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Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1216

RUSSIA: A pacifist Orthodox priest defrocked, arrested and facing 10 years in prison

A pacifist Orthodox priest defrocked, arrested and facing 10 years in prison

By Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (13.06.2022) – Defrocked Orthodox priest Ioann Kurmoyarov faces up to 10 years in prison for allegedly discrediting the

army of the Russian Federation.

First, he publicly condemned the idea of building a church honoring the Armed Forces of Russia and the court of Novosibirsk deprived him of his priesthood. Afterwards, he was arrested and detained by the FSB awaiting trial in a criminal case but on 10 June, his lawyer dramatically announced that his client had disappeared.

Father Kurmoyarov banned

In 2020, the Metropolitan banned John Kurmoyarov from serving after he criticized the construction of a church dedicated mainly to the Armed Forces, which then opened in the Moscow region.

“This is another example of how Orthodoxy turns into banal paganism with its temples, heavenly patrons, icons of branches of the armed forces,” Kurmoyarov wrote on his Facebook.

Later on, the ban was lifted. However, he was not allowed to teach at the Novosibirsk Theological Seminary, where he had worked before, and to stay in the same diocese. After that, Kurmoyarov left the city.

In March 2022, Article 207.3 providing for a prison sentence of up to 15 years was included in the Criminal Code in cases of “fakes” about the Russian army and the war on Ukraine.

Since then, anti-war speeches and statements have become a reason for criminal prosecution.

Video: "Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine will go to hell, not heaven"

After his removal from his rank, 54-year-old Kurmoyarov got a job as an office manager in a security company. Recently, he had been actively speaking about the "special military operation" in Ukraine on his Vkontakte social media page. Most of all, the Russian Center for Combating Extremism was outraged because of his video: "Who will be in hell and who will be in paradise?" The video said that the Russian military killed in Ukraine would go to hell, not heaven. "Peacekeepers," "peacekeepers" are "blessed in paradise, do you understand what the problem is? And those who unleashed aggression will not be in paradise," said the priest.

"The detained man spread deliberately false information about the armed forces of the Russian Federation. To do this, he deliberately posted a video. Linguistic expertise from specialists of St. Petersburg State University showed that the information in it can be called fake," – said a source of "KP-Petersburg" in law enforcement agencies.

A smartphone, laptop, tablet, two hard drives, a personal cassock and two icons with a wooden cross were seized from the former father's apartment. The investigation of the criminal case is ongoing. The ex-priest faces from 5 to 10 years in prison.

Sudden disappearance of Kurmoyarov

After the arrest of the ex-priest on 8 June, he was formerly granted the assistance of a lawyer, Leonid Krikun, but in

fact, a decision was quickly taken to incarcerate him without any assistance of his lawyer.

On 10 June, his lawyer reported to OVD-Info that Ioann Kurmoyarov, arrested in an alleged case of “fakes” about the Russian army, (paragraph “e” of Part 2 of Art. 207.3 of the Criminal Code) had disappeared in St. Petersburg.

On June 10, Krikun went to pre-trial detention center SIZO-1 “Crosses-2” to meet his client, but he was told that Kurmoyarov was not in the pre-trial detention center. Employees of SIZO-6 “Gorelovo” also said that the priest had not been transferred to their place. The lawyer looked for him in other detention places but in vain.

Krikun fears that his client may have been pressured or abused. “I have a stable belief that the behavior of investigator Luzhetsky on the first day of his “work” on the case of Father Ioann, his proposals to me to continue the pressure he started on the accused, as well as the absence of Father Ioann for his defender in all institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service for St. Petersburg, may indicate the use of unauthorized methods of investigation to him and attempts to hide traces of this crime,” said the lawyer in a letter transmitted to human rights defender and Archbishop Grigory Mikhnov-Vaytenko.

In short, Fr Kurmoyarov used his freedom of thought and speech to reassert the Biblical commandment “Thou shalt not kill” and condemn Russia’s war on Ukraine in the same way as Jesus did when he virulently criticized and expelled the merchants and the money changers from the Temple in Jerusalem, accusing them of turning it into a “den of thieves” and a “house of trade”. Theology applied secular life.

Photo: Ioann Kurmoyarov was deprived of his priesthood after criticizing Sergei Shoigu, and now the ex-priest in St. Petersburg faces 10 years for discrediting the army

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Notice: Undefined index: et_footer_layout in [/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php](#) on line 1268

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Notice: Undefined index: et_template in [/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php](#) on line 1269