

# Tabligh Jamaat (Muslims)

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Tabligh Jamaat (sometimes spelled Tablighi Jama'at) is a revivalist missionary movement within Islam that was founded in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The term means 'those who preach' and it is sometimes called the 'Society for Spreading Faith'. Adherents do not proselytise to non-Muslims. Instead their aim is to revive the faith of less devout Muslims and to follow Islamic religious practices more vigorously.

Tabligh Jamaat originated in the Deobandi School of Sunni Islam<sup>1</sup> in Uttar Pradesh in north India. Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi (1885-1944), an Islamic scholar and Sufi teacher, is credited as its founder. Its world headquarters are located in the New Delhi suburb of Basti Nizamuddin.

The movement has grown significantly over time. It is said to have around 80 million followers in 150 countries throughout Asia, Africa and Europe<sup>2</sup> but it is particularly prevalent in South and Central Asia.

In Europe its headquarters, complete with a *madrasah* (religious school), are in the UK with about 50,000 followers in Dewsbury (Yorkshire). There are also centres in London, Glasgow, Leicester, and Birmingham. In France, Tabligh Jamaat has been able to attract a significant number of Muslims of Arabian and

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<sup>1</sup> Zacharias Pieri, "Tablighi Jamaat – Handy Books on Religion in World Affairs" (*Lapidomedia*, 2012) accessed May 2020.

[http://www.lapidomedia.com/sites/default/files/resources/Tablighi\\_Jamaat\\_Introduction.pdf](http://www.lapidomedia.com/sites/default/files/resources/Tablighi_Jamaat_Introduction.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, Jenny, "Understanding and engaging with the Tabligh Jamaat," Lausanne Movement, November 2015. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-11/understanding-and-engaging-with-the-tablighi-jamaat>.

African origin and is estimated to have about 100,000 followers. Its activity is concentrated in the larger Paris region. In Spain it operates from Barcelona among a quickly growing number of Muslim migrants.

In North America, Tabligh Jamaat has met some success in gaining converts among African Americans and Caribbean immigrants. Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Atlanta, New York City, and Washington, D.C., are the major centres of Tabligh Jamaat activities in the US.

Tabligh Jamaat adherents never constitute themselves into formal ‘trusts’ or ‘companies’, and shun political, legal, or social engagement with the wider world. They have — intentionally — few formal points of contact within their communities.

Annual gatherings (called *ijtima*) are held in various countries and attract large crowds. The largest ones occur in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The annual World Gathering in Tongi, Bangladesh, (called *Bishwa Ijtima*) is the most popular Tabligh Jamaat pilgrimage in the world with approximately five million people attending each year, significantly larger than the traditional *Hajj* to Mecca.

### Teachings

Tabligh Jamaat’s doctrine is based on six principles, commonly referred to as the *Six Points*. They are:

- Faith in the oneness of Allah (the *Kalima*)
- The offering of the five prayers daily (*Salat*)
- The knowledge and the remembrance of Allah (*‘Ilm & Dhikr*)
- Respect for every Muslim (*Ikram al Muslim*)
- Sincerity of intention (*Ekhlas*)
- Time set aside for this work (*Dawah & Tabligh*)

Those six points act as guidelines for both the experience and the critical faculties of devotees. They include ‘respect for Muslims’ — but not for non-Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

Tabligh Jamaat followers aspire to imitate the life of Prophet Muhammad and so they adopt a lifestyle of personal piety and austerity. Members are expected to proselytise at least three times per month (approximately 130 days per year) as well as study at Tabligh Jamaat’s central mosque in Pakistan for a month per year.

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, Jenny, “Understanding and engaging with the Tabligh Jamaat,” Lausanne Movement, November 2015. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-11/understanding-and-engaging-with-the-tablighi-jamaat>.

Their teachings about the role of women in their communities and their relations with political Islam have raised a number of questions for those outside of the movement.

### ***Women***

Women are under male control in Tabligh Jamaat. They are required to practice complete seclusion and segregation in everyday life,<sup>4</sup> and to cover themselves entirely in public with a *burka* or face veil. The Tabligh Jamaat movement has been strongly criticised on these points.

Women are encouraged to share their Islamic beliefs with other women and may travel for this purpose. However, only married women are allowed to undertake such missionary activities and they must always be accompanied by a male relative, preferably their husband.

In their daily lives, they are locked into a medieval system of patronage that results in illiteracy and disaffection. Female literacy rate in Mewat, a region of the Haryana and Rajasthan states in northwest India, where the movement started, is just 5% today. They still live in *zenanas* (harems) there. Even in countries such as the UK, women are usually forbidden from leaving the house unaccompanied by a male. Marriages are conducted in their name, not in their presence.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Politics***

Tabligh Jamaat claims to be apolitical and does not advocate the use of violence, the overthrow of political leaders in Muslim majority countries nor the establishment of a caliphate.

Tabligh Jamaat's loose internal structure means that people associated with it may have diverse views and practices in different parts of the world.

In some countries, Tabligh Jamaat is perceived as rather innocuous whilst other states consider it a dangerous hotbed for radicalism and have banned it.

The movement is prohibited in **Iran**, **Kazakhstan** (2013), **Russia** (2009), **Tajikistan** (2006), **Turkmenistan**, and **Uzbekistan** (2004).

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the status of women in the movement in “The Tablighi Jamaat and Gender: Women, Narrative, and the Religious Discourse of Struggle in an Indian Muslim Reform Movement” by Megan Adamson Sijapati.

<sup>5</sup> This and other facts can be found in Zacharias Pieri, *Tablighi Jamaat* (Lapido Media), available from Amazon in paperback or Kindle at <http://amzn.to/2DO5bQp>.

## **KAZAKHSTAN: Reasons for the Persecution of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims**

In July 2018, the US government estimated the total population of Kazakhstan to be 18.7 million. The national census reports that approximately 70% of the population is Muslim, most of whom adhere to the Sunni Hanafi school. There are no statistics about Tabligh Jamaat Muslims.<sup>6</sup>

Kazakhstan claims to be secular but, in actuality, the state gives preference to ‘the “traditional” Hanafi Sunni school, while Islamic practice that deviates from the mainstream is viewed with suspicion’.<sup>7</sup> This may be the reason for the persecution of members of Tabligh Jamaat, a new minority religious movement in Islam founded in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Tabligh Jamaat movement was banned by a court in Astana in February 2013 for allegedly being ‘extremist’, although it is unclear what exactly about the movement was deemed radical. Without any evidence, authorities claimed the group was working to create a caliphate which led to the assumption that there would be an attempt at ‘a violent change to the constitutional order’ in Kazakhstan.<sup>8</sup>

This decision was contradictory to the results of a study commissioned by the secret police and the then Religious Affairs Committee that found that the Tabligh Jamaat movement ‘is not an extremist or terrorist organisation’.<sup>9</sup>

Between January 2015 and August 2018, approximately 72 alleged followers of Tabligh Jamaat were convicted of criminal offences for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. 51 of these individuals were sentenced to prison terms while the remaining 21 were sentenced to house arrest, or what is called ‘restricted freedom’.<sup>10</sup>

### **Tabligh Jamaat Muslims in Prison in Kazakhstan**

Tabligh Jamaat is considered an extremist organisation and is banned in Kazakhstan even though it does not use or advocate for violence. As a result, any

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<sup>6</sup> For more religious statistics, see U.S. Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Report on international Religious Freedom: Kazakhstan 2018*, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kazakhstan/>.

<sup>7</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Kazakhstan 2019*, 2019. [https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2\\_KAZAKHSTAN\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_KAZAKHSTAN_2019.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Corley, Felix, “KAZAKHSTAN: Religious freedom survey 2018,” Forum 18, September 4, 2018, accessed May 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2409](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2409).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

activity related to Tabligh Jamaat is illegal. Most religious prisoners in Kazakhstan are Sunni Muslims accused of involvement in the movement.

### **Tabligh Jamaat Muslims behind bars: some statistics**

As of 1 June 2020, HRWF documented **eight cases** of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims in its Prisoners' Database.<sup>11</sup> Of these cases, six arrests were made in 2017, one in 2016 and one in 2018. They were all sentenced to prison terms of three or four years. Half of them are expected to be released in the summer of 2020 and the rest in 2021.

In addition to imprisonment, persecution of this group also occurs in the form of administrative convictions, house arrests and fines. For example, on 9 July 2018, seven Tabligh Jamaat followers received terms of 'restricted freedom' of between one and three years because of their missionary activities.<sup>12</sup>

### **Articles of the Penal Code**

Prisoners are typically charged under this article of the Kazakh Penal Code:

**Article 405, Part 1** which prohibits organising activities of a social or religious association or other organisation after a court has banned this group or demanded their liquidation due to connections with extremism or terrorism. **Part 2** prohibits participation in activities of a social or religious association or other organisation after a court has banned this group or demanded their liquidation due to connections with extremism or terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

Sentences include one to four years imprisonment in either a regime labour camp or prison, with a two-year ban on practicing their religion after completion of their term.

Additionally, after sentencing, individuals convicted under Article 405 are often added to the Finance Ministry Financial Monitoring Committee List. This blacklist is for individuals who are allegedly 'connected with the financing of terrorism or extremism' and enables the authorities to freeze all of their bank accounts. The authorities may grant their dependent family members access to

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<sup>11</sup> Our Database is updated on a regular basis. For more details about imprisoned Tabligh Jamaat Muslims, see <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>.

<sup>12</sup> Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: Restricted freedom, community service for religious meetings," Forum 18, July 26, 2018, accessed May 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2398](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2398).

<sup>13</sup> Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: Religious freedom survey 2018," Forum 18, September 4, 2018, accessed May 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2409](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2409).

their accounts, but only in small and controlled amounts. After their release, they remain on this list for six to eight years.<sup>14</sup>

### **International advocacy**

On 14 March 2019, the **European Parliament** adopted a resolution on human rights in Kazakhstan in which it:

Notes the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of Kazakhstan and stresses the need for the protection of minorities and their rights, in particular with regard to the use of languages, freedom of religion or belief, non-discrimination and equal opportunities; welcomes the peaceful coexistence of different communities in Kazakhstan; urges Kazakhstan to stop persecuting people for their legitimate exercise of freedom of conscience and religion; demands the immediate release of persons convicted for holding a belief.<sup>15</sup>

In its 2020 Annual Report, the **United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** devoted a section to the imprisonment of Tabligh Jamaat followers and recommended Kazakhstan for placement on the US State Department's Special Watch List (SWL) for severe violations of religious freedom.<sup>16</sup>

## **CASE STUDIES**

### ***Tabligh Jamaat member sentenced to three years in jail followed by a five-year ban from practising his religion***

**Abilai Bokbasarov** was arrested on 13 August 2018 for holding meetings about the Tabligh Jamaat movement at an apartment in the Karaganda Region. He was charged under Article 405, Part 1. During his pre-trial detention, he pled guilty and struck a plea deal with the Balkhash Prosecutor's Office.

He was sentenced to three years of imprisonment on 9 January 2019 by the Balkhash City Court with no opportunity for appeal. In addition to this prison sentence, he has been banned from exercising his freedom of religion or belief

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<sup>14</sup> Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: Religious freedom survey 2018," Forum 18, September 4, 2018, accessed May 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2409](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2409).

<sup>15</sup> European Parliament, Resolution on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan (2019/2610(RSP)), Paragraph 11. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-03-14\\_EN.html#sdocal](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-03-14_EN.html#sdocal)

<sup>16</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Kazakhstan 2019*, 2019. [https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2\\_KAZAKHSTAN\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_KAZAKHSTAN_2019.pdf).

for five years upon release. It is unclear what this entails, and it is an unusually long ban for this conviction.

Additionally, Abilai Bokbasarov has been ordered to pay a victim compensation fee of 48,100 Tenge (the equivalent of two weeks' wages for the average worker) and a fee of 1,255 Tenge (2.57 EUR) for the psychological analysis that was conducted during his pre-trial detention. Despite there being no named victims from his actions, the judge has still ordered him to pay this compensation.

Furthermore, he was added to the Finance Ministry Financial Monitoring Committee List.<sup>17</sup> If his family does not have any other source of income, they are able to withdraw small, controlled amounts.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Tabligh Jamaat member sentenced to four years in jail followed by a two and a half-year ban from practising his religion***

**Iliyan Raimzhan**, an ethnic Kazakh born in China, was arrested in April 2017 after his case was initiated by the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police. Prosecutors claimed that he was a member of Tabligh Jamaat and had studied at its centres abroad, including in India, Bangladesh and elsewhere. He was charged under Article 405, Part 1 and Part 2.

On 1 August 2017, Iliyan Raiymzhan was sentenced to four years in prison by the Tekeli Court in the Almaty Region. The Judge also banned him from exercising his freedom of religion or belief for two and a half years after his prison term.

On 19 September 2017, Iliyan Raiymzhan lost his appeal. His bank accounts have all been frozen by the authorities, creating economic hardship for his wife and two young children.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Six Muslims sentenced as members of Tabligh Jamaat despite pleading innocence***

Six Muslim men were arrested by secret police officers in November 2016. None of the six were held in pre-trial detention, but **Abduvakhob Shakirov** and **Bakhytzhon Baimusayev** were allegedly the leaders of the group and so had to

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<sup>17</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Kazakhstan 2019*, 2019.

[https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2\\_KAZAKHSTAN\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier2_KAZAKHSTAN_2019.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: Three years' jail, five years' religion ban," Forum 18, February 14, 2019, accessed May 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2452](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2452).

<sup>19</sup> Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: 24 prisoners of conscience, 6 restricted freedom sentences," Forum 18, December 18, 2019, accessed June 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2529](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2529).

pay bail. These six men were accused of being Tabligh Jamaat Muslims, but all six insisted that they are not a part of the Tabligh Jamaat movement during the investigation and their trial.

On 4 April 2017, the Sairam District Court found all six guilty and sentenced them to prison time and bans on religious activities. Abdvakhab Shakirov and Bakhytzhan Baimusayev, as the two alleged leaders, received the longest sentences of 4 years' imprisonment in a regime labour camp, plus a 4-year ban on religious activities after their release. It is unclear what this ban entails.

Furthermore, their bank accounts have been blocked by the authorities.<sup>20</sup>

### **RUSSIA: Reasons for the Persecution of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims**

In July 2018, the US government estimated the total population of Russia to be 142.2 million. A 2015-2016 poll by the Pew Research Centre reported that 71% of the population is Orthodox Christian, while 10% identify as Muslim. There are no statistics about Tabligh Jamaat Muslims.<sup>21</sup>

Russia is officially a secular country with legislation around the separation of church and state but, in reality, the government 'gives preference to Orthodox Christianity, Hanafi Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism' and especially favours the Orthodox Church.<sup>22</sup>

Tabligh Jamaat is a peaceful missionary organisation that adheres to fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic doctrine and refrains from participating in political struggles. Its aim is to make Muslims more pious and to propagate Islam. It does not use or advocate for violence, and it also does not call for the overthrow of the political regime in Russia. The Moscow-based Sova Centre and other human rights groups monitoring the activities of Tabligh Jamaat in Russia have never found any evidence linking Tabligh Jamaat to terrorism or acts of violence. Nevertheless, the Russian Supreme Court banned this movement in

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<sup>20</sup> Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: Eight Muslim prisoners of conscience," Forum 18, April 11, 2017, accessed June 2020. [http://forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2272](http://forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2272), and,

Corley, Felix, "KAZAKHSTAN: 18 prisoners of conscience, 11 restricted freedom sentences," Forum 18, April 18, 2019, accessed June 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2469](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2469).

<sup>21</sup> For more religious statistics, see U.S. Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Report on international Religious Freedom: Russia 2018*, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>.

<sup>22</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Russia 2019*, 2019. [https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1\\_RUSSIA\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Tier1_RUSSIA_2019.pdf).



2009 based on accusations of extremism, spreading propaganda of hatred and intentions of seizing power.<sup>23</sup>

Both foreign and Russian NGOs receiving funding from abroad are administratively identified as ‘foreign agents’ and so are new religious movements of foreign origin. Tabligh Jamaat, which originated in India, is perceived by the Russian authorities as a potential threat for the so-called ‘spiritual security’ of the country, a concept introduced by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2000.<sup>24</sup>

On 7 May 2009, the Constitutional Court upheld the decision to consider Tabligh Jamaat an extremist organisation and prohibit it from operating on Russian territory.

### **Tabligh Jamaat Muslims in Prison in Russia**

Tabligh Jamaat is considered an extremist organisation and is banned in Russia even though it does not use or advocate for violence. As a result, any activity related to Tabligh Jamaat is illegal. Most religious prisoners are Sunni Muslims accused of involvement in the movement.

#### **Tabligh Jamaat Muslims behind bars: some statistics**

As of 1 June 2020, HRWF documented **18 cases** of Tabligh Jamaat Muslims in its Prisoners’ Database.<sup>25</sup> Of these cases, six Tabligh Jamaat followers were arrested and detained in 2020. They were awaiting trial at the time this report was written. There were nine members in prison in 2019, 12 in 2018 and nine in 2017.

It is important to note that, in addition to prison terms, the Russian government has increasingly used administrative penalties, such as fines, to repress this movement.<sup>26</sup>

#### **Articles of the Penal Code**

Prisoners are typically charged under this article of the Russian Penal Code:

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<sup>23</sup> SOVA Center for International and Analysis, *Anti-Extremist Policies in Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. Comparative Review*, April 2020. <https://www.sova-center.ru/files/books/wg-4-2020-eng.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> “2000 Russian National Security Concept of the Russian Federation,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, January 10, 2000. [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/589768](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/589768).

<sup>25</sup> Our Database is updated on a regular basis. For more details about imprisoned Tabligh Jamaat Muslims, see <https://hrwf.eu/prisoners-database/>.

<sup>26</sup> Bayram, Mushfig, “TAJIKISTAN: Raid, torture, interrogations, fines calendars destroyed,” Forum 18, February 22, 2019, accessed May 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2455](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2455).

**Article 282.2, Part 1** sanctions anyone convicted of organising for an extremist organisation or recruiting for it, while **Part 2** sanctions those participating in it. This article refers to organisations already banned by the court as extremist and included on a special list published by the Ministry of Justice.

Since the Tabligh Jamaat movement has been banned as extremist, any organisation of and/or participation in any activity linked to it is illegal under Article 282.2, regardless of whether there were any harmful consequences to said activities or not. Part I is punishable by six to ten years in prison or a fine between 400,000 and 800,000 Roubles (approximately 5,125-10,255 EUR), and Part II is punishable by two to six years in prison, a fine of 300,000 to 600,000 Roubles (approximately 3,846-7,692 EUR), or one to four years of assigned labour.<sup>27</sup>

### **International advocacy**

On 7 February 2019, the **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, Michelle Bachelet, issued this statement in a press release:

We urge the Government of Russia to revise the Federal Law on Combating Extremist Activity with a view to clarifying the vague and open-ended definition of ‘extremist activity,’ and ensuring that the definition requires an element of violence or hatred.

We also call on the authorities to drop charges against and to release all those detained for exercising their rights to freedom of religion or belief, the freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.<sup>28</sup>

On 18 December 2019, the **US Department of State** again placed Russia on its Special Watch List (SWL) for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom, as it had in 2018. Countries on this list are not sanctioned or otherwise penalised by the US as they would be when classified as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> SOVA Center for International and Analysis, *Anti-Extremist Policies in Russia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. Comparative Review*, April 2020. <https://www.sova-center.ru/files/books/wg-4-2020-eng.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> “UN Rights Chief ‘Deeply Concerned’ over Jehovah’s Witness Sentencing in Russia,” United Nations, February 7, 2019, accessed May 2020. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/02/1032151>.

<sup>29</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Russia 2020*, 2020. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Russia.pdf>.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended that Russia be designated as a CPC in its 2020 annual country report due to its extreme repression of religious freedom.<sup>30</sup>

## CASE STUDIES

### *Renat Suleimanov serving four years at a labour camp*

When Russia occupied the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, it extended its judicial rule over that region. This means that the ban against the Tablighi Jamaat movement was applicable to residents there. **Renat Suleimanov**, who lived with his wife and three daughters in a village north of Crimea's capital Simferopol, was arrested in October 2017. He was charged with allegedly organising meetings with three other Tablighi Jamaat Muslims.

Despite a preliminary hearing on 27 September 2018, Renat Suleimanov's pre-trial detention was repeatedly extended with no official trial date. After over a year of awaiting trial, he was sentenced to four years in prison and one year under restrictions on 22 January 2019. He has appealed this sentence twice and has received rejections both times. He intends on appealing in Strasbourg at the European Court of Human Rights next.

In May 2019, Renat Suleimanov was transferred to a Russian labour camp in Kabardino-Balkariya. Since then, he has been held in a 'punishment cell', which is a measure that prison authorities are only permitted to use as a disciplinary action. His lawyer is awaiting justification as to why he was placed in a punishment cell.<sup>31</sup>

### *Eight Tablighi Jamaat Muslims sentenced to 4 – 6½ years in prison*

On 22 December 2016, eight Tablighi Jamaat Muslims were arrested in Moscow: **Islambek Kamchybekov, Shakir Kozhamkulov, Kanybek Cuyunduk Uulu, Ayrat Usmanov, Gazybek Kubatov, Akhmet Dzumayev, Zufar Mustafin and Bekzod Bakirov**. They were arrested for holding meetings at an apartment during which it was alleged that "they carried out ideological indoctrination of new supporters" and studied the literature of Tablighi Jamaat'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report, USCIRF-Recommended for countries of particular concern: Russia 2020*, 2020. <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Russia.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Corley, Felix, "CRIMEA: Prisoner sent to Russia, more awaiting," Forum 18, July 26, 2019, accessed June 2020. [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2496](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2496).

<sup>32</sup> "Eight Muslims Convicted of Involvement in Tablighi Jamaat in Moscow Are Political Prisoners," Human Rights Center MEMORIAL, December 23, 2018, accessed May 2020. [https://memohrc.org/en/news\\_old/eight-muslims-convicted-involvement-tablighi-jamaat-moscow-are-political-prisoners](https://memohrc.org/en/news_old/eight-muslims-convicted-involvement-tablighi-jamaat-moscow-are-political-prisoners).

Zufar Mustafin and Ayrat Usmanov were initially released after the mass arrest, only to be placed in pre-trial detention on 17 January 2017. The six other men have been held in detention since the date of their arrest.

In September 2018, the Babushkinsky District Court of Moscow found all eight to be guilty under Article 282.2. Three, who were the alleged organisers of these meetings, were sentenced to six and a half years each in a penal colony: Islambek Kamchybekov, Shakir Kozhamkulov and Kanybek Cuyunduk Uulu. The remaining five received four years each in a penal colony.

All eight members of the Tabligh Jamaat movement intend on appealing this decision.<sup>33</sup>

### *Six alleged Tabligh Jamaat Muslims awaiting trial*

In February 2020, six individuals were arrested under accusations of being active in the Tabligh Jamaat movement: **Aybek Mamazhunosov, Murzy Kushuev, Aybek Halmatov, Asan Uulu, Artyk Kalbaev** and **Altynbek Kozonov**. They are all citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic.

They have been charged under Article 282.2, Parts 1 and 2. At the time of writing, they were still being held in pre-trial detention, and a trial date was not yet set.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusions

Members of Tabligh Jamaat may be vulnerable to exploitation by militant or terrorist organisations just like any other marginalised Muslims. Unfortunately, this has led to media and government authorities banning Tabligh Jamaat entirely, portraying it solely as a potential breeding ground for extremism instead of taking into account the movement's core teachings and beliefs.

HRWF and the Sova-Centre, a Moscow-based NGO, view the ban of the religious association Tabligh Jamaat in Russia and several post-Soviet countries as well as the criminalisation of its members' activities inappropriate. This organisation

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<sup>33</sup> "Moscow Court Convicts 8 Members of Banned Extremist Organization Tablighi Jamaat," RAPSI, September 17, 2018, accessed May 2020. [http://rapsinews.com/judicial\\_news/20180917/287702590.html](http://rapsinews.com/judicial_news/20180917/287702590.html), and "Eight Muslims Convicted of Involvement in Tablighi Jamaat in Moscow Are Political Prisoners," Human Rights Center MEMORIAL, December 23, 2018, accessed May 2020. [https://memohrc.org/en/news\\_old/eight-muslims-convicted-involvement-tablighi-jamaat-moscow-are-political-prisoners](https://memohrc.org/en/news_old/eight-muslims-convicted-involvement-tablighi-jamaat-moscow-are-political-prisoners), and,

"Московское Дело 'Таблиги Джамаат,'" Правозащитный центр "Мемориал, accessed June, 2020. <https://memohrc.org/ru/special-projects/moskovskoe-delo-tablighi-dzhamaat>.

<sup>34</sup> "Misuse of Anti-Extremism in February 2020," SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, March 24, 2020, accessed April 2020. <https://www.sova-center.ru/en/misuse/news-releases/2020/03/d42228/>.

promotes Islam by increased spiritual edification of its followers and has never been implicated in incitements to violence. HRWF and the Sova-Centre consider the repression of the Tabligh Jamaat members to be unjustified and counter-productive.