains. The identity of the secret witness became known to participants in the trial and journalists, but he himself refused to talk with the press.

Attorney Bogdanov doubts that it is possible to find any signs of extremism in the recordings made by "Aleksei Ermolov"

"These are ordinary conversations about religion. That God will destroy dishonest people—this is a quotation from the Bible. That people who will be righteous will live forever. Not Jehovah's Witnesses, but people who will be righteous, they will live forever. That it is necessary to develop in one's self meekness, self-control, patience, and love, and to relate to people peacefully no matter how they treat us. These are quotations of phrases that were spoken in the service," Bogdanov cites examples.

The attorney insists that in the case there is no criminal event.

In court the secret witness repeated two of the most common

accusations against Jehovah's Witnesses: that they break up families and pose a threat to their own life by refusing blood transfusion. But the witness replied to clarifying question of the defense that he knew about this "from the internet."

"Cite facts: whose family was broken up, who died without blood, what else? I know of no incidents in Orel. It is very superficial. A lot of dirt, few facts. More subjective evaluation," Bogdanov summed up the statements of the secret witness.

Several court sessions were devoted to wiretaps of Christensen's telephone conversations with his fellow believers. Attorney Bogdanov thinks that the court did not hear anything that incriminates his client. Even the opposite: without knowing about the wiretap, in one of the conversations Christensen himself says to his interlocutor: "We are not a local religious organization; we are simply a religious group, ordinary believing people." In the opinion of Anton Bogdanov, this proves the absence of any connections of Christensen with the forbidden organization.

During searches in the house of worship and in the apartment, a lot of religious literature was seized from Christensen, but the investigators did not manage to find there anything that is extremist. "There is not anything here," Bogdanov summarizes the evidence of the prosecution.

General flow

Dennis Christensen admits that he was an elder, one of several in their congregation (usually in each congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses there are five or six elders). "But this does not make me the leader of the congregation," he insists. "Jesus said in Matthew 23.8, 'You all are brothers.' I am a Christian brother, the same as all the rest, and we are equal before God."

Attorney Anton Bogdanov thinks that the prosecution does not have weighty evidence that it was Dennis Christensen who was the organizer of the worship services and generally the head of the Orel congregation. In the video recordings of meetings it is evident that the leader of the meetings was another person, and Christensen was only one of the speakers.

Bogdanov says that there was no need to organize anything: in a brochure published centrally for Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the world and not banned in Russia there is a schedule with clear instructions when to read which excerpts from the Bible, what questions to discuss, and what songs to sing. "This is the general flow of the world religious confession of Jehovah's Witnesses. And the witnesses who were questioned said: we do not need for anyone to come and say: 'So, I am your organizer; today we are reading this, and tomorrow that,' everything is clear here."

On a cost-free basis

In the attorney's opinion, the other points of the indictment are also similarly insubstantial. For example, that it was Christensen who was responsible for the use of the premises

where the worship services were held. The building at 50 Zheleznodorozhny, where the Orel Jehovah's Witnesses made their Kingdom Hall, is owned by a private individual who resides in Moscow and provides the building for use by the Jehovah's Witnesses at no cost. Anton Bogdanov supposes that the owner is a Jehovah's Witness himself and his testimony is in the materials of the case. There was no rental agreement.

And Bogdanov emphasizes, there were three congregations of Jehovahists in all in Orel. "Consequently, this building was attended not only by the group Christensen was in but also was used by other people," the attorney points out.

After Christensen's arrest, his fellow believers ceased using the building at 50 Zheleznodorozhny and now their meetings are conducted in apartments in various districts of Orel.

Second round of repressions

Despite nearly a year and a half spent in prison, Dennis Christensen, as previously, does not regret that he moved to live in Russia. "It is one of the best decisions that I have made in my life, and it brought me much happiness," he thinks.

His wife says that they feel the support and aid not only from fellow believers and relatives. Many rights advocacy organizations recognize Dennis Christensen as a political prisoner.

“In principle, in Russia this was everything that was in the Soviet Union. Jehovah’s Witnesses were under a ban for decades, they met secretly, they read the Bible surreptitiously. This all was already, it is history. This has not stopped people,” she recalls. Irina says that now a second round of repressions against Jehovah’s Witnesses is going on and they are ready for it.

“The prison terms are the very same; at that time they gave ten years, and now it is ten years. One for one. The article simply is different. There you were considered an enemy of the people, and here, an extremist,” Irina says.

She is not making plans and she is not contemplating alternatives in the event of Dennis’ deportation from Russia. Irina maintains that she and her husband have never thought about leaving the country and they do not want to even now.

There are already dozens of cases of Russian Jehovah’s Witnesses in the European Court of Human Rights, including an appeal by Dennis Christensen against his detention and by Irina Christensen for deprivation of her right to meet with her husband during the investigation. Irina does not doubt that they will win these cases, since the E.C.H.R. has already made decisions in favor of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in similar instances. In the event of an unfavorable outcome of the trial in Orel, they will of course also appeal it to the E.C.H.R.

It seems that Dennis Christensen has already lost faith in Russian justice. “To be honest, I always had the feeling—both during the investigation and during the trial—that everything

had already been decided long, long ago, and I am already convicted," Christensen acknowledges.

And he adds: "We will see whether I am right." (tr. by PDS, posted 23 January 2019)

[Translator's note: this is a translation of the second half of the original BBC article.]

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UKRAINE - CRIMEA/RUSSIA: Up to

10 years' jail for Muslims, Jehovah's Witness?

In "extremism" criminal cases opened by Russia's FSB in occupied Crimea, four Muslims face imminent trial, while Jehovah's Witness Sergei Filatov is under investigation. They face up to 10 years' jail. The Muslims "simply gathered in the local mosque to discuss religious questions", a lawyer stated. "We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible," Filatov told Forum 18.

By Felix Corley

Forum 18 (28.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2r7pJL0> – Nearly 14 months after the Russian FSB security service opened the first criminal case in occupied Crimea against four alleged members of the Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, their trial on "extremism"-related charges is imminent at Crimea's Supreme Court in the regional capital Simferopol, a court official told Forum 18. The alleged leader faces up to 10 years' imprisonment if convicted, while the other three each face up to 6 years' imprisonment. All four are from the Crimean Tatar minority.

"The men simply gathered in the local mosque to discuss religious questions," a legal specialist familiar with the case told Forum 18. "This is of course a question of freedom of conscience." Officials refused to put Forum 18 through to the prosecutor who prepared the indictment (see below).

The four Muslims were first arrested in October 2017 after the FSB opened criminal cases against them. Three have been held at home for most of the time since then. But one, 49-year-old Renat Suleimanov – who the authorities regard as the leader of the group – has been in pre-trial detention for more than a year, since his October 2017 arrest (see below).

The four Muslims are facing charges under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2. This punishes “Organisation of” or “participation in” “the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity”.

On 14 November, the Russian FSB security service opened the first criminal case in occupied Crimea against a Jehovah’s Witness, Sergei Filatov, on the same “extremism”-related charges. The following day, about 10 groups of FSB security service and OMON riot police officers from Simferopol raided his and seven other homes in the northern Crimean town of Dzhankoi. During one raid, officers put a 78-year-old man – deported to Siberia by the Soviet Union for his faith when he was 9 – up against a wall and handcuffed him (see below).

On 16 November, FSB Investigator Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin ordered Filatov to sign a pledge not to leave Dzhankoi without his specific permission. Lieutenant Chumakin is investigating the 46-year-old Filatov under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1, who faces up to 10 years’ imprisonment if convicted. Lieutenant Chumakin refused to talk to Forum 18 (see below).

"I no longer meet my friends because it might cause them problems," Filatov told Forum 18. "We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government" (see below).

"Extremist" organisations banned

Russia's Supreme Court banned Tabligh Jamaat as "extremist" in 2009. The Russian ban was imposed in Crimea after Russia annexed the peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014.

Russia's Supreme Court banned Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremist" in 2017. Prosecutors in Russia are investigating more than 90 individuals on "extremism"-related criminal charges. Of them, 25 were in pre-trial detention as of 19 November, Jehovah's Witnesses noted.

Following Russia's occupation of Crimea, the Russian authorities granted re-registration to Jehovah's Witness communities in Crimea, only to ban them following the Russian Supreme Court ban.

Annexation, restrictions imposed

Ukraine and the international community do not recognise Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea. The peninsula is now

divided between two Russian federal regions, the Republic of Crimea (with its capital in Simferopol) and the port city of Sevastopol.

After the annexation Russia imposed its restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. Many religious communities have been raided, and many individuals have been fined for possessing books – such as the Muslim prayer collection “Fortress of a Muslim” – which have been banned as “extremist” in Russia. Religious communities and individuals continue to be fined for not displaying the full name of their registered religious organisation at their place of worship, for meeting for worship without Russian state permission or advertising their faith.

Muslim Supreme Court trial imminent

Crimea’s Supreme Court is about to begin the trial of four Muslim men accused of membership of the banned Tabligh Jamaat Muslim missionary movement, a court official told Forum 18 from Simferopol on 28 November. The four facing trial on charges connected with “the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity” are:

1) Renat Rustemovich Suleimanov (born 30 August 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1.

2) Talyat Abdurakhmanov (born 1953), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

3) Seiran Rizaevich Mustafaev (born 2 January 1969), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

4) Arsen Shakirovich Kubedinov (born 6 August 1974), Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 2.

Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 punishes “Organisation of” and Part 2 punishes “participation in” “the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity”.

Suleimanov faces a maximum 10-year jail term if convicted of organising such activity. The other three face a maximum 6-year jail term each if convicted of participating in such activity.

Raids, four Muslims arrested

Russia’s FSB security service launched criminal cases against the four Crimean Tatar Muslims on 29 September 2017. Masked men raided their homes early on 2 October 2017, local human rights defenders and media reported.

The lawyer Edem Semedlyayev first noted the search and arrest of one of the men, Suleimanov, in his home village of Molodezhnoe just north of Crimea’s capital Simferopol. FSB officers and OMON riot police arrived at 6 am as he was

returning from early prayers at the mosque. After showing a search warrant about 20 officers raided the house, looking through all the rooms.

“All the men were in masks and all the official cars had their number plates removed,” the lawyer Semedlyaev wrote on his Facebook page. “So it was unknown who had taken him or where.”

Officers seized a computer, as well as five copies of three Muslim books from Suleimanov’s home. The books were by two members of the Kandahlawi family, key figures in the Tabligh Jamaat movement. Two of the three titles have been banned as “extremist” by Russian courts.

Suleimanov is married with three young daughters. “Of course he’s in shock, when they grabbed him at 6 o’clock in the morning,” his lawyer Semedlyaev told Radio Free Europe on the day of the arrest. He said Suleimanov denied having organised or being involved in any extremist organisation and was therefore happy to answer investigators’ questions.

The same morning officers raided the homes of and detained three other Muslims. At 6 am, men in balaclavas raided the home of Abdurakhmanov in the village of Melnichnoe in central Crimea, Abdureshit Dzhapparov of the Crimean Contact Group for Human Rights told Radio Free Europe’s Krym Reali. Abdurakhmanov has difficulties with his hearing.

Also on 2 October 2017, officers raided the home of Kubedinov in Simferopol and detained him. Kubedinov is married with four

children, the oldest of whom is now 11. Officers raided the home of Mustafaev in the village of Pionerskoe, south east of Simferopol, and detained him.

At hearings on 3 October 2017 at Simferopol's Kiev District Court, Judge Viktor Mozhelyansky acceded to the prosecutor's requests that Suleimanov, Abdurakhmanov and Kubedinov be held in pre-trial detention until 29 November 2017, according to court records. The Judge rejected pleas by lawyers for the three men to have them held under house arrest. The Judge ordered that Mustafaev be held under house arrest.

The requests to hold the four men had been presented to court by FSB Investigator R. Gorbachev, according to court records. He had opened criminal cases against all four men under Article 282.2, Part 1. Later the accusation was changed for Abdurakhmanov, Kubedinov and Mustafaev to Article 282.2, Part 2.

In November 2017, Abdurakhmanov was freed from Simferopol's Investigation Prison. He was instead required to sign a pledge not to leave his town without permission from the investigator.

On 22 February 2018, Kubedinov was freed from investigation prison in Simferopol. He was instead required to sign a pledge not to leave his town without permission from the investigator, his lawyer Jemil Temeshev announced.

This left only Suleimanov in Simferopol's Investigation

Prison. His lawyers repeatedly tried to challenge his continued pre-trial detention, appealing to Crimea's Supreme Court against Kiev District Court extensions to the detention. However, each time the appeals were rejected, according to court decisions seen by Forum 18.

During the one-year investigation, FSB Investigator Gorbachev was replaced by another investigator, those close to the case told Forum 18. The case was then handed to Crimea's Prosecutor's Office, where it was assigned to Deputy Prosecutor Sergei Bulgakov.

Officials at Crimea's Prosecutor's Office refused to put Forum 18 through to Prosecutor Bulgakov on 26 November.

Indictment rejected – then accepted

On 14 September 2018 – 50 weeks or almost one year after the FSB launched the criminal case against the four Muslims – Prosecutor Bulgakov handed the case to Crimea's Supreme Court for trial. However at the preliminary hearing on 27 September, presided over by Judge Andrei Paly, the indictment was found to have been “completed with violations of the provisions of the Code” and ordered sent back to the Prosecutor for further work, according to court records.

Prosecutor Bulgakov challenged Judge Paly's decision. On 21 November, Judge Aleksey Kozyrev of Crimea's Supreme Court upheld the challenge, according to court records. This cleared the way for the trial to go ahead.

The case is now being assigned to a Judge and a date for the preliminary hearing is now being set, a court official told Forum 18 on 28 November.

First Jehovah's Witness criminal charges

The first individual to face "extremism"-related criminal charges linked to the Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea is 46-year-old Sergei Viktorovich Filatov. He headed the Sivash Jehovah's Witness community in the town of Dzhankoi, one of two Jehovah's Witness communities in the town registered by the Russian authorities in April 2015. Both communities were liquidated through the courts in May 2017 following the Russian Supreme Court ban, according to Russian Federal Tax Service records.

Lieutenant Aleksandr Chumakin of the FSB security service in Simferopol opened the criminal case against Filatov on 14 November under Russian Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1 ("Organisation of the activity of a social or religious association or other organisation in relation to which a court has adopted a decision legally in force on liquidation or ban on the activity in connection with the carrying out of extremist activity"). Filatov faces a maximum 10-year jail term if convicted.

The man who answered FSB Lieutenant Chumakin's phone on 27 November repeatedly insisted it was a wrong number and put the phone down.

Eight coordinated raids

On the evening of 15 November, about 10 groups of FSB officers, OMON riot police and possibly officers of other agencies who had come from Simferopol raided the homes in Dzhankoi of eight families who were members of the two local Jehovah's Witness communities before they were banned in 2017.

"I was out when they arrived at my home, but they had handcuffed my 21-year-old son," Filatov told Forum 18 from Dzhankoi on 26 November. "I saw about 25 men out on the street, in three cars, and in my home. I counted them at one point. No violence was used in my case and officers behaved more or less correctly."

However, Filatov expressed concern about the treatment of another whose home was raided, 78-year-old Aleksandr Ursu. The raiders pushed him up against a wall, during which he fell to his knees. Officers then handcuffed him.

In 1949 Ursu was among hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses deported to Siberia from his native Moldova with his family as a 9-year-old boy to punish them for their faith. "The whole time you felt hunger," he recalls of the deportation. The Soviet authorities "rehabilitated" him in 1991, finding that he had been unjustly punished four decades earlier.

The FSB appear so far to have initiated a criminal case only

against Filatov. On 16 November, Lieutenant Chumakin ordered Filatov to sign a pledge not to leave Dzhankoi without his specific authorisation, Filatov told Forum 18.

Filatov said since the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses across Crimea, their Kingdom Halls lie empty. "We're not allowed to use them," he told Forum 18. "I read the Bible together with my family."

The criminal case against him has had an intimidating effect. "I no longer meet my friends," Filatov added, "because it might cause them problems. We simply ask the authorities to respect our rights to meet together and read the Bible. We're not law-breakers and we're not against the government."

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UNITED KINGDOM: Anjem Choudary, radical preacher released from prison

BBC (19.10.2018) – <https://bbc.in/2Jan8If> – Radical preacher Anjem Choudary, jailed for inviting support for the Islamic State group, has been released.

The cleric was sentenced in 2016 to five and a half years in prison.

He led an extremist network linked to violent jihadists, including one of the killers of soldier Lee Rigby in 2013.

Choudary, 51, has served less than half of his sentence and will complete the rest under strict supervision. Up to 25 measures to control him have been prepared, the BBC understands.

His release from prison comes approximately four months early because of time spent bailed on an electronic tag before his conviction.

Who is Anjem Choudary?

Choudary, from Ilford in east London, once headed up the al-Muhajiroun network – a leading extremist group which was banned under terrorism laws.

The father-of-five did not organise terror attacks, but is considered one of the UK's most prominent radicalisers.

He has been described as a “hardened dangerous terrorist” and

someone who has had a “huge influence on Islamist extremism in this country” by former Met Police terror chief Richard Walton.

What happened while he was in prison?

The BBC has learnt from counter-extremism sources that Anjem Choudary refused to take part in deradicalisation courses or exercises while serving the custodial part of his sentence.

He spent most of his time at HMP Frankland, County Durham, where he became the first inmate to be held in a separation unit, designed for the most high-risk terrorism offenders who are capable of radicalising others.

On a number of occasions, Choudary was offered opportunities to speak to mainstream religious leaders and other experts who have successfully turned around the mindset of other extremists.

But on each of those occasions, Choudary refused.

Nevertheless, the prison authorities were not able to delay his release.

Why is he being released now?

His departure from Belmarsh prison came automatically under legislation that allows prisoners to serve the second part of their sentence “on licence” in the community.

This means he will not be free but must comply with a list of conditions. If he breaches them, he risks being recalled to prison.

How will he be monitored?

Police will be closely monitoring Choudary – through probation officers and a requirement that he report to officials.

Choudary is staying at a bail hostel in north London.

He will be in a probation hostel for six months, the BBC understands. The conditions he must obey include:

- A ban from preaching at or attending certain mosques
- He will only be allowed to associate with people who have been approved by the authorities
- He will be allowed one phone and is banned from using an internet-enabled device without permission
- Use of the internet will be supervised
- He cannot travel outside Greater London's M25
- He will not be able to leave the UK without permission.

Earlier this week, it was announced Choudary had his assets frozen and was listed on a global record of known terrorists overseen by the United Nations Security Council.

The asset-freezing order means he will be under extremely strict financial controls which typically mean the authorities will be alerted if he tries to open a bank account or move money.

Prime Minister Theresa May said on Thursday that authorities including the police, prison and probation service had “significant experience in dealing with such offenders”.

But John Woodcock, a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, tweeted that his release was “wrong”, “crazy” and “puts the public in danger”.

Calling on Home Secretary Sajid Javid to take a tougher counter-terror approach, using Australian law as an example, Mr Woodcock added: “He needs to act fast to protect the public from terrorists being released back onto British streets.”

Sir Mark Rowley, the former UK head of counter-terror

policing, said it is important “not to overstate his [Choudary’s] significance”.

“At the end of the day he’s a pathetic groomer of others, that’s what he has done in the past,” said Mr Rowley. “He’s not some sort of evil genius we all need to be afraid of.”

Analysis: What impact has Choudary’s sentencing had?

By BBC home affairs correspondent, Dominic Casciani

When Choudary was charged in 2015 with inviting support for IS, it was a moment of great success for counter-terrorism chiefs – and they were already trying to build cases against other associates.

Some, including close confidantes, were jailed. At least four others, who cannot be named for legal reasons, were subject to a Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measure (TPim), a form of control that places two years of restrictions on the movements and activities of terrorism suspects who have not been charged with a crime.

Detectives also looked for evidence of standard crimes – such as fraud – as a means to further “disrupt” the network.

The insider view is that this work has been generally successful because it made the targets aware they could no longer act with impunity.

In theory, it created space for the security service MI5 and their police detective colleagues to focus on more urgent threats.

HRWF Comments

Anjem Choudary was born in London on 18 January 1967. He is the son of a Welling market trader and of Pakistani descent. He is an Islamist social and political activist. He was

convicted of inviting support for a proscribed organisation, namely the Islamic State, under the Terrorism Act 2000. He was previously a solicitor and served, until it was proscribed, as the spokesman for *Islam4UK*.

With Omar Bakri Muhammad, Choudary helped form an Islamist organisation, *al-Muhajiroun*. The group organised several anti-Western demonstrations. The UK government banned Al-Muhajiroun and Choudary was present at the launch of its intended successor, *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah*. He later helped form *Al Ghurabaa*, which was also banned. Choudary then became the spokesman for Islam4UK.

Clearly, banning controversial movements is not an effective solution to the threats posed by homegrown Islamist propagandists as their inspirers can repeatedly create new ones with other names and some cosmetic changes in their bylaws.

Choudary has been denounced by mainstream Muslim groups, and has been largely criticised in the country's media.

A critic of the UK's involvement in the wars in Iraq (2003–2011) and Afghanistan (2001–2016), Choudary praised those responsible for the 11 September 2001 in New York attack and the 7 July 2005 attack in London (52 were killed, and more than 700 were injured). He supports the implementation of Sharia law throughout the UK. He marched in protest at the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons controversy, following which he was prosecuted for organising an unlawful demonstration. During a protest outside Westminster Cathedral in 2006, Choudary told demonstrators that the Pope should be executed for insulting Islam.

On 6 September 2016, Choudary was jailed for five years and six months following conviction for inviting others to support the proscribed organisation ISIS.

This case raises a lot of questions. Some say the sentence was too mild, his release was premature and British justice is naïve.

Anjem Choudary has refused in prison to be 'de-radicalized'. At the time of his final release – very soon – the very strict restrictions to his freedom of movement and communication will expire, he will gain back his full freedom and will go on representing a danger for society. He will certainly try by all means, in due time and in the legal framework, to continue his fight against democracy, any non-Islamic rule of law and 'secular' human rights. He will be an 'example' for his followers and his four children that he will go on educating in his Islamist ideology.

The United Kingdom is not the only country in Europe where jihadists, hate preachers and recruiters have in their own way contributed to the implementation of ISIS political agenda, have been imprisoned for their activities and have been released or will be in a foreseeable future. France, Belgium and other countries are experiencing the same situation with that type of Islamist political prisoners. The question about "What to do with them?" remains open as our democracies have never faced such a challenge and cannot rely on any precedents.

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st/](http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/)

RUSSIA: Religious freedom in Russia: 28 members of the CoE Parliamentary Assembly sign a common declaration

Written declaration No. 647 | Doc. 14430 | 13 October 2017

CoE (13.10.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2hKWRTs> – Whilst the Russian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to freedom of religion or belief, this fundamental right is at risk as the Russian authorities continue to foster an atmosphere of intolerance, discrimination and persecution against religious minorities throughout the entire Federation. Recently, Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian denomination that rejects violence, have been banned as "extremist" by a decision of the Supreme Court.

Evangelicals, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Scientologists and others have been targeted, with some of their members sentenced to pre-trial imprisonment based on the 2002 Extremist law, while in reality being held for simply engaging in peaceful religious beliefs and activities.

The 2002 Extremism Law laid the foundation for an alarming trend in repressions against civil society and the "non-

traditional” minority religions. The law was initially passed to combat terrorism after 9/11 but it provides no clear definition for the term “extremism,” thus rendering virtually any group or individual vulnerable to political and legal harassment.

With all due respect, we urge the Russian government to intervene and put an end to these violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief of members of religious minorities in Russia.

Signatories: Ms Edite ESTRELA, Portugal, SOC ; Mr Viorel Riceard BADEA, Romania, EPP/CD ; Mr Jokin BILDARRATZ, Spain, ALDE ; Mr Liam BYRNE, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Titus CORLĂȚEAN, Romania, SOC ; Mr Paolo CORSINI, Italy, SOC ; Ms Vanessa D’AMBROSIO, San Marino, SOC ; Mr Geraint DAVIES, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr José Ramón GARCÍA HERNÁNDEZ, Spain, EPP/CD ; Mr Valeriu GHILETCHI, Republic of Moldova, EPP/CD ; Mr Antonio GUTIÉRREZ, Spain, SOC ; Mr Andres HERKEL, Estonia, EPP/CD ; Mr Giorgi KANDELAKI, Georgia, EPP/CD ; Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS, Portugal, EPP/CD ; Mr Georgii LOGVYNSKYI, Ukraine, EPP/CD ; Sir Alan MEALE, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Ian MURRAY, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Víctor NAUDI ZAMORA, Andorra, SOC ; Mr Joseph O’REILLY, Ireland, EPP/CD ; Ms Irina PRUIDZE, Georgia, NR ; Ms Soraya RODRÍGUEZ RAMOS, Spain, SOC ; Ms Leyla ŞAHİN USTA, Turkey, EC ; Mr Virendra SHARMA, United Kingdom, SOC ; Mr Adão SILVA, Portugal, EPP/CD ; Mr Ionuț-Marian STROE, Romania, EPP/CD ; Ms Adriana Diana TUȘA, Romania, SOC ; Mr Burhanettin UYSAL, Turkey, EC ; Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS, Lithuania, EPP/CD

HRWF Comment

Noteworthy is the fact that no deputy from Austria, Belgium, France and Germany – four EU countries which created questionable state institutions meant to monitor the activities of so-called sects – signed the declaration.

See HRWF book *Freedom of Religion or Belief, Antisect Movements and State Neutrality: FECRIS, a case study* in English [here](#), in Russian [here](#), and in French [here](#).

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UGANDA: Muslim Extremists in Uganda Threaten to Kill Family of Pastor

Islamists seek revenge for pursuit of legal case against them.

Morning Star News (12.05.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2rsBL3m> – A pastor in eastern Uganda who relocated after an Islamist attack has had to shift to yet another site, but he can only visit his family there briefly as his life is in danger, his wife said.

Muslims continue to track pastor Christopher James Kalaja of Nakabale village, Kaderuna Sub-County, because he filed a court case against those who recently destroyed his farm, home and church building, his wife (name withheld) told Morning Star News.

“He makes a brief appearance at our current residence because the Muslims are trailing him,” she said. “They can do anything to kill him, so as stop the court case to proceed since he is the key witness.”

Nine Muslims bearing swords, clubs and metal objects rampaged through his property on March 27, shouting the jihadist slogan “*Allah Akbar* [God is greater], Pastor Kalaja said.

The leader of the 86-member Agape Sanctuary International Church reported the case to Kaderuna police, but officers initially took no action, he said. Unable to elicit any police help, on March 28 he filed suit in Budaka District court, which he said prompted police to file a case.

After relocating his family from a friend’s hut to another unidentified location, Pastor Kalaja continued receiving threats, his wife said.

“We just want to inform you that the battle is now on, and you risk losing the whole family,” read one text message. Another on May 2 read, “You think we are kidding. Be informed that our warning still stands.

The family has spent sleepless nights over the anonymous text messages, his wife said.

“The children are also very fearful,” she said.

Their seven children (not six as previously reported), she said, ask them, “Why are we here? What have we done that we are undergoing such a great suffering?”

“These are questions that I cannot answer,” she said. “I only

tell the children to pray.

The family relocated to a site on Sunday (May 7) where they have no bedding or food, she said.

The Islamists that destroyed their property have stationed a member of their band on the pastor's land. The legal case to recover losses remains unresolved, with a court hearing scheduled on Monday (May 15) and the family without any legal representation, she said.

"We have suffered so much as a family," she said. "We are seeking prayers and financial help for food and money for hiring a lawyer."

Residents of the predominantly Muslim area opposed a church building under construction on his farm, but Pastor Kalaja said they have persecuted him for decades due to his outreach to Muslims.

A similar attack took place in 2008, he said.

The recent destruction was the latest of many attacks by non-state figures on Christians in eastern Uganda. Uganda's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another.

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